

Interview with John Twin McNamara Date 10th January 2019 Time 11.25 a.m.

Interviewer Dr Angela Maye-Banbury

Location John Twin's home, Dooagh, Achill Island.

PART 1

Angela: This is Angela Maye-Banbury, oral historian, and I'm delighted to be here in Dooagh with John Twin McNamara. The date of our interview is January 10th 2019 and the time is 11.25 (am). So John, thanks so much for finding time to do this oral history interview with me today. I'm really honoured that we're able to spend time talking about your life on Achill, in Achill. So just to begin with, John, could you maybe just explain your memories of life growing up as a boy on Achill?

Childhood In Achill 0:00.45

John Twin: Well, I'd have to be specific that I grew up as a boy in Dumha Acha which is the sandy plane or the sandy field and that's the name of our village - 'Dumha Acha.' And that's where I grew up, the biggest village. It's supposed to be the biggest village in Europe. It has actually 225 houses as we stand.

First Memories - Grandfather; Music 0:01:20

My first memories are of my grandfather, actually. And that goes back when I was over three years of age because he died when I was three and a half and I remember him and I remember the place where I was and I remember his beard and that he had his hand around me and that image of my grandfather when I was just over three years of age. That would be my first memory. I've been talking to you about the same man. He was known as Johnny Tamór and that's the man in the drawing. And he was..I have heard him referred to as Paul Henry's mentor. He met Paul Henry. That's my first memory. Now that's quite close to where we are here ...where I live at the moment. And then my second first memory of you want to put it that way was when I

was a little boy over in the village. And I was walking in the old part of the village and I heard music and I went into this house. And this was one of the last thatched houses on the village. And it was a house where everything was - where the cattle, the hens - everything. It was the old style house. The cabin, if you want to put it that way. But it was very close to where I lived. And the music - I heard the music. I was attracted by the music and I went through the door. And inside the door there was a little box. When I went in the door, this man was playing a fiddle at that part of the house which was only a one room house, It was one room where the cattle where. And when I went in, this woman approached me. She was the old woman of the house. And just as I entered the door, this noise started from this box. And I was surprised at this. And she came and she was sort of - she was curious about my reaction, you see, to the noise. And then a hen jumped out of the box. And I looked and there was an egg. So the egg came from the hen and the hen went "Go gawk! Go gawk!" and out the door. And the man was playing the fiddle. Now I left that house. I have no further memory of that house but that memory was very strong in my mind.

Angela: So that memory is very strong - the music and the hen the egg laying.

John: And I would say I was about three and a half years of age mor maybe. Well, I was certainly not four. I know that. I was just barely walking, you know.

Angela: And did this happen when you were...where you quite close to your family home?

John: 'Twas beside my family home.

Angela: OK. OK. So tell me a little bit about family life. What was family life like when you were a young boy in Achill?

Growing Up In Achill IRA; Darrell Figgis; Óglaigh na hÉireann; Scoil Acla; Bagpipes; Corrymore House 0:05:15

John: Well, when I was a young boy, we lived with my grandparents where I was born. It was my mother's house. And further down the village, my father a shop. Actually, it's an interesting story how my father and my mother met. And she told me some years after my father was dead. And there was a gap of 16 years between them in their age.

And also, my maternal grandfather and my father were first cousins. So they were closely related and they had to get a dispensation from the bishop. Now there was 16 years in the difference and my father was involved in the old IRA in those early days. That happened through a guy called Darrell Figgis who was the founder of Óglaigh na hÉireann, that movement, and he had spent some time here in Achill and with Scoil Acla. And my father had got involved as a young boy there and learned to play the bagpipes and so on. Well, that was Irish war pipes actually - the difference between that and the Scottish pipes were the war pipes and he got involved there. And of course that became...that was a very Republican movement. And the centre is - that's where Scoil Acla was founded. And he became involved there and went on to be a member of the old IRA. And in the year 1921, he was arrested in this house - this famous Boycott's house up here - Corrymore House. Coire. C-O-I-R-E (spells 'Coire'). We call it 'Coire' (ph 'Coya') not like 'Corry' because it's very Donegal, you see. And he was arrested there on the 12th July 1920 and he was interned ...(?) And there's plenty of the history coming up now and the treaty and all that kind of stuff. Now he was involved in this sense - he was - with in the old police and he was the man who was in charge of the change between the RIC in that...In 1922, when the Treaty came, my mother was an eleven year old girl.

Sliabh Mór; Slievemore 0:08:45

And Dooagh is about two and a half miles from Sliabh Mór - Sliabh Mór. We call it Sliabh Mór - not Slievemore. Sliabh Mór. And she...children went with their cow to the bull in those days because the man kept a bull in Sliabh Mór and they went with the cow to the bull.

Father Goes To America 0:09:11

And she told me the story that she was coming from a place - a man's house called ...he was Willie Eagan (sp?) And that she saw my father - she's an eleven year old girl. And he was erecting a cross on St Coleman's well in the graveyard in Sliabh Mór and he went to America the next day. And he stayed in America - that's 1922 now. He stayed in America until 1929. So...he never spoke too much about those times.

Angela: So he must have been quite young when he went to America. How old was he when the States?

John Twin: He was 22 and 5 years. Twenty seven years. Because he was born in 1895 And my mother was born in 1911. So there was that difference.

Angela: But he never talked about his time there.

