

# CLONKEEN STUDY

by Pdraig Cronin and Tadhg Lucey — 12 year olds

When environmental study began in the schools and our teacher explained to us what it was and all about it we were filled with enthusiasm. Many of us had been to Tralee and some of us as far away as Cork or Dublin, we prided ourselves too in the knowledge of places as far off as Canada and Australia, but now we discovered that few of us had been in every valley or on top of every mountain in our own area. Perhaps knowledge like charity begins at home. Anyhow we were determined to explore.

A climb to "The Paps" was organised. It would take us 2284 ft. over sea level. Some of our parents came too and a local man who knew the best and safest pathways acted as guide. It was a heavenly day and the visibility was perfect. We never realized the beauty of our valley and little glens until we viewed them spread out beneath us in the fresh green garb of early summer. Heather and golden furze impeded our progress but eventually we reached the top. Queen Dana of the Tuatha De Danann is supposed to be buried here and tradition demanded that each of us took a stone



Tadhg Lucey, Cummeenavrick and Celine O'Donoghue, Dromacraka being given helpful information for their survey by Dan Healy, Derrymaclevode.

in the last 100 yards and added it to the Cairn on the top. We felt proud monarchs of all we surveyed. We could see right into Killarney — away along the Laune into Dingle Bay, northwards to the Shannon with the hills of Clare in the background. But behind us was our own valley safe and secluded and beautiful. We came back down with a new pride.

We thought about our surnames on the rolls and discovered that we still had O'Donoghues and McCarthys ancient Irish clans. Next in number came the Luceys who appear to have come from Uibh Laoghair and Lynchs from West Cork. There were many questions to ask parents and grandparents and they were only too glad to help. We filled up our family trees back to great-grandparents. The older people were also very useful and explaining our lovely Irish placenames like Cnoc-na-Bro (quern), Cummeenavrick, Cúm-a-Chuilinn, Gortlicka, Fail a' Da Abhainn etc.

The following are two examples of the explanations we got:

## PAIRC AN AIR:

In the early night a great black bull roared from Cnochán a' Phiobaire across the valley and by an ancient fort or lios. One morning all the cows down by the Lios were unaccountably



Working on the findings of a survey in Clonkeen National School are (left to right): Eileen Cronin, Inch; Mary Crowley, Inch; Patrick Cronin, Knocknabro; Kathleen Fahey, Knocknabro; Celine O'Donoghue, Dromavraka; Tadhg Lucey, Cummeenavrick and at lack Nigel Healy, Foiladown and Sean Lucey, Cummeenavrick.

dead. This field has ever since been known as Pairc an Air or the field of slaughter.

## CLUAIN CAOIN:

Eugene McCarthy told us this referred to the caoineadh or lamentation of the womenfolk of the Mahony's when their men were beaten in a fight with the McCarthy Clan. The slopes across from our school are still called "Mahony". The Cluain means meadow.

Now we were really getting to know something about our environment and about ourselves and we were enjoying it. The idea of doing a survey developed gradually.

Somebody's horse died and his daddy got a tractor. We did a transport survey. Our parents and neighbours all remembered what transport was available in pre-war days (1939-'45). It transpired that the horse was being replaced by the tractor, bicycle numbers had lessened, so had donkeys, but the numbers of cars and tractors had increased. This was a few years ago and three families were still using traps. They have now disappeared also. Our railway line through the area from Kenmare to Killarney has also disappeared. Luckily the bridge over the Loo was retained.

Our last survey was a population one. On average there are less than



Sean Lucey, Cummeenavrick and Eileen Cronin, Inch talking with John D. Lucey, Cummeenavrick while out doing research for a project.

four in each house. This is less than survival figures. One in every twelve is an old age pensioner. One in 8 of the entire population is over 40 and unmarried. There are 40 between school age and 40 years who are also unmarried but most of these are likely to marry. In the past four years only 3 boys have started new families. We have only 22 children under school age. In the next four years 32 will leave, so our roll numbers will be down to 59. This will be a reduction of about 14 on present numbers. There are 60 married couples in the area or only half our households have a husband and wife alive. Of these only 9 are likely to have more children. After four years — what?

