

North Mayo Heritage Centre Mayo Heritage

Newsletter

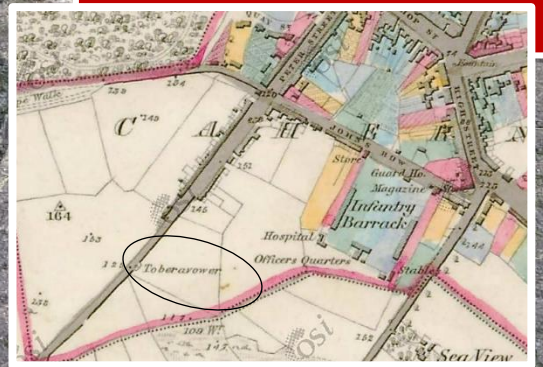
Vol.V Issue 1
7th January 2024

YouTube



Happy New Year.
2024

Tober Aoid Bour
The legend at the end
of Tubber Hill



*Cover image: Tober Aoid Bour with its refurbished roof.
The stone with the inscription detailing how the well got its
name can be seen in the background.*

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Tober Aoid Bour: The Legend at the end of Tubber Hill

Th on the edge of Westport town, where the Greenway passes under the old railway bridge at the junction of the West Road and Leenane Road, sits an interesting monument with an even more interesting legend behind it. This is *Tober Aoid Bodhar* (Deaf Hugh's Well).

The well itself was marked as *Toberavower* on the Ordnance Survey map of the area, drawn in 1838. The street leading from the Octagon up the hill towards the well is Peter Street, which after the junction with John's Row, becomes Tubber Hill, or the hill of the well. The well in question is *Tober Aoid Bour*. It's easy to imagine this well being of huge importance to the inhabitants of the part of the town closest to it. Indeed, prior to the establishment of the present town of Westport in the mid-1700s, the former settlement of *Cathair na Mart* was located less than a mile away, in what are now the grounds of Westport House.

How Tober Aoid Bour Got Its Name

Despite the well being adjacent to Westport town, it was the misfortune of a Louisburgh man which gave the well its name. Owen Bawn O'Fergus lived at Collacoona, near Louisburgh. He had four sons, three of whom travelled to France to become monks (this was the era of the Penal Laws in Ireland).

On their return after seven years, the trio entered the Augustinian Friary at Murrisk and lived out their days there. The fourth son, Hugh was known as 'Aoid Bour' or Deaf Hugh. The family were hereditary doctors, and when Hugh learned all that his father could teach him, he set off for Edinburgh to study for his degree. When he achieved this, he was appointed a professor in the University, a post he held for 12 years. Then, he decided to return to Ireland. The Browne Family of Westport House became landlords of the area where Owen Bawn O'Fergus had his holding. Browne's bailiffs seized Owen Bawn's cattle for rent which Owen Bawn did not actually owe.

James Berry recounted that 'the bailiffs drove the cattle to Cahir na Mart, and old Owen followed his stock, lamenting and exclaiming 'Oh I wish Aoid Bour could hear about this in Scotland!'

He continued repeating this as he went along, and it became a household word ever afterwards in the West, for if two neighbours were scolding, the people would say that 'Deaf Hugh could hear them in Scotland'. As the bailiffs were descending the northern slope of the hill towards Cahir na Mart, they were confronted by a strange gentleman on horseback who said 'you have driven the cattle too hard, you have them almost killed, for they are panting and frothing. To whom do they belong?' 'They belong to Owen Bawn O'Fergus of Collacoona' they replied.

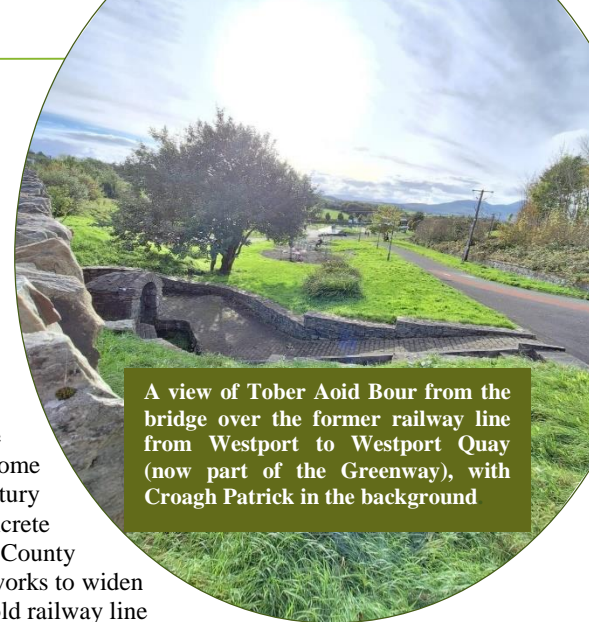
Then the stranger dismounted and looked around him until he saw a spring trickling from the foot of a green hillock. 'Get me a loy and a shovel' he said to some of the men who had gathered around him, and they did.

'At his direction, they dug a well, cleaned it up and it immediately filled and the stranger gave water to the cattle. The strange gentleman who dug the well was Deaf Hugh O'Fergus, who had returned to his native land, and the well bears his name, being to this day called Tubber Aoidh Bour', which means Deaf Hugh's Well.

When Deaf Hugh gave his father's cattle a drink, he paid what Browne demanded. Then he placed his weeping old father, Owen Bawn, on horseback, and they drove the cattle home to Collacoona, where Hugh began to practice his profession.

The well had a stone surround, which at some point in the 20th century was capped by a concrete slab. In 2004, Mayo County Council undertook works to widen the bridge over the old railway line / greenway. As part of these works, archaeologists employed on the project oversaw a new lease of life for *Tober Aoid Bour*.

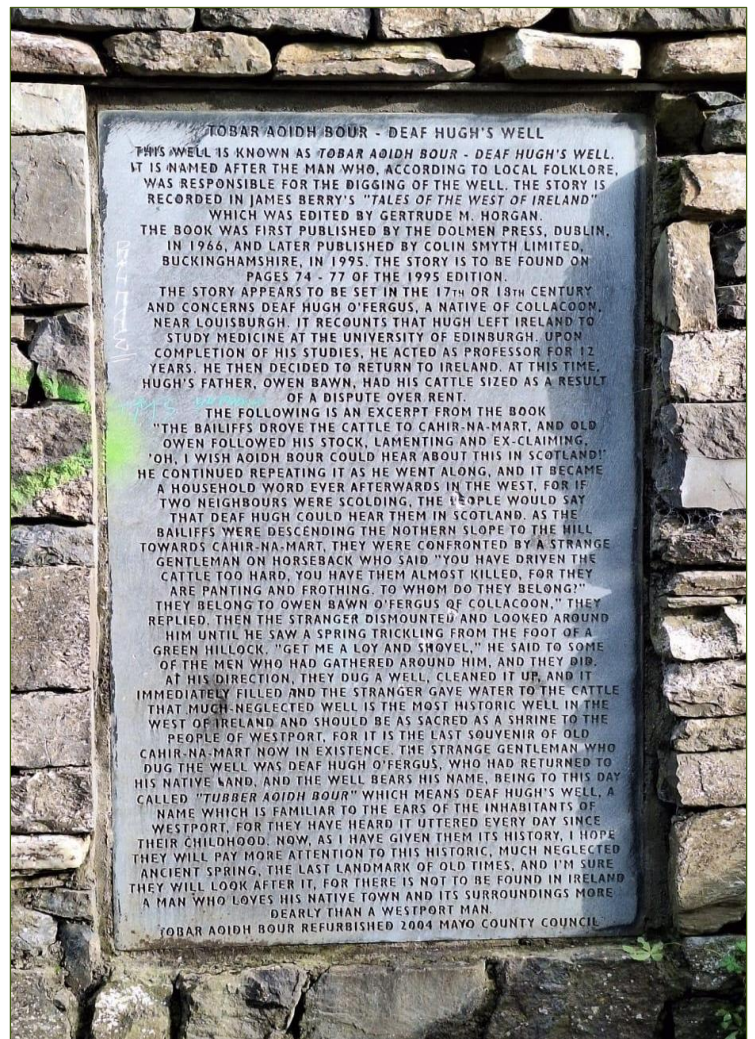
The concrete slab was removed, and new stone work, in keeping with the existing masonry over the well, was built into a grotto-like arch.



A view of Tober Aoid Bour from the bridge over the former railway line from Westport to Westport Quay (now part of the Greenway), with Croagh Patrick in the background

An inscribed stone slab was erected on the wall of the new bridge, directly behind the well, telling the story of how *Tober Aoid Bour* got its name.

Source: Berry, J. 1988. *Tales of the West of Ireland*. Horgan, G.M. (ed.) Colin Smythe Ltd. Buckinghamshire.



The inscription which tells the story of the how Tober Aoid Bour got its name.

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Newsletter

Vol.V Issue 2
14th January 2024

YouTube



**Iconic
Irish Jewellery**
the Celtic Cross,
the Claddagh Ring,
the Trinity Knot

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Iconic Irish Jewellery

Many pieces of fine jewellery are associated with Ireland and being Irish – here we explore three of the most well-known pieces.

The Claddagh Ring

The Claddagh ring originates from the fishing village of Claddagh, located just outside of Galway City. The name Claddagh comes from the Irish word ‘*cladach*’ which describes a flat stony beach or shore.

One legend tells how Richard Joyce, a fisherman from Galway, crafted the first Claddagh ring around the 17th century. It recounts the story of pirates abducting the fishermen of the Joyce family whilst sailing near the West Indies. It is said that the men were sold into slavery in Africa and Richard Joyce was made to work for a goldsmith. It was during this time that he took a small piece of gold each day and eventually used them to create the first Claddagh ring.

Joyce designed a simple ring with two clasped hands holding a heart and topped with a crown. These symbols were said to represent Joyce’s hope that his loved ones would remain loyal while he was away. Upon his return to Ireland, Joyce gave the ring to his sweetheart, who wore it to symbolise their everlasting love.

Over the years, each component of this ring has taken on a specific meaning. The two hands on the Claddagh ring represent friendship. The heart signifies love and the crown a symbol of loyalty. It is these virtues which are said to form the perfect relationship, one based on friendship, love and loyalty.

Depending on the message people would like to share, the ring can be worn on the left or right hand. Wearing it on your left hand with the heart facing outward, is a sign that you are engaged. When the heart faces inward on this hand the ring indicates that you are married. If you wear the ring on your right hand with the heart facing outward, it will indicate that you are single and looking for love. Wearing the ring on your right hand and facing inwards indicates that you are in a committed relationship.

Some Irish families have a tradition of passing a Claddagh ring from mother to daughter, as a family heirloom through the generations.

You may receive the ring as a symbol of friendship, true love or loyalty but some say it is bad luck to buy a Claddagh ring for yourself.

This superstition is fading fast with anyone purchasing a Claddagh ring for themselves or others. The ring still remains an iconic piece of Irish jewellery.

The Celtic Cross

Another recognisable piece of jewellery in Ireland is the Celtic Cross. It features a traditional cross accentuated with a circle around the intersection of the arms and stem. There are many different interpretations of the Celtic Cross, one of which is said to be a representation of knowledge, strength and compassion. The four arms of the Celtic Cross are thought to be representative of the four elements of Fire, Earth, Air and Water and as a representation of our mind, soul, body and heart. The centre ring of the Celtic Cross is said to be evocative of the Celtic symbol for infinite love, with no beginning and no end. It is said to be a symbol of God’s endless love with many believing that it is also a depiction of the halo of Christ.

The Trinity Knot or Triquetra

The Trinity Knot or Triquetra is one of the most common of the Celtic Knots used in Irish jewellery. Derived from the Latin, ‘*triquetra*’, it translates as ‘three cornered’. It is known to many as a Celtic Trinity Knot or Celtic Triangle.

Although there are many theories as to the definition of the design, each one mentions the significance of the three intersecting loops which, depending on your beliefs, can be interpreted in a number of ways such as Father, Son and Holy Spirit, Mother, Crone and Maiden or mind, body and spirit.

As with the Claddagh ring the number three represented in the Trinity Knot holds a special connotation with Celtic symbols. The trinity knot or triquetra is sometimes interlaced with a circle surrounding the three intersecting arcs, this circle is said to symbolise spiritual unity, as a circle has no beginning and no end, thus signifying the eternity of faith.

Resources:
irishfamilyhistorycentre.com
Blarney.com



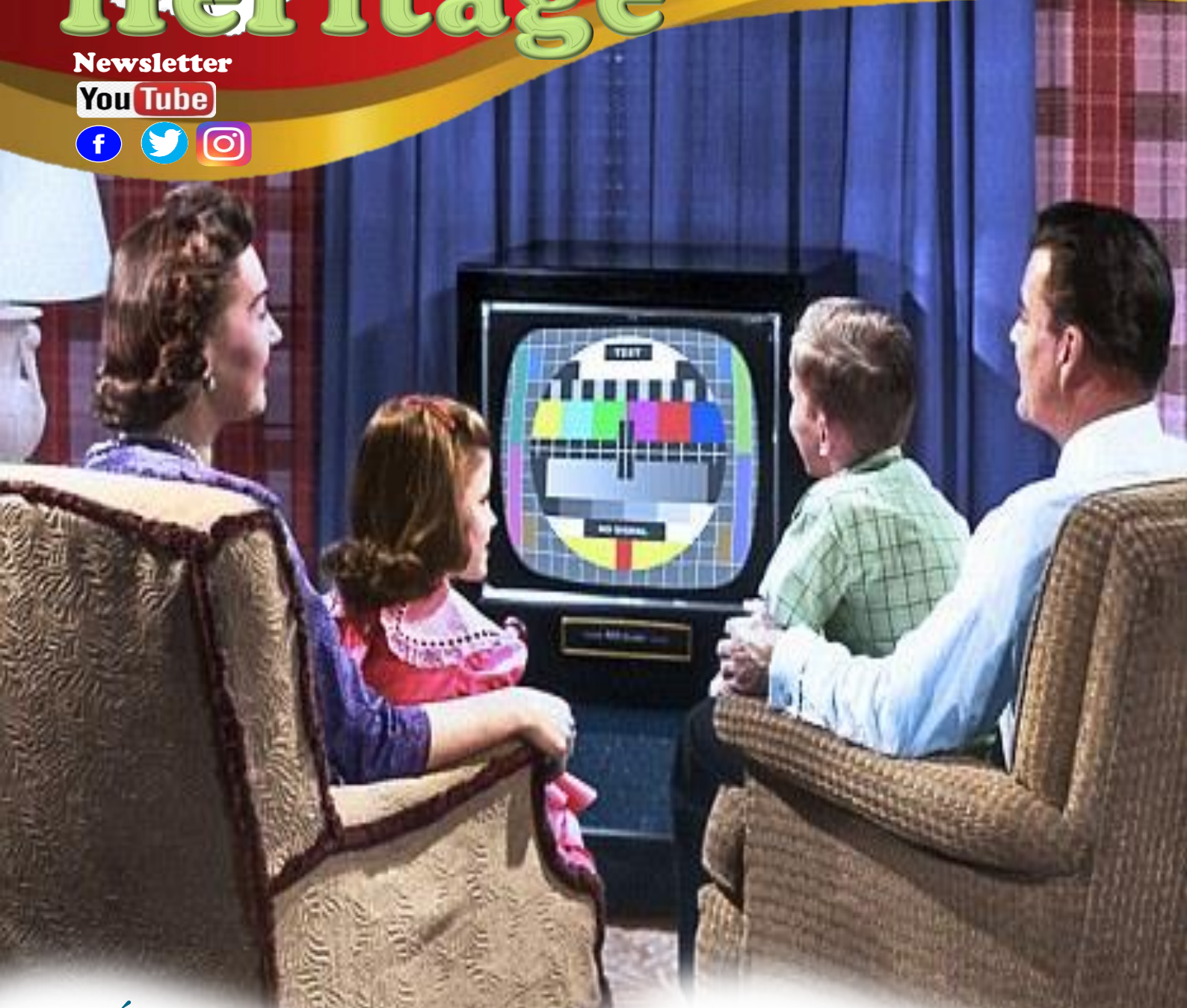
The Celtic Cross, the Claddagh ring and the Trinity Knot jewellery pieces
 (Images from *Myrishjeweler.com*)

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Vol.V Issue 3
21st January 2024

Newsletter

YouTube



RTÉ

(Raidió Teilifís Éireann)

First broadcast on 31st Dec. 1961

We profile how RTÉ has developed down through the years

(Cover image courtesy of thedailymail.com)

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Vol.V Issue 4
28th January 2024

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A brief history of

The Book of Kells



Cover image: Monogram page from The Book of Kells, Four Gospels
(image from free photo by photo.com)

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The Book of Kells – a brief history

One of the greatest treasures of its kind, the Book of Kells is an illuminated religious manuscript from the medieval period.

The Book of Kells contains the four Gospels in Latin which St. Jerome completed in 384AD (Anno Domini, Latin for “in the year of the Lord”) intermixed with readings from the earlier Old Latin translation. The book was written on vellum (prepared calfskin) and the edges were gilded in the course of rebinding in the 19th century. The manuscript today comprises of 340 leaves or folios, each leaf having a total of 680 pages.

The date and place of origin of the Book of Kells have attracted a great deal of scholarly controversy. The majority of academic opinion tends to attribute it to the scriptorium (meaning “a place of writing”) of Iona (Argyllshire), but conflicting claims have located it in Northumbria or in Pictland in eastern Scotland.

A monastery founded around 561 by St. Colum Cille on Iona, an island off Mull in western Scotland, became the principal house of a large monastic confederation. In 806, following a Viking raid on the island, which left 68 of the community dead, the Columban monks took refuge in a new monastery at Kells in County Meath and for many years the two monasteries were governed as a single community.

It was close to the year 800 that the Book of Kells was written, although there is no way of knowing if the book was produced wholly at Iona or at Kells, or partially at each location.

The Book of Kells is famous for the impact of its lavish decoration, the extent of artistry of which is incomparable.

The decoration of plant, animal and human ornament punctuate the text with the aim of glorifying Jesus’ life and message and keeping his attributes and symbols constantly in the eye of the reader. The decoration in the Book of Kells includes symbols of the evangelists, Matthew (the Man), Mark (the Lion), Luke (the Calf) and John (the Eagle) and also include swirling motifs together with Celtic knots and interlacing patterns in vibrant colours to enliven the manuscripts pages.

The Chi Rho page is the most famous page. The miniature painting which fills this page is almost entirely devoted to the two Greek letters Chi and Rho (the first two letters of the Greek word for Christ) which together form Christ’s elaborately decorated monogram.

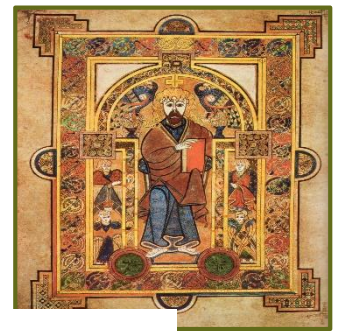


Illustration from the Book of Kells (image from Wikipedia.com)

Following the rebellion of 1641 in Ireland, the Church at Kells lay in ruins, and around 1653 the book was sent to Dublin by the governor of Kells, Charles Lambert, Earl of Cavan, in the interests of its safety. A few years later it reached Trinity College, Dublin through the agency of Henry Jones, a former scoutmaster general to Cromwell’s army in Ireland and Vice-Chancellor of the University, when he became Bishop of Meath in 1661.

Today the 1,200 year old manuscript is on display in Trinity College’s old library building with a team of conservationists working year round to preserve and protect it. Since 1953 it has been bound in four volumes. Two volumes can normally be seen, one opened to display a major decorated page, and one to show two pages of script. A record 1 million people visited the Book of Kells in 2018 and it continues to fascinate people worldwide.

Resources: Trinity College Dublin & Wikipedia.



The Book of Kells at Trinity College Dublin (image from irelandbeforeyou die.com)

DID YOU KNOW?

You can now venture on an extraordinary immersive voyage in the Book of Kells, 360 at Trinity College Dublin. This virtual tour is a spectacular journey in light and sound of the ancient masterpiece’s history.

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Vol.V Issue 5
4th February 2024

Newsletter

You Tube



The tradition of weaving a

St. Bridget's Cross still carried on today



Cover image: A St. Bridget's Cross being made at the fireside
(image Jane Chadwick©)

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St. Bridget's Cross

As we enjoy our newest Public Holiday in honour of St. Bridget, we take a look at the cross associated with this great saint.

Bridget's (Brigid / Brigit) cross, (*Cros Bhríde*, *Crosóg Bhríde* or *Bogha Bhríde*) is a small variant of the cross which is woven from straw or rushes.

The origin of the cross goes back to an old pagan Chieftain from Kildare, who on his deathbed, summoned Bridget to his bedside to comfort him.

Bridget is said to have consoled and comforted him in his final hours, during which time she picked up the rushes from the floor and began weaving them into the distinctive cross pattern. Whilst she weaved, she explained the meaning of the cross to the sick Chieftain.

He was so enamoured by her words that he requested he be baptized as a Christian just before his passing. Bridget's cross is typically woven on 1st February, her feast day, as well as the festival of Imbolc in pre-Christian Ireland.

One of the customs associated with St. Bridget's feast day was to hang Bridget's crosses in the rafters or over entryways of buildings, thus invoking the saint's blessing and protection for the remainder of the year.

If crosses were discarded, they were burned or buried, with the latter preferred due to Bridget's associations with agriculture.

Families were known to send crosses to their friends and relatives who lived abroad.

The weaving of crosses was not restricted to Bridget's feast day; friends would often gift crosses to incur blessings and strengthen their bond, while newlywed couples would often receive "womb crosses" to hang above their door, as Bridget was also a patron of fertility.

In addition to the harp and shamrock, Bridget's cross is a national symbol of Ireland. From 1962 to 1995, it was incorporated into the Raidió Teilifís Éireann logo. Similarly, Bridget's cross was incorporated into the logo of the Irish Department of Health and remained part of the logo of the Nursing and Midwifery Board of Ireland, due to her associations with midwifery.



Saint Bridget's Cross
(image from Wikipedia.com)

In 1942, the Irish Folklore Commission collected several hundred Brigid's crosses. In 2022, the Commission selected a sample of 21 of these crosses to be displayed at the National Museum of Country Life in Castlebar. The display coincided with an announcement from the Irish government that 1st February would be declared a national holiday.

Sources:
Wikipedia
Blarney.com
Catholic.org

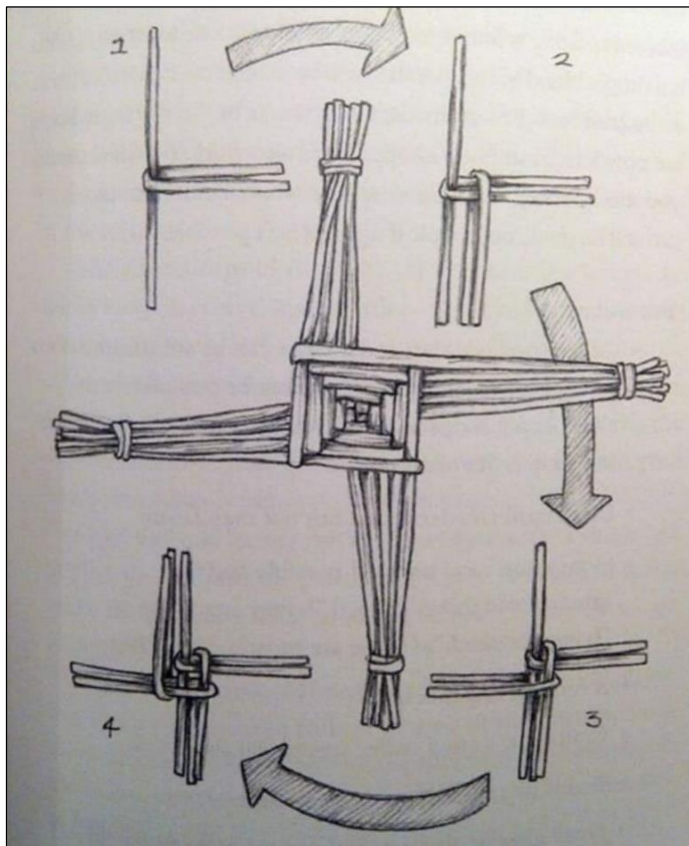


Diagram illustrating how to make a St. Bridget's cross
(image: thecronesgrove social media)

DID YOU KNOW?

- St. Bridget was born c.451 and died c.525.
- According to medieval Irish hagiographies, she was an abbess who founded the important abbey of Kildare, as well as several other convents of nuns.
- St Bridget is the patron saint of poets, midwives, newborns, Irish nuns, fugitives, blacksmiths, dairymaids, boatmen, chicken farmers, cattle, scholars, and sailors.

A Poem for St. Brigid

Bridget wove a cross of rushes by a dying chieftain's bed.
"Bridget, what is that you're making from the rushes there?" he said.

Bridget said, "A cross I'm weaving like the cross where Jesus died."
"Who was Jesus?" asked the chieftain, "Why was this man crucified?"
Bridget told the gospel story to the dying pagan king.
Lying silently he listened, never saying anything.

Then he kissed the cross of rushes saying, "Bridget, thanks to you,
I have come to love this Jesus, I will follow his way too!"



Finbar O' Connor



North Mayo Heritage Centre Mayo Heritage

Vol.V Issue 6
11th February 2024

Newsletter

YouTube



The ancient craft of
COOPERING
that still has a place
in the modern world



Cooper Ned Gavin, Co. Cavan, shaping a churn and (inset) various items made by the cooper
(images: David Shaw-Smith©)

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Coopering

Coopering is the craft of repairing or making casks and barrels.

In Ireland this was once one of the most sought after careers, with over five hundred coopers working in Dublin alone at its peak. However, the craft has declined over the decades and now there are only a handful of active coopers left.

The job of a cooper was kept within families and an apprenticeship took up to seven years to complete. The profession also gave rise to the surname Cooper. The skill of the cooper can be further subdivided, depending on the type of vessel or container being made.

The dry cooper made casks for storing dry goods such as flour and tobacco, the white cooper made dairy and domestic containers such as those used in butter making and the wet cooper made watertight containers used in the fermenting process of brewing.

The craft flourished and huge numbers of coopers worked in the cities and towns with brewers, distillers, as well as provision merchants and butter merchants all employing coopers. Each product needed a specific container depending on what materials were being stored, be they liquids or solids.

Country coopers catered for different customers, mainly farmers who required churns for butter making, butter tubs, piggins (small wooden pails), buckets, washing tubs and a variety of other vessels.

Coopers also travelled around the country, working in different places, until they decided to move on, or work became scarce.

The cooper would use different types of wood and would modify his vessel design to regional variations.

A good deal of the wood used was recycled from old vessels. Old whiskey barrels were often used as they would give a pleasant flavour to the butter made in the churn. The Schools' Collections from Dúchas.ie, a collection of stories from schoolchildren in Ireland in the 1930s details a story by a child from Gallagher, Co. Galway on his local cooper. "There is a cooper in this district and his name is Pat Staunton. He makes dash churns and tubs and he lives about two miles from here and the name of his village is Ballinalochy. He lived in Caltra once, his brother was also a cooper.

The tools he uses are:- a saw, a hammer, a hatchet, a chisel, a plane, a spoke sheaf.

The sort of timber he uses for churns is oak and it takes him about two days to make one of them.

Then he brings them to the market and sells them and he gets about £1: 5 for each churn. He uses any kind of timber in tubs. He gets about 7/6 for a full size tub and half the price for small tubs. His Father and Grandfather were also coopers and he learned his trade from them".

Today, coopering is at the heart of Ireland's drinks industry and has given rise to a renewed interest in taking up this ancient profession. A small cooperage has recently been established, Dair Nua, in Foxford, County Mayo where this ancient craft will be used to meet the needs of the Irish whiskey industry.

Resources: Mayo News, Askaboutireland, Tipperary Museum of Hidden History and Dúchas.ie.

Coopering - From past to present



A cooper at work, Co. Galway, 1950s
(image: dúchas.ie B057.01.00020)

Darren and Ian of Nephin Cooperage, Foxford de-charring a barrel, 2021
(image: Nephin Whiskey)

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YouTube



Vol.V Issue 7
18th February 2024

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The Midwife in rural Ireland



A scene familiar to the Community Midwife –
a cottage bedroom in early 20th century Ireland
ready for the delivery of a baby

(image from an *Bhean Ghlúine Midwife – Woman of the Knee –
Handywoman* by Emma Laffey)

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The Midwife in Rural Ireland

'Some poor mothers either lost their lives or were injured for life owing to want of skilled nursing, at or after confinement'.

Such was the opinion in 1903 of Fr. Thomas Lawler, Parish Priest of Killorglin, Co. Kerry, in support of the recently implemented Lady Dudley's scheme for the Establishment of District Nurses in the Poorest Parts of Ireland.

The Lady Dudley scheme, in tandem with the Congested Districts Board (CDB), set out to organize domiciliary medical care and to improve public health and sanitation in the West of Ireland from 1903 to 1923, in response to the high rates of infant and maternal mortality.