Garda; RAC and IRA 0:10: 09

John Twin: Never wanted to talk too much about it. But my understanding of it is that he was Barrack Orderly - that meant he man in charge of this transition between the Garda and the RIC. I did hear - not from himself but from my uncle - that he was offered a job of superintendent of the Guards when they were setting up the Garda. And he belonged to the Newport Brigade of the old IRA. And the Newport Brigade were almost, almost 100 percent anti treaty. And therefore - I'm only assuming - that because of his situation, now he was being offered this job so whether he took it or whether he didn't take it, his life was on the line. He took the option of...he was going

to be killed anyway which a lot of the people who were involved with them were killed in the Troubles. Now that's how that came about.

America, Canada, Cleveland, Detroit, Argentina, Thomas McNamara in Shanghai China, Ships and Meeting Thomas McNamara 0:11.20

So he came back in 1929 - he came back from America in 1929. Actually, he went in through Canada and into Cleveland. He ended in Detroit first and he had a brother who had gone to America and had lost contact. His mother - my father's mother - had said to him "When you're in America, it would be great if you could trace Thomas", his brother. And he was in a lodging house in Detroit. And he was doing a novena praying that he's find his brother. And on the night the novena finished, a man walked into the room and he didn't know him.

Angela: And it was his brother? He managed to find him and he came in on the last day of his novena?

John Twin: That's what he told me anyway.

Angela: Wow.

John Twin: His brother had left and he had gone on the ships to Argentina and different places. And to China, actually.

Angela: Goodness. So was his brother older than him, John or was he?

John Twin: He was. He was older than him.

Angela: And he'd been on ships in these different countries.

John Twin: Different places. He hadn't communciated home for a few years. So actually he was in China, this uncle of mine.

Angela: What was his name?

John Twin: His name was Thomas McNamara. Thomas Mac, you know. Tomas.

Angela: So the two brothers met in Detroit and hadn't seen each other for quite a long time.

John Twin: Yes. The link had been established. And my uncle - his wife had died and he had two children. And one of them was here and one of them was taken to California. And then he came back to Cleveland and got married in Cleveland and he started a family there and came back to Achill. And his family are here in Achill.

Angela: So that tie between Cleveland and Achil is of course very, very strong.

John Twin: Oh, it is very strong. But this is an interesting part I shouldn't leave out. This story that he was in China. The ship docked and the captain of the ship said: 'No-one go up the town here unless they are accompanied by someone else. Go in pairs.' So his job was deckhand and by the time he had finished and had everything in order on the deck and he has to walk up the street himself. And he's a bit apprehensive. And he looks behind him and he sees a China man following him. And he said he felt he was in trouble. And he stopped and looked into a window, And the man stood beside him and the man said "hello." And my uncle said: "You don't know me." And the man said " I do. You're one of the Tramones (sp?). You're from Achill Island." And he said " I was a boots - boots, you know, in the hotel. In the Sliabh Mór Hotel in Achill and I knew your grandfather. I knew your father. Your father and your family.

Angela: What are the chances?

John Twin: What are the chances of that happening? He said there are two people from Achill up here in the barracks.

Angela: This was in China. Do you know which part of China it was?

John Twin: It was in Shanghai.

Angela: Shanghai. That's incredible.

Thomas McNamara Meets Pat Lavelle 0:15:36

John Twin: And he actually met ..he went to meet these two guys. One of them was a Mc Duil (sp) and the other was was a Pat Lavelle. And Pat Lavelle - I remember Pat Lavelle. He returned to Achill. I knew the man well. He was from Dookinella, the village. From Cabaun, actually. And he used to come to Dooagh, walk back to Dooagh and so on. And he was known as Pat the Chinaman because So there's an interesting little link. 'Tis a small world.

Angela: That is amazing. What are the chances of your own uncle Thomas meeting this man, recognising him and then making the connection back to Achill? China with the population at that time would have been pretty sizeable - even in those days.

John Twin: That happened. It did happen.

Angela: That's incredible. So...

Sliabh Mór Slievemore Hotel 0:16:34

John Twin: Because the the Sliabh Mór Hotel was established in 1839.

Angela: Was it really?

John Twin: Oh yes, And there were people from different countries that worked there. Because my grandmother, actually my maternal grandmother, worked there. She was there in 1901 in the census of 1901. And she told me that there used to be people from all over the world - waiters from Hungary and from different parts of the

world working there. You see, it was a very advanced to have - 1839 - to have the Sliabh Mór Hotel and two other hotels. That's the tourism aspect of it - it started way back then.

Angela: It was beginning to get international even then. I mean, people from all over the world would come to work in the hotel. So when your father came back in 1929....

May Company Cleveland; Father's Handwriting 0:17:36

John Twin: Well, he didn't come back. He had to come back because..he had moved to Cleveland. He had a good job - he was working for the May company in Cleveland and he had got the job on the basis of his handwriting. That was the art. And it was framed in - it was up - it was framed in the May Company in Cleveland.

Angela: Is that May M-A-Y- E (spells 'M-A-Y-E'). I'm just asking as I'm 'Maye.'

John Twin: I think it could be. The May Company.

Angela: I'm thinking about it. I'm wondering. Did you father do calligraphy? Was he a calligrapher?

John Twin: No but he did the old type of writing, you know. That script. It was great.

Angela: Beautiful. So he was known for his handwriting.

John Twin: I heard his described as the best handwriter in Ireland.

