

Report of the Erris Survey

August 1990 - May 1994



Part I

A Community Response Project.

Sponsored by
Fás and Turasóireacht Iorrais Teo



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the Employment Levy and E.U. Structural Funds.



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General History

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| Leabharlann Co. Mhuigheo Mayo County Library | |
| <i>Local Collection</i> | |
| Reference Only | |
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The Erris Heritage Survey has been an ongoing project since August 1990. Sponsored by Fás and Erris Tourism it is a Community Response Project. The aim of the project has been:

*to research and compile a comprehensive report on various features of the Erris area to include:
Historical, Archaeological, Environmental, Social and Cultural.*

Through our work we have fulfilled the objectives set out for us plus much more.

Work completed to date:

- Complete survey with scale drawings of all Graveyards in Erris.
- Survey of Vernacular Architecture including the Houses, Piers, Coastguard Stations, Lace Schools, Deserted Villages, Kilns, Lodges of Erris, Glosh Signal Tower, Cross Abbey and Fish Curing Stations.
- Resource of printed work of Archaeology of The Erris area.
- Survey of majority of Archaeological sites of the area including discovery of new sites.
- Popular report on Archaeology of Erris along with complete academic files on individual sites all to be bound and placed in library including inventory of sites and known artifacts.
- Study completed on Geology, Climate, Flora & Fauna, Glaciation, Soil, Topography and Drainage.

OTHERS SUBJECTS COVERED:-

Crafts of Erris, General History, Lighthouses, Congested Districts Board, Dress in Erris, Whaling in Erris, Resource Inventory, Schools Projects, Two Heritage Guides published, Communications, Folklore, Landlords, Currachs, Saints in Erris, Life in Erris, Churches, Potato Picking, Grace O'Malley, Parishes and Placenames.

As with all surveys of this sort the resesarch could go on for ever. We have completed as much as was possible in the time allocated. The information is correct in so far as we are aware.

Much effort has gone into the collection of this information and the compilation of this report.

This project has provided training for many people (see list at end of report). The training included:-

Introduction to Archaeology
Environmental Studies
Primary and Secondary Research
Photography
Computer Studies
Life Skills
Job Search

Job placements as a result of trianing received on the Erris Heritage Project have been very high with the majority of Trainees having secured employment. Others have gone on to further training.

In the past year Fás have introduced an Integrated Assessment System to provide Certification for Community Response Projects. All Trainees with the project since the introduction of this certification system have achieved the required standard and have been presented with their certificates.

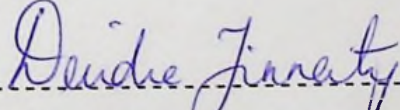
I would like to take this opportunity to thank all the hard work put in by all Trainees on the project since it began and wish them well in the future.

Deirdre Finnerty

Deirdre Finnerty,
Project Co-ordinator.

Acknowledgements

- * All of whom assisted in the completion of this work.
- * Fás and its representatives in the Erris area.
- * The people of the Barony of Erris.
- * Erris Tourism and the Heritage Sub Committee.
- * The staff in the National Library and Mayo County's Libraries.
- * The Fás Trainees who helped in the collection of this information and its compilation into report form. (names listed on next page)
- * Folklore Commission of Ireland.
- * Governmental Departments, Local and National.
- * Monsignor Edward Mc Hale and the local Clergy.
- * The Staff of University College Galway.


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**REPORT OF THE ERRIS
SURVEY**

PART 6

GENERAL HISTORY

ERRIS(IORRAS)

This is the name now given to the extreme North West of County Mayo.

The word Iorras has been variously interpreted throughout history as meaning "a borderland, a headland or promontory, a peninsula".

The name appears as "Irrus Domnann" (Iorras of the people called Domnann) in a great many Irish sources. Perhaps the most notable in an 11th Century manuscript known as "Lebor na hUidre" (the Book of the dun Cow).

The Domnann are believed to have been related to the British people who are settled over a large part of England and Southern Scotland in Roman Times, and have given their name to Devon in the South of England.

In the early historic period "Iorras" belonged to the Cinel Fedhlinidh, a branch of the Kingdom of Hy Fiachrach. In mythology Fiachre was son of Lir the Ocean God who was turned into a swan and after many years regained his human form on the Islands of Inishglora.

The Chieftain was named O'Caithniadh (Canny) whose death is recorded in the Annals of the Four Masters in 1180.

Erris was dominated by various families throughout the medieval period, principally the O'Dowds until after the Norman invasion when the Barretts and Burkes, both Norman families established themselves as Barons of Erris.

In the late 16th Century, Mayo as a County became established and ten "Baronies" were created to act as administrative centres for the then ruling English.

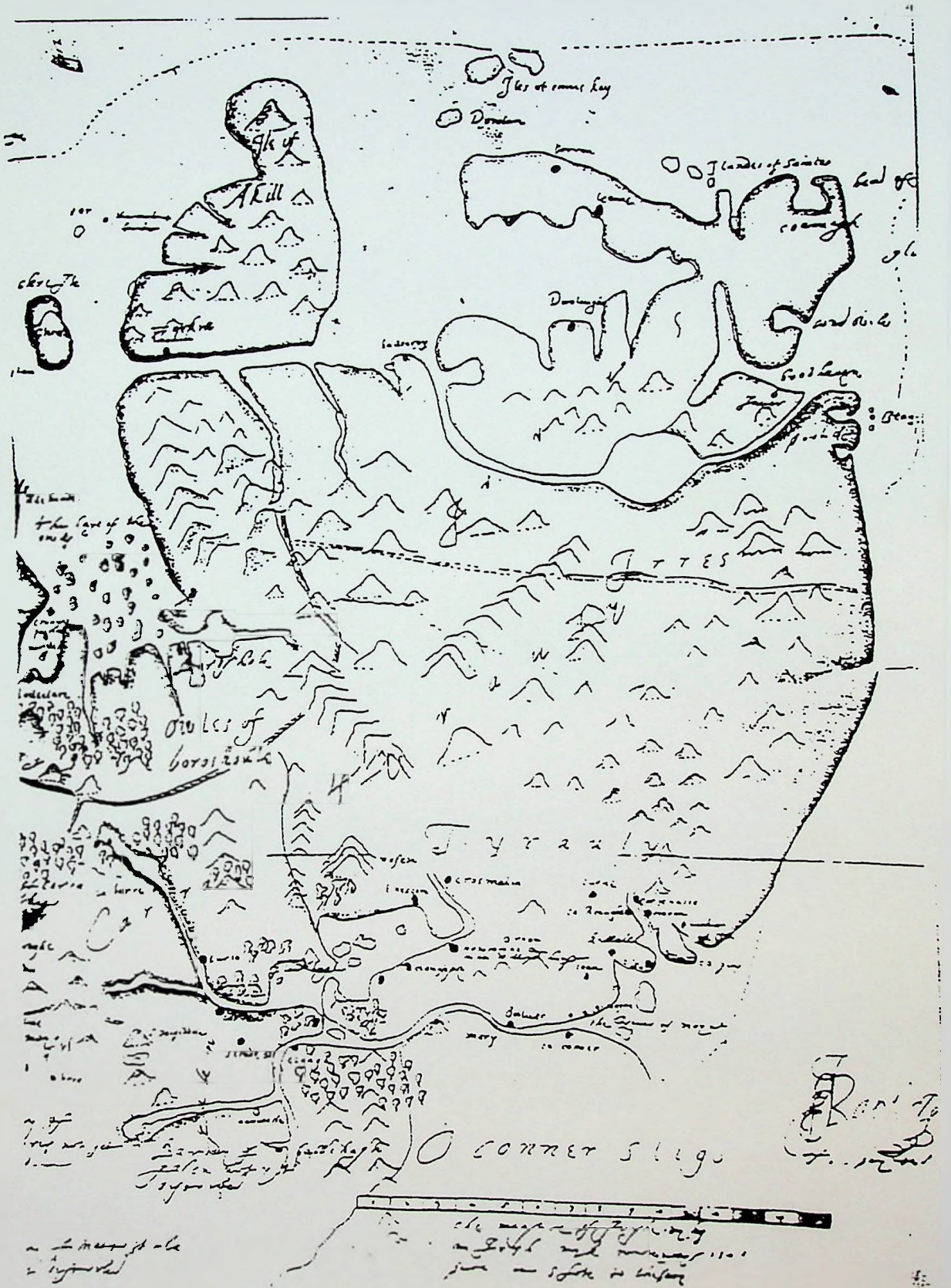
Erris (then known as Invermore) came under the governorship of Sir Henry Sidney who appointed Sherrifs and Officials. They in turn introduced landlords who were allowed to take estates under grants from the English Crown.

The plantations of the 17th Century brought new families to Erris and the local people were banished from place to place - a pattern that was repeated in later centuries of famine and eviction reports of the 19th

Century by the "Quaker Relief Committee". They give a graphic record of the pitiful conditions of the people and the massive neglect by absentee landlords.

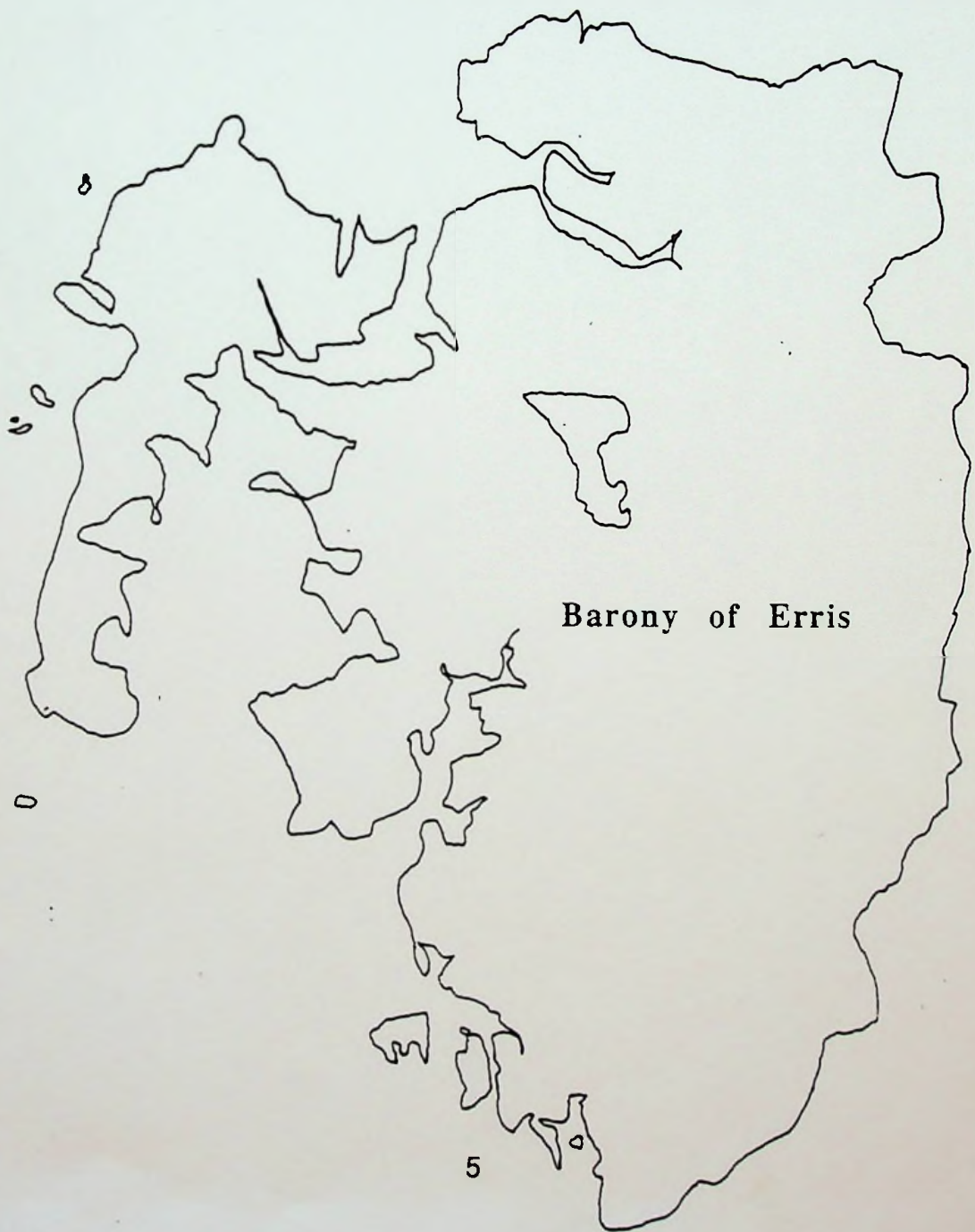
The heirs of one of these early landlords Sir Authur Shaen, were Carter and Bingham who married Shanes daughters and respectively established Belmullet and Binghamstown as they are today.

Brownes Map of Erris in 1584



BARONY:

The basic territorial division of Celtic Ireland was the Tuath. The modern Barony is a superimposed division and may be representative of single or multiple earlier units either Gaelic such as the Trichacet or Anglo-Norman such as the cantred. From the sixteenth century onwards the barony was widely utilized as an administrative, taxation and regional entity. Because of continuous use of the "Barony" it became standardized.



PARISH:

The Parish is an ecclesiastical administrative division of great antiquity and appears to indicate the area over which a local church exercised spiritual jurisdiction. Formal parishes date from the 11th and 12th centuries. By the 13th century a network of parishes existed across the countryside. The Anglo-Normans did little to alter the existing territorial framework apart from re-dedicating churches to well known saints. The armed conflicts of the seventeenth century and the suppression of the catholic clergy further eroded the status of the medieval parish. The old structures were adapted by the new religious administration and were used as civil territorial divisions in the land surveys of the seventeenth century. The creation of Catholic parishes is an ongoing process. The map below gives the old parish boundaries while the latter map show the boundaries which are in existence at present.

During the Penal times when the Government restricted the number and movements of the Roman Catholic Clergy and limited the numbers of Parishes, the Parish of Kilcommon comprised of all mainland Erris from Claggan, Ballycroy to Portacloy. (see map overleaf)

The Parishes of the Barony of Erris (pre August 1873)



Early in the Nineteenth Century Kilcommon was divided into Three districts; Ballycroy, Kilcommon West and Kilcommon East. A further change was introduced in August 1873 when the present Parish boundaries were fixed. There are now four Catholic Parishes in the Civil Parish of Kilcommon, namely Ballycroy, Belmullet, Kilcommon and Kiltane.

The fifth Parish is the Parish of Kilmore which consists of the whole of the Mullet Peninsula. (see map overleaf)



Kilmore-Erris

Kilcommon

Belmullet

Klitane

Ballycroy

TOWNLAND:

The Townland is the smallest administrative division in the country and all other territorial divisions are collections of townlands. The townland became standardised as a basic division in the seventeenth century through repeated usage in the surveys and land transactions. From this period onwards land was let by landlords and great estates were mapped and described by townland. There are approximately 62,000 townlands in Ireland, these vary greatly in size from 1 acre 1 rood 1 perch in one area for example in Mill Tenement, Co. Armagh to 7,012 acres in the townland of Sheskin here in Erris. Townland size was used as a general guide to the quality of the land - the bigger townlands are usually found in the lands of poorer value. The boundaries tend to coincide with either physical or man made features. The preceding map shows the townlands in the Barony of Erris.

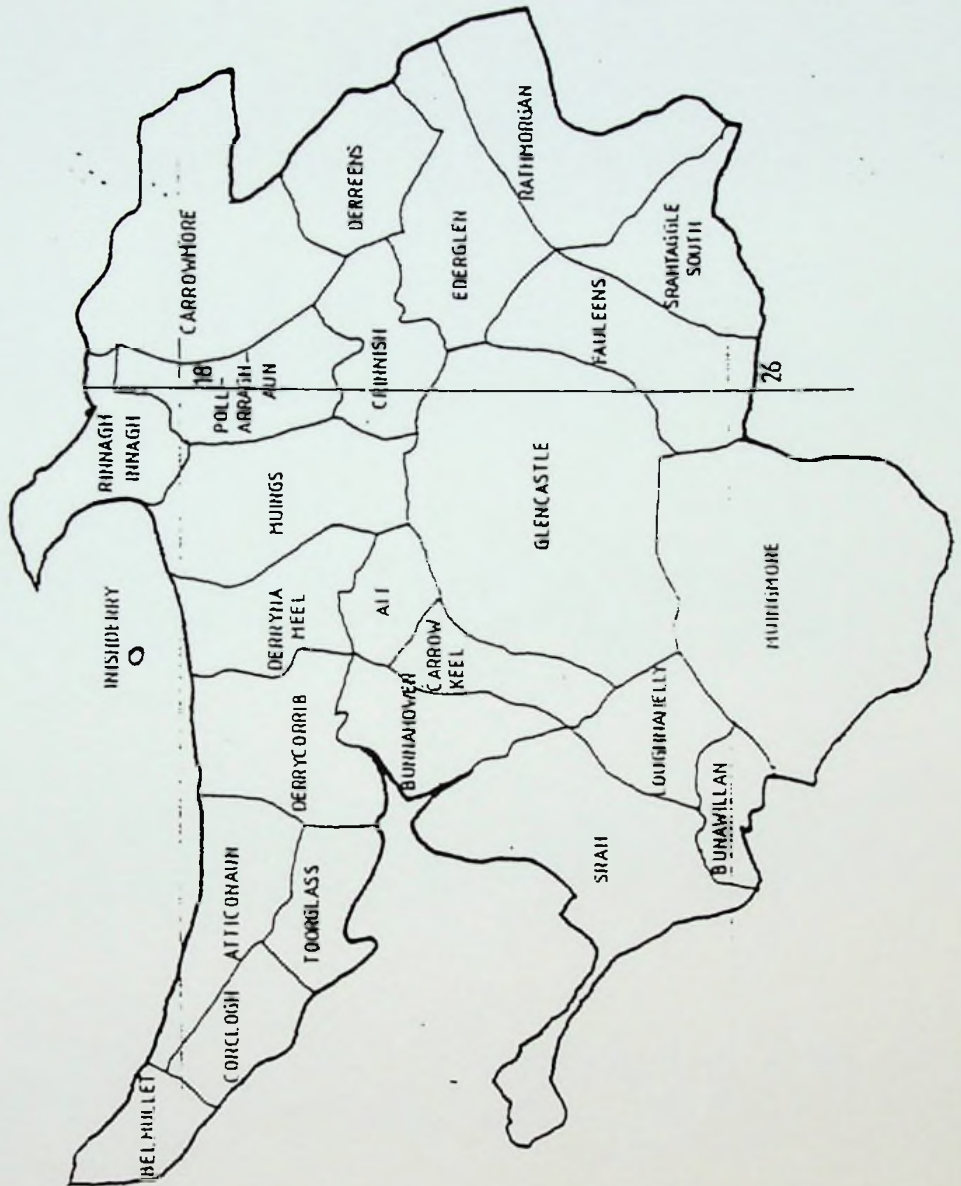


TOWNLANDS IN THE BARONY OF ERRIS

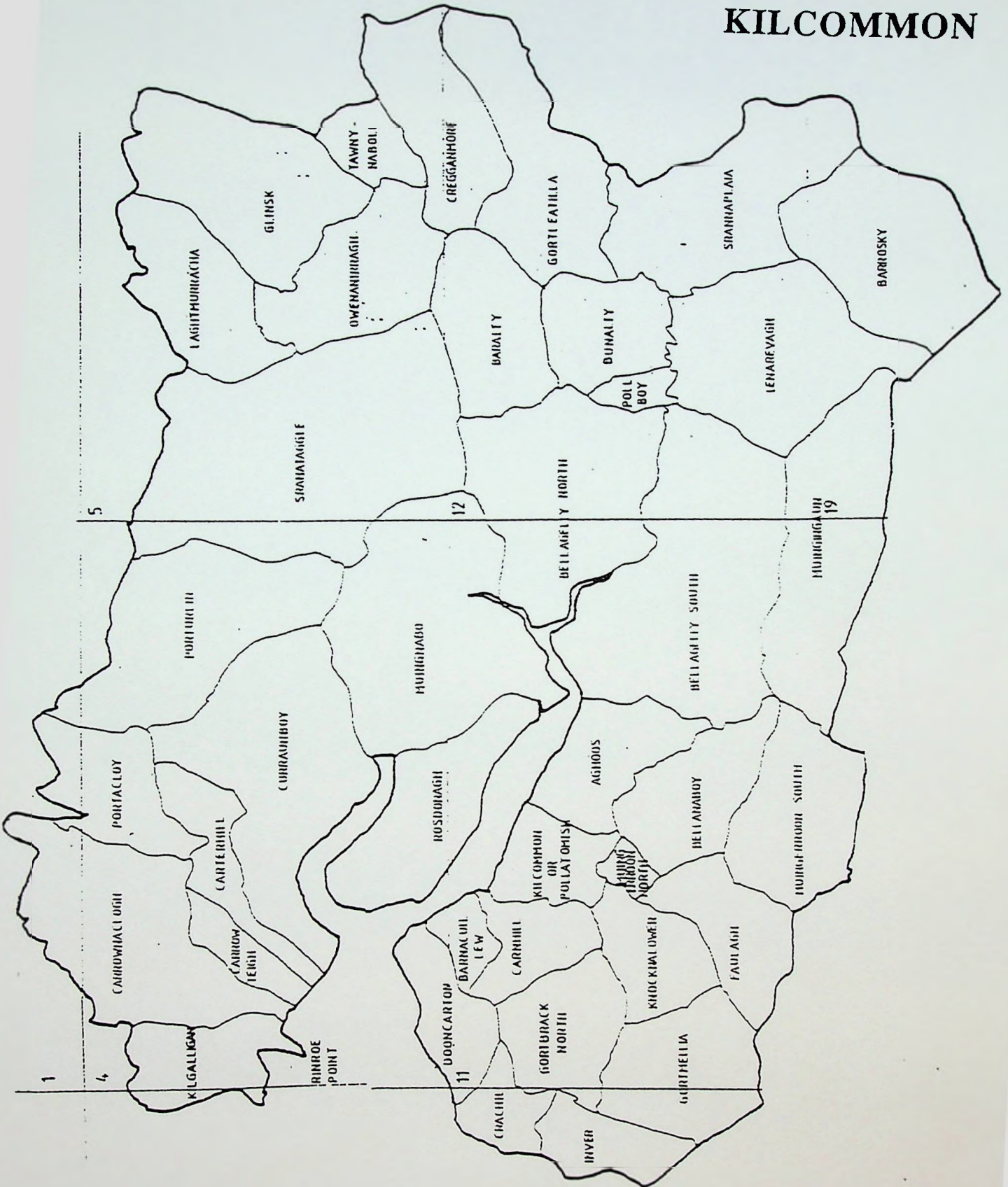
KILMORE



BELMULLET



KILCOMMON



Townland Names:

The majority of townlands were named at an early period and marked out the place where people lived and the location of the land they owned. The standardisation of territorial divisions in the seventeenth century greatly reduced the number of townlands and many placenames were lost in the process. Also these names tended to be written down by people who had little knowledge of the Irish language and in many instances the placenames which have survived may bear little similarity in meaning or construction to the original name. The primary purpose of placenames was to distinguish between places and landowners they usually refer to permanent and easily identifiable features of the landscape. The following is a list of the townlands in the Barony giving the Irish translation plus the meaning. These are based on information collected from both secondary and primary resources.

Townlands Names

| <u>Name</u> | <u>Irish</u> | <u>Meaning</u> |
|--------------------------|--------------------|---|
| <u>Ballycroy:</u> | | |
| Annagh Island | Eanach | A Marsh Island |
| Aughness | Each-Inis | Field of the Plain |
| Bellyveeny | Beal atha Aoibhne | The Pleasant Ford Approach. |
| Belygarvaun | Baile uí Gharbhain | Garvins Townland |
| Ballycroy | Baile Cruaiche | The Village of the Symmetrical Mountains. |
| Bunmore East | Bun Mor | The Big Bottom |
| Bunmore West | Bun Mor | |
| Castlehill | Cnoc an Caisleáin | The Hill of the Castle. |
| Claggan | Claigeann | Headland |
| Claggan Mt. | Cnoic Claigeann | Mountain Headland |
| Doona | Dúná | The Black Ford |
| Doorial | | Friels Sand Bank |
| Drumgallagh | | Ridge of the Stones |
| Drumslide | | Ridge of the Sliding |
| Essaun | | Waterfall |
| Fahy | Fothaigh | Playing Field |
| Gortbrack | | |
| Inishbiggle Island | | |
| Kildun | Cul and Duin | The Church of the Fort. |
| Knockmoyleen | | Hill of the Bare Surface |
| Lettra | Letrecha | A Spewy Hillside |
| Logduff Beg | Lag dubh beag | Little Black Hollow |
| Logduff more | Lag dubh mor | Big Black Hollow |
| Lurgandarragh | Lurgan Darach | Long Hill of the Oak |
| Maumaratta | | Pass of the young Hares. |
| Owenduff | | Dark River |
| Owenglass | Abhainn Ghlas | Green River |
| Scardaun | Madham(mam) | Pass of the Small Cascade |

| | | |
|------------------|------------------------|---------------------------|
| Shraduggan | Srath Dugrin | Duggans |
| Shraederdawen | Srath idir dhá abhainn | Strath/Holm |
| Tallagh | Tulach | Strip between two rivers. |
| Tarsaghaun Beg N | | A Hill |
| Tarsaghaun Beg S | | Little Threshold |
| Tawnanasheffin | Tamhnach na sibhin | Field of the Bullrushes. |

Kiltane:

| | | |
|------------------|------------------------|--------------------------------------|
| Almabroc | Ait na Brocaighe | Hill of the Badger |
| Attawalla | Ait a Bhaile | Site of the Village |
| Ballina | Beal an Atha | Mouth of the ford |
| Ballybeg | Baile Beg | Small Village |
| Ballymunnelly | | |
| Bangor | Beann Chorr | Crooked Hill |
| Bellacorick | Beal atha an Chomhraie | The Ford approach of the Confluence. |
| Bellanumera | | |
| Briska | Bruise | Brittle Land |
| Cloontakilla | Cluainte Cille | The Meadow of the Burial Ground. |
| Croaghaun | Cruchán | The small Hill |
| Darraragh | | Place Full of Oaks. |
| Doohoma | Dumhaigh Thruma | Sounding Banks |
| Doolough | Dumhaigh Locha | The Sandbanks of the Lake |
| Dooyork | Du Eabharc | |
| Drumanaffrin | Druim an aifrinn | The Hill of the Mass |
| Geesala | Gaoth Saife | Saltwater Stream |
| Glencullen Lower | Gleann Cuileann | The Lower Glen of the Holly |
| Glencullen Upper | | |
| Glenturk Beg | Gleann Toire Beg | The Small Glen of the Bores. |
| Glenturk Mor | Gleann Toire Mór | |
| Goolamore | Guaile Mór | The Big Shoulder |
| Kilsallagh | | Burial Ground |
| Kiltane | Cill Tséan | Church of Seadhna |
| Largan Beg | Leargan Beg | Little Hillside |
| Largan Mor | Leargan Mór | Big Hillside |

| | | |
|---------------------|-------------------|---------------------------------------|
| Lenanadurtaun | Leana na dTortan | The Green Spot of the Knolls. |
| Mount Jubilee | Cnoc na Logha | |
| Muingaghal | Muing a Ghail | The Boggy Stream of the Sod Building. |
| Mingdoran | | |
| Muingnahalloona | Muing Thalamhna | Stream of the Ground |
| Muingnanarnad | | Swampy Place/Charm |
| Muinhin | Muinchin | The Stream of Hannah |
| Roy | Rath | A Fort |
| Sheean | Siodhan | A Fairy Hill |
| Sheskin | Seisceann | Sedgy Mountain |
| Shrahanarry | Srath an Earraigh | Holm of the Spirit |
| Shragraddy | Srath Greadaigh | The Holm/Strath of the Burning. |
| Shramore | Srath Mór | Great Srath or Holm |
| Shranakilla | | The Shraigh of the Wood |
| Taraghaun More | Tairseachan Mór | Great Threshold |
| Tavnanasool | Tamhnach na sul | The Green Field of the Eyes. |
| Tullaghanbaun | Tulchan Ban | White Hillock |
| Tullaghanduff | Tulchan Dubh | Black Hillock |
| Tullaghaunnashammer | Tulchan na seamer | Hillock of the Shamrocks |
| Uggool | | A Hollow |

Belmullet:

| | | |
|----------------|-------------------|-------------------------------------|
| Alt | Ailt | Hills |
| Attycunnane | Aít Tighe Chonán | Site of Conan's House |
| Barnatra | Barr na Trá | Top of the Strand |
| Belmullet Town | Beal A'Mhuirthead | Mouth of the Mullet |
| Belmullet | Beal A'Mhuirthead | Mouth of the Mullet |
| Bunawillan | Bun A Mhuilinn | Bottom of the Mill |
| Bunnahowen | Bun A Habhna | Bottom of the River |
| Carrowkeel | Ceathrú Caol | Narrow quarter |
| Carrowmore | An Ceathrú Mhór | The Large Quarter (of the townland) |
| Corclough East | | Round Hill of the Stones |
| Crinnish | | Insulated place |
| Derreens | Doirín | Small Oak Wood |
| Derrycorrib | Doire Coirib | Wood of the Straddle |
| | | Timber |
| Derrynameel | Doire na Miel | The Oakwood of the Baldmonks |

| | | |
|-------------------|-------------------|------------------------|
| Ederglen | Idir Gleann | Between the Glens |
| Fauleens | Na Failin | Small Enclosure |
| Foxpoint | Roinn na Sionnach | The Point of the Fox |
| Glencastle | Glen na Cháisil | The Glen of the Castle |
| Gortmore | Gort Mór | The Big Field |
| Lakefield | Loch na Heilí | Lake of the Cliff |
| Muingmore | Muingmhore | A Swamp |
| Muings | Moyaidh | Streams/Quagmires |
| Pollagarraun | Poll a' Ghiorráin | The Grove Hollow |
| Rathmorgan | Rath Mórgain | Morgan's Fort |
| Shraigh | Srath | A Srath or Holm |
| Srahataggle South | Srath a' tseagail | Holm of the Rye |
| Toorglass | Tuar | Green Field |

Kilcommon:

| | | |
|------------------|----------------------|---------------------------------|
| Aughoose | Achadh | A Field |
| Baralty | Barr Altaigh | 000 73922 |
| Barnacuillen | | Top of the Wood |
| Barroosky | | Top of the Undulation |
| Bellagelly North | Faire Goltorta | Townland of the Appetite |
| Bellagelly South | Faire Goltorta | Townland of the Appetite |
| Bellanaboy | Beal atha na Bwaideh | Mouth of the Yellow Ford |
| Bunalty | Barr Altaigh | Bottom of the Hill |
| Bunowna | | |
| Cornhill | Gort na Chain | The field of the Lump of Stones |
| Carratigue | Ceathrú Thaidhg | Taidhs Quarter Townland |
| Cornboy | Corán Bui | Yellow Crescent |
| Cregganmore | Creaggain Mór | Great Rock |
| Faulagh | | Enclosures |
| Garter Hill | Cnon Gairtéal | Hill of the Garter |
| Glenamoy | Gleann na Muaidhe | The Valley of the Plains |
| Glinsk | Glinnsc | Valley of the Brambles |
| Goola | | The Shoulder |
| Gortbrack | Bortbreach | The Speckled Field |
| Gortleatilla | Gort a Tuile | Field of the Little Stream |
| Gortmelia | | Melleás Field |
| Graughill | Gleann Coill | The Glen with the Little Wood |
| Inver | Inbhair | The Mouth of the Inbhain River |
| Kilgalligan | Cill Ghallagáin | Galligans Cell |
| Knocknalower | Cnoc na Lobhar | Hill of the Leapers |

| | | |
|------------------|--------------------|--------------------------------|
| Laghtmurragh | Leacht Mhurchadha | Murrough's Monument |
| Lenarevagh | Leana Riabhach | Speckled Field |
| Milltown | Baile an Mhuileinn | |
| Muingeroon | Muing Eireanhuin | Irwin's Stream |
| Muingeroon North | Muing Eireanhuin | Irwin's Stream |
| Muingingaun | | Maiden Stream |
| Muingnabo | Muing na Bó | Stream of the Cows |
| Owenanirragh | Abhainn an Iorach | River of the Black Muck |
| Poolboy | Poll Buidhe | Yellow Hole |
| Pollathomas | Poll an Tsómais | Hole of Ease |
| Portacloy | Port an Chluaidh | The harbour of the Fence |
| Porturlin | Port Duirlinne | Port of the Stoney Shore |
| Rossport | Ros Duinhach | The Promontory of the Sandbank |
| | | Holm of the Rye |
| Srahataggle | Srath a tSeagail | Holm of the Plague |
| Srahnaplaiia | Srath an Pláighe | The Stoney Quarter |
| Stonefield | Ceathru na Gloch | |

Kilmore:

| | | |
|---------------------|----------------------|-----------------------------------|
| Annagh | Eanach | A Marsh |
| Ardowen | Ard Eoghain | Owen's Height or Hill |
| Aghleam | Each Léim | Aghleam |
| Aghadoon | Aghadh Dúin | Field of the Fort |
| Aghaglasheen | Achar na Gcailleach | Field of the Nun's |
| Ardmore | Ard Mór | Great Height or Hill |
| Barrett's Plot West | | Barrett's Plot |
| Barrett's Plot East | | Barrett's Plot |
| Ballyglass | Baile Glas | Town/Stone Fort |
| Ballymacsherron | Baile Mhic seathrúin | Town of the Son of Geoffery |
| | | A Place of Pointed Hills |
| Barranagh East | Bearanach | A Place of Pointed Hills |
| Barranagh West | Bearanach | The Top of the Strand |
| Barhauve | Bárr Tráighe | The Big Gate |
| Binghamstown | An Geata Mór | A Heap |
| Carn | Carn | Gilbert's Cartron or Quarter Land |
| Cartrongilbert | | A Quarter of Land |
| | | A Stony Place |
| Cartron | Cartun | A Small Lawn/Meadow |
| Clogher | Clogher | Boyd |
| Clooneen | Cluainín | Common |
| Cross | | Wallace East |
| Cross | | |
| Cross | | |

| | | |
|--------------------|--|---------------------------|
| Cross | | Wallace West |
| Curraghboy | Currach Buidhe | Yellow Moor |
| Divish | Dubh-Ais | Black Hill |
| Drum | A Ridge/Long Hill | Druim |
| Drumreagh | Druim Riabhach | Grey Ridge |
| Elly | Aileach | A Stone Fort |
| Emlycass | Imleach Cais | The Swampy Land of Cas |
| Emlybeg South | Imleach Beag | Small Holm/Swampy Land |
| Emlybeg North | Imleach Beag | Small Holm/Swampy Land |
| Emlybeg | | |
| Faulmore | Fál Mór | Great Enclosure |
| Gladree | Gleadraighe | May be a Family Name |
| Glebe | | |
| Glenlara | Gleann Lára | Middle Glen/Valley |
| Gortaneden | Gort an Eadain | Field of the Hill/Brow |
| Gortbrack | Gort Breac | Speckled Field |
| Knockshambo | Cnoc Seán Bhó | Hill of the old Cow |
| Knocknalina | Cnocán a' Liónadh | Hillock of the Filling |
| Leam | Léim | A Leap |
| Letterbeg | Leitir Bheag | Small Spewy Hillside |
| Lurgacloy | Lorg a' Chalidhe | Track of the Ditch |
| Macecrump | Más Crump | Crump's Hill |
| Macecrump (Common) | | |
| Manraghrory | Manrach Ruaidhrí | Rory's Old Hovel |
| Moyrahan | Magh Rathain | The Plain of the Ferns |
| Mullaghroe | Mullach Ruadh | Red Summit |
| Surgeview/Nakil | Naicill | The Eagle Cliff |
| Newtown | | |
| Shanaghy | Sean Acadh | Old Field |
| Pollacappul | Poll a' Capaill | The Hole of the Horse |
| Rinanagh | Rinn Eanaigh | Point of the Marsh |
| Tallagh | Tulach | A Hill |
| Tiraun | Tirean | Small District |
| Termon | Tearmann | Sanctuary Land |
| Termoncarragh | Tearmann Caithreach of The Old Fort | Church Land (Sanctuary) |
| Tonemace | Tóin a' Mháis | Bottom of the Long Hill |
| Tonemace (common) | | |
| Tonmore | Toín Mhór | Great Bottom Land |

THE ISLANDS

The remote and isolated islands of Inishglora, Duvillaun More and Inishkea North and South, lie a short distance off the western coastline of the Mullet.

