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**FULL TRANSCRIPT OF INTERVIEW WITH TOMAS DE BHALDRAITHE  
DOCUMENTARY: A LIFETIME OF STORIES, 2019  
IRISH SCREEN PROJECTS**

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**INTERVIEWER: DR ENDA MURRAY**

**TOMÁS DE BHALDRAITHE**

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**What's your name? and where are you from?**

My name is Tomás De Bhaldráithe. I'm from Rathmines in Dublin.

Is mise Tomás De Bhaldráithe agus as Rathmoinis i Baile Atha Cliath is ea mé.

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**Tell us about growing up in Dublin**

Well growing up in Dublin I was one of a large family. I was right in the middle - four above and four below; and I went to primary school in Scoil Lorcáin, in Monkstown and which was one of the first Gaelscoileanna in Ireland at the time, or in Dublin. And then I went to secondary school, to the Gonzaga College Jesuit school, and I stayed there till I finished and went to UCD afterwards.

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**An raibh sibh ag caint Gaeilge sa bhaile? An raibh sibh rugadh le Gaeilge?**

Did you talk Irish at home? Were you brought up with Irish?

Tógadh le Gaeilge mé, Gaeilge sa mbaile, agus bhí suim ag m'athair i Fhraincís agus teangacha eile. Agus bhí deis againn Fraincís a labhairt freisin. Chuaigh gach duine sa clann go dtí an Fhrainc ar feadh cúpla mí, nó go dtí an Iteal nó go dtí an Spáin. Bhí an deis sin againn, bhí an t-ádh dearg orainn.

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We were raised speaking Irish, Irish in the home. So we had the chance to speak French. So everyone in the family went to France for a couple of months; or to Italy or to Spain. We had that opportunity. We were very lucky.

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We were very lucky my parents wanted us to learn languages so they sent us over to friends they had in France or Italy or in Spain so apart from Irish we spoke English and we spoke Dublin English as well.

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**Abair liom faoi an ceangailt idir tú féin agus Conamara.**

Tell us about your links to Conamara.

Bhuel gach Samhradh téimid go dtí an Ceathrú Rua i gConamara. Agus chaith muid trí mí ansin i rith na laethanta saoire scoile.

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**Ar fuair tú an grá leis Gaeilge ansin?**

Is that where you got your love for Irish?

Ní amháin sin, Bhí suim agam sa fharraige agus na mbád agus an iascaireacht agus na rudaí sin. Bhí go leor colceathair linn a rinne an rud céanna.

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Every summer we went to Carraroe in Connemara, and we spent three months there during the school holidays.

I had plenty of cousins and other friends who used to go to Carraroe every summer and I was interested in the sea and fishing and sailing and making canoes or fishing or putting out lobster pots or anything to do with the sea.

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**Inis dom an scéal faoi Hookers.**

Tell us about the Hookers.

Nuair a bhíimid sa Ceathrú Rua, chuamar isteach sa hAran le Maidhc O'Brien. Is aige a bhí an *Tonaí*. Agus bhí sé ag tabhairt món isteach go hAran. Nó le Johnny Jimmy, fear an *Mhaighdean Mhara*, a bhí ag tabhairt móna isteach sa hAran freisin. Sin é an slí beatha a bhí acu.

We used to go in with Mike O'Brien who owned [a boat called] the *Tonaí* and he used to bring turf to the Aran Islands because the Aran Islands had no fuel then; and with Johnny Jimmy who owned [a boat called] the *Mhaighdean Mhara*. We went in a number of times to Inis Oirr, to Kilronan and we got to know the whole lifestyle that they had. The hard work they had to do to cut the turf, to bring the turf down to the pier in Strachan or Callahaigh and to load up the Hooker and set sail.

You were dependent on the weather and the wind and then they would love to have in exchange for the turf sometime they would get Breems from the Aran fishermen - fish or money in exchange for a load of turf. And the Currachs row out from the islands, from Inis Oirr and from Kilronan and bargain for the price of the load of turf.

**I lár an farraige?**

In the middle of the ocean?

When they used to see the Hooker coming in, they'd go and bargain for the price of the load of turf.

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**An raibh tú ag seoladh na Hookers?**

Were you sailing the Hookers yourself?

My brother had a púcán back in the 70s and not long after that a gleoiteog and then I got a gleoiteog myself then and I did a lot of sailing. We used to go to all the Regattas around the area during the summer, and to Kinvara (Ceann Mhara) during August - that was usually the last Regatta of the season.

Bhí chara agam, Con McCann as Béil Feirste, atá bás anois.

**Cén ait eile ?**

Where else?

I used to help a good friend of mine Con McCann who had [a boat called] the *Connacht* and we used to bring it around Ireland every year from where he had it - either in Carrickfergus or in Strangford. And we'd bring it north about, or south about depending on the weather and the winds, and so on. He'd go to all the Regattas and then I'd bring it back home to Belfast or to Carrickfergus or

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**Cé hé an turas is mór a rinne tú?**  
What was the longest trip you did?

wherever he had it moored - Strangford as well.

