**Introduction**

The Irish Tourist Association (ITA) Topographical and General Survey was compiled in the early 1940s on a parish basis within each county, presumably in an effort to gather information to promote Irish tourism post World War II. Surveyors were appointed and information was gathered by visits to the parish and the filling in of forms. Five different forms were issued to the surveyors, not all were relevant to each parish. The headings for each form were as follows-

*Form A* (pale green colour) - Natural Features, Antiquities, Historic Associations etc – subheadings Topography; Geology; Mansions, Castles & Estates; Antiquities; Historic Sites; Historic House, Burial Places; Spas or Mineral Springs; Curiosities; Customs, Patterns etc

*Form B* (white colour) – Sports and Games, subheadings Angling; Sea Angling: Golfing; Racing; Hunting; Coursing; Greyhound Racing; Shooting; Clay Pigeon Shooting; Rowing and Sailing: Games and Recreations; Athletics and Cycling; Annual Events.

*Form C* (yellow colour) Seaside Resort – Holiday Amenities and General Information. The subheadings are almost the same as Form D but under location they include descriptions of the beach, amenities, amusements, swimming baths, beach attendant etc

*Form D* (pink colour) Town or Village – Amenities and General Information, subheadings Location including brief description, population, recreation grounds, sewerage and water supplies; Public Services; Dancing; Cinemas and Theatres; Libraries; Churches and Services; Postal Facilities; Banking; Sports and Photo Supplies; Swimming Pools and Baths; Social Clubs, Cultural Societies etc; Industries and Handcrafts; Public Monuments; Important Public Buildings; Schools and Colleges; Hospitals; Fairs and Markets – Half Holiday; Garages and Petrol Stations; Conveyances for Hire (Owners); Camping sites.

*Form E* (white colour) Town or Village – Accommodation and Catering, subheadings hotels, guest or boarding houses, restaurants and cafes; gives numbers of bedrooms, bathrooms, lavatories, public rooms, whether licensed or not and a column for remarks.

When there was not enough room on the form to fill in all the details additional pages were included. For some parishes drawings were made of antiquities and photographs taken of scenic views, places of interest and archaeological sites.

The survey files survive for four of the five Connacht counties, Galway, Leitrim, Mayo and Sligo. In 1946 The Irish Tourist Association published an ‘Official Guide’ to Connacht. The description of localities in this publication may well be based on information gathered during the survey but it is sparse in detail when compared to the amount of information contained in the survey. The files give a fascinating insight into the state of each parish during the War years or what was known as “The Emergency”. They document many aspects of the cultural, economic and sporting life of the county and identify local amenities, or the lack of them. They point to the potential for the development of certain localities as tourist destinations and portray the dearth of what would now be considered basic amenities throughout the county. They show how outside influences such as World War II had an effect on small rural communities. Other subjects, for example the prevalence of birds like the partridge and grouse over much of Co Mayo and the demise of landlordism, are touched on.

**The Content of the ITA Topographical and General Survey for Co Mayo**

***The Surveyors***

The survey was carried out in Co Mayo in the years 1942 to 1945. The county was divided into three regions Mayo West, Mayo North and Mayo East. There were four surveyors for Co Mayo, namely M.J.B. O’Kelly, Conor O’Brien, Donal A. Faughnan and M. Mulligan. It is not known how they were selected but it is likely that they were archaeologists or persons with experience in archaeology. The introduction to the Irish Tourist Association Survey on the Limerick County Library website records that the survey for that county was conducted by two eminent archaeologists Ralph Lucas and P.J.Lynch. One of the Co Mayo surveyors Donal A. Faughnan was also a surveyor in Co Leitrim along with Neil Blaney, who later became a TD.

All four surveyors worked in the Mayo West region containing 14 parishes. Conor O’Brien was the surveyor for all the parishes in the Mayo North region bar one, the parish of Ballycroy. Donal A. Faughnan was the surveyor for all the parishes in the Mayo East region except for the parish of Cong which was done by Conor O’Brien. Michael J. B. O’Kelly surveyed three Co Mayo parishes Achill, Burrishoole and Ballycroy. He included pen and ink drawings of souterrains, tombs, forts, abbeys etc for the parishes of Burrishoole and Ballycroy but for the parish of Achill his drawings are of implements, such as a turf spade, a four poster bed, a cray fish pot. He also took most of the surviving photographs relating to the Co Mayo survey which are part of the files for these three parishes. The photographs are 3x2 inches in size. M. Mulligan’s drawings for the parishes of Aghaval, Clare Island, Kilgeever, Kilmeena, Knock and Turlough appear to be very professional and some are on butter paper. He sometimes wrote his reports in green ink. Donal A. Faughnan tended to write lengthy descriptions of the antiquities, customs and cures of a parish and church architecture. He often gave details of cycle rides or hikes that could be taken to view scenic sights in the locality. Conor O’Brien typed his reports. A few items of correspondence from the surveyors to the headquarters of the Irish Tourist Association at 15 Upper O’Connell Street, Dublin, are to be found in some of the parish files.

