Oral history Interview with Tom Johnston Ashleam School Achill Island

Tuesday 16th Oct 2018 10 a.m. - 10.54 a.m.

Interviewer: Dr Angela Maye-Banbury

Total running time: Interview 53 minutes and 41 seconds.

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Angela: Hi, this is Angela Maye-Banbury, the date is Tuesday October 16th (2019) and I'm here at Ashleam School with Tom Johnston. Tom, go raibh míle maith agat for doing an oral history interview with me here today. I wonder, could I just begin by asking you what your first memories are of Achill when you were growing up?

Childhood in Achill (0.28)

Tom: It's very vague, my memories, up until I was about four really. But yeah. Growing up on Achill. As we got older, we were given more chores to do, more work to do, the day was always full of activity, work and pastimes. And it was a very safe place. We were free to go where we wished. But we always remained within our village community here in Ashleam and people. Houses were open doors. People went in and out. We all knew what the neighbours were doing. And if a neighbour was in trouble, the community gave the support necessary. And if somebody fell on hard times, their turf was seen to, their hay was seen to by the community. So ...It was my early days. It was an age when we had no electricity, no running water. And ...but it was idyllic in a way.

Impact of Emigration (**1.38)**

It was a time too when we took it as norm that our fathers would be absent from our homes for 11 months of the year. They would come for one month. Maybe they would come for Christmas, just to be home for Christmas. Or more often than not, they waited until March or April for to do the

spring work, to cut the turf and to get the fields ready for sowing potatoes and oats and so on. But otherwise, we didn't realise...we thought this was the normal way of life because in our community, in our village, every home was the same. They were fatherless for 11 months of the year except in cases where there was illness or something where the father would have to wait at home. And that meant that there was a big burden on the mothers, on our mothers, they had to look after the rearing of us children, they had to look after the work in the house and outside on the farm. The cattle had to be attended to and all the other chores. As well as that, they had to make decisions about us, you know, in the absence of a father. And even it was very funny when my father retired, all the decisions were left to my mother and that was common throughout the village.

The Seasons In Achill (3.07)

But it was lovely where... Our activities were governed by the seasons, what we did in winter, it was like visiting the long nights, the women they would come together in some house and they would reminisce on the past while they were knitting. Or else they would be spinning - the spinning wheel was put into play where we had our own sheep. The wool was washed and it was carded and made into rows and got ready for spinning. There was never time wasted. Then as the day got longer, we were busy with getting ready for the spring work, with getting the fields ready. And summer then was a time when we were out playing and we were barefoot. I remember coming to this school - we'd be pleading to our parents just to let us get rid of our shoes. And of course the minute one family in the village discarded their shoes, everybody did. I remember coming into this school Ashleam - the quietness, the patter of feet, the floor in the absence of noise made by shoes. And so everybody walked to school - it was only about four or five minutes down the road. And so it was... And of course in the village too, a lot of people were related - cousins and second cousins. And everybody knew everybody and who was related to whom.

Switching On Electricity in Achill 1952 (4.48)

And it was - I think it was - an idyllic time because then in the school in February 1952 was the official switch on for the electricity service for Achill. And I was allowed - there was no rules to go to bed - and the parish priest did the switch. And I remember the excitement of going home and being able to have light just by pressing your switch. Myself and my brother spent hours just putting on and off the light that first...And then of course the beauty of that is that what I remember is winter evening having to go to the shop for tins of paraffin oil for the oil lamps and cold winter evenings. And the longer you walked, the heaver the can got and the colder your fingers were.

Evenings in Achill (5.45)

And all that was gone. Then of course, as I said, we had no radio or television. So people in the village, there were certain houses where the old people, the old men gathered. And one of those houses was my grandfather's. And I remember sitting there, I would accompany my mother on her visit at night. She was… this was a time when there were fairies everywhere and they appeared at night. I think they told us these stories to keep us in. But I would accompany her and she would leave me there while she visited her cousin or did her visits. And I remember my grandfather reading a paper - 'The Irish Press' at the time. It was shortly after the war. He would read it and leave it down. All the old men would discuss what he had read in Gaelic - they switched the language. We grew up in a bilingual village. The old people - my grandparents - we spoke Gaelic to them. But amongst ourselves the youngsters, we got into speaking English. But it was a nice time to live because things were improving. Then the excitement of radio. Before that, there were some radios. They were powered by these batteries. And I remember one we were listening to - a Mayo game - at a neighbour's house. And half way through the match, the battery went down and we didn't know until the next day who won the game, you know (laughter). But it was - and then with electricity, we got radios, television. But television then - the downside of television - that ended this social mixing where the women went. And there was another house then prior

to television time where the young girls would meet. The young lads, we would meet and we'd play cards and the men card playing in the winter time.