Ends 18.47

PART 2

John Twin's Father Returns To Achill 0:00:04

John Pat: Now that would have linked to his meeting with Paul Henry. The artist.

Angela: Handwriting is very artistic and beautiful handwriting is the work of an artist.

John Twin: So what happened in Cleveland was the Chief of Police came to him and said "You are an illegal immigrant." Because he went in through Canada and the Chief of Police at home said "I'd advise you to go." And he also said that it was somebody close to his own place who had spied on him. And that he had hoped as a result if doing this that he would get promotion. And the superintendent said to him "As long as I'm alive, he'd be on the beat." So anyway, my father came back and that's why I'm here."

Angela: That's a really interesting story. So your father was required to come back. Or at least he felt it was the wise option having been warned.

John Twin: I've a photograph of him on the boat.

Angela: Have you really? Well, you know, I'd love to come back and look at some photos. That would be brilliant. So he came back. So how did he and your mother meet? How did that happen?

John Twin: He came back in '29 and they just met up then. They married in '34 and we were born in '35.

John and Pat McNamara Born in 1935 0:01:35

Angela: You were born in 1935. So tell me about that. So you and Pat were born. Tell me what effect that had.

John Twin: In those days, the mother didn't go to hospital. The children were born in the homestead. And in many cases, they were born in the home of the mother - in their parent's home. In the mother's parents home, the child was generally born. Even if they had their own home, that happened very often for the support and everything. So that was in 1935 which was...they married on 15th August 1934 and we were born in June 1935.

Angela: So it was a big event in the village to have twins in Dooagh.

John Twin: Well, it was a very big...any birth would have been a big event. But I know I had an aunt - my mother's sister. She was much younger. She was only a young girl when this event happened and she said they were in the kitchen in the house and her two aunts came up out of the room with the two bodachs (sp?) . That was what she called them. The two bodachs (sp). That was what she called them. We were two boys, you see. So that's when our life began.

As a Child At School; Music - 'Puisín, Puisín, Ta En Seo' Song 0:03:19

Angela: When you look back to when you and Pat sort of growing up just before you became teenagers, what was life like in Achill then?

John Twin: First of all, we went to school. I suppose I remember the first day I went to school and I remember that we got an abacus. And then my first thing that hit me was we were taught a little song in school. In infants. At four. I'd have been there at four - or maybe before before the age of four we'd have started school.

Angela: Can you remember what the song was?

John Twin: I do. It was... the teacher had the picture . She had a little bowl on the floor. And she had the picture of a cat on the wall. And it was a little poem, a little song called ...about the cat. "Puisín, Puisín, Ta En Seo." (John Twin sings). "Puisín,

Puisín (John Twin to insert words). And there were there were three little verses in that song. That was the first song.

Angela: So that was about the cat getting milk.

John Twin: Yeah. Yeah.

Angela: Lovely. That's beautiful. And you can still remember that from all those ideas ago.

John Twin: Oh, I can. Yes.

Angela: So what was school like generally?

John Twin. School was tough. In those days, it was tough. And you know, I became a teacher myself so I can't be too critical of the system. But the system was pretty tough at the time.

Angela: In what way was it tough, would you think?

John Twin: It was tough for everybody. People weren't into education. They were only into...they were going to school. Homework mightn't be the priority in the home - in a lot a homes. It wasn't in ours anyway. And you know, it was - you had to toe the line and so on. It was tough. But sure that's the way things were. That was the system in those days.

Becoming a Teacher; Emigration; 'An Bád Bán'; England; Tattie Hoking; Padraig Sweeney; Secondary School 0:05:42

Angela; At what point did you decide to become a teacher yourself? How did that evolve?

John Twin: Well, I have to say, first of all, when we were in school, the pattern was in those days 1935 to 1938 - we were thirteen then. In the year 1948. My father had - and this is an important thing - my father had gone to England. And I've said this in an interview with another man from Cork - my father had gone to England in 1945 when we were eight years of age. And he had a plan that education would be the means of avoiding the "bád bán" the immigrant ship. And then when he came to our time for going to Scotland - because that's how...you went to primary school and then you went to the tattie hoking in Scotland. And then after that, a year maybe there - and then you went on to England to the building trade. That was the pattern. So he wanted us to... they were making some efforts to go to school down in Tipperary. There were priests living there and they use to come on holiday. But anyway, by coincidence, in that year, Pádraig Sweeney from upper Achill, he started the secondary education in Achill Sound. And that was a big part of Achill history because up to then, only the shopkeepers' families and people who got scholarships, some got scholarships, some went on to secondary education. And there would be a queue from each village. From this village, Dooagh, there were five - two girls, us two and another fella. Five from... And then there would be nearly nearly two hundred pupils. Well, there would be a good number of pupils leaving school in that year from Dooagh alone.

Angela: Wow - that was big numbers.

John Twin: Oh there were big numbers then. There would have been at least seventy boys and a hundred girls. There were two boys at a girls school in Doogh. There were big numbers in Achill. There were huge numbers in those days. So the secondary schools started and of course now. We had no choice. We had to go to secondary school.. We didn't want it at all. Because all of our pals - most of our pals

except one apart from myself and my brother Pat and these two girls, they were all going to Scotland. And we wanted to be going to Scotland.

Angela: You wanted to do it. You were in a minority who...