In reality though, the majority of women had depended largely on the traditional midwife (*An Bhean Ghlúine* or "handy-woman") to assist in the delivery of babies. These women — informally trained female family members or neighbours, had the 'knack' which was passed down through generations. However, their knowledge and authority came under attack during the latter part of the nineteenth century as newly trained nurses and midwives became qualified.

The Queen Victoria Jubilee Institute for District Nursing began to train nurses in Ireland in 1891; the Lady Dudley scheme followed shortly thereafter, in 1903.

On duty in the west of Ireland, one of Lady Dudley's nurses wrote in 1910:

'They had sent for the handy woman. Doctor also had to be sent for and I would not go in whilst this woman was there. Patient was lying in the corner in a frightful condition. I got assistance and had her removed and made her comfortable'.

The Jubilee Nurses managed to deliver home nursing to stricken households in the face of the deadly epidemics of tuberculosis (TB), typhus, typhoid, diphtheria and polio which swept the country.

The origins of the name Jubilee Nurse are to be found in the celebrations surrounding the golden Jubilee of Queen Victoria's reign in 1887. There was little or no government funding for these nurses and the voluntary committees had to exercise considerable ingenuity in organising fund-raising events to provide a cottage for the nurse and transport (a bicycle) for navigating the boundless country lanes throughout rural Ireland.

Following the Midwives Act 1918, the government enacted new legislation which deemed the practices of a 'handywoman' illegal from then on. Furthermore, the passing of the Midwives Act 1931, stipulated that no one could practise midwifery without being certified by the Central Midwives Board, with the provision that if no certified midwife was available and help was needed "*in extreme or urgent necessity*", an uncertified woman could attend a case.

In 1932 an untrained woman was prosecuted for acting as a midwife on Achill Island. In her defence she had to prove it was an emergency situation where both mother and baby were at risk.

SOURCES:

Recollections of Kathleen Sheehan (1894-1985), County Cavan, 1900-20
Lady Dudley's Scheme for the Establishment of District Nurses in the Poorest Parts of Ireland. First Annual Report, April 23, 1903-April 23, 1904.

The mayo news

The Drogheda Independent

An Bhean Ghlúine by Emma Laffey

Jubilee Nurse – voluntary district nursing in Ireland, 1890-1974

In general, these impressions that handywomen were dangerous and untrained were not shared by the people they helped. Overall handywomen emerged as respected authority figures in local communities whose work was viewed as valuable and who took pride in their accomplishment.

Speaking of her mother (who was a local midwife), Kathleen Sheehan, from Co. Cavan recalls that *'she was always ready to walk miles to deliver a baby, perhaps at night even, when a man would call her, complete with his lantern and they would set off over the hills and fields'.*

The local midwife was on call 24/7. The period of her absence from her own home was determined by the length of the woman's labour: there was no clocking off!

Advances in medicine and training of nurses and midwives raised public expectations and the traditional "midwife" or handywoman was replaced by trained midwives. Managed by nuns, training hospitals in Jervis Street, the Mater and St. Vincent's enrolled student nurses.



AN BORD SLAINTE CONNTAE NA MIDHE. Notice to Uncertified Midwives.

THE attention of all qualified Midwives in County Meath who do not hold certificate from Central Midwives Board for Ireland is called to the subjoined letter. Notice is hereby given that it will be illegal, for any Midwife, who does not hold the said certificate to practice midwifery. An opportunity is given to all such women to obtain registration by passing an examination.

T. O'HUIGIN,
 County Medical Officer of Health and
 Inspector of Midwives for County Meath.

Central Midwives Board, Saorstát Éireann,
 33, St. Stephen's Green, Dublin. 14th
 August, 1931.

A Chára,—I am directed by the Board to inform you as Local Supervising Authority over Midwives, that with the approval of the Minister for Local Government and Public Health, it is the intention of the Board to allow certain classes of women who hold certificates of midwifery training but who have not been certified by this Board, to sit for a special qualifying examination to be held at a future date, particulars of which will be announced later when final approval has been given to the date. On the passing of the Midwives Act, 1931, it will mean that in future it will be illegal for any uncertified woman to practice midwifery and she can only attend a case in extreme or urgent necessity where a certified midwife was not available. In the meantime therefore I ask you to be good enough to notify all women in your district who do not hold the C.M.B. certificate, but who hold a certificate of midwifery training that they should apply at once for particulars of the new provision. This provision will only allow for the registration of such women for the period of one year from the date of the first examination, but any woman eligible under the provision will not be required to train for a further period of midwifery training. All particulars will be given on application to the Secretary, Central Midwives Board, 33, St. Stephen's Green, Dublin. A stamped addressed envelope should be enclosed for reply. *Mise le meas,* OWEN MEAGHER, Rúnaltdhe.
 To the Local Supervising Authority, Meath County Board of Health and Public Assistance, County Home, Trim.

New positions for Community Midwives were being developed in rural Ireland during the late 1940s where midwives worked alongside GPs. All deliveries in this period were natural births with very little intervention.

During the twentieth century in Ireland, childbirth and medical care was uprooted from local environments and relocated within hospital-based settings.

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25th February 2024

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The Rosary *and* Rosary Beads

We explain the
Mysteries of the Rosary
and the purpose of
Rosary Beads

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The Rosary

(latin *rosarian*: crown of roses)



The Rosary is the story of the New Testament. The New Testament is the part of the Bible that deals with the life and teachings of Jesus Christ and with Christianity in the early Church.

The Rosary, refers to a set of prayers used primarily in the Catholic Church. Through the rosary beads we follow the life of Mary and Jesus. We follow Mary from the day the Archangel Gabriel came to ask her to become the Mother of Christ to the day she was Crowned Queen of Heaven. We follow Jesus from the moment the Holy Spirit came down from Mary through His childhood, His cruel death on the cross, the joy of Easter when He rose from the dead to the day He ascended to heaven in glory.

The Holy Rosary is considered a perfect prayer because within it lies the awesome story of our salvation. With the Rosary we mediate the mysteries of joy, of sorrow and the glory of Jesus. It is a very simple prayer, humble much like Mary.

In October 2002 Pope John Paul II added the “Luminous Mysteries” (Mysteries of Light) to the Holy Rosary calling us to pray the rosary daily for our families and world peace. There are twenty mysteries reflected upon in the rosary and they are;



Peadar Mhicí Ó Conghaile and Máirín Uí Chonghaile, Inis Meáin kneeling to pray the rosary, 1970s. (Image Bill Doyle)

The Joyful Mysteries

- 1 The Annunciation
- 2 The Visitation
- 3 The Birth of Jesus
- 4 The Presentation of Jesus at the Temple
- 5 The Finding of Jesus in the Temple

The Luminous Mysteries

- 1 The Baptism of Jesus
- 2 The Wedding at Cana
- 3 The Kingdom of God
- 4 The Transfiguration
- 5 The Institution of the Eucharist

The Sorrowful Mysteries

- 1 The Agony in the Garden
- 2 The Scourging at the Pilar
- 3 The Crowning of Thorns
- 4 The Carrying of the Cross
- 5 The Crucifixion and Death of Our Lord

The Glorious Mysteries

- 1 The Resurrection
- 2 The Ascension
- 3 The Descent of the Holy Spirit
- 4 The Assumption of Mary
- 5 The Coronation of the Virgin.

Rosary beads provide a physical method of keeping count of the prayers. Most rosaries contain 59 beads. The small beads that makeup rosary beads are one of the most familiar and recognised symbols of Catholicism. According to Catholic tradition the rosary was instituted by the Blessed Virgin herself in the 13th century. She is said to have appeared to St. Dominic [founder of the Dominicans], given him a rosary and asked that Christians pray the Hail Mary, Our Father and the Glory Be prayers. The devotion probably developed gradually. It reached its definitive form in the 15th century through the preaching of the Dominican Alan De La Roche and his associates who around then organised Rosary Confraternities at Douai in France and Cologne. In 1520 Pope Leo X gave the rosary official approbation and it has been repeatedly commended by the Roman Catholic Church.

St. John Paul II’s addition of new mysteries which were not required for reciting the rosary was intended to revive interest in the practice. However, some traditional Catholics rejected the new mysteries believing that they upset the relationship between the original number of mysteries and their corresponding psalms.

Single decade rosaries can also be used. During the penal times in Ireland these became known as Irish Penal Rosaries. The Rosary became a substitute prayer for families in their homes as they were unable to practise their religion freely.

On certain days, different mysteries of the rosary are said:

Monday and Saturday: the Joyful, Tuesday and Friday: the Sorrowful, Wednesday and Sunday: the Glorious, Thursday: the Luminous.

Sometimes, the Luminous mysteries are omitted and the days of the other mysteries will subsequently change.

References;
Wikipedia, Britannica

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The Shambles, Ballycastle
(Image from Ballycastle.ie)

The Shambles

Fair Day in Market Square, Castlebar in the 1950s.
This was formerly the town shambles.
(Image from connaughttelegraph.ie)

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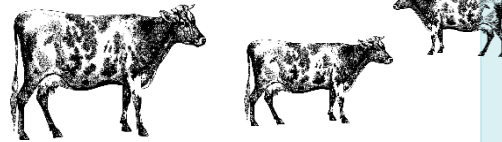
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The Shambles



The Saying “in a shambles”
 From the original meaning of where animals were slaughtered, it grew to refer to any bloody scene or place of carnage. By the 1900s, it took on the weaker meaning of a mess or scene of disorder that many of us are familiar with today.

Until the 20th century, every Irish town, large or small, had a shambles. In some cases, such as Castlebar, the name still survives today as a street name. In others, the name has vanished, even if the part of the town in which the shambles was located may still be known by that name today.

A shambles was the part of the town where butchers could slaughter animals and prepare the meat for sale. The word itself comes from the Anglo-Saxon word ‘fleshammel’ which refers to the wooden shelves on which the butchers displayed their meat in some English towns.¹

As towns like Ballina, Castlebar and Westport developed as marketplaces, the slaughter and processing of animals on the streets created all sorts of hygiene problems. This was often against a backdrop of poor quality housing and sometimes, poor water supply too. The risks of disease were many.



The Shambles, Westport, c.1900 (from osi.ie).

Other towns and indeed villages also had shambles, even though these landmarks might not have been marked on any map. On the other hand, Ballycastle has its shambles marked on both the 1st and 2nd edition Ordnance Survey maps. Ballycastle’s shambles was developed into a very attractive public park in recent years.

One common feature of the shambles in Ballina, Castlebar and Westport is that they were located near, but not on, the bank of the river in each town. Ballina’s shambles was on what is now called Barrett Street, but was formerly known as Shamble Street. In Castlebar, Shamble Street still exists, linking the junction of Market and Ellison Streets to Market Square. The Square itself was marked as the town shambles on the Ordnance Survey 1st edition map of 1838.

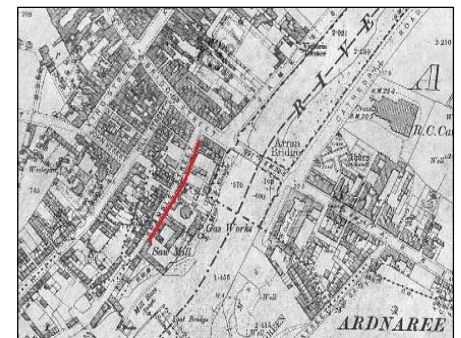
In Westport, the town shambles co-existed with the rear of the parish Church (St. Mary’s), in a lane linking Bridget Street and James Street. Just as the need to improve public hygiene created the shambles, the same need did away with them, as abattoirs were moved out of town centres.

Even after their original purpose had ceased, some of these sites continued to be used to hold cattle for fairs, markets and the like. This was especially so in Castlebar, with the shambles being renamed as Market Square, and used for fairs and markets well into the 20th century.



The Shambles, Westport, 1838 (from osi.ie)

The shambles was a designated part of the town where this activity could take place, in one location. These purpose built ‘meat markets’ known sometimes as ‘flesh shambles’, became common in the 17th and 18th century,² the latter being when Castlebar, Ballina and Westport began to develop as towns.



Shamble Street, Ballina c.1900 (from osi.ie)

If you know where the shambles was located in your local town or village, please let us know. We would be delighted to preserve and share this vanishing piece of local knowledge.

¹ From yorkcivictrust.co.uk
² From askaboutireland.ie



Fair Day in Market Square, Castlebar in the 1950s. This was formerly the town shambles. (Image from comaughttelegraph.ie)

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What are the boys
looking at?

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Lime and Lime Kilns

An insight into what they were
and how they were used



Main photo:

Lime kiln at Loch Conaortha, Co. Galway
(Image from *Dúchas.ie The Photographic Collection*,
B075.01.00007, Caoimhín Ó Danachair)

Right:

Lime kiln at Bunnacurry, Achill
(Image from *Bunnacurry facebook*).

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Lime & Lime Kilns

Lime had many uses in our ancestor's lives. It was used in building, and also for making white wash. But one of its main uses was agricultural and this is an old practice in Ireland.

Arthur Young in 'Tours of Ireland', written in the mid-19th century, referenced the burning of lime in kilns and its application on land as a widespread practice, with between 10 and 15 tonnes being spread on a statute acre.¹

Writing in the Western People in early 1949, William Winter of Ballinrobe (B. Agr. Sc) summed its value up: 'Lime is an essential element of plant food. As such it is only of very minor importance, but nevertheless very necessary in the normal growth of grasses, clover and farm crops.'

In parts of Co. Mayo where land tended to be acidic (for example peaty or boggy land), lime was very important to balance the mineral content of the soil.

Lime was produced in a lime kiln, a stone structure more often than not built into the side of a hillock or a mound. These varied in size and could range from very simple examples used to produce enough lime for the farm, up to industrial scale examples. The stone work could be simple drystone walling of a circular form, or more complex larger square or rectangular versions.

Either way, there had to be easy access to the top of the kiln, and building it into an incline or mound ensured this. There was a flue at the base, which itself varied in size depending on the size of the kiln. This was called a *puitín*.²

The process itself was hard work, with long hours. It usually involved the help of several men. The stone was gathered from surrounding lands, or in the case of coastal communities such as along the shores of Clew Bay, from the seashore. The stone was broken into small pieces with hammers and sledges. It could take four day's labour to break enough stone to be useful in an average sized kiln. The broken stones were carted to the site of the kiln.

A layer of turf, two or three feet in depth, was set at the base of the kiln. On top of this, about four wheelbarrow loads of the broken stone were set. The kiln was then filled using alternating layers of turf and broken stones.

A medium sized kiln might accommodate ten layers, five of lime and five of stones. Then, a layer of slack, coke, coal or cinders. Then, on top of this, another line of turf and one of stones. Once the kiln was filled to the top, it was covered with scraws of earth. A few cart loads of turf were placed at the face of the kiln.

With the help of a bucket of red coals, the whole thing was set alight and in about half an hour, the kiln was burning.

Old sayings associated with Lime:

*'Too much lime makes the father rich and the son poor'*⁴

*'Lime and lime without manure makes both the farm and the farmer poor'*⁵



Above: A lime kiln at Moneen, near Louisburgh (Image from the Louisburgh-Killeen Heritage Group).

It was left to burn all night, and in earlier times, especially with smaller kilns, people would have to stay up during the night tending to the fire. The burning process went on for up to four days.³

The lime was extracted via the *puitín*. It was sold by the barrel. In 1938 in west Mayo, a barrel cost five shillings. Near Belcarra, the same barrel cost between three and four shillings.

During the Second World War (the 'Emergency'), the Mayo County Agricultural Committee provided a subsidy for those who produced and purchased lime. It was a lifeline to some rural communities where the War had ravaged other forms of income.

Many lime kilns lie abandoned on farms today, some have been filled in, or may have had a few layers of stone taken for another building project of more recent need. Others are very well preserved and can be easily visited, such as the urban example in Westport.

Brief history of the Townland of KNOCKNATINNAWHEEL (*Cnoc na Teineadh Aoil*, lime kiln hill).

Situated in the south-east quarter of the parish of Burrishoole, ¼ mile east of Newport. It is bounded on the north by a lake; east by Tawnanameeltoge; south by Carrickaneady; and west by Mullaun and Knockaveely Glebe.

The road from Newport to Castlebar lies through its north side. The property of Sir Richard A. O'Donnell. It contains 144 acres, 1 rood, 31 perches, including 5 acres, 3 roods, 16 perches of water and 10 acres of bog; 129 acres are cultivated. Let at will at 23 shillings per acre yearly. Co. Cess, 3 shillings 2d. per acre yearly. Soil stony, producing potatoes, corn and flax.

(Extract from Ordnance Survey Letters of 1838)

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¹ The Western People, the 26-Feb-1949

² Dúchas.ie Schools Folklore Collection

³ Dúchas.ie Schools Folklore Collection, *Clochár na Trócaire, Leac an Anfa, Cathair na Mart, Co. Maigh Eo* p.36-37. (Therese O'Malley, Lecanvey).

⁴ The Western People, the 26-Feb-1949

⁵ The Western People, the 26-Feb-1949



North Mayo Heritage Centre Mayo Heritage Newsletter

Vol. V Issue 11
17th March 2024

YouTube



Lá fhéile Pádraig
sona daoibh!



**A brief history of
Dún Bríste
Sea Stack
at Downpatrick Head**

Main photo: Dún Bríste Sea Stack at
Downpatrick Head, Co. Mayo
(Image from Fáilte Ireland® Gareth McCormack)

Below: Seamus and Patrick Caulfield
examining a structure on the top of
Dún Bríste in 1981 (image from RTE archives)



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Dún Briste Sea Stack

The Dún Briste (Irish for Broken Fort) sea stack is located at Downpatrick Head, Ballycastle, County Mayo. Dún Briste and the surrounding cliffs were formed around 350 million years ago (during the 'Lower Carboniferous Period') when sea temperatures were much higher and the coastline at a greater distance away.

The stack stands 45 metres (150 feet) tall and 80 metres from the shore. It was once part of the headland facing out into the Atlantic Ocean. Storms and waves eroded a small hole in the stack. This hole became very large until a bridge was all that remained between the stack and the point of the head.

In 1393, a fierce storm occurred and a tidal wave exploded against the head causing the bridge to collapse. The storm abated and the point of the headland with its fort and farm, were now only a pillar in the sea. The inhabitants who survived the storm were stranded and ships ropes were used to lower them to sea level and safety. It was thereafter named "The Broken Fort" and in Gaelic, "Dún Briste".

In the 1980s, archaeologist Seamus Caulfield, his father Patrick, along with Martin Downes, a professor of biology, made plans to land on the top of Dún Briste, by helicopter, to investigate and survey the top. This was a dangerous endeavour as the helicopter could not land on unknown ground and at the last few feet they had to be lowered down.



Seamus Caulfield pictured on top of Dún Briste in 1981
(image RTE archives)

On landing they found the remains of two buildings and parts of field walls. The surface measured 50 metres in length and 15 metres in width, at its widest point. One field wall had a door or run and was about two feet square. This would have allowed sheep to pass through but not cattle. This medieval feature is also seen in other parts of Mayo.

The headland was found to be covered in a plant called sea pink but there was no sea pink on the stack which is only 80 metres away from the headland. The dominant grass found was red fescue (a common grass), this was around a foot tall and thickly matted. A broken quern stone (a stone tool for grinding a variety of materials, especially types of grain) was also found.

There have been many attempts to climb the sea stack. The first successful ascent was in May 1990 by three UK climbers who climbed a groove system up the north-facing seaward face of the stack.

It was then another 26 years before a further successful ascent. A Scottish climber and his assistant made four attempts to climb Dún Briste without success. Failure was always due to the sea being too rough for a boat to put them safely on the rock. The collapse of the bridge left great sections of rock on the ocean floor between the stack and the headland creating a whirlpool of currents, even when the surface seemed calm.

Finally, in 2016, a successful climb was achieved by this same Scottish climber who saw a view only witnessed by a handful of people in 600 years! As the stack is safe from any land based predators, it is a haven for a vast array of bird species at nesting time. The stack is occupied by Common and Greater Black Backed Gulls, Kittiwakes, Cormorants and Puffins.

Sources:
Mayonorth.ie,
Dunbriste.com
Uniqueascent.ie

St. Patrick founded a church on Downpatrick Head. The ruins of a later-built church now mark the location. St. Patrick is honoured with a statue which was erected in the mid-1980s (pictured left). Given its religious associations, Downpatrick Head was once a popular destination for pilgrims, who came here each year on the last Sunday of July. Today the tradition lives on.

Source: www.dunbriste.com



Extract from
Ordnance Survey Letter of 1838

**Brief history of the
townland of
CROSSPATRICK**
(*Cros Phádrúig,*
St. Patrick's Cross)

Located in the south of the parish of Killala. Bounded on the north by Meelick and Moyne townlands; east and south by Ballysakeery parish; and west by the townlands of Upper and Lower Tawnaghmore and Meelick. It contains 166 acres, 3 roods, 10 perches, including 1 acre, 0 roods, 4 perches of water. The property of P. Boyd, Castlebar, and is held by James Knox, who lives in Crosspatrick House, built in the year 1832. The land is let on leases of 21 years at £2 7 shillings 6d. yearly. Soil, heavy clay, producing barley, oats, flax, potatoes, etc. There is a graveyard to the west of Crosspatrick House.



Saint Patrick is
a patron saint
of Ireland,
Nigeria, the city
of Boston and
the archdiocese
of New York!



North Mayo Heritage Centre Mayo Heritage Newsletter

Vol. V Issue 12
24th March 2024

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The Bicycle in Ireland

Michael Collins aboard his
trademark bicycle, the "high nelly".
(image from www.independent.ie)

Close up of a vintage
bicycle saddle



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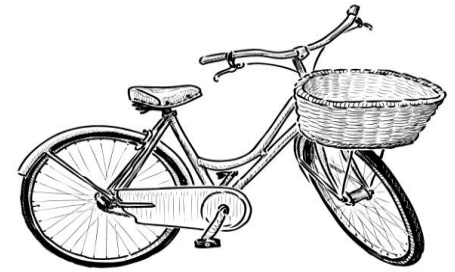


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On yer bike – The Bicycle in Ireland



In 1950s Ireland almost every household had a bicycle and cyclists were a common sight on Irish roads. But this was not always the case.

The first pedal-driven bicycle, “the boneshaker”, appeared in Ireland in the 1860s. It was hugely uncomfortable with its solid iron wheels, heavy and very expensive. Its arrival was of minor significance as through the 1860s, the 1870s and into the 1880s, cycling remained an exclusive, male-dominated, middle-class activity and was considered an object of eccentricity.

However, all of this changed in the second half of the 1880s when factories began to mass produce the improved chain-driven safety bicycle with pneumatic (air-filled) tyres. They became relatively cheaper making them more appealing to people of all ages and backgrounds. Consequently, the enthusiasm for them became a vibrant part of the social and cultural life of Ireland with both genders taking to the wheel. Cycling became big business. Bicycle shops and mechanics prospered in this new, rising industry, all of which was captured in a newspaper, *The Irish Cycling News*, founded and run by a man who went on to become Ireland’s champion cyclist R.J. McCredy.

One 1895 cyclist wrote: *‘No outdoor pastime can be more independently pursued.’* City people saw the bicycle as the chance to escape from urban life.

The novelist H.G. Wells wrote of how he and his wife were using bicycles to *‘restore our broken contact with the open air.’* Rural people, for their part, could use the bicycle to get into towns. It was, wrote one cyclist, a thing which allowed for *‘unfettered liberty’, ‘a freedom machine’*.

The golden age of the bicycle stretched from the 1890s until the 1920s. Throughout these years, the bicycle became a vital vehicle for many as cycling was their only means of travelling long distances to work, for education or to religious services.

In addition, it proved indispensable during the Irish Revolution serving as a propaganda tool, for political campaigning and for guerrilla warfare as it was a largely silent mode of transportation and difficult to detect.

Perhaps the most important bicycle produced at that time and in Irish history was the custom made “high nelly” for Michael Collins in 1919 during the War of Independence.

Beyond these activities, the bicycle raced in competitions too. Cycling clubs spread across the country and in most towns, they had at least one club. Cycling races became an important part of the many sports days that grew in Irish towns and villages. The first known cycle club in Ireland was the Dungarvan Ramblers, founded in Co. Waterford in 1869.

The Irish Cycling Association (ICA) was formed in 1884 to govern the sport. St. Christopher’s Cycling Club was the first to be established in Castlebar in Co. Mayo in the late 1930s. Among them was the first lady cyclist club member, Dot Kelly, who later married another keen cyclist, Andy Redmond, in 1943.

Dot went on to become the queen of Irish dancing in the west of Ireland and in her early years cycled around the county with her fiddle in the bicycle basket teaching the dancing steps.

During World War II, ‘The Emergency’ in Ireland led to petrol rationing for vehicles and a rail service hindered by a lack of coal.

Hence, cycling became one of the primary modes of transport and saw thousands of people cycle great distances not only for work, but also to football and hurling matches. On big match Sundays, streams of cyclists pedalled across the country to Dublin city, with some 80,000 to the 1944 All-Ireland football final. As a reporter with the *Carlow Nationalist* wrote, *‘with the shortage of fuel the bicycle was back to its own’*.

Sources:

www.irishexaminer.com
www.museum.ie
www.independent.ie
www.con-telegraph.ie



The starting line-up at the cycling road race at Main St., Castlebar, organised by St. Mary’s Cycling Club in the early 1950s. (Image from con-telegraph.ie)



The Wilkes Barre
Good Friday
Bombings

Image: North Main Street, Wilkes Barre, Pennsylvania



Why is Good Friday called “Good” Friday?
“Good” in this context refers to a “a day or season” observed as holy by the Church
(source: Oxford English Dictionary)

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Wilkes Barre's Tragic Good Friday

Wilkes Barre, Pennsylvania lies just a few miles southwest of Scranton, Ballina's twin town. The whole valley in which the two cities are situated has deep historical ties to north Co. Mayo.

From about 1860 onwards, thousands upon thousands of emigrants from north Mayo made their homes in this part of Pennsylvania. What attracted the emigrants in the first place was, of course, work, in the coal mines around the valley. It was harsh, dangerous work, and tragic accidents were common. So too was tension over labour rights. Early miners lived in mine owned houses and shopped in mine owned shops. But as the 19th century gave way to the 20th, organised labour, often violently and even murderously resisted, came to establish itself. Tensions around union politics were never far away however. And such tension led to the horrendous, tragic events of Good Friday, April 10th 1936.

We know now, at a remove of 88 years, what happened in sequence. No such luxury was afforded to the residents of Wilkes-Barre on the peaceful Friday morning in question. The mailmen innocently delivered six cigar boxes to addresses in the valley. Each box was marked 'sample' and had a hand written address. One postman read the address on such a box, and approaching the house, spotted a little boy playing in the garden. He handed the child the box. The child was delighted; he thought it was a box of candy. But, miraculously, he then noticed it was a cigar box, and lost interest.

He left the box on the kitchen table. His father arrived home and sitting down to open the package offered his son-in-law to join him in having a cigar. Then he opened the box. The resultant explosion was so severe that it instantly killed the man. His son-in-law, somehow, escaped with serious injuries, but he survived.

Two of the six boxes exploded, killing a total of three people, one of whom was a four year old boy. Some of the scenes were so gruesome, the police banned the press from photographing them. The other four boxes were intercepted and soaked in water to defuse them.

Right: A picture published in the *Evening News* on April 10, 1936, shows the scene outside the home of Thomas Maloney at 694 E. Northampton St., Wilkes-Barre Township.

The boxes were all addressed to men involved in union affairs in the district. There was a dispute at the time whereby one union had called a strike, but had then claimed that other miners had crossed the picket line and taken work from the striking miners. One of the deceased, named Gallagher, was believed to have been a case of mistaken identity, but police discounted this.

Panic, understandably, ensued in the region. The police tried to keep things calm, but they faced the same problem which always arises in cases like this; they were under severe pressure to find those responsible. The explosive material itself was of a brand used in only a handful of mines in the area, and was eventually traced to one colliery. Fingerprints were found on one of the unexploded devices. The hunger with which the local press reported the arrests and subsequent trial hold an air of desperation.

