

NEWSLETTER

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THE TRAVELLING SHOP

Cover image:

**Paddy Dalton, Claremorris
at his travelling shop
during the 1970s.**

(image from irishbeo.ie)

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THE TRAVELLING SHOP

Who remembers the travelling shop – the feeling of anticipation of what goodies could be bought, the sights and smells of the various items on board, the jars filled with lollipops and the bull's eyes staring out at you?

O'Malleys travelling shop, Castlehill
(image from *Crossmolina Chronicle*)

Visiting each area on specified days, the travelling shop was in existence in an age where the population of Ireland was not as mobile as it is today. Delivering by motorised vehicles, they provided an invaluable weekly service selling everything from basic groceries to hardware.

Such was the variety of items available on the travelling shop that you could purchase mouse traps, rat poison, needles and thread, socks, wellington boots, fencing wire, shovels, forks, rope, animal feed, seed potatoes, eggs, meat, sugar, flour, cigarettes, cod liver oil and everything in between. Prior to rural electrification, candles, wicks and globes were vital supplies provided by the travelling shop. The division of large quantities of dry goods meant a lot of preparatory work had to be done prior to the dispatch of the travelling shop to the various areas.

Usually a one-man operation, it halted outside each household and was the highlight of the week. Its arrival was eagerly anticipated as the shopkeeper would have no hesitancy in imparting news from the surrounding area.

Travelling shops, once established, provided a consistent service for many years in an area. There were no plastic bags or reusables, instead the goods were wrapped in brown paper and secured with twine. Luxury commodities such as biscuits were sold loose from a tin. Children's treats consisted of bulls-eyes, lolly pops, penny bars, liquorice, sticks of rock, skipping ropes, water guns and lucky bags.

Many housewives had hen eggs to sell (egglers) and these were often used in part payment for goods. Operating a travelling shop in the general Foxford area, Michael John Gallagher recalled how he endured many obstacles including days of shortages and rationing following World War Two, petrol scarcity and the 'big snow' in 1947.

Frank McDonnell, Crossmolina recalls his days on the travelling shop for O'Malleys, Crossmolina. Having established the travelling shop in 1935, O'Malleys designated different days for different areas: Monday was Glenisland, Tuesday was Glenhest, Wednesday was Keenagh, Thursday was Bofeenau, Friday and Saturday were Ballycroy. The business has since developed into Lough Conn Milling and Transport.

Joe O'Toole, Tuam, Co. Galway, having started out with a travelling shop in the 1940, went on to employ 170 people in his Supervalu store in Tuam.

He reminisces that it was a far cry from his early days travelling the highways and byways of Co. Galway in his travelling shop.

Similarly, Paddy Dalton, a travelling shopkeeper in south Mayo during the 1960s and 1970s realised that with the growing use of private cars followed by the coming of the supermarkets to towns, the demise of the travelling shop was inevitable.



McHale's travelling shop, Lahardane. Left to right: Kevin McHale, Lahardane, Bridget Grahan (née Neary), Bridget Barrett (née Hoban), Bridgie Harte (née Brogan), Mrs Kilcoyne... all of Massbrook
(image from *The Open Door*)

The latter part of Paddy's life in the retail sector reflected these changing times as he first established a supermarket and later a news agency in the town of Claremorris.

Among the travelling shops operating in north Mayo were the following:

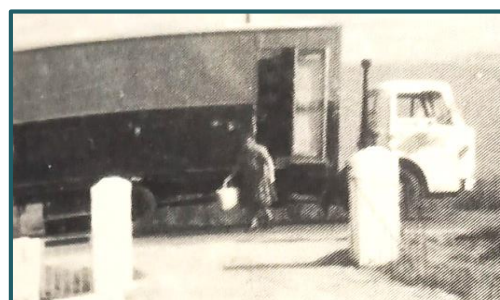
Morans (Ross), Tim Healy, Sean Lally, Sweeneys, Dodie Shevlin, Eamon Shevlin, Seamus Gaughan, Langans, John McAndrew (Erris), O'Malleys, Dalys, Munnellys, Lynches (Crossmolina), Coyne (Bofeenau), McHales and Leonards (Lahardane), Gallaghers (Ballylahan and Foxford) and many more.

The 1970s saw the end of the travelling shop in most areas due to the increased use of motor cars. However, this bygone era is etched in our memory during a time when life was simple.

References:
Shraigh N.S. Centenary 1888 – 1988
Rathkell N.S. Centenary 1907 – 2007
Crimlin N.S. 1859 - 2009
Irishbeo.com
Crossmolina Chronicles
The Open Door by Kathleen Browne

A travelling shop at Shraigh, near Belmullet 1970s

(image from *Shraigh N.S. Centenary 1888 – 1988*)



Extract from the Ordnance Survey Letters of 1838

A brief history of the townland of **SRAIGH/SHRAIGH/SRAH** (strath or holm)

Located in the parish of Kilcommon, it's situated approximately 3 miles south, south-east of Belmullet. Bounded on the west by Blacksod Bay and on the north by Trawmore Bay. The property of Major Bingham. It contains 1,378 acres, 2 roods, 0 perches*, of which 555 acres are cultivated; 100 acres are blowing sand; and the remainder is mainly deep bog. There is a headland, called Claggan in this townland; it stands out westwards into Blacksod Bay, and is prevented from being an island only by a narrow strip of sand only about 50 chains in length.

The north, west, and most of the south coast of Claggan is rocky, and in its east part is an Infants' burial ground. The rest of Srah has an extensive sandy beach.

* There are 40 perches in a rood, and 4 roods in an acre.