Turf Saving (7.58)

Then, of course, in the summer, there were other activities. And of course Ashleam Bay was our (inaudible) where we swam and we fished. But having said that, we were kept busy. The older we got, the more jobs we got. For example, turf (saving?) that took up a lot of time because the turf for this village was on the mountain side. It was a long way from home and it had to be carried home. This was before tractors came on the scene. It was brought home by the donkey and pannier - these panniers. Ah it took, we were seven weeks bringing home the turf from the mountain. And then on a warm day, we'd like to go swimming. We were allowed to go but be back in an hour. We'd run and get in because we were, you know.

Ashleam Bay (08.57)

Angela: Did you swim down in Ashleam Bay? Is that where you use to go?

Tom: Yes. And we had the official opening there during the festival. And it's a bay where we get because of tide movement and storms, sand is deposited and it becomes a strand. And we had a strand this year. And we were hoping it would remain but it only lasted three months.

St Stephen's Day, Lá na Dreoilín (09.28)

Tom: But it is...now we rarely left the village. We rarely left to go to the Sound. And one of the big day in our lives was the day after Christmas - St Stephen's Day, the 'Lá na Dreoilín' as we used to call it - the wren - when we went from house to house. We made what was meant to signify was a bush but it was a frame of timber and strings and papers. And we went - and we'd have to say "Dreoilín, dreoilín, dreoilín… rí na n-éan, is mór do mhuirín, is beag é féin, éirig suas a bhean

a tí; is tabhair pingiun don dreoilín." And if we didn't say that, we might not get paid. And we had this off my heart. And with the pennies we got, the big day was at the Sound for Christmas.

Achill Sound (09.10)

And of course there was a big crib at the Sound Church. And of course we went down to visit the crib. But of course, it wasn't visiting the crib, it was visiting the shops. And we came back with cap guns, with sweets (laughter). In other words, this money was burning a hole in our pockets. But these were the memories we had. And we walked everywhere. And I remember the roads were tarred. The teacher was here was from the Sound. And we did our First Communion and we all walked in the summer time to the Sound Church. And we got sandals because we had been barefoot, you see and we put on sandals to dress up for the occasion. And I remember coming home - the time the sandals got stuck in the tar. And we came home and we had to. And our feet! But these are the things....

Television, Cars and Internet (11.06)

Things were changing. Now that I see my grandchildren, what they have, born into - motor cars, televisions, internet - I wonder what's left for them. There was always something new for us on the horizon. Something which was lovely. And we got television and then of course...But anyway. But life was basic though, Angela, you know. The main thing was used to have to get up and work, you know no matter what.

Angela: So your life, it was governed by the seasons and you say it was idyllic in many ways, working on the land.

Slean, Hay and Turf (11.52)

Tom: Yes, we were working. And the hay had to be mown by the scythe and we were introduced at 14 and we had to mow our own hay and we were cutting turf at an early age by hand with the

slean - hand cut. And my father would come home. He would sacrifice getting away for Christmas. But he would get away so he could do this work - what we called the ‘spring’ work. And what he would do was the turf was cut and then the land had to be altered by hand, you know, for cultivation. And that was time consuming. And we were all introduced to spades and shovels at an early age. And it did no harm. It did no harm.

Sport (12.40)

Our day was full. There was always something to do. If it wasn’t work, there was sport or something. And then in the summertime after Easter, we had sports and we were preparing for the school competitions. We’d a local teacher here, Dennis Gallagher, who was very much involved in sport. He later become minister for the Gaeltacht. But he was our teacher here and he was very much involved in sport.

Second Level Education (13.07)

Oh yeah, memories of school were good. And a big change in Achill then, of course, in 1948 - secondary level education became available to everybody. Until then, only those who were in business or could afford it went to boarding schools which meant there was no chance that we could go.