Although they were inhabited for hundreds of years, the turn of this century has seen the sad and lonely demise of habitation on the islands. The increasing pressure of inaccessibility and isolation coupled with the Drowning Disaster of 1927, brought about this inevitable situation. The islanders were forced to vacate their homes and find a new life for themselves on the mainland.

Uninhabited now, there are only the remnants of early Christian living, found in the wealth of archaeological remains on each island.

More historical information has been written on the Inishkea islands, than on both Inishglora and Duvillaun More. Hence the lack of comprehensive detail on these islands.

INISHGLORA

Inisgluaire (Isle of Purity)

The Inishglora Island lies off the coast of the Mullet Peninsula in Co. Mayo, and is made up of sixty acres. It is shaped roughly like the figure eight, lying north-west and south-east. Most of the ruined buildings, of which there are numerous, lie at the south-east end.

This is the most noted of the islands off the coast of Kilmore-Erris mainly because of the two legends associated with it, namely that the Children of Lir, who had been turned into swans, were buried there after they regained human form, and secondly, that bodies buried on the island did not decompose.

There is also a less well-known legend which says that clay from the island would banish rats and mice, even when brought to the island. Although mice swarm in vast numbers in other parts of Ireland, here not a single one is found. No mouse breeds there and if one is introduced it will immediately run towards the sea and leap into it. If it be stopped before it leaps to its death, it will immediately die.

Brendan the Navigator, who died in 577, founded a Monastic Settlement here. The remains of this are today a National Monument. The ruins include a Monastic Cashel, St. Brendan's Cell or Beehive Hut, St. Brendan's Chapel, a Nunnery, a Monastery, a Holy Well and various "leachts", tombstones, decorated cross slab and pillars.

On Inishglora there are two ruined churches, one known as Teampull na Bhféar or Teampull na Naomh, and the other slightly smaller Teampull na mBan. The chapel of St. Brendan is only 12ft x 8ft and is built of dried stone, and stands now with only the remains of a corbelled roof. The Holy Well dedicated to St. Brendan is covered by a 'clochán' called "Tor Piprait" (tower of the well). This tower is approached by an uncovered passage nine feet long and down seven steps. It is a very special well and no woman may draw water from it.

By 1934 the last of the inhabitants had left due to the continued pressure and isolation associated with island life. This was prompted by the drowning disaster on the Inishkeas of 1927.

DUVILLAUN MORE

Duibh-Oileán Mór (Big Black Island)

South 4km south-west of Fallmore is the small island of Duvillaun More, accessible only in very calm weather. It was abandoned at the turn of the 20th Century but also contains the ecclesiastical remains of a small anchorite settlement, including beehive huts, cross slabs, a monastic enclosure and a holy well.

Remains of a small early anchoritic settlement can be found on the island, including a small circular enclosure subdivided like Kilmore-Erris by a curved north-south cross wall.

Black Island (Duibh-Oileán), lying south-east of Inishkea, has nothing to attract the notice of the antiquarian except a killeen, the unconsecrated burial ground of children.

THE INISHKEA ISLANDS

"I think Inishkea, where the people form an independent state of their own, and must be pretty near heathens. They acknowledge no landlord, they pay no rates, they elect a monarch of their own, and though a priest does come at intervals to confess, to marry, and to christen them, they have an idol they regularly worship and propitiate before their boats put out to sea".

(A.I. Shand, Pp, 110-1)

The Inishkea Islands are situated three miles west of the mainland of Glesh Surgeview in the Mullet Peninsula, in the Barony of Erris. These islands were inhabited until 1934 until unbearable weather conditions and a drowning forced the people to leave and head for the mainland.

Sadly, little has been recorded about the social history of Inishkea, and it is becoming increasingly difficult to get an appreciable amount of knowledge which would afford us an insight into the life and customs of the islanders in their hayday.

INISHKEA - North and South

Named after Geia, a holy virgin, the islands are divided from each other by a narrow neck of water. These were the most densely populated of all the islands, particularly in the 19th Century when both islands contained approximately thirty families.

A monastic settlement had been founded by St. Columcille in the early Christian period; archaeological excavations are designated National Monuments.

The islands had a distinctive lifestyle. The main livelihood was gained through fishing. Mackerel from October to Christmas and Lobster from April to October. The two islands came together to fish, and, along with the inhabitants of Inishglora, used the currach with skill and expertise. Currachs were also used to transport cattle to market and fish for sale in Blacksod and Tiraun. Profits were used to bring back flour and other supplies to the island. Potatoes and oats were grown locally and each

family worked five or six acres of land. Dances were held at weekends and the islanders would also meet up in houses and amuse themselves in story-telling, music and song.

Schooling began at an early age and by adolescence the young men had learned to handle the currachs and started to fish. To obtain further schooling necessitated leaving the islands and many eventually emigrated to America. In 1935 the Land Commission had rehoused the inhabitants on the mainland in areas such as Glosh and Fallmore.

Inis Geidhe (Geia's Island)
Inishkea - North and South
Heritage Guide to the Mullet Peninsula
1991 Morrigan Book Company.

POVERTY IN THE LAST CENTURY:

Any view on Inishkea in the last century would have to be seen in terms of a background of extreme poverty in the whole of Erris at that time. Farm holdings on Inishkea were small where the division of land took place. As was common throughout the Barony of Erris in the 19th Century, lots were cast for tillage land every third year. Every person was entitled to grow potatoes for the first year and barley or oats the second year on ridges assigned to them on the lottery. A headman or kingsman was appointed in each village, and it was his duty to cast the lots every third year, take care of the rent collection and applot the proportion of taxes with the other villagers. All was done in a patriarchal way.

Housing too was inferior on Inishkea in the 1900's, though by the early part of this century, houses were reported to have been tidy, well kept and whitewashed with lime. They were built of stone and thatched loosely. Feather beds were common, the feathers often plucked off wild fowl killed by fishermen.

FISHING:

The currach was rowed by the fishermen of Inishkea. From a very young age boys were taken out in these canvas canoes and they learned through experience and instruction as to how to handle the boats. By the age of twelve or thirteen boys went to fish in the Atlantic as their fathers and grandfathers had. The catch of fish, typically mackerel and lobster were brought to Blacksod or Belmullet to be sold.

FOOD AND ENTERTAINMENT:

The islanders were forced, through necessity, to ferry in some supplies by currach, from Belmullet. Only one shop and public house stood on North Inishkea, and though the 19th Century saw the islanders as almost totally self-sufficient some other supplies were necessary. Their self-sufficiency encouraged a diet of potatoes, fish, milk and butter. Flour, sugar, tea and stout were needed to supplement the island store.

Bad weather conditions often cut the islanders off from the island. Experience taught them to be prepared, and often four months advance supplies were bought from Blacksod to Belmullet in case of bad weather. (typically true of Christmas Shopping).

Colm O'Gaora, a former Gaelic League organiser in Co. Mayo, described Belmullet as a hive of activity in the 1920's.

In the winter evenings there was card-playing, house dancing every Sunday night, and on alternative Islands the schoolmaster recited the rosary and all the families assembled. Home crafts; including knitting, patchwork, quilt making etc., were the task of the island women. Although it constitutes the area of work, the women enjoyed it, taking great pride in the products and being meticulous in their making.

SCHOOLING:

There were no schools in Kilmore parish before 1824 when Dean Lyons invited as Inspector of the Kildare Street Society, to the area, with the idea of establishing a number of national schools.

The south Inishkea school was opened in 1886 and the north school opened in 1894. Both were closed in 1934-'35, when the islands were deserted.

As the south island school was opened eight years before the north, children from the north island were ferried across in currachs to attend the school on the south island. When the islanders transferred to the mainland in 1935-'6, Aughleam school was extended to accommodate them, and a new school was built in 1965.

Deserters from the army were harboured by the islanders from time to time, and in return the children were instructed in English and the three R's (reading, 'riting and 'rithmetic). Though Irish was the main language of the people, the fishing trade with the schooling system enabled many of the islanders to speak fluent English also.

The list of principal teachers who taught in the national schools at Inishkea north included: MacSuibhne 1894-'97, O'Dochartaí 1897-'98, O'Roichir 1898-'99, Bairead 1899-'20, O'Riain 1921-'23, O'Conghaile 1923-'24 and O'Fiodbara 1924-'35.

WAKING AND BURIAL CUSTOMS:

Writing in the 1830's both O'Donovan and Knight refer to a peculiar kind of custom of raising a heap of stones (a carn) not only where a person was killed or died suddenly, but on every spot where the corpse was laid down while being carried to the churchyard. White quartz stones were often used from the adjoining beaches and gave a beautiful effect to the graves.

Pat Rua Reilly gave the following account to Father Michael Harrison in 1987 concerning the waking of the dead.

"When a person dies he/she would be put overboard by the people on a bed surrounded by white sheets. The coffin was made on the island locally. The wake lasted for two days and keening women stood over the bed lamenting the dead".

A box of 43's; white clay pipes (sic) and plenty of tobacco was readily available at the two day wake. Islanders believed that the dead people smoked in the graves and because of this the 43's were interred with the corpse.

After the wake and the recitation of the rosary over the corpse, transferal took place to the north island by currach, before a final journey of one and a half miles on foot to the graveside.

Charles R. Browne M.D. M.R.I.A. wrote on the "Ethnography of the Mullet, Inishkea and Portacloy". He gathered his information through personal observation and local informants who had close contact with the everyday life of the people.

Leabharlann Co. Mhuigheo
Mayo County Library

Browne believes the natives of both Inishkea North and South to be very hospitable and kindly to strangers. A visitor, however distrustful would be welcomed into their homes and entertained as best as possible.

In times of trouble the islanders were noted as equally kind, generous and helpful towards one another.

Although some cases of dishonesty and odd practices in bargaining occurred they were on the whole honest in their dealings with each other. Browne noted a certain amount of distrust and jealousy between the natives of the two Inishkeas, rooted in strained relations between people in remote areas.

"As regards intelligence they are extremely sharp and shrewd, and seem fond of argumentation. There is but little crime, with the exception of illicit distillation, and drunkenness..... They seem to be conscientious in their religious observances and depend much on the guidance and advice of their clergy".

(C. R. Browne)

X THE NANHOGE OR NEEWOGUE:

Formerly on Inishkea, a small stone figure called the Neewoge (little saint) existed. It was believed to have great power over the weather, and was thus treated with great reverence.

It is said that a pirate landed on the island, plundering and stealing all that was portable. He set fire to the houses but the one which held the Neewoge would not light. Search was made for the cause and the image was taken out and broken. The power of the Neewoge, though still great, never fully recovered to its former strength.

Some years ago, the parish priest's attention was drawn to the image, and he threw it into the sea. He died soon afterwards and many of the islanders ascribed his death to the interference with the neewoge. One Inishkea man spoke in a morbid tone when explaining that he had never known misfortune or hunger on the island, until the destruction of the figure.

Opinions differ as to the shape of the Neewoge, some describing it as "a stone figure of rude workmanship" (Browne) and others as a small flat stone, but both agreeing that it was clothed annually in a covering of homespun.

Regardless of the form of the neewoge the belief in and reverence of this object was unanimous. It had great importance for the islanders and portrayed their great love for the mystical and supernatural.

BATHU INIS GÉ

Nach bocht an cás é is nach doar an bás é
Nuair a rinneadh an báthú in Inis Gé,
Ta deichniúir báite chomh maith san áit seo
I bport a' Chairn is nach mór an scéal.
Más é an cúrsa a bhí i ndán dóibh
Nior tháinig réalta ar an spéir san oich'
Ach thart le costa bhí an fharraige tógtha,
'S ni raibh caladh báid ann le teacht
chun cuan.

2

Ni amháin sa pharóiste 'tá caint faoin mbáthú,
Ach ar fud na hÉireann uilig go leir
'Sé an scéal is deacra 's tá go leor ag trácht air
Ni gan ábhar , cead faraoir gear,
Dá mbeadh a gcorpanna le cur i gcónra
Ná a gcolainn gránna le síneadh i gcré
Ni bheadh mna no páiste chomh buartha cráite
Is bheadh muintir sásta in Inis Gé

From the tower a narrow road runs downhill to a small beach that faces the Duvillauns. On either side modest cottages and bungalows stand in line, the homes of those who once lived out to sea on Inishkea North and South. Some are deserted and falling apart, others send thin wisps of peat or coal smoke into the gale through squat and chubby chimneys. Walking down the land I look for the house of John Riley, a survivor of October 28, 1927.

The cataclysmic event for Galway and Mayo fishermen these past hundred and fifty years had nothing to do with land league agitation, the revolution for independence, black and tans, World War I or II, the great depression of the twenties, entry into the Common Market or even the Virgin Mary's apparition in the tiny village of nearby Knock. It was the "Terrible Western Tragedy" of an October evening in 1927, the "most sudden, the most remarkable, the most disastrous storm on record". Forty-five fishermen, all in currachs weighted down with tons of nets full of mackerel, were obliterated in an avalanche of wind and wave. Nine islanders from Inishboffin in Galway, seventeen from Claggan Bay, nine from Lacken and ten from the Inishkeas died in a span of thirty to forty minutes.

Excerpts from the various Official Inquests:

Festy Feeney stated he was in one of the boats that left Claggan.

There were four other men and they carried nets weighing almost a ton. These occupied about one fifth of the boat, leaving no room for working her. "We started shooting the nets after 6 o'clock, and were engaged at it when the gale came on. We were about a quarter mile out from the shore at the time. All the boats were shooting their nets together, and were about 400 yards apart". Asked is he had any indication of the gale, or if it was expected, the witness replied, "No, it was a grand calm night, the sea being like a lake. Then suddenly the gale came along roaring, and the sea was lashed into huge breakers. We had two nets hauled into the boat at the time but we had to cut the others and make off".

Question: "During the time you were hauling and cutting nets, did you see other boats?"

Witness: "It was impossible to see anything when the gale came on. There was nothing but spray and salt water flying over us. This was the fiercest gale I was ever in. I never experienced anything like it before".

Question: "If you had not seven nets in the boat, would you have been able to have brought your boat home?"

Witness: "I could not tell you. It was God who brought us home".

Remark of the local doctor:

“Currachs are small miserable craft. They are suicide tubs. It was criminal folly to allow people to risk their lives in this manner in order to obtain their supper”.

Testimony of the coroner:

“Bodies are gradually being discovered, many in advanced stages of decomposition. The body of a headless man was found on Tuesday at Blacksod. Through a birthmark on the finger it was identified. It was coffined that evening and buried”.

A reporter, The Ballina Herald:

“One of the Kearneys was observed getting up on a rock and waving his hand towards the shore, when a wave dashed him off the rocks and he disappeared immediately. All yesterday the fisher folk scanned the waves for any trace of the men, but their vigil has been unrewarded. The scene at the pier baffles description”.

A reporter, The Galway Observer:

“The night was beautifully fine and clear, but very dark. Dark nights are best for fishing in the bay. The hurricane swept down on the boats with frightful suddenness. The balance of the nets that had not been boarded were hurriedly cut adrift and the fight for life began. The boats, all currachs, made for the pier. At first, slight progress was made but after an hour's fruitless effort the crews found themselves being carried towards the cliffs in a tempestuous sea. Heavy waves broke over the boats, which soon became half full of water. In some cases the oars were wrenched out of the crews' hands. All hope was abandoned. The boat soon cracked against the rocks and the whole bottom fell out of her. The crew were precipitated into the raging sea”.

Thomas Williams, fisherman, The St. Patrick:

“I went down twice, and when I came up the second time I caught hold of some floating wreckage. The next place I found myself was on the shore, being swept in by a huge wave”. That same wave had also swept the remainder of the crew onto the shore as well, but Anthony Kearney, who was lame, was swept out again by a receding wave and was seen no more.

A reporter, The Ballina Herald:

"Carrying stable lamps, the men and women of the village were loudly shouting the names of their friends, and imploring God to save them, and when all hope was given up for the drowned fishermen, Fr. Quinn, raising his hand in the darkness of the night, pronounced conditional absolution. The scene was heartrending and impressive. Three boats had been smashed on the rocks, and the pieces of them had been washed ashore. The strand was littered with the boards of the boats along with coats, caps, and other articles of clothing belonging to the lost crews. On Saturday morning and even on Friday evening, thousands of seals could be seen on the cliffs and shore, being driven by the storm. Their roaring and whining added to the horror of the scene".

A reporter, The Ballina Herald:

"It is only on Monday that their relatives on Inishkea Islands learned of the tragic deaths of their breadwinners on Friday night last. On Saturday nine men from the islands risked the crossing to the mainland seeking information that some of the men might have landed safely elsewhere, but weather conditions were so bad that it was not until this morning that two of them, the harbingers of bad tidings, were able to return with the bad news, 'Not so'. Several women fainted, and many became hysterical. Those who had more fortitude and restraint prevented several women and girls from plunging into the sea. Last night, the lights on the islands continued to shine brightly as signals to the absent fishermen, indicating the usual landing places for themselves and their currachs. Tonight, those lamps are dimmed for fishermen who will never return".

An interview with Fr. Dodd, parish priest of the Inishkeas:

"No finer Christians could be found anywhere; clean living, industrious, and honourable, they were an asset to any nation. No tragedy such as this has ever occurred in this district, and I am fearful of the results. Ten of the most experienced and able fishermen have been lost, and this will mean the end of the fishing industry here. In addition to losing their breadwinners, their families have lost currachs and gear, they face starvation".

Inishkea obituaries:

"John Monaghan was the only married among the ten deceased. he leaves a wife and seven children, the eldest being eleven.

Michael Kean, though only nineteen, was the sole breadwinner of his family, supporting an aged father and younger brother.

The deaths of Michael and John Monaghan practically wipe out this family, as there is none left but a crippled brother and an aged mother and father.

The body of John Riley, twenty-one, is the first to be recovered, washed to shore entangled in nets. Clenched in his hand was his little brother's cap, a young lad of fourteen, and also lost".

The Fisher Folk's Calvary:

"These poor people live in wretched conditions. Their heritage is hardship. They live, most of them in cabins not considered good enough to house the least considered livestock. There are hundreds of one-roomed, tumbledown hovels in which at night the cow, the ass, and oftentimes the pig, are sheltered at one end, and the family live in the other end. The kitchen is at once the bedroom and stable. His stock is everything he has. Food: potatoes, tea, salt fish. No butter. Meat and fowl on Christmas, Easter and the first of November. Eggs are never eaten, but traded for tea. Most of the men go harvesting in Scotland each fall, and depend heavily on money from relations back in America. The young people who have any life in them emigrate abroad".

Mr. O'Connor, M.P.:

"I knew a young doctor once whose duties brought him to this part of the world for a while. He told me one of his experiences, how he saw a woman delivered of a child, and her bed was a pile of seaweed".

A reporter, The Connaught Telegraph:

"It is quite true to say that today the Gael in his compounds and reservations is as much isolated, ostracised, submerged and degraded as he was in the Penal days. The only things he has freely now are the consolations of his religion. In all else he is much the same - same starvation diet, same old hovel, same old bog. The fish which poor men and boys of the Inishkeas lost their lives in catching were not being sought for sale - there is no market within their reach - but for food, the salted mackerel, which would tide their families over the winter. One might well disbelieve that such conditions could exist widespread in parts of

the twenty-six Counties. It is plainly manifest that many people have drifted into the English mentality which inspired a one-time Chief Secretary, in answer to a question in the British House of Commons, to reply: "The honourable member need not expect the Government to feed the people of the West of Ireland on chicken and champagne".

And a month after the disaster:

"Bodies are still appearing on the shore. The sea is too rough for islanders to cross over to the mainland for the purposes of identification. But later, with the aid of sweaters and other bits of clothing, they can usually determine who the victim was. Yet another body was found by a man working the seaweed, near Tiraun Point, Blacksod. Two girls were there, and with their aprons they made a stretcher and carried it up to the priest's house".

EXTRACT FROM THE WESTERN PEOPLE, SATURDAY 5TH NOVEMBER 1927.

THE ERRIS HORROR

"Tragedy upon tragedy!" writes the "Western People" special representative. "From Lacken, on the north coast of Mayo, where I listened to the wails of the people mourning their dead, I travelled to Blacksod, and beyond it to Faulmore, on the extreme western coast of Mayo, to listen anew to tales of grief, to see strong men sobbing while tears coursed down their weather-beaten cheeks and choked their utterings, to see again women and girls with heads bower under the weight of a crushing sorrow, to behold a silent, stricken woman across the foot of a cheep coffin in an attitude of soul-tearing anguish.

The coffin contained the only body of ten which had been yielded up by this hungry sea.

Blacksod is 54 miles from Ballina by road. Faulmore, where the road ends at the sea, lies a couple of miles further to the west. Away to the south-west are little dots of islands - Gagbta, Leamarcha, Duvillanmore, the largest of the little group, and Keely, the tiniest. To the north-west are the two larger islands of Inishkea North and South lying about four miles from the mainland. These island are in the parish of Binghamstown, the parish priest of which is Very Rev. A. M. Dodd, B.D. The islands are isolated regions, the inhabitants of which live

principally by fishing, supplemented by the meagre earnings from cultivation of the soil. They are an industrious race. Two national schools - one on each island - provide educational facilities which are availed of to the full by the rising generation”.

The Population

“The population of the South Island consists of twenty-nine families, comprising of one hundred and eighty-nine individuals, and that of the North Island of twenty-five families, embracing one hundred and forty-four persons.

The figures were given to me by the beloved priest, Father Dodd, a real father to his flock, who knows practically all of the inhabitants personally, and who knew well and respected the ten whose loss is mourned today”.

The Tragedy

“About 5.30 on Friday evening nine currachs left the South Island and thirteen the North Island to fish for mackerel in the sea between the islands and the mainland. The fishing ground lay a short distance off the island coast. Each craft was managed by two fishermen. The first haul was meagre; yet with a premonition of danger most of the crews decided to put back to the islands, fearing a squall on this wild coast. Six of the crews however, hopeful of better results from another ‘shot’, as they call it, remained out to try their luck. Those who desisted after the first haul got home safely.

About 7.30 the wind rose, blowing from the north-west - west-north-west they told me, though Lacken men insist that the wind which cost them nine lives was from the south-west. The gale came on without warning, and soon a hurricane, in which the stoutest craft could hardly live, threw the little fleet into confusion. Some of the fishermen got their nets aboard hurriedly. Others in their terror cut their nets adrift, and plying their paddles, fought heroically, frantically with the storm, endeavouring to made for their island homes”.

“The night was dark. The gale raged with appalling violence, pitching the frail boats about like feathers, blowing them off the island coast, despite the most desperate efforts of men who might almost be said to have been born with the paddles in their hands, and who knew how to use them as few mainlanders knew, for the islanders’ safety at all times

depends upon their seamanship. Here the sea is always rough, and frequently even the few hundred yards between the two islands is almost impossible to negotiate. So angry indeed are the waters that priest or doctor cannot venture across the four miles of sea at most seasons of the year and Mass is only celebrated on the islands at intervals when the sea is calm and Stations are held.

From the first burst of the gale it was a matter of each boat for itself, with death staring the hardy islanders in the face, as it so often stares them all through their lives on the waters, even when conditions are comparatively propitious.

Who can imagine the feelings of the two occupants of each boat as they found themselves driven further and further from their homes and safety in the all-stash enveloping darkness, with the rain blinding them and soaking into their skins, and the spray choking them, and the roar of the hurricane making it impossible to converse even in couples! The six craft which had remained at sea to be caught in the gale, were separated almost at once, and the only two survivors of the tragedy are unable to give any account of the fate of their comrades. Nothing to tell the story of the end of the ten men remains beyond the wreckage of the currachs washed ashore.

The End

There was terror and horror on the two islands when the six crafts failed to reach their homes, but the hope was entertained alike by the relatives and those who had succeeded in reaching the island that the tiny boats had affected a landing on the mainland. Next morning this hope was found to be groundless, for at nine o'clock the previous night the only survivors, two brothers named Meenaghan, were cast ashore at Aughleam, or Tiraun, close to the chapel of Tiraun, and struggling to the nearest house, told the story of their experience as soon as they had recovered from their exhaustion. They, however, could throw no light on the fate of their comrades. Next morning the wreckage told its own tale, the broken remains of the currachs, and one unbroken, being washed ashore.

On the sands, entangled in a net which had been washed ashore, was the body of John Reilly, who with his brother Terry, a youth of 14 1/2 years, had formed the crew of one of the boats. In his hand he clutched

his young brother's cap - doubtless ceased in a pathetic effort to save the youngster as the waves closed over them and they went together to their deaths.

It is not improbable that the two Reillys at least had got close to the shore of the mainland, following practically the same course as the Meenaghans, before their currach was captured and battered by the wind and waves.

Of the others no trace could be found and the circumstances of their last struggles are enshrined in the same mystery that surrounds the deaths of their fellow-countrymen at Lacken.

THE SCENE AT BLACKSOD

In the downpour of rain, which left the road under water in places, I reached Blacksod on Sunday. Outside a long tin roofed, tidily-kept cottage looking out on Blacksod bay I pulled up, attracted by two forms which stood outside the door. A stream of water, coming from a culvert, covered the street to a depth of about four inches and flowed into the sea across the way. The house was that of Michael Keane, an Islander now settled on the mainland, an uncle of one of the victims.

As I approached the door some young men standing just within stepped outside into the rain to allow me to enter.

I went straight into the kitchen and then I pulled up with a shock. Stretched right opposite the door was a coffin. The kitchen was full of mourners, men, women and young girls. In the coffin was the body of John Reilly.

A pathetic figure was presented by a woman of middle age, who lay sprawled in an agony of silent grief across the foot of the coffin, her arms embracing it.

On the breastplate of the coffin was painted the simple inscription:

JOHN REILLY
Died 29th October, 1927,
Aged 21 years.
R.I.P.

Included in the gathering in the kitchen was Mr. Thomas O'Reilly, Belmullet, Dail candidate at the recent election. He introduced me to many of the relatives of the lost fisherman.

I have never seen women bear their burdens of sorrow more silently than these Erris women, gathered around that coffin. Handkerchiefs or aprons to eyes, they wept, but they made no display.

Many years ago at the Abbey Theatre in Dublin I witnessed on more than one occasion J.M. Synge's masterpiece, "Riders To The Sea", depicting the tragedy of the fishermen's homes in the west when the sea exacted its toll. In that little one-act drama the women were vocal, proclaiming the loss aloud. Here in this remote corner of Erris, in the heart of the Gaeltacht, where everyone struck me when comparing the scene with Synge's women in the drama of Western Fisherfolks Lives. The women were perfectly silent in the presence of their dead. There was not trace of keening, no declamation, no protest against the hardness of their lot, no wild complaints of the losses they had suffered, nothing but silent anguish and tear-dimmed eyes.

What can one say that is not banal in such surroundings and in the face of such a tragedy? I express my sympathy with the families of the victims. And as they spoke to me the tears rolled once again down the cheeks of the men, whose toil is one that tries conclusions with death almost every day of the year.

WEEPING MEN

There was John O'Donnell, of Inishkea South, in his blue jersey, uncle of the confined John and Terry Reilly, still lying out somewhere in the sea. "Terry was in my house a couple of hours before they put out", he said. "I warned them that they should not go out, that I was afraid that it was going to come on to blow. But they were too courageous, and when they saw it calming down again and the others preparing to go, you could not keep them. They went, and now there is one of them, and the other he is out there beyond somewhere. My God, but it's terrible, all the poor fathers and mothers and brothers and sisters crying for them today".

"Aye, crying for all the good it will do us now or ever again", wailed Tom Meenaghan from Inishkea South, father of Martin Meenaghan, one of the victims. "They lived by the sea. It was their home, and they looked on it as a friend. Little friendship it showed them on Friday

night. Little friendship it shows us today, crying or grand boys, keeping them from us, not even giving us a chance of waking them and burying them and knowing where they lie. O, my poor boy, my son!" And the sorrow stricken parent, heart-rent with inconsolable grief, burst into tears. And all were silent as he sobbed pitifully and the big tears rolled down and fell unheeded on his vest, already sodden with the rain which fell in torrents without as if the very heavens joined in the mourning with this afflicted area.

"The finest boy he was in all the parishes around". The bereaved parent was speaking again. "Well over six foot he was, and so fit and strong and courageous. Where he is today, my lovely boy that we nursed and reared and saw grow up to be a credit to us? Dead, and lying out somewhere in the sea with no one to help him, to shut his eyes or to straighten out his fine limbs that were so strong until the sea brought him down and killed him".

"I know, sure I know, I'm no worse off than many others, but that doesn't made it easier for any of us. Another nine young fellows like them you cannot find on the island today. Go out and see for yourself. If you go there today it isn't Inishkea at all. God comfort their poor mothers and the others that are crying for them out there. They are in a poor state, crying and weeping for their sons, their children.

AN ONLY SON

"Poor Sarah Lavelle", said another as we stood by the coffin. "She is a widow woman", he explained to me, and John, the boy that is gone with the others, was her only boy. A good lad and a nice boy. God be good to him today and have pity on his poor mother".

INISHKEA DROWNING DISASTER

NAMES OF THE TEN MEN LOST

JOHN MEENAGHAN
JOHN MONAGHAN
MICHAEL MONAGHAN
JOHN REILLY
TERRY REILLY
JOHN MC GINTY
MARTIN MEENAGHAN
WILLIE REILLY
JOHN LAVELLE
MICHAEL KEANE

On the night of 28th October, 1927 a violent storm blew up as fishermen were out at sea between the North Island and the Mainland. There was no warning whatsoever. Six currachs were caught containing twelve men, two men fortunately survived but ten men were lost. This tragedy amongst other reasons led to the gradual desertion of the Island.

