

LOCAL BELIEFS AND SUPERSTITIONS ABOUT ANIMALS

BY FRANK WATTERS

Although we probably didn't think of it at the time, those of us who, like me, were growing up in the 1940's and 50's would regularly be meeting with, and talking to, adults who had been born in the last quarter of the nineteenth century.

Of course, generations overlap, and in the years after the war - a time when very few families locally had a car or a telephone, while the horse was still the source of power on many small farms, electricity had yet to light up the nights in many parts of the countryside - there was still space for a lot of talking and listening. In that time, before television changed the way of life, there was still a great deal of telling and re-telling of old anecdotes and recounting and passing-on the many very ancient beliefs and superstitions which were well-remembered and perhaps still practised by some.

Both my parents, Paddy and Kitty Watters, had been born in the 1890's and in their early days they had obviously very close relations with people who could, at first hand, tell them of events and folk-practices as far back as the Great Famine and beyond. In time some of this lore inevitably passed on to me.

Then, later on, as a young fellow and teenager, I spent many of my school-holidays doing menial chores on small local farms - gathering potatoes, tying hay, working at the threshing - and often found myself working alongside some older person who chatted away, telling me of events and people and folklore from times gone by.

While usually these people had little formal education, they were often very observant, intelligent people who during their lives had amassed a huge store of what could loosely be termed 'folklore' and they were, in that sense at least, very learned people, their knowledge having been gathered, not from books, but from listening to their elders, and observing and reflecting on events of their everyday lives. When they talked and I listened, neither of us was aware that our sessions were in truth a sort of informal 'tutorials' which was to prove to be a valuable and enriching experience for me.

Now-a-days a young fellow in the cab of a John Deere is insulated from his surroundings. His cab is air-conditioned and he has his headphones on or is on his mobile phone listening to Lady Gaga perhaps. In times

past, while perhaps sitting under a bush waiting for a shower to pass, he would have talked to an elderly neighbour and perhaps picked up some snippet of local lore of more lasting interest.

The topics discussed ranged widely and would arise naturally as we chatted and one subject which came up from time to time was the relationship between people and animals.

According to the Griffith's Valuation of 1867 there were 79 'farms' in the townland of Aughtantaraghan. Six of these farms were 20 acres or more while the average size of the remaining 73 was less than 6 acres, with many just an acre or two. This number had greatly reduced by my day but there were still perhaps 20 small one-man farms in the townland. Looking back, it seems to me that the men and women who owned and worked these small holdings generally had a great respect for the animals - both domesticated and wild - they encountered in their daily lives. There seemed to be an unspoken, but general, acceptance that animals had preserved in a way some sort of primeval instinct or wisdom, perhaps innocence or sensitivity, which people had somehow lost. It was accepted that animals could, for example, sense approaching danger or that a change in the weather was coming and even foretell trouble or a death. Some maintained that by observing animal behaviour closely, one could perhaps get a clue as to future events.



Norman Cole

The late **Norman Cole** of Druminargal, who, 30 years ago, gave me a lot of information about "*The Night of the Big Wind*", (January 6th 1839), told me that his people noted that on the day before the great storm broke -

without warning and catching humans totally unprepared - animals were seen to be behaving in a very agitated, disturbed way. Normally quiet, well-behaved domestic animals were very unsettled and pigs, in particular, were said to have made a dreadful racket all day long. Perhaps it was hindsight, but Norman's family firmly believed that their animals had sensed that the great storm was approaching and were attempting to prepare for it in their own way. This notion that animals can sense bad weather was supported by a lighthouse keeper from somewhere on the Atlantic coast. When talking about a particularly ferocious storm which he feared would destroy the lighthouse, he mentioned that the previous day was calm but significantly all the seagulls had left the lighthouse and gone inland.

I should say that while it is sometimes assumed that the following folk beliefs were peculiarly Irish, this is not the case for many of these things were believed throughout the British Isles and further afield and while there is a huge body of literature on the topic of beliefs and superstitions about animal behaviour, I do want to stress that the following notes are based solely and entirely on what I was told over many years by various locals. They are or were beliefs once held, or said to be held, by people in this locality and much of the following arose in the conversations referred to above as opposed to any systematic attempt on my part to gather 'folklore'.

