

To organize a shoot the keepers would hire in some men and boys from around the parish as beaters. Sometimes twice a week, sometimes only Saturdays. Some of us boys liked Saturdays as then we could go. During the week prior to the shoot the keepers would go around the perimeter of the woods that were going to be used on a particular shoot. At certain vantage points they placed a stick in the ground with a number on it. The keeper knew how many guns he would have on a particular day, so would place the same number of sticks with numbers around the wood.

On the morning of the shoot the gents would all assemble and draw a number from a hat and that would be their stand number for that day. So it was the luck of the draw as to whether they had a lot of birds coming towards their stand or not.

Prior to this the pheasants would have been fed and the beaters had been driving in any stray birds from outlying fields and hedges. Then some of us boys would be placed around the wood on what the keepers called stops, to keep the pheasants in the woods. You see the keepers knew the surrounding land like the back of their hand. They knew the places where the pheasants may sneak out very quietly, such places would be up through a small gully or a gutter way by the side of a field hedge, in a valley between fields, or anywhere it was quiet. You would stay there with your stick tapping it on something just to make your presence heard by the pheasants, who would know there was somebody there even if it was only me. Then the beaters would walk through the woods rising the pheasants to the awaiting guns. As the beaters came by, you joined in with beating through the wood. As boys we looked forward to these Saturdays, I suppose being out with the men and going places we would not normally go, and I suppose the biggest attraction was earning a bit of pocket money. The days pay for beaters was men 7/6 and boys 3/6 such money as we boys had never had before. Farm wages around that time were about 30/- a week.

P8
With all this in mind - maybe you can share a little thought with me, - as a small boy 12 years old and Jack as a trained game keeper in his 30's all those years ago. Sitting with Jack and his wife in the warmth and comfort of their home at New Bridge, which had been their home since the day they got married in 1929. I felt very privileged to be sharing with them some of the experiences of those pleasant game keeper days and it is something I will always remember.