Seasonal Migration Work - Scotland (13.33)

Although with my father being in England, like every father, the remittances came every two weeks. We were never short of money. We hadn’t too much. But we had enough. Whatever we wanted to have really - it was very basic - we had. And so...I was talking there about - oh yeah, second level education. And my brother was one of the first to attend there. But my parents were determined that we would have an education, that we wouldn’t have to follow the way of life they did. My parents went on seasonal migrational work to Scotland at the age of 14. And from June

until November, they travelled the potato fields from Ayrshire in the south across Scotland up to the North Sea to Arbroath and Forth and those places. In by November when they would come home. And indeed my parents were married after a season of work there. And when the first born arrived, my mother decided to stay. My father just continued to work in England until he was 65. And that was the norm of life on Achill. But that has completely changed now. And that is because of the depopulation.

Achill as Place (14.53)

Achill has a great tie on its people. They always returned. In other parts of the country, you had migration where people went and left, it was, it was, it was the seasonal migration that they returned, the magnet for home was so strong that they just did this and they kept the home fires burning here. You see the way the land was positioned on Achill was most houses has 4 - 5 acres of land would couldn't sustain a family. We had mountain commonage.

Seasonal Migration (15.30)

Another income to sustain life...we wouldn't be able to live here. So that was the...the answer was seasonal migration. And that started in Achill from the 1880s. In England, of course, with the industrial revolution people moved to the cities, they needed food and potato was the food. And Scotland supplied England with a large source of that which meant farmers in Scotland sold his potato and the merchant bought the potato as it was growing. And it was his job to harvest the potato and get it to the markets in England. So to do that, he needed a large workforce that was mobile. Because when one field was finished, that moved.

Angela: Moving onto the next one…

Tom: As we say frictionlessly which meant... Now where did they find this workforce? They found them on the west coast of Ireland, the poor communities of Mayo, Achill and Erris and Donegal,

north west Donegal. So they got a local man called a gaffer who would organise. He would gather the squads and get them ready. Their fares were subsidised to Scotland. And they started in Ayrshire which seemed to have been frost free. That was where the early potato grew. And then they moved across and made their way up the east coast.

Achill, Donegal and Scotland (17.15)

But I remember as youngster listening to then reminiscing about things that happened in Scotland and the people from Donegal they met. And there has been a great tie between Achill and Donegal because a lot of people met there and people from Donegal married - out in Aran More island. And so another legacy of course was the pipe bands in Achill - they heard the pipe bands of Scotland. The only place in Ireland - Achill and Donegal - where the pipe bands are on new year's night. And we've a very strong tradition - five or six pipe bands and it's still very strong. But that was the way I saw life ..

Angela: And so idyllic, and working with the land and responding to the seasons both here and in …What is it about...You were saying that the population of Achill has fallen quite substantially. Does Achill still have that pull on its people, do you think? It was a special magnet for people.

Cleveland (18.31)

Tom: We have certainly this Achill diaspora. The Achill people seem to… (coughs)...they used Scotland many of them to go to America. And people from Achill happened to settle in Cleveland and there was work there and they would send the passage home for a brother, or a sister, or a cousin or or a neighbour to join them. Very often people went to Scotland - they used that to get to America. But they all converge on Cleveland. And at the moment, there's official toe between Achill and Cleveland. I've been out twice there to the meetings in the late years. And I remember the first time going to Cleveland. I happened to be on holidays with my … in Canada - we went across to Cleveland. And we were staying in this house. And word arrived. And this man came

and he was very annoyed that he hadn't heard of us coming. He'd invited all my neighbours that I went to school with.

Angela: Oh, wow. That's amazing.

Tom: He knew more about what was happening at home that what I did because they're in contact. And a funny thing happened I remember this neighbour of mine had died. I didn't know. I wasn't aware of it. The phone rang. And somebody from America - the word had got round. And the same thing applies. And that's why every summer they come in great numbers. And that's why the Kildownet Festival is great, I know, my family we all come from England or wherever and they're all here for those two or three weeks.

Angela: So the people in Cleveland keep a really keen eye on what's going on. They really keep their ear to the ground.

Tom: Oh they do. And even down the years when churches were being built, whenever there was a cause for this, the Clevelanders came up trumps. You've only to look at the gravestones where you see Cleveland - they were sponsored by people of Cleveland. But things are changing now you see. There's not many going to Cleveland. The youngsters aren't going now.

