

# Mayo Heritage

Newsletter



## The craft of the **TAILOR**

Image: (The National Library of Wales)



**CONGRATULATIONS!**  
to the Crossmolina Team  
on being crowned Connacht  
Intermediate Champions

Are you interested in

### TRACING YOUR MAYO ROOTS?

If you are interested in professional help to research your family history or are curious about your ancestry, why not contact us?



The  
*North Mayo*  
Heritage  
Centre



Rialtas na hÉireann  
Government of Ireland

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At one time in rural Ireland, especially in the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the tailor was a travelling craftsman, wandering from village to village, repairing and making clothes.

The arrival of the tailor in a locality was an occasion to be looked forward to. He would set up in some house or other, where he could also have lodgings. Because he travelled from place to place at a time when people often remained local to their homes, he was a welcome arrival.



From askaboutireland.ie (image from Leitrim County Council)

## Exploring the long-forgotten craft of



# The Tailor



He brought with him all the news from the various places he had been. The first task when the tailor set up in a house was to give him a space to work in. A door was taken off its hinges, and used as a table for him to work off. This was known as 'whipping the cat'. Straw was placed under the unhinged door, and here the tailor would sit cross-legged, mending, cutting and sewing, while a stream of neighbours came by, some with commissions, others just to hear some news or to be part of the gathering.

The main materials used in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century for clothing were frieze, corduroy, pilot cloth, broadcloth and moleskin. Shirts were made from linen.<sup>1</sup> In a town of any decent size, there were always a few tailors.

Like a lot of such trades and crafts, tailoring was hereditary, whether these were wandering tailors, or those who were set up in towns. The skills, and often the tools of the trade, were passed down.

The 1901 Census of Ireland records that, in Killala, Thomas Orme, aged 65, and his son, William, were the tailors in the town. In Belmullet, demand for quality was clearly high; there were five families involved in the tailoring business. Thomas Gaughan and his brother James operated on Barrack Street. Their sister Annie was a dressmaker. Arthur Nash, who had moved out from Ballina, operated on Davis Street, and three of his daughters were dressmakers.

Also on Davis Street was David Loftus and Michael O'Malley. Two of O'Malley's daughters were in the dress making business also. On William Street, Pat McHugh also carried on the tailoring tradition.

In Foxford, there were three tailors, John Gethins, Pat Walsh and John McGowan. Being in a town did not guarantee you a living however. In Ballina, in the 1860s, the local linen trade collapsed, and tailors in the town struggled.<sup>2</sup>

Did any of them take to wandering the surrounding parishes looking for work?

If they did, the next generation to follow them in the north Mayo Capital had better times.

By 1911, Terry Reilly writes, the town was 'full of tailors.' Among them was Michael Ferguson, 'who had gone to England to learn his craft'. When he came home, he set up in Ardnaree and employed five men 'in a house which today still bears the Ferguson thimbles over the door'<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Cross, E. 1942. *The Tailor & Ansty*. Mercier Press, Cork. p.30-31

<sup>2</sup> Reilly, T. 2014. *Ballina, One Town, Three Wars & More*. Yew Tree Publishing, Ballina. p.30

<sup>3</sup> Reilly, T. 2014. *Ballina, One Town, Three Wars & More*. Yew Tree Publishing, Ballina. p.53

**CHRISTMAS MARKET**  
**14<sup>th</sup> & 15<sup>th</sup> Dec.**  
 NORTH MAYO HERITAGE CENTRE  
 Tel. 096 31809



The house in Ardnaree where Michael Ferguson employed five other tailors in the 1910s. Note the plaster thimble motifs above the name.