

## **Bill Hayes and the Beeman**

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Men who take to the road and walk in search of work are never seen these days but they were a feature of the landscape in the 1950s.

One of the last of these men walked up the road alongside our farm and asked my father for work.

He had walked from Tipperary to Kildare with no success. My father offered him a few days' work. He accepted, and stayed for years.

A neighbouring farm had an empty, derelict house and he moved into it and "fixed it up," as they say, for himself.

Bill Hayes was a hard worker and a generous man. When he got his wages from my father he would go off to Naas on his bicycle and come back with sweets for the children. As he cycled out of the yard later he would scatter fistfuls of sweets in glittering, multi-coloured wrappers up into the air for myself and my sister to catch before he went off to his house in the fields.

The story has a good ending: he eventually moved elsewhere in the parish, married and settled down. It was an extraordinary achievement for a farm worker at a time of scarcity in the country.

Other men passed through the farm also. Sometimes they would sleep in the hay shed overnight having given my father an undertaking that they would not light cigarettes while they were lying in the hay. And they didn't. Or if they did they managed not to set the place on fire.

One man lived in our farmyard. I don't know why, or where he came from or went to. He was called the Beeman and he lived in a shed across the yard which he, too, had "fixed up." I have no memory of him whatsoever but his shed, which later became a calf house, was known from that time on as the Beeman's Hut.

Such men must have developed a capacity to be alone with their own thoughts for hours on end. That was in rural Ireland. Today, men like the Beeman might be alone with their thoughts in a flat in the city. Perhaps he was better off in our yard.