Angela: Where are the youngsters going now?

Second level education (20.52)

Tom: Well, I've always said - you see, talk about second level education and that secondary school made secondary, second level available to everybody. And those children - pupils going to the secondary school , they'd a very good vocational school. Ninety four per cent go to third level of one sort. Ninety four per cent - which means they qualified for careers which brings them out of Achill. Now it might not being them very far - Castlebar or Westport. But it brings them away

from here. They don't live here, rear their children here. My own, for instance - two of my children are in Westport and Castlebar. They're down every weekend. But they don't go to school here. The schools are closing. This school (Ashleman) is closed. Dooega school. There's few schools open. For instance where I was teaching in Bunnacurry in the eighties, we'd over 110 children. Four teachers. That's down to 11 - the centre of the island.

Angela: Can we talk about your career as a teacher and what inspired you to become a teacher?

Tom: It's just - things happened. When I was 12, when I was 14, I got a scholarship. Ninety years ago, the government established what they called preparatory schools. Preparatory Schools. So they were worried about the demise of the Gaelic language, so that language be brought back into schools. So they wanted to concentrate on boys and girls in Gaeltacht areas who would have been natural Gaeltacht speakers to qualify as teachers. And they would be sent to schools to help to uplift the language. So when I was 14, I got that examination which gave me free education in Galway. And also in the training college, it was free so much as you got a grant and it was taken out of your salary when you qualified. But you were - The idea was you would become a national teacher. At the age of 14, we were geared towards that in Coláiste Éinde in Salthill in Galway where I was. And in 1959, I qualified as a teacher. And I must say looking back now, it was wrong to put me in a school because at only 19 years of age, I didn't know. I was very innocent about the facts of life and about things you learn. But anyways, I spent 40 years teaching and I was able to retire at 59.

Angela: What did you teach? Did you teach in general? Or did you specialise?

Tom: No, no. It was the national school - primary teacher. So my first job was in Erris in Gahoma (sp). And I had a year there. And then a vacancy occurred here in Dooega. So I cycled for the first part of the year.

Angela: Rain or shine you were cycling.

Decline of Pupils (24.28)

Tom: And then the numbers fell in Dooega and it was to become one teacher school. At the same time, the Franciscan monks decided to be in Bunnacurry. And there was a vacancy there. We didn't have any say in the matter. I transferred there as Principal to Bunnacurry school which was the centre of the island and children were brought by bus there. At the time, it was the biggest school on the island. We had four teachers. So I was very much involved in the language because growing up with it, I had this love for it. Whenever I have to think sometimes, I have to think the Gaelic words or think in Gaelic. I can think better in Gaelic than in English. But I believe that for the language to survive, it had to be brought outside the walls of the school. I was involved in drama and other activities, you know, where the children...We had Gaelic drama festivals and all the schools were involved. It was ...I like teaching.

Drama and Plays (25.45)

Angela: Tell me about the Gaelic drama festival.

Tom: Well, it was schools. We decided to have a competition. I wrote some plays and I actually won an All Ireland (?). It went on from Achill to Connacht to the Taighdhearc in Galway and then if you survived there, you went to the (inaudible).

Angela: Tell me about your plays. Do you still have them?

Tom: Well, I have the text.

Angela: The script.

Tom: The scripts of them, yeah. Many of them are printed. I thought drama was a great way of getting children involved. It was good for them to give them a presence on stage and give themselves self-confidence. And even then, I think we have dramas fairly lively. We have Dooega - the adults put on plays there every year. But then I retired at 59 and luckily then, what would I do? Well, I retired. We decided - my own family were finished with third level and the expensive university years were over. They were working. They didn't need my money. So I decided. But then I got working with Hibernia College. And I didn't know a think about it. And they asked me if I would become supervisor. So it was great. I was there for a number of years doing schools in Connact. I avoided local schools anyone I knew . Supervised youngsters coming into their teaching practice. I advised them and sent in reports. I got involved in doing corrections for exams for them. Then I gave up the driving. So I ...they gave me some work where i could evaluate the different standards and signing off meetings in Dublin. Then I gave that up. As well as that, University College Galway were doing outreach diploma courses. So I was doing them here in Achill and in Castlebar for four or five years. And I enjoyed that because I was dealing with adults for the first time ever rather than children.