# ROS

Journal of Kerry Folk Life

Christmas, 1974

## LA NA nIASMAI NO LA COILLE

Le Mícheál Ó Guithín, An File (ná maireann)

Lá tábhachtach:

Ní chuala féin, dá fhaid é mo chath ar an saol so, aon ainm ag muintir an Oileáin dá bhaisteadh don chéad lá den mBliain nua, ach Lá na nIasmaí. Lá tábhachtach i saol Gael ab ea é. Be é an chéad lá den Bhliain Nua é. Bhíodh peil nó spórt éigin suaithinseach i nDúnchaoín an lá san áirithe.

Le saolú na nua-bhliana bhíodh dóchas láidir ag ár sean-mhuintir, go leagfadh an tArd-Mháistir Naofa a bheannacht anuas orthu, go mbeadh an rath orthu féin is ar a gcúram i rith na haith-bhliana. Tuigeadh dóibh gurb é Dia féin an fear ab fhearr chun iasma a lorg air.

Théadh gach ceann-líntí ar a ghlúine go homósach go moch maidin lae na nIasmaí. Bhaineadh sé fíor na croise ar chlár a éadain. Thugadh sé é féin agus a theaghlach suas do Dhia an lá san agus gach lá ar feadh na haith-bhliana. Gach a mbíodh amuigh is istigh, idir bheo agus mhairbh, is gach aon duine a ghoilfeadh no ná fóirfeadh air; idir bhuaibh, is caoire is gamhna, gach a raibh ina sheilbh. D'fhreagraíodh an líon-tí é lé cráifeacht ós ard: A Thiarna Amen.

Ansan labhradh fear a'tí go deamhóideach, a dhá láimh fáiscithe le chéile aige, a dhá shúil dlúite ar a chéile mar bheadh leanbh ina choladh i gliabhán. Chluinfeá na focail uaibhreacha ag dul suas fé fhrathacha an tí:

Iasma a loirgím ort, a Athair na nGrást,

Bí fial; déan an trócaire ar m'anam, Is maith dhom a ndearnas riamh, Osclaím an croí cruaidh seo agam, Anseo i láthair mo Thiarna Dia, uilechomhachtach.

Maithim óm chroí amach, dom chomharsain, gach dochair dár dheineadar sa tsean-bhliain atá caite agam,

Gach cúl-chaint is formad, éad agus míosgar, do chorraíodh m'intinn is m'aigne chun feirge,

Gach maoidheamh a dheineadar, orm féin is ar mo chuid, do bhí fá na súile ar ghort is ar shliabh, Go mór mhór mo líontí,

Maithim dóibh d'fhonn is Dia do mhaitheamh dom féin, Mar tá fhios aige na fuilim saor ach Ísland).

oiread lé cách ós na lochta seo.

Ba dea-shompla don aos óg a bheith ag féachaint ar a nathair is ar a máthair ag cur a nguí chun Dé ar son síochána is dea-mhéine a gcomharsan a ghnóthú. Is annamh lé blianta fada gur thóg éinne a cheann suas i dtreo neimhe Lá na nIasmaí ag iarraidh ar Dhia iasma a thabhairt don anam.

Do ghlac an taos óg chuchu an lá iontach san. Dheineadar cosúil lé Lá Le Bríde é. Bhíodh ag dul ó thigh go tigh ag bailiú phingíní. Bhíodh a gciall cailte ag na daoine óga, chun an aráin seo go mbíodh rísíní agus siúicre ann, is é déanta lé dúthracht ag bean a' tí i gcóir an lae. Nuair a thagadh na páistí go dtí an doras ní dhéanaidís aon dearmad gan an bhéarsa beag so a chanadh go binn ceólmhar roimh dhul isteach dóibh:

Fógraím Iasma ort; Móra thoir agus Móire thiar dhuit, Is Móra ó Mhuire gach maidean sa bhliain duit.