THE SURVIVORS

The Meenaghan brothers, soul survivors from the six currachs caught in the storm, were there waiting to pay their last respects to their neighbours and comrades, whose fate they had so narrowly escaped. They moved about restlessly, though unobtrusively. Their story is briefly told as far as they wished to repeat what they already had been called upon to say to those with a claim born of a great sacrifice to know all they could tell of what happened. They were within thirty yards of a landing on their home shores at one time in their terrible struggle with sea and storm, but they were borne off by a gust greater than they in their exhausted condition could hope to resist, carried out into the trough of the waves once more, battered and buffeted about as if they were the special object of the storms assault; and then they lost trace of their whereabouts. They had done their best and failed, and they could not only trust to Providence to bring them safely through the tempests furies. Adrift, running before the gale, with nothing to indicate the direction of their passage save the terrific wind, which they endeavoured by the use of their paddles to keep a stern, rushing through the waters at a speed they had never attained before or never could hope to attain by their own exertions, they were carried before

the wind. Then into their minds flashed the thought of the dread 'Pluthaun' of Pluddany Rocks, which lie perhaps a mile off the south western peak of the northern island. If they struck these then all hope was lost. Their nets were aboard the three-men currachs in which they had gone fishing. If they could get these nets overboard a stern they would act as a sort of a sea-anchor to retard their passage and keep them from drifting onto the dreaded 'Pluthaun' - as long as they could keep an end of the drag aboard in safety. It seemed to be their only hope. While one of them kept his paddle at work the other managed to throw the net out behind. And so they fought or rather drifted clear of the rocks. "And when we passed the 'Pluthaun' in safety", said John with an abounding simple faith, "something told me we would live". That was the summit of their ambitions out there, friendless, helpless and alone in the darkness with the elements bent on their destruction - just to live.

To the fact that the Meenaghans happened to be two men in a three-men currach is attributed some share in the explanation of the fact that their craft weathered the storm so successfully. Water was coming in, but as long as it did not rise too high in the boat it provided a sort of ballast. But it was rising, and as they raced before the gale John endeavoured by the use of the wooden baller - ascouped-out, semi-globular vessel carried in all three boats - to keep their frail canoe from being swamped.

Was it minutes, hours, or an age until they struck land? The fishermen could not tell. Time had passed out of their reckoning. The currach struck the rocks and capsized. The brothers were thrown onto the rocks on the mainland coast close to Tiraun Point, and behind Tiraun Chapel - the nearest place of worship to Inishkea or to Blacksod or Faulmore - four miles to the south.

BROTHERS HEROIC STRUGGLE

"It is little short of a miracle that men could attempt to land there and survive the effort. Providence, however, which had shaped the helpless brothers' course, still watched over them, and they managed to secure a foothold. Anthony, on being thrown to the rocks, was stunned momentarily by the contact of his head with the stone, which inflicted a bad gash. With his brother's aid he managed to regain his feet and struggle out of danger onto the shore.

With nothing to guide them in the darkness but the wind, they struggled onward, the gale in their backs helping them, and so they came to the licensed premises of Mrs. Conalty at Aughlead.

It was exactly ten minutes to nine, he told me, when the two Meenaghans came to our place. One brother, John, was almost carrying the other, who was dazed and exhausted. Indeed John was little better himself. We had no idea that anything was amiss on the shore, though the storm left but little hope of safety for anyone who might be afloat in a currach on such a night. Only for his brother Anthony could not hope to have made his way in his condition, even if he had ever risen from the rocks that injured his head. Their state was pitiful when they got to our place. John still carried in his hand the bailer of the currach, and such was his condition that we had to take it from him, for he still seemed to cling to it dazedly as if it were something vital. He had been bailing out the currach when she struck, and even in his struggle for a foothold on the rocks in the darkness he held onto it.

The brothers were in no state to be questioned just then. We revived them with whiskey and hot tea, and when they had been partially restored we questioned them. They told us as well as they could what had happened but no sooner had they come to then they wanted to go and see after the currach. I gathered some of the boys and Pat Cauley, Win. Monahan, Jim Mc Andrew and myself got a bicycle and lamp and went out to search the shore. We got Meenaghan's currach and net. There was a hole in the side of the currach and the rail was broken. We secured the currach.

THE FINDING OF THE BODY

Next morning we searched the shore again and between seven and eight o'clock William Heffernan, of Aughlead, was the first to come on the body of John Reilly - maybe not the first, for he says there were three footprints past the body when he found it. That seemed to show that somebody else had found it, but did not interfere with it. Fishermen do not like to be the first to find a dead body, you see. Win. Heffernan found Reilly's currach broken in halves. The Meenaghans said they thought some of the other currachs had come ashore, but could not be sure.

We used one half of Reilly's currach as a sort of stretcher to carry his body over the hills to the road.

Leabharlann Co. Mhuighne
Mayo County Library

A WARNING

They should have known, said a man standing by listening - sad, he shook his head significantly. They got plenty of signs if they only took them.

"Sign", I queried.

"Yes", he repeated, sign. when they got their nets full.

"I don't understand", I said, puzzled.

"When the big fish came into their nets three weeks ago", he explained. You had it in the Western People.

This talk was by the wayside as the people flocked over the sandhills and fields from all directions to attend the funeral of young John Reilly.

BACK TO THE MOURNERS

Let us go back to the mourners, to the cottage where the mournful gathering throngs the neatly-kept kitchen, where rests the coffined body of young John Reilly, awaiting burial; back through the rain and the flowing water which sweeps past the door; back to where on the bed in the corner of the kitchen a spotless white bedspread with a patchwork centre of red squares catches the eye as one turns from the coffin, supported by two stools, with the woman - she hesitated to reveal curiosity in such a setting by asking whether the anguished woman was the dead boys mother, or whether the coffin was a symbol of her despair in the loss of someone near and dear to her - still crouched over the foot of it, embedding the low voiced talk all around, commencing with her dead.

Here they stand, silently grouped around - men and boys, fathers and brothers of the victims of the remorseless sea.

There is no rest on Inishkea today, one stalwart islander is saying plaintively - no rest since the storm gave us fright. When the boys did not come back, and we knew they were lost, when all hope of their coming had gone, and we knew they were searching for the bodies, we were searching too, on the island. With the glasses we could see the broken currachs on the shore over here. We saw two men going towards the currachs, sad when there were fires lighted for us on the mainland, we knew then that there were some of the remains found. We came over to find out, and only John Reilly - God Rest his Soul - of the whole ten had come back to us for burial. Ten dead - ten friends and comrades - and all from within four doors of each other on the island.

On the shore, where lie four broken currachs, and one comparatively sound, there are also the nets and the mackerel in them, brought in by the wind and tide.

“We won’t take them back for ever again”. Tom Meehan, the father of young dead Martin was speaking in answer to a remark of mine as to the value of the loss in property and what it meant for the struggling islanders. “If they were worth a £100 a piece, a net or currach will never leave where it is after them drowning our sons. When we will have to go to the workhouse, let us go, but they won’t be taken”.

Outside in the drenching rain, where groups have assembled, oblivious of all but the presence of a tragedy and death, a cart rumbles up - a farmers heavy cart - with a covering of straw on the body.

“Come on now. The cart is here, and let us be going”, says a voice briskly from the doorway, and we, who are intruders on this scene of death, move out into the rain”.

After us, in a moment, comes the coffin, born by many helping hands. Two men lifted onto the straw on the cart. Awkwardly the assembled relatives and neighbours - the two survivors of the tragedy amongst them - from the islands and mainland - some from Belmullet, thirteen miles away - fall into processional order behind the cart.

“My boy, my boy, and all the boys from the islands that are dead this day!” wails a father chokingly in accents that go straight to the heart, and the sad procession moves on for Faulmore, where young John is reverently laid to rest in the graveyard, on the most southerly point of the promontory, and within sight of his kinsmen on his island home.

PREVIOUS TRAGEDIES RECALLED

Here too, the people recall a tragedy of about 100 years ago, when ten fishermen lost their lives at Termon Point, the most westerly point on the peninsula. Is it more than a coincidence that here, as in Lacken, history should have so tragically repeated itself for the Mayo fisherfolk?

Four years ago three men were lost in Elly Bay, an inlet of Blacksod Bay, some five miles on the Belmullet side of Blacksod, through the capsizing of a currach while herring fishing.

THE CURRACH

The currach is a type of boat with which none but those who live on the extreme western coast of Mayo and Galway are familiar. It is really a canoe. It is constructed of light ribs, covered over with an American canvas, which is tarred to make it water resistant. Two seats provide seating accommodation for the crew of two or three men in a three-man currach. It is propelled by what are locally called paddles, though used like the oars of the more common boat. Instead of row-locks thowl-pins are used to secure the paddles and provide the necessary leverage for propulsion.

Fragile as the craft is, it is regarded by the fishermen of the western coast as a perfectly safe means of transport, though care has to be exercised to balance oneself through fear of overturning. The extreme lightness of the currach provides a buoyancy which the fishermen say leaves the little vessel safer for sea travel than modern boats of a much larger type.

Very Rev. Fr. Dodd P.P. Binghamstown, with whom I discussed the nature of the safety of the craft during my visit to the scene of the Erris disaster, assured me that he would trust himself anywhere with the Inishkea Islanders in their currachs. They are splendid fishermen and marvellous sailors.

A CULTURED RACE

Their parish priest, who has spent eight years in Erris, has a extremely high opinion of the moral, cultural, and physical qualities of his island people.

"They are", he asserted, an example of good - living and highly cultured people. Their rough exterior affords no index to their qualities of mind and heart.

From my own experience of them I can only say that nowhere in Ireland or elsewhere have I met a fisher-people and peasantry possessed as high a standard of natural culture, or who spoke more grammatical English with a perfect communication. This latter observation indeed applies to Western Erris as a whole.

This, at first, strikes one as rather astonishing in view of the fact that here is the real home of the Gaelic language, handed down from sire to son uninterruptedly from early ages. But it becomes less surprising when one remembers that here English is an acquired language, learnt in the national schools, and therefore largely devoid of idiom or slang such as makes up the linguistic equipment of the average person in the centres regarded as more enlightened. I have spoken to some hundreds of Erris people in the course of my present visit, and never have I found any of them experience the slightest difficulty in finding two right English words to convey their meaning. Not once in the course of my conversations with the Inishkea islanders has one lapsed into Gaelic when addressing me in English. They speak the alien tongue with the most perfect ease and fluency, and in speaking amongst themselves return to their native tongue with an ease that strikes one as delightful and euphorias.

BETTER BOATS NEEDED

In the course of my conversation with Fr. Dodd he stressed the urgency of governmental attention to the needs of the Erris fishermen, especially the islanders. Much faith as they place in their currachs, it is evident they are utterly unsuited to the requirements of the fishing industry.

A year ago, Fr. Dodd told me, he discussed this question with Mr. Finian Lynch, the Minister for Fisheries, and Mr. Moriarty, of that department, but nothing has been done to meet the needs of the fishermen. The pier on the south island has fallen into disrepair. On the north island there is no pier at all. Provision in this respect is urgently needed, and finding some means of securing sea worthy fishing boats. "Skilled as they are as fishermen and sailors", said Fr. Dodd, "if they were provided with large boats in which they could go to sea and compete with the trawlers which rob them of their harvest, they might be relied upon to provide a decent livelihood for themselves and their people. They are naturally industrious, and it is due to this that they should receive help and encouragement.

Facilities for the transport of their fish from the mainland at Blacksod are also needed, but this would, I believe, prove no great difficulty if the supplies were available regularly.

The Western People
Saturday, November 5th, 1927

THE CRY AT INISHKEA

I

True-hearted Gaels of Inishkea,
Your sad attention pay
To hear retold the tragedy
That night near Blacksod Bay,
Concerning those brave fisherfolk
Who gave their lives at sea
To win their childrens bread and theirs
At Island Inishkea.

II

The roar of billows mounting high
Made faint the womens wail,
The little childrens screams for dad
Was smothered in the gale.
Their frail canoes were then no use
In such an angry sea,
The cries of loved ones from the shore
Increased their misery.

III

The tiny fleet helplessly tossed,
With sterling human freight,
Those loyal hearts and callous laws
Abandoned to their fate.
All lands on earth should treasure them,
Toss toilers of the sea,
The very stock and seed of Gael
The lads of Inishkea.

IV

Condemned for aye to breast the wave
With antique timber craft,
When other lands would prize their grit
And take them to its heart,
Equip them for the task of life
They spend upon the wave,
So that the mighty engines help
Could succour well those brave.

V

In vain they pleaded for redress
Against their crew lot,
But yet the gay, big world outside
Went on and heeded not.
And now the price is paid at last,
The trusting hearts are still,
Too late their struggles are believed
In difference may kill.

VI

May the nations lamentation
Give Eire to its own,
Too long the Celt has been denied
A livelihood at home;
Her truest children forced to roam
On the unpitying sea,
All Irishmen should hear the cry
Going up from Inishkea.

VII

When the dark storm gathering round
Brought night and wintry sky
They battled bravely for the land,
'Twere hard for them to die,
And draw their darlings to the shore
To give them cold embrace;
Now on the haulet grief has set;
None 'ere can fill their place.

VIII

To Ireland ever true were those,
In right succession stood,
The race was never watered through
contact with alien blood.
May he who stilled the waves one day
On fair tamed Galilee
Raise up the hearts of those who mourn
Today in Inishkea.

Patrick Mac Andrew
1927

Interviewer's Deirdre Lavelle and Tisha Monaghan.

Date: 29/01/1991.

Name: Dominic Reilly

Date of Birth: 08/02/1903

Vincent: Where were you born?

Dominic: I was born in the old hospital over in Belmullet.

Vincent: Yeah.

Dominic: In nineteen hundred and three, eighth of February nineteen hundred and three.

Vincent: Where did you live?

Dominic: I lived, I was thirty three years living on an island, I was born, I was reared on the island, Inishkea.

Vincent: Did you live anywhere else like you know?

Dominic: No, only the town here.

JJ: What was it like to live on the island?

Dominic: It was alright, we had enough and plenty enough of everything, plenty fish, plenty potatoes, plenty, plenty of everything.

JJ: What time of year did you do the fishing?

Dominic: We used to fish in m.m., we used to fish lobster from the 15th of April up to the end of November and we'd be fishing mackerel too in the Harvest time from October. We'd be at every class of fish, we used to go to with the nets with mackerel, nets in September and we'd be out there till Christmas. You know we used to get alot of Mackerel.

Vincent: Used ye only fish for ye're own fish or is it?

Dominic: Oh no, we used to sell tonnes of them, we used to come twice a week in boats with loads of mackerel and pollack and cod and herring.

JJ: Into the main land is it?

Dominic: Into Termon pier to sell them in the town.

Vincent: Could you describe the changes that has taken place over the years?

Dominic: Ah! there was great changes in it because they em, the disaster was alot of trouble.

Vincent: When did that that happen?

Dominic: In nineteen, the 28th of October in nineteen twenty seven.

JJ: How many people were killed in that?

Dominic: There was ten drowned, there was a em, there was fifty two men out altogether that night. There was two in each currach, there was two in each currach. There was two in each Currach. Fifty two out altogether but alot of us came home safe, do you know it em, blew a storm.

Vincent: Had ye any warning of the storm?

Dominic: No, but em, a I was em, I saved three currachs, six men that night me self and my brother. Ye know there was a mist coming you know and they had there nets and there was two fella's, six men that had their nets folded, they came as far as us and we had our nets out we em told they were going to put out the nets again and I said let ye don't put out ye're nets now until we see will we get any fish in the nets. So they waited for us and we pulled up the net we got no fish let ye make for the shore now, and we made for the shore and we were put up on the shore and we were in the mouth of the harbour when it blew up and we were put up on the shore like a box of match and there was seven or eight currachs of old age pensioners. They were out too the same night there the evening was good when we went out you know but it was raining all day long but anyways the

storm came, there was seven or eight currachs just over the other side but they were safe and there was five currachs cleared out to the mainland and they were lost.

Vincent: Ye came in because ye weren't getting any fish is it?

Dominic: We did, oh sure it was the storm it was the storm and the fish gone out to sea. We were in before the storm in at the mouth of the harbour on the up on the beach.

Vincent: What fuel did you use then?

Dominic: We used to go down to Morahan down to the bridge there for loads of turf and we used to go up to Achill sound that time for turf.

Vincent: And how used ye bring it down?

Dominic: In a boat. We had great sailing boats.

J.J. Were they like currachs?

Dominic: No, they were like sailing boats.

Vincent: Were ye only able to bring turf when there was wind?

Dominic: We used to tack with the breeze never mind do you know and sort of , we knew the way the weather would turn.

Vincent: You would have to wait so to get the wind suiting?

Dominic: Yeah, yeah north easterly wind was the one that would favour us.

J.J. What did the locals do when you were younger?

Dominic: Well em.

Vincent: Had they big farms, or did they own the land?

Dominic: Well about six acres of land we had, six acres of land.

Vincent: Who owned the land?

Dominic: It was their own it was their own the land commission gave it to them.

J.J. Were you in it the time of the landlords?

Dominic: No.

Vincent: How many families were living on the island?

Dominic: There was em, thirty families on each island you know.

J.J.: And how many islands were there?

Dominic: Two, the two of them were only about two fathoms apart. They were em, united. Some of the men used to marry the woman on the other island.

J.J.: Were there any schools on the island?

Dominic: There were two schools one on each island.

J.J.: Ya, what did they use for transport like apart from boats on the islands. Was it a big island?

Dominic: The islands were big. There was 640 acres on our island and 535 on the other island.

J.J.: What did you use to get about in them?

Dominic: What?

J.J.: What did you use as transport on the island. Had they bicycles or what?

Dominic: No, there were no bicycles no.

J.J.: What did you use for working on the farm was it horses?

Dominic: No, the spade digging.

J.J.: What kind of crops did you grow?

- Dominic: Just potatoes, barley, and a bit of meadow and turnips and cabbage.
- JJ.: And the cow you used to have?
- Dominic: Cows, two milking cows.
- JJ.: What did the people eat, like food, like?
- Dominic: Wait until I tell you what they ate. They used to eat potatoes and fish and there was plenty of bread and everything.
- JJ.: Homemade bread is it?
- Dominic: Ya, for fear of the storm we used to have fifteen or sixteen bags of flour at the end of the house. It would do us a good while you know. It was cheap that time, you would get a bag of flour for six or seven shillings.
- JJ.: What kind of drink, were there any pubs?
- Dominic: There were two pubs in it.
- JJ.: What were they called and who owned them?
- Dominic: There was an aunt of mine who had a pub, there was another fellow across on the other island that had a pub too.
- JJ.: Did they make poteen at all on the island?
- Dominic: They did, they did make poteen on the island but not in my time. In my fathers' time many is the time they were caught.
- JJ.: Did the guards raid it?
- Dominic: The Coastguards used to raid it. There was no guard on the island at that time but the Coastguards used to raid it.
- JJ.: Did they grow many crops on the island?

- Dominic: Oh! We had plenty crops, they used to get thirty tonnes of potatoes in the harvest time and we used to have plenty of grain.
- JJ.: What used ye use all the potatoes for?
- Dominic: We used to have a lot of potatoes for the donkeys and horses.
- JJ.: Did they buy much food in the shops?
- Dominic: Oh they did yeah, they bought a lot of stuff.
- JJ.: Where did ye do your shopping, was it on the mainland?
- Dominic: No, in the townland of Blacksod.
- JJ.: What other materials did ye buy besides food?
- Dominic: Meal, barley, pollard for the cow feeding. We used to have a lot of barley.
- JJ.: How often did you leave the island to go shopping?
- Dominic: We used to go every Saturday. We used to go with the fish to Blacksod, do you know we used to sell the fish in Blacksod.
- JJ.: Were there any grants from local authorities at the time.
- Dominic: There were no grants at all.
- JJ.: So if you did any building you had to pay for it yourself.
- Dominic: The Congested Districts Board built houses for us at that time. Galvanised roofs that was on them.
- JJ.: What materials, were they all stone?
- Dominic: Stone, galvanised and timber.
- JJ.: Was it granite or cement ye used to use?

Dominic: It was cement.

JJ.: Had ye any electricity?

Dominic: No, no only the paraffin.

JJ.: Can you remember who were the first people on the island who had a T.V. or radio?

Dominic: There was no television or radio on the island at that time. We were out on the mainland before we got a radio.

JJ.: How did ye keep in contact with the people in the outside world. Newspapers?

Dominic: We'd be writing to them in America. There was a lot of my people in America.

JJ.: Was there a lot of emigration. Did a lot of people leave the island and go to America?

Dominic: Oh yeah, there was alot of them in America.

JJ.: And would they come home or.....

Dominic: Oh yeah, they'd come home on holidays every three or four years.

J.J. : What kind of pastimes did ye have?

Dominic: We had plenty of pastimes. There was a big crowd between the two islands in it you know for dancing. There used to be a dance nearly every Saturday night and Sunday night.

J.J. : Were they house dances?

Dominic: Ya, ya.

J.J. : You'd take turns going to the houses?

Dominic: Ya, ya.

J.J. : Was there any story tellers?

Dominic: Oh well there was. There was an uncle of mine in it and he was a great storyteller.

J.J. : Singers and all was there?

Dominic: Ya when he'd be telling stories he'd be clapping on your knee to listen to him. He'd be telling lots of lies. He was out in Australia.

J.J. : Can you remember any stories?

Dominic: Ah he told us alot of stories.

J.J. : What were they based on generally, the stories songs and poems?

Dominic: We used to have our songs learned from school and poems, oh we used.

J.J. : Where used the dances be held?

Dominic: We used to have them in the schools sometimes. The teachers used to let us in.

J.J. : Ya, ya what were the teachers like at that time?

Dominic: Oh they were good, they were good.

J.J. : At what age used you go to school because the school?

Dominic: When I was three years because the school was only 20 yards away. We used to go over to school early then, that time ya know. We'd leave when we were about three years.

J.J. : When would you finish then?

Dominic: Do ya know what age I finished. We were going to school, myself and my brother, two brothers and my sister were going to school together. The teacher told us when I was fourteen well now her says I couldn't teach ye know more ye're as good as meself. Oh that's the truth ya.

J.J. : You were happy going to school?

Dominic: I was, I was happy because there was a fella from Attavalla that went to school first, Gaughan was his name and Barrett from Glencastle taught me then, Francie Barrett. He was a native from Glencastle out there. He was a teacher.

J.J. : Did the teachers live on the islands then?

Dominic: They did. He was married to a cousin of mine, oh a teacher died in on the Island, in the South island, he did.

J.J. : What were the two names.

Dominic: Padden was one of them and Anthony Barrett and Frank Gaughan and there was one from Castlebar in it em, Connolly and there was another man from Sligo in to, Newry.

J.J. : Were they buried on the island?

Dominic: No, no they were not, because he died on the island but was brought out by boat to the church and he was buried in Keane.

J.J. : And used you come in for Mass as well?

Dominic: We used an odd time we used, we used have our rosary on Sunday but when the teachers left we didn't bother.

J.J. : Used the priests ever go out?

Dominic: They used to twice a year. There was alot of priests, Fr. O'Donnell and Fr. Lavelle and ara there was alot of them.

J.J. : Used ye have to pay to get into the dances?

Dominic: No there was no payment, only if they was a raffle you know if they were raffling something.

J.J. : What would ye be drinking, would ye be drinking at the dances?

Dominic: No because when we were going to the dances the pub was closed.

J.J. : Did many women usually go into the pub?

Dominic: No, no women at all was in them that time. There was plenty women drinking though. There is more women than men drinking now.

J.J. : There is ya, more alcoholics.

Dominic: Oh ya, they'd swallow the pint.

J.J. : What kinds of bands used ye have?

Dominic: Oh em we used have great melodeon players, we used.

J.J. : Everyone would do something would they?

Dominic: Ya.

J.J. : What were the weddings and the wakes like at that time?

Dominic: The wakes were worse than the weddings anyway. They'd be alot of chalkpipes.

J.J. : Why did they have the chalkpipes?

Dominic: Chalkpipes.

J.J. : What was that story?

Dominic: That was the wake chalkpipes and tobacco.

J.J. : Was that for everyone that came in?

Vincent: Do you remember any stories from you parents or grandparents about the English in this area?

Dominic: No, no but I read alot about what the English done in Ireland long ago. Cromwell and Strongbow on.

J.J. : Were you here, when the old I.R.A. were going?

Dominic: There were alot of them on the island.

J.J. : Had they a barracks there?

Dominic: They had, they had.

J.J. : What were they like?

Dominic: They were not bad. We use to go roaring and they would be in the barracks and we use to go roaring and there was an old Sargent in it.

J.J. : Would they follow you?

Dominic: They followed us but they couldn't catch us.

J.J. : What was the 2nd world war like, or did it effect you at all?

Dominic: There was I.R.A. in visiting. They had to go around you know, they were afraid. They had to go in like, there was eight or nine of them, they were in it a good while too. The most of them were in our house.

J.J. : What year was it?

Dominic: 1918 and 1920

J.J. : Were there any attacks on the police that time?

Dominic: The police were gone that time out of it.

Vincent: When did the police leave? Were they afraid?

Dominic: They were brought out to another barracks in Mullaghroe there. So we were in the Barracks.

J.J. : Did the police come back after that?

Dominic: No but the patrol boat came after us burning the barracks. They were looking for the ones. They got no answer anyway.

J.J. : No one would tell them anything.

Dominic: No, no.

J.J. : What kind of punishment did ye get at school?

Dominic: We use to get hard sums I'll tell you.

J.J. : What would happen if you didn't know them.

Dominic: We knew them. They were hard, we used to make geometry installation and algebra. We had hard questions.

J.J. : Used many people go to secondary school?

Dominic: There was no secondary school in it. If there was secondary school or colleges like they have now, sure I wouldn't be here at all. I would go somewhere else. I'd go to college.

J.J. : How did people become teachers?

Dominic: There were two teachers in it.

J.J. : You don't know where they went?

Dominic: No, no.

J.J. : How long was your day at school? What time did you start and what time did you finish?

Dominic: If you were in sixth class you would be there till four o'clock.

J.J. : Were you on the island during the second world war?

Dominic: Ya, I was. There was timber and barrels of oil

J.J. : Did you know what boats came off.

Dominic: No.

J.J. : Did anyone ever come looking for the stuff.

Dominic: Yes they did, looking for timber and barrels of oil.

Vincent: Coast guards ever come?

Dominic: No, no.

Vincent: No shortage of butter, was there?

Dominic: No shortage at all, plenty of potatoes.

Vincent: Used ye grow them, ye're self and animals?

Dominic: Yes.

Vincent: Where were the animals kept?

Dominic: They were still on the islands.

Vincent: Would ye have them indoors in the winter?

Dominic: Yes, we used.

Vincent: Were they kept in the houses that time or in the stables?

Dominic: In the stables.

Vincent: What year did ye come to the mainland?

Dominic: 1934.

Vincent: Who built the houses that time?

Dominic: The Land Commission.

J.J. : How did ye bring the animals in and out of the islands.

Dominic: In the boats, standing up, three big animals in the boat.

J.J. : They wouldn't jump out on ye.

Dominic: No, they wouldn't.

J.J. : How used ye keep food fresh.

Vincent: How long would pigs last.

Dominic: They'd last a long time.

J.J. : Was there many in your family.

Dominic: Four in mine.

J.J. : Is it true that fishermen don't like to swim.

Dominic: There was good swimmers on the islands.

Vincent: Did they give land as well, on the mainland?

Dominic: They did, four or five acres.

Vincent: Who owns the land now?

Dominic: No one, we were too long in it. We earned our living in it. Many the night I left Belmullet in the dark. In boats, we had four boats with us and we were perished with the cold, with rain and storm. Ten miles to Blacksod from Blacksod to the islands.

J.J. : How long would it take you to get in?

Dominic: It would take a long time, about three quarters of an hour. With great speed with the boat.

J.J. : What was the longest time it took ye?

Dominic: Half a day against the storm and the current.

Vincent: Did you mind leaving the island?

Dominic: We were lonesome leaving the island.

Vincent: What age would you have been then?

Dominic: I was 32.

Vincent: Was there many about that age?

Dominic: No there wasn't.

Vincent: How was the old people about leaving?

Dominic: They were crying.

Vincent: Did ye all leave at the same time?

Dominic: We did, ya.

Vincent: How long did it take them altogether?

Dominic: Seven years after the night of the storm.

J.J. : Did you get married on the island?

Dominic: No, when I came off the island. No, the man that wanted to get married wouldn't go at all. There would be three old fellows asking the woman, so you know and they'd be there then.

J.J. : Who would they talk to?

Dominic: They'd talk to the couple that was in the house.

J.J. : Her parents.

Dominic: Ya, ya.

J.J. : How would they go about making the match?

Dominic: Oh they'd bring plenty poteen with them.

J.J. And would they be giving it to the old man?

Dominic: Oh giving it to the old man, was some queer tricks.

J.J. : Was there tricks?

Dominic: There was.

J.J. : Used they have dowries in that time?

Dominic: No, no.

J.J. : They used to give nothing at all?

Dominic: Nothing.

J.J. : Did you think arranged marriages were a good idea?

Dominic: They were a good idea.

J.J. : Would they always work?

Dominic: They did. They did work out alright.

J.J. : Had the women any say in it at all?

Dominic: No.

J.J. : If the father said she had to get married, she had to get married.

Dominic: That's it, that's it and the mother.

J.J. : Ya the two of them.

Dominic: Ya the two of them.

J.J. : And she'd have to get married then.

Dominic: She would.

J.J. : Would the matchmaker get anything out of it.

Dominic: Just drinks that's all.

J.J. : And used ye speak Irish on the islands?

Dominic: It was all Irish, no English spoken on the islands. Sure I have nearly my Irish lost. I was 34 years working in McIntyre's and there was no one to speak Irish with only myself, you know, they wouldn't speak Irish. There was no word of English spoken in the island all Irish.

J.J. : Was there much spoken 30 years ago?

Dominic: There was plenty Irish 30 years ago.

- J.J. : Were people very religious then?
- Dominic: They were, they were. We also read plenty of Stair na h-Eireann, they were great books. I think alot of these blokes in the government didn't read much of them. It was all the dirt that the English did on Ireland long ago. Ah, they were cruel.
- J.J. : Do you remember the English being here or did you hear stories about it.
- Dominic: I read alot about it in Stair, there was Stair a Haon 's a do, they were great books.
- Dominic: Did ye get on well as good as themselves.
- Vincent: Had ye any problems.
- Dominic: No.
- J.J. : Used the people go back to the island?
- Dominic: No.
- Vincent: Who was the last family to leave?
- Dominic: The Lavelles of Annagh and ourselves.
- Vincent: Was it lonely then just the two families?
- Dominic: It was lonely.
- Vincent: Have you been back many times since?
- Dominic: Two years ago, with a crowd from Kilnashane. There was a crowd of us together and it was two bad days in it. Myself and my brother caught a big shark one night. With three nets. The far end of the net he got caught in, he put the three nets around him. The fifteen currachs towed him to tow him in. Forty foot in length. He was a bad article. If you went near him he would eat you.
- Vincent: What did ye do with him?

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Dominic: We brought him ashore and left him there and he was there until he rotted away.

Vincent: Was there many sharks in the water.

Dominic: There was plenty. The bay was thick with mackerel and they used to eat them.

Vincent: Would ye be swimming?

Dominic: There was good swimmers on the island. There was one swimmer that got lost between the channels and the island, about twenty yards. He got caught in the ropes around the lobster pots.

**Interviewers: Deirdre Lavelle
Bernie Masterson**

Interviewee: Paddy Lavelle, Moyrahan

Paddy: It was a very calm day, but it rained, rained, rained. About 3 or 4 o'clock in the evening the rain stopped. It dried up and the sun shone. The fishermen were only out fishing for about two hours when the storm started. They were only out two hours. Some of them didn't like the night so well, some of them got afraid and they came into the shore. Some of them took their time and about half past eight or nine o'clock the wind blew up all of a sudden from the

Deirdre: No warning?

Paddy: No warning at all it came like a flash, like a flash from the west, north-west. West-north-west wind. And the wind was so strong that the currachs were out, wouldn't be able to come against it anyway and they were all driven away before the wind and they weren't, except those that were near the mouth of the harbour, they were thrown up on the point of the harbour. A few currachs were thrown up there, a few had come in, a few were thrown up along the point of the harbour, and 10 no 12, 12, 6 currachs were caught containing 12 men and driven away towards the mainland between Achill and Aughlea, two of the men washed ashore survived, 10 of them were lost. Another 2, there was another 2 put ashore on the point of the island away from the port, from the port on the west of the island. The storm only lasted about 4 or 5 hours. After 12 o'clock then the following day there was a search for the men. Through time they were found, and the rest of them saved themselves by being in the harbour or by being in the mouth of the harbour.

Deirdre: What did everyone actually do on the island, what were you doing?

Paddy: Well of course at that hour of the night it was dark, you know it was the end of October, you see it was, they were out in the dark fishing mackerels and the people on the island were in their houses. We couldn't go out even to see

what was happening, you see it wasn't day time, it was dark. But we made for the harbour or I mean the people that were strong enough to go to the harbour. It would be a mile from the houses and some of them went, no one was hardly able to face against the wind to walk against it, it would be that strong. They joined hands to one another and kept going until they made for the harbour and all that was ashore were sound. They went along there from that to see would there be any others put ashore on the other side of the island, to see was there any more currachs, a few saved themselves in the mouth of the harbour.

Deirdre: Did that happen on just the north, drownings on the north?

Paddy: As a matter of fact it's on the North Island they were fishing, between the north island and the mainland they were fishing, that would be just behind Elly. Some of the fishermen were from the south island, from the two islands, they were all fishing in the one place.

Deirdre: And was there any one else drowned, no one fishing from the coast of the south island?

Paddy: No, all the south island fishermen would come to the north island and they'd fish mackerel from the same place as the north islanders, from the same harbour and from the same, out in the same spot.

Deirdre: About what age did you start fishing?

