



# Cumann Oidhreachta Eanách Dhúin Annaghdown Heritage Society

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Nuachtlitir Uimh. 3

Geimhreadh 2018

## FÁILTE

Fáilte chuig an tríú heagrán d'ár nuachtlitir, ag deireadh bliana a bhí thar a bheith gnóthach.

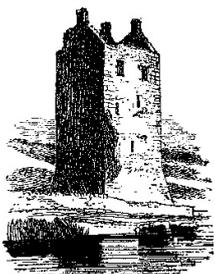
Our work on recording stone-built wells resulted in the recent publication of a booklet, which is now on sale locally. The booklet was officially launched by Conor Newman on Friday 30 November; thanks to all who attended on the night. Full information, including the wells database and map, are available on our website at [wells.annaghdownheritage.ie](http://wells.annaghdownheritage.ie). Our thanks once again to the Heritage Council for their generous support of this project.

An interesting aspect of the wells project has been the emphasis on local knowledge and memory. Video interviews with Mary Potter of Mace and John Murphy of Cregduff are also available on the foregoing website, and we hope to continue developing this method of preserving our heritage. We would be delighted to hear from any member of the community who would be interested in participating in a similar informal interview; please contact any Society member if you know of anybody who might be interested.

Elsewhere, work on our Heritage Room has moved forward, with drylining and plastering completed and painting to commence shortly. We are now focussed on displaying our collection of artefacts in an appropriate manner, together with developing content for appropriate display panels. We hope to officially re-launch the room early in the New Year.

Looking forward to 2019, we hope to organise a second series of lectures for the spring season. Details will be announced in the local newspapers and church newsletters. We also invite you to sign up to our mailing list, either via our website or by sending us an email. Nollaig Shona agus Athbhliain faoi Mhaise daoibh go léir.

## INFORMATION



**Events** are announced on our website and in local newspapers/church newsletters. All are welcome. The current officers are Paul Greaney (Chair), Irene McGoldrick (Secretary) and Nicholas Lyons (Treasurer). Membership of the society is open to all; we request an annual subscription of €5 to help with costs, including insurance, website and printing of newsletters.

**Find us on Facebook & Twitter:**

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## MARY FORDE, BALROBUCKMORE

### *An Appreciation*

It was with deep regret and a sense of loss that we learned of the death of Society member Mary Forde (née Goaley) on 3 October. Over many years Mary contributed in large measure to the development of the Society, with her erudite teachings both oral and written, her practical insights to life in general, her keen sense of humour, her boundless generosity and her faithfulness to the people and places in her beloved parish of Annaghdown.

Mary was born in the village of Annaghdown in January 1925, the eldest of nine children of John Goaley (Annaghdown) and Katie Skerritt (Kilgill). Following education at Annaghdown National School, she emigrated to Bradford after World War II, where her uncle, Canon Martin Goaley, was a parish priest in the Diocese of Leeds. She returned to Annaghdown some years later and married Patrick Forde of Balrobbuckmore. Patrick predeceased her in 1997. Their family, Padraic, Martina and Bernadette, and later, her five grandchildren, were at the centre of Mary's life.

Mary was involved in the Heritage Society since its inception and has left us a lasting legacy which is treasured by all who had the privilege of knowing her. She wrote several articles for the parish magazine *Anach Cuain*, and we have now published these on our website in her memory. She was always available to those interested in Annaghdown history and genealogy, and her characteristic wit and good humour were enjoyed by many. Our sympathies go especially to the Forde and Goaley families who mourn her loss. Ar dheis Dé go raibh a h-anam uasal.

## WAS THERE A FAMINE IN THE WEST OF IRELAND IN 1925?

*Johnny Burke*

The early years of the Irish Free State were full of turmoil, beginning with the conflict between Pro- and Anti-Treaty factions which we know as the Civil War. After the cessation of hostilities in May of 1923, the country was in a ruinous state, with many roads and bridges blown up and in general disrepair. Cumann na nGaedheal was the party in government, with only the Labour Party in opposition due to the abstention of Sinn Féin. The financial situation was also dire, and the Government responded with austerity; cutting the old age pension by 10%, introducing a 7

day working week and slashing the wages of farm labourers by 16%. This latter tactic highlighted an objective of the Government which was to support the big farmers, with the aim that agricultural production would be the driving force behind economic recovery.

By 1925, reports were coming in of severe food shortages in West Donegal, Connemara, West Clare and parts of Kerry. These areas were known as the Congested Districts. Two years of extremely wet weather in 1923 and 1924 had severely damaged the potato crop, while leaving turf unsalvageable in the bogs. As early as 1923, the *Irish Independent* of 22 December carried an astonishing report of starvation in Gweedore, West Donegal:

‘Chronic unemployment and the absence of means to obtain even the barest necessities for existence are held responsible for the death of one woman whose husband and six young children have been conveyed to the county home Stranorlar, weak and emaciated from hunger’.