Ná tuigh gur lé bochtaineacht, ataimíd dá n-iarraidh,

Is go méadaí ar nAthair Neamhga, Fairsine is bia chughat.

"Amen a leanaí" deireadh bean a'tí. "Do theastódh san uaim" agus thugadh sí foisceallach beag dóibh a dheineadh iad a shásamh. Is iad a bhíodh móiréiseach ag cur na slí dhóibh.

## Cluiche na Nollag

"Lá Nollag, . . . agus nuair a bhíodh lá mar sin ann is ea a bhíodh comórtas báire le bheith ar siúl agus an baile go léir ceangailte isteach sa chluiche sin. Bhíodh beirt beartaithe, fear ón dtaobh ina dhá maor, mar a déarfá; bhíodh gach re fear acu sin á thógaint nó go mbíodh a mbíodh ar an dtráigh roinnte le chéile. Camáin agus liathróid a bhíodh an uair sin ann. Is ar an dTráigh Bhán a bhíodh an báire acu, gan stoca ná bróg; amach go muineál aon uair a théadh an liathróid don fharrage. Ar feadh dhá lá dhéag na Nollag ní bhíodh sé i gcumas aon fhir san Oileán an bhó a bhagairt chun cnoic le tinneas droma, agus tinneas cnámh; cos dhubh ag beirt; fear eile ar leathchois go ceann mí."

Excerpt from chapter 15 of An tOileánach by Tomás Ó Criomtháin (writing on life on the Blasket

Ṣuímíó nollagis raol mhaise is raol áthas dár léitheoirí uile



My Mother recalls ...

## Christmas in the Glen\*

60 YEARS AGO

The beef or pig killed during November was still in the barrel or hanging from the ceiling. The oicheannta airneain were in full swing.

It was easy to spend the long winter nights with card games or friendly gambles in alternate houses and a goose or pair of home made socks or ball of sugáns for the winner. The women were also busy spinning or knitting or quilting red flannel quilts that lasted a life-time. There was the big open fire, the new song to be learned or the new dance to practise and time went quickly.

We didn't feel until it was Advent. Preparation went on apace then. The holly bush was cut to clean the chimney, the loft was scrubbed and the walls were all whitewashed inside and out. The weather seemed better then. The geese were put in and given raw potatoes to fatten them.

### AMERICAN LETTER

Early in December came the American letters all bearing news of friends over there and always there was the cheque or dollars for Christmas. The amount you got depended on the number of your family in America and the shopping depended on the cheque money.

Christmas shopping was planned. Not a few hurried items but a long list that was to keep the household in supplies until Biddy's Day (February 1). You made your list for each shop you dealt in. Every cart on the shopping trip was filled with holly and ivy for the shop keeper and friends who didn't have it on their doorstep. There were

the currants and raisins and the ling for Christmas Eve and always the barm brack — dark and rich and full-blooded with fruit. In the box with your purchases was put the present — the jug of jam, or the china tea pot filled with sugar lumps, or the holy picture, and you boasted to your neighbours on your popularity. Of course the big Christmas candles were in every shopping box — two or three large ones for the lower windows, a packet of small candles for the upper ones. Some people liked the red and yellow ones, others liked the pure white.

Out there in the country the Christmas decorations were all at hand — red berried holly from Log na gCuileann and bearts of trailing ivy from Carraig an Eineain.

Santa Claus was hardly known but when times were good he brought money boxes — a black china pig with a slit in his back or a dark Turk in a turban but there was always an apple or an orange for the toe of the Christmas sock.

Christmas Eve was a fast day and the dinner was potatoes and ling but at the supper the table was laden with raisin cake and barm brack and strawberry jam and all feasted while the candles glimmered in the window and the door was on the latch beckoning the Holy Family to a welcome visit in the Glen.