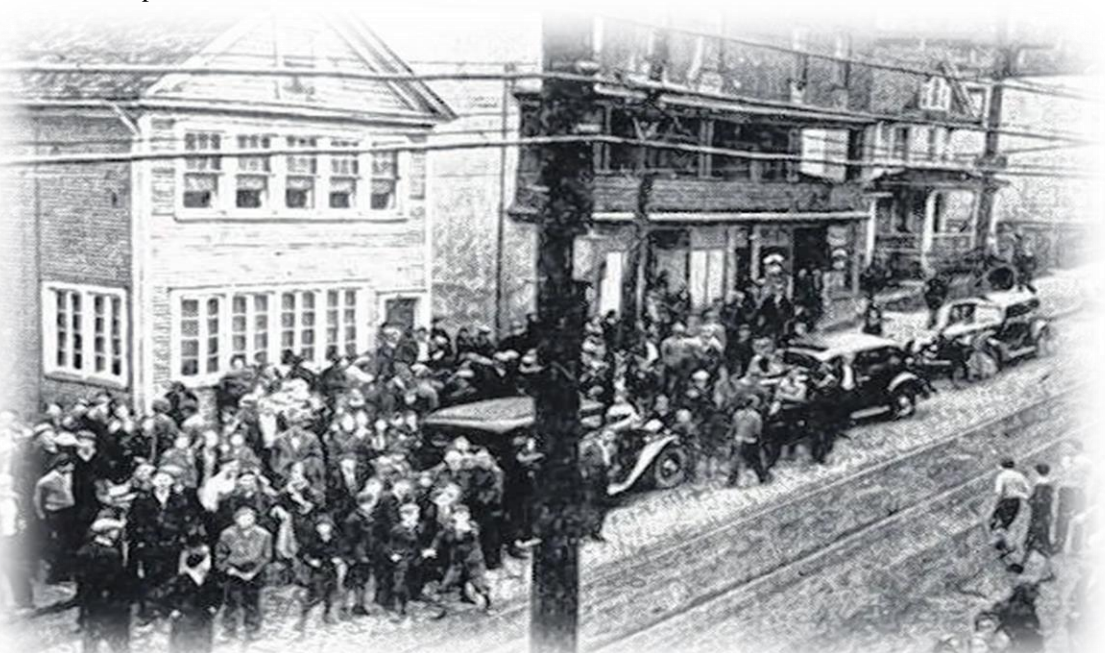
After arresting several suspects who were of no value to the investigation, the police raided a home in Hanover, a part of Wilkes-Barre. Unbeknownst to the woman of the house, her husband, 52 year German native Michael Fugmann, was already in custody. The police ransacked the cellar of the house and took away several pieces of evidence having dug up the floor of the cellar.

Fugmann was tried for the Good Friday Bombings, a trial that set many precedents. There were extra jurors sworn in. Handwriting experts were summoned to compare Fugmann's handwriting with those on the unexploded packages.

In evidence, police said they had found wax paper, empty boxes and nails in his cellar all of which exactly matched those used in the bombs.

Fugmann had been in America for only 12 years, having emigrated in 1924. His wife claimed that he could speak and read English, but he could not write it. His parish priest stated he knew him well and that he was not capable of such evil. When Fugmann was arrested, the press reported that he was a former German Army Artillery sergeant who had fought in World War I for 'four years'. By the end of the trial, he was a 'deserter'. Fugmann was found guilty, and despite his counsel appealing, he was executed in July 1938, protesting his innocence to the very last. Police even received a hand scribbled note stating that they had got the wrong man.

For the victim's families, and those who survived, life would be forever changed, and they bore the scars, mentally and literally, of Good Friday 1936 for the rest of their lives.



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We profile

ACHILL ISLAND

The largest island in Ireland

**Sheep on Achill with Keem Bay,
Achill Island in the background**

Images: ©Failte Ireland (Chaosheng Zhang)

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ACHILL ISLAND

Achill is the largest island situated off the Irish west coast with an area of over 100 square kilometres. Its name derived from the Latin word “aquila”, meaning eagle and it is connected to the mainland by a bridge which opened in 1887.

Early history

Achill's first human settlement is at least 5,000 years old. The remains of megalithic tombs and monuments show settlement by Neolithic people dating back to the 3rd or 4th centuries BC.

These people greatly altered the landscape of the area, as it was once heavily forested. Neolithic culture brought farming to Achill, which caused the clearing of forestland for cereal crops, and walled fields for livestock. It is estimated that at the end of the Neolithic era, about 4,000BC, Achill had a population of 500-1000 people.

Proof of the Bronze Age (c. 2000 BC) settlement on Achill includes hut platforms, field systems and enclosures in the area of Slievemore. The remains of several promontory forts along the coast show that settlement grew across the island in the Iron Age (c. 400 BC).

The arrival of Christianity

The early medieval period, dating from about 400 AD, saw a large expansion in agriculture, especially with more iron tools, including the plough. Evidence of early medieval artefacts has been reported at Keem Bay, Slievemore, Kildavnet and Achill Beg island. The arrival of Christianity into Ireland around this period is demonstrated in two remnants on Achill. One at Kildavnet, where the ancient church is named after St. Damhnait (St. Dympna), a 7th century saint. The other at Slievemore, where an ancient church site and Holy Well are located, both dedicated to St. Colman who was also a 7th century saint.



The Colony (image from achill.tourism.com)

The O'Malleys and Granuaile

Achill once lay within the ancient Kingdom of Umail. It was ruled at different times by a small number of families or clans which included the Butlers, the Burkes, the O'Connors, the O'Donnells and, probably most famously, the O'Malleys.

The name O'Malley is still popular in Achill today, and has links to the area dating back to at least the 12th century. The best known member of this family was Granuaile (Grace O'Malley), the legendary Pirate Queen. Under her leadership the O'Malleys controlled the waters of the western coastline, imposing taxes and levies on all ships passing through this territory. Kildamnait Castle, which still stands on the island, is a 15th century tower house associated with the O' Malley Clan.

Achill Mission ('The Colony')

One of Achill's most well-known historical sites is that of the Achill Mission or 'the Colony' at Dugort. In 1831 the Protestant Reverend Edward Nangle founded a mission at Dugort. The mission included schools, cottages, an orphanage, a small hospital and a hotel (the former Slievemore Hotel).

'The Colony' thrived for a time and frequently produced a newspaper called the 'Achill Missionary Herald'. The Reverend Nangle expanded his mission into Mweelin, where a 'school' was built. The Achill Mission declined slowly after Nangle was moved from Achill and was finally closed in the 1880's. Edward Nangle died in 1883.

The Deserted Village

Near to Dugort, at the base of Slievemore mountain stands the Deserted Village. There are approximately 80 ruined houses in the village. The houses were constructed without cement or mortar to hold the stones together. Each house contained just one room which was used as a kitchen, a living room, a bedroom and even a stable.

For generations, people lived in the village until 1845, when the Great Famine struck Achill, as it did in the rest of the country. A majority of the families were forced to move to the nearby village of Dooagh, which is situated beside the sea, while some others emigrated. Living beside the sea provided fish and shellfish that was used as an essential source of food.

The village became completely abandoned, hence the name 'Deserted Village'. No one has permanently inhabited these houses since the time of the Famine.

However, the families that moved to Dooagh, and their descendants continued to use the village as a 'booley village'. This meant that throughout the summer season, the younger members of the family, teenage boys and girls, would bring the cattle to graze on the hillside and they would stay in the houses of the Deserted Village.

This custom continued until the 1940's. Boolying was also carried out in other areas of Achill, including Annagh on Croaghnaun Mountain and in Curraun.

Sources:

www.destinationwestport.com
www.achilltourism.com

The townland of Slievemore in 1838

(Sliabh Mór, great mountain).

Located in the west of the Island of Achill. Bounded on the north by the townland of Dooagh West and the sea; east by the townland of Keel East; south by the sea; and west by the townland of Keel West.

It contains 3,722 acres, 3 roods, 21 perches, including 26 acres, 1 rood, 16 perches of water. The property of Sir Richard O'Donnell, and is held by tenants at will in divisions or by sums, at a rent of £100 for the townland. There are 3 villages here; Slievemore, in the east of the townland, is the largest; the other 2 are Tonreege and Dooega in the south of the townland, on the banks of Tonreege River.

It is all mountain bog and pasture, except about 300 acres of cultivated acres, producing rye and potatoes. At Slievemore village is a well called Tobercolman, and beside it is Slievemore graveyard. Achill Tower stands in the north of this townland.

Extract from Ordnance Survey Namebooks 1838



North Mayo Heritage Centre Mayo Heritage

Newsletter

Vol. V Issue 15
14th April 2024

YouTube



CROAGH PATRICK *and the phenomenon of the* ROLLING SUN

Cover image:
The rolling sun down the slope of Croagh Patrick
(image from con-telegraph.ie)

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THE ROLLING SUN

The townland of Boheh lies six kilometres southwest of Westport, along the road to Leenaun. In this townland is an ancient monument known traditionally as St. Patrick's Chair.

The 1838 Ordnance Survey map of the townland not only marks this rock as 'St. Patrick's Chair and Kneemark' but also shows that the ancient 'Togher Patrick', a pilgrimage route to Croagh Patrick, passed by the site. Some believe that this route originated at Rathcroghan, Co. Roscommon. The reference to St. Patrick's knee marks are the clue to the rock's original, or rather, older, claim to fame: the prehistoric rock art carvings which cover the surface of this rock.

The rock is a natural outcrop, measuring 5.2 by 4.8 metres, and more than 2 metres in height, and is decorated on all surfaces with 'cup and ring' motif carvings. Most of these rings are circular, but some touch each other, or overlap. There are also 'keyhole' and cross motifs, and an inscribed cross on the north side which is considered to date to the days of the Penal Laws.

The prehistoric carvings are considered to be one of the best decorated rock art stones in Ireland or Britain.¹

The Boheh Stone has long attracted attention from visitors, but in the early 1990s, local historian and archaeologist, the late Gerry Bracken, observed a phenomenon which changed the understanding, not only of the Boheh Stone itself, but of the importance of Croagh Patrick in prehistoric times.

Bracken was convinced that there was a solar alignment between the Boheh Stone and Croagh Patrick, on either the summer or winter solstice.

On the 16th of April 1991, he visited the site to continue his enquiries, and cycling home after what he considered a failed mission, took a glance back over his shoulder.

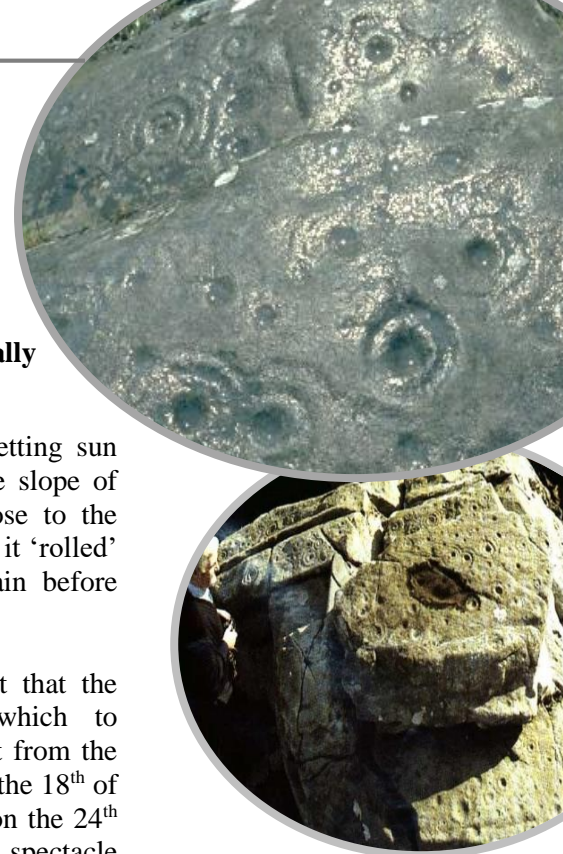
The orb of the setting sun was sitting on the slope of the mountain, close to the summit. As it set, it 'rolled' down the mountain before disappearing.²

Gerry worked out that the exact date at which to observe this event from the Boheh Stone was the 18th of April, and again on the 24th of August.³ 'The spectacle would have resembled a golden disc rolling down one side of a perfect triangle before disappearing into darkness.'⁴

Taken with the winter solstice, on the 21st of December, the two dates for the 'rolling sun' divide the year into three nearly equal parts. A solar alignment was subsequently observed between a notch on the eastern shoulder of Croagh Patrick and the row of standing stone in the townland of Killadangan, 5 kilometres north west of the Boheh Stone.

On the 21st of December, at about 1.40pm, the sun 'sits' into this notch and aligns with the row of stones.

The Boheh Stone is now part of the renowned Clew Bay Archaeological trail, and the 'rolling sun' attracts a crowd of sun watchers every April 18th and August 24th.



The Boheh stone with prehistoric rock art visible (images from the Croagh Patrick Heritage Trail Facebook page and Carrowkeel.com)

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³The Mayo News, the 25-Ju-2001, p.17

⁴Morahan, L. 2001. *Croagh Patrick, Co. Mayo, Landscape, Archaeology & People*. Croagh Patrick Archaeological Committee, Westport. p.29

The Humble Potato

We explore its origin and modern-day use



Cover image:
Young girl with basket of newly picked potatoes 1924,
An Blascaod Mór, Co. Kerry
(image from dúchas.ie M001.18.00538)

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THE HUMBLE POTATO

The potato has a long and storied history in Ireland, dating back to the late 16th century.

There is much speculation as to how the potato was introduced to Ireland...the English word "potato" comes from the Spanish word *patata*, indicating a possible Spanish connection. However, it is broadly believed that potatoes came from South America, where they were native and brought to Europe by the Spanish. The potato quickly became a staple crop in Ireland due to its high yield and nutritional value. By the 18th century, the potato had become a dietary mainstay for the Irish people, particularly the rural poor.

On 20th August 1845, David Moore, curator of the Royal Dublin Society's Botanic Gardens at Glasnevin in Dublin, noticed the first signs of a disease on the potatoes, thereby heralding the arrival of *Phytophthora infestans* (the potato blight) in Ireland. This proved to be catastrophic for the Irish population who relied heavily on the potato, with the Irish Lumper being the main variety of potato impacted.

The blight spread rapidly reaching all corners of the country. The period of famine, 1845-1848 (An Gorta Mór), was a period of unimaginable mass starvation and disease and was a defining time in Irish history. County Mayo was one of the hardest-hit areas during this time. The population of County Mayo fell by 29%, from 388,887 to 274,830, due to deaths and emigration.

Of the many pre-famine varieties of potato which existed, few have survived to the present day.

The most common varieties in the Irish potato market today are Rooster (1991), Kerr's Pink (1920s), Golden Wonder (in Scotland since 1906), Maris Piper (1963), Home-guard (1942), Premier (1979), British Queens (1894), Records (1925) and King Edward VII (1902). Despite the tragic history of the Great Famine, the potato remains a beloved and essential ingredient in Irish cuisine.

Many dishes showcase the versatility and deliciousness of the humble potato.

It is not uncommon to see a dish consisting of some form of potato for breakfast, lunch and dinner.

In Irish folklore potatoes reputedly had a cure for many ailments. It was believed that raw potatoes, when applied topically, cured ailments such as eye styes, burns, bites, scars, inflammation, cuts and frost bite. Many of our ancestors had potatoes in their pockets to ward off rheumatics. The humble potato is also the basic ingredient for *poitín* (poteen) and it too was noted for its medicinal benefits!!!

Such had been the dominance of the potato since the 19th century, that numerous images of potato harvesting appeared in various art forms, including Van Gogh's 1885 painting *The Potato Eaters*.

In Irish art, the humble potato on Achill Island is depicted in the paintings of Paul Henry, "The Potato Diggers" (1910) and "The Potato Pickers" (1912). Irish author James Joyce and the poets, Seamus Heaney and Patrick Kavanagh also referenced potatoes.

Above: Newly dug potatoes being placed in a pit. Newport, 1943. (Image by Helen Hooker O'Malley)

Undoubtedly the history of the potato in Ireland is a complex and multifaceted tale of resilience, tragedy and tradition.

From its humble beginnings to its enduring presence in modern Irish cuisine, the potato remains a beloved and essential part of the country's culinary heritage. The humble potato – food for thought when you next sit down to dine!!!

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"Potato – Definition", Merriam-Webster. 21 June 2023
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The Famine in Mayo

Did You Know?

In a reference amount of 100grams (3.5 oz), boiled potato with skin supplies 87 calories and is 77% water, 20% carbohydrates (including 2% dietary fibre in the skin and flesh), 2% protein and contains negligible fat (bordbia.ie)

The biggest potato ever grown weighed just under 5kg. Guinness Book of Records tells us it was grown in England in 2011 by Peter Glazebrook (theirishtimes.com)

In 2021, world production of potatoes was 376 million, led by China with 25% of the total. Other major producers were India and Ukraine (Wikipedia)

Right: Organic potatoes 'chitting' i.e. growing stalks, ready for planting in the organic garden at the North Mayo Heritage Centre



North Mayo Heritage Centre Mayo Heritage Newsletter

Vol. V Issue 17
28th April 2024

YouTube



Feature article

Stained Glass



The exceptionally detailed stained glass windows of
St. Brendan's Cathedral, Loughrea
(Image from connachttribune.ie)

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STAINED GLASS

Ireland has a rich legacy of stained glass. Fine examples of the art can be found in public and private buildings across the country, but primarily in our churches. If you travelled around the regions, you would begin to see certain trends.

Windows created at The Clarke Stained Glass Studios, who were based in Dublin from 1893 to 1972, and at Earley & Company, who operated in Dublin from 1864 to 1972, are found mainly in Catholic churches.

By contrast, the Church of Ireland largely chose An Túr Gloine (The Tower of Glass), established in Dublin from 1903 until 1944, and the Clokey Stained Glass Studio of Belfast, which operated c.1904 to 1972, with the production of the latter studio mostly found in Ulster.

In the earlier decades of the 20th century most orders for stained glass were for a single window (often a memorial), whereas in the second half of the century, particularly post-Vatican II, architects commissioned stained glass for an entire church.

War and conflict brought unexpected work for stained glass artists. Many Protestant churches contain impressive stained glass windows erected in memory of young men who never returned from the Great War.

In more recent times the Troubles took their toll and while several churches lost fine windows in bombings, there are occurrences of entirely rebuilt churches enhanced with complete schemes of stained glass.

Right: "The Last Judgement" window in St. Patrick's Church in Newport
(image from buildingsofireland.ie)

A few individual buildings stand out for particularly distinguished collections of stained glass: St Brendan's Cathedral in Loughrea, Co. Galway is filled with impressive windows by An Túr Gloine artists spanning half a century; Galway Cathedral has a remarkable collection of stained glass from the second half of the 20th century, in particular showcasing the work of Patrick Pollen.

In Cork, the Honan Chapel in the grounds of University College Cork (UCC), has some striking works by Harry Clarke, such as his depiction of St. Gobnait in her role as patron saint of beekeeping. Many rural parishes off the beaten track hold unexpected gems, such as the little church at Bridge-A-Chrinn in north Louth which has an astonishing two-panel window made by Michael Healy in 1923. Within the county of Mayo there are more exceptional examples of Harry Clarke's work.

He was an artist of high technical and imaginative ability and undoubtedly Ireland's greatest stained glass artist. Hence, Canon MacDonald of Newport, Dean d'Alton and Monsignor Thomas Shannon of Ballinrobe were among the parish priests who commissioned his windows for their churches.

In 1925 to 1926 he designed and executed "The Adoration of the Magi" window in Kilmaine. Between 1921 and 1931 he created the windows for the churches in Ballinrobe, Newport and Roundfort. Ballindine, Claremorris, Cong and Knock boast windows created and designed by the Clarke Studios under his supervision during the 1920s. "The Last Judgement" window in St. Patrick's Church in Newport is the last window created by him (below).

A large amount of stained glass windows by Irish artists was commissioned for overseas locations too.



Stained glass window in St. Patrick's Church, Lahardane entitled 'Titanic Rescue'. Designed by Michael Coleman and constructed by Art Glass in Derry.
(Image Kenneth Noone)

A crematorium chapel near Wellington, New Zealand is home to six superb windows by Geddes, Healy and Hubert McGoldrick dating from 1914 to 1939. Irish missionaries commissioned windows for churches in India, Pakistan, Philippines and Nigeria. Two small ones were also made in Abbey Stained Glass Studios, Dublin in the 1970s by George W. Walsh for the Ashkenazi Synagogue in Harare, Zimbabwe.

Resources:

www.irishtimes.com
www.mayo-ireland.ie
www.heritagecouncil.ie
www.harryclarke.net



Mayo Heritage

Newsletter

North Mayo Heritage Centre

Vol. V Issue 18

5th May 2024

YouTube



On the anniversary of the birth of one of the greatest Mayo men of all time, we celebrate

Monsignor

James Horan

Monsignor Horan pictured boarding the first flight to Rome from Knock Airport in 1985

(Image: irelandwestairport.com)



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Monsignor James Horan

May 5th is the 113th anniversary of the birth of Monsignor James Horan in the tiny village of Tooreen in the parish of Partry.

The son of Bartley and Catherine Horan (*née* Casey), he attended Partry National School, St. Jarlath's College, Tuam and St. Patrick's College, Maynooth. He was ordained to the priesthood in 1936. After serving a number of years in Glasgow, he returned to his native archdiocese of Tuam. He was appointed to Knock in 1963, first as curate and then parish priest in 1967. He was responsible for the transformation of Knock Shrine including the erection of the new church in 1976, which was later designated the Basilica of Our Lady, Queen of Ireland.

Knock was the scene of an apparition of the Blessed Virgin Mary, St. Joseph and St. John the Evangelist, together with an altar, a cross and a lamb surrounded by angels, on 21st August 1879. The apparition was witnessed by several local people and after two Commissions of Inquiry in 1879 and 1936, Knock Shrine was recognised by every Pope from Pope Pius XII onward. The founding members of the Knock Shrine Society suggested the idea of a Papal visit and the provision of an airport to facilitate pilgrimages to Knock Shrine as far back as the early 1950s. It was Father James Horan who was able to turn those dreams into reality.

On September 30th 1979, Pope John Paul II made his visit to Ireland and Knock. In his homily that day the Pope said: "*Here am I at the goal of my journey to Ireland, the Shrine of Our Lady of Knock.*"

Right: Monsignor Horan enjoying the celebrations prior to the first flight to Rome from Knock Airport in 1985
(Image: irelandwestairport.com)



Monsignor James Horan in the control tower of Knock Airport 1986
(image Con-Telegraph.ie)

The Pope elevated the new church in Knock to the status of a basilica and promoted Father James Horan to Monsignor. Monsignor James Horan was totally committed to the development of an international airport in the west of Ireland. A long, and at times controversial, campaign was led by Monsignor Horan for the approval of the airport with the go-ahead being given by the then Taoiseach Charles Haughey in 1980.

The political upheavals of 1981 and 1982, a new government, the risk of recession and a crisis in national finances saw the withdrawal of support for the project after an initial commitment of over £9m.

Monsignor Horan and his supporters began the task of raising nearly £4m in private subscriptions in the west of Ireland, the USA and Australia.

With state funding, private fundraising and some borrowing the airport was completed on schedule and within budget. The airport was officially opened on 30th May 1986 by Charles Haughey TD. On October 25th 1985 it was first used by Aer Lingus for three flights to Rome.

Monsignor Horan passed away suddenly on the 1st August 1986 on a religious pilgrimage to Lourdes, just a few months after the official opening of the airport. His remains were flown into Knock, the first funeral to fly into the airport. He was buried four days later adjacent to Knock Basilica.

Today a bronze sculpture of Monsignor James Horan stands at the entrance to Knock Airport in his honour. How proud he would be today!

Source: Exploring Mayo by Bernard O'Hara



Taking a Chance

Extract from Monsignor Horan's interview with RTE's Jim Fahy at the start of construction of Knock airport 1981.



Jim Fahy: "*Monsignor Horan, what on earth are you doing?*"

Monsignor Horan: "*We are building an airport – now don't tell anybody. We've no money, but we're hoping to get it next week or the week after!*"

Jim Fahy: "*Do you have planning permission?*"

Monsignor Horan: "*I'm not sure whether I have permission or not but I'm going ahead anyway, just taking a chance!*"

Source: rtearchives.ie



Did you know?

Monsignor Horan's life and work were chronicled in a musical written by Terry Reilly and broadcaster Tommy Marren, entitled *On a Wing and a Prayer*

We explore the extraordinary
Dry Stone Walls
which feature prominently on our landscape

Cover image:
Stone walls Inis Meain, Co. Galway, 2008
(Image Donal MacPolin)

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Dry Stone Walls

It is estimated that more than 400,000km of dry stone walls can be measured across the whole country. The oldest ones are located at the Céide Fields, in north Mayo, which were built approximately 5,800 years ago by the first farmers.

Most of the dry stone walls we see today are much later than this, originating when land was enclosed on a mass scale in the 18th and 19th centuries. Wall types and styles reflect the underlying geology of the land, function, stone type and the skill of those who erected them.

The process of dry stone wall building involves using only stone without any mortar to bind them together. In the past, stonewall builders found solutions to problems regarding function, weather, ground surface, stone type and shape, bonding pattern and gravity. All this knowledge was passed down from generation to generation. Typically, the walls are made up of nine or ten courses and are 1.35-1.5 metres in height. Two main techniques were developed, the simplest and easiest technique is to pile stones and boulders on top of each other. The more intricate technique requires additional skills, time and tools.

Stones are carefully selected, positioned and sometimes cut (corners knocked off). The tools required are a crowbar, a sledgehammer, a lump-hammer, a ball of twine and short hazel rods. Some of the different types of dry stone walls include the following:

Single dry stone walls are built with one stone in thickness. They do not have a core. These walls are often built at speed. The most notable single walls are the granite boulder walls of *Cnoc Fola* (Bloody Foreland) in Co. Donegal and in Connemara, Co. Galway.

Double dry stone walls have what are called two faces, one each side of the wall. The centre of the wall is filled with a 'hearting' of small stones. Where available 'through stones' are placed at the centre point of the wall to add stability. Walls can be finished with an upright, slanted or flat row of cap stones or copes.

Combination walls

or **Feidín walls** combine the single and double technique. They are a characteristic of the Aran Islands and the west of Ireland. They are built with a "family" of stacked stones. Often there will be vertical slabs ("mother stones") which act as a frame within which smaller stones ("children") are stacked. There are countless variations.

Stone earthen bank walls

use a bank of soil or ditch faced with stone on one or both sides. Often the top is planted with native hedgerow plants like hawthorn, ash, elm, alder and furze. They can be constructed with alternate layers of soil and stone.

Consumption walls, also known as clearance walls, were built on farms to get rid of (or to consume) excess stone lying on the surface of the land. The land was then more productive although the thick wall took up valuable land as well.

These walls have provided many purposes from enclosing fields, marking boundaries, preventing soil erosion, controlling stock, whilst providing habitats for flora and fauna.



Dry stone walls at the Ceide Fields
(Image from Mayo-ireland.ie)

Moreover, in the mid-19th century during the Great Famine, a series of dry stone walls were built throughout western and southern regions.

Large examples of these can be seen in The Burren in Co. Clare. These walls were known as the famine walls. They were famine-relief work projects run by churches and landlords to offer work and food to the poor and starving peasants.

Irish emigrants also exported these building techniques abroad. As a result, dry stone walls can be found in Scotland, Australia and North America. Today, interest is growing in our dry stone wall heritage; we have one of the oldest and most extensive cultural landscapes of dry stone walls in the world.

Resources:

www.thejournal.ie
www.teagasc.ie
www.donegalcoco.ie
www.mayo-ireland.ie



Left:
Men building a dry stone wall on
Inishmore, Aran Islands 2022

(Image University of Galway Archival
record ID p103005 – George Pickow)

North Mayo Heritage Centre Mayo Heritage Newsletter

Vol. V Issue 20
19th May 2024

YouTube



We explore the origin of the Child of Prague

With unreliable and haphazard weather you may want to include this little fella in your Wedding Day plans.



Cover image: Niamh McCarthy©

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The Child of Prague



The flamboyantly-dressed statue of the baby Jesus is found in almost every Irish household. Here we explore its origin.

The 'Infant of Prague' or Child of Prague was a popular statue in Ireland from the late 19th to the mid-20th century. During these times the statue was linked to customs about weddings, prayers for fine weather, and superstitions about keeping away poverty from a household or a family.

Even in modern times, it has been believed that if you place a statue of the Child of Prague in your garden before your wedding you will be blessed with a glorious day. In some parts, it is suggested it should be positioned outside the church or even buried. Others speculate if it is luckier with or without a head.

Ireland is not the only country that worshipped the statue. In Italy they send letters to it. In the Czech Republic they dress it up in colourful robes on church holidays and in the Philippines they put it in the clothes of their profession. It is believed that a famous Spanish noble-woman named Maia Manriques received the statue of the infant Jesus from her mother when she married Czech nobleman Vratislay of Pernstyn in 1556. Hence its connection with weddings.

However, the exact origin of the statue is unknown. Historical sources point to a 48 cm sculpture of the Christ Child with a bird in his right hand, now in the Spanish Cistercian monastery of Santa María de la Valbonna in Asturias.



Close up of a statue of the Child of Prague. Note that the head had fallen off and has been reattached
(Image: folklore.ie)

The bird in these statues symbolises either a soul or the Holy Spirit. One legend says a monk in an abandoned monastery between Cordoba and Seville had a vision of a small boy telling him to pray. The monk had spent several hours praying and then made a figure of the child.

The statue was placed in the oratory of the monastery of Our Lady of Victory in Prague. There, special prayers were said before it twice a day, and Carmelite novices professed their vow of poverty in the presence of the statue. When he heard about the Carmelites' devotions and needs, the Emperor Ferdinand II donated 2,000 florins and a monthly stipend for their support.

