Mary B Davitt nee Morrison was born in Thallabawn village in the half parish of Kingswell, County Mayo. This is an account of what life was like at her age of eleven.

Every village in the area had one or two shops even though money was very scarce. It was a farming community and only what you needed was bought from the shop. You would love to go to the shop because it was a great adventure, but you would always have to be careful not to break or lose anything on your way there and back. Sometimes you would have to take the donkey with you when large heavy items such as flour were purchased.

White and brown flour, sugar, tea and oil were essential. Everyone would have their own gallon can for oil used in lamps. You could also buy biscuits and sweets which were sold out of big tin boxes with glass lids. When other tins in the shop would be empty, they would be given to someone in the neighbourhood. The shopkeeper always remembered who the tin was promised to; one family would never get a tin twice in a row. The plain biscuits would cost half a penny or sometimes one penny and they were the size of a saucer but fancy biscuits cost more. If you were lucky enough to buy boiled sweets you always took them home and broke them with a stone so everyone would get some. Getting biscuits and sweets was a luxury and not often purchased but sometimes when you went to the shop the shopkeeper would be busy churning the milk for butter, so she would ask you to churn while she weighed out your goods or even if she needed to.
Buying and selling

write in her book. She sometimes would ask you to count her chickens or find some that had strayed off as well and in return she would give you some sweets and would wrap them up in paper. She was very kind and would always give you more than one because she knew you would have to share them. Going to the shop was also a great way to find out news and often messages would be sent home with you for your family or even your neighbours and you would find out if anyone had died. A bargain was almost always asked for and you sometimes would get a few shillings of some items.

Soap, washing powder and washing soda were also purchased however washing soda was more popular as it was cheaper and once the clothes where washed they dried out very clean. Bars of soap where used for washing collar of shirts as well as using it to wash yourself. Pollard was bought for the animals which was a fine flour like substance mixed with grain and potatoes and fed to the pigs.

Everything came into the shop in bulk. There were no plastic bags or bottles; everything came in strong paper or cloth bags. The flour was sold in large ten stone white sacks. These sacks were very useful and where often used for curtains, table cloths and dish cloths. Even the thread which was used to seal up the bags was used for sewing. Once the bags were boiled they became much softer and easier to work with. Tea was sold in one quarter or a half pound bags and sugar was sold in two or four pound bags and these bags were very useful too. When the shopkeeper was not busy in the evening or if it was raining she sometimes weighed items out in
Buying and Selling

advance and always made sure that she added a little extra so to be fair, but some people liked it weighed out in front of them just to make sure they got the correct quantity. There were no fridges or freezers in those days so no perishable goods where sold or bought.

Eggs were a very valuable source of money, they would be used to pay for a lot of your weekly shopping. You would get about six pence an egg but, when they were scarce you would get a few pence more. During Lent and spring time you would have more eggs to sell. A Westport buyer would come out and collect the eggs. Not every shop would accept them as payment for goods though. Some shops in Louisburgh would take butter as there was a bigger demand for it.

When you were sent to the shop you would have a grocery book with which your mother would fill out what you would need and make sure you had enough eggs and money to pay off as much as the bill as possible. The shopkeeper would write down the same sort of thing in their big book called a ledger, all the items, the price and the total. It was very important to try and not have a lot of items bought on account. The eggs would be a great help to pay off as much as the bill as possible. When the piglets or lambs were sold the back payments were paid off.

When selling sheep or cattle they were walked to Louisburgh. This was a great day out if you were allowed to go, boys always got to go. There were no gates in those days so a good dog was invaluable. It was very important to look after your livestock.