Angela: So it was a very different experience as a teacher for you.

Tom: Ah, it was a different experience.

Angela: In what way was it different?

Tom: It was. You had to be very careful with children. You were very conscious of their families, what you say, what you do, certain you don't. Adults you can talk about. It was very interesting because in Castlebar, we had people from all over the county came. And it was a two year course, a diploma course. And I was… once a week and it was giving lectures, covering the course. And I enjoyed it because those who came were anxious and eager. And I found that most rewarding.

And I have great friendships made from that past and those people who attended those courses since.

Angela: I don't know how many hundreds of...adults who are now older people who you've been involved with over the years...the mentoring...the teaching.

Tom: It came to the stage in Bunnacurry where I was teaching some grandchildren of people I had taught. Would you believe that? Because when I studied at that school, I was 20 when I came here. And some of the children were fourteen - six years older than them.

Angela: So not that much of an age difference.

Tom: I didn't want to teach in Dublin. I wanted to come home.

Angela: So Achill is home.

Tom: My parents were here. It was great that we were here. My wife, Kathleen, is from here.

Angela: So how many of you were in your family?

Tom: Five.

Angela: How many boys and how many girls?

Tom: Three boys and two girls. They're all here. I've one sister - she decided to go to England and she lives there. But otherwise we're all here in Mayo and Galway.

Angela: And you have your own children. And you and Kathleen are grandfather and grandmother.

Tom: It would be nice if they were able to come and live here. Alright, now we're lucky they come from Galway. Rarely we're without one of them. We had all of them last week (laughs). But two of them have built houses here. And another one beside me. So they have their own accommodation.

Angela: Is this your son who's the barrister?

Tom: Yes, that's right. Yes.

Angela: So when you look back, Tom, you look back on the years of being on Achill and you're teaching career. You're still very much involved in the protection of Achill as an ambassador for Achill .

Gaelic Athletic Association GAA (31.10)

Tom: I was involved in the GAA club. I believe that sport too is a great way for children to express themselves. I got involved in the Achill club, attending county board meeting and being secretary, chair, treasurer you name it. And I was invovled in underagedfootball for about 37 years. I enjoyed that. And when you're here then, you have to get involved in the community. I got involved in the Kildownet Committee where we built that pier now where the lifeboat is. School then when it closed, we looked after ..we out in those facilities for the school as a community centre. And it's great now that the likes of you can use it and the ladies it.

Angela: I'm very honored to be able to.

Tom: And we have the use of it for meeting sometimes. But there's a bit of work to be done with the sheds. But we'll get round to that. But you cannot avoid but getting involved with the community where everyone knows everybody.

Angela: Well, this is it. You try and make a positive difference. Project like this, like Achill Oral Histories,are designed to preserve, to do high quality recording of people's memories of Achill and their relationship with Achill as place. Is there anything else you think projects like this could do? When we've finished our interviews, I'll post a copy of your interview on a CD and I give you a written transcript. Then it goes on the project website so people can play it back and they'll see a photo of you and they'll hear your voice describing Achill over the years. Is there anything else a project like this should be doing?

Importance of Local History: Achillbeag and Deserted Village (33.16)

Tom: No but I believe that local history is so important. When I was teaching, I emphasised local history that the children knew about Achill, place names and why they got the place names. There were the days when the schools would go on school tours but I would bring them out to Achillbeag Island, bring them to Achillbeag and show them the round fort, and the lighthouse and the story of Achillbeag in my boat. I had my own boat which means I could bring them out there.

Angela: Oh, so you had your own boat which meant you could bring them out there yourself.

Tom: And then another year, we went out to Annach at the back of Slievemore - and we had a picnic there with the children. I think that was more.. And the place names and why they got their names and so on. And I think that was more productive - history's great but learning about battles and kings and going back...But the local history then, there's the story of the Franciscans came when I was teaching in Bunnacurry and the disasters, the drownings and the way of life of the Achill people, they could identify with those things. I remember one day, it was one of the things , you make it worthwhile and you teach it at school. And I got a phone call from a friend of mine who was coming to Achill on a school tour. And he said,"Do you know anybody who could come on the bus and explain - show the kids around and tell them about the place?" So it was just...I

contacted two lads who had just left school. They were on holidays because it was secondary school. So I gave him their names. So they were picked up. And when they were finished, they came by the school. And they came into the school. They stayed there to be home on the bus with their brothers and sisters. And they were excited. They showed them the Deserted Village and they told them about it and they showed them Keem. And they were able to.. And that was because they had done that. I thought...