"CARRAIG EANNA"

\* The Glen is west of Ballinskilligs at the foot of Cum-an-Easpaig.

## Christmas Around Sliabh Luachra

FIFTY YEARS AGO

By Dan Cronin

In days of yore the first 'move' towards Christmas was taken in the month of May in that historical area of Sliabh Luachra in East Kerry. It always came about on the day of the 'meitheal' cutting turf, when the man down in the fifth sod found something obstructing the progress of the sleam. He would call for a spade and axe, and would remove a large, rough, knotty lump of bogdeal. "Good boys" he'd cry out, "a great 'Chrothail' for the fire on Christmas night" — the yule log of bogdeal that could be more than ten thousand years old.

There were no further developments until the month of October. Then the geese — flocks of these birds were raised on every farm in those days — were taken in off the grass and housed to fatten. It was said that a goose fattened inside tasted much better than a bird fat off the grass.

Then the holly trees with the berries were being 'spotted'. These trees were carefully noted — often times the holly had to be cut two to three weeks before Christmas, to beat the holly 'thiefs' who were wont to knock around from areas where no holly grew.

Around this time also the women-folk would busy themselves with Christmas cakes and puddings; in those days everything in this line was home-made. The decorations too, were made in the home — the flowers, the streamers, everything. The holder for the big Christmas candle was a big turnip, in which a hole had been drilled, trimmed and decorated.

The boss and missus of the house went to the nearest town a few days before Christmas to bring home the necessary 'goodies'. Jars of porter, some wine and one or two half pints, together with temperate drink for the youngsters would be collected. The Christmas candles, together with many other odds and ends were also procured.

Money was very scarce in those days, and much of the purchasing for Christmas depended on the slim wages of the sons and daughters, who had spent the year toiling from dawn to dark in wet and cold for well-to-do farmers, in counties Cork and Limerick. Too, there might be the letter from America, with the almighty dollar — oftentimes at this time of year it greatly lightened the burden for many a household.

On Christmas Eve around six in the evening, every window in each dwelling was adorned with a lighted candle, large candles of various colours and around one or two pounds in weight. Following the rosary which was then recited, the big supper was served. The cakes that had been received as presents from the various grocery shops with whom business had been transacted during the past year were all sampled, together with gorgeous home-made treacle and ginger bread with added currants and raisins. Usually these cakes were 'treated' with a drop of a fiery liquid, of illegal origin, yet it was procured for Christmas. There was never any 'schoraid-eacting' on Christmas night — it was a case of all stay at home.

On Christmas day little children were out early to show the neighbouring children what Santa had brought them, and to compare presents. Late on Christmas day it was customary for friends to visit one another to wish a happy Christmas.

St. Stephen's day brought the wren-boys, complete with masks and long tattered clothes. Some had their faces blackened with soot or paint and all carried musical instruments. It was always the same old wren song:

"The Wren, the Wren, the king of all birds,  
St. Stephen's Day was caught in the furze,  
Up with the kettle and down with the pan —  
And give us a penny to bury the wren".

On St. Stephen's night there would be a party in some house in almost every townland. There would be music, song and dance, a gorgeous supper for all present — oftentimes washed down with punch. The entertainment would continue long into the night. Next day Christmas was nearly over — excepting a little activity on New Years night and again on Small Christmas day, Lá Nodlaig na mBan.

## Archaeological Discoveries

The great importance of being on the look-out when involved in any work disturbing the ground was emphasised by two significant archaeological finds in the Rathmore area this year.

In June a wooden milk pail was found on the land of Teddy Cremin at Lissyconnor, and in July a fulacht fiadh (ancient cooking place) was found on the land of Stephen Murphy of West End, Rathmore. It is a tribute to the concern and perception of both men that these memories of another time — may be as far back as 3,500 years — were brought to light and are now in Muckross House.

