Farming

In my grandfather's day, no one around here ever made silage instead it was hay. There was a lot of work involved in making hay.

First they had to cut the hay with a scythe, then pick all the weeds by hand. They had a special fork with two prongs and they used it to shake out the hay.

After a couple of dry days and it was dry on top they would turn it. Often they would turn it several times. If the weather was poor they would have to lap it. Laps were small balls of hay about forty centimetres high, with a hole through the middle for the wind to dry it.

Once the hay was dry, they'd use forks to gather it for coicking. Coicking is where you stack hay in a pile about two metres high, with a bag on top to keep it dry.

When all the hay was cocked at harvest time at the end of summer, they would load the hay onto a horse and cart and bring it into the baggard (that's the farmyard) to make a hay reek. It could take several days to bring in all the hay.
A reek would be five to six metres wide and as long as was necessary to hold all the hay. To begin with they used to make a Forrágh with bushes or any such dry material to keep the hay from rotting on the ground. Then they'd build the haystack on the Forrágh. The children really enjoyed the building of the reek because they were allowed to play on the reek while it was being built to trample it and this was good fun. There was usually one veteran reek builder who oversaw the building of the reeks because it was important that the reek would not let in water or fall over in the winter storms. When the reek was built it was thatched with rushes to protect it from the rain.

In those days there were no lorries to transport hay from outside the area, and if your reek was ruined so too was your livestock. In the day of my grandad the reek played a vital part in the well being of the livestock.

Sean Bourke writer

Gerard Bourke letter