The Carmelite novitiate was transferred to Munich in 1630. The Thirty Years' War brought an end to the special devotions in Prague, and in 1631 the Swedish army of King Gustavus Adolphus captured Prague.

The Carmelite friary was plundered and the statue of the Infant of Prague was thrown into a pile of rubbish behind the altar. There it lay forgotten for seven years, its hands broken off, until it was found again in 1637 by Father Cyrillus and placed in the church's oratory.

One day, while praying before the statue, Father Cyrillus is said to have heard a voice say, 'Have pity on me, and I will have pity on you. Give me my hands, and I will give you peace. The more you honour me, the more I will bless you.' Since then, the statue has remained in Prague and has drawn many devotees from across the world. Pope Leo XIII approved devotion to the statue in 1896 and instituted a sodality in its favour.

Pope Pius X further organised the Confraternity of the Infant Jesus of Prague in 1913, while Pope Pius XI granted the statue its first canonical coronation in 1924. Pope Benedict XVI crowned the statue for a second time during his visit to Prague in 2009.

This perhaps gives credence to the belief that this statue does hold the meteorological fate of your wedding day in its tiny hands.

References:

Patrick Comberford
www.nationalshrine.org
www.wikipedia.org



(Image: irishexaminer.com)

The Child of Prague and the Film Star

Navan born actor and former James Bond star Pierce Brosnan engaged in the custom for his wedding to Keely Shaye Smith. He recalls:

"We got married in Ballintubber Abbey and held the reception in Ashford Castle. It was August and an old woman told me we had to get a Child of Prague statue and put it outside the west corner of the building to make sure it didn't rain. The Child of Prague is a little statue of Jesus dressed as a king and it's an old tradition to put it out the night before wedding.

So I staggered out after my night out with the lads and many Guinnesses into the gardens of Ashford Castle and found a hydrangea bush and put the statue in it"

(Taylor 2013)



It is believed that money placed behind the statue will bring good health and money placed under it will bring wealth.

North Mayo Heritage Centre Mayo Heritage Newsletter

Vol. V Issue 21
26th May 2024

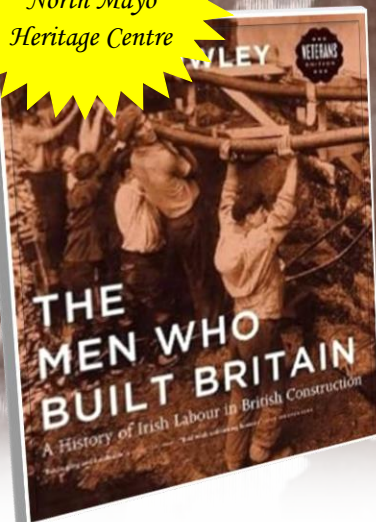
YouTube



McAlpine's Men

**Who was
McAlpine?**
We examine the
history of the
men behind the name.

Available from
Reception at the
North Mayo
Heritage Centre



**One of McAlpine's earliest projects:
Lanarkshire and Ayrshire Railway,
1885-1890**

Robert McAlpine (fifth from right) with some of his staff and engineers of the Caledonian Railway Company during construction of a viaduct on the Barrmill to Kilwinning section of the line.
(Image: Srm.com)

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Robert McAlpine and the McAlpine Fusiliers

Sir Robert McAlpine Limited is a family-owned building and civil engineering company based in the UK. This company is known by many Irish families whose relations emigrated from Ireland from the 1930s onwards to find work in the UK. New arrivals would be told *'where to go to get the start'* and it was the McAlpine company who employed many of these men.

The song associated with the lives of these Irish men on the building sites of the UK is immortalised in the famous song 'McAlpine's Fusiliers'. Even though much is known about the lives of the Irish men or 'navvies' (labourers employed in the excavation and construction of roads, railways etc.) on the building sites, knowledge of the origins of the Robert McAlpine company and Robert's humble beginnings is not widely known.

Robert McAlpine was born in 1847 in the Scottish village of Newarthill near Motherwell. From an early age he worked in the nearby coal mine, leaving at the age 16 to become an apprentice bricklayer. Later, working for an engineer, he progressed to being foreman before starting out on his own at the age of 22. He had no capital other than the wages he could earn himself and his first contract, involving the employment of other men, had to be financed by borrowing £11 from the local butcher.

From there, McAlpine enjoyed rapid success, centred on his own trade of bricklaying. By 1874 he was the owner of two brickyards and an employer of 1,000 men. It was on one of his housing estate contracts that he first experimented with using concrete blocks as well as bricks in the building process which earned him the nickname 'Concrete Bob'.

Following the collapse of the City of Glasgow Bank in 1878, Robert McAlpine was financially wiped out as his mortgages were called in and his debtors did not pay him. Robert then went into partnership with his clerk, trading under the name McAlpine & Company.

After securing his first large contract for the Singer Manufacturing Company in 1883 the clerk was bought out and the profit from his Singer Company contract enabled him to pay off his remaining debts. Almost immediately he faced further financial difficulties after winning a contract for the Lanarkshire and Ayrshire Railway when, without the necessary technical knowledge, it led to the need for rebuilding work, legal action ensued, and yet again, he had to make another fresh start.

In 1887, Robert took his two eldest sons, Robert junior and William, out of school to help him in the company with his two younger sons, Malcolm and Alfred following soon after. They endeavoured to make the company more efficient in relation to administration and finances. Undaunted by his earlier experience, McAlpine took on further railway contracts, this time successfully. McAlpine's company became involved in many major building and civil engineering projects including, docks, harbours, power stations, factories, Wembley Stadium and the Dorchester Hotel.



Image from the book entitled, McAlpine's Men by Ultan Cowley



Sir Robert McAlpine

(Image National Portrait Gallery London)

Sir Robert McAlpine died in 1934, aged 87, two weeks later his eldest son, the new Sir Robert also died. William and Alfred remained in charge of operations however, a separation of the business took place in 1940 with the business in the north of the UK renamed Sir Alfred McAlpine and the south, Sir Robert McAlpine.

Subsequently, in 2003 Sir Robert McAlpine Ltd. sued Alfred McAlpine Plc over the use of the family name, winning the legal proceedings and preventing Alfred McAlpine trading under the name McAlpine. From the 1930s onwards Sir Robert McAlpine Ltd. employed a large number of Irish workers who had come to Britain looking for employment. The harsh working conditions with which McAlpine's management treated their labourers has gone down in Irish immigrant folklore. The song, McAlpine's Fusiliers, written by Dominic Behan and made famous by The Dubliners, described the realities of life on the building site for many Irish workers.

*As down the glen came McAlpine's men
With their shovels slung behind them
'Twas in the pub they drank the sub
And up in the spike you'll find them*

*I grafted hard and I've got me cards
And many a ganger's fist across me ears
If you pride your life, don't join by Christ
With McAlpine's fusiliers.*

Author, Ultan Cowley's book, *The Men Who Built Britain: A History of the Irish Navy*, details the lasting mark Irish immigrants made to the construction industry in Britain. The book includes extracts from interviews with Irish construction workers, their families and the sub-contractors. It is available from The North Mayo Heritage Centre priced at €30.00.

Resources: Wikipedia

The Men Who Built Britain
(Ultan Cowley)

North Mayo Heritage Centre Mayo Heritage Newsletter

Vol. V Issue 22

2nd June 2024

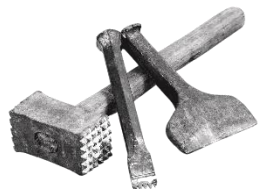
YouTube



Here lies the burial place of
An Gobán Saor
the most famous of all craftsmen

The Gobán Saor is said to be the source for many inventions in the trades of building and carpentry.

Read all about
An Gobán Saor
in this week's article



The reputed burial site of An Gobán Soar at Derrynaflan, Co. Tipperary.
(Image from irishstone.org.)

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The Gobán Saor

In Irish legend, the Gobán Saor was the most famous of craftsmen. It is considered that his first name may be a form of Goibhniu, the ancient god of smithcraft, while his second name means 'artificer'. Characters similar to An Gobán Saor can be found in Welsh mythology also. There is a ninth century Irish poem which refers to God as Gobán, constructor of the firmament.

Gobán was reputedly born near Lusk in Co. Dublin. His father was Tuirbhe, a follower of the ancient god Lugh.¹ Tuirbhe is reputed to have stopped the tide coming in at Turvey Strand, near Lusk, by throwing his hatchet at it. The Gobán Saor's legend became mixed up in several early Christian stories.

One suggestion as to why this happened is that 'Gobán' became a popular Christian name, and it was borne by several monks. In this context, accounts of his adventures were set in south Leinster, but, as the late Daithí Ó hÓgáin noted, his 'fame' soon spread.²

The Gobán Saor is mainly featured as a great builder and carpenter, and his legend survived down to the 20th century.

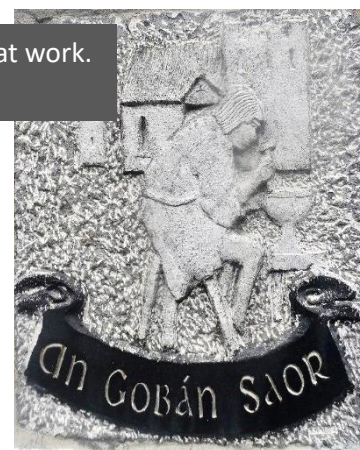
The Schools Folklore Collection, gathered in the late 1930s, mentions him, and one story from Ballinderry, Co. Galway even attributes the 'Soar' in his name to the Irish word of the same spelling for 'free' because he could build castles so cheaply!³

Several monasteries and round towers are attributed to his skills. One legend describes how, when almost finished the construction of a monastery, the monks attempted to lower his wages. The Gobán Saor refused to negotiate. The monks waited until he was atop the scaffold, and removed all of his ladders, trapping him upstairs. 'The clever Gobán began to throw down stone after stone of the building, saying that this was as easy a way as any to descend safely to the ground. The monks relented and paid him in full'.

The Gobán's wife was said to be Ruaidhseach, a shrewd and calculating woman, who is the heroine of perhaps the most famous legend concerning her husband. The Gobán's fame was such that a foreign king asked him to build a castle for him. The emerging edifice was seven years in the making, and the work was outstanding. The king, jealous that the Gobán might build somebody else an equally fine castle, decided to kill him and his son.

The Gobán, suspecting the King's evil intent, stated that he could not finish the job without a special tool which he had left behind him in Ireland. The tool was called 'crooked and straight'. The king refused to allow either Gobán or his son depart. Instead, he sent his own son to Ireland to collect 'crooked and straight'.

Carving of An Gobán Saor at work.
(Image from Wikipedia).



When the King's son turned up on the doorstep of Gobán's house, Ruaidhseach immediately knew what the code words meant. She took the King's son hostage and sent word that if the King wanted to see his son alive again, he must immediately release Gobán and her son.⁴ The motif of this legend appears across Europe in connection with the construction of several great buildings. It has also appeared in Irish lore confused with the earlier anecdote concerning the building of the monastery.

Tricks of the Trade:

The Gobán Saor is said to be the source for many inventions in the trades of building and carpentry:

When he saw his son trying, unsuccessfully, to build a straight wall, he invented the plumb-line.

He invented the rule-cord for cutting straight pieces of timber.

He happened upon three men who were roofing a house. Three pieces of timber for the joists were too short. He showed them how to make a cross joist with these short timbers, which held the roof just as well as beams of the proper length would do.

He is attributed to inventing the method of 'a stone in, a stone out and a stone across' to ensure a solid structure in walls.

REFERENCES:

¹ From which we get the Irish name for August, Lughnasa. Lugh, a sun god associated with harvest, was worshipped elsewhere in Europe. The city of Lyon, in France derives its name from Lugh also.

² Ó hÓgáin, D. 2006. *The Lore of Ireland. An Encyclopedia of Myth, Legend and Romance*. The Collins Press, Cork.

³ From dchas.ie, Schools Folklore Collection, *Baile an Doire*, Co. Galway, p.205

⁴ Ó hÓgáin, D. 2006. *The Lore of Ireland. An Encyclopedia of Myth, Legend and Romance*. The Collins Press, Cork.

Legendary Feats.

- The Gobán Saor could drive a nail into the top of a high building without climbing the walls. He could throw a nail into the air, throw the hammer after it, have the hammer strike the nail in the correct spot and catch the hammer as it fell.
- The Gobán came across a team of craftsmen who were busy working on Holy Cross Abbey in Co. Tipperary. He joined in with their work, but when they took a break to eat, he was not invited to dine. Upon asking the foreman what he should do while the others ate, he was mockingly rebuked: 'you can make a cat with two tails if you like'. When the workmen returned from their meal, they found a neat carving of a two tailed cat, but the Gobán had vanished.

North Mayo Heritage Centre Mayo Heritage Newsletter

Vol. V Issue 23

9th June 2024

YouTube



Along the West coastline
many relied heavily on

FISHING

This week we explore
fishing as a livelihood

Curragh at Inis Gé Thuaidh, 2006
(Dúchas.ie C021.03.00064)



Cover image: Fisherman at Portacloy, Co. Mayo, 1942
(Dúchas.ie, B005.03.00009)

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Ireland's relationship with fishing dates back to ancient times when early inhabitants relied on rivers, lakes, and coastal waters for food and trade. During the medieval period, fishing expanded as a commercial enterprise, driven by the demand for salted and preserved fish in European markets.

By the 17th and 18th centuries, more fishing villages and ports appeared which increased the growth of fishing communities. These communities thrived on the bounty of the sea, with fishing becoming a way of life for coastal residents. The fishing industry supported livelihoods, provided employment opportunities, whilst fostering a sense of camaraderie among fishermen and their families. The traditional fishing methods helped shape the cultural identity of Ireland's coastal and inland regions.

Sea fishing was more predominant and was mainly carried out from small boats. These boats were typically animal hide covered wooden-framed boats, known as currachs. Sea fishing usually took place in the summer months when the fish were more plentiful and the weather was less dangerous. In deep waters, fishermen used a spilllet line (a weighted line with several hooks). Hand lines caught mackerel, pollock and bass from not only a boat, but even from a cliff. Nets were cast out to gather salmon, herring and mackerel. Various net techniques were used which included the drift, seine and draft netting. Additionally, pots made from willow rods or heather trapped lobsters and crabs.

Other types of shellfish were collected from boats using a rake or dredge, with some prised off rocks along the shoreline by hand.

Old Sayings:

- When the wind is east, the fish bite the least.
- Leaving the dock on a Friday may mean bad luck!
- Bad luck to bring a banana on board a fishing boat.

(Old Moore's Almanac)

Freshwater fishing was largely a supplementary activity. A number of the most prized rivers were in private ownership, and this led to poaching. Traps made of wicker or netting were set in the rivers to catch salmon or trout, along with snares and large hooks called stroke-hauls. Some ancient techniques, such as spearing still existed, and was used to catch eel and salmon. Eel fishing was generally legal, however, spearing salmon was illegal, therefore this often took place at night.



Fishing at the River Moy, Ballina 1946
(*Dúchas.ie, B005.03.00024*)

Along the west coast of Ireland, many people depended heavily on sea fishing. For example, on Achill Island, most people owned a boat and had a skilled fisherman as a family member.

Herrings were commonly caught and were either sold at the renowned fair in Achill Sound or were preserved and salted in wooden barrels. Fish was eaten daily and often the fishermen would gather to cook their meals ashore on a turf fire at a rock called "*Carraig a'póta*", (rock of the pot) located near Keem Bay.

In 1947, a basking shark fishery was established in Keem at Purteen Harbour. The basking sharks were attracted by the warm waters of Clew Bay, influenced by the nearby Gulf Stream, and the local fishermen harpooned and netted them

Right: Lobster pots at Fallmore, Mullet Peninsula, 1935
(*Dúchas.ie, B009.03.00002*)



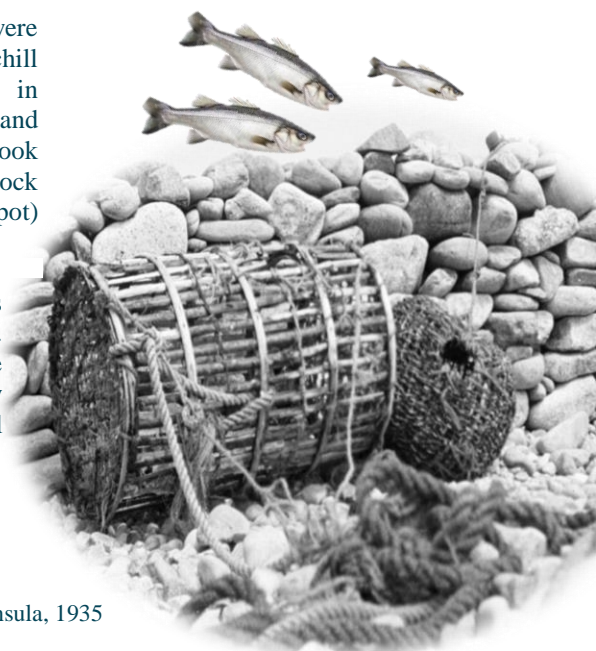
Fishermen at Portacloy, Co. Mayo 1942
(*Dúchas.ie, B005.03.00010*)

Initially, the sharks were caught for their liver oil. However, when the prices for the oil declined, their large characteristic fins and flesh were sold at ornamental markets and used in Asian shark fin soup. Achill's basking shark fishery was the best-recorded fishery in the world. At its peak, it caught a total of 9,000 sharks between 1950 and 1964.

Today, as Ireland continues to navigate the many difficulties of modern fisheries management and environmental conservation, the legacy of its fishing heritage endures. The story of fishing in Ireland is a demonstration to the resilience of coastal communities and the lasting bond between the fishermen and the sea.

Resources:

www.fishingguide.cstyle.ie
www.museum.ie
www.mayo-ireland.ie
www.marei.ie





North Mayo Heritage Centre Mayo Heritage

Newsletter

Vol. V Issue 24
16th June 2024

YouTube



In Ireland long ago, children
improvised when it came toys.

In this week's newsletter
Children's Homemade Toys
in Ireland in 1930s.



Cover image: Children in Ireland, 1939
(Image from Dúchas.ie E004.33.00003)

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Children's Homemade Toys

in Ireland in the 1930s



Long ago, most children did not have toys bought for them. Parents worked hard to give them essentials such as food and clothing, therefore toys were often homemade.

The extracts below from Dúchas Schools Collection, a compilation of stories by school children in the 1930s, gives an insight into how children made their own toys.

An extract from a pupil in Co. Mayo

When I do have nothing to do in the winter nights I do start making dolls and frocks for dolls. When I want to make a doll I stuff hay or straw in the doll and sew on cloth to the outside. Then I get all the cloth that is through the house and begin to make frocks. I also make necklaces of flowers and I put every second flower of a different colour. I also make bracelets of the same way. Then I spend all the winter nights knitting and sewing for my doll.

An extract from a pupil in Co. Galway.

In former times young boys and girls found amusement in making toys and other things during their spare time. For example, children made dolls, marbles, jack-stones from 'dabe' which was fine sand they discovered at a bank of a river, and they mixed it in the palms of their hands until they had it made into whatever article they wished and then they left it out in the sun to harden.

In summer girls made chains from daisies and put different flowers in the centre for an ornament and this was the way they did it. They put a hole in the end of each flower and put a stem into the hole and so on until they had it finished and they dressed themselves with the chains.



An improvised see-saw in Ireland (Image: Wikipedia)

They had a sling made from a piece of leather which was tied in both ends, and a hole in the centre of it for the stone and a string from it which they twisted round their hands, and gave it a fling to see which could send it the greatest distance or the greatest height.

Another pastime boys had was to make bubbles and this was the way they did it. They filled a clay pipe with dissolved soap and water and blew into the pipe and made a bubble as large as a balloon which would fly around the house. This was another amusement boys had. Pitching pennies, they put up a spud and pitched pennies towards it and whoever would go nearest to the spud or hit it would get the penny.

An extract from a pupil in Co. Galway.

When I was young I made dolls from turnips. I got a large turnip and cut the one end into the shape of a head and cut the other end into a body and made hands and feet from sticks and put scotched flax for hair and then dressed her up nicely at which I found great pleasure.

I often made pop-guns from elder branches. I got an elder stick and with a red hot piece of wire I got the huer from the centre and I put another stick with a bit of wool on the end into this and with it I could send water a great distance.

They make spinning tops from spools by cutting them to a point and putting a spike through them and twisting them on a level board with a small whip. The whirligig is a very popular toy and is made from leather, tin or cardboard cut round and mitred and a string is put through it and when it is twisted it will continue from itself.

An extract from a pupil in Co. Mayo

There are many ways in which I spend my leisure hours. Whenever I get a big spool I make a top out of it by pairing it until it is in the shape of a cone. Then I get a bit of wood and point it and I put it through the hole. Then I make a whip by cutting a straight stick and by attaching a strip of cloth to it, then I whip until the spike breaks.

During the winter I make kites. The way I make it is, I cut two laths off a tea chest, and I make a cross of them. Then I put wire through the four ends of the laths. Across that I sew the cloth of an umbrella and I take a strong paper and I sew it. I make a tail out of small bits of paper. I buy sixpence worth of twine and attach it to the kite. When the wind comes I go out on top of a flat roofed barn and sail the kite all over the town.

Resource: dúchas.ie



Left: Two children, Ireland 1939 (Image Dúchas.ie E004.33.00002)



North Mayo Heritage Centre Mayo Heritage Newsletter

Vol. V Issue 25
23rd June 2024

YouTube



Cover image depicts scenes of dancing at the crossroads, (image from Jimmy's Hall, Wikipedia.org)

Anyone remember

Crossroads Dances?

This chorus from *Wild Swans* sums up Dancing at the Crossroads best.

We were dancing at the crossroads in the shadow of a bonfire,
Underneath the silver moon light we were singing until dawn,
We were dancing at the crossroads with the poteen and the porter,
Dancing jigs and reels and polka until the early morn!

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Dancing at the Crossroads

The long-standing tradition of dancing at the crossroads brought communities together in a celebration of music, dance and culture. This practice, which dates back centuries, involved the gathering, at a designated crossroads, of friends, family, neighbours and people from other townlands or parishes.

The origins of dancing at the crossroads can be traced back to a time when rural communities were isolated and lacked official venues for social gatherings. Isolation was not a deterrent though, as the bicycle was more than efficient to transport men and women miles to these events.

Reminiscing on dances similar to these, the poet Patrick Kavanagh talks of how *“the bicycles go by in twos and threes”* in his poem *Iniskeen Road (July evening)* and how *“there’s the half-talk code of mysteries and the wink-and-elbow language of delight”*.

Crossroad dances or roadside dances did indeed instil *delight* and provided a welcome distraction from the mundane routine of the past week. However, without a specific finishing time or bouncers to keep law and order, fist fights took place often over ladies. One of the most iconic aspects of dancing at the crossroads was the live music that accompanied the dancing.

Traditional Irish musicians, playing fiddles, tin whistles, accordions, melodeons, flutes and bodhráns provided the lively soundtrack for the evening’s festivities. Songs like *“The Black Velvet Band,” “The Wild Rover,”* and *“The Irish Rover”* rapidly became synonymous with these gatherings and inspired those in attendance to join in the fun. The odd bottle of beer or drop of poitín helped rid them of any inhibitions!!

The dancing itself consisted of groups of people forming intricate patterns and executing precise footwork to the rhythm of the music. Irish step dancing was trendy at the time, with dancers displaying incredible skill and agility as they performed jigs, reels, and hornpipes and sets. Waltzes, quicksteps, foxtrots, polkas, shoe the donkey and the siege of Ennis later became popular. Men would be ranked favourably as prospective partners if they were regarded as a *“good dancer”*.

Crossroad dancing is remembered fondly by Kathleen McHale, Tooreen (collected as part of the Dúchas Schools Folklore Collection) where she recalled:

“They used to dance jigs, reels, and hornpipes, and there used to be a prize for the best dancer. There was a good fiddle player, his name was Paddy Lynott, Carrowmore, Ballina, R.I.P. He was a blind man. When the people would gather at the dance, one of the men would go around to the people and gather money for him. Then he’d play away. He was a very good fiddler. He made his living chiefly on that”.

Over time, crossroads dancing became ingrained in the fabric of Irish culture. However, this type of social gathering declined in popularity in the mid-20th century, due to rural depopulation and pressure from the Catholic clergy which resulted in the Public Dance Halls Act of 1935.



Image from the fadingyears.com

This act restricted all dancing to licensed establishments and the government and church denounced from the pulpit and the political platforms the crossroads dances. Illegal assemblies had to answer to a trinity of clergy. This made it more difficult for crossroad dances to take place and they eventually ceased altogether.

References:

Dúchas.ie
Irelandsloreandtales.com

DID YOU KNOW?

Bonfires that are held on St. John's Eve are often lit by the oldest person present. Locals would bring home a spent ember from the fire to throw into a field to bring good fortune in the year to come.

(www.wikipedia.org)



Crossroads dance, East Cork, 1910 which was typical of those occurring in the west of Ireland (image from irelandsloreandtales.com)

Mayo Heritage

Newsletter

North Mayo Heritage Centre

Vol. V Issue 26

30th June 2024

YouTube



PONTOON
— the dancing mecca of the west

«SATURDAY, 15th DECEMBER

BIG TOM & THE TRAVELLERS

“Will ya dance?”
A trip down memory lane remembering
nights of dancing in
Mayo's
BALLROOMS OF ROMANCE

Cover images from irishshowbands.com and con-telegraph.ie

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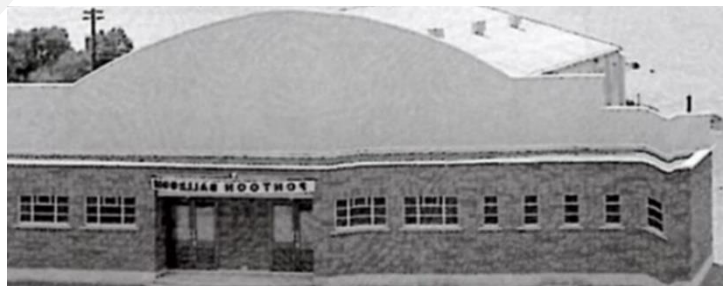
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Mayo's Ballrooms of Romance



Following on from our article on Dancing at the Crossroads last week, we consider the dance halls and ballrooms of romance that followed.

Anyone who grew up in Ireland from the 1950's to the 1980's would remember the ballrooms, dance halls, parish halls, and hotels that were home to a golden age of dancing. Along with the halls were the Irish showbands who travelled the length and breadth of the country to play to packed houses every night.



One of the most famous ballrooms of the time the Pontoon Ballroom
(Image con-telegraph.ie)

Most showbands had 7 or 8 members with a lead singer out in front, and names like the Miami, Royal, and Capitol showbands are still fondly remembered. Some of the leading showbands from Mayo were the Jack Ruane Showband, Doc Carroll and his Royal Blues, and the Brose Walsh Band.

Ireland was unique in that these ballrooms were not just located in towns and cities, but spread across the country, often located 'in the middle of nowhere'. However, these same ballrooms often drew crowds from miles around.

Often the air at the nightly dance would consist in part of a sickly petroleum haze.

In the early 20th century nearly all towns and villages across the country had at least one parochial hall, but some had up to three.

Dancing to the big bands and orchestras of the 30's, 40's, and 50's finally exploded into the heyday of the showbands in the 1960's. Many new ballrooms were quickly built to meet the increased need of the dancing public. The halls were custom built for dancing and usually included a few bathrooms, a cloakroom, and a mineral bar. There was little seating other than a row of benches around the perimeter of the dancefloor. The new ballrooms had replaced the old parish halls, where it was once the practice to douse the floor with paraffin to keep the dust down.

With the parish hall came the local priest who would use the dance hall to fundraise for the parish, as well as being the moral guardian for the night. In many ballrooms the priest would personally tour the hall delivering a stern word or quick whack to any courting couples getting too close.

Brenda Fricker took centre stage in the film, playing a middle-aged singleton still on the shelf. She had eyes on a member of the band, but was fighting off the unwanted attention of a farmer from the mountains.

In Mayo the ballrooms were the scene of many a match and subsequent marriage. Some of the most famous venues in the county were the Royal ballroom in Castlebar, the Maryland in Ballina, the Round Tower in Turlough, the Pontoon Ballroom, Westport's Starlight Ballroom, the Arcadia in Belcarra, and the Palm Court in Belmullet. Other ballrooms were in Charlestown, Ballyhaunis, and Toreen.

Today most of the ballrooms are gone. Many have simply been demolished to make way for a new development, but many more are simply empty and derelict. Often built in remote areas the land they occupy generally isn't very valuable. However, some have been saved by local residents and used as community centres and multi-function halls.

A government report in 1952 put the number of licensed dance halls in the country at 1258, estimates say with other venues this could be as high as 3000. Mayo was the land of a thousand dances in the 1960's and 1970's. The dance hall was at the centre of social life, and there were up to 80 ballrooms in the county alone.

In 1982 the film 'The Ballroom of Romance' was released. It had been filmed in the ballroom in Knockmoyleen, Ballycroy, and reflected the Ireland of the 1950's, where a lonely farmer's daughter hoped to find romance at the village ballroom.