The cow (and the hare): The animal with which the farmer and his family were most closely associated would probably be the family cow, which occupied a central position in the farm's economy. The family's cow had a name and anything which threatened the cow's wellbeing was most serious. If for any reason a family's cow's milk-yield dropped suddenly, or was less than expected, it was something of a crisis. Very often in such cases, it seems, in years gone by, some malign influence was considered likely.

I have been told several stories of how a farmer, having noticed that his cow's yield had dropped or that butter wouldn't form when churning, immediately suspected foul play. In these stories usually as a result, the farmer sat up all night to watch over his cow in the field. Nearly always in these tales, the cow involved was the family's only cow, so the supply of milk was particularly important.

At dawn the farmer invariably sees a hare coming into the field where his cow was grazing and taking her milk. This confirmed that a witch - for it was always an old woman who lived nearby - was believed to be able to take on the shape of a hare in order to steal milk from her neighbour's cow.



James Loy

A tale, typical of this kind was told to me by **Minnie Savage**. She told me the story of two elderly brothers called Parsons who lived in Lisnagree townland, Lissummon in the nineteenth century. Their only cow was known to be a particularly good milker, but for no known reason, her yield dropped dramatically.

Minnie said: "*The brothers suspected 'foul play'. So they sat up one night and kept watch and sure enough near daybreak next morning they saw a hare come through a gap in the hedge into the field where the cow was lying down and start to take her milk.*"

"*So the two brothers went to a neighbour man who had a muzzle-loading gun. He loaded the gun up and put a silver sixpence in it, for lead wouldn't do. Then the next night the neighbour and the brothers lay in wait in the field till the hare came into the field.*"

As is typical of these stories, the man shot at the hare and wounded it in the leg, but it escaped through the hedge. The next day, an old woman living nearby was seen to be limping and 'going on a stick'. Thereafter the cow's yield returned to normal.



Sara and Minnie Savage

I was told very similar stories by **Pat Lynch**, **Artie O'Hare** and **Terry** and **Annie Murray**. **Artie** told me about a case in the townland of Ballylough when as an alternative to a gun, a greyhound was used. It this

case the greyhound chased and injured the hare. However, it escaped and ran in through the open door of a cottage. When the owner of the greyhound went into the cottage there was no sign of the hare, but an old woman was sitting at the fire and had a cut on her leg.



Annie Murray

Annie Murray told of a case in Ballinagreagh townland near Acton where the cow suddenly went dry causing the family great hardship. In that case the man of the house went to a ‘wise man’ in Meenan in the Co Down who had a charm and got him to come. He came and performed his ritual charm and thereafter the cow’s milk returned to normal. It was presumed that some malicious neighbour had caused the problem.

A cow, or ox, was traditionally believed to have been present in the stable at Bethlehem on the night of the Nativity and it was widely believed that cattle knelt down at midnight on Christmas Eve in memory of that first Christmas. My parents and many others of their generation certainly believed this or said that they did. This was not just a local belief for it is referred to in a poem by Thomas Hardy entitled ‘The Oxen’ about this same traditional belief in the West country of rural England.

The poem begins ...

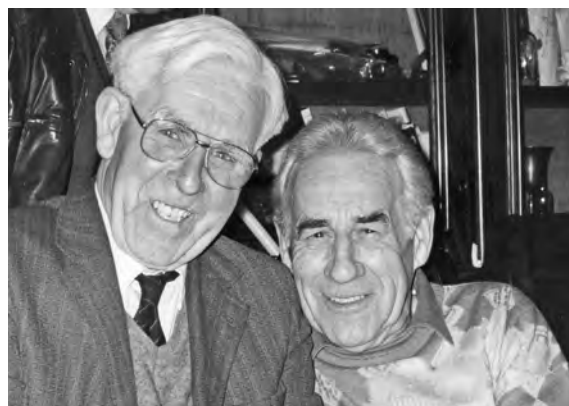
*‘Christmas Eve and twelve of the clock
Now they are all on their knees’
An elder said as we sat in a flock
Round the embers in hearthside ease.....?’*