### PRE-HISTORIC MILK PAIL

— Ned Myers, Muckross House

The wooden milk pail is made from a single piece of wood (probably red deal), 10 inches high, 14 long and the width tapers from 8½ at the top to 5½ at the bottom. The base of the vessel is missing. On the top end are handle sockets — from other finds this could have been for a moveable handle and could have been a piece of yew branch, pressed, when in a flexible state, into notches with projecting lips on the inside.

The pail was found in cutaway bog (about two sods depth under ground level) at the same level as many bogdeal roots. The vessel, which was lying parallel to the bank, was found when new turf was being turned on June 20th.

As well as the co-operation of Mr. Cremin the successful recovery was made possible because of the help of Pdraig O Duinin, Hollymount and Dan Cronin, Aunaskirtane. Those were helped in their investigation by Mrs. Grosvenor and P. J. Fleming of Muckross House.

### ANCIENT COOKING SITE

— Michael Ryan, National Museum of Ireland.

In July, 1974, the trough of a fulacht fiadh (or ancient cooking place) was discovered during the development of a house site belonging to Mr. Stephen Murphy of West End, Rathmore.

The importance of the find was

quickly recognised and a preliminary investigation was carried out by Messrs. Jöseph and Paud Dineen (both of Rathmore) and Mr. Dan Cronin of Shrone, Rathmore. Mr. Edmund Myers, Manager of Muckross House, Killarney, was informed and, after an examination of the site reported the discovery to the National Museum, on behalf of which the necessary work was carried out by the writer.

The trough was made of planks of wood, probably of oak, set into a pit excavated specially for the purpose. Two large planks formed the base of the trough; one side plank survived; another portion of plank, which may have formed part of a side, was found. One end-board, carefully slotted into the planks forming the bottom, was uncovered. The planks had been adzed; the marks of the tool were clearly visible on some of the timbers. Unfortunately, the mechanical excavator which originally uncovered the timbers had cut away one end of the trough; there is, however, no reason to think that it differed in construction from the surviving end. Burned stone occurred in quantity in the surrounding soil.

All the evidence suggested that a typical fulacht fiadh existed at Rathmore. These structures, used originally for heating water and cooking, may be identified easily by the mounds of burned stone which are often kidney — or horseshoe-shaped. They occur on marshy ground or on the banks of

streams.

The fulachta fiadha method used for cooking is described by Keating in his *Foras Feasa ar Eirinn*, "the trough was filled with water and meat, wrapped in straw, was put in; stones heated in a nearby fire were dropped into the water until it boiled; the meat was then allowed to simmer, the temperature of the water being maintained by the regular addition of heated stones until the food was thoroughly cooked. (Experiments by Professor O'Kelly have demonstrated that meat can be cooked satisfactorily and efficiently by this method). When the cooking had been completed, the stones were raked out and thrown on the ground, normally on three sides of the cooking trough, leaving one side open for ease of access. By this process the mounds gradually acquired their characteristic horseshoe shape."

It seems clear that the fulachta fiadha were in use in Ireland for a very long time indeed, from as early as 1500 B.C. or, perhaps, even earlier down to the historical period. It is important that each one should be listed and that any example in danger of destruction should be reported at once to the National Museum of Ireland so that a proper investigation can be carried out before the site is disturbed. With the country-wide increase in the number of land-drainage projects fulachta fiadha are in particular danger since they seem to be commonest on marginal land and are not widely recognised as being archaeologically important.

The National Museum was very glad of the opportunity to inspect and record the Rathmore example and wishes to thank all those named for their kind co-operation in enabling the investigation to be carried out.



The custom of having Bidy Boy groups at the beginning of February is now a thing of the past in most areas, except for the odd gang of children using it as a glorified form of begging. However there is one area in Kerry where the Biddies are active; FRANK LEWIS writes about the . . .

## KILGOBNET BIDDY

Dressed in white shirts and trousers with multi-coloured sashes, croises and coloured tape along the side seams on their trousers, their faces were masked and they had highly decorative straw head dress as the dozen or so members of the group marched in single file along the country road.