John Twin: In the initial stages, there were hundreds and hundreds of people leaving school in Achill at that time. Couple of hundred. About forty went to the first secondary school in Achill.

Life At Secondary School; Wrist Watches As Rite Of Passage 0:09:35

Angela: So what was life like at secondary school, John?

John Twin; We hated it because we didn't want to be in school. We wanted to be...our pals were in Scotland. And it was the quarters (laughs).

Angela: You wanted to be in Scotland with everyone else.

John Twin: Yeah and we wanted to have a wrist watch.

Angela: Is that what everyone had - they came back with a watch?

John Twin: They came back with a wrist watch and a new suit and everything, you know. It was the pattern, you know. It was the next stage from childhood to manhood.

Angela: Yeah. Yeah. It was a rite of passage even to go to Scotland.

John Twin: That was it.

Angela: So you had to stay here. But your father was very much into education by the sounds of it.

John Twin: Well, yes. He saw it as the only solution - the only way to escape the boat. And he hated, even though he was in England, he hated being there.

Angela: He would have been away for so many weeks of the year which was the norm then.

Father Working a in Beet Trade Then Security At Good Year 0:10:36

John Twin. No. He went away in 1943 when we were eight years of age to the beet in Shrewsbury. And he was arrested the following year because his old activities in the IRA. He was arrested the next year. Lost his job as a checker. Actually, it's an interesting one it was a result of his handwriting that he got this job as a checker for the beet. There would have been hundreds of people working in the beet trade in that time, you know. Picking, pulling beet and exporting it on lorries and all that kind of stuff. So he was a checker. So he had lost his job because of the past. And then he was... the man - the manager of the project - said: "I've a friend in Wolverhampton and would you be interested in a job in security in police, as as security policeman in Wolverhampton?" which was in Good Years.

Angela: The tyre company?

John Twin: And he took that job. But as a result of that, he became a permanent immigrant . Almost. Except for two weeks at Christmas and two weeks in June.

Angela: So he would come home for two weeks at Christmas and two weeks in June.OK

John Twin: From the time we were eight years till we were 26.

Angela: Did you go to see him at any point or...?

John Twin: We did, yes, When we left secondary school. But he didn't want us to go there at all.

Angela: He wanted you to stay in Ireland. In Achill.

John Twin: Aye. In Achill. So...but we did go during the summer and what I remember he met us at the station. He says "Now are you happy?"

Angela: It must have nice to have seen him all the same, to have seen you and Pat happy.

John Twin: Oh, it was great.

Angela: Did your mummy come too with you?

John Twin: No. No. No.No. We just went. Ah, but we were bucks.

Angela: You were older then sure.

John Twin: Ah sure, we were about 17 years then.

Angela: So you became a teacher and Pat became a dentist.

John Twin: Yeah. And then...

First Teaching Jobs 0:013:00

Angela: Where did you teach when you first taught?

John Twin: I had a great love of home and love of Achill. I didn't want to go anywhere else. And that was my one thing...I wasn't a great..I wasn't a very good student because I didn't know where I was going at the time. But when I eventually settled on it, it was to get back to Achill. So I came back as a teacher except for a very brief ten days at a place called Carraholly outside Westport. I was ten days there.

Angela: Where did you do your teacher training?

John Twin: Well, through the university and then in St Patrick's training college in Dublin.

Angela: So you came back to teach in Achill. So how did that feel when you first came back to Achill to take up your teaching job?

Achill As Place

John Twin: Well, aye, well first of all, I knew I had a job in the place I wanted to be, that I loved. Because I loved every aspect of life in Achill. I mean, I wouldn't be too different to anybody else but that love of place, that love of home, I love every aspect ..I look out of my window every day, I love what I see. And when I was away, I was constantly thinking about it. I'd have maybe a photograph of the village and I look at the photograph.

Angela: What is it about Achill that has this pull on people do you think? What is it that makes it really special? It might be quite difficult to describe. What is it that it has that magnet?

John Twin: I think about the place a lot. I think about this every day. When I look at the window, I see the same subject. But it's not the same. It's different every second. I think of it as a theatre and it changes and the show goes on every day. And I would like, I would describe it as "my theatre of dreams."

Angela: That's beautiful. Gosh, that's so lovely.

John Twin: You know, everything from the clouds to the skies to the mists to the storms. To everything to do with the landscape. And even cloud shadows on the mountain and their movements and all that kind of stuff. I'm at the stage now where I take a trip on those cloud shadows and they take me across the other side of the mountain where I know and where I would love to be. That's the nearest I get to it

now - is going on one of these trips. But I'm constantly - I just love the place. I think it's a very special place.'

Angela: It is a very special place. And it's a magnificent place and it changes constantly.

John Twin: I regard myself as being very, very lucky to have lived my adult life here and I have been very happy. Every life has got sadness. And we've had sadness in our life. We lost our son. We lost our son when he was only 29 years of age.

Angela: I'm so sorry.

John Twin: And that ...that was the saddest part of it. But joy and sadness and so on. I've lived here all my life and couldn't ...it looks as if I'm going to finish it here as well, knowing that I am 83 years and a half.

Angela: And you have grandchildren.

John Twi: We've a couple of grandchildren.

Angela: How many grandchildren do you have? Two grandchildren?

John Twin: Two sons we have now left. And we have three grandchildren.