As I said in relation to the hare, milk cows were often seen as the target for jealous neighbours or witches. There were various stories and beliefs associated with **churning**. If during churning, butter would not form it was generally assumed that an evil person had ‘blinked’

the cows or in some mysterious way ‘charmed’ the cream from the milk. If a person called at a house when the churning was taking place, it was expected that they would take a ‘brash’ at the churn for otherwise it was thought that they did not wish the churning process well.

Minnie Savage also told me that there was a woman in Lissummon who kept a churn and was reputed to regularly sell butter in Newry Butter Market, although she had no cows!

She also told me that there was a tradition in the Lissummon area that when a heifer had her first calf, the first milking, called the ‘beastings’, should be poured at the root of a fairy thorn as an offering to the fairies. She said that a man called Arthur Carty of Leish, was still practising this tradition of pouring the beastings at the root of a fairy thorn in his field, till he died in 1917.



Terry Murray and Tommy Morrow



The Hare: While on the subject of hares, there are also stories about hares which couldn’t be caught by the best greyhounds. It was generally believed that such a hare was supernatural and again most likely a witch in disguise.

Terry Murray told me that in Aughantaraghan townland early in the 1920’s there was such a hare. This hare’s reputation was such that it was christened ‘Dudley’ by members of the Loy family, (possibly after a man called Dudley Magennis who had lived in the locality in the nineteenth century and had been re-incarnated in the form of a hare!) It was said that *Dudley*, the hare, had supernatural powers and couldn’t be caught. How sincerely this was believed I don’t know, but *Dudley* was for a time something of a local celebrity. People with great greyhounds were said to come from a distance to hunt *Dudley* but *Dudley*, according to the tradition, always escaped.

Artie O'Hare told me that in the townland of Knockanarney, near Jerrettspass, where he was born, there was such a hare which couldn't be caught. It was often hunted without success. One day a man arrived with two champion greyhounds and they chased the hare very closely. The hare ran close to the door of a little cottage and as it passed, with the hounds in close pursuit, a little girl standing at the cottage door was heard to cry out, "*Run granny! Run!*"

Unlike the rabbit, the hare does not have a burrow or hiding place, relying on its speed and agility to escape predators. It is believed that young hares give off no scent and as a result were difficult to detect by predators. As well as this, the mother hare gave birth to her leverets in three or four different locations, often miles apart. Leaving just one leveret in each form increased the chances of survival. Hares are designated as game and can only be hunted in certain circumstances by those who are licensed to do so. The hare's cry, when caught, is plaintive and quite human-sounding and said to be like the cry of a child.



The Horse: In the past, rivalling the cow as the animal most vital to the farmer's family, was the horse. The horse was so central to so many activities that it isn't surprising that the farming people, I knew well, had many stories and explanations regarding the behaviour of a horse, particularly when the behaviour was uncharacteristic. After all, apart from pet dogs and cats, only the horse and cow were actually given names and were viewed with affection and pride, for they were nearly part of the family. While in my youth, tractors were beginning to be more common, older farmers still depended on the horse for much of their activities and some like Billy Minnis and Paddy Rafferty continued to keep horses until they retired. But in former times the horse was at the very centre of life providing power and transport. Having a good and dependable horse was a vital asset on the farm and life in general. So when a usually biddable horse became unmanageable, it was a '*big deal*'.

One explanation of such erratic behaviour, I was told, was that a horse was said to be able to see or to detect the presence of supernatural beings that a human eye couldn't see. It was said that if you looked between the horse's ears you could see what the horse saw. It was also believed that the horse's eye magnified things to four times their actual size.

Horses would sometimes, inexplicably, stop on the road and refuse to move or pass a certain point. Often this spot was said to have been the scene of some tragedy or death in the past, possibly involving a horse or horses.