Paddy: Ah well at that time we would start rowing the currachs when we'd be young, fairly young, we'd go out rowing in the currach we wouldn't actually be fishing we'd be doing little bits and we started to row about 11 or 12 and about 13 or 14 we would be well able to row. You would fish maybe for a while of a day or half a day or a couple of hours now and again. The fishing mostly from the start but no, no youngster of 13 or 14 would be out a night like that. They would be 16 years, gassurs or youngsters or young boys would do little fishing, a couple hours was away on some other errand for a couple of hours you'd be just learning bits.

Deirdre: Did you know the others, any young one around?

Paddy: Indeed they were all young except one man, only one man was married and the rest were all single, they'd be maybe around the 20 mark, there was one other man who was about 16.

Bernie: What did the women do on the island?

Paddy: The work of the women? They'd do the house work, the washing, the cooking and indeed they used to milk cows and they used to help with the sowing in the spring and the harvesting in the harvest. They used to help with the setting of potatoes and barley.

Deirdre: What was the land like?

Paddy: The land that we had on the island was very sandy, grassy dandy land and potatoes and barley were the main crops, and they used to keep cows.

Deirdre: What age did you leave the island?

Paddy: I left the island when I was about 16.

Deirdre: Why did they leave the island?

Paddy: Oh the people in the island, probably the drowning that we're talking about was the main cause. A lot of people were afraid.

Deirdre: So it's nothing to do with the land commission?

Paddy: Well of course then probably the clergy found it very hard to attend to sick people especially. It was hard to get a doctor or to get a clergy man, so the clergy wanted them out of the island. A lot of the people on the island decided to leave when they had the chance, so they applied to the land commission so they could transfer the land from the island and from that it started. In the early thirties 30/31. It was late when I left the island, about 1937, 1937 everyone was to go.

Deirdre: Was it hard to adapt to life on the mainland?

Paddy: Well of course, there wasn't much difference between life they had on the Island and how and the life they had on the mainland after coming from the island. The people on the mainland here, in the parish of Kilmore were doing the same work as the people in the island, the only difference that was in was the island people were more constant ... but still, they got it done, but they started going away to Scotland, England, and Scotland just like people now.

Deirdre: Did you ever go to Inishglora while you were on the island?

Paddy: Oh we used, we used, I went to Inishglora 2 or 3 times before I left the Island at all. The island fishermen, some of the island fishermen used to go to Inishglora for the Summertime and fish lobsters. They started fishing in May and they'd be fishing till August a few boys would be with them and they'd be a race to a small little shanty and they'd stay there and come home at the weekend in Blacksod, every Saturday and they'd bring their weekly rations book with them to the house.

Bernie: How did the other people treat you when you came off the island?

Paddy: As a matter of fact the majority of them came out of Glosh, that's Fallmore area, behind Aughleam, but our people came to Annagh and of course a few of us came down here to Glenlara. The people on the mainland, well of course, where we came to Annagh, of course there was no people in this area where we came to. It was place where there was no one, no other people were living in, there was only one house probably in these places the Land, the Landlords. The Land Commission took over the place and divided it so it was kind of renewed in a way. So they were there together you see. But they were used to it. They used to know the people that were going our among, they used to meet at fairs and that.

Deirdre: Had you Mass on the island?

Paddy: No, we had no mass on the island. Its only twice a year the priest would visit the island, they'd call that station time. They used to have stations twice a year, now, the rest of the year we had rosary in the school on Sunday. The people would go to rosary in the School on Sunday, that was our mass. Some of the young people, you'd find Sunday mornings some of the young men would to the the mainland. They'd go to the mainland in their currachs, the nearest chapel to them was Tiraun, the old chapel in Tiraun, the new one is there now. They used to come ashore in Fallmore, Gortmore and walk to Clonmish. That would be near Moylaw. .

Deirdre: The religion must have been very strong on the island, the rosary.

Paddy: "Probably it was stronger, it was stronger than if they'd had mass every Sunday because the twice a year Mass was more important that if they were at it regularly" It was tough.

Deirdre: It must have been very hard rowing currachs to the mainland?

Paddy: They wouldn't be able to so that except in fairly fine weather. They didn't mind rowing at all 8 or 9,10,11 or 20 miles. They were not worried about that at all so long as the sea was calm they wouldn't mind. Racing like you see in the sports.

Deirdre: Had you any dances?

Paddy: No we had no dances, but they used to dance in their own houses, they used to dance in their own kitchens because we'd only have about 20 - 25 houses and you'd have 20 people 40 would be the most at a time. I thought it would be hundreds. If you has a dance hall here, even if you put them all into it it would look empty.

Deirdre: There was no dance hall at all?

Paddy: No, no dance hall.

Deirdre: And then when you moved to the mainland, then of course, was there fishing as well?

Paddy: No, no dance hall.

Deirdre: And then when you moved to the mainland, then of course, was there fishing as well?

Paddy: Yes, they continued fishing yes. The auld people continued fishing anyway. French Port in Blacksod and in Broadhaven.

Deirdre: Your dad taught you fishing?

Paddy: He did. They fish yet all the time, some of them fish there in the Summertime and they have cattle and sheep. They used to use it as grazing land.

Bernie: How did they bring them across?

Paddy: They bring them mostly in the Springtime and they leave them there then until the fall of the year again. November, some of them used to leave them there until the following winter and the following year again.

Bernie: And when people got married , what used to happen then? Did they get married on the island?

Paddy: No, when they would get married they used to come out, they would arrange with the Parish Priest and the Parish Priest would appoint the day and they would go out and they would get married in the church, the parish church, that would be in Binghamstown or maybe in Tirraun.

Bernie: What kind of celebration would you have after like?

Paddy: They used to have what we would call a Bainis Show, that would be a wedding party and they used to dance and there'd be food and drink. I remember only one wedding. It was the same type of wedding that they'd have around Fallmore or Tirraun or Binghamstown or Cross or any of the villages here outside on the mainland, plenty.

Deirdre: Do you think there was much difference on the island than on the mainland?

Paddy: There was no difference. The people on the island had a hard life, They had a harder time to come to the fair and to the market and they'd have more to do with the sea. A lot of people on the mainland never bothered fishing only the island people. The island people were alot better off than alot on the mainland cause they were making more money out of fishing than indeed the farmers.

Deirdre: How many families?

Paddy : About 24/25 families on each island. There was a school on each island.

Bernie : Who used to teach them?

Paddy: Oh there was two teachers. Two teachers were in them.

Deirdre : Was it all in Irish?

Paddy : It was Irish, it was Irish that was spoken.

Deirdre: Was English taught in school?

Paddy: Yeah, English and Irish were taught in school. In the beginning there was no English, when I went to school there was only English taught, there was no Irish at all taught in the school.

Deirdre: And how did?

Paddy: When my father and mother went to school, it was all English. My father and mother now had their tables off in English. When we went to school we had them off in Irish and they used to do their adding up in English. But then in our day of course this was the time of the Free State we had Irish as well.

Deirdre : And no French?

Paddy: No French , not a word.

Deirdre: So your mother and father were brought up in their houses not Irish speaking?

Paddy: Yes.

Deirdre: And then went to school?

Paddy: Yes in English they learned in school, they learned English , not only that they had to learn their prayers in English. They had the prayers in Irish at home. We had to learn our prayers in English and so had they and tables or what ever.

Deirdre : What do you think of the situation now when no one speaks Irish?

Paddy : I don't know what answer is supposed to be given to the question . The situation is like.....

Deirdre : Is like ?

Paddy : The situation is worse, the situation as regards languages are worse because they were, even in the Gaeltacht schools in those days, they had two languages, I'm afraid the situation is worse now.

Deirdre : What do you think of the fact that, this is the only country in the world that does not speak its own native language?

Paddy : Well of course you can say that. I don't know, it's sad, well of course that's a fact of history you see. If you go back 500 years all Ireland was just Irish speaking, most of Scotland was Irish speaking, Walse was welsh speaking and indeed only three quarters of England was english speaking.

Deirdre : What was the rest of the English speaking?

Paddy : There was a mixture, you had, you a had a language in Cornwall of its own.

Deirdre: Really. In Cornwall?

Paddy : Yes, you know Devon and Cornwall had a language of their own, Cornish. The Isle of Man had a language of their own, Manx. Walse had their own language, Welsh, its the strongest language left beside English and half of Scotland was Irish speaking and all Ireland was Irish speaking. Now the history of the last four and a half thousand years has changed all that and Imperialism always works that way, that the one ruling class gets their culture spread. Out, out, out over all the others outside that they have got, so that there is more to Empire building than taking territories and the other countries, they also spread their language and culture and everything else, and that's what happened with the...

Deirdre: So the English were the domineering?

Paddy: Yeah.

Deirdre: Culture at the time?

Paddy: Well not at the time but it, it got the power behind it made sure that it did dominate but bit by bit. It takes years, it takes hundreds of years for that to happen.

Deirdre : But it is bad though that there isn't Irish spoken, is it? I know that you spoke Irish to each other but that is rare.

Paddy : As a matter of fact, Ireland would be a great country if we had got independence 400 years ago instead 75. Because what would happen then is that you would have the Irish were be getting stronger and stronger and stronger. So that what you'd have when newspapers and books started to be printed you'd have Irish newspapers and Irish books as well as english. There wasn't a newspaper ever in Ireland in Irish, daily papers. I'm talking about now, because it was 200 years ago when the daily newspaper started coming. It was only when the English came here, there was no , the English was used and spoken and in Scotland indeed of course and the same in Walse and the same in Devon and Cornwall. Their languages weren't allow to develop. It's a fact of history.

Deirdre : So it wasn't the independence?

Paddy: Yes, but I mean you could not do anything about it with the last 100 years. It was finished in other words. Ireland and Scotland and Wales, they're dominated so long now that it's nearly finished, the English has taken over. Maybe it's a good way. It's a good thing to have two. Funnily enough Belgium has the two languages, Switzerland has three or four. Probably if we had another country west of us with Russian and if we had another country to the south with Spanish or French. If we had them around us we would have three or four languages, there'd be no difference, but we only had one to one side of us that dominated us.

Deirdre : Irish isn't taught in some English schools?

Paddy : No, Irish is taught in places as the private school does. You can set up class in the big cities with different languages. But that is not what is called an official way of helping them. It was quite possible to revive the Irish when we got independence, but indeed there was a good start made, we'll say that in the '20s and '30s there was good progress made too. But I think after the second world war that everything went with the srutham, with the tide again, and then America was the other big country on the other side of us across the Atlantic, we were between two English speaking powers.

Deirdre : Any why don't Americans have their own language ?

Paddy : Well of course they never had. Well, they had but they killed it too. The Red Indians had their own language in America before the Europeans went at all. But since the Spaniards and the English and the French from Europe when they went to America and started taking over. The Spaniards took over south America and that's why you have Spanish and Portuguese in South -America today. And in central America up to Mexico you have the same thing. Well the United States and Canada then, was between the French and the British and the French and the British conquered the Indians, took over the United States and Canada and that's why they have English in the United States and Canada and French. There was some French left in parts of them that it's the Europeans that took over in America and you can say that at the moment in America is an appendix for Europe

and they cleared until then. The people that were in America before them, the same thing happened in Australia to the Aborigines. The Europeans took over Australia.

Deirdre: I wonder why it is that European Countries are the strongest?

Paddy: Well that goes back to the Roman Empire. Well I don't know how the Euro Peace, the Greeks, the Romans brought them into Europe building that was called Empire Building. The Romans made a big empire in Europe around the Mediterranean and they came as far as the Island near England. Sure the Roman Empire had Egypt, from Egypt to England and the Roman Empire broke up then a lot of other what we call nations tried to build up empires like it, that's what the Spaniards and Portuguese did in south America. The French founded their own empire many a time and the British started building their empire and that's why they have all the wars in Europe and there was no wars anywhere else in the world. There was wars between the French and English, the French and the Germans and the Russians and the Polanders and Switzerland. They were all fighting trying to build a big mighty empire like the Romans to dominate all the others. And that's going with the last 2,000 years until they got tired and then the last two wars and the first world war tired them a bit but the Second World War finished them and said we had no sense. That's why you have no wars in Europe because they have learned their lesson and all the wars now are out in Africa or Iran or Iraq or Vietnam; all these. They're fighting wars now in far away countries. That's one thing I can tell ya the nuclear bombs and atom bombs have saved us.

Deirdre: They have saved us?

Paddy: They have because they saved us from having a World War long ago.

Deirdre: Because of the threat?

Paddy: That's right ya. It's the threat that they'd start a war with all the modern things they have with the last forty years. They're no more winning than they are loosing. The winner would be loosing whatever they do with all these things. They're trying to dismantle them now.

Deirdre: They're sending them out to space.

Paddy: Isn't it an awful pity though that a lot of the bills that were spent on those, it's a pity it wasn't spent on the people and it wasn't much either for the people in Third World that time. But such is such and we cannot do a thing about it. All these place names are Irish words and the English took the words from the mouth of the Irish people and they wrote them into English as one word, well in the Irish words you had maybe two or three and they made one word out of two or three and that's how they are big long words in English but in Irish there are two or three simple words put together. For example now we'll say Moy Rahan.

Deirdre: The English for clever and

Paddy: These are two words put together but the English people put in a y and a h Moyrahan. There are two words and you want to go to the two Irish words to find out what the words are and that was Pollnashantan. Now you have Poll there that's one word in Irish inanach shantan. You have three nouns and one of the article in and ach and they Poll so whole or wait till we are we'll take the simple one Pollachapail that's the "hole of the horse" likely a horse fell into it or something like that. Poll a Chapail, well, Poll na Bo is the "hole of the cow". Poll na bo and you had three little words joined together. Well Poll na Shantanagh is a hard word because it's very hard to know what the tanach is at the end. Now the nearest we could go to is another fella who told us and he took it that the tanach that is the end of that comes from the word Tan and that means cows or cattle in Irish. Tan bo Chuine is the tan. The old Irish stories told long ago, well tan meant cows/cattle and Poll na Shantagh is the "hole of the old cow".

Deirdre: And how is that? It's only a hole I'd say.

Paddy: But what happened was that they know the hole was in it and they used to mind the cattle but sometime or other this man one day missed his old cow, one of the old cows he had and where she had gone when he was looking for, he couldn't find her and at long last he saw her below and the waves making bits of her and there she was down there and that time then to become known as Poll na Sheanchanagh. It's happening yet, you could get these names after a certain horse or a cow or a man. We'd say if there was a man living on his own on a mountain, there would be a part of the mountain called, he had no house we'd say a hut and the place where he had that hut would be called after himself or after the hut.

Deirdre: The name of the mountain would be called after the situation?

Paddy: Well, maybe a part of it anyway. One side of it would be called after yer man.

Deirdre: And how did that hole happen?

Paddy: They're common. There's about 1,2,3. There is three of them, there is one below in Aughadoon, yes there's another one of them behind in Gladree, no behind in Port between Gladree and Frenchport. Behind Scotch Port, the other side. The sea breaks in the cliffs, in a cliff now when the waves are hitting the cliffs all the rocks in a cliff are not the same. They are younger rocks and older rocks, sandstones and different types of rocks like basalt and all that.

Interviewee: John Lavelle,
Annagh,
Date: 31/10/90

Interviewers: Deirdre Lavelle and Tisha Monaghan

Deirdre: You're over eighty years?

John: Yeah.

Deirdre: So that was the main reason for moving on to the mainland?

John: It was.

Deirdre: How did you get this land, people that left the Island and came to the mainland, the Land Commission divided the land up?

John: Yeah. Up in Glosh they came out first but then we didn't come out there you see we thought here was better.

Deirdre: So was it up to you where you lived?

John: Ah, we could get a place up in Glosh, but we didn't take it.

Deirdre: Did you choose to live here, did they offer you this place.

John: This place was divided and we got this place.

Deirdre: And was there any procedure, like, why people were sent to different places?

John: Ah no, a few more went to, ah three houses went down to Glenlara. There was a landlord here at the time, Bingham, he was leaving then and the Land Commission broke up the thing and they divided them into homes.

Deirdre: Just supposing you were offered a place in Glosh, you didn't take that?

John: No.

Deirdre: Then you were offered a place here?

John: Yes, that's right.

Deirdre: What if you didn't want to take this place?

John: Well you see we had to take this place then, everyone else had died, and then it was very lonesome to stay there so I decided to move.

Deirdre: You didn't go to Glosh did you, you didn't want to go, and then you were offered this place, just supposing you were offered to live in Moyrahan, would you have any choice?

John: No I'd rather here than Moyrahan.

Deirdre: But would you have any choice if you did want to go to Moyrahan? Has Annagh changed much over the years?

John: Well not much, but the sea is coming across down here and...

Deirdre: It hasn't changed at all?

John: No, no.

Deirdre: Did you carry on fishing when you left?

John: Yes we did, we carried on fishing as soon as we came here.

Deirdre: The same place?

John: Yeah, here.

Deirdre: What do you think of the decline of the Irish language?

John: Well, well most Irish people are emigrating you see and the English language is taken over.

Deirdre: Do you like to see Ireland as an Irish country?

John: Well, I like to see them both Irish and English, two languages.

Deirdre: Would you speak Irish now to Dominick?

John: Oh, all Irish, we are used to speaking Irish when we are around.

Deirdre: And has it changed the language?

John: No, not nothing, since we left, we have the same all the time.

Deirdre: Is life changed between the teenagers today and, say your age?

John: There's alot of difference, there is.

Deirdre: How?

John: Ah, there's better things now. Their was no money that time. There's plenty money now.

Deirdre: What would you do when you went to the dances?

John: We used, but we didn't pay going in because we had nothing to pay, it had to be free.

Deirdre: Was any of the dances charged to get in?

John: No. It was all free but when we were older we had to pay a shilling to go into a dance and then we would get tea and biscuits and everything. The dance would be going on till morning.

Deirdre: I suppose you enjoyed yourselves?

John: Oh yes we did.

Deirdre: Did you go to Inishglora?

John: Yeah, many a time.

Deirdre: Is that right next to Inishkea?

John: Well it's a bit from Inishkea. Its pier is next to Inishkea.

Deirdre: Say, looking from Glosh, just supposing you were looking at the Island from Glosh, would you be able to see Inishglora?

John: From Glosh, you would.

Deirdre: So there was no warning at all about the storm?

John: No, no warning at all, it came very quick.

Deirdre: Was the weather usually bad?

John: Well no, it came very quick, you see. You'd get some storms but not as bad as that.

Deirdre: That's the first storm you were in?

John: 'Twas.

Deirdre: Ever since you moved to the mainland?

John: Oh, 'tis the worst storm I remember.

Deirdre: And how old would you be when you'd go out fishing full-time?

John: When we'd go out fishing first, ah, about fourteen or fifteen.

Deirdre: Is there any where in the area that you think may be of any use to us?

John: Well I don't think so, a lot of people go to Dunmore.

Tisha: Where is Dunmore?

John: You go back Corclough way, Gladree and as far as you could go then.

Deirdre: And what is it?

John: There was a port there one time.

Deirdre: Is it near Pullnashantina.

John: 'Tis, that's right Pullnashantina.

Deirdre: We were there, it's a little?

John: You were living back in Gladree, it's not far from here. If you came here a few years ago there was a man here and he'd keep telling you ghost stories all night.

Deirdre: Who was he?

John: Ah, he was a man from there, Michael Gilboy.

Deirdre: We were speaking to Pat Rua ...

John: What about?

Deirdre: About historical, agricultural and social life?

John: Now if you would like to go to, there's a man down in Belderrig that's good at that.

Deirdre: Belderrig, where's Belderrig?

John: Down the north coast road, you go down to Glenamoy and from that to Belderrig.

Deirdre: And what would he know?

John: A fair bit.

Deirdre: What's his name?

John: Haughey that's the man that could tell you alot, he has enough to do to keep the house going. They'd have to boil potatoes and boil tea, water for the tea and wash clothes and everything like that.

Deirdre: That hasn't changed much.

John: Corrigin and pick winkles.

Tisha: And what would they use the corrigin for?

John: Ah, they use to get a good price for it, sell it.

Deirdre: What's this corrigin?

Tisha: They used it for a bad cold.

Deirdre: What is it?

Tisha: It's like, did you ever eat Dillesk?

Deirdre: Dillesk, yeah.

Tisha: It's like that, it's brighter than dillesk.

Deirdre: The women, did they help with the harvesting?

John: They used yes, they use to dig potatoes, tie the corn.

Deirdre: How did "Admiral" get in your name?

John: I think it's father that got it, he was twice, two or three times in Australia.

Deirdre: What army is that?

John: Ha.

Deirdre: In the army?

John: No, he went on his own.

Deirdre: On his own?

John: On boats they went that time.

Deirdre: How long would it take on a boat, to sail to Australia?

John: About six months.

Deirdre: Was there a school on the Island?

John: There was.

Deirdre: Suppose you wanted to be a professional like, how would ye go about it?

John: Well, there was no ways, when you'd leave the school, you got nothing but the national school. If you had money you'd go to college.

Deirdre: And would you go straight to college from national school?

John: They use to.

Deirdre: And then you spend?

John: And you'd be at school until fourteen or fifteen.

Deirdre: In national school, and then go to college, there was no secondary school in between?

John: No.

Deirdre: Was there any on the mainland at the time?

John: Ah, well the convent, they use to go to the convent.

Deirdre: Seventy years ago, say in the twenties, was the convent in action then?

John: I don't know at that time, about, wait till I see when the convent was in action.

Tisha: It was in the sixties wasn't it?

John: The 60's, or was it earlier, it was cause there was a girl from Inishkea in the convent before we left the Island.

Deirdre: So it was open before 1937?

John: Yes it was, but it was only small that time.

Deirdre: So the convent was open say in 1900?

John: Ah, in about 1924 or '25.

Deirdre: So before that there was only a national school or college?

John: That's all.

Deirdre: Does that cart tell you where all the charts are?

John: No, that's the directions, the wind directions.

Deirdre: Have you got that long?

John: Oh, we have it within twenty years you could say.

Deirdre: What are the numbers along here?

John: Depths of water.

Deirdre: Would number twenty-two mean twenty-two foot?

John: Twenty-two fathoms I'd say.

Deirdre: Fathoms.

John: Fathoms, six feet in every fathom.

Deirdre: Did you know roughly how much was there in Inishkea Islands?

John: There was 500 acres on the north island.

Deirdre: And do you know how much was on the south island?

John: About 350 acres.

Deirdre: And did some people own more land than others?

John: Where?

Deirdre: On the island?

John: That's right they did.

Deirdre: And how did that work out?

John: Well I don't know, it's going very far back since the time that kind visited before.

Deirdre: So there was no landlord on the island?

John: There was, but I don't know who he was now. He owned the island, some landlord. But he was staying in the mainland.

Deirdre: Was it Bingham?

John: No, it was back the country.

Tisha: It wasn't Carter?

John: No, it was in Tallagh, Carter was. There was Granins back the country and there was another Bingham back in Elly, Major Bingham. There was one back in Tiraun, there was another landlord but I don't know what landlord there was in Inishkea.

Deirdre: Do you know who owns it now?

John: Oh, the people that left it, they have it all the time.

Deirdre: So you own land on it?

John: Yeah.

Deirdre: There's not many people that know that.

John: Oh yeah, the people back in Glosh they own land all the time, they graze sheep and cattle.

Deirdre: How do you get the sheep and the cattle out there?

John: Out on the boats.

Deirdre: Did they turn around alot?

John: We used to have them to one side. We used to have goats and helpers.

Deirdre: You wouldn't be able to bring them over in a currach?

John: On the boats only.

Deirdre: So if anyone wanted to do anything with that they'd have to ask every single man?

John: That's right.

Deirdre: Was there mass?

John: No, the teacher used to say the rosary like, all on a Sunday, but the priest used to come twice a year.

Deirdre: To say mass?

John: Yeah!

Deirdre: And what time of the year would that be?

John: What time of year, oh in summer time, early in summer and in August.

Deirdre: Would you think religion was stronger then, than it would with mass?

John: There was religious people on the island, 'twas strong.

Deirdre: Did you like it on the island?

John: 'Twas nicer than here.

Deirdre: Pat Rua said he was glad to be off the Island.

John: Yeah, he lost his two brothers in the disaster. So you see that is why.

Deirdre: None of your brothers died?

John: No, we were too young to be out that night.

Deirdre: Did some man tell you to go home on the night of the storm.

John: No.

Deirdre: Did any mainlander get drown?

John: No, the fishing were done by the islanders at that time.

Deirdre: How did you get there in the first place?

John: Where.

Deirdre: To the island?

John: They were there with a long time?

Deirdre: Your fathers, father on it?

John: Yes there were, some of them went in from the mainland and they got a place here to live and they all came back to the mainland. They were fishing and they had fish to eat and they had potatoes, they had seaweed.

Tisha: Did they eat dillisk?

John: Yes.

Deirdre: You were better off really.

John: Well we were alright while we were on it, we had plenty potatoes and fish. In forty-seven they were very poor on the mainland, the potatoes failed they used to get grain too from ships that passed, big ships, sailing ships.

Deirdre: Was it healthy, it must have been healthy?

John: 'Twas healthy, 'twas.

THE MULLET PENINSULA

The MULLET PENINSULA forms the western limits of the ancient Barony of ERRIS. It is bounded by the Atlantic and the associated islands of Inishkea, Inishglora and Duvillaun More to the west and the twin bays of Blacksod and Broadhaven to the east. It is joined to the mainland by a narrow neck of land at Belmullet town.

The Peninsula is approximately 30 km in length rising to form the steep rocky cliffs of Erris Head at north, and the gentler, granite slopes of Termon Hill to the south. Between those two extremities it is seldom more than 30 metres above sea level and consisting of sand dunes and fine beaches. It is 12km at its widest narrowing to little more than 400 metres in the vicinity of Elly Bay.

In 1817 a main road was established from Castlebar through Erris, but it was not until 1823 that the first two-wheeled cart passed through Binghamstown en route to the southern extremity of the peninsula. Even today, The Mullet would be considered as one of the remotest areas of Ireland with a large expanse of Blanket Bog separating it from Blacksod Bay/Cuan An Fhód Duibh

When the Spanish Armada sailed from Lisbon on May 28th, 1588 it contained 130 ships ranging in size from mighty vessels of 1294 tonnes to small pinnaces and dispatch boats. On board were some 3,000 men. Of this vast fleet some 40 ships failed to return to Spain and of the men on board barely one in three survived. At least 20 were wrecked on or off the North and West coasts of Ireland. One of these was La Rata Sancta Maria Encoronada, a Genovese merchant ship of 820 tonnes. Already suffering from storm damage and in need of provisions, shelter and repairs, the commander Don Alonso de Leiva put into the wide harbour of Blacksod and successfully disembarked all his men, over 400, together with their arms, jewels and other treasures. Hearing that two Spanish ships were now anchored off Elly Bay he joined them, burning his own ship. He sailed for friendly Scotland on board the Duquesa Santa Ana, but was shipwrecked in Loughros Mor Bay.

LIVING CONDITIONS IN TERMON

1862 reminds us that conditions had hardly changed except for the worse in 40 years. The cabins were poorly thatched, beds consisted of a few sticks laid across two piles of stones and covered with a bundle of straw. The bed clothing was scanty and of the most wretched kind, and often consisting of an old thin quilt, without blankets. In every house I

saw either a pig, a cow, a donkey. In two of the houses into which I went, men were lying sick, and fires that smouldered on the hearth could not afford warmth or comfort to the poor invalids.

Excerpt from Women in Mayo.
1821 - 1851

A Historical Perspective,
By Maureen Langan-Egan.

BLACKSOD

It is said that this name came from a story about a ship that lodged in black silt. It was the captain of the English ship they named it Blacksod. When he came ashore he met some people near the pier cutting turf. He asked them the name of the pier, they did not know so with this he picked up a sod of turf and fired it at the wall of the pier and christened it Blacksod. It was previously known as Bails an Chladaigh and Cnoic Bails na Bhfod. A landlord by the name of Gamble lived in this area around the 1860s under the British Government. The pier was built around 1860. Gamble was not a bad Landlord. He owned a large house with 16 rooms. The Inland Revenue Commissioners were following him so he ran taking his family with him. Morell took over from him. He owned a big yacht and stagecoach.

Granite was exported from Blacksod from 1880 to 1885. The workers dressed the stones themselves. This was difficult work for which they got very little pay. The Granite was exported by ship to Dublin, England and Europe. In both Dublin and England it was used in the construction of the Government Buildings. In 1880 it was also used in the construction of a railway to transport granite. One ship called The Rodger sank containing Granite but there were no fatalities.

Sale for Granite stopped when the lighthouses and Coastguard stations were finished in 1912. A Landlord by the name of Palmer leased land for mining. Of Welsh origin, an Anglican priest, he was a brother in law of the Bingham's. They had their own joinery and melting. Palmer had two blacksmiths working for him. They made their own chisels and used iron ore to make their own instruments.

FALLMORE ('The Great Hedge of Field' (An Fal Mor))

Teampall Derbhile ('Derbhile's Church'), located in the townland of Fallmore, is now a National Monument, dedicated to St. Derbhile.

Derbhile de Irras of the race of Fiachra lived in the sixth century, this suggesting that the church originated in the early Christian Period. The ruins as they are seen today were probably built in the 12th century, replacing or incorporating the earlier foundation. Rectangular in ground plan it has a round-headed east window and rounded doorway with beaded and interlacing decoration on both sides. The decoration can still be seen on close examination.

The north and south walls have been reduced to low foundation courses, but a small annex can still be seen on the south side. The church is located at the tip of the Peninsula and has sandy beaches adjacent. It lies on a low hill with fine views south to Achill island.

Leaba Derbhile ('Derbhile's Bed') is surrounded by a small, but crowded graveyard containing the reputed resting place of its patron saint. This is marked by a small, square, walled enclosure lying close to the north-east corner of the church. It contains a small upright slab with an incised cross on one face.

Folklore has it that grass does not grow on the grave of a saint and presently this appears to be the case!

Tobar Derbhile ('St. Derbhile's Vat'), a holy well, lies a short distance to the north amongst sand dunes. Supposedly the waters in the well have curative powers for eye complaints. (It is said that St. Derbhile was very beautiful and so plucked out her eyes so that no man might desire her.) A pilgrimage to the well takes place every year on the 15th August.

TERMON

Termon was a sanctuary, safe haven, gave protection to people who came. There were 102 houses. Houses were built side by side. No planning permission in those days. A school house was opened by the Department of Education in 1832. Henry Cross (strongest man in Ireland) lived there. He walked from Tarmon to Belfast to sell woollen products made by the weavers. He is buried in the old graveyard in Faulmore. He traded in Sligo where on his return by foot he was once attacked by three men whom he overpowered, he was so strong. There was a great tradition of weaving. Two sisters, Gaughans were great weavers. Mary Monaghan was a great quilter, they made garments for their own use. They spun the wool and put it on cards.

Houses were made of stone with a small window and door, and a hole to let out the smoke because if you had a chimney you had to pay chimney tax and if you had a big window you had to pay extra tax. The land was owned by landlords who had bailiffs and yeomen to collect taxes and rent. Any family who could not pay were evicted. The Yeomen came and knocked down houses to the ground.

Heneghans had a pub and shop called Shibeen in Tarmon over a hundred years ago. A Heneghan man was a bailiff. Jimmy Heneghan was an agent for Lipton Tea and had a few shops. Walker also had a shop.

Mr. G. McLoughlin was a teacher of the school in Tarmon. He came from Pomeroy in Co. Tyrone. First he came to Westport, then Achill, then to Tarmon. He married Julie Ann Mc Cormach from Elly. The pay was small and people paid with bags of potatoes, chicken, geese etc. The attendance dropped and the school was closed. Mr. McLoughlin then went to teach families in the Faulmore Hedge School.

1870-1875 : There was a musician in Tarmon Piobaire Ban(Gaughan) who played the big bagpipes (uileann pipe with bellow). He travelled to the islands to play and also played in Bingham's Castle. Other entertainment was flutes, violins, harpists and bagpipes. They made their own with "cairseach". They put reeds into instruments "guilceach" to make bagpipes like bamboo canes, 3 drones back in the pipe.

Rye and Corn were grown. The Quernstone was used to grind. Kelp was made also from burning shell and was sold. Flax was grown and used to make linen. The wide ridges are still to be seen today in Tarmon. Boxty, fish, chickens and geese were the main diet.

Atkin, Morell and Palmer were Landlords at that time, later on McDonnell. McDonnell was Scottish and had a big three storey house in Achill still to be seen there in the valley. He gave some land back to the people and the rest was leased 10 yrs - 20 yrs - 99 yrs and so on. In 1880 the British Government put pressure on the Landlords not to evict people, the Land Act was set up in 1883-85. Another Landlord Gorange stayed in Colemans Lodge, which had fifteen rooms.

He stayed for thirty years and left. He was not a bad Landlord. McDonnell then took over followed by Morrell. There was a Castle in Cuislean prior to the British Invasion owned by an Irish family, the foundation of which still exist.

The Redcoats raided Tarmon later. When the famine came many fled, this ended Tarmon which has only 21 houses today.

(Information given in an interview with John McNeely, Blacksod in October 1991)

Interviewee: Patsy Gaughan, Termon, Blacksod.

Interviewers: Maureen Keane and Mary Ruane.

Date: 14/07/1991

Maureen: Your name?

Mrs. Gaughan: Tell her who you are.

Patsy: Patsy Gaughan, Termon.

Maureen: How long have you lived here?

Patsy: All my life.