John Pat As Ambassador For Achill Culture And Heritage 0:17: 16

Angela: Tell me about...I understand as well as teaching that you've done a great deal for the culture and heritage of Achill to try and keep Achill alive and animated. Tell me a little bit about the other activities that you've been involved with over the years.

Jon Twin: Well, I don't know...

Angela: There might be so many of them.

John Twin: I suppose, well, to be truthful, this started before ever I left Achill. When I was 10 years of age or 12 years of age and our house over the village and I heard, I woke up this morning and I heard my mother crying down in the kitchen. And it was because....and then we lived right beside the road and the bus, the sound of the bus went by. And the sound of the bus and my father was going to England. I know it was at Christmas time. And I ...my mother is then crying in the kitchen, lonely. And for some reason, I said: "Oh this is wrong." You know, even at that very early age. And I always felt that it was, the system was wrong, the children are home, the mothers doing all the homework and the hard work at home, the little subsistence, well, farming work, they were on that doing that. And the father was in England and the children were growing up without a father and the mother had this difficult task. And the mother had this difficult task being father and mother to the family. And I suppose that's how it started. I don't know whether I made a vow that time that at that time maybe I had to do something about it.

Angela: So something clicked in your mind even at that young age that there was an injustice, something that was wrong with that system and compelled you to...

John Twin: So when I came back to Achill, I became involved with...trying to do something about the situation of immigration and... I could see why things were, you see, immigration was almost...in the early years, it used to be seasonal migration, people went for a few months. But now it was becoming more permanent like expect for the short period of holidays. And that system, I thought that was all wrong. I tried to, I tried to do something about that. And that's how I became involved in community for the day I came back to Achill to teach. You know, I got involved with that. And of

course, I was in the school. And the children in the school were, their fathers, the vast majority of them were in England - not in Ireland now.

Angela: Or not in Scotland either so....

John Twin: Or not in Scotland either. Fathers mainly would have been in England at that stage.

Angela: Yeah.

PART 3

Curb Trend Of Immigration - Bunnacurry Co-op 0:00:01

Angela: So what did you do in addition to teaching to try and curb this trend of immigration?

John Twin: We started an organisation. There's some film about it. We organised representatives from every village in Achill and set up a co-op. Where the monastery is now, the Franciscan monastery, we bought that and the whole idea was to create jobs and have people working in Achill. That was very, very difficult because of the location. Achill is iargúlta, as they say, it's a long way. It's forty miles from the nearest town... forty miles from Westport.

Angela: It's isolated. What kind of job were you hoping to set up through the co-op?

John Twin: Well, the jobs that were going at the time, you see, there was an organisation called Gaeltarra Éireann and became later Údarás na Gaeltachta and I had a spell when I didn't, before I came back to teach, I had a break from the university and I worked for a spell in Gaeltarra Éireann in Dublin where I discovered that every Gaeltacht area in Achill was being catered for except Achill. There were some little projects, Donegal and different parts of Donegal and Mayo. Anywhere there was a Gaeltacht in Ireland was a project except in Achill. And when I came back to Achill, I says "We'll have to fight to put this right." That's what's led to the co-op and then where the monastery is and then that led to negotiations with Uadaras na Gaeltachta to have an industrial estate and those factories were built.

Angela: You know, it's funny you should mention that. Because only this morning when I was driving up here, I was thinking, what is the history of having factory units built there? Is this the one where the Expo was held in last year (2018)?

John Twin: Yes.

Angela: OK. So you were instrumental in getting that

John Twin: I must say I was with two people from every village in Achill. I was only one of these people.

Angela: Yeah. Yeah. One of a collective...

John Twin: A group, a group who were trying to do that, to reverse the situation and to have this idea of the woman doing this work.

Human Rights; Edward Nangle and Irish Language Gaeilge 0:02:53

John Twin: And I thought and all of us who were involved in it, we thought that Achill were not getting their rights. And of course, it co-incided with the European Commission of Human Rights. And of course when we got this circular saying the rights of the people of Europe and we have no such rights and that's why we started this human rights committee and that led to the co-operative. And we bought the co-op, 67 acres of land on the monastery for 8,750 pounds and there were over six hundred people who became shareholders - 10 pounds to buy a share in order to get, to try and do something. To reverse the trend.

Angela: So this would have been towards the late 1940s or when would this have been?

John Twin: Oh no, not that far. This was ..it was about 1969, '69 - '70.

Angela: Was this part of the movement to try and get Achill recognised as a designated Gaeltacht area?

John Twin: No, no. no. It was already a Gaeltacht. And in fact, this part of Achill. That's another...why it did not remain a Gaeltacht is another story and that goes

back to a huge part of Achill history Reverend Edward Nangle in Dugort., the consequent. I think there's a very important book published..

Angela: Patricia Byrne's book? The Prelate and the Preacher. Have you read it? It's very good.

John Twin: I have. But it's very good in this sense. I told you earlier that my grandmother worked in the Slievemore Hotel in 1901, that's my maternal grandmother. My grandfather worked there as a carpenter. So there were connections. So it wasn't all bad. People were getting some jobs, some of them. But the thing I could never understand that man, that photograph you see there on the wall, he was born in 1848. The 3rd of November 1848. And he was a native speaker. And as my grandmother's, their language was Irish. And then I came to asking my uncle Thomas, that man who came back from America. I said "How come that your father is a native speaker and that you and my father and the rest of the family have very little Irish?" And this was in the 1970s now I asked that question because it was a bit of a puzzle to me. And he said, he said "ah, there was a campaign going here. Father Henry and he had, he had the people not to speak Irish to their children." Now when you read this book "The Prelate and the Preacher" by Patricia Byrne, you'll find that when Nangle came to Achill, it was through the Irish language he wanted to do his missionary work. And this spanner in the works, the children can't speak Irish. He can't do anything.