On these occasions the horse would be said to be '*white with sweat*' or '*in a lather of sweat*' and trembling uncontrollably.

Several people (**Minnie Savage, Hugh Meehan, Peter Murtagh, Artie O'Hare, my mother and others**) locally told me of times when this happened. Funerals seem to have been particularly prone to this and I was told of several occasions when the horses pulling the hearse stopped and refused to move. Black horses were favoured by undertakers and **my mother** talked of one funeral when the black horses being '*white with sweat*'. She said that eventually the coffin had to be carried more than a mile to Cullyhanna church. Such an event at a funeral was obviously particularly distressing for the mourners and for all concerned. Certain people were said to have the ability to calm horses on these occasions and would have to be sent for when all other efforts failed. As an example of this, **Artie O'Hare** told me of a funeral going to Donaghmore Church which was unable to proceed because the horses refused to pass a certain house, the late owner of which had had a bad reputation. A local man, - unfortunately I don't recall his name - who had it seems these '*special powers*' was sent for. He was able to calm the horses and lead them past the house and allow the funeral to proceed.

Peter Murtagh told me of once when he was taking a load of coal from Porter's yard in Jerrettspass to Barr Parochial House that the horse stopped at a place he called '*the Carnye*' (at the road junction opposite Barr School) and refused to go on. It became so distressed and that he had to undo the harness and leave the cart there. Peter believed that in the distant past there had been a battle of some sort at '*the Carnye*', which he described as "*auld kings of Ireland, fightin' through other.*"

Another sign that something supernatural was present on a road was when a normally quiet, biddable horse would suddenly take fright and become unmanageable, bolt and gallop in panic for a long distance before returning to normal. **Minnie Savage** told that on one occasion, when her father was coming home from Banbridge his normally very quiet horse bolted when passing Union Lodge gates on the Loughbrickland Road and galloped wildly from there through Poyntzpass village to their home in Laurel Hill, Lissummon, where it arrived exhausted and in a very distressed state.

A well-known local story connected to Union Lodge concerns William Fivey the owner of the estate. It was said that the ghost of a horse which Fivey had locked up and starved to death could be heard galloping up the avenue at certain times

A horseshoe nailed to an outhouse door with the open points upwards was a lucky sign and would ward off evil.

If it was hung the other way round, it was said that “*all the luck would run out of it.*”

Carrying a horseshoe nail, made by the local blacksmith, in your pocket was believed to prevent toothache and bring good luck.



Dog: A dog's lick was said to be an aid to healing a cut. If I had fallen in my childhood and grazed my hands or knees, I would be told to ‘*let the dog lick it.*’ I was told by Alan Gibson that on one occasion when he fell and was seriously cut the pack of hounds belonging to Newry Harriers came along and many of them licked his wounds which thereafter healed perfectly. (It appears that there are enzymes or antibodies in the dog's tongue that actually do encourage healing.)

Occasionally when a dog is sleeping he will yelp quietly and his legs will twitch. He was said to be ‘*dreaming.*’ It was said that this was a sign of visitors coming and that they were coming from the direction the dog's nose was pointing.

It was also believed that dogs can sense the supernatural and are quick to pick up a sense of when something is wrong in a house.

A dog called ‘**Trudge**’ was said to prowl certain local roads at night. Meeting this huge black dog, with eyes ‘*like burning coals,*’ was a terrifying experience. Peter Murtagh, Minnie Savage and Pete O’Hanlon, an uncle of mine by marriage, told me stories of this supernatural beast. Pete O’Hanlon, who drove a horse-drawn ‘hackney-car’ – told me that one night Trudge followed him all the way from Poyntzpass to Markethill. Minnie Savage told me that she knew a man called Joe McGrath from Keadymore who told her that he had encountered this fearsome dog twice. She said that he described Trudge as, ‘*the devil incarnate.*’



Goat: It was believed that keeping a goat along with cattle was a way of preventing the cattle developing a disease called ‘*red-water.*’ ‘*Red-water*’ is caused by ticks and goats were thought to act in some way as a defence against these ticks. A goat was also kept with cows as the goat could safely eat weeds and plants which the cows wouldn’t eat or which would be harmful to them if they did eat them. It was believed that because goats ate these herbs their milk was stronger and particularly health-giving and was recommended for sick people or delicate children.

