

Changing Times - Life in 1950s in NI by Peter Smyth

These were the post-war changes that shaped NI

During the 1950s expectations changed in regard to Housing, Transport, Entertainment, Leisure Time, Education, Food and Health. Authority began to be questioned in ways which would have been unthinkable even a decade earlier.

The streets smelled of harness, sweat and ———

Belfast's street lighting was provided by 16,000 gas lights.

By the mid-50s chemical retting and electrically driven mills eliminated lint dams and scutch mills.

In Belfast cattle drovers were known colloquially as 'cow wallopers'.

In 1958 seven villages and new housing estates now formed Newtownabbey. The names Dalriada, Queenstown, Coole, Edenmore and Parkerstown had been offered.

Deluxe white paint was introduced in 1953 and soon replaced brown or dark green as chosen colour.

Smokers could choose Four Square, Park Drive, Woodbine, Gallaher's Blues, Craven A, Bristol, Airman, Dunhill, Senior Service, Players, du Maurier, Baron's, Churchman's No 1 and Oliver.

Late 1957 the Russians launched the first Sputnik - the Space Age had begun.

Petrol rationing finished in May 1950. Sweets rationing lasted until early 1953.

In 1958 the first self-service branch of Stewart's opened.

In 1960 Belfast Corporation granted its first licence for a Chinese restaurant.

The milk bars and snack bars which had been established as a temporary courtesy for American forces were now a permanent feature.

Rock n' Roll arrived - Elvis and the movie - Rock Around the Clock - hit song Blue Suede Shoes.

1958 brought legislation for drinking in pubs - 10.00pm uniform closing time.

Cinemas were very popular: programmes changed frequently - usually on Monday and Thursday.

The Festival of Britain was held in 1951 but in NI local enthusiasm was muted. It became the victim of partisan politics.

Sport played an important role in, but not a dominant part in 1950s life. The amateur ethic remained fundamental. Helsinki Games of 1952 were followed by the Melbourne Games gave a nod to Thelma Hopkins and Ireland's Freddy Gilroy, John Caldwell and Ron Delaney. Television coverage boosted interest in the Rome Olympics of 1960.

Stirling Moss competed at the Tourist Trophy Dundrod races in the early 50s - little newspaper coverage.

When Roger Bannister broke the four-minute mile in May 1954 - in England - the Belfast Telegraph showed little interest.

In 1951 the Minister of Finance introduced a tax on betting, criticism ensued because this was regarded as the government giving recognition to what had previously been an unacknowledged activity. Legislation followed in 1957 - tidy up work.

BBC Radio offered a choice between the Home Service, the Light Programme and the Third Programme. Radio Eireann was dubbed 'Athlone'

Televisions arrived - 1st May 1953 - BBC local service was inaugurated. The BBC monopoly was challenged when ITV was launched in London in September 1955. ITV eventually arrived on the local scene at the end of October 1959 - a merger of two consortia gave us UTV.

In August 1959 the first Austin and Morris Minis were launched in Britain.

In 1954 it was decided that on trunk roads a single white line should be painted down the middle to indicate that two lanes existed. Zebra crossings were introduced in Belfast as an experiment in 1953 and on a large scale in 1955. After much debate a speed limit of 30 mph in built-up areas was introduced on 1st October 1956. Driving tests were introduced in 1956. The 'friendly chat' from police was recognised as not suffice to for safety on the roads. It was now accepted that official intervention – legislation - had to happen.

The road network needed some improvement. Trunk roads were those designated by the Ministry of Commerce as main through routes. Below that were Class 1 roads which ran between main towns; Class 11 roads connected smaller towns and villages; Class 111 comprised minor roads serving agricultural and industrial premises; and below that unclassified or district roads for agricultural vehicles only.

Religion mattered deeply to many people in NI and could inform all aspects of life.

Towns of sufficient size to warrant a newspaper ensured that there was a Catholic and a Protestant paper.

Do you remember the 'eldritch' screeching sound as a class of children scraped pencils across slates? Did you master inches, feet, yards, chains, furlongs, poles, miles and even leagues? Did you measure area in square feet, square yards, rods, poles, perches, roods and acres? Did your understanding of capacity include gills, pints, quarts, gallons, pecks and bushels? Were you busy with farthings, halfpence, pence, three pence, sixpence, shillings, florins, half-crowns, half sovereigns and guineas. These were bewildering on their own, and terrifying in combination.

The Education Act of 1947 was based on the English educational model. Each county, plus Belfast, was charged with creating an Education Committee. Peter Smyth explains the 'voluntary' and 'controlled' school management on page 158 of his book. The provision of universal free secondary education was another of the crucial factors that marked the 1950s as the transitional decade between the pre-war era and the modern age.

10-Question MCQ on Changing Times - Life in 1950s in NI by Peter Smyth

	A	B	C	D	Correct
Which of the following aspects of life in NI during the 1950s did NOT see a change in expectations?	Leisure Time	Food	Fashion	Housing	C
How was Belfast's street lighting provided in the 1950s?	16,000 gas lights	10,000 electric lights	5,000 lanterns	Solar lights	A
What were cattle drovers colloquially known as in Belfast?	Cow runners	Cow drivers	Cow shifters	Cow wallopers	D
Which colour of paint was introduced in 1953 and soon became popular?	Brown	Dark green	Deluxe white	Sky blue	C
What significant event marked the beginning of the Space Age in 1957?	NASA was formed	Moon landing	The launch of the first Sputnik by the Russians	The discovery of a new galaxy	C
When was the first self-service branch of Stewart's opened?	1960	1957	1953	1958	D
Which popular Rock n' Roll song was mentioned in the text?	Jailhouse Rock	Rock Around the Clock	Blue Suede Shoes	Tutti Frutti	C
Which of the following events related to television occurred in May 1953?	BBC local service was inaugurated	ITV was launched	Televisions were banned	UTV was formed	A
What were introduced on trunk roads in 1954 to indicate two lanes existed?	Double yellow lines	Dotted lines	Single white line	Blue lines	C
In which year was a speed limit of 30 mph in built-up areas introduced?	1953	1955	1956	1958	C

Commentary on Answers:

- *Question 1:* Fashion was not mentioned as a changing expectation in the provided text.
- *Question 2:* The text states that Belfast had 16,000 gas lights.
- *Question 3:* According to the text, cattle drovers were colloquially called 'cow wallopers'.
- *Question 4:* Deluxe white paint was introduced in 1953.
- *Question 5:* The launch of the first Sputnik by the Russians marked the beginning of the Space Age.
- *Question 6:* The text mentions that the first self-service branch of Stewart's opened in 1958.
- *Question 7:* The song "Blue Suede Shoes" was the Rock n' Roll song mentioned.
- *Question 8:* The BBC local service was inaugurated in May 1953.
- *Question 9:* A single white line was painted on trunk roads in 1954.
- *Question 10:* The text states that a speed limit of 30 mph in built-up areas was introduced in 1956.