Bhuel chuaigh mé go dtí an Fhrainc. Go dtí Brest agus Douarnenez sa Breton.  
I went to Brest and to Douarnenez in Brittany and back one year, and that's probably the longest trip I've done.

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**Cén saghas bád atá siad? Tá siad déanta le lámh?**  
What type of boats are they? Are they hand-made?

Hookers are between 35 and 40 feet. [Made from] Oak ribs and Larch wood. Gleoiteogs are smaller, anything from 21 to 23 feet. The same gaff rig, jib, fore sail and main sail. Now, the older Hookers before the terylene and nylon came in, their sails would be made of calico and tarred, so that they would not disintegrate due to the sea water and salt in the air.

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**Inis dom faoin grian grafeanna agus an scéal le do athair.**  
Tell us about the photos and the story of your dad.

Bhí m'athair i Brooklyn nó i New Eamharch in áit éigin.

My father was in New York somewhere and he walked into a bookshop and what do you see but a book of black and white photographs of Ireland. And he was paging through the book, bit by bit ,and wow, low and behold in the very middle of it he saw a photograph of his own son Taimín and I was smoking a fag at the time. So he bought the book and he sent me a cursory note. "T'is an awful pity you had a fag in your mouth,"!

"Is mór an trua go bhfuil tú ag caitheamh fag agus pictiúir breá agat ann."

**Cen bád a bhí sin?**  
**Which boat were you sailing [in the picture]?**

Sin é mo bád féin, mo gleoiteog fein.

That photo was taken maybe the late 70s or maybe early 80s.

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**Inis dom faoin tamall inniu ar ais ag Eireann agus seoladh arís?**  
Tell me about being back in Ireland recently and sailing again?

I went back to Ireland last summer and I went to nearly all the Regattas there. I was out sailing, but I'm too old to be hoisting ropes and dealing with heavy timbers now, and I just go there to sail and accompany. I don't skipper any of the boats anymore.

But I sailed with my brother's boat, Padraig who still has a boat and we had a lovely sail this year. We sailed from Leitir Meallain [Lettermullan] all the way around Slyne Head into Clifden this year. She's a good weather boat, a lovely weather boat a gaffrey(?) boat he bought in Falmouth. because he's older he's the same age as myself he's two years older and too old to be hoisting heavy spars and lifting heavy timbers.

**An raibh tú ag seoladh bád eile san Astráil?**  
Have you been sailing other boats here in Australia?

I took a Cornish crabber Sydney Harbour down to Port Jackson and back but I got tired of going out with sailors from Sydney because all they used to talk about was the

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stock market and shares and the price of houses. They had no interest in the sea or stories about the ocean. I got bored of that. I don't go sailing to be talking about Dow Jones or the footsie and the price of Sydney Harbour houses but it's a very Sydney thing.

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**Cé mhéad teanga ata agat?**

How many languages do you speak?

"Very well, we are here this morning. You are talking to me this morning as part of the Irish Film Festival next year in the Chauvel Cinema. You are making a piece about Irish people who live here in Sydney. They are talking about whether to return to Ireland or stay in Sydney. "

Other languages? I speak Norwegian.

I speak good Norwegian.

[Tomás speaks in Norwegian]

Cén fath?

Why [were you in Norway]

I speak fairly good Irish I speak English I speak French fairly fluent French.

Tres bien. Nous sommes ici ce matin. Vous avez parlé avec moi ce matin, pour le Festival de Film Irlandais, l'année prochain, a la Chauvel. Vous allez faire un pièce sur les Irlandaises qui habite ici a Sydney, et qui parle de retourner a Irland, ou rester a Sydney.

Teanga eile? Labhraím Iorais

Snacha flión Norsk.

Ukka Norsk von treo sete. Yo fellim okstenee.

I lived in Norway from 1971 to 1973. I was there during the referendum on the EU.

Mar fuair mé sort deontas chun dul chuig an Iorai chun trachtas a dhéanamh ar seandálaíochta. Ach chaith mé go leor am nuair a bhí mé ansin, in áit a bheith gnóthach le mo chuid stáidéir... Chuaigh mé ag obair ag toscaracht in aghaidh an Comh Mhargadh.

I got a grant to go to Norway to do research in archaeology. But I spent a lot of time there. (When I should have been busy studying) I was working for the organisation who were campaigning against the European Union.

Instead of finishing my MA over there and studying, I got involved in the Norwegian movement against joining the EEC (at the time) under those conditions. The Norwegians had their oil, their fisheries, their hydro. They all these natural resources, and they had a very strong campaign for and against joining. But they finally decided not to join and they have benefited greatly since then - for the people of Norway not for the wealthy elite.

Unfortunately Ireland sold away all its fisheries all its mineral rights when they joined the EU, or the EEC at the time. We had a Fisheries Minister unfortunately who didn't

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**So bhí tu ag teacht ar ais, ag teacht abhaile agus stop thú sa Bhreatain, agus bhí siad ag cur ceist ort, "Cad is ainm duit..." Inis dom faoi scéal sin.**

know the difference between a herring and a whale; and everything was sold for higher quotas of pig meat and cattle exports.

