



- MEET A TOWNIE -



It's great that characters such as Albert Robinson are about to help remind us of times gone by

Back in 1961, Robert John Robinson purchased an alarm clock in Coyle's jewellers on Letterkenny's Main Street. Fifty-seven years later, his grandson, Albert, still has that clock. "And it's still going," he proudly proclaims.

Time has indeed marched on and the Letterkenny of that era has changed beyond recognition and particularly that Main Street.

"It's not been the same since Dillons the supermarket closed," Albert insists. But, fortunately, characters such as Albert Robinson do remain to help remind us of what it was like.

One of a family of four, he resides in the townland of Mullaghfin near Dooballagh. "Roughly where I live, I'm fairly near the centre of Donegal or so I've been told. You'd need to check it on the map," he advises.

His own upbringing was in keeping with the times. "My mother, Tilly, reared the four of us."

Tragically one of those siblings, Cecil, passed away at the age of just 28 from a hole in the heart condition. "He died in Letterkenny Hospital thirty years ago."

Another brother, Bertie, lives, says Albert, "between Killygordon and the Cross" while his only sister, Isabel, works in a nursing home in Convoy.

Like his brothers and sister, Albert, attended the local national school at Lissnisk – now only a memory – and recalls teachers, Annie McGettigan, Mrs. Gallagher, Mrs. Duffy from the Broadroad in Convoy, and Mrs. Lafferty from Stranorlar.

His brush with state education ended with National School – "Secondary school? Not at all", he declares – but the great university of life continued to educate him.

At the age of fourteen, he took up potato farming – and in recent days, as 'the Leader' attempted to catch up with him, he could be found harvesting the spuds which invariably made catching up with him a difficult task!

Outside of farming, he was a regular visitor to the Twin Towns on the CDR bus. "Jim Carr was the conductor and it cost 2/9 to travel. I bought a coat or two in Mickey Cannon's second hand



shop in Flea Lane."

Albert also recalls travelling with his mother on the rail coach to Cornagilla driven by Mick Gallen "from Castlefin country".

His own mode of transport and specifically related to his work on the farm was the tractor. "I used to keep three of them but I have just the one now."

In his time, he has worked with the County Council and the Northern Regional Fisheries Board on various

schemes. "I was involved in twelve schemes in all and was working in Ballybofey – "the very dogs there know me! – , Drumkeen and Glenfin and various other places in the Finn Valley.

"I worked on 120 farm lanes as part of the L.I.S. schemes. Nice old work," he maintains. "Good old work to be involved in."

Albert also undertook a scheme at the Community Centre in Letterkenny where he recalls working with Liam

O'Donnell and the scheme supervisor, Liam Coyle.

"I was the first small farmer in Donegal to work in these schemes," he points out.

Meanwhile, he has been a long-time stalwart for the Fianna Fail party. "Myself and Gouldie McGettigan and Eddie Tinney would have been electioneering for Bernard McGlinchey.

"Way back in the seventies, we had a wife bad laneway up to our home. And

thanks to Bernard we got a grant and it was tarred and chipped for the first time. An almighty job, it was, and it's been done a few times since.

"It took eight years to get it declared as a county road and that was due to Bernard McGlinchey and Pat the Cope."

Politics is still in his blood and he continues to campaign for local councillor, Ciaran Brogan. "He does a lot of work for the area," Albert remarks.

A familiar figure with pipe in the mouth – "I have smoked one since the age of fifteen" – he notes the change of tobacco brands over the years. "Everything changes including the tobacco," he relates.

But some things remain the same. A bachelor all his life, Albert maintains: "I never went the lengths to get married. I hardly had the time for it, I was that busy."

For entertainment purposes, he enjoyed attending the traditional dances. "I'd go round the county every road to go to them." Dancing at the Fiesta ballroom, in Drumkeen and anywhere else that would host country music and ceili. "I liked Big Tom," Albert reflects on the recently deceased legend.

In the form of company he does share his life with Prince, a blue and white collie dog of eight years. "I've a couple of cats as well and they be pecking at my pockets scrounging for something to eat because I usually bring them back something whenever I'm out."

He doesn't keep badgers but he might as well do! "There's a lot of them round and about but the dog and the cats and them keep their distance."

For Albert home is the warmest of hearths and he has never had an inkling to travel much further than that. "I had that much work on, I never had the time to go abroad."

Though he did venture to the lower end of Fanad for the first time a few short years ago when he spent some time working with Bonar's Quarry at the Mountain Top!

On the last day of January next, he will turn seventy and it could be that he will find himself in the Dry Arch Inn having a quiet celebratory drink. Or maybe not so quiet!

For the present, however, there are taters to harvest and early morning risings and his grandfather's trusty alarm clock to help him get there.....

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