

Biddy Early

The Wise Woman of Clare

For the complete story of Biddy Early read "Biddy Early - The Wise Woman of Clare" by Meda Ryan 1798 - 1874



Biddy was born in Faha around 1798. Her father was John Connors, a poor tenant farmer and her mother was Ellen Early. As a child, it is reported, she used to "talk to the fairies". She spoke Gaelic and some English and may have spoken "Shelta" the native dialect of the travelling people. From an early age her mother taught Biddy the value of herbs and the cures they afforded. Many of the herbal cures were considered family secrets, that Biddy would use for the rest of her life. Both Biddy's parents died while she was young and Biddy had to fend for herself during her formative years.

Biddy wandered the roads, took employment as a domestic, lived in the local poorhouse all in order to survive before meeting her first husband Pat Malley, who had a son John, from Feekle. Pat and Biddy settled in Feekle where Biddy began to develop a reputation as a woman with many gifts. Faith healing was common in Ireland at the time and healers were in great demand. Healers had a service to offer and the only payment expected was a small gift, perhaps a naggin of whiskey or a bag of loose tea. Biddy's house became a popular place to visit - they were always something to drink. However Pat, who was twice Biddy's age died when she was twenty five leaving her a widow with one son.

Biddy married John Malley, her stepson shortly after Pat's death. Biddy's marriage to John lasted seventeen years before John's health gave way to excessive alcohol. Biddy, not liking to be alone now married Tom Flannery and they moved to a two room cottage in Kilbarron. Biddy's talents by now were attracting visitors, seeking cures and advice, from far and wide. Biddy could offer cures, advice and because she did not extract a payment she became more popular than the doctors or even the clergy. Biddy's cures and advice was not limited to people, she could help the local tenants with ailing animals or problems with their holdings.

Biddy had a famous blue bottle she always carried under her shawl. She could look into the bottle for inspiration and apparently it worked or helped. This blue bottle became an object of resentment from the clergy who thought it had some ties with witchcraft. In 1865 Biddy was accused of witchcraft under a 1586 statute and was brought before a court in Ennis. She was tried for witchcraft - but no one would testify against her.

In 1868, Tom Flannery died. Bidy was a widow for the third time at 70. In 1869, she was married again to Thomas Meaney and they lived together in her cottage in Kilbarron . Tom died the following year - again alcohol was considered the cause.

In 1874 Bidy passed away in her cottage at Kilbarron.. A priest was present at her death, he took her bottle and tossed it in the lake near her home. At her funeral a local priest remarked, "**We thought we had a demon amongst us in poor Bidy Early, but we had a saint, and we did not know it**".