The had a bodhran and a squeeze box. One member of the group carried a life size doll with one outstretched arm and a large Saint Brighid's cross pinned to it.

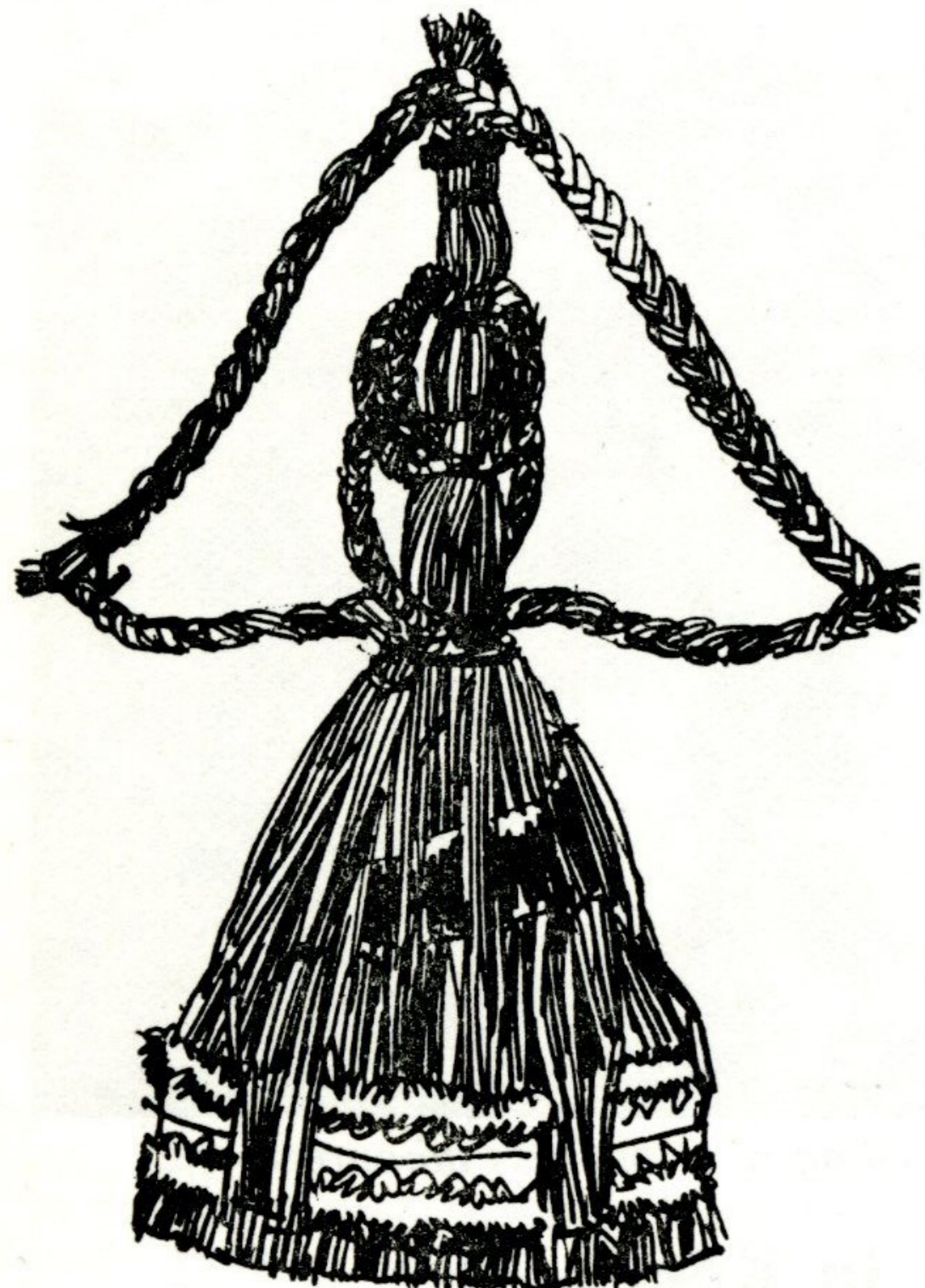


The Kilgobnet Bidy dance a Kerry Set in a farm kitchen.