The owner of the ballroom had faith in the traditional match-making possibilities in his 'Ballroom of Romance'.

Sources:
www.independent.ie
www.con-telegraph.ie
www.irish-showbands.com
www.letterboxd.com

Did you know?

In 1997 a man named Murdech McAndrew had lobbied for all the ballrooms to be reopened as he was concerned that young men were being left on farms while the girls went to Dublin for college or work.

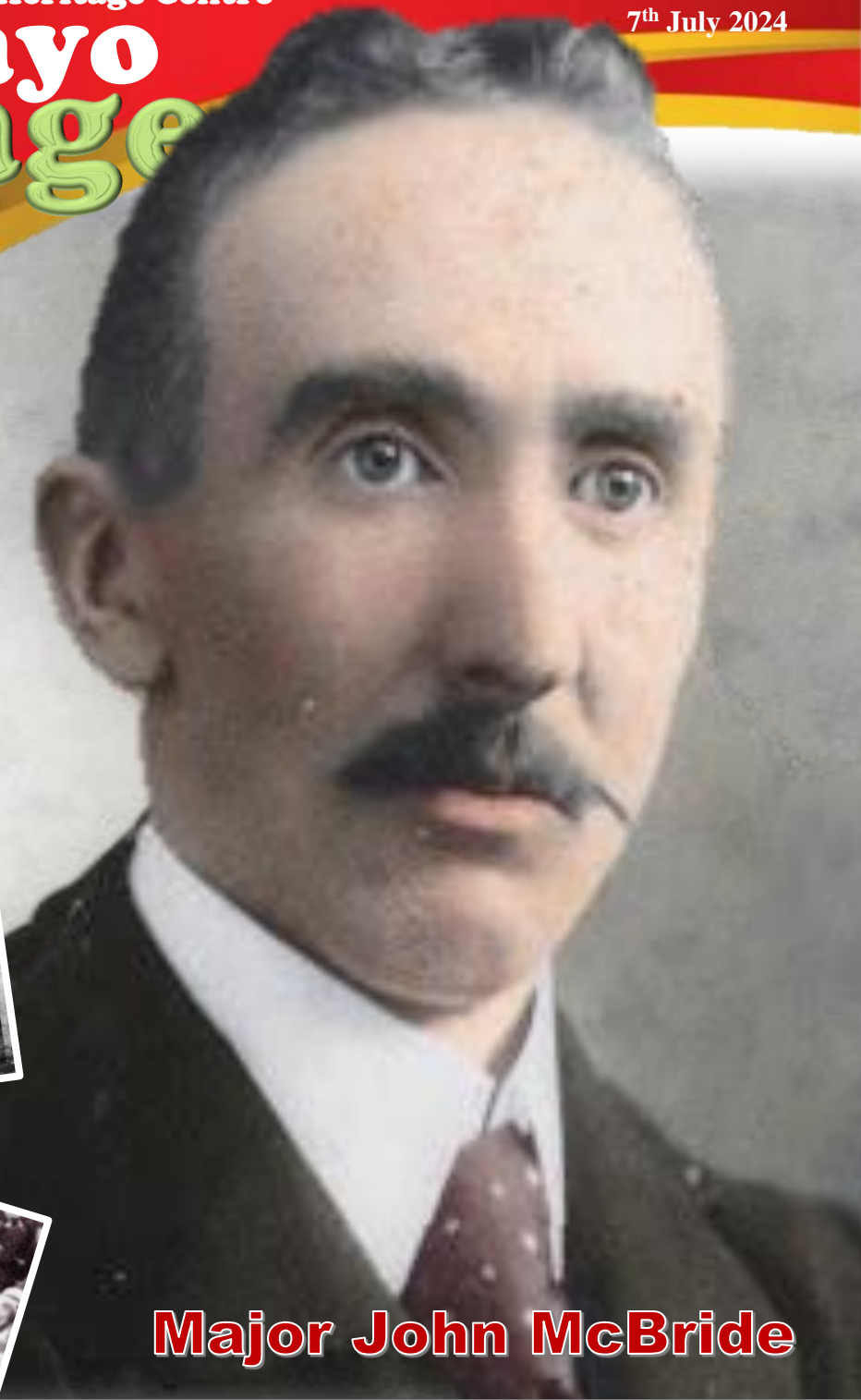
(irishfarmersmonthly.com)

Left: Newspaper strip advertising some of the entertainment in the Ballrooms of Mayo
(Image mayo.ie)



Mayo Heritage

Newsletter



Major John McBride



Cover images:
Major McBride
President Hillery unveiling a statue of John McBride in July, 1983 in Westport
John MacBride pictured in South Africa 1898 (standing on left).
John McBride pictured standing behind Pearse at O'Donovan Rossa funeral
(images courtesy of Westport1916)

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The
North Mayo
Heritage
Centre



Riailtas na hÉireann
Government of Ireland

This project is supported by the Department of Rural and Community Development and Pobal through the Community Services Programme

On this month 41 years ago, a statue of Major John McBride was unveiled on the South Mall in Westport. Here we examine the life of John McBride up to his execution in 1916.

Major John McBride

John McBride was born on the 7th May 1868, at the Quay, Westport, to Patrick and Honoria McBride, shopkeepers in the town. He was educated at the Christian Brothers School in Westport and St. Malachy's College, Belfast. At school he was given the nickname 'Foxy Jack', due to his red hair and long nose. He went on to work in a drapery shop in Castlerea, and then to study medicine, which he later quit.

McBride became involved with the GAA and the Irish Republican Brotherhood. He started working in a chemist in Dublin and joined the Celtic Literary Society. Through the society he became friends with Arthur Griffith, who remained an influence on him throughout his life.

By 1893 the British government had labelled him a 'dangerous nationalist'. In 1896 he travelled to Chicago to represent the IRB at a republican conference. The following year he emigrated to South Africa, to the Transvaal Republic where he began working in a gold mine.

In South Africa McBride became leader of a pro-Kruger government group which included Arthur Griffith. With the outbreak of war in South Africa in October 1899, McBride organised the Irish Transvaal Brigade with about 300 men to fight on the Boer side.

During his time in South Africa he was nominated to stand in the by-election in South Mayo following the resignation of Michael Davitt.

He lost to the Irish Parliamentary Party candidate. In May 1900 McBride's unit in South Africa was in retreat, and eventually it was disbanded in September 1900.

McBride then travelled to Paris where he became involved with a group of Irish nationalist expatriates, including Maud Gonne. Despite advice from friends he married Maud Gonne on the 21st February 1903. A year later they had a son, Seán.

The marriage was a failure and a separation was granted by a French court in 1906.

On his return to Ireland McBride's reputation was tarnished by his marriage break up, and Irish nationalists treated him with caution due to his drinking problem.

They also kept him outside their plans for the 1916 Rising, and as a result he happened to find himself in the midst of the 1916 Rising without notice.

He was in Dublin on Easter Monday morning to meet his brother Dr. Anthony McBride, who was arriving from Westport for his marriage on the following Wednesday.

John was walking down Grafton Street when he saw Thomas McDonagh in uniform leading his troops. He offered his services and was appointed second-in-command at the Jacobs factory.

By all accounts McBride, dressed in civilian clothes throughout, fought well in the Rising. Before surrendering on 30th April he encouraged his men to escape and to take up the fight again at a later date. He made no effort to escape or disguise his identity.



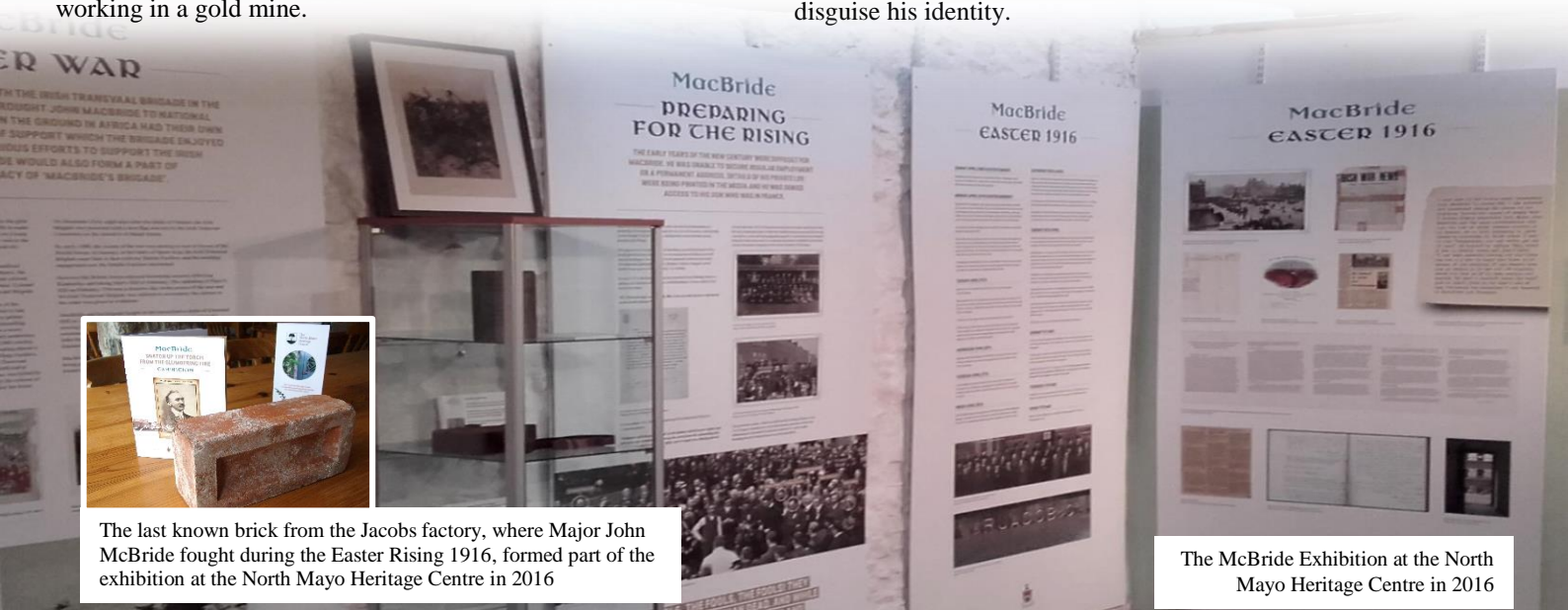
Above: John McBride and Maud Gonne with their son, Seán in 1904 (irishtimes.com)

A gold watch inscribed with "From the Women of Mayo resident in New York, to Major John McBride, 16th July 1901" photographed at the North Mayo Heritage Centre as part of the McBride Exhibition in 2016.

He was court-martialled on the 4th May and sentenced to death. John McBride was executed by firing squad in Kilmainham Gaol on the 5th May 1916, two days before his forty-eighth birthday. He was buried in Arbour Hill Prison in Dublin.

Today a plaque marks the building in Westport where he was born in 1868, which is now the Helm Bar and Restaurant.

Sources
<http://www.westport1916.com>
<https://www.dib.ie/biography>
<https://en.wikipedia.org>



The last known brick from the Jacobs factory, where Major John McBride fought during the Easter Rising 1916, formed part of the exhibition at the North Mayo Heritage Centre in 2016

The McBride Exhibition at the North Mayo Heritage Centre in 2016

Mayo Heritage

Newsletter



*Do we take our
Hedgerows
for granted?*



The National Parks and Wildlife Service is the Government Body that is tasked with protecting hedgerows. The service is responsible for implementing the Wildlife Act 1976 insofar as it relates to hedgerow habitats

Cover image:
Hedgerow near Crossmolina, Co. Mayo

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Irish Hedgerows

Who among us has ever cut a fishing pole from a hedgerow hazel? Have you scavenged and nibbled on the wild strawberries in summer or on the ripe blackberries in late August? Or perhaps you helped your father to “stick a bush in a gap” where the livestock had broken out, whilst he uttered the wise old saying, “good fences make good neighbours”? You may have experienced some of these activities, but have you ever stopped to consider when these hedgerows first appeared in Ireland?

Most of our hedgerows were planted during the 1700's and 1800's. Acts of Parliament were passed in 1697 and 1721, making it compulsory for landowners to build proper permanent boundaries between their properties. These boundaries were ditches of six feet wide and five feet deep, and planted with quick-set trees. Where these would not grow, furze (also known as gorse or whins) was recommended.

Other alternatives included a ditch with a dry stone wall or mud wall and in wet ground the banks were planted with willow or alder trees. Hedgerows along townland boundaries often date from medieval times or earlier. The ancient Gaelic bank-and-ditch, known in Irish as *clas*, originates from as early as the Neolithic and Bronze Ages (c.3500 – 700 BC).

Hedgerows, man-made though they are, are fundamentally ribbons of native woodland across the landscape.

The strong, sturdy nature of the blackthorn wood is ideal for making shillelaghs.

Do you know what a shillelagh is?

This is a knotted walking stick with a large club on the top, also known as a cudgel.



Dog Rose
(wildflowersofireland.net)



Blackthorn
(askaboutireland.ie)



Hawthorn hedgerows in flower (pollinators.ie)

They serve many purposes which include connecting species that would otherwise be isolated, therefore supporting genetic diversity. They help rainwater to dissipate more quickly, protect soils and filter pollutants. They shelter livestock from harsh weather, including sweltering heat. They also link us to our cultural roots: many of the species they shelter have fascinating backstories in Celtic mythology and folklore, and offer excellent foraging opportunities.

A survey by the Irish Wildlife Trust in the late 1980s revealed that hedgerows are home to 37 species of shrubs and trees and 105 species of wild flora, with hawthorn trees forming the bulk of most of them. Hawthorn is also widely referred to as whitethorn and as the May-bush, on account of its explosion of white flowers in May. Its Irish name, *sceach gheal*, translates as “bright thorn”. Young hawthorn leaves are edible; traditionally they were called “bread and butter” and were grazed upon by children on their way to school.

Other shrubs also found their way into hedgerows, such as elder, guelder rose, dog rose, wild cherry, holly and hazel. In certain areas, rarer shrubs such as spindle, wild damson and blackthorn would creep in slowly from nearby scrub and woodland.

A well-managed, mature, hedgerow will have a three dimensional structure that offers a range of habitats for invertebrates, birds and mammals.

Old hedgerow trees are frequently the most valuable as their branches, bark and holes provide nesting and roosting spaces for birds such as tits and tree creepers, and even on occasion, the increasingly scarce barn owl. Bats also like to roost in old, hollow hedgerow trees and hunt for insects along the hedge itself.

Hundreds of different species of invertebrates have found their niches on the leaves, twigs and bark of hedgerow shrubs. Hedgerows are chosen by a sizeable number of common bird species for nesting and roosting: 55 of the 110 bird species recorded regularly in Birdwatch Ireland's Countryside Bird Survey use them during the breeding season.

These include the linnet and yellowhammer, two species which have declined in Ireland. The base of the hedgerow, with its leaf litter, dead branches and twigs contains invertebrates, and the birds and mammals feed on them, such as wrens and hedgehogs. The under-storey of the hedgerow provides nesting sites for birds, such as robins and yellowhammers.

Resources:

www.farmingfornature.ie
www.teagasc.ie
www.irishtimes.com
Wild Embrace by Anja Murray



Yellow Hammer (Shay Connolly)



Mayo Heritage

Newsletter




The Pine marten

One of Ireland's Rarest Mammals

The pine marten has been present in Ireland for thousands of years.

Niall MacCoitir in his book, *Ireland's Animals – Myths, Legends and Folklore*, makes many references to the pine marten, including possible links to place names such as Carrickacat (Carraig an Chait – rock of the cat) in Co. Mayo.

MacCoitir also describes references to the pine marten in stories about Fionn MacCumhaill, the mythical hunter-warrior, and his band of Irish warriors known as the Fianna.

The pine marten is protected in Ireland by national and international legislation. Under the Irish Wildlife Acts it is an offence, except under licence, to capture or kill a pine marten, or to destroy or disturb its breeding or resting places.

Cover image: Pinemarten.ie (Maurice Flynn)

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The Pine marten



The pine marten (Irish name, cat crainn) is native to Ireland and is one of Ireland's rarest mammals. Once common throughout the country, by the 20th century it had become extinct from the majority of the island, surviving only in a few isolated and fragmented populations, mainly in the west. This decline was the result of hunting, loss of habitat and persecution.

By submitting your observation of a pine marten using the form www.pinemarten.ie/report-a-sighting, you will be contributing to the ongoing collection of data on the species.

Following the introduction of legal protection in 1976 the pine marten is gradually recolonizing Ireland and returning to areas where it has not been seen for decades.

The pine marten is related to the Irish stoat, otter and badger and adults are about the size of a domestic cat. They weigh between 1kg and 2.2kg with females being lighter and smaller than the males. They have large feet and ears which are ringed by pale fur and a long bushy tail. Their coat is brown with a large patch of pale coloured fur over the throat and chest.

Pine martens are solitary animals, thus in one patch of ground only one adult male and female will be present. Breeding occurs once a year with two or three kits (young) born in spring. The kits are born blind and hairless and are wholly dependent on their mother for the first 40 days.

Their natural habitats include hollow trees, rabbit burrows, squirrel nests known as dreys, tree roots and rock crevices although they have been known to take up residence in residential buildings.

Pine martens search for possible den sites during the months of November to February although they may not take up residence until late spring. They are excellent climbers and can squeeze through gaps of just 45mm in diameter and will chew small openings to create an access point. They are not overly frightened of humans and are extremely curious, they will not always flee if they are approached.

Their diet is varied and consists of berries, fruits, insects, frogs, birds, small mammals and decaying carcasses.

Although largely nocturnal, pine martens may also be active during the day in the summer months.

The National Parks and Wildlife Service, part of the Department of Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht, provides the legislative and policy framework for the conservation of nature and biodiversity in the Republic of Ireland. It oversees its implementation with particular emphasis on the protection of habitats and species. Thus, the pine marten is protected in Ireland by both national and international legislation.

Under the Irish Wildlife Act it is an offence, except under licence, to capture or kill a pine marten, or to destroy or disturb its resting places, playing a key role in their conservation.

Resources:
National Parks and Wildlife Service & The Vincent Wildlife Trust

Do pine martens enter houses?

Yes. As a result of the scarcity of natural den sites, pine martens may use both inhabited and uninhabited buildings as den sites.

Information on how to prevent pine martens taking up residence in your home is available at www.pinemartens.ie

February to mid-March is an important time to check if your attic is pine marten proof.



PINE MARTENS AND FOWL

A pine marten will gain access through the smallest opening, so be meticulous in securing your property. A fine metal mesh over every conceivable opening is the only way. Your poultry need to be perfectly secure and if they are, you have greatly enhanced your chances of keeping them safe. Pine martens usually only strike at night.



Image pinemartens.ie (Maurice Flynn)

Mayo Heritage

Newsletter



We profile
Captain Gallagher
from Bonniclon,
One of the last robber Captains in Ireland



Cover image: Glass Island near Pontoon where Gallagher had a residence 1817-1818 (*image bbc.com*)

Illustration of Captain Gallagher, also known as Robin Hood (*image: irelandloresandtales.com*)

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Captain Gallagher

Captain Gallagher was one of the last robber captains in Ireland. He was a folk hero who was a champion of the oppressed lower classes. Gallagher and his small group of bandits used surprise and force, to re-appropriate the wealth of the British landlords. Like Robin Hood before them, they robbed the rich and gave it to the poor.

Anthony Gallagher was born in Bonniclon in 1800, and reared by his aunt in Derryronane, near Swinford. As he reached adulthood he and his group began raiding mail coaches, as well as wealthy landowners, and travellers, throughout eastern Mayo. He operated within an extensive area from Bonniclon to Swinford, including Attymass, Lough Talt, and Foxford. Robberies were committed in broad daylight and residences of the gentry were regularly plundered, almost nightly.

He was a notorious figure and his deeds are recalled in folk history. All of the accounts in folklore make reference to his generosity to the poor, and his ability to escape the law of the 'Redcoats'. Some of his famous hideouts were in the Ox mountains near Rookery, in the Ballylyra Woods near to Knock Airport, and he was reputed to have had a residence on Glass Island, close to Pontoon.

There are many legends about the exploits of Captain Gallagher.

One tells of the village of Killasser, where he stood up for dozens of Mayo tenant farmers, who were facing eviction. Gallagher had come across eviction notices while robbing the house of their landlord. Legend has it that he made the landlord eat the eviction notices, whilst pressing a gun to his temple.

On another occasion a woman was coming from the fair in Tubbercurry having sold her last cow in order to pay her rent to the local landlord. Nightfall was approaching as she passed through the Windy Gap near Lough Talt when she spotted a shadow in the distance. As they met, the person spoke and asked her where she was going in such a hurry. She replied that she was trying to reach home before dark in case Captain Gallagher robbed her.

On hearing this the man smiled and gave her the price of the cow and the money with which to pay the rent.

Captain Gallagher was driven by a desire to help the county's impoverished residents. But this also earned him the loyalty of the locals who would warn him of pursuing authorities, and offer him a safe house. Eventually, Gallagher's good luck ended.

In 1818, one story tells, he was hiding in a cabin when he was spotted by a local man, with British loyalties, who tipped off the soldiers hunting him. Soon he was surrounded by 200 British soldiers.

Another story tells that he was captured while he was recovering from an illness. He was given a meal laced with *poitín* and fell asleep. The family put him to bed in the '*cailleach*' beside the fire, tying his arms and legs with flax rope.

DID YOU KNOW?

Gallagher's execution in 1818 was reportedly the last public hanging to take place on the Mall in Castlebar

A message was sent to the Redcoat soldiers in Foxford, and he was captured. After a sham trial he was taken to Castlebar to be hanged.

As he was hanged the rope broke and he fell to the ground, breaking his legs. He was given a glass of wine, shoved on to the trapdoor and hanged.

Gallagher is reputed to have bargained with his captors, that he would lead them to his hidden treasure in Ballylyra Woods, if they freed him. His execution still went ahead, but afterwards the soldiers searched the woods for his loot. Nothing was found, and it is believed to be still buried there, seven feet from the river beside a tree.

Sources:

<https://www.mayo-ireland.ie>

<https://www.bbc.com>

<https://www.advertiser.ie>

Lough Talt, where Gallagher hid out from his captors
(image bbc.com)

North Mayo Heritage Centre Mayo Heritage

Vol.V Issue 31
4th August 2024

YouTube

Newsletter



Artisan Food & Craft Market
10th August 2024
11am – 4pm

North Mayo Heritage Centre

F26 FR94
(Tel. 096 31809)

Why do we salute or wave at
THE MAGPIE?

Cover image: rte.ie

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Saluting the Magpie

*One for sorrow, two for joy,
Three for a girl, four for a boy,
Five for silver, six for gold,
Seven for a story yet to be told.*



Old man salutes the magpie

Magpie swooping season occurs during a magpie's mating period, which tends to fall between August and October each year. While it can seem like it drags on forever when you're dreading your commute and trying your best to avoid feathered projectiles, a magpie will usually only swoop for around six weeks.

Why do people salute, wave at, or flap their arms at magpies?

It is not just physical gestures that are shown to the bird, some people speak to it and ask how it and the family are. Often people bless themselves or raise their hats on seeing one. But why do we do this?

The most intelligent species in the world is believed to be the magpie, part of the crow family. The bird looks black and white but if seen up close in sunlight it reveals a purple-blue colour on the wings and green on the tail. Its name comes from 'mag' meaning to chatter and 'pie' which refers to a bird of black plumage, a hue of mixed colours, who engages in loud chattering.

There is no word in the Irish language for magpie. Instead, these birds are commonly referred to as francagh, which translates as "Frenchman." No one knows exactly why they were given this name.

The magpie is present in superstitions here in Ireland and in Britain, it is considered evil in Europe and the United States, but associated with positivity in China and East Asian countries, where it is a sign of fertility and domestic bliss. Victorians were so superstitious of the bird they nearly hunted it to extinction. So why are there so many superstitions and bad omens associated with the magpie?

At the time of the crucifixion the magpie was the only bird who didn't comfort or mourn Jesus, and this has linked it with bad fortune and evil since then. It was also the only bird not to go into Noah's ark and stayed on top of it chattering, while the earth drowned.

Its evilness is not only limited to religious superstition, the magpie is associated with the devil, and its pied plumage is associated with bad fortune. Magpies are known for stealing shiny objects and have the ability to deceive others.

There are also superstitions around the magpies' eating habits. They are omnivores and eat plants, seeds and dead animals. It is this particular trait of eating dead animals that is said to give it devil's blood, and association with death.

There are references to dried and powdered magpie flesh being used as a treatment for epilepsy and portions of magpie were used to cure melancholy, vertigo and poor eyesight. Eating a magpie's leg would also help someone recover from being bewitched.

To avoid bad luck and bad omens after meeting a magpie people have found various ways of counteracting the encounter.

It is believed that if the bird is shown the utmost respect it will never attach its bad luck to you. The advice is to salute or wave at a magpie to show respect. Some people also believe that greeting the bird also helps fend off bad luck.

Many say on meeting a magpie "Hello, Mr Magpie-how's your wife and all the other little magpies?" or "Hello Jack-how's your brother?"

The superstitions are considered so serious that many people wink when they see a single magpie to believe they saw two. Another method is to flap your arms to imitate a second magpie. Others believe that seeing a crow immediately after a magpie will cancel out the unfortunate effects of seeing the bird. The magpie has a rhyme associated with it, thought to originate from 1780, which has many different versions according to the country. However, the meeting of a single magpie is always negative and brings bad luck, but meet two magpies together and joy and positivity will be yours.

Sources
<https://www.rte.ie>
<https://www.dublinlive.ie>
<https://www.countrylife.co.uk>



Birds on stamps

Birds have featured regularly on Irish stamps. The Eurasian magpie featured on the Irish stamp from 2002. (birdtheme.org)



DID YOU KNOW?

The most intelligent species in the world is believed to be the magpie, a bird who is from the crow family.



North Mayo Heritage Centre Mayo Heritage

Vol.V Issue 32
11th August 2024

YouTube

Newsletter



Jack B. Yeats, **Ireland's first medalist** at the Olympic Games in the wake of the creation of the Irish Free State.

Did you know?

100 YEARS AGO AT
THE PARIS OLYMPICS

At the 1924 Summer Olympics in Paris, Yeats' painting, *The Liffey Swim*, won a silver medal in the arts and culture segment of the Games.

The man who painted Ireland

JACK B. YEATS

Cover image: Hulton Archive/Getty images

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Jack B. Yeats

Jack Butler Yeats (1871-1957) Artist and Olympic Medalist

“No one creates. The artist assembles memories.”

Jack Butler Yeats was an Irish artist and Olympic medalist and also the brother of W.B. Yeats, poet, dramatist and writer.

Jack B. Yeats, was born in London, the youngest child of the artist, John Butler Yeats and Susan Yeats (née Pollexfen). He spent his early years moving with his family between London, Dublin and Sligo as his father struggled to establish himself as an artist.

From 1879 to 1887 he lived in Sligo with his maternal grandparents. He rejoined his family in London in 1887 in order to begin his art training at the South Kensington School of Art and then the Chiswick School of Art. He married fellow student, Mary Cottenham White and in 1897 they settled in the coastal village of Strete, Devon.

Jack began his artistic career in the 1890s as a black and white journalistic illustrator working for various publications. Following his move to Devon, Jack began to focus on working in watercolour, holding his first exhibition of Devon life in watercolour in London in 1917.

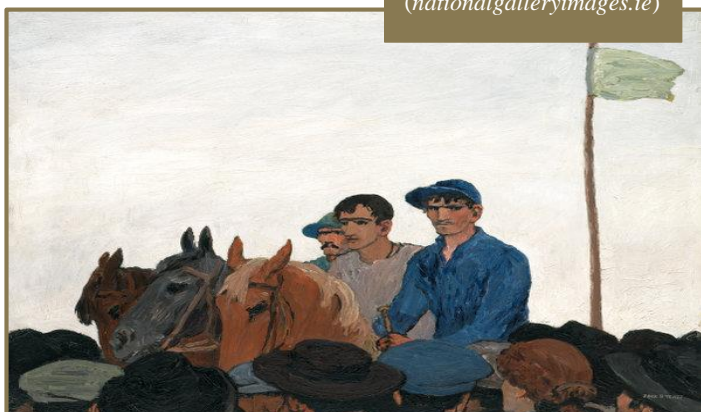


The Liffey Swim, 1923 by Jack B. Yeats which won a silver medal at the Olympic Games in Paris in 1924. Photo © National Gallery of Ireland.

Jack and his wife moved to Ireland in 1910 settling in Greystones, Co. Wicklow until 1917 followed by a move to Dublin where they remained for the rest of their lives.

As one of Ireland’s most important artists, many of his works were inspired by memories of his childhood in Sligo with Irish landscape, music and horses prominent in his paintings.

Before the Start 1915,
- a painting which Yeats entered in the Culture section of the 1924 Olympic Games in Paris (nationalgalleryimages.ie)



A visit to the west of Ireland in 1898 inspired his first solo exhibition, *Sketches of Life in the West of Ireland* and this remained the theme for much of his artistic career.