Maureen: Could you tell me something about Old Termon Hill?

Patsy: Old Termon Hill, well, the Brits had a hut on Old Termon Hill during the 1914 - 18 war. And they had a flag signal station on it, and all the British Destroyers at that time were anchored here in Blacksod Bay. That was the 1914 - 18 war, then we come to the 1939, 2nd World War. I joined

the Marine and coast-watching Service and I spent five years on the hut as a coastguard in 1939.

Maureen: Do you know anything about the houses on Old Termon Hill?

Patsy: What?

Maureen: Do you know anything about the houses on Old Termon Hill?

Patsy: No I don't, it's before my time.

Maureen: You don't know anything?

Patsy: When I was young and going to school Mr. Carney told us there was 102 houses.

Maureen: 102 houses? Was there a schoolhouse there?

Patsy: Well of course, I wouldn't be able to know of, there was a schoolhouse there in 1832.

Maureen: The first schoolhouse?

Patsy: Yeah.

Mary: Tell us about your life in the coastguards then?

Patsy: Yes, Coastwatching Service we called it.

Maureen: Coastwatching Service?

Mary: Tell her about your work there then.

Patsy: We done a course of training in Castlebar, Dromore Barracks in Galway Customs Barracks in Athlone Portobello Barracks in Dublin.

Mary: When you trained, then you worked after that?

Patsy: We used to do twelve hours a day, there was eight of us on the Coastwatching Service.

Maureen: Day and Night?

Patsy: Yeah.

Maureen: How would you describe the changes that have taken place in the area through the years, since your young days?

Patsy: I couldn't believe it.

Maureen: Better?

Patsy: The work, it was hard work, harrowing shovels, pick-axes, shovels and crowbars.

Maureen: Yeah?

Patsy: Quarries and everything - now they are done by machinery.

Maureen: What about food? What kind of food did you eat?

Patsy: You'd have your flask of tea with you in the morning, I used to go down to Belderrig and up to Ballycroy on a Honda Bike.

Maureen: Really?

Patsy: For the County Council. I worked for the County Council after being discharged from the Marine Coastwatching Service.

Mary: What about the food away back in the old days, what people lived on, on Old Termon Hill?

Patsy: As I already said, the food was potatoes, fish cockles and mussels and periwinkles.

Mary: Then what happened the people, the village, it had a102 houses, and it had a schoolhouse and a population a denser population, what happened to the people, where did they go?

Patsy: I suppose they emigrated, some went to Australia, Canada and New Zealand.

Mary: Most of them probably died from the hunger. Is there not

Patsy: an old graveyard on Old Termon Hill?
No.

Mary: Where were they buried?

Patsy: Oh, yes there was a graveyard at Ballamore below the road.

Maureen: Where?

Mary: Ballamore, that is on Termon Hill. We passed it on the way over.

Maureen: Are there graves there?

Mary: There was an old graveyard there, yes, during the famine times.

Patsy: There is an old graveyard there, Ballamore, big wall. Because there is an old story told one time, I don't know if it's the truth, that they were building a house in Termon and six men carried this flag-square stone, brought it up and put it up over the door and the next morning there was drops of blood on the floor. They had to take the stone down again and put it in the ground.

Mary: That would be Jack Garratt's field then?

Patsy: No, Michael Hennigan's field.

Mary: Hennigan's field that is where the well is?

Patsy: It's called Tubernenafaragh.

Mary: So there was a graveyard there as well as a church, and a well and a schoolhouse.

Patsy: Yes.

Mary: They took the stone out of the graveyard, it started bleeding and they had to put it back again. That's where all the stones are up there. They are grave markings. The death toll must have been very high in the famine times.

Maureen: I wonder why they built so high up on the hill?

Mary: It didn't seem a very sheltered spot. Why did they build the houses so high up on the hill?

Patsy: The height of Termon Hill is taken from where I was telling you, you know, Ballamore, when they were measuring the hill well, I mean, there was houses coming down from the road you know yourself, 102 houses.

Mary: So Ballamore is down in Jack Garratt's?

Patsy: It's at the crossroads going up to John Hennigan's house.

Maureen: I wonder what the houses are made of in those days?

Patsy: They were made of stones, and thatched with scraws and rushes.

Mary: And did they have any chimneys, just a hole in the roof to let out the smoke?

Patsy: A hole in the top called the poll an iarta.

Mary: To let the smoke out on top?

Maureen: Would they have windows?

Mary: Ah, they would, they would have a window and a door in the house.

Patsy: Well, there would be a small window.

Maureen: One or two rooms probably?

Mary: They didn't have stone houses in the beginning did they?

Patsy: In Termon, stone houses were built as they didn't have any bog in Termon, it was too solid.

TERMON HILL

Cnoc Tearmainn, Hill of the Termon of "sanctuary".

Near the southern extremity of the mainland, in the townland of Termon. There is a little hill 342ft above the level of the sea.

In Irish, Tearmon, "sanctuary land" situated in the south extremity of the parish.

In contains 1,033a, Ir, 35p. of which 334 acres are cut-out bog and boggy pasture, 250 acres of blowing sands and the remainder is arable and pasture.

It was the property of W. H. Carter Esq., who leased it forever to Mr. Caldwell. The strand on the Blacksod side is shingle and sand. With the exception of a reef of rocks, which project about a quarter of a mile.

On the west, the beach is partly rock and partly sand.

AGHLEAM ('Horse Leap')/Eachleim

Sí an Ghaeilge gnáth theanga labhartha sa cheanntar seo agus fáiltítear roimh cómhra Gaeilge. Many people were rehoused here following the abandoning of the Inishkea Islands. An Aghleam house, still lived in, has incorporated into it a part of Blacksod Whaling Company's former administration building.

ARD OILIGH/Ardelly Point

During the early years of the 20th century whaling was an important industry on the Mullet. In 1910 the Blacksod Whaling company set up a station at Ardelly Point. This was largely the work of a Captain Bruun. The station closed down during the war years, re-opening again in 1920. Whaling was permitted only between April and October and prohibited within 3 miles of low water.

On 21st February 1923 a large part of the station was burned down. Something of a mystery surrounds the cause of the fire. One explanation which seem to have been half accepted officially is that the fire was started accidentally during a search for explosives believed to have been hidden in the factory. However the local version is

somewhat different for it is said that three men who were refused jobs set fire to the factory out of spite. Today only traces of the foundations remain.

TORAN/Tiraun Point - Standing Stone

A number of standing stones are located along the coastline throughout the Peninsula.

These were erected in all periods and for different purposes. Some may have been used as boundary markers or to represent ancient routeways, others marked burial places or were used for pagan or ritual purposes the advent of Christianity.

CUAN OILIGH/Elly Bay

A substantial tumulus or burial mound. A broken standing stone is located on top. This is the site of the original Bingham Castle (see Chapter on Landlords).

CROSS

Cross (Croise - a cross) is beautifully situated close to the shore line, with views of Annagh Head to the north, Eagle Island, Inishglora Island and Belderrig strand. Located here is Cross Abbey a medieval church, standing on the site of a sixth-century foundation of St. Brendan Crosrayn. The present Cross Abbey is set in a graveyard in which there have been so many burials through the centuries that the earth within the encircling wall has risen to its level. The place is still holy as is the case with most ancient Irish churchyards. It is surrounded by an ancient burial ground which contains the grave of Richard Barrett (Riocard Bairead), a famous local artist of the 18th Century. This poem is dedicated to Owen Conway a land agent employed in Erris, who died in 1788 and is buried in the graveyard of Termoncarragh.

Nach e seo sceal deacrach san tir seo,
In anacair chroi 'gus bron,
O fhagas to Creagan an Line
Go dte go dti an Fal Mor?
A leitheid de screadadh 's de chaoineadh
Niro chuala tu ariamh go foill,
Ce nil againne aon ionadh,
Ocailleadh, faroar, Eoin Coir!

(Isn't this the most pitiful story
That ever touched heart to the core?
Today we saw Owen to glory
From Creagan-a-Line to Fallmore.
Such wailing and loud lamentation
Were ne'er heard in Erin before,
For we've lost our best friend in creation
The kind, tender-hearted Owen Coir)

There are few people who have not heard of this poem about Eoin Conway, an unmerciful tyrant who was employed by Major Bingham, as a drover and bailiff and it was any widow's curse that followed him to his grave. Richard fell in love with Nancy Tallot, the beautiful daughter of Jack Tallot who was landlord in Moyrahan, but Jack was not enamoured with having Dick as a son-in-law, as he was of peasant stock and a Catholic with the reputation of a rake, but Dick eloped with Nancy from a dance house and they were married.

Around 1118 the monks of Inishglora had come ashore to Cross, most probably through fear of the viking raids such as that suffered by Inishmurray in 807. In a papal letter of 1427 and 1428 we find the monastery called "Inysgluayr alias Cross" and again in a letter of 1448 it is given the name "St. Brendan's Crosroyn".

There is also an ancient connection between Ballintubber and Cross, Cross was a cell of the Monastery of Ballintubber.

MAINISTIR NA CROISE/Cross Abbey

3km west of Binghamstown is the ruins of the medieval church of Cross. It is beautifully located at Cross Point with fine views west to the island of Inishglora. It is thought that the monastic settlement on Inishglora was moved to Cross in the 10th century, retaining the alias Inishglora or St. Brendan's throughout the medieval period. From the 14th century

onwards it became a 'priory' dedicated to the blessed virgin and a dependent on the Abbey of Ballintober from which it received its revenues. Legend holds that anyone who passes through the east gable window in Cross, three times, will be forever safe from drowning. It is surrounded by an ancient burial ground which also contains the grave of Riocard Bairead, the peninsula's most famous scholar and poet who died in 1819 aged 79.

AN GEATA MOR (THE BIG GATE) Binghamstown

Binghamstown was established some 3km south of Belmullet on the lands of Ballymacsherron in the third decade of the 19th century. It was named after its founder Major Bingham and reached its culmination in the years immediately preceding the famine. At this time it consisted of one long street containing an alignment of 70 private dwellings and other buildings, including a market house, court house, church, constabulary barracks, general store, smithy and workshops for other types of craftsmen. A fair was held in the village on the first day of each month and a quay was erected at Saleen harbour to ship corn and potatoes to Westport.

Binghamstown originated as a 'Landlord Village' and one of its principle functions was to provide a rudimentary service for the estate of its founder. By 1855 most of the villagers appear to have been families of local origin who earned their living mainly by working land allocated to them in the newly formed townland of Binghamstown.

The fate of Binghamstown may be attributed largely to the success of Belmullet, a rival settlement. Belmullet had grown rapidly and soon had taken much of the trade from Binghamstown. Finally Bingham built a huge gate across the roadway to try to prevent cattle being driven to the fair in Belmullet without paying a substantial bill. Hence the Irish name An Geata Mór.

However in retaliation the country people drove their cattle through the fields thus avoiding payment on their way to Belmullet. By the end of the 19th century Binghamstown fell into disuse and the main use for Saleen harbour was in carrying Irish emigrants on boats bound for America.

LEACHT AIR IORRAIS

Leacht Air Iorrais at Binghamstown stands "in a wild poetical spot" in the middle of a wilderness of sands (O'Donovan Letters). The leacht itself is 35ft across and 15ft high. Also called "The monument of the slaughter of Erris". It was covered with sand until about 1811, and though the people of the time pointed out the place where a monument "ought to be", the faith in its existence was wavering. A legend told how a great battle was fought against an invading army from Munster, which with its King, was annihilated. The greatest slaughter was said to have taken place at a hollow in the sandhills called Lug na fullagh, or 'the hole of blood' where human bones were found in quantities and indeed under the adjacent sandhills.

The mound is still called after the King of Munster; it was opened and a standing skeleton found with an inscribed stone. The people in their reverence for the dead, covered up the remains again.

TUAISCEART IORRAIS

On Aois Meolíteach i leith, d'fhag glúnta d'áitreanóhaí Iorrais Thuaidh, oidhreacht saidhir i'ghnéitheach ina ndiaidh, le taighdiú. Ní féidir linne agus na glúnta atá le teacht, nach níos fearr a fhágáil dár síocht ná go mbeadh meas agus urraim ar an oidhreacht seo, agus go dhéanfá na hiarsmaí óreaátha, iomadúla a chuireann le tabhacht agus seasamh an cheanntair, gan láimh a leagan orthu. Ach tá ceád míl fáilté roimh cách, teacht agus aoidhneas agus eolas a dhaint as an oidhreacht sonrach seo, as an timpeallacht dúchasach agus as an gcultúr ársa atá sainiúil don cheanntar - Iorrais Thuaidh.

ERRIS NORTH

Since the Neolithic age, generations of inhabitants of Erris North have left behind a rich and varied heritage to be explored. This and future generations can leave no greater legacy than to respect and leave untouched the many fine antiquities that enhance and add to the significance of this area. Yet all are welcome to experience and enjoy the specific heritage, natural environment and the traditional culture unique to Erris North.

DROICHEAD MUINGNABO (Muingnabo Bridge/ Annie Brady Bridge)

Known locally as 'Droichéad Muingnabo' (Muingnabo Bridge) it was named after Annie Brady, a suffragette and wife of the Road and Harbours Commissioner. Her husband, Sir Thomas Brady carried out work in the area in the 1880's. A regular visitor to the local hunting lodge (which no longer exists) Annie Brady was touched by the isolation of the local people and thus donated money for the construction of the Bridge. While it is now replaced by an iron bridge, remnants of the original stone and wooden structure still exists.

ROSSPORT HOUSE

Built around 1837. A man by the name of Samuel Burns occupied the village of RosSPORT and Muingnabo in the year 1707. He came along with his wife, some of his family and servants from Killala. He received a grant from the government. Roads were built, the land was striped and laid out better than was done in any other village. He was accompanied by his wife's mother and grandmother. They died in RosSPORT and were buried in Kilgalligan. One of the servants a Catholic was buried in Kilgalligan. Samuel was a Wesleyan Methodist. He built a graveyard and church. The bodies of Samuel's wife's mother and grandmother were transferred from Kilgalligan cemetery to RosSPORT. Since then there has not been as much crying heard in RosSPORT as there was that night. It is thought that it is the Catholic servant girl that was crying after them.

Samuel was a wise and sincere man. There was a spring well down from the house. It was called "tobar na craoibhe". There was a small tree growing there. He made a pipe from the house to the well. People of the area told him it was a curse to change the well in any way. He ordered his workforce to cut the tree. They would not let him knock the tree. He made the pump. Afterwards two in his family died. It is said there was a woman in RosSPORT who was visited by a beggarman and that he said to her that Samuel would have no luck because he cut the tree. Samuels family went to London. There are some of them who are accountants in Co. Offaly.

RosSPORT House was a two-storey house with some rooms and a parlour. When Samuel Burns left RosSPORT a member of the Monaghan family from RosSPORT called Jack Ceadaigh bought it. There were bells attached to a string where the person upstairs would call on the person

downstairs. The time of the famine 1846 - 1848 Samuel had boats that went to Belmullet for flour. Nobody died on Samuel's estate during the famine.

Before my time, they had fiddlers. In winter time the people of Broadhaven, Carrowteige, Stonefield, and Kilgalligan would invite Michael O Dugain and Patsy Walsh to come for a week. Some of the people of the village would give their houses for the dancing. There was no concrete floors that time. They would spend a night here and there and on the seventh night the ball would be held. The ball was the last dance of the night. The fiddlers would not get paid until then. The boys would give a shilling per person. The girls would not have to pay. If they wished the girls could keep him another week. They could get him on four pence per person. The dance would begin at seven p.m. and continue until two a.m.

CEATHRU THAIDHG (Taidhg's Quarter)/Carrowteige

Situated on the extreme north coast of Erris, you can still find the 'Old Ireland' of years gone by. Here the natives converse in the beautiful musical language of Irish. A wealth of folklore exists, originating from this area. 25,000 pages of folklore manuscripts collected from the Carrowteige area are housed in University College Dublin.

Together with Eachleim on the Mullet Peninsula Ceathrú Thaidgh represents one of the last surviving areas of the Mayo Gaeltachta. The pre-bog field walls found in the mountainous region south of Benwee Head and the settlements known from the sandhills suggest some of the earliest human activity in Erris took place in this region.

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AN BHEANN BHUI (The Yellow Pear Or Ear)/Benwee Head

Benwee is so named because of the yellow colour of the rock. The most northerly tip of Erris, it lifts its lofty head some 830 feet above the pounding surf of the Atlantic. It was here among the most splendid and spectacular quartzite cliffs that the first nesting site of fulmars in Ireland was recorded in 1911. West of these cliffs lies the immense Bay of Broadhaven. Further on is Erris Head, the most northerly projection of the Mullet Peninsula. Also in the view from the east and far beyond are gigantic cliffs, while grey-blue in the distance are the mountains of Sligo and Donegal.

RIN RUA (The Red Point)/Rinroe Point

Rinroe is a south facing headland with traces of extensive fortifications along the northern coastline of Erris. Other examples of promontory fort in this area can be found at Dun an Iarainn to the north-west and Dooncarton to the south. Here castles were also established by the Barretts and Burkes, two Norman families. Rinroe also contains the remains of a Fish Curing Station established by the Congested Districts Board. A Coast Guard Station also built here by the C.D.B. no longer exists.



KILGALLIGAN

Interview with Johnny Bournes on 14th July, 1991

The name of the village near to Stonefield is Kilgalligan. I think myself Dalligain is the correct name. These names arrived with the English. It was said, if it is Galligan or Dalligan that he was in the monastery where Kilgalligans graveyard is now. There was another St. Comin in Lacken. The two saints met in Belderrig on Cnoc Tanai as it was called. When our saint from Kilgalligan went back early in the morning, the sun was against his eyes and then after midday when he was returning the sun was again hitting his eyes and it is said that it is the sun that made him blind. That is now the piece I heard and I am not saying it is the truth.

I would say that there was not many people around in this area for many years. The land was poor, and it was boggy. There is a mount in the graveyard in Kilgalligan, where it is said that the holy saint, St. Galligan had his monastery. There are two graves at the top of the mount. In 1826, one of them was buried, another boy was buried some years before that. That man I was talking about is a protestant and his son Thomas who died in the snow coming with meal long ago from Rosspport is buried on top of the Carn. At the sides of the Carn there is a woman from Bangor buried. At the bottom of the Carn there is another Burns buried in 1829. This shows there was not many people buried in the graveyard. It was in Pullathomas they were mostly buried.

There was not many houses in it. There was a few houses in Baile Ur. There is a map Bals Map 18 - a few houses where the houses of Stonefield were (up north of the Kilgalligan Well). I am seventy years old now, and there was no slated roofs in Stonefield during my time only your grandfathers.

There was a house behind it Michael Mhor and Michael Aindi. There was some galvanised roofs. It was mainly thatched houses, there was about 50 houses in it.

About the place they called Stor 'n Rinne (Fish Curing Station) the remains that are still there is the old wall. A branch of English Government gave away boats and things. There were some in Inver and Rinroe. A station was built at Rinroe. Another one was built in Portacloy and one in Porturlin helping the fishermen. This happened around 1900. I was born in 1920. There was a place called Banc that is a place where fish are plentiful at the back of Kid Island. There was

herring and trout to be found in it. People were sent over from Scotland to teach the people of the place to manage a boat. There was a pump at the corner of the station where they could pump water up from the sea with the hand.

TARTER

When I was a young man, boats were run by steam that time. The tarter was a boat that brought stuff like flour and barley from Sligo to Belmullet. The boat stopped at Portacloy, people came out to the boats with currachs. The correct stop was out from Ait Ticonainn a mile out from the town. They called it Tarter Pier. It took people out, on their way to Scotland. This was before the second World War. It went from Portacloy to Sligo and another boat from Derry took them to Scotland. The boat came for many years. They put fish in barrells with pickle, your fathers uncle used to tell me. They took the pickle out again and put the bung in the barrell.

TOWER

There is nothing left of it now, "Bogach an Teamhair" called on the area including Binn Bhui, Stonefield. This was done a few hundred years ago. These towers were called Martello towers this was around the time of Napoleon, it was expected that Napoleon would take Ireland from England. There was another one in Tip MacSamhail and another one outside Dublin where famous people like Joyce was associated with. It was only called the tower here. There is no knowledge of anyone living there.

"Linn an Teamhair" There is a big dam it is overgrown now. It was called "Linn an Teamhair", it was said an old woman was seen there, she was called the old woman of the tower. There was no association between the tower and the "Linn".

CASTLE

It was Barretts that was in it. They were in it before the 16th century. Also Burkes and Deanes. There is a book to be found called the "Book of Composition 1661", Barretts were Normans.

"CARRAGAIN CLOCH"

Our village is baptised from Stones, people dug up stones. It was said that it was bad luck to move these stones. It is also said you are not supposed to stop a path on anyone that is, if it is not disturbing a lot on you. Also not to stop anyone going to the well if it is on your land. God gave water to everyone.

Another type of Carragain, if someone died in a certain place, they would throw pebbles in the spot where that person died they were called grave mounds.

GALLIGAN

There is a stream coming down to the shore, a quarter of a mile down from where Galligan was living. It is said that he was at the bank of the river and that he was reading a book. There was a red trout in the river, this trout jumped and put a burst of water on the page of the book he put a curse that no trout would be in the river again.

There is a garden back from the Carn. It is Burns from Portacloy that are buried in it. They were Protestants. There was a time when the Bishop of Killala was to come to the graveyard but he said he could not bless the graveyard, whilst, there was protestants buried there. There was a man in Portacloy, William Burns. He got the loan of a horse and cart and he took stones back from the rinne. He made a garden, his mother was Catholic and his father was Protestant. I don't think the place was blessed since. There are seven people buried here. Around the time of the Congested Districts Board was the first time the Fish Curing Station were there. Also, knitting started in the Lace Schools. The man was Sir Thomas Brady.

Times were so bad there was no bridge in Muingnabo but stones. Annie Brady was with Sir Thomas this day on a side car. When she saw the state of the place she gave her annuity money to build a bridge in Muingnabo.

There is a place down from Kilgalligan graveyard (Ait ti Andrew) that was Andrew Byrnes. He had two daughters Mary and Sydney. He had a house where Tom Ann Doherty's land is. It is still called Cnocan ti Andrew. The 10th of June 1707 he was made a landlord. My relations were up in Roscommon and Castleconner. Since 1665 some of my relations were here.

Arthur Shane took over Erris, Queen Anne was Queen. In 1707 land was given out to the Bournes, the worst land. There was no canal, Shane cut across Blacksod Bay to Broadhaven Bay called Shane's Cut.

Binghamstown was the centre of Erris in 1826. It was bog all the way into Belmullet.

First road made into Belmullet was from Castlebar.

Sir Arthur Shaen - Englishman living Cill Mor, Athlone - had two daughters, one married son to Bingham and another daughter married a son to Carter. Carter was from Castlemount, Co. Kildare.

GALLIGAN WELL

People came before night of fair day 15th August (Feast of Assumption). Also they came the 7th September and 8th September. They also came mainly on Saturdays. It was mainly women that came. They left pieces of ribbons and halfpennies. They tied the ribbons around the paths of the well. People came walking from Rossport and Seamhachaire. Pilgrimage should be done before setting of the sun. Twenty five years ago the tour stopped. It is said this woman who came from Stonefield made the pilgrimage upside down that is against the sun. She went down, a foggy day when she thought nobody would see her but someone saw here. It is said that the well dried up.

People did not go there if people wanted cure for cows or sheep. But if a person was sick, people in America who believed in power of holy well could have the pilgrimage for them by someone related to them or anyone in the place. It was the same as if they had made the pilgrimage themselves. I heard my father saying people came there if someone was dying, or for a widow or someone that is sick. If the pilgrimage was made and if a trout was seen at the top of the river you could go home and be sure that your miracle would be granted.

Interview with Michael McGrath on July 23rd, 1991

CASTLE

It was said by some people that it was the Tuatha De Danann that was in it. They came here a hundred and fifty or two hundred years ago. There was a defence wall there and there were houses below it. The wall was twenty five feet in height, and there was steps made of stone,

as a way up to the castle. It was said there was a pot of gold up from the castle and there was a flagstone on top of it. It was said, about the group that was in it that they stole horses from the people of this area. I heard this from John Gannon who is buried with a long time. They stole a horse from a man in Carrowteige one of the De Danann, he was out at night and the rope that was on the horse was tied around his feet, and he was asleep. The man who owned the horse went back in the night, it was no use for him to go out during the day he wouldn't come back. It was said he jumped on every horse and he beat this horse and he took him back quarter of a mile and it was said that he pulled the leg from him.

There is a castle at the corner of Glengad and another one over --- in it was said that time that there was only one pot between the three of them, when one party had their potatoes boiled, they would throw the pot back to the people at Glengad so that they could boil their own potatoes and when they had their potatoes boiled, they would throw it back to the people in Gleannlaire, that evening the pot was sent back to the people at Toin na Mean so they would have it for their potatoes the next day. The pots were big and made of metal, there was no plastic.

PASSAGE OF THE DEAD

There was no roads in it that time. The passage that was laid out was across the field. It was said that time that you should not make any short passage with the body, but that you should go with it like the way that is set out for it.

TOWER ABOVE ROWANS HOUSE

It was in it the time of the troubles, maybe it was the English that built them looking out for boats, you could see out Portacloy and back Erris Head. The mark of the tower is still there. There is another one up above Johnny Connollys house. They were look out houses.

LOOK OUT HOUSES (PORTACLOY)

It was said the Sheerins that built it. It was a lookout house. Looking out for submarines or boats. They would send word by phone if they saw anything happening.

POT OF GOLD

It was said that a pot of gold was buried under the corner of John Dohertys house, Portacloy. There is an old woman who takes care of the pot of gold and you would be followed if you went near the pot. You would have to cross the road and the river, which borders Stonefield and Portacloy. You would have to be fast or if you got caught you would lose your pot and yourself as well. It is said the pot is still there and hasn't been moved.

LAND COMMISSION

Houses had one room and a kitchen. Before the Land Commission there was thatched houses. The kitchen was thirty foot in length and some were forty foot in length. I saw some and there was no roof at all but the fire made up against the wall. There was a smoke hole on top and if you went in on a summers evening you would cut the smoke inside. There was a big stone each side of the fire and they were a few hundred in weight each of them. As well as keeping in the fire it made a seat for anyone who sat on it. There were cows tied at the bottom of the house. Nothing keeping the animals down but a big drain. If there was an extra child in the house there was a place cut across for them or there was another piece made out from the house. There was not much furniture no chairs but stools. Everyone in the house going into the other one. If there was an old man in the house there would be five or six old men in at him talking or playing cards especially winter nights. Table was beside the press it was 5ft long and 3ft wide and 3ft deep. In it was every type of food, flour, in case a mouse would come on it. Also, in it was the delph. They had no cups but mugs, four or five maybe, no forks. They ate mainly potatoes and fish and scraping boxty. They had not much money to buy flour. They had a scattering of hens in any house. At Christmas they had geese and ducks. Around that time, they used to take part in cliff climbing with ropes looking for birds and eggs.

COASTGUARDS

They had houses made of stone. They came looking for turf. Men and women were paid by the English. They owned the place at the time. They ate cows meat. They had plenty of money. People came from Scotland to teach people of the area to sail a boat. People of this area only knew how to row. The Scottish had no fishing team back with them and the fish was plentiful. There was four or five boats at Rinroe

that time. It was mainly trout that was caught and brought into the Fish Curing Stations, one at Rinroe and another one at Portacloy.

There was an old man from Scotland out fishing one day with some people from this village. They are dead now these people with twenty years. It was spillers that they had, so many hooks on the spillers. The hooks were three or three and a half feet or six or seven feet apart.

He began landing and there was no hook that hadn't got an eel on it. These eels or congareels were five or six feet long. He had no use for them. People of the village were afraid to clean them. He put a man on the stern and began cleaning them himself. He was not long cleaning them and two more throwing them out. When he had everything cleaned and raky, he took off the old hat he had on him and said "if I was over in Glasgow today I would get full of a hat of money on that fish".

"Tarter" used to come from Sligo that time to Belmullet. A steam boat that burned coal. I saw the "Tarter" myself when I was a young land.

OILEAN MHIONNAIN/Kid Island

Its name originates from pre-Christian times when places were named according to the perceived shape of the land. It is accessible and a spring water well is located in the centre of the island. It lies off the shores of Stonefield and consists of approximately thirty acres and was once used by the Burns family for grazing sheep. Originally named from Manaan Mac Lir, the Pagan Sea-God, Kid Island has a more colourful history in the distant past when it was the site of piratical and smuggling operations.

PORTACLOY AND PORTURLIN

These small settlements along the extreme northern coastline of Erris represent some of the most isolated geographical locations within the region. Richard Webb writing in 1848 claims, *'The only access by land is over high and boggy mountain so wet and swampy that it is difficult to reach even in Summer. There is probably not in Ireland a cluster of human habitation so completely secluded'*. It was because of this that the Congested District Board purchased a steam ship, the 'SS Tarter', in 1899 to trade between Sligo and Erris. It carried general cargo and livestock and called into Porturlin and Portacloy on its way to overnight in Belmullet. Goods such as flour, sugar and meal were carried by

currags from the main ship anchored off shore. Two trips a week were made during the Summer months, one in the Winter. This service ended in the early 1930's. Important sea bird colonies occur throughout this undisturbed area with the largest concentration of Fulmar in the country as well as Kittiwake and Puffins. Directly west of Poratcloy Harbour lies Benwee Head. Fine sea cliffs of quartzite around the Head where the first nesting site of Fulmars in Ireland was recorded in 1911. The promontory fort known as Dunminulla is also found along this coastline. The view from the fort is excellent as the site is on the highest point of land in the locality. From there the Stage of Broadhaven may be seen.



EXPERIMENTAL STATION - GLENAMOY

The Peatland Experimental Station at Glenamoy was established in 1955 by The Department of Agriculture. It was set up to carry out experiments on the topography of the type of plants that would grow on it. It has proved to be the best studied site on the low level Irish blanket bog. An Foras Talúntais scientists have carried out ecological research at Glenamoy. The bog here is both of botanical and zoological interest.

Leabharlann Co. Mhuigheo
Mayo County Library

POLL AN TOMAIS (The Pool of Ease)/Pollatomish

Beautifully situated on the southern shores of Sruwaddacon Bay, Pollatomish village was formerly owned by the Protestant Bishop of Killala, he leased the property to various landlords including the Cormicks circa 1636 and in the 1770's to the O'Donnells. They later built a substantial dwelling place which is partially incorporated into the present day Kilcommon Lodge. The only remnants of that was a Protestant colony established in the 1880's, was previously a rectory and is now an An Oige Youth Hostel.

GORTHMELLIA

Interview with Nora McAndrew

Trisha: Where are you from originally?

Nora: Porturlin.

Trisha: How many were in your family?

Nora: There were seven or eight.

Trisha: When did you move to Gorthmellia?

Nora: In 1916, St. Patrick's Day, 1916.

Trisha: Who did you marry?

Nora: He was McAndrew.

Trisha: What was his first name?

Nora: James McAndrew.

Trisha: Can you tell me anything about Gorthmellia when you first came here?

Nora: Ah, times were hard, hard times.

Trisha: Was there a school in Inver at that time?

Nora: There was

Trisha: Who was teaching in it that time?

Nora: John Caulfield.

Trisha: Was there many in school at that time?

Nora: There was a lot, a lot.

Trisha: What transport was in the area at that time, was there cars?

Nora: There was cars going. Side Cars, Johnny Keenaghan here beyond had a car. There was bicycles.

Trisha: What sort of entertainment did ye have? Were there dances. Was there dance halls around?

Nora: There were dances.

Trisha: Where were the dances?

Nora: Over in Barnatra, down in Balur, and roundabout.

Trisha: Do you know who owned the dancehall in Balur?

DERRYNAMEEL

Interview with Martin Meenaghan

Maureen: What's your name?

Martin: Martin Meenaghan.

Maureen: Your address?

Martin: Derrynameel.

Maureen: There is an old chapel isn't there down there by your land?

Martin: That's right.

Maureen: Do you know anything about it?

Martin: It's been there since early 1700's and it was an old thatched chapel and it was there until about 1820, I think, and according to Father Seans book it had been destroyed then. Whoever destroyed it, I don't know. But, that was a village there was a village down there at the time. Belmullet wasn't known at that time, it was just Derrynameel down there it was a very old ancient village. It probably was attached to the settlement the monastic settlement that was on the island, and up through the centuries and even today you can see the places of the buildings along the shoreline of the village and they are now on the high water mark of the tide which is eroding the place. I have unearthed quite a few of them when I was doing work on the fireplaces and all that.

Maureen: There is nothing left of the church is there?

Martin: There is nothing left of the church just the trace of the foundations, just the foundations that would be it, people say they took some of the stones when they were building. They brought the church out, then to Glencastle, and that too was a thatched chapel first, yes, and was built at the corner there, the junction at the crossroads exactly there at Glencastle crossroads and was built inside the corner there, that's where the cemetery is now, yes, and then in later years they started another more modern church, right in the centre and the gable is there yet that was slated.

Maureen: There is pictures of the two churches in Fr. Noonan's book?

Martin: That's right, the slates came from Claggan, there was no made roads at that time to bring them in like and the cheapest way was to bring everything by sea. The hookers and the boats landed above at Claggan and slater and the workers they went out and they had landed. The priest told them and all the people at mass like that everyone that whatever number of slates you can carry maybe one or two.

Maureen: Do you know the island out there, what is the name of it?