Oh go minic nuair a bhí mé ag dul trí London. Ag an am sin, nuair a bhí na Trioblóidí ar shiúl sa Tuaisceart. Bhí siad i gcónaí ag cur ceist orm mar bhí Pas agam i Gaeilge. Pas Éireannach agus ainm i Gaeilge. Shíl siad go raibh tú pairteach nó teacú. Agus cuirfidís ceist ort, agus go minic bhí sé náireadach an chaoi a chuir siad ceist ort.

Often when I was going through London, at that time when the Troubles were going on in Northern Ireland. The British police were always asking me - because I had an Irish passport, and it was written in Gaelic - and my name was written in Gaelic. They thought I was involved, or at least supportive, of the Republicans or the IRA. They would question you, and often it was shameful how they would question you.

“What's your name in English?”

That's my name. It's in Irish. That is my name. And I would say “What's your name in Chinese?” And that would infuriate some of the police and security in London. And I still come across that in Ireland, I'm asked by public servants or civil servants what's your name in English? And I say “That is my name. If it's in Greek, you won't ask a Greek person or in Italian what's your name in English? Well then why do they have to ask an Irish person what's his name in English if his name is in Irish. I find that most objectionable.

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**What's your day like now in Sydney?**

Well now I'm retired and both my sons are working, I would sooner be anywhere but in Sydney. Sydney is alright when you're working. When you're not working, okay the weather might be fine, but I'm never at ease in Sydney when I'm not working.

I get involved in some community things, I help out in the community radio every Saturday morning, and I help you when the Film Festival is on. I'm on the board of the Irish National Association, and I like to help out when there's functions, or concerts are on. And that's the sum total of it. I find that unless you're either working part-time, or volunteering it's not a city that I would like to live in full-time. I would sooner be anywhere else on earth than here in Sydney.

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**Why do you think that is? Do you think it's because of your ties to the West of Ireland?**

I think the uniformity, the amorphous uniformity of accent here is very off-putting. There are people from all over the

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world who live in Sydney, [and] who speak perfectly good English. But because they don't speak with an Australian accent, they are excluded from the TV and radio and mainstream [media]. Also the city is full of poker machines. It's the highest per capita of any city on earth and it's a blight on this society.

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**What do you think is your proudest moment looking back?**

I suppose like anyone we have regrets of things we did in life, but my proudest moment is raising two fine boys and they're healthy and intelligent and good-hearted and decent citizens. That's all you can do, that's all I could ask for. And I like to keep in touch with my friends and family, and travel if I can afford it back to Ireland or back to Europe - between now and the day of reckoning let's put it at that.

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**Tell us briefly about the last couple of years spending time in Australia and in Ireland.**

Well, as best I can I spend half the year here and half the year in Ireland or in Europe. And I do various things; I help friends who have a barge up and down the Shannon. I go out and I like to go sailing and fishing I help people bring the turf back home from the bog. I love exploring rural Ireland. I keep in touch with people who have similar interests, in nature and archaeology in history and the wildlife in Ireland.

Maybe next year I will go on some of the Irish whale and dolphin group trips - they have a research vessel that goes around Ireland. Maybe I'll take advantage of joining them for a trip, if possible.

I like to keep in touch...Ireland has changed dramatically, especially in the last ten years... a lot of the rural communities, rural towns and villages in Ireland. Because of the lack of employment they're all migrating towards Dublin. And it's causing its own problems.

But I was glad to see Dublin is very changed - in some ways for the better. That you have people from all over the world working there, and in any street in Dublin you can hear five six different languages being spoken with no sense of being excluded. You have Spanish, Portuguese and French, Italian and of course we depend a lot in Ireland at the moment on our tourism. There are more and more tourists coming to Ireland. And if they, in a way we should look after the country before we destroy it.

Sadly like any big urban centre, because of the population growth in the cities, traffic is going to become a big problem. And there are problems with the health system and problems with homelessness - especially in Dublin which I find very distressing. And this disparity between

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the average young person or middle-aged person working, and the wealthy, is growing wider and wider and it's a worry.

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**Back tracking slightly... inis dom faoi stáidair a rinne tú san ollscoil.**

Tell me about your university studies.

I did an Honors Degree in Archaeology and History and I also did some other qualifications afterwards. I was a school teacher for a number of years, and when I availed of the leave of absence scheme that the government brought in in the 80s in Ireland in order to alleviate the jobs shortages in health and nursing and teaching; I came out to Sydney for a year for a holiday.

I have a younger brother here Ciaran who lives in Cremorne in Sydney and he invited me over and I worked in various jobs here in Sydney while I was here. Labouring, putting in gas mains, teaching for a while and ended up working in customs in Sydney Airport for the last 18 years, until I retired.

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**ENDS**

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