

Reminiscence Sessions

For four weeks in April, Museum Assistant, Emma Wilson and Cross-Border Education Officer, Declan Carroll from Newry and Mourne Museum conducted Reminiscence Sessions with residents of Our Lady of Mercy Home, Newry. The Sessions took place each Wednesday from 6th-27th April at 2pm.

Four residents participated in weeks 1 and 2 and three residents in week 3 and 4. The use of photographs portraying old scenes from Newry and Mourne along with a number of artefacts from the Museum's handling collection were used as prompts in the sessions. Charlie, who had been a farmer in Mayobridge, spoke about the hard



(Charlie with an old wooden peg)

work he did, rising at 5 o'clock each morning, while Joe, in Week 1 spoke of the heavy sacks of potatoes that he had carried in his early working life and the strength this required. Theresa and Josie had both been professional singers and a number of programmes from Newry Musical Society performances throughout the 1950s, prompted them to recall the songs they sang, the clothes they wore while performing and, in Theresa's case, the nerves she felt before she first sang in public.

Charlie also spoke of his memories of the Second World War, the money the government paid farmers to grow flax for the war effort and his memories of American soldiers. He particularly remembered 12 American soldiers visiting their farm, who left their rifles outside the house when Charlie's mother invited them in for tea. When they returned outside afterwards, the rifles had disappeared.

As for schooldays, Theresa said she was glad to leave school at the age of 14 years "for the teachers were very strict", while Charlie remembered his favourite subject was always geography as he was always interested in the rest of the world. He also spoke of the cane being used on the children's palms if they misbehaved.



(Theresa reminiscing with Museum Education Officer, Declan Carroll, while Josie looks at a ration book from the 1940s)

Josie said she'd always had a very busy life and doesn't remember having time to relax and read a book, while Charlie remembered going to dances in the village as "it was something to do" and that his dancing was "no worse than the rest". Passing

around wooden butter pats, a yo-yo and a small slate board prompted more recollections of school. Theresa remembered yo-yos but said she was never any good at playing with them. Josie and Charlie remembered having small bags to carry over their shoulders in which to put their slates, pencils and chalk. Josie and Theresa shared their memories of songs they remembered singing and recited some of the words together.

All of them remembered rationing and the shortage of certain foods during the Second World War. Charlie spoke of the boat many used to get at Narrowwater for six pence, in which they would smuggle back tobacco, soap, and tea which were heavily rationed in Northern Ireland at the time.



(Theresa sharing memories with Josie, while Charlie enjoys his tea)

The Reminiscence Sessions proved to be a very successful and worthwhile exercise – both with the Residents, who certainly seemed to benefit from sharing their memories of times now past and Museum Staff, who thoroughly enjoyed hearing their stories.