Angela: That history of Edward Nangle.. I've recently read the notes Edward Nangle made to report back to the Houses of Parliament following his work here. We'll talk about that another day maybe, John. What I was really struck by when I read Patricia's book was the way that those events at that time - 1830s - fuelled the building of schools on Achill both from the Church of Ireland perspective and the Catholic perspective.

John Twin: Well, Church of Ireland first we have to say.

Teaching in Multi Denominational Achill 0:07:30

Angela: Church of Ireland first - yeah. What do you think about the different denominations of schools? Did that impact on your experience as a teacher or as a pupil? Was there any sense of that?

John Twin: Oh there was a sense of it because of the way we were being taught. It was them and us like.

Angela: It felt like a them and us like division.

John Twin: Oh definitely, You know that you couldn't ...people couldn't attend a funeral in the Church if Ireland in Dugort. There were two sides of the story. And the way I look at it is is if had Nangle not come to Achill, we wouldn't be where we are now. I would say, it has an effect, it had an impact on the history and changed the whole course of history in Achill. And we've only got to, I suppose we're here talking in my house. If we were going round looking at the situation in Achill, we'd be able to appreciate more, like that Dugort was in 19.., well, in the late part of the nineteenth century, that it was as it is now. And we were in mud cabins in the village of Dooagh. It was mud cabins. And to think we were evicted from Slievemore. My ancestors were evicted from Slievemore to Dooagh and into mud cabins and from that, they built themselves, through immigration through going to Scotland, through immigration and tattie hoking and every other means, they built themselves up to come from the mud cabin. Put it in that sense because that's what they were to the housing they own and possess today. And it's an interesting thing that the vast majority of people in this village that you see, the vast majority are owners of those houses. And they have through striving, through working, to put a roof over their heads. That was the

aim of the Achill person. And incidentally, it has turned out, that the people on Aran Mór Island in Donegal, that of statistics of ownership of houses in the district of Donegal, the people of Aran Mor are the owners, 96 percent of Aran Mór island, these tattie hokers, like the Achill tattie hokers, own their own house.

Angela: Well that is a remarkable statistic,

John Twin: It is.

Angela: So there is a sense of not wanting history to repeat itself, to never be in a position to ever have a roof over your head because someone else had the power or ability to evict you, you know. People would always have a base, they would always have a home which is a very important aspect of a person's life.

John Twin. It is. For Achill people, it became there aim to put a roof over your head. There was everybody's aim.

Angela: That's really interesting, John. You were saying that you were motivated by this sense of injustice that you'd seen the men having to go away to work and there not being opportunities for young people to...So how old were you when you retired from teaching? When did you retire from teaching?

John Twin: I retired in 1997.

Angela: OK. So that's recently.

Ends 0:11:044

PART 4

After Retirement - The Gaelic Athletic Association GAA 0:00:0

John Twin. Twenty one years. Actually, twenty two years. Since 22nd December. So I have been my wife Mary and myself have been very lucky. And we were two people from the village - this village - and we became teachers here. And we also taught with the nuns the Presentation Order.

Angela: Did I read somewhere that you were involved with the GAA as well?

John Twn: I was involved with the GAA in my early years. At that time, when we grew up, it was soccer football which was being played in Achill because of the going to Scotland and the influence was already there. And in this part of Achill, particularly in lower Achill, they use to call it Aoifle Acla (sp?) there were soccer teams and also in the place where you are based in Ashleam they had a soccer team based up there. Because through the immigration. And then the local teachers Padraic Shonaghan (sp?) was one of them and Dómhnall O' Gallagher (Sp?), they were Achill people who trained as teachers and there was a local man here in this village who was a bus conductor from Longford - a man called Mick Lynch. And Mick Lynch -he started to teach us Gaelic football. And we were quite old at the time. We were maybe 12 years when that happened. And I remember the first days at Padraig Sweeney's school, the secondary school at the Sound. And Padraig Sweeney showing us how to lift the ball off the ground, you know. Put your foot under the ground. You had to put your foot under it. So were involved then and we were involved in Gaelic football with the team, the local team here called St Pat's. Then there was the Scanlon Cup competitions - we were the first even though we were the most soccer part of Achill, we were the first team to win the Scanlon cup in 1954.

Angela: Fantastic. That's amazing.

John Twin: And this was ...this great man called Mick Lynch, he was a bus conductor from Longford. He was the boy, he was the captain of that team. And he was involved for quite some time. I was captain of that team, the Scanlon Cup team that won in 1957.

Angela: So you're someone who...

John Twin: Now I wouldn't be regarding myself as a top footballer or anything, you know.

Preserving Achill's Heritage

Angela: But you're someone who feels very committed to Achill. You're an ambassador For Achill. You're a former teacher in Achill. You love of place, Achill as place, is self evident. Is there anything, with this project, the Achill Oral Histories project, which is to systematically record the stories people of Achill beginning with teachers. Is there anything...? What kind projects like this do to try and preserve the heritage of Achill or to try and promote that and to make the specialness available to a wider audience?