To keep goats from wandering too far they were sometimes ‘*langedled*’ or ‘*spancilled.*’ This was done by tying a piece of rope from one of the goat’s front legs to one back leg in such a way as to limit the goat’s stride. It was said of a person, man or woman, who made a bad match in marriage that they “*would be better off langelled to a goat.*” A metal spike, which was attached to a goat’s chain or rope and hammered into the ground when tethering a goat, was called a ‘*stab.*’ In bad weather it would be said, “*That’s like a night a goat would pull up her stab and go home!*”

I was told several stories of people being terrified when they heard the sound of heavy chains being dragged along a lonely country road at dead of night. They believed it to be the devil or an evil spirit and were very relieved when they discovered that a goat had indeed pulled up her stab and was wandering about dragging a chain and the stab behind her.

If a man hadn’t shaved for several days, he would be said to have ‘*a beard like a buck goat.*’



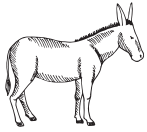
Sheep: It was said that a sheep would drown if it fell into water as its fleece would become waterlogged and cause it to sink. I don’t know if this is fact or fiction.

A sheep can sometimes turn over on its back and not be able to get up. If not aided to get back on its feet, it will die. I have seen this several times myself. Locally a ewe was called a ‘**yoo**’ and what is called a ‘*tup*’ elsewhere is called a ‘**tip**’ locally. What is known as ‘lanolin’, a waxy substance in natural wool, is known as ‘**eek**’ locally. Johnny Carson would say, on a hot day, “*That will rise the eek in them.*”

I was very recently told by a lady member of our society of a strange incident, involving a sheep, which occurred at the funeral of her uncle in 1999. (I will not embarrass my informant by identifying her, but I can assure you that this comes from a most reliable source). The uncle in question was a sheep farmer at Clontigora in South Armagh. Clontigora is on the border and in days past – or maybe in days yet to come – smuggling was a major industry, often involving the movement of livestock. The lady told me that her uncle was a sheep-man all his days.

On the day of his funeral those fit enough decided to walk behind the hearse from the deceased’s home to Killeen church, a distance of nearly two miles. A large number of family and neighbours chose to walk. When the cortege had gone about 200 yards and was passing a field in which some sheep belonging to the deceased man were grazing, the people were amazed to see a

sheep climbing over the stone wall and join the cortege, walking behind the hearse. It continued all the way to the chapel gate, at which point it turned and went back the way it had come. The lady told me that one of the wreaths placed on her uncle's grave was in the form of a sheep made from white flowers.



Donkey: My parents certainly believed, and it was also widely believed throughout the British Isles, that the donkey, like the cow, would kneel down at midnight on Christmas Eve in memory of its presence at the first Christmas. However, it was said to be very unlucky to try to spy on this event. It is suggested that the significance given to the donkey owes much to its role in the New Testament story and that the cross on its back is a legacy of its presence at events such as the Nativity and on Palm Sunday etc.

The donkey is said to have special powers and is associated with certain cures. A cure for whooping cough was to bring the patient – usually a child – to the donkey and pass him or her over and under the donkey three times. Felix McConville of Lenaderg told me that his mother did this saying at the same time, “*A-pugana, hugana, lugana, a-lugana, pugana, hugana*”. He didn't know the meaning of this but thought it was possibly Irish.

Another cure involving a donkey is that for mumps. The donkey's blinkers are placed round the sufferer's head and he is led to the pigsty saying to the pig, “*Pig, pig here are your mumps!*”

It was believed that hairs cut from the donkey's cross and worn round the neck in a little bag was a cure for respiratory problems such as asthma.