Much of the information was gleaned locally by the surveyors or from secondary sources, for example there are references to such works as Joseph Hone’s *Moores of Moorehall* and T. Brett’s *Mayo of the Saxons* in the files for the parishes of Burriscarra and Mayo Abbey. There is also reference to the writings of Sir William Wilde in the Cong file.

***The Survey***

Every parish, with the exception of Kilcolman and Cong, is covered by a Form A recording its natural features, antiquities and historic associations and for the majority of parishes additional pages are used to record these details. Although Form A is missing for Cong its topography and history are extensively covered in the additional pages. The north west corner of Kilcommon Erris is described as “perhaps the most isolated and unexplored (by the tourist)”. The surveyor Conor O’Brien goes on to describe the frightfully bad roads, old mine workings and the magnificent cliffs, caves and stone monuments of this parish. Kilfian on the other hand contained “very little of interest to the tourist”. Several huge and devastating landslides are referred too in the parish of Kiltane (Bangor Erris) and caves and puffing holes along the shoreline are described in the file for the parish of Ballycastle. The Belmullet peninsular was a true Gaeltacht area (ITA/2/12). The fertile limestone area of south east Mayo is referred to in the files for Kilcommon and Kilmaine parishes. Kilmaine had possibly the best land in Mayo. Horses thrived in this agricultural district and Hollymount had a type of clay suitable for pottery. Kilmaine parish was unusual in that one of its townlands, Ballisnahyny, was isolated from the rest of the parish.

Archaeological sites are very well covered for all the Co Mayo parishes. Details are given of rights of way or the name of the person who owned the land on which they were located. There are some very fine pen and ink drawings of archaeological remains which are also the subject of many of the photographs. For example there is a long description of the antiquities of the parish of Killasser with two photographs of the horned cairn at Cartronmacmanus and the dolmen at Prebaun and a description of a penal day carved cross. Castles and ruined churches and abbeys also feature prominently on Form A, sometimes with accompanying sketches and plans, especially for the parishes in the fertile plain of Co Mayo, such as Burriscarra, Kilmaine, Shrule.

Terence Dooley in his book *The Big Houses and Landed Estates of Ireland: A Research Guide* (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2007), page 168, draws attention to this survey because it contains a subsection about the old mansion houses of landlords. The fate of a number of these houses can be traced in the survey, for example Dalgan House in the parish of Shrule, a mansion of about 50 rooms, had been stripped of its roof and fittings in the previous year. Castlereagh, a Knox house in the parish of Killala, had been acquired by the Land Commission and demolished. Belleek Manor and “a splendid demesne of over 6,000 acres” had recently been sold to Mr J. Frank Beckett of Ballina (ITA/2/13). Belville, in the parish of Moygownagh, remained unoccupied as it was believed to be haunted. Frenchgrove House in the parish of Robeen had been a ruin for over 70 years but Mount Jennings the birthplace of Delia Murphy, was still the home of her parents. Rock House at Claggan in the parish of Ballycroy was once the residence of the Clives, who were related to the famous Clive of India. Brabazon Park House in the parish of Kilconduff was used as a dairying and poultry school by the Sisters of Mercy. Only a very few owners of these houses were amenable to visitors.

Many of the customs and patterns recorded for the various parishes were the same or similar, for example funerals took the longest route to the graveyard, a bride should not return to her old home until a month after marriage, ashes should not be thrown away or money paid out on New Year’s Day. There was a belief that the seventh son in a family had a natural cure for ringworm and it was considered unlucky for a person to be godparent to two children in one year. In Attymass and Killasser the surveyor records the demise of many of the old customs and cures. On the island of Achill the St Patrick’s Day celebration was a very colourful annual event, with the Dooagh and Keel Fife and Drum bands leading the parade. Local curiosities included the “Land League Cottage” in the parish of Balla which was built in one night and straddled three estates: the Browne cenotaph in the parish of Islandeady and the musical bridge at Bellacorick in the parish of Kiltane.

