

Traditionally cooking was done in an open hearth fireplace . There was one of these in each of my grandparents houses in Bere Island and Kilmacowen. And also in many of the traditional Irish houses that I have visited in my work years.

The fireplace was a large space built into either the gable end wall or into an internal wall which had another room behind it. This room was warm and cozy from the fire and was often used to bed a sick person. The fireplace could be up to half the width of the wall and 4,5 and even 6 feet high. A large baulk of timber over it supported the wall above ; the flue was behind that. A so called crane- which was an iron frame-was attached at one side; from it pots were hung over the fire. The crane and pot could be swung out safely away from the fire. Ordinary cooking was done in a round black 3 legged iron pot. Water was boiled in a black iron kettle. Baking and roasting was done in a 3 legged flat iron oven called a BASTABLE. This was placed into the turf fire and hot firing was put on the lid. The women had great skill to be able to judge the temperature and time needed for baking or whatever. They had no dials or alarms that we are so dependent on today. In most cases there was a shelf or hob at each side within the fireplace where things were placed to keep them warm.

In our own house there was a large black iron Stanley stove with a side oven. Later we had a PRIMUS and a Primus stove for baking. The Primus was powered by paraffin oil. This had to be pumped to force the oil through a fine nipple under pressure. TO start it the burner had to be heated with lighted METHYLATED SPIRITS so that the oil was vaporised for burning.

For LIGHTING , the earliest forms were candles and oil lamps. Reading and knitting or whatever was done in their light. The oil lamp gave light from a cotton wick which drew up paraffin oil from the fuel container of the lamp. The wick and flame was adjusted by a cog wheel which was controlled by a little wheel at the side of the lamp. The burner and the flame were protected by a glass globe.

Later we had a TILLEY lamp. This worked in the same way as the Primus- but the oil vapour came through a so called MANTLE. This was made of fabric – such as silk-impregnated with metal nitrates which glowed when flame passed

through them. The fabric burned off on the first use and left a very brittle mesh which required great care when handling or lighting. Again the burner was protected by a globe. The TILLEY gave a lovely soft and very bright light.

Then in the mid 50s we got CALOR gas in containers. With that we had a gas light –which again had a mantle. And also a gas cooker and a gas clothes iron. Before that the clothes iron was a heavy iron which had to be heated on the stove or fire. The temperature was judged by tapping it with a dampened finger to see if it sizzled.

Then there was the RADIO or WIRELESS as it was called. Our first one was a PYE wireless. This was battery operated and needed a wet and a dry battery. The wet battery was like a car battery but was enclosed in a heavy glass casing. It had to be charged regularly and taken to Town to a garage or whatever to do so. When the ESB came we had an EKCO wireless. Both of these were valve radios and had SHORT WAVE, MEDIUM WAVE and LONG WAVE bands.

On short wave we listened in to Irish Lights. That was when the MIZEN Head Light keepers contacted in turn the Roanarrig, the Fastnet, the Bull Rock, the Schelligs and the Tearaght lighthouses. And also the ships- the Nabro or Valonia and later the Ierne. This was to get weather reports and possible landing reports and so on.

On the medium wave which was broadcast from the Athlone transmitter we got RADIO EIREANN. There we got the news and weather forecast. and also sponsored programmes such as the WALTON programme. That was presented by Leo Maguire. HE always signed off by saying “ if you feel like singing , do sing an Irish song”. There was Ceilidh House every Saturday night with Sean O’Murchu.

And of course Micheal O’Hehir bringing Croke Park into the kitchen on Sunday afternoons. Especially there were the two All Ireland football finals of 1956 and 57, when Beara men Neilly Duggan and Paddy Harrington played . And also Joe O’Sullivan Gorth. Unfortunately Cork were beaten by Galway in 1956 and little Louth in 1957. Dermot O’Brien, the great accordionist, was their captain.

Radio Eireann ‘s signature tune was O’ Donnell Abu played over and over.

Radio Luxemburg was for pop music. They called themselves 208 the Station of the Stars. A favourite programme was The Top Twenty introduced by Pete Murray on Sunday nights. He gave the time with his “H. SAMUEL ever right watch”- advertising for them.

On the long wave there was the BBC LIGHT programme.