Martin: Inisderry, it's known as Inisderry or Inisderra in Irish. It has been recognised by the ecclesiastical people since the times of the settlement there, where the monks were, I

don't know what order they were, probably the priest of the parish knows what order they are, they were supposed to have shaved heads, bald heads. And they were on that island for a long time I believe. Whatever happened them, they died away.

Maureen: Was there graves on the Island?

Martin: Oh yes, there was a lot of graves on the island there was a few on the eastern side of it here. Facing the land that is where they had their little huts, beside the sea and they tell, they were living on shell fish mostly, they were very plentiful there, up until recently in fact, oysters and scallops and all that, because the people from here used to go to pack up the shells in a heap and people used to go out with sacks and bags and the currachs and collecting them bringing them in and used to burn them for lime and whitewash their little cottages. I know on one occasion two neighbours of mine were digging and they came on some bones, they came on more bones, they left them and the didn't dig no more.

Maureen: I think there were actually some finds on the island, was there?

Martin: There was, oh yes there was a stone, a stone statue found on the island, by a neighbour of mine, John and it was taken to the Museum its in the museum in Dublin, it goes back to the 6th or 7th century and I understand that another one, something similar of the same period was found on the islands of Inishkea, something similar and there was some other, some kind of pot found by another man on the island, they are all in the Museum in Dublin. But, to prove like that there as some monastic settlements on that island it has been recorded on the annals of the Killala Diocese, where the Pope wrote to the Bishop of Killala and mentioned the monks, the order it was in Latin in those days.

Maureen: Is it easy to get out to the islands?

Martin: It is very easy only to find somebody who will ferry you out like you know there are not so many boats about now, it is

really interesting like you know.

Maureen: What about the old village you were telling me about, the old village down there. When would that have been there?

Martin: That must have been there about the, it was there since, I couldn't say for sure, but I would say since the 17th century at least and they used to hold their fairs there, their annual fairs every quarter, they had four fairs a year. Down here and there was no place to hold a fair only and I think there was a little trade make at Quay Saleen, behind Binghamstown, not Binghamstown itself but the Quay. Where the old quay is and there was another one such like at Crossmolina, and it's a field now where they used to sell there it wasn't selling. I believe, it was a harder system there was no money to exchange, really they reckon because they used to trade by barter system and apparently all the trade, that was done here, was by boat going around from one port to another you see. But you had four fairs there every year and I understand that we have a fair on town now the 15th August that is a kind of a pattern day here it's a big day. It's called LARNBHA and they reckon that that fair was already used here below. That celebration was down here at this fair in August before ours was ever. They need to hold a LARNBHA at this fair down here.

Maureen: I wonder was there many houses here?

Martin: There must have been quite a few, now I see them they were nearly all one long street down by the shore they were all one - one long line probably along the shore it's now the edge of the bank, it's eroded away and some of them then are further in a bit off the bank. At that time apparently it was mostly bog that was up here until the people settled up here. I suppose this road was made in 1800 and something 1812 or 1815, I think this was built.

Maureen: I don't think these houses were on the map were they?

Martin: The old houses?

Maureen: There not on the map?

Martin: There a bit old for that, I'd say, oh yes.

Maureen: Actually the two or three houses down there are on the map.

Martin: Are they? Well they were pretty good size buildings, and they were made of stone and all the house along the shore was made of stone. In the old days that was an awful lot of people living in little huts and they weren't stone, they were sod houses, that kind of thing you know. But it must have been pretty well cut, their buildings, you know, at the time.

Maureen: I wonder what happened them?

Martin: I think, it was penal times, and that they perished and the whole lot were banished you see, then there was a lot of feuds between different people like you know, they were trying to colonise the place, you see at the time and the landlords were mostly responsible for it but maybe not the actual landlords themselves but the settlers were coming you see and that was around from here to Inver. Inver was always an old settlement, you see and the pathway before the field was made, the pathway ran along the shore there.

Maureen: What about the landlord I wonder who that was. Was it Bingham, no?

Martin: No, Bingham - Carter - Shaen, I suppose was the first man that owned a lot. But our estate was Atkinson's. He's recorded in the book that what-you-call-him wrote his name is in Castlebar, his name is listed in that book. There were three of the main landlords in this area. This village was the last outpost of his territory as I told you there old fence there that's one of the oldest fences around. It would have been between two or three landowners and a division between two townlands, a division between two estates and between two electoral divisions yet and between two health district boards.

Marie: Did the landlords live around here?

Martin: Our landlord lived out on the hill on the top of the hill there at Rath which is very close to where the church is now.

Maureen: There is a road going up that way?

Martin: Yes, yes, up to the top of that hill, I understand there was three or four other Atkinsons, the man that was dealing with us at the time he was the Kings Councilor and apparently he had been living there we thought at first that he was but I understand now that he wasn't living there much. The Atkinsons were there you see and they had a big house on top of the hill there and they used to have a kind of a dairy there you see the . They had an avenue then running from there straight down to the road out here. We still call it the avenue, there was an Iron gate we still call it the Iron gate and of course, his wife, that was there was Catholic. The last man that was there now and drove her into the church. But claimed all that land out there. My people lived out there first, my Great Grandfather.

Maureen: Was it your uncles that owned the old houses down there?

Martin: That's right, well my grand-uncles.

Maureen: There is still quite a bit of the remains left of their houses isn't there?

Martin: Yes there is, and its interesting to see the stonework there, that's where my grandfather was born you see.

Maureen: And they had sheds for cattle?

Martin: They had a little shed near the house for convenience, for the cattle.

Maureen: I wonder what was there diet?

Martin: The diet was, on all nearly self-sufficient, the diet was potatoes and vegetables and scallops and they kept a lot of chickens and that stuff. You see for the eggs and that was the chief diet. And they they bought in later years, they bought flour, but that's about all they bought was the flour, tea and sugar, they lived off the land mostly.

Marie: Was there schools around here?

- Martin: There was no schools. But there was a hedgeschool I understand down the road here at Barnatra and there was something similar up here in a house in the village and they need to have, all they had was a hedge-school.
- Maureen: What about the village itself?
- Martin: In the old village, I don't know if there is any trace. I never heard of any record, was there any trace but apparently there was a hedge-school there at least and if anyone was caught speaking Irish they'd be punished!
- Maureen: If they were caught speaking Irish?
- Martin: Yes. Because they were native Irish speakers even in my mothers time they were great Irish speakers.
- Maureen: What about Emigration?
- Martin: They all emigrated for instance my relatives here, my grandfather had four brothers and one sister, five of a family, five house here in each of these here would reared on average eight to ten of a family and at one stage there was forty to forty-three first cousins in the five families and everyone of these went to America, a few went to Scotland. My people went to Ireland, the rest went to England and America. During the free emigration.
- Maureen: Was it on the liners leaving Blacksod?
- Martin: Later than that my people left but before that I believe on my fathers side my fathers relatives left Blacksod on the liner and landed abroad in Nabraska. All our people here like my mothers people most of them went to America. Out of every house the five houses, there are four or five members of each family in America and they done well?
- Maureen: Do they come home?
- Martin: Very few of them because there is a little story there in Fr. Seans book about going away on the Tarter. The Tarter used to run between Sligo to here, like at one stage.

Maureen: What's the name of that?

Martin: The Tarter was the name of the boat.

Maureen: Oh yes.

Martin: He was telling a story of those two who were going to America, brother and sister. And none told the other they were going and the two met at the Tarter and one returned. But a similar story happened to my uncle. They were fishing and they had a boat from where they called the Congested Board the Congested Districts Board. He was caretaker then and he asked ten shillings from his father my grandfather like, to go into Belmullet and buy nets so he went.

Maureen: Does the island belong to anybody?

Martin: Oh yes it's private property. It was going with this estate you see them when the Land Commission took over from the C.D.B. like they got nothing for it, nobody here would take it. It was useless

Maureen: Do you know who owns it?

Martin: Yes, a Mrs. McAndrew from Foxpoint.

Maureen: Is anyone allowed out?

Martin: Oh yes you can go out, oh you can. The Germans down there go out now and again.

Maureen: Can you go out from down here (you land)?

Martin: Well there's no boat here to go out but they're out there today picking winkles aren't they. They go out there often like they go out there on good weather.

Maureen: It's the locals who go out?

Martin: Locals yes.

Maureen: Is the shell midden still there?

Martin: You wouldn't see them now because sand has blown over. I know where they are like, there is a small lovely beach, clean facing into the bank, facing this way. That's where the shells were. then of course I was telling you there was a big landslide over there, it came right in near the houses down there, it didn't take them with it though. The road had been built at that time I understand when it came and blocked the road over. They thought it had eroded the road and had taken it away. This man came along with an iron and tested where the road would be found the road was still there. He took the contract of clearing it. It paid him well. They thought it brought the road away. Then there is another section of the road back there when they were building it where the swamp and made to build it a raft, when it was daylight On that land there, there is oak trees and the on account of the monks, that were shaven, ... oh there must have been some fine trees away back. They were real solid real solid.

Maureen: Thanks for talking to us.

Martin: Your welcome.

LOCH NA N-OILEAN RUA (Lake of the Red Island)/Dereens Island

Carrowmore Lake is centrally located on mainland Erris. The Irish 'Loch na n-Oileán Rua' translates directly into 'Lake of the Red Island'. It was so named because holly grows in abundance here. The lake is protected under the Wildlife Act. Dereens Island is situated at the north-west side of the lake. On the island are ruins of about six dwellings and a church. There is very little information about the ruins but it may be presumed that they date from the Early Christian Period.

INISDOIRE (Island of The Oakgrove or Thicket)/Inishderry Island

Located close to the shore on the inner reaches of Broadhaven Bay and in the townland of Derrynameel. This small low lying island was once home to a religious settlement in the Early Christian Period. A stone figure found in a shell midden on Inishderry in the 1940's is now housed in the National Museum.

ATTYCUNNANE

The meaning of Attycunnane is site of Conon's house. It covers 551 acres and the population in recent years was 1841 - 320, 1851 - 248, 1911 - 159. The landlords of Attycunnane were Isabella Short and William H. Carter.

GLEANN AN CHAISIL(The Glen of The Castle)/Glencastle

The ancient ring fort of 'Dún Domhnaill' is found in this townland. Just north of this fort is a small rectangular enclosure which represents Domhnaill's grave, as marked on the 2nd Edition Ordnance Survey map.

RATHMORGAIN (Morgan's Fort)/Rathmorgan

Travelling from Glencastle to Bangor, you pass through the townland of Rathmorgan. The remains of a holy well are situated south west of the highest mountain in this area, Knocknascallop (788 Metres), and are marked by a flag. The holy well is associated with St. Deirbhle who is supposed to have crossed over this hill on her way to Fallmore, on the Mullet peninsula. It is reputed to have curative powers for all types of ailments. Long ago people from all over Erris visited the well on August 14th and prayed the Stations of the Cross there. The local people still continue this tradition.

MUNHIN BRIDGE

The Munhin Bridge is the oldest bridge in Erris. It was the only bridge on the old road from Belmullet to Tyrawley in 1793. It was built of stone from the ruins of the chapel and dwellings on Dereens Island, Carrowmore Lake. The stone was dressed on the island and conveyed to Munhin by boat. The spring Assizes of 1795 granted £35 to Denis Bingham and others for the repair of the bridge.

The Munhin Bridge was almost completely restructured by Peter Monaghan in 1900, at a cost of £32.5.10. A Western People reporter stated "the stones which were procured at great trouble in the centre of the mountain of Muinganana are of superior quality, and the red stone is especially good". An inscription on the bridge says it was erected by Mayo County Council in 1901.

THE LEGEND OF MUNHIN

Donal Dualbhuí, a giant, lived with his wife Anna in a dún or fort in Glencastle. He had one major enemy called Ciortán who lived in Inver and the two were constantly at war. However, around his waist Donal always wore a crios or belt which had magic powers making him invincible in battle.

Anna fell in love with her husband's enemy, Ciortán and between the two of them they planned to slay Donal. One night Anna crept silently to her husband's side while he slept and snipped the belt so that it still hung around his waist but had lost its magic powers. On the following day, Donal and Ciortán once again went to battle. This time without the magic power of the belt Donal was defeated and killed. Following this Ciortán came to Glencastle to live with Anna in the fort. One day they decided to go to Bangor then called 'Ball a Chathal' to get married. They travelled on horseback and just as they came to a river Ciortán started to think that if Anna had betrayed her husband so easily she could possibly do the same thing to him. He said to her, "Beidh go ndéanfadh tú an rud ceanna ormsa agus a rinne tú ar do fhear céile" and promptly threw her off the horse and into the river where she drowned.

The river is now known as Munhin river coming from Muing Anna which literally means 'Stream of Anna'.

BEANNCHOR IORRAIS (Ridge of Mountain Peaks)/Bangor Erris

Bangor Erris came into being as a stopping place for travellers along the rough passes through the mountains from Ballina and Westport. These were treacherous routes, due to the rough terrain and the brigands.

The first house was built in 1798 as a barrack for revenue police. The second house was a pub, managed by a Robert Burns. Both were built by Major Bingham. These two buildings, on the east side of the village, have their gables facing the street as this was built later. Bangor bridge was erected in 1843. Roads radiate from the village - the impetus for their development was trade/fair activities.

Bangor offers picturesque scenery, fine walking/climbing trails and the leisurely pursuit of fishing.

Bangor was officially declared a town in 1861 when the number of dwellings forming a group had reached twenty. This was due largely to

the influence of Major Denis Bingham who by 1823 had received a patent to hold fairs in Bangor and Bingham's Lodge can be seen on the western edge of the town.

Prior to this Bangor was at the crossroads of two old roads leading west to Ballina and south to Newport. The latter route is now known as the Bangor Trail or the Nephin Way and is used annually for organised walks along the Nephin Beg Mountain range. This would have previously been used by emigrants on their way to Westport to board ships for America, or by drovers taking cattle to market.

Bangor is situated adjacent to the Owenmore River which is renowned for its salmon fishing. A bridge was built to ford the river in 1845. This was swept away by heavy rain in 1910 and the present bridge was built shortly after.

Charles Bianconi established an office and changing station for mail coach horses in Bangor in 1860 on the present main street.

The Bianconi travel service which was initiated in Co. Tipperary quickly spread throughout the country and provided Erris with its first organised transport service. The motor service finally replaced the horse in 1917.

GLENCULLEN

This townland was the property of Sir Arthur Shaen, who leased it to Robert Higginsbottom. Many others held the lease until 1838 when W. H. Carter of Castlemartin, Co. Kildare, a descendant of Arthur Shaen sold it together with Emly Beg in the Mullet to Samuel Crozier-McCormick and John Reilly, both of Morahan, and Ann Jackson, a spinster and daughter of George Jackson of Fortland, Co Mayo, a wealthy landowner for £1,200. The townland was bought by the Congested Districts Board from the Reilly family on December 1st, 1920, and stripped by the Land Commission in the 1930's. Glencullen was a favourite sporting ground, for the Reilly family, one day in August 1868, Thomas Reilly and a friend "bagged eleven and a half bags of grouse and eleven hares on the Glencullen mountain", while two young members of the Reilly family "landed forty eight beautiful trout from the Glencullen River. In the evening a considerable number of sportsmen were invited to take refreshments at Glencullen Lodge, Tomas J. Reilly the host, had refreshments laid on at an elaborate scale. After supper dancing was introduced the peasantry from the surrounding villages were made

welcome to the strains of the violin and bagpipes, the lads and lassies found partners and danced away to their hearts content, the old folk with their black dudeens sat looking on". Such was the life of the wealthy landlords of the day who held the hunting and fishing rights of all the rivers and lands.

BELLACORRICK/Mouth of the Ford

To the east of Bangor lies Bellacorrick. 'The Musical Bridge of Corick' built in 1820 is said to be one of the best built bridges in Mayo. When this bridge, that spans the Abhann Mor river was being built it was foretold that it would never be completed. It never was, and to this day there is a stone missing from the north-east end of the bridge. It is said that anyone who replaces this stone will come to a bad end.

Music can be heard from this bridge in two different ways. First by rolling a stone along the parapet on either side. As the stone hops along, musical notes are produced in rapid succession. The second method is to hold the stone in your hand and to strike it on the slab which form the coping of the parapet, hitting each slab as you go along, and drawing back the hand immediately after striking. Each slab forth its own peculiar note and a wonderful musical scale is produced.

In 1963 a Peat-power Station was built in Bellacorrick by the Electricity Supply Bord. The station burns 3000,000 tonnes of peat and generates 170 million units of electricity a year. The electricity generated here is fed into the National Grid. The station has one cooling tower which is 290 feet high. The peat is pulverised and dried by Bord Na Mona in the summer months. It is then stored on the bog in large piles and covered by polythene sheets. When required by the station, the peat is loaded onto eight ton railway wagons and brought to the station by diesel locomotives. The peat is fed into pulverising mills which dries it and grinds it down into fine particles suitable for the firing chamber.

The peatlands around Bellacorrick are vast and perhaps more important is the protection of this unique environment, for the blanket bog provides an unparalleled habitat for plant and animal life. As a result some areas have designated Nature Reserves by the government under the Wildlife Act. These areas are accessible to everyone but protected by law.

WIND FARM AT BELLACORRICK

On the 23rd of November 1922, a £7 million Wind Farm was opened by the Minister for Justice Mr. Pdraig Flynn.

The facility which is situated at Bord Na Mona's Bellacorrick bog is owned and by Renewable Energy Ireland.

The farm which consists of twenty-one giant wind turbines towering 100 foot high and it is hoped to provide enough electricity to supply in the region of 4,500 houses. Backed by E.C. funding, it is said that the turbines will be producing energy almost every day in the year. The output of the farm will be sold to the E.S.B. and fed into the National Grid.

Considering its location, Mr. Flynn said that no place other than the West of Ireland is suitable for this type of development.

CASTLEHILL

A Protestant church dedicated to the Holy Trinity which is now roofless was built here in 1850. There was 200 people at the opening but in the following years Protestant population decreased. It is said that in the early part of the last century the Parish Priest of Ballycroy and the Protestant clergyman were great friends. One day the clergymen received a letter from the minister saying that he was paying a visit to see his congregation. The clergymen told the priest he was ruined since he had only a very small congregation. The Parish Priest told him not to worry. The next day the minister came, when he entered the church it was full with the devoutest congregation ever seen. The minister said, someone wanted to injure you with me, but I am satisfied with your congregation. I haven't seen a better one in months. The Parish Priest had said mass early picked out the best dressed men and women, led them to the Protestant church. To see that nothing went wrong the Parish Priest had put on a big over coat and sat in the back. Thus the clergymen got his congregation. Close by lies the rectory where the minister lived.

CASTLEHILL CASTLE

Castlehill castle, once the property of the Bourkes, was destroyed in 1526, by O'Donnell. It is believed to have been built on the site of an older fort; 'Ailill's Dun'. When the present Castlehill House was being

constructed, around 1838, much of the building material was taken from the ruined castle. Castlehill House itself, may stand on the original site of 'Dun Atha Fen'/'Caorthannan'. Both this site and 'Ailill's Dun' were forts mentioned in the ancient Irish minor saga "Tain Bo Flidhais" (the Cattle Raid of Erris). South of the castle site there is a cross-inscribed pillar, on the east of which there is a cross pattee, among others. To the north-west of Castlehill House there are the remains of two wedge tombs, (c. 2,000 BC.), both in a rather ruinous condition

KILDUN

In the townland of Kildun there are two standing stones set on top of a low mound. One is decorated with a cross pattee on its west face. Close by, to the northwest, there are traces of two hutsites, one rectangular, the other circular. One local tradition asserts that the mound was the burial place of Doon, son of Mile. Another says that this was once an ecclesiastical site, the mound being erected over the grave of one of its Bishops. The evidence suggests that this is a prehistoric monument, Christianised in later times.

INISHBIGGLE ISLAND

Situated five miles north-west of Bellyveeny Bridge. Around the 1830's the proselytizing missions were being established here by Reverend Edward Nangle of the Achill colony. They were offering the poor starving food and clothing if they accepted the Protestant faith. Sixty percent of the Catholics became Protestant, in the 1870's the Protestant colony established a mission school and a church called "Holy Trinity" at the eastern end of the Island.

Inishbiggle has had a long history of emigration especially to the potato picking fields of Scotland.

Getting fresh water to the Island has always been a problem, in the olden days they used to bring it across in the boats. But in April 1981, money was allotted to take fresh water from Achill beneath the sea in a submarine pipe to the Island. They finally got the water but unfortunately, the rapid sea current at Bulls Mouth soon uprooted the waterpipe. In 1990 a water supply was installed from Ballycroy. Many documentary films about life on the Island have been made. It highlights the life and struggles of the people on the Island.

ANNAGH ISLAND - MARSH ISLAND

Annagh Island covers an area of 627 acres. Annagh Island is in the Barony of Erris. This Island is situated a short distance off the townlands of Kildun and Claggan. Vehicles can easily be driven onto the Island at low tide. In 1855 there were workmens houses on the Island. At the moment there are two families living on the Island. One is of German origin.

CLAGGAN - HEADLAND

Claggan covers an area of 1,066 acres. An ancient church and ecclesiastical remains of St. Fintany/Fintan overlook a small inlet in the south of Claggan townland. Legend has it that he had to reside in Claggan due to his deer having broken his leg on crossing from Achill to the ferry. This saint was supposed to have lived longer than the 969 years accredited to Methuselah. Today nothing survives of the church he founded, though a 'holy well', bullaun stone and a 'rocking stone' still bear his name. Legend holds that if a person can, with their little finger, push this large stone over, their greatest wish will be fulfilled. Near Claggan Hill there is a portal dolmen and the wild blue space of the Atlantic Ocean can be seen from here. Located close by is 'Rock House'. This is a fine stately residence. The grounds around 'Rock House' are heavily wooded. It was built around 1800 by Thomas Birch, an Oxford barrister. He developed this area. He established 'Home Farm' and an aviary. He had roads made and land reclaimed giving employment to the local people. A plaque in his memory can be seen in a Protestant Church in Castlehill. Edward H. Clive took over the estate and further improvements were made. The result was a modern farm way ahead of its time. Rock House is at present the residence of the Mallet Family. It contains a gatehouse, beautiful gardens, walks and many different species of trees. Claggan Hill forms a peak. In times past the 'Ferry' or the nearest crossing point from Achill in those days was by boat, so people used to cross here to buy provisions at the fairs in Achill. This waterway also explains the number of intermarriages between Tonragee and Ballycroy.

DRUMGOLLAGH

In the townland of Drumgollagh there is a Court Tomb dating to the Neolithic (New Stone Age) Period. It is well preserved despite its having been used at one time as a shed, with a sod-roof resting on the upright stones (orthostats) of the chamber. It is aligned south-east,

north-west with the remains of the court to the east, leading to a gallery divided into large chambers. An impressive roof-stone covers the west end of the rear chamber. The site is surrounded by an irregular mound, possibly the remains of the original cairn.

BALLYCROY

Ballycroy, enclosed by the Nephin Beg Range and lying opposite to Achill Island, has an area of approximately 30,000 people. The people who settled here were mostly Ulstermen. This was mainly due to the fact that around 1854 many Catholics in Ulster were disposed of their land under King James I, which was alternatively given to English and Scottish settlers and the Ulster Catholics were forced to leave and seek their living elsewhere. Most of them came to Connaught and eventually settled here. Through time they became Connaughtmen but their surnames such as O'Donnell, Claery, Sweeney, McGuire and a host of others, ever today, are quite noticeably Northern. During the Penal Times, mass in Ballycroy was celebrated along the shore of Loch an Aifreann, a lake in the shape of a fiddle, 604 feet above sea level in the mountains overlooking Ballycroy. Nearby was a rock known as 'Clogh an aifreann' where someone could keep guard for strangers or passers-by. In 1853 a church was completed at Crosshill, built in the shape of a cross and dedicated to the Holy Family. It is still used by the locals today.

Until the establishment of a proper road network in the 19th and early 20th centuries contact with other parts of Erris was primarily by sea with a ferry running across Tullaghan Bay to the Doohoma Peninsula.

Thomas Birch of Claggan was the first landlord to make any real improvement to an estate at Ballycroy. He established a farm at claggan called "Home Farm" and employed local labour in road making and land reclamation. He died in April of 1868 and was buried in the Protestant graveyard at Castlehill. "Edward H. Clive who later took over the estate, had further improvements made. The result of all this was a modern farm at Claggan with machinery, horse type machines, ploughs and other implements".

Interview with a Ballycroy resident, name not supplied.

- Q. Have you lived in Ballycroy all your life?
- A. Yes, I have lived here all my life.
- Q. What have the changes been like here?
- A. Well times were poorer in them days and the people hadn't much money.
- Q. How did people earn money?
- A. Hell people used to spin, carn and have two pigs for selling and keep cattle.
- Q. And would you have many cattle?
- A. No not many, a few but not many.
- Q. Can you describe the changes that have taken place?
- A. Well we have electricity now and running water and we had only lamp light and candle light in my days.
- Q. And how were the lamps run?
- A. On oil, on paraffin oil.
- Q. And where would you get the oil from?
- A. Well from the shop, from Clery's shop in Ballycroy.
- Q. Were there any other shops?
- A. A few small shops.
- Q. And where were they?
- A. Doona and Tallaght.
- Q. And what happened to them?

- A. Well they closed down.
- Q. How come they closed down?
- A. Well the lorries started running from other places, from Achill and from Westport and they knocked the trade off the small shops.
- Q. Were, they cheaper, the lorries?
- A. Well they were, a bit, not a lot.
- Q. What kind of transport did you have?
- A. Bicycles, everyone hadn't bicycles in them days only a few, they couldn't afford it.
- Q. Did most people walk?
- A. Most people walked to mass, there was nine o'clock mass and eleven o'clock mass and you had to walk to it and from it.
- Q. And did you go to mass every Sunday?
- A. We went most Sundays people were very religious in them days. They went to mass even in the bad days. Many people would not know the time, neighbours call each other, the one's that had a clock would call them on Sunday morning.
- Q. Did everyone go to mass?
- A. Well the most of the people went to mass, people who were sick and couldn't go to Mass, the priest would come to them and hear their confession, twice a year.
- Q. Are the clergy different today?
- A. Well people were very afraid of the clergy in the days gone by, they used to be very afraid of them to do anything wrong, because they would to up on the alter and make a sermon regarding the people in question.
- Q. Well do you think the people are more religious today?

- A. No, the religion I think is going down. The celebrated Christmas and Easter very well in those days, I think it is only for fun nowadays. The youth today aren't as religious as in our times.
- Q. How were unmarried mothers treated?
- A. Unmarried mothers were looked down on and were kept in a long time after the child was born, the child was treated O.K. people used not pass many remarks.
- Q. What kind of past-times did you have?
- A. In our days there was not television all they had were school dances. There would be a school dance every week for a shilling in the neighbours house, in the country houses and there used to be raffles, a penny raffle and a six penny raffle. You used to get tea and cakes and be able to dance the whole night.
- Q. Did many attend the dances?
- A. There used to be a lot of people at the dances up to fifty of sixty people. The raffles were held on an odd night and the school dances held every night during the Winter time.
- Q. Were there dances held in Inishbiggle?
- A. Yes, there was. People used to go in by currach, six or seven on the currach, and we came out again when the dances were over, when it was daylight, there used to be great crack, with dancing, laughing and singing.
- Q. Did many people go to the pub?
- A. Most of the men went to the pub but the women hardly ever went to the pub, any woman that went to the pub was looked down on. The pub and shop were joined on to each other. They used to sell sugar and tea and anything you wanted.
- Q. Would you sell anything to the shops?
- A. Yes, we used to sell vegetables, potatoes and turnips, and eggs.
- Q. Was there a lace school in Ballycroy?

- A. Yes there was a lace school in Tallaght, they used to make lace collars and things and go to Westport to sell them.
- Q. Were there many people employed there?
- A. Seven or eight women were employed.
- Q. Did you know any of them?
- A. Yes I did but they are all dead now.
- Q. What kind of food did you eat?
- A. Potatoes, cabbage and turnips everyone grew their own produce.
- Q. What about butter?
- A. We used to milk the cows and make our own butter. When the cow was milked you would strain the milk and let it set until the cream came to the top, take the cream off the milk put it into a crock and leave it there for a week and then put the cream into the churn and start making your churn then for twenty five minutes onwards, then you have two little spades and then you gather it up into a little bucket and you would put water on it a few times take all the milk out of it put salt on it and then make it up into a square, leave there for a week and then use it.
- Q. Did many people sell the butter?
- A. No, not many people, a few did, but they had big families and needed it for their own use, homemade butter was always the nicest.
- Q. What were the houses like?
- A. Well the houses were only a room and kitchen, they were small houses, made with stone and thatched with scraws and straw.
- Q. How would you thatch a house?
- A. People would set rye and at harvest they would cut it, and lift it into shaves and they would trash it at the end of the year. They would take the grain out of it and the day of thatching a few of

the neighbours would help you to put it up on the house and tie the straw with suggans, and there would be a big goose killed for that day and a current cake made and it would be a great day.

Q. How would you make lime for the houses?

A. When the tide went out you would go into this island with your donkey and pardogs and you would fill your pardogs with shells and they had a hole dug in the ground which is called a lime kiln, lined with stones, a big round hole lined with stones, you would put the shells into that and keep putting turf on it for a hole day, and you would let it burn for a day, they would leave it there for a day, the shells would be burned, then you would take out the shells and lay them on the ground. You would cut straws then, and put it on top of the burned shells and throw water on it and they would be left there for a week, and you would see steam coming out of that and when you would take the scraws off them and there was lime as white as a likky and you would take that lime, and then put it in your bucket and mix it and white-wash your house with it and the houses used to be as white as snow.

Q. What kind of furniture would you have?

A. People wouldn't have a lot of furniture maybe a table, three forms, a kettle maybe a chair or two, and a dresser, there was no carpets or anything in them days..

Q. Where would you get your furniture?

A. Well men that used to make them, there would be men in the village that would make them for you, for a few shillings.

Q. Were they carpenters?

A. They were carpenters, but they were handymen that had learned the trade off but they never went away to learn it.

Q. Was there a blacksmith?

A. There was, there was a blacksmith in Knockmoylee, there was only one. He would shoe the horses, he did good business, there was a lot of horses in them days and he did well.

Q. And how would you bring turf home?

A. You would bring turf home on your donkey and pardogs and it would take you a full week to bring turf home from the bog.

Q. Who would work mainly in the bogs?

A. The women worked a lot in the bogs and there families some of the men were in England and the one that wasn't would help cut the turf.

Q. Why were the men in England?

A. They went over to pull the sugar beet, howing turnips and doing the harvest for the English farmers, there was money in England, they would earn money in England and send it home to their families to support them. They would go for a few months every year.

Q. How would they send the money home?

A. In a registered letter, it would take four or five days coming.

Q. What part of England did they mainly go to?

A. The north part of England and an awful lot of people went to Scotland from around about, from Erris, Inishbiggle and Achill. They used to go every year to Scotland for picking the potatoes.

Q. Were the farms here big?

A. They had small farms, there were a few big farmers.

Q. Were they landlords?

A. Well I don't remember landlords, people had their own land and they had to pay rent to the Land Commission people had their own bogs.

Q. What kind of crops did they grow?

A. Potatoes, turnips and cabbage, when the time of the digging at the back end of the year would come, everyone would dig there

potatoes and they would make pots, and put eight tonnes of potatoes in every pit and put scraws on them and thatch them and they would last the year long.

- Q Would anything go near them?
- A. Well rats would come and eat them, but people would set traps, rat traps, people used to catch rabbits in the same traps.
- Q Would people get any grants from local authorities?
- A. The Land Commission would give grants to people if they built slated houses, nearly everyone got slated houses then.
- Q And is there any thatched houses left in this area?
- A. Well there is some in Knockmoykeen. The thatched houses were very comfortable but of course the houses now are nice and modern with everything in them. People would wash cloths by hand once they had washing boards and no washing powder. People also had there own produce and only used what they wanted so things didn't go bad and they didn't need fridges. The bacon was cured, it was salted, and it wouldn't go bad the whole year, the fish was salted too.
- Q Where would you get your fish from?
- A. You would get your fish from Belmullet mostly, it would come from there in then days.
- Q Were there fishermen in Ballycroy?
- A. Well seldom they used to fish, except some of them for their own use.
- Q Who would bring the fish from Belmullet?
- A. They would come with a cart selling it and they would stay in some houses for the night. They would sell mackerel and herring.
- Q Would people buy newspapers and how would you find out the news?

- A. There was no newspapers much in them days only the press. Not many people would buy them. Sweeney's from Achill used to bring them with him when he was coming around with the goods. He would ring an odd paper to his customers they would buy them from him.
- Q. Were you interested in what was happening elsewhere?
- A. Well people weren't to interested in the outside world.
- Q. Do you remember the war (W.W. II)? What was it like? Was it a hard time?
- A. Yes I remember the war, we had black flour and we were rationed down to an ounce of tea, and the sugar and everything was very scarce. No one from this area went off fighting in the war.
- Q. Can you tell me about St. Patrick passing through Ballycroy?
- A. St. Patrick! He came down from Westport, from Croagh Patrick, to this side of Mulranny, the Ballycroy side, going to Achill and he was supposed to have washed his cloths and spread them on the rocks, and there is four or five white rocks there, as white as the snow just like a bleach and the people used to say that is where he spread his bleach. When was coming from Croagh Patrick, he went into this house in Tirnagh. And he asked for a drink and the woman gave him a drink of water, and when he was coming through Ballycroy to a place called Bellagarvaun, (this is what I was told anyway), he asked for a drink there. There was only a herd's cottage there, and they brought him in and gave him whatever they had, milk and porridge, stir-about people used to call it, in them days. He said that Bellyagarvaun would be always flowing with milk and honey. There is a lot of houses built in Bellagarvaun now and it is a very nice place, and St. Patrick went on his way to Achill.
- Q. What is the story about St. Patrick and the lightening?
- A. It must have been making thunder and lightening when he was in the herd's house, and they must have been afraid, for they started shaking holy water and he told them not to be afraid for no-one will ever be killed in Ballycroy from thunder and lightening, and

they haven't Thank God!