In the late 1940s we had a donkey which could be particularly stubborn and headstrong at times. It would occasionally, for no apparent reason, stop and refuse to move. There was no suggestion of any supernatural motive, it was just said that the donkey had taken a “*strunt*” and was just being deliberately defiant and awkward.



Pig: Pat Lynch, my father and several other locals told me that pigs can see the wind and this belief it seems, was once widespread. There is no explanation for it other than that pigs apparently become agitated in windy conditions and it is said that they have an acute sense of smell. As I mentioned

earlier Norman Cole's family believed that their pigs had some premonition that the ‘big wind’ was coming.

It was also believed that pigs couldn't swim because they would cut their own throats with their sharp little trotters. Apparently this is not correct. The cure for mumps mentioned for the donkey (above) also involves the pig. One explanation was that a pig has chubby cheeks not unlike those of a mumps-sufferer and it was thought that the patient had become infected in some way by contact or nearness to a pig. A pig's bite was said to be particularly severe and dangerous. I was told of an instance where a child was severely bitten by a sow when he went into a pen where there were piglets and of another instance where a farmer had a fortunate escape when a boar ripped off a large part of his wellington boot.

There were several ‘pig butchers’ in the locality in former times who would visit farms to ‘cut’ (castrate) male piglets or slaughter a pig or pigs. I remember John Burns killing pigs for my neighbour Joe Lennon. When he had been killing pigs for someone, John Burns occasionally brought home a pig's bladder which could be inflated and used as a ball or balloon. He said that you could use every bit of a pig only the ‘*squeak*’



Hedgehog: It was believed that hedgehogs would drink the milk from a sleeping cow which was lying down in a field. There seems to be some evidence that this may be true. It was also believed that a hedgehog could carry an apple by rolling on in such a way that it got stuck in its spines. **James Loy** told me that he once saw a hedgehog with an apple on its back.



Weasel – Stoat: There are no weasels in Ireland. The animals locally called ‘weasels’ are in fact stoats, but I never heard anyone referring to them other than as weasels. My father told me that if a weasel was threatened or cornered, it would whistle by putting its tail in its mouth and that other weasels would come to its assistance.

As a weasel was believed to be extremely ‘wicked’ - bad - tempered and that it could be very aggressive if cornered.

Ian Copeland told me that some years ago, when an out-house on his farm became infested with rats, he set a gin-trap inside the out-house. He caught quite a number of rats but one morning when he inspected the trap he discovered that he had caught a ‘weasel’. While it was trapped it wasn't seriously injured and, as he had no wish

to kill it he set about trying to release it. He opened the door of the out-house and taking a brush-shaft he managed to prise the jaws of the trap open. He had expected the weasel to flee through the open door but instead it ran up the brush-shaft to attack him. He threw down the shaft and fled!

James Loy, Andy Liggett and others believed, or told me they believed, that weasels hold funerals for their dead. They said that the remains of a dead weasel would be carried in procession by two weasels, with a group of other weasels following behind, and that the remains were buried. They told me of individuals they knew who had witnessed this event, although they hadn't witnessed it themselves.

However last year a member of our Local History Society, **Nuala O'Hagan** told me that she had witnessed something which looked just like this *'funeral procession'* some years ago. While she was driving near Lily O'Brien's she saw a number of weasels in a row going along the side of the road. She didn't stop but got the impression that the one in front was carrying something on its back. She feels there were six or seven weasels in a row. Roberta Cockfield (Loughlin) told me that her Uncle John Johnson had told her that while working out at Carrickdrummond in the Fourtowns he had witnessed this phenomenon.

My mother told me that a purse made out of the skin of a weasel would never be empty.



Badger: There was a large badger-sett on Andy Liggett's land and he said it was an infallible sign of a good spell of weather if the badger dragged the bedding from its sett outside the entrance on a spring day.



Cat: It was generally accepted that a cat used its whiskers to determine whether or not its body would pass through any opening. (This is not correct) Because of a number of narrow escapes from danger of one kind or another, a cat was said to have nine lives. It was believed that if a cat fell from a height it would always land on its feet. A black cat crossing one's path was a very lucky omen. If the cat was seen sitting at the fire washing its face, it was believed to be a sure sign of bad weather.