Jack B. Yeats also holds the distinction of being Ireland’s first medalist at the Olympic Games in the wake of the creation of the Irish Free State. At the 1924 Summer Olympics in Paris, Yeats’ painting, *The Liffey Swim*, won a silver medal in the arts and culture segment of the Games.

The cultural significance of the Liffey Swim in Irish life is underlined by his painting which captured the 1923 race. The painting features spectators watching the race as the swimmers are approaching O’Connell Bridge. The man wearing the brown fedora is thought to be Yeats and the woman in the yellow hat, his wife Cottie.

The broad fluid brushstrokes of that work mark the change in his technique during the 1920s and from that decade his work became more expressive. At the Olympics art was broken down into five categories and featured a medal competition at the Games between 1910 and 1948.

Paintings entered had to be inspired by sport, and Yeats also entered, *Before The Start*, an oil painting of three jockeys before a race began.

Today, Jack B. Yeats’ work is held in numerous national collections including The Irish Museum of Modern Art, The National Gallery of Ireland, Dublin City Gallery, The Hugh Lane, Crawford Art Gallery and The Model, Sligo.

Resources: *Irish Times, Wikipedia, The National Gallery The Irish Museum of Modern Art.*



Front and back of the silver medal awarded to Jack Butler Yeats for *The Liffey Swim* in the Painting Competition, Paris Games 1924 (nationalgallery.ie)

Mayo Heritage

North Mayo Heritage Centre

Vol.V Issue 33

18th August 2024

YouTube

Newsletter



Story of the week:

THE "BALLER" LAVIN

Sprinter Sean Lavan / Baller Lavin (pictured centre) during the Olympic Games at Colombes Stadium in Paris on 9 July 1924 (image: rte.ie)



FREE

HERITAGE WEEK 2024

FREE GENEALOGY CONSULTATIONS with our Researcher, Brendan Walsh at Castlebar Library 23rd August 2024. Time: 11am to 4pm. No appointment necessary.

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The “Baller” Lavan

John Thomas (Sean) Lavan represented Ireland at the 1924 Olympic Games in Paris in the 400 and 200 metre sprint, just missing a place in the final of the latter race.

John Thomas (Sean) Lavan, was born on the 21st December 1898 in Kiltimagh, the eldest of four children born to Michael and Bridget Lavan. He was educated locally at Ballyglass national school and went on to win a scholarship to De La Salle College in Waterford, where he trained as a teacher. He was appointed to his first teaching job in 1919, in Cloongullane national school, near Swinford.

His sporting career began at school where he represented De La Salle at Gaelic football and boxing. He was a member of the Mayo Gaelic football team (1918-1924) winning two Connacht senior championships. He was also an accomplished handball player, where he earned the nickname ‘Baller’ Lavan.

Arguably one of his most noteworthy actions of his career came in Croke Park in 1921 when lining out for Mayo in the All-Ireland final against Dublin.

He was positioned at half-wing forward, where he was seen as Mayo’s most potential threat on the day.

Lavan’s background in athletics came to the fore throughout the game, and one or two runs from him had managed to keep Mayo within three points at half-time.

Lavan continued to attack in the second half, scoring Mayo’s only point and hit the crossbar after another spectacular Mayo attack. It was his style of running at defenders that marked him out from other players. He is credited with introducing the toe-to-hand solo run into that match, where he scored a point that was disallowed. Lavan had just introduced to the game a unique skill that would be legalised and become fundamental to the game in time. In 1923 he entered UCD to study medicine, qualifying in 1929. While there he became a prominent athlete representing the college athletic club from 1923 to ‘28.

He won 15 national athletic championships at 100, 200, and 440 yards, and 120, 220, and 440 hurdles.

He also won a number of intervarsity titles at these distances, in addition to the half mile and discus.

His victories at the National Athletic and Cycling Association included 100, 220, 440, and 880 yards, as well as the long jump.

At the 1924 Olympic Games in Paris he represented Ireland in the 400 and 200 metre sprint, just missing a place in the final of the latter race.

Again in the Olympic Games in Amsterdam in 1928, he was Captain of the Irish team and competed in the 200 and 400 competitions.

Lavan was not just talented in Gaelic football and athletics, in the 1927 intervarsity rugby game against TCD he scored a remarkable try in Lansdowne Road, and in the following year played on the St. Vincent’s Hospital rugby team that won the Dublin hospital cup.

During his time studying at UCD, he won the O’Ferrall medal for surgery in 1929, and he went on to become Lecturer in Anatomy, and later surgeon in Temple Street Hospital.



Sean Lavan also opened a general practice in Terenure and held the post of doctor to the Garda Síochána

He had long believed that sport had the potential to bring peace to the island, and he argued for this when he addressed the INTO conference in 1932. Lavan married a fellow doctor, Constance Cook and they went on to have three children, one son and two daughters. In 1952 he was the Chief Medical Officer to the Irish Olympic team.

In 1996, a commemorative plaque was unveiled to him at his birthplace near the Church of the Holy Family, Corrdarragh, Kiltimagh. Altogether, Lavan had won over 120 medals and in 1997 they were exhibited in Kiltimagh. Sean Lavan died in Dublin on the 5th August 1973.

Sources
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www.mayo-ireland.ie/



The crest from jacket worn by Sean Lavan of Kiltimagh, Athletics competitor on first Irish Olympic Team in 1924. (museumsofmayo.ie)



Commemorative plaque to Sean Lavan in Kiltimagh (kiltimagh.net)



Sean ‘Baller’ Lavan (olympedia.org)

North Mayo Heritage Centre Mayo Heritage

Vol.V Issue 34
25th August 2024

YouTube

Newsletter



The history of HURLING



Cover image depicts Setanta and Cú Chulainn
(playhurling.com)

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The History of Hurling

“Give me o’Lord a hurlers skill, with strength of arm and speed of limb, unseeing eye for the flying ball, and courage to match them whatever befall”. The Hurlers Prayer

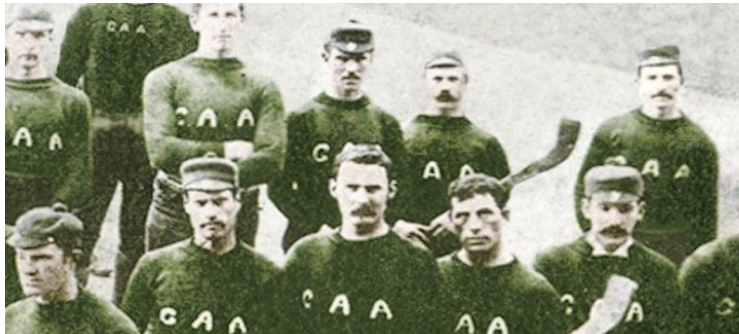
There are references to the game of hurling back to the 7th and 8th century in the Brehon laws which describe various sporting injuries that should be compensated.

One of the most famous accounts of hurling is the story of Setanta who killed a vicious hound belonging to Chulainn with a hurley and sliotar. From then on he became known as Cú Chulainn, or the Hound of Chulainn.

The game of hurling was outlawed by the Normans in the 12th century but regardless of this, the game was played throughout the countryside often with few set rules. One 17th century account describes the games as being played on a plain 300 yards long, with the victorious team being the first to drive the ball through the goal of the opponent.

In its earliest form hurling was played with a stick called a camán which was curved at the end, and a ball made of animal skin and hair.

There have been hair hurling balls found in bogs throughout the country which date back to the 12th century, and an old hurley stick found in a bog in Offaly dated back to the 16th century.



The first All-Ireland final was played in Birr in April 1888 between Meelick in Galway and Thurles in Tipperary (rte.ie)

By the time of the Famine hurling had declined in popularity and was in danger of dying out completely. At that time its strongholds were in Munster, Donegal, and Down.

The 19th century saw a new version of hurling or ‘hurley’ as it was known. It was exclusively played by the upper class and was little like the traditional game. By 1879 there were at least six hurley clubs in Dublin and the Irish Hurley Union was founded in Trinity College. During this period the various forms of the game merged into the recognisable sport of hurling.

The founding of the GAA in 1884 was part of the Gaelic Revival, a cultural movement to protect and preserve the Irish language, literature, and games.

This was also pivotal to the game of hurling developing recognition. Michael Cusack realised the need for common regulations and this inspired much of his thinking in the formation of the GAA. The GAA was formed to support and maintain traditional Irish sports and it offered a platform for arranging contests and matches as well as assistance in standardising the rules of the GAA.

Hurling matches prior to GAA involvement were often played with a wide range of rules and equipment, and this often made it challenging for teams to compete.

By adopting a set of standard regulations a level playing field for all teams was achieved.

The advent of new tools like the sliotar and hurley was a significant advancement in modernising the game, making it faster and more exciting.

Hurling provides people in Ireland with an irreplaceable connection to the past and a sense of identity that goes back to folklore, myths, and legends.

The hurley and sliotar are symbols immediately recognisable as uniquely Irish. Hurling is a strong symbol of identity and pride, celebrated in music, literature, and art. Hurling to some, is a second religion and matches are some of the biggest social events in the country.



Hurleys in the National Museum collection (ouririshheritage.org)

In 2018, hurling received international recognition when it was inscribed by UNESCO on the Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity.

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Pictured is Michael Collins throwing in the ball at the start of a match in Croke Park 1921 (bbc.com)



North Mayo Heritage Centre Mayo Heritage

Newsletter

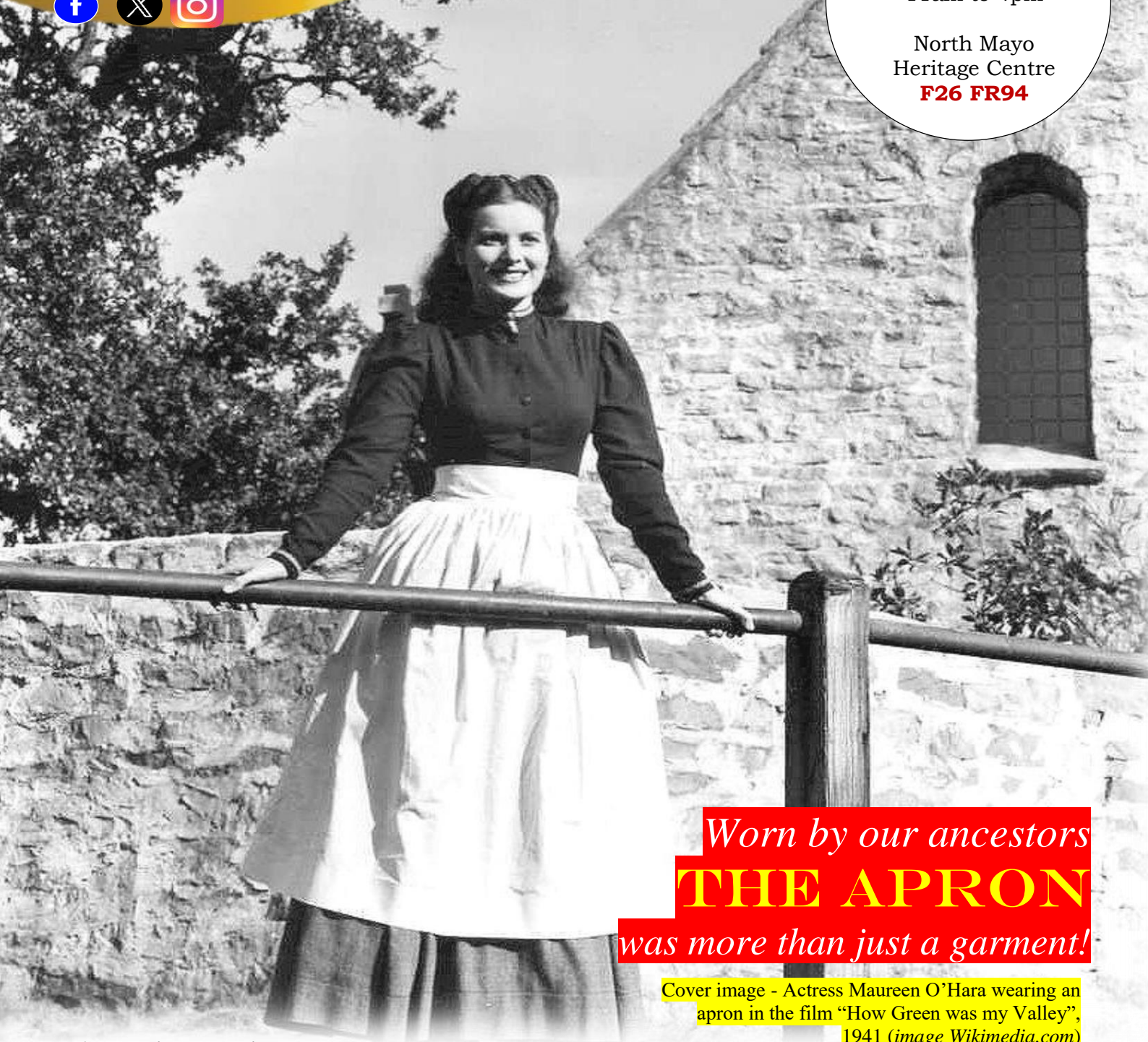
YouTube



Vol.V Issue 35
1st September 2024

**Artisan
Food & Craft Market**
September 14th
11am to 4pm

North Mayo
Heritage Centre
F26 FR94



Worn by our ancestors
THE APRON
was more than just a garment!

Cover image - Actress Maureen O'Hara wearing an apron in the film "How Green was my Valley", 1941 (image Wikimedia.com)

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Tel: 096 31809 www.northmayogenealogy.com Email: northmayo@gmail.com Email: nmhmanager@gmail.com

Did Nora Batty Popularise the Apron?

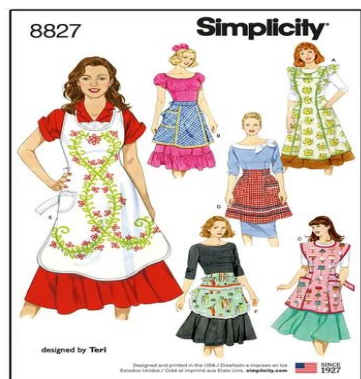
Nora, a fictional character from the BBC series *Last of the Summer Wine* was well-known for her distinctive appearance, particularly her trademark floral-patterned aprons.

Long before this though, the apron had been a staple piece in kitchens throughout Ireland, serving as a practical garment designed to protect a woman's dress ... as she only had a few! The word "apron" originates from the Middle English term "napron," which evolved into "apron" due to a phonetic shift. The apron dates back to ancient civilizations, with evidence suggesting that it was used by Egyptian workers as early as 4,000 B.C. Interestingly, early art works in the 1300s feature ladies in full-length aprons.

In more modern times, aprons were categorized into several types: bib aprons, waist aprons, full aprons and house coats. Bib aprons cover the chest area and below the waist, while waist aprons just hang downwards from the waist. Full wrap-around aprons encompass both the front and back of the wearer and house coats (as the name suggests) resembled a lightweight coat with a collar, sleeves and a front fastening

For many growing up in the west of Ireland, the image of their mother/grandmother in some form of an apron is a staple memory. School books were full of illustrations with mums wearing aprons and the first item made in many sewing classes was an apron.

Interestingly, the use of the apron extends far beyond the culinary realm, making it a versatile accessory with a rich history. For instance, the apron served as a "glove" for removing hot pans from the oven/fire. It was perfect for drying children's tears, providing a hiding place for shy kids, wiping runny noses, washing children's faces or stopping bleeding wounds.



Simplicity Patterns used for making aprons (etsy.com)

Eggs, kindling and turf were brought into the kitchen in an apron. From the garden, it carried all sorts of vegetables and apples. When needed, the old apron could dust in a matter of seconds and a wave of the apron summoned the men in from the fields during meal times.

The apron pockets could hold a multitude of items including handkerchiefs, cigarettes, safety pins for nappies, buttons, or rosary beads.

Babies were wrapped in an apron when being carried and the term "cutting the apron strings" has since been used to signify becoming independent from one's mother.

Many of us reminisce about the ol' apron - Kathleen Walsh (Oughterard) remembers "*fags being hidden in the pocket*" while Dorrie Flaherty (Oughterard) remembers Christmas shopping being carried home in an apron.

The decline of apron-wearing among housewives in Ireland can be attributed to the change in gender roles as more women entered the workforce and pursued careers outside the home. The introduction of less labour-intensive cooking methods, reduced the need for clothing to be protected.

As fashion evolved significantly, aprons became less fashionable and were often viewed as old-fashioned.

Despite their decline, certain occupations such as nurses, butchers, welders, hairdressers and bakers continued to use aprons.

As Ireland has evolved into the modern era, the memory of Grandma's apron endures.



Nora Batty wearing her apron (yorkshirelive.com)

In modern Ireland, it serves as a nostalgic reminder of the past, a connection to our roots, and a symbol of the values that have shaped Irish identity.

Today, whether it's a small child donning the apron to try out a recipe or a local artisan creating new designs, the spirit of the grandmother's apron lives on, binding together the stories of yesterday with the dreams of tomorrow.

SUPERSTITIONS

It has been said that if a woman's apron falls from her body, it foretells bad luck.

Another legend claims an apron worn back to front can bring the wearer good luck.

If an apron string becomes loosened, your true love is thinking of you.

If a girl wets her apron in washing, it is a sign that she will have a drunken husband.



North Mayo Heritage Centre Mayo Heritage

Vol.V Issue 36
8th September 2024

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Ellison Street, Castlebar where O'Malley was born
(weebly.com)

We profile
Ernie O'Malley

Cover image – Ernie O'Malley in earlier years
(image: alchetron.com)

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Ernie O'Malley 1897 - 1957

Ernie O'Malley was born on Ellison Street, Castlebar on the 26th May 1897, the second of eleven children. His father Luke was a clerk for the Crown Solicitor for Co. Mayo, Malachy Kelly. The family belonged to the comfortable Catholic middle class, a class which identified itself with the British administration in Ireland.

His parents would never speak about Irish nationalism to the young Ernie, although his father was a conservative Irish nationalist. The family moved to Dublin in 1906, where his father took up a position with the Congested Districts Board. Ernie went to school at CBS North Richmond Street, and later won a scholarship to study medicine at UCD.



Ernie O'Malley's state funeral in 1957. (*image historyireland.com*)

In Dublin at that time there was great unrest. O'Malley in his autobiography recalled the great lockout of workers in Dublin in 1913, the ceremonial nationalist funerals, the gun running at Howth, the marching and drilling by the Irish Citizen Army, and the outbreak of World War 1. O'Malley's family remained staunchly in favour of British rule and staunchly Catholic. Frank, the older brother, had joined the British army as a cadet. By the time of the Easter Rising in 1916, Ernie was thinking about following him. The turning point for Ernie was the execution of the leaders of the Rising.

He joined the Irish Volunteers as a member of F company, 1st Battalion, Dublin Brigade. The volunteers drilled with broom handles in halls used for teaching Irish language and dance. When he finally received a rifle, O'Malley had to hide it beneath the floorboards of his room, in his parents house. In June 1918, having twice failed his second year university exams, O'Malley committed himself fully to the republican cause. He was initially a volunteer organiser under the instruction of Richard Mulcahy, operating in the northern counties.

Then in August 1918, he was sent to London to buy arms by Michael Collins.

During 1919 he worked as an IRA staff captain attached to GHQ in Dublin, while also training volunteers in Clare, Tipperary, and Dublin.

During the War of Independence, O'Malley was a leading figure in attacks on barracks. He was captured in December 1920, but managed to escape Kilmainham Jail in February 1921, and took command of the IRA's 2nd Southern Division. O'Malley rejected the signing of the Anglo-Irish Treaty.

He was captured in the Four Courts on the 30th June 1922, but again escaped. In November 1922 he was captured and badly wounded by the Irish Free State Army in Dublin.

Imprisoned until July 1924, it was during this imprisonment he was elected as a TD for Dublin North in the 1923 general election. Following his release, he went home to live with his parents, and tried to complete his medical degree at UCD.

Increasingly he began to become interested in travelling and writing. From 1924 until 1926 O'Malley travelled around France, Spain, and Italy. From 1928 to 1935 he travelled in North America. While in New Mexico he began writing on his two autobiographies, '*On Another Man's Wound*', and '*The Singing Flame*'.

O'Malley married Helen Hooker in London in 1935, and from 1938 they settled in Burrishoole Lodge near Newport, where they had three children. This was to be his base until 1954 when he moved to Dublin.

In 1953 O'Malley suffered a heart attack and his later years were scarred by ill health. He died of heart failure on the 25th March 1957.

He was given a state funeral and is buried in the O'Malley plot in Glasnevin cemetery. A sculpture of Manannán Mac Lir, an Irish Sea God, donated by O'Malley's family, stands in the Mall in Castlebar, County Mayo.

Sources

www.rte.ie/history
www.irishtimes.com
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Left: Burrishoole Lodge, Newport where O'Malley lived from 1938-1954 (*buildingsofireland.ie*)

North Mayo Heritage Centre Mayo Heritage

Vol.V Issue 37
15th September 2024

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THE EXTERMINATOR The Third Earl of Lucan



Lawn House, the residence of the Earl in Castlebar

Image: George Bingham, the Third Earl of Lucan
(wikipedia)

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The Exterminator - The Third Earl of Lucan

George Charles Bingham, the third Earl of Lucan, was born in London on the 16th April 1800, the eldest son of Richard, Earl of Lucan and his wife Elizabeth.

He was educated at Westminster School and joined the army. By 1826 he had become lieutenant colonel of the 17th Lancers. He became a Tory MP for Mayo in 1826 and in 1829 he married Anne Brudenell, daughter of the Earl of Cardigan.

Lucan, finding peace-time army life boring, retired on half-pay and in 1837 he moved to Castlebar to take over the family estate. The estate of 60,000 acres was unprofitable but he was determined to change that. He declared that he 'would not breed paupers to pay priests' and fired his popular land agent St. Clair O'Malley so he could begin a systematic clearing of people from the land. In 1842 he summoned O'Malley, who was a fellow magistrate, for poaching, and had a violent argument with him in court, for which he was dismissed from the magistracy.

Furious with the decision he appealed to the House of Lords and was reinstated. He also forced the commander of the army barracks in Castlebar to block up all the windows because they overlooked his demesne. The 3rd Earl was a feared landlord in Mayo and was given the nickname 'the exterminator' by his tenants.



A model of the farmyard - the entrance was around where the old Bacon Factory was located (weebly.com)

One time when it was thought he was in London an effigy of him was burned in Castlebar. The tenants scattered in fear when he rode his horse into the middle of them shouting 'I'll evict the lot of you'.

The Famine gave Lucan an opportunity to evict his tenants on a wholesale basis, and he did this with complete disregard for public opinion. He believed it was necessary to clear land that could not support people, so the people must go.

Lucan claimed he was receiving nothing from his estates, all his rents and a good deal more was being put into the land. Eviction became common on the Earl of Lucan's estates. Thousands of people were evicted from around Ballinrobe where 15,000 acres were cleared.

The destitution caused by the evictions was immense. He cleared villages such as Drumconlon near Castlebar to facilitate grass farms and built sheds from the stones of the tenants houses.

In Aughadrina he built a racecourse following the clearances. In Castlebar in the densely populated area of Staball, (nowadays the Thomas Street area), all the houses were demolished. Several populous villages were cleared of people and farms established in their place. In part of the demolished villages Lucan constructed a dairy farm, with the yard and buildings covering three acres, all built from the stones of peoples' cabins.

The starving tenants in Mayo were in terror and they clung to their land for refuge.

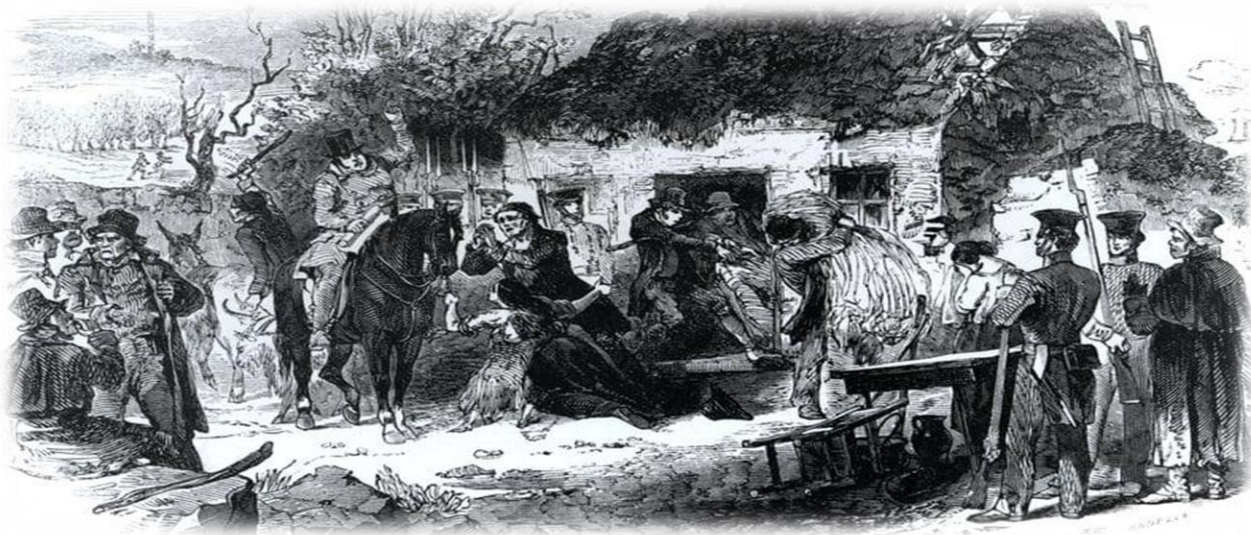
They would often return to the houses they had been evicted from. To stop this Lucan organised crowbar brigades to pull down the houses over the tenant's heads and make them flee the land.

In the House of Lords in 1847 Lucan was attacked for his treatment of tenants in Mayo, claiming that 6000 evictions had been carried out. Lucan reacted angrily saying that he had only sought to improve his Irish estates, and that he spent far more on them than the income from his rents. As Chairman of the board of guardians of the Castlebar Poor Law Union he refused to pay his full poor law rates and insisted that the workhouse be closed down at the height of the Famine.

Lucan served in the Crimean War where he was involved with ordering the Charge of the Light Brigade, which resulted in heavy British casualties. He returned to England where he died in London on 10th November 1888.

When the Third Earl of Lucan died, aged 88 years, he was not a rich man. High living, drinking and gambling had whittled away his vast fortune.

Sources
<https://www.historyireland.com>
<https://www.con-telegraph.ie>
<https://victorianweb.org>



Left: The scene of an eviction 1848 (www.rte.ie)



THE BIANCONI MAIL CAR

We explore how
Charles Bianconi
impacted Co. Mayo.

Image: A Bianconi mail carriage in Galway
around 1880 (*National Library of Ireland*)



The ruins of the Bianconi Inn in Ballymacragh,
Westport Road, Castlebar 2023 (*google.ie*)

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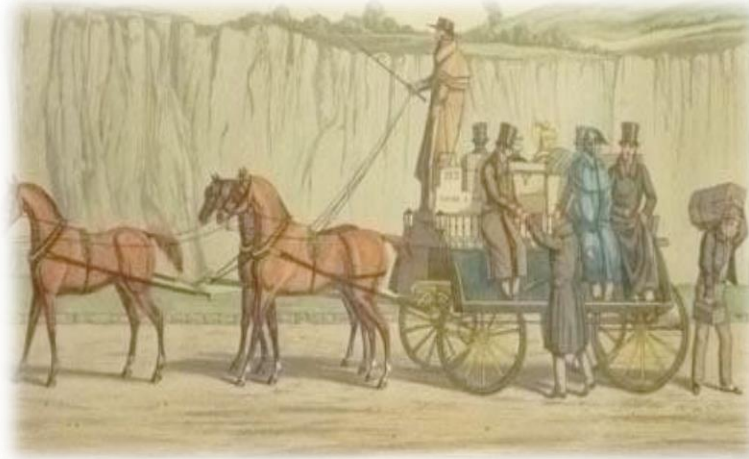
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Charles Bianconi – in Mayo

Carlo Bianconi (later anglicised to Charles) was born in the Lombardy Highlands, Italy, on the 24th September 1786.

The family worked in the silk industry and at the age of sixteen Bianconi's father sent him to England to work as an apprentice.

By 1802 he had moved to Dublin and was employed as an engraver. He moved on to selling engravings, and travelled the country on foot. He would leave Dublin early on Monday mornings and travelled through Munster and Leinster.



Dropping a Passenger from a Bianconi coach. (museum.ie)

Then in 1833 he introduced the 'long car' which allowed him to carry up to twenty passengers with cargo.

His business eventually had 100 vehicles that travelled over 3000 miles daily. These called to 120 towns, and used 40 stations to changeover the horses. To run the network over 1000 horses were used, with larger stations employing up to 89 grooms to care for the animals. In Mayo in 1836 Bianconi established stables with accommodation just outside Castlebar in the townland of Ballymacragh.

