

into round brown moulds. Like every other small boy I knew each stain as I knew the precise number of telephone cables on the poles, and on many a day I watched in fascination from my bedroom window as the water droplets gathered pendulously on the lines near the wire insulators; they grew fat by feeding on their neighbours and then, with pear distended bellies and a tenuous elongated connection to the wire, they slid down the incline from the cup finally losing their grip to tumble and burst on the roadway far below. Those telephone cables went straight up to our unpretentious little post office, here was the other haven of security to the town and the neighbourhood, because dollars arrived from boys in America, and pounds from the men working in England and the migrant potato pickers of Scotland.

Those potato pickers were known as "tatty hokers" and they came mainly from the west of Ireland, and particularly from the island of Achill. Boys and girls and men of all ages traditionally went to Scotland in June for the potato harvest - they returned in drabs and drabs until December; they were following the custom of previous generations of their families until by 1937 it was estimated that 6000 pickers were crossing over to Scotland from the west each year. I went to school with some of those boys and girls and I knew the deprivation of the land and the living from whence they came:

*Barren bogland: watery waste with rampant rock-*

*Inheritance of alien curse.*

*Cromwell, Clanricarde, countless scion from Ardrahan-*

*With privilege and purse.*

*Gnarled hands, weathered face,*

*Broken knees in potato mire,*

*Broken spirit at Scottish ire,*

*Broken body in bothy fire.*

The houses, or "bothys" in which the workers were accommodated were in many cases no better than animal stalls, and it was in one of those filthy dwellings in Kirkintilloch, Dumbartonshire, that tragedy struck in the early hours of 23 September 1937. A number of young boys, accompanied by their sisters had gone to Scotland for the potato harvest; they were lying asleep on beds of straw upstairs in the bothy, their sisters were downstairs - the building went on fire and ten young Achill men were trapped above and burnt to death.

Frank Sherry's writings refer to the post office of his day, and whilst he was describing it, his thoughts were rambling over new ways and old:

'Man is a vain creature: to each it seems that the universe

revolves around him. Each plays his or her little part in the centre of the stage, forgetting that every other player thinks that the limelight is for him. Well, after all life is like that: each man's life is his drama, in which he plays the principal part. It has to be that way, because God gave each of us a soul. I have paused here to wonder is it worth while to set down the thoughts that come to a man when he looks back over the years that are gone.

In recalling memories it is easy to bore people with incessant laments for old times. Yet, I feel that the old times for all their hardships had much good in them, but I am willing to admit that the new times have their compensations. I am glad that the lot of the worker has improved; I am glad that rural housing conditions have got very far away from the mud cabin, but I am not so sure that these things are appreciated - is the worker of to-day much happier with shorter hours and the half holiday? He has, I think, partly forgotten how to be happy.

Here in Foxford we still make our own amusements, we have no cinema, though they are accessible. We have plays and concerts and our own talent furnishes them and that is good for us.

While many small towns are sunk in apathy we are lively. Strangers notice the busy activity of our little Post Office - from its appearance one would imagine that half a dozen letters a day would be its full compliment and that telephone or telegrams were yet unknown. But the little old fashioned shop, with its rustic air, hums with business and the switchboard girl has her work cut out for her. Some day they will build a sedate edifice with 'POST OFFICE' in stucco on the front of it and it will be a pity because the wee shop has a character all of its own. It might almost be a showpiece for tourists - it is exactly what a Hollywood producer might present as a rural post office in Ireland, without even dreaming that it has been true to life. Its activities mirror the bustle and briskness that a thriving industry brings to a neighbourhood.

Any of the towns and villages of Ireland could be made equally brisk by providing local industries, then the countryside would no longer be a place out of which youth is anxious to escape. It would return to something like the old ways, when story telling by the fireside was an art, and the "travellin' man" with his news was made welcome. The stories and the news come over the radio to us nowadays, but I doubt if we enjoy them as much.

He may have been right in his musings on life in general, but he was wrong about the Post Office. Nowadays it is in a different location, but there's no stucco sign, and were he to walk in there to-day he would notice little change.

On a fair day in Foxford the only area where cow dung did not