John Twin: Well, there are so many aspects to Achill life. Of course, and of course, number one is that if jobs could be created and you could have family life, and that there wouldn't be this drain in the community that there is . That's staring us in the face. But I am hopeful that tat will once day, I don't know, it will long after my time, it will be long after my time, it will one day reversed. And there will be people living here. But there are so many aspects to Achill life. And I think that is paramount. The jobs, that the job be created. I mean, I have had a great life in Achill because both my life and i were able to work and live here. But will our family be living here? They're living elsewhere now.

Angela: Where are your sons now, John?

John Twin: One son is in Lucan in Dublin. He's living there. And the other son lives in Meath at the moment. Now I'm hopeful he'll come back to Achill with his wife Catherine and their son Connor.

Angela: So you'd get to see your grandchildren as often as possible.

Impact Of Evictions in 1840s: Dooagh 0:05:21

John Twin: Oh we do. We get to see them. But you see, one things that has always affected me was the way...because of our history and because of where we started, we were evicted first of all. We were evicted on to bog land here in this part of Achill and there was lots of evictions in Achill in those times in the 1840s.

Angela: You're talking about the time before the time before the Great Hunger. The 1830s period. The time of the Nangle mission when that appeared in Dugort. Yeah.

John Twin: Yeah. World War Two, at that period, there were very few people living in this village at that time. It was known as Keel West. There was Keel village was there and this was known as Keel west and then this...these people were evicted from a place in Slievemore - in Sliabh Mór - I have to say it properly. The east of the graveyard, a place called Fogher in Sliabh Mór all the people were cleared off the lands here and they were turned into four big farms and there were planted. That's the.. And it's there today.

Angela: Is that when Doogh became Dooagh? Is that when the village itself was first formed here?

John Twin: I don't know whether...there was Keel West first and then that would have caused the upsurge at that time in population. They were allowed to take the stones off the shore, build their cabins and use the land and the bog, the sea sand, sea shells and sea weed to reclaim the bog and make land out of the bog. And that's

what you had to do. There wasn't a blade of grass, green, in this village in those days.

Angela: So things were built from the beach and ...right

John Twin: Yes.

Angela: That's a very sobering thought.

John Twin: And they were magnificent people when I think about it. The way that these people came from that background to where we are today. We're not in an ideal situation. But there are people from this village who reached riches in foreign places. But this was their background.

Angela: Well, that so inspiring, the way that people did resist all these efforts to undermine them. That they, that they found ways not to survive but thrive in certain circumstances. I think it does give you hope for the future.

John Twin: Well, it does.

Angela: It gives you hope that beauty and the people will realise the specialness that Achill has to offer current but future generations.

John Twin: Well, the hope is that these links will not, they'll never be broken. I know they won't be broken because... I happened to have a niece living in, well a niece and a nephew living in Australia and recently she was home. And I was very stricken by the most thing that she loved. And that was in this village of Dooagh walking around what is called the Loop - it's about two miles that she was just, she was walking and it was bare and bleak is the stretch of big and it whispers of time forgotten. And this is what is was doing for her. It was, she's back from Australia.

That was the most thing that was linking her to the place - the bog and the land and the place.

Angela: I can understand that. You feel when you're walking around Achill, you're walking in the steps of your ancestors. You're re-living the lives that people had here because the landscape itself, it has changed with maybe a few buildings popping up here and there. But the landscape, it's a magnificent, ancient landscape that has endured so much over the centuries, over the millennia.

John Twin: Oh, it is yeah.

Angela: You know, that it gives a sense, you know, that life has that permanency, life has a permanency and that it's worth living and it's worth protecting both in terms of the stories of the people of Achill such as yourself, John, for future generations. Because we can't ..what's the saying..we must never forget to remember.

John Twin: Oh ,that's for sure.

PART 5 0:0:00

Importance of Music in Achill: Traditional and Pipe Bands 0:00: 26.

Angela: John, that's been a lovely interview.

John Twin: If I can I just finish my saying...

Angela: Absolutely. Is there anything else?

John Twin: Well, apart from living and living on the land in that subsistence farming, having seen that side of life where we milked the cows, we had a horse, we saved hay, we saved rye, we did all those tasks. Now none of those tasks are being done. But that's one aspect of life. But the other aspect which has had a huge influence on my life is the music aspect of it. And from day one, I refer to that bit of the story but

then the music tradition. And there was..this man was connected incidentally with Nangle and that. A man called William Hamilton Maxwell and he was a reverend but he wrote a book called "Wild Sports of the West." In that, he said in that, he said that the people of Achill that they are an extremely musical people and that their fiddles go twittering like sparrows.

Angela: That's a lovely saying.

Scoil Acla, Chonradh na Gaeilge, War Pipes and Achillbeag 0:01:43

John Twin: So they were a musical people way back then. And my first taste of that was through the fife and drum bands. And here in Dooagh, there was a fife and drum band, particularly round St Patrick's Day and that was the first music I heard and that was established in 1882 when they went to meet Michael Davitt in Newport. And there were five of those pipe bands. Fife and drum bands in Achill. In Tondragee, Shraheens, Bunnacurry, Keel and Dooagh. Five, Five of the. They were the foundation of the music. Then of course during Scoil Acla they introduced the war pipes. There was a famous man on Achillbeag Island which you'll probably be hearing about up that part of the island called an Paorach who came back from England and he was one of these war pipers and the Irish war piper and he was also a great scholar. He taught on Achillbeag Island. The place is deserted now.