Angela: And they were able to do that because you had passed that on to them. That's amazing.

Tom: Yeah. That was wonderful that they could..It was worthwhile in the end.

Angela: So they were recounting the stories that you had told then, they were passing them on.

Tom: And they had been part of this. We visited different places.

Angela: So your teaching - it was taking children out of the classroom.

Tom: If I could.

Angela: If it was possible, it was very important to experience these different places and explore why places had the names that they had.

Tom: I remember one year we did a project called 'Achill On The Sea', the influence of the sea on Achill and so on. And it was for Údarás na Gaeltachta in Gaelic so that the children talk about the traditions of fishing and the hookers trade and so on. And I remember we would bring people into the school and the kids would interview them in Gaeilge, ask them questions I know this man - when they talk about the hooker trade. Hookers were cargo vessels and until the 1930s, it was still, they were still used to bring goods from Westport to Achill and to Belmullet. Not so much to Belmullet later until there was a road system going into Belmullet in 1910. The communities on

the west coast depended on this hooker trade where the train came into the quay in Westport and those sailing boats - Achill sailing boats - would bring whether it was the timber or cement or meal for animals or what. Gunness for hte pubs. They supplied Clare Island - all the communities around the coast. And there would have been a bridge out into Achill many years earlier but that bridge would have denied access through the Sound to go from - back from - Clew Bay to Blacksod so that they could service Erris. And it was until the swing bridge - I think it was the first swing bridge in Ireland - in 1887. And it swung to let the hookers through. But I knew this fella - I got him. He loved talking to kids anyway. And they were questioning...we had already identified the names of forty hookers, forty owners through this project. And his grandson was there listening - and this was the first time his grandson knew his granddad had worked on a hooker. You see, the television has come in. Television has caused the break. You see, we listened, we knew what was happening. We had an old saying in Irish “Tá cluasa fada ar mhuca beaga” - “Little piglets have long ears.” We could hear everything.

Angela: There was nothing else to distract you. Because the TV is a distraction.

Tom: The television created a hiatus between people. They don’t know what’s happening. They’re more interested in what’s going on on the television.

Angela: Is there any way to kind of to breach that generational gap do you think, Tom?

Tom: Maybe your project now when it comes available - maybe that will be. We have a very vibrant historical archaeological society in Achill and we have weekly talks and lectures. I’m sure that they would be very interested in this. But it’s..the tie with the past with youngsters is not as strong as it was and I think that love for home that we had maybe has been diluted now because their minds are on those IPads and.. I see my own grandchildren.

Oral History Workshops (40.34)

Angela: One of the things I'm planning to do is running a series of workshops on oral for local schools, anyone, to give young people to have the skills of doing oral history and to conduct some interviews with older members of their family. They may not necessarily have sat down and talked to them before. And I've done that kind of work with other schools - it's really instructive because the young people, maybe 12 - 16 year old, wouldn't necessarily have spent finding out about older members of their family. Even their parents or grandparents. It's great for skills development, you know - research skills, technical skills; analysis skills.

Tom: That would be wonderful for second level.

Angela: I'm hoping to run a public open day and a series of days when we're next back. Just to let people known what the project is about. It is the preservation which is really important.

Tom: You see, the more the children know about their area, and about the work that people did and the more respect they will have.

Angela: Exactly.

Unconsecrated Graves (42.43)

Tom: For instance, now where we have built our own homes or our land which was there, we'd never dream of selling them because there's this tie. But I remember before I retired there I was I was very happy with. You've heard of these unconsecrated graves for stillborn babies? I have a first cousin buried in one.

Angela: Have you really?