The ruins of this fine stone building are still to be seen across from Shaw's garden centre on the Westport Road. The building offered accommodation for horses in the lower part, with rooms for passengers and javeys above.

The building was referred to by locals as the 'Mail Coach Stage', but as with all stopping points on the network it was known as a Bianconi Inn.

Castlebar was to be the centre of Bianconi's transport system in Mayo. One service was the mail coach to Ballina and then onwards to Sligo, a second service went from Westport to Dublin, with a third going from Westport to Tuam. Bianconi extended his Mayo network to include a daily service from Longford to Ballina that ran through Foxford.

He revolutionised movement for Mayo people when in August 1851, he announced an ambitious new route that would take a passenger from Ballina to Dublin in a day.

The two horse coach would leave Ballina at 5.45am every morning. They would travel on to Castlebar, Westport and then Leenane, Letterfrack, and Clifden in time for the mail coach from Galway to Dublin. It would also be in time for the Westport and Castlebar coach to Galway railway station.

In addition to the two horse coach, a four horse coach would depart Westport to Castlebar every morning. When it left Castlebar the coach would pass through Ballinrobe, and Shrule, and make its way to Galway. Capacity on this coach was 15, with 4 passengers inside and 11 outside. Bianconi boasted that by availing of these routes the Mayo traveller could be in Dublin that evening enjoying an early dinner.

By the 1830's railways were coming to Ireland and Bianconi realised that his coaching business would have a limited future. He began buying up shares in railway lines as they were being constructed. The famous 'Bians' continued on into the 1860's but the railways were taking over as the preferred transport method.

Charles Bianconi died in 1875 at the age of 89. He is buried in Cashel, in the family mortuary chapel.

Sources

www.ouririshheritage.org
www.museum.ie
www.historyireland.com



Right: Portrait of Charles Bianconi (askaboutireland.ie)

"The man who put Ireland on Wheels"



The Moores and Moore Hall



The fascinating story of

MOORE HALL

Image: Moore Hall today (castlebar.ie)



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The Moores and Moore Hall

Moore Hall is a magnificent ruin, hidden away on the shores of Lough Carra. It was designed by the architect John Roberts, between 1792 and 1800. It was built for George Moore, a wine merchant, who had made a vast fortune in Spain.

George was a Catholic who had gone to Spain to escape the Penal Laws in Ireland at that time. However, George wanted to retire to Mayo and he sold his Spanish properties, and bought over 12,000 acres of land on the shores of Lough Carra.

He took an oath of allegiance to the Crown, so that he could have tenants on his land to generate an income. George Moore had a certain design in mind when building his mansion. He decided on a location which according to locals was unlucky, because of events which involved the killing of a Druid around 400AD.

Moore Hall was designed in a neo-Classical style. The interior had 35 rooms over three storeys. No expense was spared in the building of it. It featured a fine oak-panelled dining room, an elegant drawing room decorated to neo-classical taste with delicate Italian plasterwork. There was a summer drawing room with large windows overlooking Lough Carra. The house also had a nursery and private chapel, wine cellars, servant's quarters, and a tunnel going from the kitchen to the gardens and farmyard. The Moores had invested in a large library full of rare books, including a manuscript copy of the Annals of the Four Masters.

In their time in Moore Hall the Moore family went on to produce some eminent members who would go on to shape history.



Moore Hall as it originally looked (buildingsofireland.ie)

The house provided employment for many locals, and the family were well liked in the area. However ill-luck seemed to follow them as, after the house was built, George Moore the founder died in 1779 at the age of 70 having suffered a stroke His son John was to die a year later.

Many will associate Moore Hall with **John Moore**, the first President of Connacht. He had joined General Humbert's troops who came ashore in Killala in 1798, a rebellion later crushed by the British.

John was sentenced to death, which was later reduced to deportation. While awaiting deportation he died due to having been maltreated. His burial place in Waterford was only discovered in 1960, and he was reinterred in the Mall in Castlebar with a state military funeral.

Right: An aerial view of Moore Hall (suzannewinterly.com)

Other Moore family members were **George Henry Moore** who had used his winnings from horses to feed his tenants with corn and supply cows during the Famine.

Maurice George Moore was a statesman and humanitarian, who went on to become the first envoy to South Africa. **George Augustus Moore** was a well-known novelist and writer who mixed with Yeats, Wilde, and Lady Gregory.

On the evening of the 1st February 1923, during the Irish Civil War, George Augustus was in the house when armed men burst in and demanded the keys. He later wrote of staying up all night hoping to save some of the library. At 4 o'clock he heard four loud explosions and by five the whole house was in flames. The intense heat of the fire destroyed Moore Hall and left it in the roofless ruin we see today. The Moores received £7000 compensation from the Free State government, and later went on to sell a large part of the estate to the Irish Land Commission.

Moore Hall is now a ruin sitting in the middle of a conifer forest planted after the house was abandoned. The area is now a protected habitat for a rare species of bat, the Lesser Horseshoe Bat. For visitors there are lovely walks in the woods, or by the shores of Lough Carra. The classical beauty of the ruin can still be enjoyed from the clearing that surrounds the building.

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North Mayo Heritage Centre Mayo Heritage Newsletter

Vol.V Issue 40
6th October 2024

YouTube



Christmas Markets

North Mayo Heritage Centre
14th & 15th December

Seán na Sagart The Priest Hunter



Seán na Sagart, the 'priest hunter' is buried at Ballintubber Abbey. Pictured is his grave with a tree growing through it, splitting it in two.

*Learn more about
him on page 2*

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Seán na Sagart – John of the Priest (1690-1726)

Penal laws were introduced into Ireland to establish the economic, social and political supremacy of Protestantism over the Catholic majority.

The laws hoped to end Catholicism and sought to banish bishops and clergy, and to ensure that no new priests were allowed to enter the country. Despite the harshness of these laws the majority of the population remained Catholic, and Mass was still celebrated at secret locations such as Mass Rocks. While Mass was being said, watchers kept a look out for soldiers, and for the widely hated priest-catchers.

John Mallowney was born in Derrew, near Ballyheane in 1690. He grew up with a love of horse stealing, and heavy drinking. In 1715 he came before the court in Castlebar on charges of horse stealing, for which he was almost certain to hang. However, his low character was perfect for the role of a priest-hunter and Bingham, the Sheriff of Mayo, struck a deal with him. His freedom for an annual 'rent' - the head of a priest. It was not long before Mallowney became known as Seán na Sagart or John of the Priests.

Priest hunters operated in a similar way to bounty hunters, with bishops worth £100, priests £20, and a monk £10 when caught. These men would be executed when caught, if they did not pledge allegiance to the Crown. The hunters were considered the lowest of human form, and it was not unusual for a mob of Catholics to chase them through the streets and attack them.



Seán na Sagart on the lookout for priests (amayodruuidblogspot.com)

Sean had a reputation as an expert priest hunter. Every member of the clergy he killed, he cut off their heads and brought them to Bingham who would give them back. The Schools Folklore Collection tells of Seán then throwing these heads into a lake. The lake was called Lochán na gCeann, reputed to be in Aille, near Aughagower. By 1726 priest hunting was in decline in some parts of the country but Seán still worked with a passion.

Despite his efforts he couldn't locate two priests in Mayo. He resorted to trickery to catch them.

He murdered with steady success until he had killed all but two of the area priests.

Right: Ballintubber Abbey where Seán na Sagart is buried (askaboutireland.ie)

He went to the home of his sister, Nancy Loughnan, a widow and devout Catholic and told her he was dying. He wanted to confess his sins before his death, and a priest was sent for.

Father Kilger arrived at the house in disguise. As he knelt down beside Seán to absolve his sins, Seán jumped up and plunged a knife into his neck. Seán knew that the priest's nephew, Friar Bourke, would be at the funeral for Father Kilger. He was there, in disguise and acting as a pall-bearer.

As the funeral procession commenced, Seán jumped out from behind a tree and grabbed hold of the friar. He shouted "*tá mo chíos íochta agam*" - my rent is paid, meaning the bounty he would receive. The friar however was a match for Seán, and managed to break free and run off. Seán pursued him and eventually caught up near woodland in Partry, where a confrontation took place. Friar Bourke wounded Seán with his own knife, and he was then fatally stabbed by John McCann, who had followed the two men.

Seán na Sagart was buried in Ballintubber Abbey. However, furious locals dug him up and threw his body into the nearby Lough Carra. Friar Bourke, who Seán had tried to kill, ordered that he be reinterred in Ballintubber, although in unconsecrated ground, facing north so he would never see the sun again. An ash tree later grew out of his grave splitting it in half.

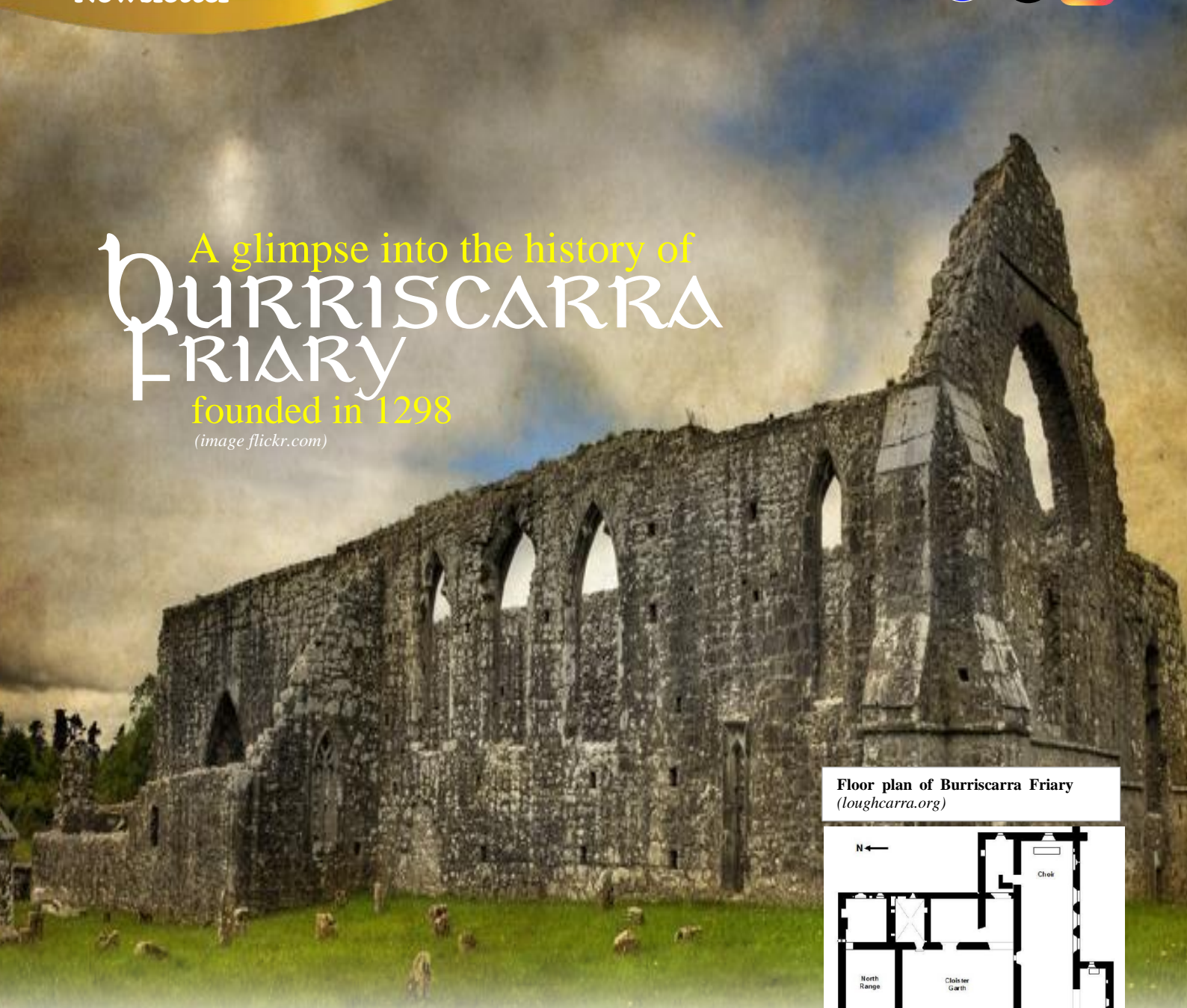
The tree can still be seen in the grounds of Ballintubber Abbey, known as the Seán na Sagart tree.

Sources:
ballintubberabbey.ie
ronangearoid.blogspot.com
cpht.ie
duchas.ie

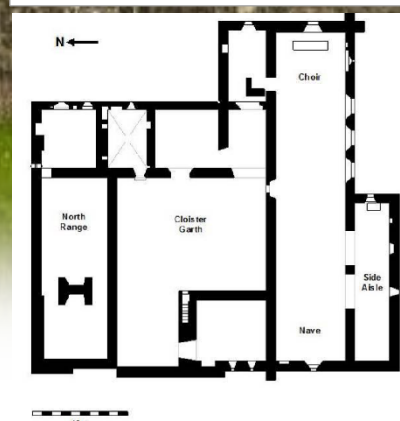




A glimpse into the history of
BURRISCARRA
FRIARY
founded in 1298
(image flickr.com)



Floor plan of Burriscarra Friary
(loughcarra.org)



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BURRISCARRA FRIARY

Close to the shores of Lough Carra are the remains of Burriscarra Friary, founded in 1298 by Adam De Staunton for the Carmelite order.

The De Stauntons were Anglo-Norman barons who hailed from Stanton in Warwickshire, England.

De Staunton had been given permission by the Red Earl of Ulster, Richard Óg de Burgo to also build a fortification at Castlecarra, which stood on the north-eastern shore of Lough Carra. By the early 15th century the friary had lain abandoned by the Carmelite order for over 30 years and was in ruins.

In 1413 the deserted friary was handed over to the Augustinian friars of Ballinrobe, who had then established the first Augustinian house in Connacht in the 14th century.

The transfer was finalised by Papal decree from Pope Gregory XII, and specified that the transfer was with the consent of the Archbishop of Tuam, and Henry the rector of the parish church of St. Mary and the Holy Cross, which was possibly the medieval church located near the friary.



The Sedilia in the friary
(image loughcarra.org)



The interior of Burriscarra Friary (image Tom Gillespie)

The occupation of the friary by the Augustinians coincided with a second phase of expansion of the mendicant orders in late medieval Ireland. The transfer was not without controversy.

A dispute arose between the Carmelites and Augustinians in 1438 with regard to the occupation of the friary, a decision made in the dispute went the way of the Augustinians and they remained in possession of the friary until it was suppressed, the date of which is not recorded.

The friary was later granted to John King of Dublin in 1607, and then to Sir Henry Lynch in the reign of King Charles the Second. Henry was a lawyer and was appointed Recorder of Galway when the Catholic Corporation was restored by King James the Second in 1686.

In 1910 the 11th baronet, Sir Henry Lynch Blosse sold the neglected Castlecarra and Burriscarra Friary to the Congested Districts Board, ending 250 years of Lynch ownership.

**THE REMAINS OF BURRISCARRA ARE AMONGST
THE MOST EXTENSIVE OF THE AUGUSTINIAN
ORDER IN IRELAND.**

The friary is built in the late Irish Gothic style, incorporating the use of pointed and round arches, in addition to random schemes of ornamentation.

The church of the friary has two sections, the nave and the choir are combined to form a single hall, and adjoining the south wall is a long narrow side aisle. The west doorway of the friary was the main entrance to the church for members of the laity attending mass.

Friary churches were orientated eastwards to face Jerusalem and the rising sun.

This allowed morning light to flood in the large east windows and brighten the choir where the friars worshipped. The side of the friary was entered by means of twin arches which separate the nave. It is thought that this segment of the friary may well have served as a chapel.

Inside, typical features of a mendicant church can be seen. A sedilia, where the clergy sat during mass, features a hood moulding with carved heads at each end which may represent patrons of the church. Also to be seen is a piscina, used for washing sacramental vessels, topped by a pointed arch which rests on two columns. Some parts of the friar's domestic quarters survive which give a glimpse into the friar's everyday life, where they worked, ate and slept. In 1962 the Office of Public Works carried out a conservation project on the friary.

Sources:
<http://monastic.ie>
<https://loughcarra.org>
<https://www.mayo.ie>

A brief history of
Castlebar
Gaol

Image: Castlebar Gaol with
the hanging window in the
centre (nli.ie)



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CASTLEBAR GAOL



Castlebar has had three main prisons, the first was near Egan's jewellers at the junction of Castle Street, the second built in 1785 was on the Mall where the Motor Tax Office is - this had a tunnel running to the courthouse across the road. And the most recent of the prisons was on the Westport Road, where Mayo University Hospital is today.

Throughout the 1820's the prison on the Mall was overcrowded, it was in a state of disrepair letting in rain and described by prison inspectors as the worst prison in Ireland. A tendering process for the construction of a new gaol was put in place and won by the firm, Clarkes, that had recently built the Military Barracks in Castlebar. They had tendered a bid of £18,000 to construct the gaol, the final figure was £24,723.

The building of the gaol began in 1830 and it took five years to complete. The entrance, opposite the Travellers Friend Hotel, was a limestone building with four towers and heavy double gates. It also included a large window to the room where hangings took place. Lord Lucan, who had sold the land for the prison hung a sign outside it which read 'Outside Beware, Within Amend'.

The gaol had an unusual design with the three storey Governor's house in the middle of a circle of prison units.



The gaol replaced an older prison at this site now the motor tax office (irelandxo.com)



Plaque on the last remaining section of Castlebar gaol (visitcastlebar.ie)

Six separate buildings radiated out from the house, four of these were male prisoner buildings, and two service units. Separate from this was a women's and children's area which had three prison buildings, and the female warden's house. Surrounding all of this were twenty-foot walls. The capacity of the gaol was 180, with 98 male single cells, 20 female, and several double cells.

Also contained inside were two units of three solitary cells, along with a treadmill for raising water from a well, usually used as a punishment tool, and a stone breaking yard. Each prison cell measured 4 foot 6 inches wide and 14 foot long. All were well ventilated. There was a peer-hole in each door. Each cell contained a bed of bare planks - with no pillow, a small wooden table, a form shaped stool, a wooden salt cellar and a horn spoon.

The staff of the gaol included the governor, the deputy governor, matron, assistant matron, visiting surgeon, nurse, gate porter, guards and three chaplains. The first governor of the gaol was Governor Rodgers, who along with his staff had transferred the prisoners from the Mall. The historian, Michael O'Connor, tells of staff refusing to wear uniforms and bringing their families to live in the gaol. Prison inspectors eventually tired of the situation and decided to replace the staff. When they arrived at the gaol, staff wouldn't let them in, and the police were called to attack the gaol and free it from the staff.

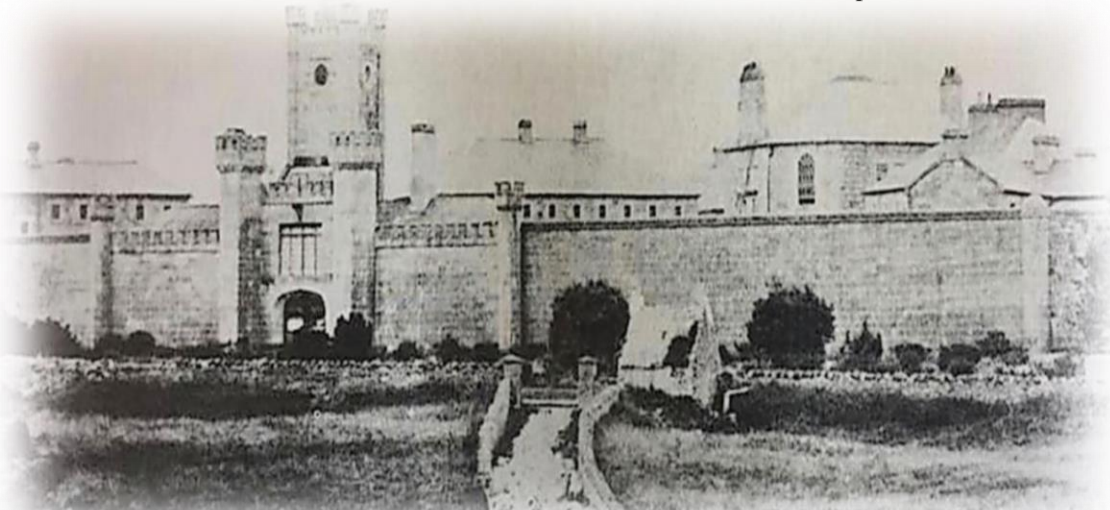
After 1913 there was a call to close the gaol in Castlebar, and prisoners were transferred to Sligo. In 1919, at the start of the War of Independence, the RIC took over the building. By 1921 the Black and Tans occupied the gaol. In 1922 anti-Treaty forces took control of the gaol and started to imprison pro-Treaty and Free State Army men. In July that year the National Army moved against the prison and the anti-Treaty forces abandoned it and set it alight. The army put out the fire and used it as a prison for IRA members.

By 1924 the gaol was in extreme decline and being used by Mayo County Council as a machinery store. In 1929 the building was handed over to the council. It was converted into a site for the county hospital. Demolition began on the gaol in 1932 and in 1933 the first stone of the new hospital was laid.

Sources:

- Con-telegraph.ie
- Dr. Michael O'Connor, The Prisons of Castlebar Walk, May 2024
- Castlebar.ie

Left: Another view of the gaol (con-telegraph.ie)





We recall the
The Doolough
Tragedy
of 1849

**Delphi Lodge was at the
centre of the tragedy in 1849**

Here it is pictured in modern times, 1995
(image rte.ie)

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The Doolough Tragedy



The Doolough valley which winds between the Mweelrea Mountains and the Sheeffry Hills, is in a scenic corner of Co. Mayo, where unspoiled scenery combines with a raw, isolated landscape. This beautiful area is forever remembered for an event that happened in March 1849.

Two officials of the Westport Poor Law Union arrived in Louisburgh to inspect people in receipt of 'outdoor relief', (for those who didn't want to enter a workhouse), to verify that they should still continue to receive it. Similar inspections were taking place throughout the county to ensure that the relieving officers books were up to date, and to guard against abuse of the outdoor relief system.

People gathered in Louisburgh on the day, as they were ordered, and were met by two officials. Francis Hogreve, a vice guardian of the union, and Captain JM Primrose, the Poor Law Inspector. The inspection never happened, for reasons never satisfactorily explained. The two officials then left Louisburgh for Delphi Lodge, some 12 miles away, where they were to spend the night.

The relieving officer in Louisburgh, Michael Carroll, then ordered the people gathered to follow on to Delphi. The crowd was told to present themselves at Delphi Lodge at 7am the following morning, if they wished to continue receiving relief.

Carroll would later say that he had been instructed by Primrose and Hogreve to move the people. They maintained that they had not instructed him to do so.

The only hope for survival for the starving people that had travelled to Louisburgh was to remain on the relief list. Without their weekly food rations they faced imminent death. And so, in the cold and wet weather, a group of barefoot, poorly dressed 'living skeletons' of men, women, and children were forced to make their way on foot to Delphi.

The inspection took place on the following day, the 31st March 1849. After the inspection people were left to make their way back home, with no food or water having been offered. The next morning five bodies were found lying on the roadside between Delphi and Louisburgh.

A letter written to the 'Mayo Constitution' newspaper, signed 'A Ratepayer', in April, reported that the bodies of seven people, including women and children were discovered on the roadside. It later transpired that nine or ten others, who had left for home never returned.



Above: Part of the road that winds through the Doolough Valley (rte.ie)



Left: The Famine Memorial in Doolough (irishfaminememorials.com)

A number of deaths also occurred soon afterwards, among those who had succeeded in returning home. The letter writer went on to blame Michael Carroll, the relief officer, for the deaths of the people. It was claimed that the relief books in Louisburgh were not up to date, and that was why the inspection had not taken place.

The editor of the 'Mayo Constitution' laid the blame firmly with the two officials who had gone on to Delphi and not conducted the inspection. He called for a public inquiry into the tragedy. Following a post mortem on two of the bodies and a two-day inquest, the jury returned a verdict of death from 'starvation and cold' for all of the victims.

Later local priest, Rev. Thomas O'Dowd provided coffins to ensure that the bodies were given a proper burial.

After the names of six of the dead were published, the now enraged editor, again called for a public inquiry. However, there is no evidence of an inquiry ever taking place.

The Westport Union, just like the county at the time, was struggling to cope with an increasing death rate from disease and starvation among the poor of the area.

Sources
www.rte.ie/history
<https://en.wikipedia.org/>
www.theirishroadtrip.com

Superstitions



When it comes to weird and wonderful superstitions, here in Ireland, we have plenty of them. We take a look at some of the most common.

- Breaking a mirror - the ancient Romans believed that when you stared into a looking glass you were looking at your soul, so breaking a mirror was detrimental to your soul.
- Shoes on the table - this dates back to a tradition in mining villages in England that when a miner died his shoes/boots were displayed on a table.
- 'Bless You' when someone sneezes - the custom originated in the 6th century with the theory that sneezing was the first symptom of plague, so people would say a blessing to ward off the disease.
- Horseshoes - the iron composition was believed to ward off evil spirits, especially the fairies and hence was considered lucky.
- Black cats - they are associated with witches so a black cat crossing your path often meant a witch was near.
- The Number 13 - some attribute the number 13 as being unlucky as Judas was the 13th guest to arrive at the Last Supper. Meanwhile, ancient Norse lore holds that evil and turmoil were first introduced to the world by the appearance of the evil God Loki, who was the 13th guest at a Norse feast for the Gods.





Inishkea Islands

The islands, now uninhabited, serve as a tourist destination, but boast a rich and fascinating history.

Images – Remnants of a deserted house on the Inishkea Islands (northmayo.ie) and day tourists visiting the island (independent.ie)

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The Inishkea (Inis Gé) Islands

A few days ago marked the sombre anniversary of a tragic maritime disaster that unfolded off the rugged Inishkea Islands, where, on October 28, 1927, a fishing tragedy claimed the lives of several local men. The echoes of their loss still resonate in the hearts of the local community. Today, the Inishkea Islands are uninhabited and serve as a day-trip tourist destination as they boast a rich and fascinating history.

The low lying, exposed, Inishkea Islands are off the coast of the Belmullet peninsula. Thought to have been named after Saint Kea who lived there, there are two main islands, Inishkea North and Inishkea South. The islands were populated until 1932 and the remains of two villages can still be seen.

The earliest evidence of island settlement goes back at least 500 years, and the islands contain archaeological sites from the Neolithic age and several early Christian monastic sites. During the early Christian era Saint Brendan and Saint Columba founded monasteries there and the remains of these settlements can still be seen. An early Christian monastery flourished on Inishkea North between the 6th and 10th centuries. On the south-west of the island there are the remains of a church dedicated to St. Columba.

On the north-east there are 3 large mounds, known locally as the Baileys – the Bailey Mór, Bailey Beag and Bailey Dóighte, meaning big, small and burnt. There are also a number of megalithic tombs built from 3500 to 2000 BC. On Inishkea South there are cross-slabs and pillars.

One, to the north of the harbour, is a stone with a cross inscribed on it, located at the centre of two circles of stones. It is believed to be a Pre-Christian monument 'Christianised' at a later date.

At the time of Griffith's Valuation in 1855 there were 18 families living on the north island and 35 families on the south island.

Potatoes were grown in lazy beds across the islands wherever there was enough soil to sow them. It is thought that the Famine did not affect the islands as much as the mainland due to the prevailing winds keeping the blight away.

Many of the islanders lived mainly by fishing and the sale of kelp. During the lobster season fishermen lived in primitive huts for up to two months, using homemade lobster pots and fishing from currachs. The lobsters were sold for five shillings a dozen in Belmullet, from where they were sent to Ballina, and also in Blacksod from where they were sent to Achill.

In 1908 a whaling station was established which lasted until 1922. It was said that about 50 whales were caught each year.

On the 28th October 1927 ten fishermen from the island drowned. It had been a calm, wet day and when the 30 currachs went out after dark on their usual fishing trip, they ignored the low pressure shown on the barometer. They were only about an hour into the trip when a hurricane came out of the night and tossed their boats around. Eight men from the south island and two from the north island died.

There would have been more casualties but with uncanny instinct some islanders sensed the bad weather and turned for home. After the drowning disaster a national fund was established and nearly £40,000 was collected to give a grant to the bereaved families.

However, the islanders now looked towards the mainland as being safer and a letter was sent to the Land Commission, signed by the islanders, asking for holdings on the mainland close to their fishing grounds.

In the early 1930's the families of both islands were brought to the mainland by the Land Commission. Most were settled in Glosh and Surgeview, Belmullet, on 400 acres bought by the Land Commission from R.J. Reilly of Crossmolina.

The islands were left to the donkeys and the sheep, the birds and the seals, and in the summer the day-trippers who visit. The islands are home to rare birds such as the Little Tern and Dunlin. Barnacle Geese winter there from October to April. The islands low-lying coasts are important sites for the Atlantic Grey Seal and about a third of the national population live there.