Rats: It was widely believed that rats could steal eggs. I was told that one rat would lie on its back and hold the egg between its paws and other rats would drag it, and the egg, to their nest.



Birds:

Swallows: I was told by several people, including my mother, that a house on which swallows had built their nest would never be struck by lightning. It was regarded as very unlucky to kill a **swallow** or to interfere with a swallow's nest. Some people thought it a sign of good luck when a swallow built on their house. Others, who were annoyed by the amount of bird-droppings, would sometimes knock down a nest from under the eaves of a house. This was seen as *'asking for trouble'*. A farmer who killed a swallow ran the risk of his milk turning to blood.

Like the swallow, the **cuckoo** is a migratory bird which arrives in this country around the beginning of April. When a period of stormy unsettled squally weather occurred in early April it was said to be *'the cuckoo storm'* for it was believed that the cuckoo only arrived in windy weather as it needed the wind to help it get here.

My mother told me that the **robin** got its red breast when its feathers were stained by the blood of Jesus as, in a kindly gesture, it pulled thorns from his crown of thorns as he hung on the cross. As a result of this, a robin was regarded with great affection and thought of as a special bird. Various people working in gardens managed to befriend a robin and I was told of several instances where a robin would eat out of their hand. It was believed to be most unlucky to harm a robin in any way or to interfere with its nest. However it was regarded as a very bad omen if a robin came into the house. That was said to foretell a death in the family.

I never heard any local traditions regarding the *'jenny'-wren* which elsewhere was hunted on Boxing Day by individuals calling themselves the *'Wren Boys'*.

There were various superstitions about **magpies**. Seeing one was unlucky. My father would say, *"Good morning Robert and good-luck"*, when he saw a lone magpie. I was told of an old fellow called Johnny Farnon who lived in Tay Pot Row, who if he saw a single magpie when on his way to a fair would turn on the road and go home. Seeing two was a good omen. Magpies were well-known for their *'stealing'* of bright things and particularly anything shiny.

Locally rooks, jackdaws and crows were all simply known as ‘**crows**’. Crows were said to start building their nests on February 1st, St Brigid’s Day, However, according to Mickey Waddell, his old neighbours believed that if the 1st February was on a Sunday, the crows didn’t start to build till Monday 2nd.

Harry Campbell believed that if the crows built their nests in the tree-tops it was a sure sign of a very wet year. It was said that if a jackdaw’s tongue was split using a silver sixpence, the jackdaw could be taught to speak or at least say several words.

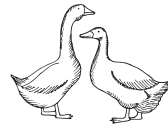
If seagulls were seen inland at any time, or following a plough in the springtime, it was said to be a sign of a storm at sea.



Poultry: My mother who, every year, would have had a clocking hen or two sitting on hen or duck eggs in late spring or early summer, always feared that there would be a thunderstorm during the incubation period. She said that thunder would ‘*addle*’ the eggs and so kill the potential chicks inside. One way of avoiding that was to put a horseshoe under the hen with the eggs.

I don’t know if there is any basis for this in reality but it

appears to have been widely accepted as fact and it seems to me, looking back, that thunderstorms were much more common in springtime back then. A ‘setting’ was 13 eggs although more often than not fewer. A straw hanging from a hen’s tail feathers was said to be a sign of a stranger (visitor) coming to the house. Kathleen McVeigh told me that it was most unlucky to bring hawthorn blossom into the house for, as a consequence of doing this, any eggs set under a hen would fail to hatch.



Goose: The fat recovered after a goose was roasted, was called “gooseame” and some of it was kept in a jar as it was widely believed to be effective when used to treat sprains or rubbed on stiff joints.



Insects:

Bees: Joe McKee kept bees and he said that he believed that bee sting were good for relieving rheumatism and pains generally. This was widely believed. I never met a bee-keeper locally who practised the tradition of “Telling the bees!” when there was a death in the family.

DOG ECLIPSE

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