With unemployment high across the country, the extreme West began to suffer from a shortage of food, which was heightened by a lack of fuel for people to keep warm in their homes. Local and national newspapers carried reports of famine. The following headline from the *Connacht Tribune* of 7 February 1925 read: ‘Deaths from starvation in Connemara’. The report stated that the combined effects of two wet years and the failure of kelp and fishing industries was disastrous in westernmost districts. The report added: ‘These poor people conceal their poverty, sometimes even from one another.’ The *Irish Independent* of 6 February 1925 gave the high incidence of winter storms as the reason for the lack of fish. The paper also highlighted the lack of turf as a major economic disaster for the region because the people there normally sold turf to make a living.

However, despite the government response, there appears to have been an attempt by politicians to cover up this tragic event. Two things appear to have caused a shift in government thinking. The first, a report from the *Manchester Guardian* in February 1925 which reported famine conditions in the West of Ireland. The second, a telegram from the editor of the *Boston Globe* seeking Government clarification on whether a famine existed in Ireland seems to have sent shockwaves through the political and business classes. So much so, that on 13 February 1925, the Minister for Land and Agriculture Patrick J Hogan stood up in Dáil Éireann and said:

‘There is no abnormal distress in the West this year. I say that definitely and deliberately. There is always distress in the West [...] the distress this year is not, taking the whole congested districts into account, particularly unique [...] and there was no failure of potatoes this year, except in one or two limited areas’.

Hogan was a native of Cloonmain, Loughrea in County Galway, so how could he deny the severity of the distress in newspaper reports? This seems all the more incredible when the Minister’s own departmental secretary F.J. Merrick described the 1924 potato crop as ‘practically a complete failure’. Looking at attitudes of that time, it could be argued that there was a class distinction in evidence.

In a letter written in 1921 about the poor of Irish society, the then Minister for Local Government of the Provisional Government, W.T. Cosgrave stated:

‘People reared in workhouses [...] are no great acquisition to the community and they have no ideas whatsoever of civic responsibilities. As a rule their highest aim is to live at the expense of the ratepayers. Consequently, it would be a decided gain if they all took it into their heads to emigrate. When they go abroad they are thrown on their own responsibilities and have to work whether they like it or not.’

Cosgrave would go on to become leader of *Cumann na nGaedheal* and of the Irish Free State from 1922-32. Meanwhile, the Minister for Finance Ernest Blythe warned that the use of the word famine ‘will do great harm to our credit in every way unless it is immediately countered’. It would appear that the headlines from overseas were embarrassing for the new Government who were attempting to establish the principle that the Irish could not only govern themselves, but could look after its own people.

It could also be argued that the 1925 hunger was used as a political football by Labour Party leader Thomas Johnson. The secretary of Workers International Relief (WIR) Helen Crawford, who had been providing food and clothing to the worst hit areas, appealed to Johnson to aid the relief effort. He refused, comparing the actions of the WIR to that of “souperism”. Ironically, it appears that Johnson was distancing himself from a socialist organisation.

The Government did respond with a total relief package of approximately £500,000 which included relief works schemes, seed potatoes, fuel and clothing. Private relief was dispensed by the aforementioned WIR, by the Lady Dudley Nursing association, United Irishwomen and Save the Children, while donations were sent from America and elsewhere. The hunger crisis was ended by good weather in the summer of 1925, with a plentiful harvest, but unemployment and the struggle for survival remained on the western seaboard.

### Sources & Further Reading:

- *Connacht Tribune*
- *Irish Independent*
- Fin Dwyer, ‘1925 – Ireland’s Forgotten Famine’ in *Irish History Podcast* - [irishhistorypodcast.ie/1925-irelands-forgotten-famine/](http://irishhistorypodcast.ie/1925-irelands-forgotten-famine/)
- Una Newell, *The West Must Wait: County Galway and the Irish Free State 1922-32* (Manchester, 2013)
- Timothy P. O’Neill, *Minor Famines and Relief in County Galway, 1815-1925* in Gerard Moran and Raymond Gillespie (eds), *Galway: History & Society* (Dublin, 1996) pp. 445-78.
- Adrian Grant, “‘Workers to the rescue’: Workers’ International Relief in Ireland, 1925” in *History Ireland* - [historyireland.com/20th-century-contemporary-history/workers-to-the-rescueworkers-international-relief-in-ireland-1925/](http://historyireland.com/20th-century-contemporary-history/workers-to-the-rescueworkers-international-relief-in-ireland-1925/)
- Dáil Éireann Debates, Friday, 13 February 1925 Vol. 10, No. 3 - [oireachtas.ie/en/debates/debate/dail/1925-02-13/19/#spk.89](http://oireachtas.ie/en/debates/debate/dail/1925-02-13/19/#spk.89)