Historical events such as the 1798 Rebellion feature in a number of the parish descriptions, for example Aglish, Addergoole, Crossmolina and Knock. The Land League is also highlighted in such parishes as Balla, Templemore, Kilcolman and Kilvine, where the first Land League meeting was held in 1879. Details are also given of famous personalities connected with a particular parish for example James Hardiman, Dr Gilbert of Gilbert and Sullivan fame and Mrs Roberts mother of Lord Roberts were all “possibly” born in Westport and George A. Birmingham (Canon Hannay) lived there in the early 20th century (ITA/1/4). The parish of Bohola was the birthplace of Martin J. Sheridan, Olympic champion for the USA at discus and other disciplines and Killedan of Dr Sean Lavan, an athlete, who represented Ireland at the Paris Olympics in 1924 and the Amsterdam Olympics in 1928. Cloghans House in the parish of Kilmaine was the home of General Arthur C. Lewin, known as the “Flying General” because of his love of aviation. Straide in the parish of Templemore was the birth and burial place of Michael Davitt and the inscriptions from the O’Donnell vault beside Straide Abbey are all recorded.

Form B recorded the sporting amenities of the locality and for most parishes there are details of the availability of fishing and shooting. Sea, lake and river fishing are all covered. Locations are given, the best types of flies are recommended along with the names of ghillies and boatmen. For a number of parishes extra forms (Ba.) are included covering the fishing on each individual lake or river. For example there are 13 forms detailing the fishing on lakes and rivers in the parish of Aghagower and 11 forms for the lakes and rivers in the parish of Kilgeever. In the parish of Kilvine the best flies for catching brown trout on the River Robe were March Brown, Hare’s Ear, Cochy Bondhu, Black Gnat, Yellow Sally. Pike and eels could be caught on the Dalgan River. Sea fishing in the parish of Kilcommon-Erris was good and the charge for the hire of a currach varied from 10/- to £2 per day.

Good woodcock shooting was to be had on the preserves of Lord Oranmore and Browne in the parishes of Cong and Crossboyne. Grouse and partridge were still widespread over the county although grouse shooting was forbidden at Keel, Achill Island, in an effort to improve the stock. The parish of Kilcommon Erris had very good shooting, particularly for grouse, snipe, duck, teal and wild geese. Golf courses (all with 9 holes) were recorded in the parishes of Annagh, Ballinrobe, Belmullet, Cong, Kilcolman, Kilconduff, Kilmeena and Kilmoremoy. Some parishes also had GAA and boxing clubs and handball alleys were a feature of some villages. An interesting reference is made to a local pastime in the parish of Templemore “A game sometimes played is that of pitching horse-shoes on to an upright road (otherwise the principal recreation in the area is ‘pitch and toss’, which all the young people indulge in, with sometimes heavy betting)” (ITA/3/23). Horse races were held at Ballinrobe and a number of flapper meetings at other venues in the north west of the county.

Only a few parishes bordering the coast contain Form C, which gave details of seaside resorts. The parish of Achill contained six resorts and there were also resorts on Inisturk Island (ITA/1/7) and at Mallaranny in the parish of Burrishoole.

Form D highlighted the pros and cons of the various towns and villages as tourist destinations. Mention is made of the progress of businesses in the town of Westport including the clog factory (ITA/1/4). A detailed description is given of Castlebar which includes a street map and reference to the part played by the town in the 1798 Rebellion (ITA/1/3). Pilgrimages to the Shrine at Knock had done much for the development of that village. Belmullet was described as “a thriving, prosperous market town and a rising watering place”. Killala on the other hand was “now a little town of derelict old warehouses”. Although Castlebar was the county town, Ballina was the largest town in the county but its industrial awakening was temporarily hindered by War conditions (ITA/2/13). Ballinrobe did not fare well in the surveyor’s eyes it was “easily the most ill-kept town in Mayo – if not in Ireland”. Claremorris had important rail connections and Charlestown was named after Lord Dillon’s agent Charles Strickland. Kilkelly was a small country town of about 70 houses (ITA/3/20).

Most towns and villages had poor public water supplies and very few had public sewerage systems. Kiltimagh had a town improvements committee and 75% of the houses had water and flush sanitation (ITA/3/18). A report from the Department of Pathology, UCD, for the neighbouring town of Swinford, parish of Kilconduff, included in the file, shows that the public water supply there was very contaminated. Other details are given under the various headings concerning transport, postal, banking and church services, also schools, cultural and social societies and local industries. Crossmolina was “sadly lacking in recreational facilities, the sole public or social entertainment consisting of an occasional dance at the parochial hall”. Cinemas tended to be open once or twice a week and most dances were held in the parochial hall. Few towns or villages had a public library service although quite a number had private lending libraries. Ballina’s five private libraries included that of Mr John Clarke of O’Rahilly Street, Ballina who had 400 books [Jackie Clarke Library]. Ballinrobe had an annual operatic concert. There were drama societies at The Neale in the parish of Cong and at Cooneal in the parish of Ballysakerry.