Tom: I have. And I didn't know much about it. But they didn't speak about it. And this was in 1927. And I happened to be over in Manchester visiting my uncle - he was - he wasn't well. And I spent a day or two and we were talking about home and this and that I found out about the grave. And I said "Tell me about gorai (sp) na reillige" on Atlantic Drive. And he mentioned that his sister's baby, Mary, was deadborn and that his father and the father of the baby made a little wooden box in the shed and they waited until it was dark and they went with the lantern and a spade and buried the baby in this gorai (sp) na reillige." I never visited it. My aunt could look out everyday and see this. They never visited it. We knew where it. So we decided then... a few of us got together .. and thought we should mark them. So I put it to the teachers at a meeting and they all agreed that it would be nice for the children too to find out from their community where this graves are, what name, what's the names that some of them are called (insert Tom's names In Irish of different villages). Anyway, they did. And we identified 22. Located them. And many of them had been blessed . They had a concrete cross in the middle. Some of them they'd made beautiful walls around them. It was wonderful what they did. And they had been, you know, they had been identified, you know. You talk about research - the fact that school children did this and they came back with this information. And we were all part of compiling it. And they felt this great satisfaction when they say this. And a lot of children visited the different.

Angela: That's an amazing story and the fact and that they were given the opportunity to do that. They had a real sense of ownership and responsibility.

Tom: There's a friend of mine who has just launched a book a poetry. It's interesting - his daughter died last year of this very violent type of cancer which was incurable. And she was in her thirties. And she asked him to write a book and to do something for research before she died. And he has written a lovely … in fact, we had a launch there last Thursday night in Wesport at Matt Malloy's. And all the proceeds of this book - every penny - goes to cancer research in Dublin. It's for a particular kind of cancer - it's called a "triple" - I forget the name. And anyway, he has written one

lovely poem. I'll get you the book. The book's called "Taking Stock." And her has really capsulated the whole story. But again, this is all local history. And that was done for the millenium. The next generation wouldn't know.

(Conversation about local fisherman in Ashleam, local history and some part of Ashleam Bay not mentioned on maps).

Tom: Ashelam Bay. We did a map of Ashleam Bay. We managed to get a camera - a drone and took a lot of beautiful. A beautiful summer we had. You see, we knew the name of the rocks. And we put as many as we could . This was part of the 'Fish Local,' the unveiling of this. Now I think it has to be placed in. That size of board, coloured, a little bit of the history of it. But the place names are so important. And we came together - The Achill Development Company based at - you know where the aquarium is? I was the chairman of that for a few years and so on. But we decided to do the place names on Achill because they had been forgotten. Because when we went to the mountain - "Where are the cows?" They're up at Borrough; they're up at Carraigh Freac, you know. And every rock, every height, every hallow - there was a name. So we knew where they where. But since people stopped going to the mountain...maybe sheep farmers would have known. But we all went to the mountain because we knew where the sheep where and we would have been bringing home the sheep. Everywhere - all the place names. So we decided to put them on Achill. And we got an ordinary map and we got some funding for it. And we have almost two thousand of them.

CD Achill Place Names (49.19)

And I can show you the CD. I'll get you the CD and you can ask for which area you want. So we got people in every village. We got them all to work. The people that knew.

Angela: Is that (the CD) available anywhere in the public domain?

Tom: They're for sale in the aquarium, the Achill Experience. In the shop. Now I went to Galway. I did it in one day. I got the 1, 700 names. And there was little, maybe an explanation what it meant in English. And why it got its name, you know, the place got its name because of a tragedy or an accident that occurred there or incident that happened or whoever owned it. But again, unless we did that then, it would be lost. But at least it's there for scholars.

Angela: That's fantastic. I'll swing by the aquarium today and pick up a copy.
(talk about the aquarium and the CD)

Tom: But I get very despondent at times when I see the population. I see my own village where I live now. We're all over 70. There's no children.

Angela: Are you in Ashleam?

Tom: We're on the other side. Opposite Achillbeag Island. The very last house. And alright, my son has built a house just beside me. He's very busy with his own work. Then, you know, we miss the...it's so quiet. When they're all together, it's great. And they go back.

Angela: Do they come to you for Christmas and event like that?

Tom: We do. We're in contact every day and the phone now…

(Conversation about Skype; Facebook, texting in Irish).

Angela: It's been an amazing interview. I've enjoyed listening to every word. Your lifestyle as a child, your father being away, then how you got into education, the electricity coming on and the radio being available, then just moving in the way you were working with young people to

encourage them to explore their own history and then pass that on. You ave a beautiful...it's such a lovely series of things that have happened that have brought you to this point in your life, you know

Tom: Well, I hope it shows results. But again, you know, when they cannot live here. You know, we'd love to get the place animated for the people to come back to live.

Interview ends 53.51