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## REFLECTIONS ON THE PAST

*Kathleen O'Shea*

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At the turn of the twentieth century and probably before that, St. Brendan's Church, Corrandulla had two side altars. One was adorned with a picture of Our Lady of Good Counsel where Mrs. Frances Butler, Winterfield House, Tonagurrane prayed. This altar was situated near where the commemorative window to the late Fr. P.V. O'Brien is today. In later times that same picture was hanging in the then childrens' corner until the 1970s.

Across the aisle, where the window dedicated to St. Francis is now, Mrs. Helen Blake, Cregg Castle had a picture of Our Lady of Perpetual Help on her altar. That picture has lingered on and can be seen today hanging on your left as you enter the church by the side door. Those two altars were beautifully adorned with golden-laced cloths, shining candle holders with lighted candles and of course flowers of the fairest. During Mass those two ladies would be praying with their backs to each other and side on to the rest of the congregation. Meanwhile the Reverend celebrant would be on the altar with his back to everyone.

Frances was Captain Butler's second wife, he having been first married to her late sister Alice (née Jackson). The Jacksons owned a hardware business in Galway. It was also Frances' second marriage. She had one son from the first marriage, Dr. Arthur Jacksson-Brewe. He was one of two first class passengers to drown on the ill-fated Titanic in April 1912. According to their great-grandson, Tony McCourt, Captain Butler was a Surgeon-Major in the British army and served in the Crimean War of the mid-1850s. Tony McCourt was the architect of the current national school in Corrandulla which opened in 1995. Captain Butler died in 1887 and Frances died in October 1912, six months after her son.

The six tall candleholders you sometimes see on the altar for special occasions were donated by Mrs. Blake, who died in 1925. Her remains reposed in the oratory in Cregg Castle and it is said that seven masses were said for her happy repose during the course of the day. Mrs. Butler presented a sanctuary lamp, which is not the present one. At one time the pews only extended half way down the church. Mr. Patsy Furey, Bunatubber, donated pews for the rest of the church.

In the 1920s, the principal in the girls school, Miss Mary E. Comer, a native of Williamstown presented a set of vestments and the four brass vases that are still used on the altar. Each vase is engraved underneath with ME Comer. Miss Comer's assistant teacher was Miss Nora Loughnane of Shanaglish in south Galway. She was a sister of the ill-fated Pat and Harry Loughnane who were arrested and brutally murdered by the Black and Tans in November 1920. During the time of their incarceration the Tans came to the Girls' School and took Miss Loughnane away for interrogation as they falsely claimed that her brothers had escaped. The school children spent the whole day praying for her safe delivery.

Meanwhile a Crossley tender had arrived at Pat and Margaret Stauntons, Mullaghadrums, where Miss Loughnane had been lodging. They ransacked Stauntons house and poured petrol around the outside, threatening to burn it. They only relented when Margaret Staunton promised not to keep Miss Loughnane as a lodger anymore. When the Black and Tans arrived at Staunton's they blocked the road on the brow of the hill with more than one Crossley tender. I heard from Mrs. Mary (Mom) Hynes (1894 - 1998), that on her way from Corrandulla she came upon the blockade. A machine gun was placed on the wall and she saw them putting the petrol around the house. She had to stand there terrified until a policeman from Cloonboo RIC Barracks said she was alright, that they could let her pass. She had to climb up on the side of the road and hold on to Cahills wall in order to do so.

After that Miss Loughnane lodged at Wades cottage beside Cregg Mill. Whilst identifying the bodies of her dead brothers she is alleged to have said: "Their souls are in heaven, they died for Ireland so it doesn't matter how their bodies look." Sometime later she joined the Our Lady of Apostles order of nuns in Cork and served in Africa, being known as Sister M. Patricia. Her last days were spent in Castlemagarrett Nursing Home near Claremorris which was then run by the OLA Sisters. She died in 1984.

The statue of St. Therese of Lisieux inside the main door of the church was presented by Fanny Saunders. She had come from the north of Ireland to serve as a governess to Emily and Marcella Ryan of Mace House. When she had completed their instruction, their mother Mrs. Ryan, (Helen Blake's sister) kept her on as her lady's maid. During her long stay at Mace House, she converted to Catholicism.

**Author's note:** A lot of this information came from my mother Julia O'Neill (née Lally), November 1900 – 3 February 1971.