Local industries such as spinning and weaving were still quite prevalent in some parishes particularly those in the more remote regions. One reference suggests that this was partly due to War restrictions (ITA/2/9). Michael MacGreal of Askil did the weaving for some of the Achill locality in winter. Croquet and hand knits were made in the old lace schools at Carrowteige and Pullathomas, Bangor and Geesala (ITA/2/9 & ITA/2/14) and there was a toy factory at Elly Bay on the Belmullet peninsular which employed 130 girls (ITA/2/12). Michael Gallagher had a tomatoe farm at Bunnacurry (ITA/1/1) and poultry houses were made in Crossboyne by CastlemacGarrett Industries (ITA/3/11).

Form E listed the accommodation available in the parish but this form is only included in parishes that had hotels, guest or boarding houses. The lack of sanitary facilities is very marked in the accommodation that was available. The Dudley Arms Hotel in Belmullet had 10 bedrooms with one dry lavatory and no baths. The village of Cong was well served with three Irish Tourist Board listed accommodation providers – Ashford Castle, Ryan’s Hotel and O’Connors guest house. The Old Head Hotel in the parish of Kilgeever had 15 bedrooms and was one of three hotels in the parish. Claremorris had three registered hotels and 23 guest or boarding houses all listed by name (ITA/3/13). The owner of Healy’s Hotel in Foxford is recorded as only accommodating “people when he feels like doing so” (ITA/3/24), while Major Freyer of Corrymore House, Achill Island, managed his guest house in a rather peculiar manner. The surveyor, M. J. B. O’Kelly, wrote that the Major only wanted young people or those who “are young in spirit” or those to whom he took a liking, to come and stay at his guest house, built on the site of Captain Boycott’s former residence.

References to the effects of World War II on the county are included in a number of the parish surveys. Films were shown once a fortnight in the parochial hall in the parish of Ballycastle “before petrol restrictions”. The installation of public sewerage systems in a number of towns was delayed because of the War, for example in Crossmolina and Ballinrobe. The spinning wheel had returned to general use in the parish of Kilcommon-Erris “since the war commenced. Prior to that the craft had almost been forgotten”. An area acquired as a public park by the Urban Council of Ballina had been divided into “vegetable plots during the emergency”. The annual race meeting held at Claremount in the parish of Kilcolman had not been held since 1940 but was expected to resume, presumably after the War.

**Accession Note**

The survey files were acquired by the County Library from Bord Failte in 1983 through the auspices of An Chomlairle Leabharlanna (The Library Council of Ireland). The files had remained in the possession of the Irish Tourist Association/ Bord Failte for the previous 40 years. Dr Peter Harbison was archaeologist to Bord Failte in the early 1980s and at his suggestion the files were transferred to An Chomhairle Leabharlanna for distribution to the county libraries, where it was felt their permanent home should be. The annual report of An Chomhairle Leabharlanna for 1983 states:

“During the year An Chomhairle took over from Bord Failte the data relating to the Irish Tourist Association Topographical and General Survey, which had been carried out in the 1940’s. The data collected on a county basis, was distributed to seventeen county libraries and many of these reported that the files were a valuable addition to their local studies collections”[[1]](#footnote-1). A number of county libraries, such as those of Clare, Limerick and Tipperary, are now highlighting the survey on their websites as sources in their local studies collections.

**Structure of the List**

The Survey files have remained virtually untouched since they arrived in the County Library, Castlebar, in 1983. They had been arranged in three divisions before they came to the Library - Mayo West (14 parishes), Mayo North (16 parishes) and Mayo East (23 parishes). The files have been kept in their original divisions (ITA/1, ITA/2, ITA/3) and in their original alphabetical parish order within each division. In the third division one file No. 9 appears to be missing but as there is no other parish in Co Mayo beginning with the letter ‘C’ it is suggested that this may be a numerical error and that in fact no file is missing. In general the files are in fairly good physical condition. The material relating to a parish is contained within the two pages of Form A, constituting a file. This has caused wear and tear to Form A for some parishes, particularly those with a large amount of additional pages.

**Bibliography**

Irish Tourist Association *Connacht, Galway, Mayo, Sligo, Leitrim, Roscommon: Official Guide.* Dublin: Irish Tourist Association, 1946.

1. An Chomhairle Leabharlanna, 36th annual report; year ended December 31, 1983. Dublin: An Chomhairle Leabharlanna, [1984], (P1.3290), p.13. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)