Nowadays, boat tours operate several times daily from Blacksod pier ferrying passengers to the island for day trips during the Summer months.

www.Irishislands.info
<https://en.wikipedia.org>
<https://www.ouririshheritage.org>
www.lifeonmachair.ie



Currach at Inis Gé Thuaidh (duchas.ie C021.03.00064)

PAT 'RUA' REILLY

Pat 'Rua' Reilly was, up until his death in 2008, the last living survivor of the terrible fishing tragedy of the night of October 28, 1927. Among those lost were two of his own brothers. Pat was relocated after the tragedy to Glenlara near Erris Head.

(image themayonews.ie)



Memorial of the Inishkea drownings at Faulmore Graveyard (image goldenlangan.com)

DID YOU KNOW?

The ruins of St. Colmcille's Church are located on Inishkea North. St. Colmcille is one of Ireland's three patron saints. The other two being St. Brigid and St. Patrick. Colmcille came to Inishkea North and founded the church there in the 7th century.

One of the beautiful beaches in Inishkea North (image: Anthony Hickey)



The Congested Districts Board

'helping people to help themselves'



Detached four-bay single-storey lobby entry Congested Districts Board or Irish Land Commission house, post-1922
(www.buildingsofireland.ie)

This house was erected as one of a cluster on a site obtained (1920) from the estate of Thomas Francis O'Reilly (1852-1936) of Carn House, in the environs of Aughleam on the Mullet peninsula.

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The Congested Districts Board

The Famine of the 1840`s had changed Ireland, and the system of land ownership was at the forefront of politics. The Land League, founded by Michael Davitt, fought for the 3F`s, fair rent, free sale and fixity of tenure.



Members of the Congested Districts Board receiving directions from a local woman (image: cso.ie)

In 1891 the Chief Secretary for Ireland, Arthur Balfour, established the Congested Districts Board. The Board classed districts along the western seaboard as ‘congested districts’ if their valuation per head of population did not exceed £1 10s. Its aim was ‘to alleviate poverty and congested living conditions in the west and parts of the northwest of Ireland’.

The Board sought to combine small holdings into larger economical farms through land purchase from landlords, from amalgamating many smaller, adjoining plots into one, and through ‘migration’ from congested areas in the west, to farms in Meath. One of its aims was to improve farming methods and Irish livestock. It did this by teaching tenants about modern farming methods such as crop rotation and fertilisation, the sale of seed potatoes and seed oats and introducing new breeds into the native livestock population. In 1893, over 18 congested districts were identified containing some 893,480 acres.

Before the CDB could offer any assistance a survey of the congested areas was carried out. The areas selected to survey were Achill, Belmullet, and Kiltimagh. In 1892, Henry Doran wrote a report on the Kiltimagh area. He found that ‘only potatoes, oats and some cabbage is grown and that the land is badly cultivated’. He also examined the livestock and advised that they needed improved breeding. Many men from the area travelled to England as migratory labourers each year, and they saved an average of £8 from working. Many were forced to do this to pay their rent.

The report also noted that most people were in debt to shopkeepers and banks, but this was usually paid off when the labourer returned home from England. The Congested Districts Board’s aims of alleviating poverty and helping the congested areas, were achieved in different ways throughout Mayo.



The old type of dwelling



The new houses (images reddit.com)

The Inspectors recommended that the areas would only improve by ‘helping people to help themselves’ Firstly, they had to purchase land so they could ‘migrate’ people from the congested areas to better quality farms.

Among the landed estates sold in that period were the following:

The Port Royal estate around Ballinrobe, bought for £10,500, the Leeth estate in Kiltimagh, bought for £2,100, the Dillon estate of 87,000 acres in Mayo, bought in 1899, parts of the Lucan estate in Castlebar, and the Faulkner estate in Pheasant Hill and Cloonkeen.

Free potato seed and artificial manures were provided. Demonstrations were provided on spraying potatoes with sulphate of copper and lime to prevent blight, new breeds of livestock were introduced, and farmers were aided and advised in improving wet or rocky land.

The drainage and reclaiming of portions of land was encouraged to make the holdings more profitable.

The CDB also organised horse and agricultural shows in Westport, Ballina, Achill and Belmullet to showcase new breeds, new farming methods and to encourage competition. One of the achievements of the Board was the setting up of Parish Committee Schemes, sponsored by Fr. Denis O’Hara from Kiltimagh.

These were set up to induce tenants to make improvements in their holdings, dwellings and surroundings. Grants and small money prizes were provided for carrying out approved improvements, that had been suggested by the board.

Another legacy of the C.D.B. was the Co-Operative movement which was founded by Sir Horace Plunkett who had been shocked by his experiences working as a member of the first Board.

The Congested Districts Board continued their work until 1923 when it was taken over by the Irish Land Commission, by the time it was dissolved it had purchased over two million acres in Ireland from landlords.

These estates were ‘striped’ and developed into smaller holdings of about 25 acres for the new occupiers. A loan was provided to purchase the farm.

The Board found that people were unaccustomed to farming 20 plus acres, and education in land management needed to be provided, so instructors were sent to teach people new methods.

Sources
<https://athlonehistory.ie>
<https://www.jstor.org>

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<https://athlonehistory.ie>
<https://www.jstor.org>

Mayo Heritage

Newsletter

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CHRISTMAS MARKETS

SAVE THE DATE

14th & 15th Dec '24



A towering figure in the history of the Catholic Church

ARCHBISHOP JOHN MacHALE

We delve into the LIFE AND LEGACIES of this great man.

Image: Statue of Archbishop John MacHale at Tuam Cathedral (image:visitgalway.ie)

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The North Mayo Heritage Centre

Archbishop John MacHale

'The Lion of the West'

This month marks the 143rd anniversary of the death of Archbishop John MacHale, a towering figure in the history of the Catholic Church in Ireland and a dedicated champion for social justice. MacHale's fascinating journey from a humble parish priest to the Archbishop of Tuam not only shaped the religious landscape of Ireland but also left an indelible mark on the communities he served.

John MacHale was born in Tubbernavine, near Lahardane, on the 6th March 1789. His parents were Patrick MacHale and Mary (Mulkieran) and their house often served as a wayside inn on the road between Castlebar and Sligo. The MacHale children grew up speaking both Irish and English, and John started his education at the age of five in a hedge school.

During his childhood he was influenced by three important events. Firstly, the 1798 Rebellion, secondly the landing of French troops in Killala, and thirdly the execution of Fr. Andrew Conroy, a local priest, and a family friend who had in fact baptised him.

MacHale studied Irish History after school, and as he was destined for the priesthood, he was sent to a school in Castlebar to learn Latin, Greek and English grammar. By the age of 16 he had received a bursarship to study at St. Patrick's College, Maynooth. MacHale was among the first Irish bishops since the Reformation to have been educated solely in Ireland.

After seven years of study, he was appointed lecturer in theology in 1814, and by the end of that year he was ordained a priest. He continued to lecture in Maynooth until 1820 when he was nominated professor of theology.

In 1825 he was appointed to assist the ageing Bishop of Killala as a coadjutor bishop, and during this time he initiated the building of St. Muredach's Cathedral in Ballina.

He denounced government policy that schools should be run on a mixed-faith basis, and gave full support to the Catholic hierarchy's policy that Irish primary schools for Catholic children, should be run by Catholics.



The birthplace of John MacHale in Tubbernavine with the memorial plaque on the gable (images: castlebar.ie)

He helped Daniel O'Connell with his campaigning, and took a prominent part in the question of Catholic Emancipation, and denounced the severity of the Penal Laws which had branded Catholics as inferior.

During the 1830's MacHale wrote to Earl Grey, the Prime Minister, describing the distress of starvation and fever in Connacht, condemning the tithes paid to the Protestant church, criticising the greedy landlords and their high rents, and the prices they were charging their tenants for seed potatoes. No attention was paid by the government to these letters and MacHale was ignored.

In 1834, when Oliver Kelly, the Archbishop of Tuam died, MacHale was one of three candidates selected for the role.

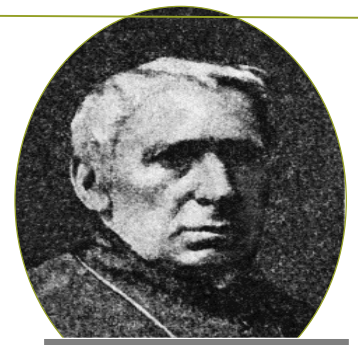
The government was against him becoming Archbishop and sent agents to Rome to persuade the Pope not to appoint him. MacHale was duly appointed Archbishop of Tuam.



The Famine of the 1840's affected MacHale's diocese more than most, and at first, he preached that this was God's way of punishing his flock for their sins.

By 1846 he was appealing to Lord John Russell, the Prime Minister, for help for the starving people. Appeals for food were sent all over Europe and America, and MacHale was involved in the collection and distribution of aid.

As Archbishop, MacHale gave support to the Fenian movement, and refused to ask the Pope to condemn the Fenians, as many other bishops had. He also supported tenants' rights and eventual land ownership, and gave support to Michael Davitt's policy of the 3F's during the land wars.



Archbishop John MacHale (image: irishcentral.com)

MacHale had a great love of the Irish language and he preached a sermon in Irish every Sunday in his cathedral. His last sermon in Irish was preached in April 1881, and just seven months later on the 7th November 1881 MacHale died, at the age of 90. He had been Archbishop of Tuam for 47 years. Mourned by thousands of people at his funeral in Tuam Cathedral, he was buried in a vault there, under the High Altar.

In his honour, both MacHale Park and MacHale Road in Castlebar were named after him. In Tuam he is honoured with MacHale College.

In his birthplace in Lahardane, the local GAA club is named Lahardane MacHales in his honour, and in Galway, the Dunmore MacHales club is named after him.

Sources
<https://en.wikipedia.org>
<https://www.catholicireland.net>
<https://www.con-telegraph.ie>



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A MANAGER

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nmhcrecruitment@gmail.com

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The SS Crete Boom

BALLINA'S CONCRETE SHIP

Image: (northmayo.ie)

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Ballina's Concrete Ship

The SS Crete Boom

In Ballina, between the Quay and Belleek Woods there lies a very unusual feature, that of the concrete SS Crete Boom, an old concrete tugboat lying in the River Moy.

Few people will remember when it arrived in the town but many townspeople will have memories of swimming and diving off the hulk in years gone by. Unlike other shipwrecks such as the MV Plassy on Inis Oirr (think of the opening credits of Fr. Ted), the SS Crete Boom was constructed of concrete for its main body.

The SS Crete Boom was part of a fleet of cargo ships designed to transport iron ore from Spain to Britain during World War 1. Given the shortage of steel in Britain as a consequence of the war, a new method of building these ships and boats was needed. It was decided that a concrete fleet of ships would be viable, and an order was placed for 154 units, 24 of them tugboats, at a cost of £4 million.

Production had commenced in 1917 on several tugboats similar to the SS Crete Boom, however, the conflict had ceased before the completion of the vessels. Immediately after the end of the war in 1918 many of the outstanding orders were cancelled and work only continued on those vessels nearing completion.

Only 52 barges and 12 tugboats were completed out of the 154 ordered. Once those boats were complete the building programme was abandoned.

In 1922 a London based shipping company bought the surviving barges and tugboats and set up the Crete Shipping Company. They used the boats to tow coal to the continent from Sunderland.



Image: northmayo.ie

However, by 1924 the company had ceased operations and all its vessels were left mothballed on the River Tyne. The SS Crete Boom was laid up on the River Wear for a number of years before being sold for dismantling. It was stripped of its metal parts leaving only the concrete hulk of the boat.

In 1937 the Ballina Harbour Commissioners purchased the SS Crete Boom along with several other wrecks. It was intended to sink them at the entrance of the River Moy where they would form a sand barrier. The idea was postponed when the Moy Fishery Company threatened legal action to protect the salmon run into the river.

By the time of the outbreak of World War 2 in 1939 the idea had been abandoned. During the move of the tugboat to Ballina in 1937 it was discovered the wreck was taking on water.

It then became evident that the tugboat was in danger of sinking and blocking the whole quay. A decision was made to tow the boat to mid-stream and allow it to sink to the bottom. It sank, and stayed there for almost 50 years.

By the 1970s the River Moy was silting badly and dredging work began. It was decided to move the sunken tugboat from the centre of the river as it was stopping the proper flow of water.

On March 16th 1974, during high tide, the SS Crete Boom was lifted from the mud and towed a short distance to its new home.

Tons of mud that had accumulated in the hulk were cleaned out along with hundreds of eels that had made the boat their home.

In re-surfacing the boat, a new interesting landmark was given to the town of Ballina. The welfare of the fishing industry was also improved, as the removal of the tugboat from the river bed improved the under-water conditions.

The SS Crete Boom never fulfilled the purpose for which it was built, it has however become one of the town's most unusual attractions.

Sources
<https://www.northmayo.ie>
<https://www.thejournal.ie>
<https://www.historyireland.com>



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The craft of the **TAILOR**

Image: (The National Library of Wales)



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At one time in rural Ireland, especially in the second half of the 19th 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 19th century for clothing were frieze, corduroy, pilot cloth, broadcloth and moleskin. Shirts were made from linen.¹ 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.²

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’³

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

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

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

CHRISTMAS MARKET
14th & 15th Dec.
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The house in Ardnaree where Michael Ferguson employed five other tailors in the 1910s. Note the plaster thimble motifs above the name.

Mayo's Round Towers

Cover image: Turlough Tower - The tower stands on a hillside overlooking the gardens of the National Museum of Country Life. (*image westporttourism.com*)

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Mayo's Round Towers

Mayo is home to five round towers, relics of medieval Christian Ireland, built between the 10th and 13th centuries. The Irish for these towers is *cloigtheach*, meaning bell house, and may give a clue to what they were originally built for.

The towers were free standing structures shaped like a tube and covered by a conical cap of stone. They were around 30 metres in height and had a single doorway entrance, several metres off the ground. The remains of 65 towers are scattered across Ireland, with most built at sites of well-known Christian churches.

During the 19th century archaeologists tried to discover the purpose of the towers. Some believed that the towers were fire temples for sun worship, or for astronomical observation. Others believed they were places of refuge especially during Viking invasions. We can imagine the monks climbing up the ladder to the tower doorway, pulling it up after them and locking the wooden door in a bid for safety. However, many believe the towers were constructed firstly as bell towers, and used secondly as a place of refuge. County Mayo has five of the best-preserved towers in Ireland and these are located in Aughagower, Balla, Killala, Meelick, and Turlough.

Balla

This early monastic site was founded by St. Mochua during the 6th century. The tower is thought to have been built in the 12th century and was used as a bell tower during the 19th century. The tower is now 10 metres high but it is estimated it was 30 metres originally. There are two doorways, one in the east 6.5 metres up and a later addition doorway facing north.

Meelick

Meelick round tower is situated on a hill three miles from Swinford. The tower was built between 923 and 1013 AD on the site of an ecclesiastical foundation attributed to St. Broccaidh. Meelick was once the principal abbey in the barony of Gallen. The tower now stands at 22 metres with originally five or six floors. The doorway is 3.5 metres off ground level.

Aughagower

The tower was believed to be constructed in the 11th century on a monastic site founded by St. Senach, who was made Bishop of Aughagower by St. Patrick. The tower was built 16 metres high and its original doorway facing east was just two metres from the ground. A church ruin and cemetery lie close to the tower in the middle of the village. Tochar Padraig, the pilgrimage walk from Ballintubber Abbey to Croagh Patrick, runs through this monastic site.

Killala

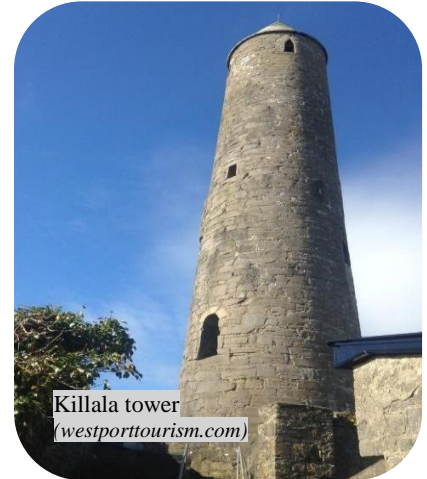
This tower standing at 25 metres is thought to have been built in the 12th century. The original monastic settlement dates back to the 5th century when Muiredach was appointed by St. Patrick as the first Bishop of Killala. The tower was constructed of limestone and has a doorway 3.5 metres off the ground. There is a notable bulge halfway up the tower where it was hit by lightning in 1779.

Turlough

It was built in the 9th century at 23 metres high, on the site of a monastic settlement dating back to 441 AD. The original doorway was 4 metres above the ground and just below that is a doorway added at a later date. The first reference to the tower was in a drawing from 1792



Meelick tower
(westporttourism.com)



Killala tower
(westporttourism.com)



Balla tower
(northmayo.ie)



Aughagower tower
(northmayo.ie)

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We explore
The history of Christmas Cards



Was this the first ever
Christmas Card?

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The First Irish Christmas Cards



The custom of sending Christmas cards was started in the UK by Henry Cole. In 1843 he commissioned the first card as a time-saving device, as he had a lot of unanswered mail piling up. He asked his friend John Calcott Horsley to design an illustration that he could send in reply to his many letter writers. Horsley came up with an image of a family at the Christmas dinner table, surrounded by images of people helping the poor. Inside was a printed greeting and all Cole had to do was insert the recipient's name and his own.

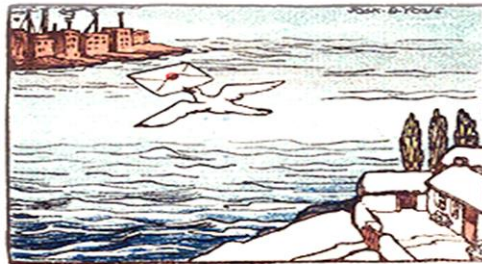
By the 1860's the tradition of Christmas card giving had taken off thanks to new printing techniques and processes that could print elaborate cards. The Victorians exchanged and displayed their cards in vast numbers. This period saw the debut of many of the symbols of Christmas, winter scenes with robins, holly and ivy, churches in snowy landscapes, happy Victorian families in the snow or at Christmas dinner, Santa and Christmas crackers.

In Ireland before Christmas 1916 Countess Markievicz realised that with the advent of World War 1, the traditional festive cards made in Germany were being replaced by patriotic English ones. She set about designing a series of Irish cards. It is not known what images she used on these cards, possibly reflecting a very Gaelic Christmas as opposed to the traditional German and English festivities, as by Christmas she was in prison and her designs have never been found.

A series of Christmas cards produced by the Gaelic Press and Tower Press reproduced the work of Irish artists such as Jack B. Yeats and George Fagan. These reflected the Irish Christmas sentiment along with a strong nationalist identity. One early Jack B. Yeats image showed a bird in flight, carrying a letter over the snow-covered roofs of an Irish cottage. Another depicts George Fagan's couple on their way to Mass across wintry fields.



This card by Hallmark produced in 1977 has sold 34 million copies ([amazon.co.uk](https://www.amazon.co.uk))



Both of these cards show images by Jack B. Yeats. ([historyireland.com](https://www.historyireland.com))

The woman wears a red cloak trimmed in white fur. Even then, reminiscent of Santa. Even earlier than those cards, in 1902, some of the first commercially available Irish cards were being advertised. A Gaelic journal advertised 'Cartaí Nodlag i nGaedhilge Amháin' (Christmas cards in Irish only). By 1905 there was an extended range of designs being advertised and were available for sale in many stationers.

Christmas in Ireland at this time was a very Gaelic affair. Cards that were sent to family and friends abroad had to be Irish. One company in Dublin advertised Irish-made cards containing a pack of shamrock seeds and greetings from 'the Old Country'. A Cork company printed beautiful cards in gold and full of Irish mottos and symbols.

Other companies produced cards which were 'Gaelic' in their use of 'Irish designs, Irish artists, Irish manufacture'. Somewhere between luxuriously printed offerings and the plainer variety, Eason's produced Christmas cards as part of their 'Irish Series'.

As a free modern Ireland started to emerge, Irish Christmas cards began to feature the traditional scenes of snow, holly and ivy, the Three Wise Men, the Holy family, Christmas feasts and Santa. Irish firms began advertising toys, dolls and cards all made in Ireland. The support of Irish manufacturers was a badge of pride for many people. They were determined to support the Irish language, Irish sport, Irish culture, and Irish manufacturers.

The tradition of sending Christmas cards in Ireland is declining, replaced by a text message or email. However, a survey showed that Europeans still send an average of 11 cards at Christmas. In 2017, 68% of respondents surveyed by An Post, said they would still prefer to receive a handwritten Christmas card.

With the most popular Christmas card produced by Hallmark in 1977, depicting three angels, selling 34 million, Christmas cards have been a huge business. And, if you had received a card from Henry Cole back in 1843 you could be sitting on a fortune. One sold in 2013 for £22,000.

Sources

<https://www.historyireland.com>

<https://www.vam.ac.uk>

<https://www.irishexaminer.com>



This 1930's card is from the National Library of Ireland's Gordon Brewster collection.

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Will you have
Blue Willow Tableware
on your table this Christmas?

We explore the story behind it

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Blue Willow Tableware

Most of us have savoured a meal on a plate adorned with a Blue Willow pattern or sipped from a cup featuring the same design - but did we ever consider the story behind it?



The blue willow design is categorized as a chinoiserie design, drawing influence from Chinese art and culture while being crafted for European audiences. The pattern was created by Thomas Turner of Shropshire, England in 1779.

The imagery is rooted in a well-known romantic legend about forbidden love. According to collectors, the story revolved around a wealthy Mandarin merchant named Tso Ling and his daughter named Kwang-se, who despite being promised to a wealthy suitor by her father, fell in love with a poor clerk. The story focuses on her escape and the pursuit by her father.

On close examination of the plates and cups featuring the blue willow pattern the various elements of this story are revealed and its dramatic narrative has inspired numerous exquisite ceramics in all shapes and sizes. To be classified as a true Blue Willow pattern though, certain features must be included: willow trees, pine trees, three men on a bridge, a fence, a boat, a tree house or pagoda, and two birds in flight.

Over the years, various iterations of Blue Willow have emerged and been replicated. According to the International Willow Collectors Website, there are 500 documented manufacturers of Blue Willow around the world.

While blue willow is widely produced and not considered rare, early English examples made before Queen Victoria's reign (pre-1837) can be quite valuable and sought after by collectors. The popularity of blue willow tableware can be seen in many notable films including *The Quiet Man*.



Its prominence makes sense considering the symbolic meaning many from Ireland attach to the blue willow.

In an account given by Caroline Carr, Donegal County Council, the blue willow was "more of a status symbol - the more you had displayed and not used, the better." Owing a set of blue willow china was a point of pride. The Schools Folklore Collection (dúchas.ie) has many mentions of blue willow patterned tableware - Mrs Margaret Kelly (Co. Meath) recalls how her "aunt had tea-pots at least 100 years old of blue and white pattern".

Blue willow pieces often became treasured heirlooms, passed down through generations. Many kitchen dressers still have some part of a blue willow set on display. The next time you enjoy a drink from a blue willow cup or a meal from a blue willow plate, pause for a moment to appreciate its design and the story behind it. Do you still have blue willow tableware in your dresser?

Sources:
www.thebrooklynteacup.com
www.wikipedia.com
www.rarebirdantiques.com

The Willow Pattern

by B.L. Bowers

Whilst we sit around the table,
 please allow me to relate,
 The entrancing ancient fable,
 of "The Willow Pattern Plate."
 Every picture tells a story,
 like the Willow Pattern Plate,
 Where two lovers dwelt in glory,
 and defied paternal hate.
 By elopement from the castle
 you observe upon the ridge,
 Where the violent old rascal,
 chases them across the bridge.

Tries to catch the rogue and whip
 him,
 'Ere he steals the daughter fair;
 But the loving pair outstrip him,
 let him languish in despair.
 Thrown upon their own resources,
 in a junk they emigrate,
 To a splendid little oasis,,
 near the margin of the plate.
 Dwell in peace, whilst unmolested,
 in most perfect harmony;
 Till at length they are arrested,
 by his Nibs' gendarmerie.

Then the tyrant lord appeals to Law
 with their power;
 Caught, confined, they have their
 meals
 in that horrid little tower.
 When the pair are executed,
 to appease their lord irate,
 To a pair of doves transmuted,
 still they fly upon the plate.
 Every picture tells a story,
 like the Willow Pattern blue,
 And true love will reign in glory,
 To infinity! Adieu



Left: Blue willow tableware in the movie *The Quiet Man* (imdb.com)

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“The wren, the wren the king of all birds
St. Stephen’s Day was caught in the furze.
Up with the kettle and down with the pan,
Give us something to honour the wren”.

Boys dress up as **WREN BOYS**

visiting houses

Athea, Co. Limerick, 26th December, 1947

*(Image: Caoimhín Ó Danachair School’s Folklore Collection
H055.21.00055)*

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Wren Day – Lá an Dreoilín

The tradition of the Wren on St. Stephen's Day, celebrated on December 26th, is a well-known and vibrant cultural practice. This custom involves a group of merrymakers, often referred to as "Wren Boys," who dress in elaborate and very colourful costumes, sometimes adorned with masks and hats, parade through their local communities. They sing traditional songs and play musical instruments, all while carrying a decorated wren on a pole, symbolizing the capture of the bird.

Historically, the wren was associated with the Celtic festival of the winter solstice, and its killing was believed to bring bad luck. The practice of hunting the wren has evolved, and today, it often serves as a metaphor for the end of the old year and the welcoming of the new. The Wren Boys typically collect money for charity, emphasizing the communal spirit of the occasion.



In *The Journals of the Kildare Archaeological Society*, it mentions that if any of the wren boys were refused money when they visited houses, they would bury a wren (from their "wren bush") opposite the hall door into which no good luck could enter for twelve months (Danaher, 1972:247)

Originally the 'Wren Boys' carried a dead wren or wrens with them on their escapades. The wren is no longer part of modern celebrations which are a much more animal friendly affair.

In Britain the 26th of December is commonly referred to as Boxing Day, as this was the day servants and tradesmen would traditionally receive gifts known as a "Christmas Box" from their masters, employers or customers.

NEW YEAR TRADITIONS

New Year's Day is a secular feast, and was not really observed in Ireland until the 18th century. A new calendar introduced in 1751 set January 1st as the start of the New Year. Before that, your ancestors began a new year on the first day of Spring. In the Irish context, this was St. Bridget's Day, February 1st.

Similar to St. Bridget's Day, divination and portents of the future underpinned the traditions of New Year. Among these were: After midnight, the first person to enter the household should be a black haired male. This was known as the 'first footing' and was a sign of good luck.

New Year's Eve was 'Oíche na Coda Móire': the night of the big feast. Eating a very large supper ensured plentiful food for the whole year to come.

In parts of Ireland, a cake was baked and thrown against the door of the house to banish hunger.¹

In other places, the cake was pounded against the door by the woman of the house while she repeated a rhyme to banish famine.

Dust or dirty water must never be thrown out on New Year's Day; they were considered luck, and you were throwing your luck away by throwing them out.²

It was unlucky for a man to come into a house, light his pipe and walk out smoking it. Money should not be paid out on New Year's Day, you would be paying money out every day of the year that followed.³

Hansel Monday was the first Monday of the New Year. In parts of the west of Ireland, it was celebrated on New Year's Day itself. Children went from house to house and were given a small gift of money or a sweet cake. It was considered lucky to give the approaching child their gift before they asked for it.⁴

Sources:

¹ Danaher, K. 1972. *The Year in Ireland*. Mercier Press. 258-261

² *The Schools' Collection, Volume 0094, Page 265* (Patrick Dempsey, Loona More, Belcarra, Co. Mayo, 14-Jan-1937. From duchas.ie

³ *The Schools' Collection, Volume 0152, Page 413* (Seán MacGallachubar, Killacorraun, Co. Mayo. From duchas.ie

⁴ Danaher, K. 1972. *The Year in Ireland*. Mercier Press. 258-261

New Year Traditions

collected as part of the
Schools' Folklore Collection
([Dúchas.ie](http://Duchas.ie))

At dusk on New Year's Eve young girls would kneel facing the moon and say "If I see him ever I will see him now." Then they picked three grains of mud and put them into a stocking, go back home and did not speak. Then they put them into a little box under their pillow, and hoped to dream of the man they would marry.

Informant: Mrs Moran, Cartoon, Co. Mayo

On New Year's Day, it is not right to give away milk, money, or any utensil. It is not right to put out any ashes or to go a visiting, because it is said that you would be giving away the luck, if you gave away anything

Informant: Mrs. Joyce, Ballyglass, Co. Mayo

They used always watch the direction of the wind on New Year's Night because if it is from the west the Irish will have a fine year and if it is from the east the English will have a fine year and the Irish a wet year.

Informant: Pádraig Seóigneach, Ballyglass, Co. Mayo

Source: [Dúchas.ie](http://Duchas.ie)