

Pope John Paul II
Knock people remember his visit
1999 Interviews

‘The day he came I got up about five o’clock in the morning and when I looked out the window there were thousands of people coming from the Sligo road. And the tramp of their feet, I’ll never forget it. There was a good story to be told that night when the crowds were dispersing. There were many guards on duty that were not local. There was a garda on duty up in Barnacarroil. Two or three people came up and asked him where Barnacarroil was and he said: ‘I don’t know who this Barnacarroil is, but he must be a very popular man as you’re the third or fourth person that has asked me where he is!’

John Carty, Carramore, Knock

‘I was mostly involved in the security situation. I was the head of it in this area. There were commissioners, superintendents and inspectors coming and going for two weeks beforehand. I’ll never forget the day he came. When he prayed in the Shrine, I was within two feet of him.’

John Foley, Garda Sergeant (retired), Knock

‘It was at the end of July and I came into work one day and the place was under siege. There were reporters and priests everywhere. I knew the Papal Visit was on the cards but I hadn’t heard the news that morning so I didn’t know the visit had just been confirmed. I remember walking around the night before he arrived. The buses were coming in, the flags flying, the atmosphere was indescribable.’

Marie Page, Knock Shrine Office

‘We thought it would never happen, like the airport, but it did. There were a lot of security arrangements. We could only drive in and out of the village with a security pass in the last couple of days. It was really wonderful to think that the Holy Father was here. It was like having the Lord himself walking among us.’

Frankie Harte, Meeltrane, Knock

‘I was a foreman with the County Council at the time so I was involved in getting the roads ready for the visit. When you looked at Knock at that time, it was like an old town. The stalls were only make-do on the side of the road, the school road only a path and the car park a green field. The main road itself had to be widened. We worked through the rain, one hundred and twenty of us, mainly from Knock, Ballyhaunis and Kiltimagh. I remember the hard work and dedication of all those people.’

John Kelly, Drum, Knock

‘I remember the day he came. It was a misty day and he was late in coming. I stood to watch him just inside the gate in the convent grounds. For me, like many others, it was one of the highlights of my life.’

Mary Keenan, Drum, Knock

‘The village of Knock on the eve of the visit was very colourful. There was bunting and flags everywhere. The crowds kept getting bigger and bigger. The atmosphere was great. It was a magnificent spectacle when the helicopter door opened and the Holy Father emerged. Everybody was tremendous in the way they gave of their time and talents to make sure everything worked out well.’

Tom Neary, Head Steward, Knock Shrine Society