Angela: But there was a school there, of course, before.

John Twin: There were 165 people there I think on that island on 1901. Those figures can be checked. So then in 1946, the pipe bands started and it was a man from Donegal who through the tattie hoking, a man from Aran Mór island married a woman from Achill from Pollagh here and he came to live here and they had a pipe band in Aran Mór and he restarted the pipes and they switched from the fifes to to pipes. And there are now five pipe band in Achill. A lot of the music is Scottish but it's also Irish.

Angela: And because of the connection with the tattie hokers..

John Twin. It is a bit that way. But we cannot forget that there a pipe band in 1913 and my own father was a part of it.

Angela: Oh, really. There you go.

John Twin: There were four or five pipers. And this Paorach use to come from Achillbeag with another young lad called on Para Og (sp?) they use to call them. They had that in those days, that was the Scoil Acla time That aspect in my life, it was before my time. But what happened during the establishment of Scoil Acla and Chonradh na Gaeilge and the people who came to Achill and they influence they had on Achill is a huge story, And then in 1985, with 36 pupils and it's 35 years later there were 700 pupils like students coming to learn the music from all over the world. Really from all over the world. I hope it continues. But it has been a huge,..the music is a big part of Achill life.

Angela: Music is a big pull for people and a great way, a great aspect of Achill's heritage, Achill's contribution to the rest of the world. There's the harp festival, there's never a dull moment. There's always something going. There's always something, whether its drama or music, or heritage, or plays or talks. Tommy Johnson was telling me there is someone coming to talk about the RAF site. Unfortunately I'll be back in England then - just will have missed it on 23rd Jan, I think he said.

Plane Crash Croaghaun 16th June 1950 0:06:00

John Twin: You see, there are two things. Are we talking about the plane that crashed on Croaghaun? But the plane that crashed on Croaghmore was not RAF. It was a meteorological plane.

Angela: Yes, that's right. It was doing a survey.

John Twin: That's how they use to do the weather forecasts in those days. They would go out and saw the clouds and all that kind of stuff, you know. I actually heard that plane crashing.

Angela: You didn't! Oh my goodness! You heard the impact of it.

John Twin: It was the 16th June 1950.

Angela: Wow. OK.

John Twin: There's a very good project going on in Achill at the moment. The maritime history. It's on these boards.

Angela: They have the boards up, haven't they?

John Twin: The maritime history. It's a great project. And that plane crashed on that date. And I know exactly where I was. And I did a piece from a lady but she does a piece for the Castlebar community radio on that plane crash. 1950. I know exactly where I was. I did this interview on the bog where I was. We were talking about the fog. You couldn't see your finger. That was why the plane crashed.

Angela: Was that why it crashed, because the visibility was so poor?

Shark Island Drowning Tragedy 12th May 1951 0: 07:31

John Twin. No visibility at all. And that was when..1950. And then in 1951, we had what was called the drowning where they were doing the film "Shark Island." That was 12th May 1951. Two places. It's on a board up there towards Corrymore. The two events are there and you can't see where the Daisy Rocks. And I was on the same bog where I could see the Daisies in '51 and I saw the boat quite close to the Daisy Rocks and we were saving turf. And I remember as a boy. Well, I was 17 then,

in 1951. I was 16 and I remember looking at the Daisies quite close. Now the shark fishing was a full swing at that time and that's where they were filming this film called "Shark Island." And I said to myself in my own mind: "That's very close to the Daisies." And I went back to do the turf and then when we came home in the evening and discovered that actually it had been lost.

Angela: Can you see the Daisy Rocks from here?

John Twin: Oh you can. You can't see them from this house.it's just up the road there.

Angela: You just go up the road a wee bit.

John Twin: Yeah.

Angela: It was very sad. I heard about that. You see two big rocks when you're going to Keem. Just up the road there.

Angela: Aye, Yeah. They stand out, don't they?

John Twin: And then these, the Daisies are just small and just farther out.

Angela: It was very said, that accident because they'd just come, they were coming to the end of the filming, They were maybe only a day or two away and they didn't have to do this option optional extra. There's a film about it. John, thank you so much, that's been a brilliant interview.

John Twin; You have too much!

Angela: (laughs) I could never have too much! I'm just going to thank you formally. John, thank you so much for that interview. It's been a very detailed comprehensive account of so much that has happened over the course of your own life. Are there

any particular highlights that stands out for you, when you look back, that stands out for you particularly that was an important aspect of your relationship with Achill? Any highlights from those things that you've described?

John Twin: Well, the main thing would be my closeness too, through my grandmother, who was born in 1881 and died in 1980. She was 99 years.

Angela: Wow - that's a wonderful age.

John Twin: And she had worked in Dugort. And I was very closely connected through that. It made me think of me a lot. And as well as that, she talked a lot about the people and the names who were there. And then my grandfather, he earned this living there. These things happened. This is part of history.

Angela: So all those things that people that communicated you, your parents, your mother and father, your grandparents and the people before them have all impacted on the relationship you have with Achill. Through interviews like this, these will now be available to future generations of people who know Achill but also people who don't know Achill's special qualities. So I am very grateful for your time for sharing very generously this hour and a half we've been talking. It doesn't feel like it, I must say. But that's been great, John. Thank you very, very much indeed.

Ends