Q. What were weddings like?

A. Weddings long ago, weren't like they are now, you would only ask the village people and the relations on each side, they used to be held in the house, there wasn't any going to hotels or anything. They wouldn't have any fancy dress, just an ordinary dress on the girl, and a veil. The man had a suit, they weren't all dressed up.

Q. What kind of clothes would they wear?

A. Well they used to spin wool, and there was a wool spinner in Drumslide and another in Gorthbrack, and they used to make the cloth, and you would colour the wool and spin it in different colours.

Q. How would you colour the wool?

A. You would take stuff of the stones 'quarter' they used to call and put it in a pot and boil it and put your wool into it and it would colour it brown and people might have a bit of dye if they could get it, and they used to meet the weaver and he would make blankets for you, and cloth, and out of that cloth trousers were made for the men and skirts for the women, with a bit of velvet on the bottom of them.

Q. There were not many fancy clothes I suppose?

A. Not so much until people started going away to America and they would send nice clothes back to the people at home, and people in England would send clothes home.

Q. What were funerals like?

A. well they were very sad occasions, the funerals in them days, they would be held in the house. Lots of people would be sick a long time and they died and they would be left to lie for two days in the house. There would be tea and tobacco, clay pipes, there was no cigarettes going in them days. They made tea for you and you would wait up there till morning. People would be taken on a cart to the burial ground. People used to be very sad, they would be crying mad. Lots of people used to die young because there was

no such thing, the very odd doctor that used to be in it, there wasn't very much going, there was no such thing as tablets or anything.

Q. Was there anyone who would look after the sick?

A. Well an odd one here and there were supposed to have cures, they used to cure some people. There used to be a lot of T.B. in them days.

Q. Do you know any of the cures used?

A. There used to be a thing called a clayeen, that was a bone in the chest which would fall in and there was one or two in Ballycroy who used to say they could lift it. You would put oatmeal in a glass, an oatmeal cake in a glass and they would leave it on your chest and it would keep coming up and the bone would come out to its place.

Q. And what would people think was the cause of that cure?

A. Well they used to pray a lot and they believed that it was the power of the prayer that used to do it.

Q. And was some man supposed to have banished rats from Ballycroy?

A. They used to say that the rats came in from Achill to Ballycroy and that some man banished them off. The rats ate before them than night, any field of grain that was in it was ate in the morning and there was thousands and thousands of them in it, that came in of the tide. There were supposed to have come from Achill and then to Ballycroy and then a Ballycroy man was supposed to have put them to Erris, whether he did or not I do not know.

Q. What about marriages, were they arranged?

A. Yes they were arranged, people from the houses would go to the fair. The oldest girl in the house would have to get married first.

Q. Did the marriages last?

A. Well no one separated in them days anyway, they were happy

enough, they were poor and they had to work very hard.

Q. The fairs how often were they held?

A. Well there was two fairs held every year and that was where people brought all their materials, shoes, knives, spoons, dishes and cups and everything. People would have a pig or two to sell at that fair for Christmas, to buy goods for Christmas. People would have cattle two or three, some would only have one that was how things were in them days.

Q. What would they but for Christmas?

A. Well, they would always buy tea, two or three pounds, tea for every house and seven or eight pounds of sugar and currents and raisins, they were awful for current bread in them days for Christmas and they would buy bacon.

Q. Would you look forward to Christmas?

A. People would always look forward to Christmas, there was no such thing as lights and decorations like there is now, but people used always is now believe in the candles, they would light a candle in every window, there wasn't many windows in the small houses in them days, but the people always looked forward to Christmas.

Q. And would you go to midnight mass?

A. There was no midnight mass in those days, you go to eight and eleven o'clock masses.

Q. Were there many schools in Ballycroy?

A. Same amount as there is now.

Q. Did everyone attend the National School?

A. All the people went to National School.

Q. What were the teachers like?

A. There were severe enough some of them.

Q. Were they good teachers?

- A. Yeah, some of them were good enough and some of them were very severe teachers.
- Q. What sort of punishment would you get?
- A. Well they would get out a rough rod or bush and you would get six slaps on the hand, on a cold day your hand would be swollen for a week after.
- Q. Did many people go to Secondary School?
- A. Not a lot , no. They went away anyone who left school until they were seven or eight years old. And when they left school then they would be at home for a few years and then they went away to America, England and Scotland and they started going away and waiting away.
- Q. What about those who did not attend school often?
- A. Well, the Guards would land, they would go out with you, and you would get a summons, your parents would get a summons if you wouldn't put your child to school, you would be fined a half a crown or four shillings. That was a lot of money in them days.
- Q. Did any famous people come here?
- A. Tomas MacDonald came to Cross Hill to Ballycroy Church.
- Q. Who was Tomas MacDonald?
- A. He was a singer, a singer, he used to sing in the Church.
- Q. What about the Bishop coming?
- A. People were afraid of him he would ask a lot of questions and if you were a bad scholar you would get much, well the priest used to go around asking you questions in them days, to the school they would come, there would be a load of priests and they would go around and if you wouldn't get a ticket they would put someone who would have the pull and they would get one for ya, but people would be scared of their lies an they wouldn't put a pass on all their catechism. There was very hard catechism in them days.

- Q. What was the ticket?
- A. You would have to have a ticket when you would go up to the Bishop.
- Q. What about Holy Communion?
- A. Same as it is now but nobody would get communion in their hands in then days, and a woman couldn't go into the church without having a scarf on her head.
- Q. What was Confirmation like?
- A. Confirmation was hard too, there was very hard catechism in them days it's very easy now the catechism. When I was confirmed three big old men were confirmed the same day.
- Q. Were there many Protestants in Ballycroy?
- A. There wasn't any protestants much in Ballycroy in my day but there was lots of them on the island of Inishbiggle. But they turned, they turned into Catholics.
- Q. How were they treated?
- A. Not a bit of difference. Not a bit of notice taken of them.
- Q. There was a Protestant Church up there is Claggan, was there?
- A. There was, they were supposed to live in the priests house in Castlehill. There wasn't many Protestants in it, there was nobody coming much to service in it and it was suppose to be closed down some man was suppose to be coming to check on it, it was supposed to be closed down and the Catholic priest was supposed to put up nine or ten people to it that day, they were Catholics and was kept open.
- Q. Did the Catholics mind going up?
- A. No they didn't, people were ignorant in them days there was no difference.
- Q. If you could live your life again would rather grow up in them

days or now?

A. I suppose back when I was young because people seemed to be more happier than they are now, they have no time for old people now.

Q. Could you tell me the story of Fr. Sweeney?

A. The night Fr. Sweeney was born their was a sailor in the house, in his father and mothers house and before the child was born, he went outside and he ran in and told them hold back the baby for a few minutes and the baby happened to be born as he was coming in the door and they wanted to know why he wanted this. He told him that the child would be hung he knew it in the stars. so they made a priest out of the child then and later on as he grew up and became a priest he was down in Erris and as he was leaving through Ballycroy where he had some relations the Sweeneys in Dooriel, Edward Sweeneys family, Edward Sweeneys parents and grand parents of Dooriel were related to him and he went from that onto Achill where they used to ferry them from Dorans into Bull's Mouth and he went away home and he was in a house then down in Achill, he went into a house down there in Achill, the British were after him, the Yeoman were after him. Why they were after him was he was caught talking to a French crowd that left Killala and that were on their way to Castlebar, he was caught talking to them in Newport and an O'Donnell man from Newport. A Yeoman took him to be a spy he put the Military after him, so on his way from Erris to Achill, he went into a house in Achill hiding up in a loft and the woman was spinning flax, and she said it was a bit of his cloak slinging down off the loft, and she was spinning, and she said in Irish "Flax and tow a card and spin, cock in the roost, pull up your wing". she was telling the priest that his wing was down his cloak. So they didn't get him that day, but they got him, they went, they came along him when he went into hiding up in another loft, and the woman, they let a shop up in the air, and the woman in the house said in Irish "Ta an Sagart Marbh", that the priest was killed and they caught him, and they brought him up to Newport and they hung him above on the thing, in Newport. And he wasn't dried or anything, they hung him above in Newport, and he was innocent.

The day he was hung then he asked him, he asked for a drink of water and a Murphy man gave him a drink in his shoe or hat, I

cannot say which and a trooper kicked it out of his hand and another brought him a drink and he said to this man that he would have a long and happy life and so he did. But, the man, another trooper said "Priest meat was going high today" and the priest answered down before he died "That a disease would come on the man's hand" and it did, and that was when he'd be got his body would be decayed and he died on a high mountain between Newport and Mulranny and the dogs brought down his bones. when he was got the curse came true. There's a painting above on the wall in Newport about all, about him being captured and hung, and all the pictures are there in Newport. The Sweeney family and all the relations gathered together in a rally and they got it done, and it's there for anyone to see.

**INTERVIEW DONE BY MARIE CAFFERKY, ERRIS SURVEY OFFICE,
BELMULLET. 14/11/91**

'I have left these mountains, and never shall
I enjoy the unalloyed excitement, the calm,
luxurious solitude, which I found among their
wastes. What has retirement to offer me
in exchange? Will the overstocked preserve
replace the moorland chase, with its glorious
ridge of purple highlands, its silver lake,
and sparkling river - my wild followers - my
tired friends, and the dear cabin and its
snowy tent, peeping from the dark expanse
of heather, like a white sea bird from the
lap ocean? Alas! nothing will compensate
for these or give me an equivalent for the
joyous intercourse with kindered spirits,
which it realise and left in the wild of
BALLYCROY'.

W. H. Maxwell's
WILD SPORTS OF THE WEST

BUNMORE WEST

There is a 'holy well' in the townland of Bunmore West dedicated to St. Anne, or to St. Catherine. Until the 1940's this was a place of pilgrimage, visited on the 15th of August each year. There were the remains of an early church and graveyard here also, dedicated to St. Eunna, these were destroyed in the 1950's.

THE LEGEND OF KNOCK-A-THAMPLE

In the valley of Knock-a-Thample, beside a ruined church and holy well, the shattered walls of what had been once a human habitation are still visible. They stand at a bowshot distance from the fountain; which, instead of a place of penance for ancient crones and solitary devotees, was visited two centuries since for a very different purpose.

The well, although patronised by St. Catharine, a lady of as determined celibacy as ever underwent canonisation, had one peculiar virtue, which, under her especial superintendence, it might not have been expected to possess. Indeed, in every-day complaints its waters were tolerably efficacious; but, in cases of connubial disappointments, when the nuptial bed had been unfruitful, they proved an absolute specific; and in providing an heir for an estate, when "hope deferred had made the heart sick", there was not in the kingdom of Connaught a blessed well that could hold a candle to that of Knock-a-Thample.

Numerous as the persons were whom the reputation of the fountain collected from a distance, few returned without experiencing relief. Occasionally a patient appeared whose virgin career had been a little too protracted, and to whom the rosary, rather than the cradle, was adapted. And so thought St. Catharine, though her water was unequalled, yet she had neither time nor inclination to work miracles eternally; consequently, those ancient candidates for the honours of maternity returned precisely as they came; to expend holy water on such antique customers was almost a sinful waste, their presumption was unpardonable, it was enough to vex a Saint, and even put the blessed Patroness of Knock-a-Thample in a passion.

Holy water, like prophecy, appears to be of little value at home, and hence the devotees usually came from some distant province. The soil, indeed, might then have possessed the same anti-Malthusian qualities for which it is so remarkable at the present day. Certainly the home-

consumption of Knock-a-Thample was on a limited scale, and the herdsman and his wife, who then occupied the ruined cottage near the church, owed their winter comforts to the munificence of the strange pilgrims, who, during the summer season, resorted in numbers to the well.

It was late in October, and the pilgrimages were over for the year, winter was at hand, the heath was withered, and the last flower had fallen from the bog-myrtle the *boolies** (*Temporary huts for cowherds and milkmaids for use in the summer and autumn on mountain pastures.) were abandoned, and the cattle driven from the hills. It was a dark evening, and the rain which had been collecting on the mountains began to fall heavily, when a loud knock disturbed the inhabitants of the cabin. The door was promptly unbarred and a young and well-dressed stranger entered, received the customary welcome, with an invitation to join the herdsman's family, who were then preparing their evening meal. The extreme youth and beauty of the traveller did not escape the peasants' observation, although he kept his cap upon his head and declined to put aside his mantle.

An hour before the young stranger had arrived another, and a very different visitor, had demanded lodging for the night. He belonged also to another country, and for some years had trafficked with the mountain peasantry, and was known among them by the appellation of the *Red Pedler*. He was a strong, under-sized, and ill-visaged man; mean in his dress, and repulsive in his appearance. The Pedler directed a keen and inquisitive look at the belated traveller, who, to escape the sinister scrutiny of his small but piercing eyes, turned to where the herdsman's wife was occupied in preparing the simple supper. The peasant gazed with wonder at her guest; for never had so fair a face been seen within the herdsman's dwelling. While her eyes were still bent upon the stranger, a fortuitous opening of the mantle displayed a sparkling cross of exquisite beauty, which hung upon the youth's bosom; and more than once, as it glittered in the uncertain light of the wood fire, she remarked the rich and sparkling gem.

When morning came, the Pilgrim took leave of the hospitable peasants, and as he inquired the road to the holy well, slipped a rose-noble into the hand of the herdsman's wife. This was not unnoticed by the Red pedler, who proffered his services as guide, which the youth modestly, but firmly, declined. The Pilgrim hastened to the fountain, performed the customary ceremonies before noon, and then took the mountain path, leading through an opening in the hills, to a *station*,* (*A place of

penance frequented by Catholic devotees) which, though particularly lonely, was usually selected by good Catholics for a last act of devotion, when returning from visiting at the blessed well. The Pedler, who, on various pretences, had loitered near the place, soon afterwards departed in the same direction.

That night the herdsman's family sought repose in vain, wild, unearthly noises were heard around the hovel; and shriek and laughter, awfully mingled together, were borne upon the breeze which came moaning from the mountains. The peasant barred his door, and grasped his wood-axe; his wife, with trembling fingers, told her rosary over again and again. Morning broke, and, harassed by alarms, they sunk to sleep at last. But their slumbers were rudely broken, a grey haired monk roused them hastily, horror was in his looks, and, with difficulty, he staggered to a seat. Gradually he collected strength to tell his fearful errand, the young and lovely devotee lay in the mountain glen, before St. Catharine's cross, a murdered corpse.

The tidings of this desperate deed flew through the country rapidly. The body was carried to the herdsman's cabin. For many hours life had been extinct, and the distorted countenance of the hapless youth bespoke the mortal agony which had accompanied the spirit's flight. One deep wound was in his side, inflicted, evidently, by a triangular weapon; and the brilliant cross and purse of gold were gone.

The women from the adjacent villages assembled to pay the last rites to the remains of the murdered Pilgrim. Preparatory to being laid out, the clothes were gently removed from the body, when a cry of horror burst from all *the Pilgrim was a woman!* Bound by a violet ribbon, a bridal ring rested beside her heart; and, from unequivocal appearances, it was too evident that the fell assassin had committed a double murder.

The obsequies of the unhappy lady were piously performed; the mountain girls decked her grave with flowers; and old and young, for many a mile around, offered prayers for the soul of the departed. The murder was involved in mystery, the peasants had their own suspicions, but fear caused them to be silent.

A year passed, the garland upon the stranger's grave was carefully renewed, the village maidens shed many a tear as they told her melancholy story; and none passed the turf which covered the murdered beauty without repeating a prayer for her soul's repose.

Another passed, and the third anniversary of the Pilgrim's death arrived. Late on that eventful evening a tall and noble-looking stranger entered the herdsman's cottage. His air was lofty and commanding; and though he wore a palmer's cloak, the jewelled pommel of his rapier glanced from beneath the garment, and betrayed his knightly dignity. The beauty of his manly countenance forcibly recalled to the peasants the memory of the ill-starred stranger. But their admiration was checked by the fierce, though melancholy expression of the handsome features of the stranger; and if they would have been inclined to scrutinise him more, one stern glance from his dark and flashing eye imperiously forbade it. Supper was prepared in silence, until, at the Knight's request, the herdsman detailed minutely every circumstance connected with the lady's murder.

While the peasant's narrative proceeded, the stranger underwent a terrible emotion, which his stern resolution could not entirely conceal. His eyes flared, his brows contracted till they united; and before the tale was ended he leaped from his seat, and left the cabin hastily.

He had been but a few minutes absent, when the door opened, and another visitor entered with scanty ceremony, and, though unbidden, seated himself upon the stool of honour. His dress was far better than his mien, and he assumed an appearance of superiority which, even to the peasants, appeared forced and unnatural. He called authoritatively for supper, and the tones of his voice were quite familiar to the herdsman. With excited curiosity, the peasant flung some dried flax upon the fire, and, by the blaze, recognised at once the well-remembered features of the *Red Pedler!*

Before the peasant could recover his surprise, the tall stranger entered the cottage again, and approached the hearth. With an air which could not be disputed, he commanded the intruder to give place. The waving of his hand was obeyed, and, with muttered threats, the pedler retired to the settle. The Knight leaned against the rude walls of the chimney, and remained absorbed in bitter thought, until the humble host told him that the meal was ready.

If a contrast were necessary, it would have been found in the conduct of the strangers at the board. The Knight ate like an anchorite, while the Pedler indulged his appetite largely. The tall stranger tempered the *aqua vitae* presented by the host copiously with water, while the short one drank fast and deep, and appeared anxious to steep some pressing sorrow in the goblet. Gradually, however, his brain felt the influence of

the liquor, and unguarded from deep and repeated draughts, he thus addressed the host:-

"Markest thou a change in me, fellow?"

"Fellow!" quoth the peasant, half affronted;

"three years ago we were indeed *fellows*; for the *Red Pedler* often sought shelter here, and never was refused".

"*The Red Pedler!*" exclaimed the tall stranger, starting from his reverie, as if an adder had stung him; and fixing his fiery glance upon the late visitor, he examined him from head to foot.

"You will know me again, I trow", said the Pedler, with extraordinary assurance.

"I shall", was the cold reply.

"Well", said the new-comer, "though three years since I bore a pack, I'll wager a rose-noble that I have more money in my pouch than half the beggarly knights from Galway to Athlone. There!" he exclaimed, as he flung his cloak open, "there is a weighty purse, and here a trusty middoge, and a fig for knighthood and nobility!"

"Slave!" said the stranger, in a voice that made the peasants tremble, "breathe not another word until thou hast satisfied my every question, or, by the Mother of Heaven! I'll cram my rapier down thy false throat;" and, starting on his feet, he flung his mantle on the floor.

Though surprised, the Pedler was not discomfited by the dignity and determination of his antagonist.

"Yes!" he sullenly replied, "I wear no rapier, but this *middoge* has never failed me at my need", and drawing from his bosom a long, triangular weapon, he placed it on the table. "Sir Knight", he continued "the handle of my tool is simple deer-horn; but, by the mass! I have a jewel in my breast that would buy thy tinselled pommel ten times".

"Thou liest, slave!" exclaimed the Knight.

"To the proof, then", said the Pedler; and opening a secret pocket, he produced a splendid cross.

"Villain!" said the tall stranger, under deep emotion,

"surely thou hast robbed some hapless traveller!"

"No!" replied the Pedler, with a cool smile; "I was beside the owner of the cross when his last sigh was breathed!"

Like lightning the stranger's sword flashed from its scabbard.

"Murderer!" he shouted, in a voice of thunder, "for three years have I wandered about the habitable earth, and my sole object in living was to find thy caitiff self; a world would not purchase thee one moment's respite!" and before the wretch could more than clutch his weapon, the knight's sword passed through his heart, the hilt struck upon the breast bone, and the Red Pedler did not carry his life to the floor.

The stranger for a moment gazed upon the breathless body, and having with the dead man's cloak removed the blood from his blade, replaced it coolly in the sheath. The Pedler's purse he flung scornfully to the peasant but the cross he took up, looked at it with fixed attention, and the herdsman's wife remarked that more than one tear fell upon the relic.

Just then the grey-haired Monk stood before him; he had left his convent to offer up the mass, which he did on every anniversary of the pilgrim's murder. He started back with horror as he viewed the bleeding corpse; while the knight, having secured the cross within his bosom, resumed his former cold and haughty bearing.

"Fellow!" he cried to the trembling peasant, "hence with that carrion. Come hither, Monk, why gapest thou thus? hast thou never seen a corpse ere now? Approach, I would speak with thee apart", and he strode to the further end of the cottage, followed by the churchman. "I am going to confide to thee what"

"The penitent should knell", said the old man timidly. "Knell!" exclaimed the knight, "and to thee, my fellow mortal! Monk, thou mistakest, I am not of thy faith, and I laugh thy priestcraft to derision. Harken, but interrupt me not. The beauteous being whose blood was spilled in these accursed wilds, was the chosen lady of my love. I stole her from a convent, and wedded her id secret; for pride of birth induced me to conceal from the world my marriage with a fugitive nun. She became pregnant, and that circumstance endeared her to me doubly, and I swore a solemn oath that if she brought a boy I would at once announce him as my heir, and proclaim my marriage to the world. The wars called me for a time away. Deluded by the artifice of her confessor, my loved one was induced to come hither on a pilgrimage to intercede with thy Saint that the burden she bore might prove a son. Curses light upon the shaveling that counselled that fatal journey! Nay, cross not thyself, old man, for I would execrate thy master of Rome, had he been the false

adviser. Thou knowest the rest, Monk. Take this purse. She was of thy faith, and thou must say masses for her soul's health. Yearly shall the same sum be sent to thy convent; see that all that prayers can do be done, or, by my hopes of grace, thy hive of drones shall smoke for it. Doubt me not, De Burgo will keep his word to the very letter. And now, farewell! I hurry from this fatal spot forever; my train are not distant, and have long since expected me".

as he spoke, he took his mantle from the floor and wrapped it round him carelessly; then, as he passed the spot where the body of the murderer lay, he spurned it with his foot, and, pausing for a moment, looked at the Monk.

"Remember!" he said in a low voice, which made the old man shudder, and, passing from the cabin, he crossed the heath, and disappeared.

But the terror of the herdsman's family did not abate with his departure; a dead man lay before them, and the floor was deluged with his blood. No human help was nigh; before daylight assistance could not be expected; and no alternative remained but to wait patiently for the morrow. Candles were lighted up, the hearth was heaped with fuel, and a cloth thrown over the corpse, which they lacked the courage to remove. To sleep was impossible, and in devotional acts they endeavoured to while the night away. Midnight came, the Monk was slumbering over his breviary, and the matron occupied with her beads, when a violent trampling was heard outside, and the peasant, fearing the cattle he had in charge were disturbed, rose to ascertain the cause. In a moment he returned. A herd of wild deer surrounded the cabin, and actually stood in threatening attitude within a few paces of the door! While he told this strange occurrence to the Monk a clap of thunder shook the hovel to its centre, yells, and shrieks, and groans succeeded, noises so demoniac as to almost drive the listeners to madness, hurtled through the air, and infernal lights flashed through the crevices of the door and window. Till morning broke, these unearthly terrors continued, without a moment's intermission.

Next day the villagers collected. They listened to the fearful story with dismay, while the melancholy fate of the gentle pilgrim was bitterly lamented. To inter the Pedler's corpse was the first care; for the Monk swore by his patron saint that he would not pass another night with it overground to be made a "mitred abbot". A coffin was forthwith prepared, and with "maimed rites", the murderer was committed to the earth.

That masses were requisite to purify the scene of slaughter was indisputable, and with the peasants who had flocked from the neighbouring villages, the Monk determined to pass that night in prayer. The bloodstains were removed from the floor, the corpse had been laid in consecrated earth, and the office had commenced at midnight, when, suddenly, a rushing noise was heard, as if a mountain-torrent was swollen by the bursting of a thunder-cloud. It passed the herdsman's cabin, while blue lights gleamed through the casement, and thunder pealed above. In a state of desperation, the priest ordered the door to be unclosed, and by the lightning's glare, a herd of red deer were seen tearing up the Pedler's grave! To look longer in that blue infernal glare was impossible, the door was shut, and the remainder of the night passed in penitential prayer.

With the first light of morning, the Monk and villagers repaired to the Pedler's grave, and the scene it presented showed that the horrors of the preceding night were no illusion. The earth around was blasted with lightning, and the coffin torn from the tomb, and shattered in a thousand splinters. The corpse was blackening on the heath, and the expression of the distorted features was more like that of a demon than a man. Not very distant was the grave of his beautiful victim. The garland which the village girls had placed there was fresh and unfaded; and late at the season was the blossom still upon the bog-myrtle, and the heath-flower was as bright and fragrant as though it were the merry month of June. "These are indeed the works of hell and heaven", ejaculated the grey friar. "Let no hand from this time forth pollute itself by touching yon accursed corpse".

Nightly the same horrible noises continued. Shriek and groan came from the spot where the unburied murderer was rotting, while by day the hill-fox and the eagle contended who should possess the body. Ere a week passed the villain's bones were blanching in the winds of heaven, for no human hand attempted to cover them again. From that time the place was deserted. The desperate noises, and the frequent appearance of the Pedler's tortured spirit, obliged the herdsman to abandon his dwelling, and reside in an adjacent village. The night of the day upon which he had removed his family and effects, a flash of lightning fell upon the cabin, and consumed the roof; and next morning nothing remained but black and rifted walls. Since that time the well is only used for penance. The peasant approaches not the desecrated burying-place if he can avoid it. The cattle are never known to shelter underneath the ruined walls, and the curse of God and man have fallen on *Knock-a-thamplé*.

LAGHTDAUBYHAUN

Corslieve ('the rounded mountain') is the highest point in the Barony of Erris, some 723m (2369ft) above sea level, and on a clear day commands unsurpassed views in all directions. On this point there is a large cairn (mound) of stones known as Laghtdaubyhaun; "the stone mound of white (haired?) David". It is possible that this cairn contains a Megalithic tomb, maybe dating to the Neolithic or Stone Age period (4500 to 2000 BC).

FAHY CASTLE

One of the more interesting features of the townland of Fahy is Dun-Atha Castle. It has been stated by McPharlan and Knight to have been built during the reign of Elizabeth by Grace o'Malley. She was noted not only for the great energy and power by land, but for keeping a small fleet at her disposal, and to her is attributed the building of many Castles along the coasts of Mayo from Erris to Connemarra, in Galway. However locals say that Dun-Atha Castle belonged to Brian Revagh O'Kelly who was married to one of the Barretts and flourished in the area in the reign of Elizabeth.

Dun-Atha Castle with its mysterious past was always a haven for smugglers, a home to many long since forgotten names and also witnessed the destruction of the Spanish Armada Ships. La Rata Encoronada. Driven by storm, she dragged anchor and struck firmly into sand. The Spaniards set fire to the ship for fear she would fall into enemy hands.



DOOLOUGH

Across the strand from Geesala gets its name from the sand-dunes and a nearby lake. This lake is also known as St. Patrick's lake and three crannogs are possibly situated here. According to folklore there is a stone bearing the imprints of the saint's knees in the lake have consistently failed.

Anglo Norman families arrived here after 1380. One of the major families being the Barretts, this family had several castles in Erris including one in Doolough. In 1585 Edmond Barrett who was known as 'The Baron of Erris' and was head of the Erris Family resided in The Castle of Doolough. The lake nearby is sometimes referred to as St. Patrick's Lake. According to folklore a stone bearing the imprints of his knees is to be found in the Lake. It is said that constant efforts to drain the lake have failed. A section of sand-dunes in Doolough referred to as 'The Cillin' is a childrens burial ground which was used during the famine. During this traumatic period, the corpses were wrapped in cloth and buried in pyramid form.

Doolough has many other places of interest to see with its beautiful shores, scenery and friendly people, it is well worth a visit.

GEESALA

Geesala (Salty Sea Inlet). Branching off to the left, west of Bangor the road brings you to the pretty village of Geesala. Geesala is connected to Doohoma by a narrow isthmus. A modern hotel recently built is the 'Ostan Synge' and is prominent on your right. This is the setting for J M. Synges celebrated 'Playboy of the Western World'.

In October 1971 the lace school in Geesala closed, and the building was acquired from Gaeltarra Eireann by Peggy and Patrick Mangan who had a small clothing industry in Dooyork trading under the name, 'Kenman Products'. After the building was extended and modified to accommodate their work, Kenman moved in with sixteen girls and began producing childrens clothing which are sold in all major cities of Ireland. The industry now employs thirty girls full time. All that remains of the old lace school is its beautiful red pine floor.

JOHN MILLINGTON SYNGE

April 1871 marked the birth of J.M. Synge in Dublin. Synge born of respectable and godly parents, was barely a year old when his father died. His mother was regarded as a major influence in Synge's life.

Sickly and asthmatic as a child, Synge did not attend school regularly, but did have a tutor before entering Trinity College. He did however, read by himself and his faith was upset when he read Darwin's "Origins of the Species" at the age of fourteen.

EDWARD MILLINGTON STEPHENS, Synge's nephew, described John as having a "sober reticence" and "stubborn single-mindedness", with a rigid regard for the truth. He did however, describe him as a playboy, with a pleasant and fun way about him. He could play the fiddle, the flute, the penny whistle, and the piano, and won a scholarship at the Royal Academy of Music.

"He hated the idea of the English in Ireland - except for the Synges. He thought the English a heavy and bovine people 'who had achieved a great literature by a mystery!....'"

(Rodger P.P. 96 - 7)

Rodger found out through interviewing Stephens that his uncle, J.M. Synge, lived with that Irish split. He was a Protestant in a Catholic country, "a disbeliever reared in a devout environment; a Puritan and a playboy..." At the age of twenty-one he went to Germany to study music, but much more than that. He needed, to leave Ireland to find himself, to find his abilities and his own sharpness.

Two years later Synge retired from his musical career and went to live in Paris.

RICHARD BEST who was living in Paris previous to Synge's arrival came to know Synge as a curious man. He was curious about everything; person, places and things. Very little escaped Synge.

Synge had a rambling interest in the arts, in music, painting, sculpting, writing, coins and medallions, prints and engraving, but it was his ability as a playwright that brought him most recognition. That recognition revealed itself in negative and positive reactions to his plays.

On the advice of an unnamed Irish poet, Synge visited Aran
“... that bare, primitive, hand-to-mouth place, that he, who had such
riches of imagination, such endless means and meaningless ends, found
peace and purpose”.

(Rodger. P. 100)

Aran, was said by Stephens, to have given Synge “a heightened sense of
drama, and a supreme sense of comedy”.

The most prominent characteristic of J.M. Synge was his silent almost
sly sense of observation. He remained “the stranger” on Aran despite
having visited the area in five successive autumns. Oliver St. John
Gogarty spoke of Synge as “a drinker-in and not a giver-out of talk”.
It is the story that John Synge heard from old Pandeen Derrane, and out
of which he fashioned “The Playboy of the Western World”.

Synge also fashioned the plays “The Shadow of the Glen” and “Riders to
the Sea”, and was meticulous in detail. As with “The Playboy of the
Western World”, there two plays were written in the rival Irish
vernacular and were about the living countrymen. Synge believed in
taking his material from what he experienced, what he was and from
what he heard in his everyday travels through Irish life.

Director of the Abbey in 1904, Synge remained quite reserved. So
reserved in fact that he was uncomfortable in the company of his peers
at parties after matinées. Peers such as Lady Gregory or Yeats.

When “The Playboy of the Western World” went to the printer, Synge
insisted that

“... you must print it as it is written...”

After an initial reluctance to print the play, because of the
‘blasphemous’ passages, the publisher was persuaded.

Similar difficulties arose at the first performance of “The Playboy”. The
audience expressed its disapproval at the language used, while a few
tried to quell the disturbance. The following morning’s newspapers
contained reviews of the play; reviews mirroring the negative views of
the majority of theatregoers.

Young men; Gaelic Leaguers and members of Nationalist Clubs attended
the play the following evening, with the sole intention of stopping the
performance. Synge was adamant to remain in his pit and to ignore the
abuse being hurled not now solely at his work but the playwright

himself. This was however the last performance he attended that week. The effect of the reaction to the play was difficult to ascertain. Synge feigned indifference but was inevitably affected by the public reaction to his play.

“Disappointment and sickness turned him in on himself, and his work began to take on a more personal tragic and poetic tinge in “Deirdre of the Sorrows...”

(George Roberts)

Roberts also quoted Bernard Shaw as saying that “the Playboy’s real name was Synge”.

(Rodger. P. 113)

October 1908 saw the death of Synge’s mother. Preparations for the future were being made by him, including a marriage, but Richard Best felt that he would never leave - that he was infact a dying man.

Synge did die alone, in Elpis Private Hospital. He had not managed to resolve himself with his religious beliefs, and vowed to remain on earth for as long as possible because he was so unsure of a heaven or an afterlife.