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## BIG DEAL

*Peter Newell*

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When we were children in the 1950's, one of the red-letter days was St. John's Day, better known as *Bonefire Night*. There was much excitement and great competition among we school children as to which group would have the biggest, brightest fire. For several days before the much-awaited night, the whole place would be a hive of activity collecting fuel for the fire.

Some people contributed turf, more gave scraps of timber, but the most prized material of all was Bog Deal. Bog deal is the remains of the forests of Ireland that covered the country many years ago. There was an abundance of it in the local bogs close to where we lived, namely Barana, and other townlands around the district. To a child's eye catching a glimpse of these ancient forms bursting through the bog land, would resemble the backdrop of a ghost story. Some had grotesque shapes and were extraordinarily heavy to carry, so the donkey and cart would be brought into service to assist with the collection of the

more awkward specimens. Sometimes our group of gatherers would get lemonade and sweets, but always we had a great time heaving and pulling these giant forms from our bog lands.

As the years rolled on, and we all grew up and moved away or stayed put, the importance of bog deal decreased significantly in our lives, unless a great stump of it got in our way while trying to clear land or cut turf. It's ironic though, how something that was held in such regard in your youth, returns to mean something in your adult life bringing with it a warm memory of childhood.

This happened for me in the 1970's, when my sister married in Lanesboro, Co. Longford. Her new husband, John Casey, had a brother Michael who happened to have a very artistic and creative side to him. Where we could only see fuel for our fire, Michael was able to recognise art. He had travelled a good deal and had returned to live in Carrick-on-Shannon. Sometime later he bought land near a place called Barley Harbour on the east shore of Lough Ree near Newtowncashel in Co. Longford. There he began to dig the foundation for what he hoped to be a new art studio.

It was just beneath the surface that he came across something that hindered his progress. He dug carefully around the obstruction and it turned out to be a giant Bog Yew tree trunk, and being as artistic as he was, he saw shapes and forms in the gnarled wooden block before him. He proceeded to get expert advice on how to handle this ancient wood, and how to properly and slowly dry it out. With his artistic side well and truly fired up, Michael began to sculpt and carved an altar, tabernacle and a bishop's chair from the giant tree trunk. In effect, he succeeded in turning bog wood carving into an art form.

As well as being an extraordinary artist, Michael also had a head for commerce. He not only turned bog wood carving into an art form, he also turned it into a thriving business. Bord na Móna showed a keen interest in his new sculptures and material, and agreed to salvage bog wood for his use. They also gave him a permanent exhibition centre in their offices on Baggot Street. In return, Michael set up classes in selecting the wood and carving it into various interpretations.

Some of Michael's pieces have gone far and wide and it's now possible to see examples of his work internationally. One very striking piece called *Ainmhí na Spéire* is located at Dublin Airport, welcoming and bidding farewell to thousands of travellers daily. He also installed pieces called *Sea Wall* at Achill, Cúchulainn on Horseback and one very interesting one commissioned by the nuns of the Diocese of Ardagh and Clonmacnoise. It depicts the shape of both dioceses in bog wood joined together using steel bars. The list of his works goes on and on with each one depicting and meaning something different to each viewer, but all doing so through a medium that had lain in wait for centuries.

We children could only see a way to win our *Bonefire Night* competition, but it turned out that our Bog Deal became a Big Deal for someone else too.



Pictured at the launch of *The Stone-Built Wells of Annaghdown Parish* were Evelyn Stevens, Paul Greaney, Jessica Cooke, Conor Newman, and Br. Conal Thomas.

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## LECTERN

*Joe McDermott*

*(Inspired by the lectern in the mortuary chapel)*

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Neolithic forest falls.  
 Earth womb, entombed.  
 Brownd with essence of  
 peat and  
 tannin-stained in anaerobic heat.

Oak and yew aborted from the bog  
 ripped from a five thousand year sleep.  
 Why was I disturbed,  
 sheared?  
 Modern noises now are heard.

Porcellanite axes my species cleared;  
 Neolithic man hunted the deer.  
 I saw grass grown  
 in a clearing  
 attracting prey for devious spearing.

Sap and sweat now intermingle;  
 hardy hands work my grain.  
 chisels and plane.  
 Sandpaper - gifted trades  
 showing my fibre in varnished shades.

I now bring comfort to  
 those bereft, left behind.  
 I carry a different message - *His* message.  
 Birds once roosted upon the limbs  
 that now hold homilies and hymns.

Centre of attention, yet I'm alone;  
 my friends still sleep  
 in peat,  
 in heat, of Gaia's embrace –  
 oh restore me God to my resting place!