“It is a pity... that I should die, for I still have more than one playboy in my belly”.

Synge
(Rodger. P. 115)

Material collected from Irish Literary Portraits. W.R. Rodger’s broadcast conversations with those who knew them.

British Broadcasting Corporation, London, 1972.

DOOHOMA

Situated on the coastline boasts large sandy beaches, crystal clear water and commands an extensive view of Blacksod Bay from its west coast and keep your eyes open for a plentiful supply of shell fish!

It was said in 1927 of Doohoma and its people by a visitor, “I beheld the most charming scenery that I have gazed upon, and in like manner I met the most courteous and warm-hearted people with whom I have ever come in contact”.

The Returning

(Poem dedicated to the people of Doohoma - North West, Co Mayo)

I took up a paper - three months ago now -
It was lying beside my coat,
And I started to think back thro' forty odd years -
For the date on it struck a strange note,
I thought of Doohoma, the place of my birth,
In the North-West of County of Mayo.
The date on the paper was St. John's day,
When the bonfires were lit long ago.
It started me thinking far into the night,
While Mary slept there at my side -
We had never been back since the day we left -
When Mary was only a bride.
I thought - do they burn the bonfires still
In honour of good Saint John?
For forty odd years is a fair length of time,
And now we were both getting on.
And I thought how we were when we first came out -
There were times when we felt quite along,
But determined and young we worked mighty hard
'Till we had a small place of our own
Then little by little we added a piece -
We employed some to give us a hand,
And without yea or nay we can honestly say
'Tis the best kind of its kind in the land.
But, there's always a hunger in every man's heart -
His home is the place of his birth,
And there is no exception to that in a man
From any place on this earth.
Well, that was my thinking and Mary asleep,
And I wondered if she would agree
To sell out the lot and take ourselves home -
I'd to wait until the morning to see.
Well, early next morning when breakfast was done
And the breakfast things cleared away
I said to her - "Mary, come here and sit down
There is something I want to say".
Mary paused and looked around at me straight -
Her face a quizzical frown,
I smiled as she looked and beckoned her over,

And over she came and sat down.
I said "Mary, I didn't sleep much last night -
I was thinking well into the dawn,
I was thinking - this place is too much for us now
The truth is we're both getting on.
We did things together the most of our lives,
'Twas seldom you ever said no.
So, what do you think? - we'll sell the whole lot
And go home to the County of Mayo.
We need never more want for the rest of our lives -
We have more than enough and to spare,
We would buy a small place in Doohoma itself -
Sure, we're bound to know somebody there.
Mary just pressed my hand and said to me "John,
You've been thinking the most of your life,
And to me - that's the best bit of thinking
that you've ever done.
Since the day I became your wife'.
Well, needless so say we made no delay,
We got everything settled, and so
Younger at heart, to-morrow we'll start
For the place that we left long ago;
And there we will live out the rest of our lives,
With the scene all around us to show
That the best place on earth is the place of our birth -
Doohoma - in the County of Mayo.

Walter Noel Morrison.

TALLAGHAN BAY

Away from youth's elysian bowers,
Those happy haunts of yore.
Surrounded by sweet Galway clovers,
Yet in a barracks core,
Methinks with all I hear a call,
It comes from far away,
It seems to me to say with glee,
Come back to Tallaghan Bay.

Oft have I in days gone by,
With comrades fond and true,
Plied the paddle and oar from shore to shore,
Across those waters blue.
Mid mirth and joy to Ballycroy,
We often sailed away,
I loved to stand on that magnetic strand,
Beyond sweet Tallaghan Bay.

Mine is a sorrowful cup today,
Those days are like a dream,
That change has come none can gainsay
By every bay an stream.
Still this cup of mine fills on,
More gloomy grows each day,
The tranquillity of this land is gone,
Even round sweet Tallaghan Bay.

Still as yet I can't forget
You dear old pal of mine,
And a verse or two I'm sending you,
For the sake of Auld Lang Syngie.
A puzzle small to one and all,
No trouble I dare say,
It will name a place of matchless grave,
Beside sweet Tallaghan Bay.

Four ninths of a camel species find,
With a vocal vowel annexed,
A prefix as an affix bind,
Now you need not look perplexed.
Dear pal, a fond farewell.

Until some other day,
When we meet in friendship sweet,
Beside sweet Tallaghan Bay.

Written by Tom Munnelly.

TALLAGHT

During the Penal Times Mass in Ballycroy was celebrated along the shore of Loch An Aifreann (The Lake of the Mass), a lake in the shape of a fiddle, 604 feet above sea level in the mountains overlooking Ballycroy. Nearby was a rock known as Clogh an Aifrin where someone could keep guard, and could easily see anyone coming at a distance. In 1853 a church was completed at Cross hill, built in the shape of a cross and dedicated to the Holy Family. It is still used by the locals today.

BELMULLET PARISH

Belmullet town is a beautifully situated small town of about 1200 people. It represents the principle town in Erris and was established in 1825 by the then Landlord, William H. Carter. In 1825 the site had been chosen as the headquarters for the command or coastguard but when William Carter visited the area in 1824 he was much impressed by the possibilities of the site and had plans drawn up for the town which was commenced in the following year. Built on a narrow neck of land less than 400m wide, Belmullet divides Broadhaven Bay at the north and the much deeper Bay of Blacksod at the south. As such it forms the gateway to the Mullet peninsula itself. A canal was built by Arthur Shaen (father-in-law of Carter) to join the two bays. Known now as "Shaen's Cut", a new bridge was opened to cross this narrow chanel in 1986.

During the Penal Times when the government restricted the number and movement of Roman Catholic clergy and limited the number of parishes, Belmullet parish was part of the old parish of Kilcommon. Later, Kilcommon was divided into districts when Belmullet became Kilcommon west, comprising of the present town of Belmullet as well as Faulagh, namely Mount Jubilee, Geesala and Doohoma. The present boundaries of Belmullet Parish were fixed on August 5th, 1873, a few weeks after Father Henry Hewson became parish priest.

Included in the Belmullet Parish are;

- | | |
|--------------------|--------------------|
| 1. Alt | 15. Ederglan |
| 2. Attycunnane | 16. Fauleens |
| 3. Barnatra | 17. Foxpoint |
| 4. Belmullet Town | 18. Glencastle |
| 5. Belmullet | 19. Gortmore |
| 6. Bunnahowen | 20. Lakefield |
| 7. Bunawillan | 21. Muingmore |
| 8. Carrowkeel | 22. Muings |
| 9. Carrowmore | 23. Pollagarraun |
| 10. Corclough East | 24. Rathmorgan |
| 11. Crinnish | 25. Shraigh |
| 12. Dereens | 26. Srahataggle S. |
| 13. Derrycorrib | 27. Toorglass |
| 14. Derrynameel | |

Belmullet represents one of the best planned urban development initiated by the 9th century landlord class. The thought behind its establishment was to create a home market which served the commercial and administration functions of the Erris region. A market as such did not previously exist nearer than 40 miles by land. The town began to flourish and grow and by the 1920's the forces of modernisation had begun to penetrate Belmullet.

In 1824, the new road from Castlebar to Belmullet was completed. On May 1st of that year, William Carter with his agent Cecil Crampton arrived in Belmullet on a horse drawn carriage. This was the first time Belmullet has seen such a contraption. By then there was not a single hotel or house of accommodation in the whole area. That was a far cry from the town of Belmullet as we know it today.

In 1834, Patrick Knight drew up a plan for Belmullet arranging the streets in rectangular fashion. The plan was never realised. However, he did design up to fifteen buildings which were erected. At that time Belmullet consisted of one street, 600 yards long, divided by "The Square". In a short time the street formation was as follows;

| | |
|----------------|-----------------------|
| Barrack Street | |
| William Street | - Now Main Street |
| Davis Street | - Now American Street |
| Bridge Street | - Now Chapel Street |
| High Street | - Now Church Street |
| Nugent 's Quay | |
| Inver's Quay | |

During the relief work for the distress in 1846 and 1847 the footpaths were formed and flagged. A new road, now Shore Road, was also built. Later in 1838, Mayo County Council completed the steam rolling of the streets.

1865 saw the introduction of the Sewage Utilisation Act. In 1871 it was proposed that water be conveyed by pipes to the town from a large well near the present hospital. It was an expensive project and was never realised. Therefore women were forced to continue drawing water from the well near the shore. This was to change in 1882 when Belmullet received its first water supply from the "Springs of Carne". This supply was augmented in the late 1930's when a new pump and reservoir were built near the hospital. The increased demand for water in recent years in Belmullet was met by another scheme in 1985 whereby water

was supplied from a reservoir at Carrowmore Lake to the town and surrounding lands. A number of street lamps were erected in the town in 1899. Light was produced from carbide gas. The lamps were lighted by one of William Carter's servants but gave off very little light.

Today the modern town of Belmullet differs little from it's original layout and the central area named after it's founder is still referred to as Carter's Square. The streets are lined with shops of every description. There are approximately 55 shops ranging from hardware stores, hairdressing salons, fashion shops and draperies to coffee shops and fast food restaurants.

The Western Strand's Hotel stands in the centre of Main Street and provides accommodation, hot meals, a bar and function room and friendly service. Along with the hotel, there are several guest houses scattered around the Belmullet area. Though it may be considered a very small town by many, Belmullet certainly has houses to keep locals and tourists alike content with "ceol agus craic" and of course "di". It is sometimes quite humorous to see the expression on an American's face when he/she is invited into a bar "for the craic"

The following is a list of all the bars functioning in Belmullet today;

| | |
|-------------------------------------|----------------|
| McDonnell's Bar: Bilingual | Lavelle's Bar |
| Fiddler's Green Bar & Steakhouse | Clann Lir |
| Western Strand's Hotel Bar & Lounge | The Anchor Bar |
| Carey's Bar & Lounge | Lenehan's Bar |
| Mullet Bar & Lounge | P. Healy's Bar |
| Mangan's Bar & Lounge | |

The latest addition to Belmullet's night-life scene is the 'Anchor'. Before it was renovated in 1991, large wedding parties were not catered for in Belmullet; most going to Crossmolina, Ballina or Castlebar. The 'Anchor' however, filled this gap and now has a large function room and a varied menu. It is also considered a "disco hot-spot" on a Friday night.

The Palm Court Ballroom, established some twenty odd years ago is still going strong - opened all through the Summer months and other holiday times: the music is supplied by the cream of Irish bands. The Belmullet night life caters for all age groups and all tastes; whether you are into disco's, traditional music and ceili, card games or just drinking sessions! Unfortunately, there is no cinema house in the town as it was closed down five or six years ago. Now movie lovers must go to Ballina or Castlebar.

The social life of the town has its high and lows during the year, but years after the first fair-day or "aonach", the 15th of August still brings the crowds out and indeed natives home from abroad. The streets become a hive of activity, full of colour and vigour; children laughing, children crying, pleas for ice-cream, salesmen shouting, women and men bargaining, greeting for the holiday makers and then there are those who are steadily making their way - or crawling - to the nearest pub door. Traditional music blasts from the stalls and from the open pub doors. The streets are cluttered with stalls selling anything from clothes and toys to jewellery and kitchen utensils. The children have a field day 'down at the docks' at the funfair; swinging boats, dodgem cars, candy floss all the things children love and parents love to hate. That night the streets are empty of all human activity but the cluttered gutters full of sweet papers and cardboard are the reminder of the busy day past. The pubs are alive and packed beyond capacity, everyone content - but no necessarily quiet - the odd sleeper in the corner exhausted by the day and a gut full of Guinness or 'goodness it is more affectionately known. Then off to Palm Court for those who still have energy - more crowds, more bustle, more shouts of glee, loud music and the occasional boxing match !!! Another 15th of August in Belmullet over but the beginning of another long and painful day, the others swear "never again" until next year.

In olden Belmullet before the advent of dance halls or picture houses, people made their own entertainment. The social life in Belmullet in 1900 was impressive. Besides having a football club, Belmullet had a cycle club, a billiard club and a mountain climbing club. Edward Page of Avoca, Co. Wicklow, was actually the first person to start a football team in Belmullet. "He was the principle means for starting the G.A.A. in Erris". By 1905 he turned out a team representing Belmullet in the Erris Championship. Ed Page came to Belmullet in 1902 working as a postman for 40 years. He himself was an outstanding footballer in his hey-day. He also refereed matches for many years. Very successful dances were held in the National Schools. One important social event took place on New Years Eve 1900-1901; Midnight Mass was celebrated for the first time in Belmullet to usher in a new year and new century. The Belmullet church was one of only three in the diocese that was given the privilege of having Midnight Mass. People came from all over Erris in large numbers. An hour before mass started the church was full to overflowing. There were other forms of social life especially on fair-days and St. Patrick's Day when a platform was erected in the middle of the square on which people sang and danced. The first feis

was held on the 17th and 18th March, 1904 and was an unqualified success. Nineteen exhibits of local industry were on display.

In 1927 Austen Gaughan, who in those days had a motor-taxi service, converted one of his garages in Barrack Street into a dance hall. The music was provided by the local town band, called, 'The Four Masters'. Shortly after opening the dance hall, Andrew McAndrew and his travelling theatrical company played, 'The Merchant of Venice' here.

Despite the economic recession of the 1900s, Geoffrey Hurst opened a dance hall on St. Stephen's night, 1932. This became very popular and three years later in November of 1935 the first fancy dress ball in Belmullet was held there. The dances in those days began at about 9.00 p.m. and ended about 5.00 in the morning unlike today when they start at about 12.00 a.m. and end at 2.00 a.m. Men were always charged a few shillings more than the ladies on admission.

St. James's Hall was another one of the social hot-spots then. The boxing club and dramatic society met regularly there. Also, the first silent film in Belmullet was shown here in 1929.

During the war years G. Hurst's dance hall closed down. However, when the war was over the people were back with a vengeance; determined to make up for lost entertainment.

G. Hurst re-opened and an agricultural show was held in September of that year, followed by a dance. Such events were to become annual features of the town. A year later in the Summer of '46 a Gala week was held with the emphasis on watersports.

In August of 1851, new mail time arrangements were introduced which meant the speedy delivery of mail - speedy for the times that is! The following newspapers were available in Belmullet:

| | | |
|-----------|---|---------------------------------------|
| Tuesday | - | Mayo Constitution |
| Wednesday | - | Connaught Telegraph/Ballina Chronicle |
| Thursday | - | Tyrawley |

Up until the 1860s Charles Bianconi ran a mail service, carrying both passengers and mail to the town. They were long cars drawn by four horses. By 1868, Bianconi had been replaced by Millett Mail Car Service. Mail from Dublin arrived at Ballina early in the morning and was then brought to Belmullet at midday.

In 1899, a telegraph communication was installed in Belmullet seemingly without much planning. The poles, apparently lodged in the middle of the streets causing an obstruction to passing cars.

On January 1st, 1910, a company called, 'Reeds of Liverpool', began a motor mail service between Ballina and Belmullet. It was the first time ever that a motor vehicle was used to convey mail between Belmullet and Ballina. They also had two vehicles for carrying passengers. One leaving from Belmullet while the other left from Ballina and vice versa in the evening. This service only survived for nine months however, because of the state of the road. Once again a horse drawn long car service was introduced.

In the early 1920s Paddy Dowling operated a taxi-service in Belmullet. He kept the finest and most expensive cars of the day. He had previously been a chauffeur to the Jameson family, the whiskey distillers in Sheskin, and afterwards during the Eucharistic Congress of 1932 he was the official chauffeur to the Papal Nuncio. John Doherty of Muings bought Mr. Dowling's property in Barrack Street and continued the taxi-service business. He had two model 'T' cars. Mr. Doherty was also the first to sell ice-cream in Belmullet.

Much has changed today in the line of communication. Practically every house in Belmullet has a telephone. The delivery of mail is much quicker. The McNulty's run a daily coach service to Castlebar along with a taxi and mini bus hire service. M. Gaughan also runs a car/mini bus service for tours, outings or weddings. The C.I.E. bus goes to Ballina on a daily basis. McIntyre Travel Agency offers services for all aspects of travel arrangements. There is any amount of free information available along with help with passport and visa forms. There are numerous daily, weekly and monthly, Irish and English newspapers available in the town today. One can also order newspapers from H. Carey's newsagents.

Electricity was first introduced to Belmullet in the early 1930's, many years before it reached other parts of Erris. Jack McLaughlin generated electricity in a garage opposite the Western Strand's Hotel (formerly

Healon's Hotel). He used the engine of a trawler he had bought to generate the electricity which he supplied to the hotel and a few other premises. It was the only used for lighting and radios as it was very expensive to produce. The McIntyre's also produced electricity supplying it to many houses and shops in the town. The late 1950's brought the E.S.B. to Erris. Belmullet was connected in 1957. In 1964, the first electric lights were installed.

Much of the development of the 1960's was due to the work of the Town Development Society led by Peter Davy. A town park was formed in what was known as "Rose's Field". A handball alley was also erected. Both of these facilities are still in use today. They were successful in getting Mayo County Council to start a refuse collection in July 1964. In January of 1965 the County Council converted the old courthouse into a fire station. Later a new building was erected at Church Road.

In September of 1984 a £120,000 sports and recreational centre was opened. Dressing rooms at the sports club were opened when the Mayo Senior Football Team visited the town for the occasion. The recreational complex is a great asset to the youth of the town.

Emigration had always been a feature of Irish Life. The scourge of unemployment has over the years struck a heavy blow at Irish society causing much suffering to many families. Belmullet town is no exception.

The famine of the 1840's brought havoc to the town. People were starving to death while there were, "151 soldiers guarding several tons of Indian Meal which was to be sold or given out for the benefit of the people". There was a total lack of the amenities they needed to cope with a disaster of the magnitude which loomed all through 1847. Early in Black '47 an even greater killer than starvation appeared the so called famine fever. One writer says, "Belmullet it would appear is a domed town. There is not a second house as we are credibly informed which does not contain fever At present fever is committing dreadful havoc among the inhabitants of this small town". So fearful was the news that visitors from outside Erris were not entering the town.

It was quite some time before food relief schemes were organised for Co. Mayo and by the time it came it was too late for many. By the time the food was rationed out, many of the people were too ill or weak to even collect it much less eat it. The following is the harrowing scene witnessed by a visitor to the Geraghty family:

"The father lying dead and the mother and five children huddled on the floor, all bowed down by disease, none of the family had been able to go for the rations."

Some women motivated by a fierce independence and a fear of the workhouse tried to stay independent until they collapsed. In Belmullet, a woman of this kind collapsed in the street. She had applied for relief and had 3s. 1d. in her pocket when brought into the workhouse. Such a sum of money would have procured food for her, at least for a time, but she did not spend it in this manner as it would have been sacrificing her cherished independence.

Erris at the time was the "fag end of misery". The Rector of Kilcommon was Rev. Samuel Stock, who resided in the Belmullet area since 1816. He was the chief organiser of famine relief administration in the area and he worked closely with the parish priests. Often he assisted his wife and daughters to man a soup kitchen. This good lady, Mrs. Stock, not only manned a chief soup kitchen in Belmullet, which was set up in the kitchen of the rectory but she also set up a "clothing factory" for industrious women in the Belmullet area until fever disrupted the venture.

The government paid the transport costs in supplies of food from America which were landed on the West Coast, including Belmullet. There were many complaints about the method of distribution and after visiting Belmullet on May 13, 1847, Richard Webb of the Society of Friends retold harrowing stories of the distress endured by the people. One Belmullet trader's experience, Mr. Martin McIntyre, grocer and general merchant, went as follows; "People had in reality no potatoes. Numbers of them were living on Indian Meal. There was no seed for the spring People were digging the potato grounds, not for the purpose of digging the potatoes, for they knew long ago there were none to be got, but for the purpose of turning the ground as it had to be turned for the next sowing."

On producing his books, Mr. McIntyre showed case after case of small farmers in the district to whom he had given bags of yellow meal on credit. He said it was impossible for the shopkeepers to continue credit, which had been already to heavily given in his books.

In 1848 the potato crop failed again. The result was a wholesale and a desperate effort to get away from what had become a land of death and despair. People took to the roads to make their way to a port. They

hoped to get a passage to England or get on board one of the so called 'coffin ships' for the hazardous voyage to America. Many did board the ships but unfortunately many never survived the journey. Ships sailed which were overcrowded, not provided with the legal quota provisions of water and dangerously antique in construction. A typical example of a coffin ship was the barque Elizabeth and Sarah, which sailed from the small harbour of Killala in July, 1846, arriving at Quebec in September. She had been built in 1762 and was 330 tone burthen. Her list of passengers, as certified by the officer at Killala, showed 212 names whereas in fact she carried 276 persons. she should have carried 12,523 gallons of water but had only 8,700 gallons in leaky caskets. The Passenger Act of 1842 required 7lb's of provisions to be given out weekly to each passenger, but no distribution was ever made in the Elizabeth and Sarah. Berths numbered only 36, of which 4 were taken by the crew; the remaining 32 were shared between 276 passengers who otherwise slept on the floor. No sanitary convenience of any kind was provided, and the start of the vessel was 'horrible and disgusting beyond the power of language to describe'. The passage from Killala, largely through the incompetence of the captain, took eight weeks; the passengers starved and tortured by thirst and 42 died on the voyage. Eventually the ship broke down and had to be towed into St. Lawrence by a steamer. The voyage of the Elizabeth and Sarah was a local speculation and passages had been sold in districts round Killala by means of circulars which were incorrect in almost every particular.

As a final blow to a hopeless land, Asian Cholera struck in 1849 and soon spread to Belmullet where there was no real means of dealing with the epidemic. The plight of the starving and dying necessitated the building of a fever hospital and workhouses. Such buildings were the last resort; according to the rules governing workhouses, "they should be of such as to be irksome and to awaken or increase a dislike to remain in the workhouse"

a workhouse was speedily erected on the site of the present hospital and welfare home and was opened in November 1849. The workhouse served an area of 145,598 acres, the largest Union in Ireland. Relief was only given to workhouse people because outdoor relief was considered to be affecting market prices. As a result, the workhouse became crowded and in the extremity of distress to which people were now reduced, almost every person admitted was suffering from some complaint; diarrhoea or extreme exhaustion or the first stages of the fever. The workhouse hospitals were far too small to deal with the numbers or to separate sick from the healthy; even medical

examinations of applicants to detect infection became impossible. Therefore the whole workhouse was changed into one large hospital without the appliances necessary for rendering it efficient as such. The Central Board of Health laid down that temporary wooden wards, 'fever sheds', were to be erected and that each patient was to have a separate bed and fresh bedding, with a clean night shirt weekly or more frequently if soiled. However, for Unions in the distressed districts the expenditure required was out of the question. On July 11th, 1850 there were 2,462 persons in the workhouse and two temporary buildings. Of these 1,010 were between 5 - 15 years. There were 137 under 5 years. In the workhouses, women used spinning wheels to make garments, while men broke stones for roads. Men also made creels and worked on a workhouse farm. Only men working on the farm using spades and shovels wore shoes. During the harvesting of the new crop of potatoes in November 1851 the number of people in workhouses dropped to 489. By 1855 the numbers even dropped further because children between the ages 5 - 15 years were sent to Ballina workhouse and from there to Australia. One can't even begin to imagine the sentiments of these young children, being led away like spring lambs to the unknown and shipped off and away from their families. Yes, they were being saved from a land of death and destruction saved from their own homes but what was in store for them? A trip to a foreign land for slave labour?

Despite the distress of the 1840's, Belmullet grew considerably. According to the census of 1851 the town area was twenty one acres. There were 165 families, 154 houses and a total population of 939. During the "free emigration" period of 1883 many left Belmullet for England and also the 'land of milk and honey'. On July 1st, 1924 the Emigration Act of the United States came into force, whereby all emigrants had to possess passports. The set back of the economic war of the 1930's brought the sale of livestock to a standstill and this affected Belmullet town and banking interests. To relieve the distress, the Fianna Fail Government introduced the dole in 1934. They opened a labour exchange office which was later moved to Chapel street in 1935. It was again moved in 1971 to its present position in American Street. At this time there was little employment in Belmullet and not much more in England either. The economic condition improved during the latter half of the 1930's but this was shortlived as the Second World War began to take its toll.

A major social problem in the Republic is the depopulation of the West of Ireland. The continual drain of people from the West to the big cities or abroad has contributed to a deepest demoralisation. New figures released from the various Mayo Unemployment centres show that County Mayo has 9,630 on the live register. Of those 1,189 are in Belmullet. These are shocking figures in an area continuously decimated by emigration.

EDUCATION

The Penal Laws forbade the education of Catholics in any but Protestant schools. The lack of a system of education acceptable to the majority of people led to the rise of hedge Schools. These were illegal schools and probably gained their name from holding the classes in a shelter erected beside a hedge. A remote spot was selected by the master, away from the eyes of passers by. There he sat on a stone with scholars spread out before him. One pupil was usually placed at a vantage point to give warning of the approach of strangers. In the early stages of the Penal Laws, the schools had to be held out of doors because Catholics were forbidden to establish, teach or harbour school masters in their homes. Later on as the laws slacked, lessons were held indoors - barns, sheds, etc. - but still retained the name hedge Schools.

The curriculum had, at the very least, the 3 r's; Reading, 'Riting and 'Rithmetic. Often geography, history, greek and latin were taught also. The teachers were paid by the parents per quarter; usually one or two shillings. Often they were paid in kind with butter, bread, milk, potatoes and bacon when money was not forthcoming. There was a Hedge Schools on Shraigh Hill in 1826, in which forty boys and seven girls, all Catholic, were taught. The teacher was Martin Barrett who travelled from village to village to accommodate pupils. Nine years later in 1835 he was still teaching here. His class consisted of twenty seven boys and nine girls. By 1855 this Hedge School had ceased to exist.

In 1857, the Board of Education recognised a Hedge School in the townland of Muingmore, and named it Doolough National School roll 7879. The children of Shraigh attended this school until a new national school was opened in their own townland in 1888. There was also a Hedge School in Belmullet in 1826. The teacher was a Protestant, William Moran. He taught 60 boys and 24 girls in a building of stone.

In 1824, the Irish Bishops presented to the House of Commons a petition asking the House to adopt such measures as might promote the education of the Roman Catholic poor of Ireland in the most effectual manner. In 1831 a sum of £30,000 was voted by the parliament for the establishment of the National School System of Education. Existing schools were taken into the system if the buildings were judged adequate and the locations suitable. Although facing many obstacles, the National School System gradually became established, leaving Hedge Schools in their wake.

Present day pupils with their central heating, free transport, playing fields and visual aids would find it difficult to visualise the conditions in which their forbears were taught with their slates, spelling and table books, cathechisims. Strange to them also would be the fact of sitting in desks for compositions and sums or having to 'toe the line' for geography. The 'line' was a semi-circle around the map and was marked on the floor with chalk or sometimes with brass screws sunk in the floorboards.

In addition to their salaries teachers could benefit from Results Fees. The better a class performed for the inspector, the more the teacher received. This led at times to severe pressure on the students. Until recent years access to second-level education was minimal. Thus the whole onus of equipping people for life fell on the national schools. It had to develop in its students literacy, oracy, numeracy, and confidence. Past pupils of those national schools without the benefits of second-level education were able to fill posts and professions which nowadays would challenge third-level graduates. Most of the schools were made of stone and were single roomed with two teachers; one teacher with classes at one end of the room and the other with the junior class at the other end. Between 1938 and the present day there have been 11 national schools in Belmullet parish;

Belmullet:

| | |
|-----------------------------------|-------------|
| National School Roll No. 5311 | 1838 - 1850 |
| Our Lady's Sec. school | 1943 - * |
| Belmullet Workhouse Roll No. 5929 | 1847 - 1855 |
| Female N. S. Roll No. 17923 | 1896 - * |
| Male National School | 1855 - * |
| Belmullet Workhouse N. S. | 1861 - 1912 |
| St. Brendan's College | 1982 - * |

Glencastle:

| | |
|----------------------------------|-------------|
| Glencastle N. S. Roll No.7835 | 1859 - 1888 |
| Glencastle N. S. Roll No. 13222- | 1888 - 1966 |
| Glencastle N. S. Roll No. 13222+ | 1966 - * |

Shraigh:

| | |
|-----------------------------|----------|
| Shraigh N. S. Roll No.13383 | 1888 - * |
|-----------------------------|----------|

Barnatra:

| | |
|-------------------------------|-------------|
| Barnatra N. S. Roll No. 8061 | 1858 - 1896 |
| Barnatra N. S. Roll No. 14188 | 1896 - * |

* Still in existence today

-/+ Roll No. 13222 was transferred to a new building

The first national school in Belmullet was established in 1838 and was given the Roll No. 5311. Richard Flemming, former Hedge School teacher in 1855, was the teacher though he was not a fully qualified one. He was replaced by Fr. P. McHale in 1848 and years later the school closed. The Belmullet Workhouse National School was opened around the famine years and was situated in the townland of Curraghboy. A year later it became an all girls school with a total of 229 children. A year later it became an all girls school with a total of 383 children. The boys were moved to the Ballina Workhouse. During those years of poverty and distress, large numbers of children were admitted here and to auxiliary workhouses. In 1855, the school was closed permanently and struck off the Roll. All the girls attended the Belmullet Female National School Roll 6431. This school was situated at 57 Barrack St. and commenced in 1851. For some reason the school was closed from Christmas 1875. The highest roll in any one year was 286 in 1858 yet the average attendance was only 50. This school was replaced by a Female National Roll 14851 in 1896, built it to accommodate 75 girls. In the early part of this century it became a Junior Primary School for boys and girls between the ages of 4 and 8 years and was given the Roll No. 17923. The boy's National School Roll 17923 was built in 1855 and was situated in the chapel yard one eighth of a mile from the town. The lease was from the Catholic church. The average attendance was 50 boy's. The school was accepted by the Board of Education on November 1st, 1855. It was temporarily closed

during 1871 though was in action again the following year. The school continued until 1896 when it was replaced by the Belmullet Boy's National School Roll No. 14850. In 1902, evening classes were introduced for persons over 18 years. Books were supplied by the Board of Education and at least two subjects had to be taught to qualify for a grant. These evening classes were intended to provide education for boy's and young men engaged in daily occupations as shopboy's, mechanics and agricultural labourers in the neighbourhood. In 1903, 34 persons attended evening classes. At the beginning of this century this school became a Senior Primary Co-Education School for children between the ages of 8 and 13 years. It was given a new Roll No. 11727T. As mentioned earlier, the children from the Hedge School in Doolough were transferred to Shraigh National School Roll No. 13383 which was opened on 4th June, 1888. In 1889 there were 180 children on the Roll. This school is still in existence today.

Glencastle National School Roll 7835 was accepted by the board of Education in 1857 and was the first national school in Glencastle. Situated beside the church but not in any way connected to the building, it has 277 pupils on the roll in 1874. In 1886 the Board of Works granted money for a new school, roll 13222 to accommodate 120 children. It was built in 1887 and came into operation in 1888. The old school house was struck off the roll. In 1902, evening classes for young men were introduced. In August 1966, the government sanctioned the building of a three classroomed school to accommodate 120 pupils. The roll number 13222 of the former school was transferred to the present one.

Our Lady's Secondary School - formerly St. Mary's - commenced in 1943 when a small group of girls were accepted for secondary education. These students boarded at the convent. An extension was built in 1962 as it was considered to small for the growing number of pupils attending. Again in 1991 a larger extension was built and the most modern facilities installed.

A vocational school was built in 1936 along Shore Road. This school closed as it was to small to accommodate the number of students attending. Also the school was close to the sea-front with the result that the sea water came through the doors during storms. It was replaced by St. Brendan's College which was opened on April 20th 1982 and was built on an eleven acre site near Our Lady's secondary School. An extension is currently being built.

Corporal punishment was a feature of the educational system and administered freely for failure at lessons to make the pupils learn. The cane was regarded as the basic aid to teaching and a teacher without a cane was regarded as a soldier without his gun. Such were the extremes of those days but perhaps we have reached the other extreme today. Long gone are the days when a student would get caned for misbehaviour or unlearned homework and then get twice as much more when they went home. Today, a teacher can be sued for hitting a student and parents frowned on for smacking their children. More emphasis is placed on talking to the children and reasoning with them rather than 'beating sense into them'.

In all schools in the early years, Irish figured largely on the curriculum. The idea was to make Irish the everyday spoken language of the country therefore most lessons were conducted through the medium of Irish. In many schools, students were rhyming off all sorts of things in Irish without really knowing what they meant in English. However, English was to prevail as it already had too much of a grip on the people.

Education is now a very costly business. The government states that education is the fundamental right of each child and therefore those families on low income are entitled to free education. How 'free' this education is though, is questionable with uniforms, lunches, books, examinations, field trips and heating to be paid for by the parents themselves.

Unfortunately, there are no third level institutions in Mayo at the moment - though the establishment of an R.T.C. in Castlebar is currently being considered - so students from Belmullet must go to Galway, Limerick, Cork, Sligo, Dublin, etc. to seek further education. Grants are available from the Mayo County council to those students whose parents are in low income. These grants pay the college fees and contribute towards the keep of the students during the terms.

For students who cannot afford third level education or the mature student, correspondence courses are available whereby they can undertake a course quite inexpensively in the comfort of their own homes: postal communication being the medium between college and student. The student is then able to work full-time and do a cert./diploma course concurrently. FAS training courses and secretarial courses are also available in Our Lady's Secondary School and St. Brendan's College.