I was mesmerized. On that first Sunday in February, more than 18 years ago, my face was glued to the back window of the car as my father drove along the old Board of Works road under the northern shadow of the McGillicuddy Reeks.

### Head Dress Hierarchy

There is a clear visual hierarchy in the group. The younger members wear



Head dress of the senior members of the group.

very simple straw head dress while that worn by the more senior is much more decorative. As can be seen in the illustration the elaborate head dress includes several St. Brighid's crosses, flowering reeds, small flags tinselly Christmas decorations — and anything else that adds to the appearance is likely to be included. The head dress is a work of art and demands considerable skill in the making.

While in my Kerry memory the groups have always been called Bidy Boys (though including men and women in male dress) but in other parts of the country the whole focus was on groups of young girls with "the most exemplary virgin in the townland" chosen to represent Brighid, and then move on immediately to the next house.

Great exception is taken if they don't visit a home. "St. Brighid warned that all sorts of misfortune would befall the family who didn't have a cross in the house — cows wouldn't calf; crops wouldn't prosper; the goat would run dry and a whole lot more," they told me.

"If the house was too poor to have a cross of its own then one would have to be brought in at least once a year" and the Bidy brought their cross from house to house, so "a lot of the old people still think this is of great importance."

In earlier times many of the groups had quite an elaborate religious ceremony at each house and they finished this by giving a Saint Brighid's cross to the woman of the house. Sometimes this cross was only left up for the twelve months but in many places you could tell the age of the house from the number of crosses pinned to the thatch over the door.

### Bidy: Brighid

The word Bidy is a derivation from Brighid and the doll carried by the group is an effigy of the early Irish saint. In olden times each household struck a pin in the outstretched arm to show that the Bidy had visited



Simple head dress of the new members of the Bidy Group.

## PEIG

BY BRYAN MacMAHON

(Published by the Talbot Press — Price £2.95)

It is welcome news that Bryan MacMahon's fine translation of Peig (the life-story of Peig Sayers of the Blasket Islands) has gone into its second edition from the Talbot Press of Dublin and that within the past month an American editions has been published by the Syracuse University Press of New York. This is not surprising as Bryan kept very close in his translation to the simple but idiomatic narrative of the original, and preserved its flavour as hardly any other writer could have done.

I first met Peig Sayers in her own home on the Great Blasket in 1931 when, along with three companions, I spent a month camping on the island. Peig was then at the height of her powers as a story-teller and both the islands and visitors loved to gather around her as she told them fine folktales like 'Seán O Sé Bánóige', or reminisced about her young days as a servant-girl before she married a Blasketman.

Máire Ní Chinnéide and her husband, Seán Mac Gearailt, were on their annual visit to the island when I was there, and she was quick to realise that Peig's life-story, apart altogether from her great store of oral traditions, would be well-worth recording. So she persuaded Peig's son, Mícheál, an File, to take down his mother's story from her dictation, and, edited by Máire Ní Chinnéide, its original version in Irish was published by the Talbot Press in 1936.

Tomás O Cricomhthain's remarkable autobiography, An tOileánach, written by himself for Brian O Ceallaigh, had already appeared in 1929 and was regarded as the finest book which had come from the Gaeltacht at any time up to then. Its fame was enhanced by the English translation of it, made by Dr. Robin Flower ('An Bláithín' as the islanders christened him) and published in 1934 under the title of *The Islandman*. Muiris O Súilleabháin's book, *Fiche Blian ag Fás* (and its translation,

*Twenty Years A-growing*), were yet to come.

I had the pleasure of meeting Peig again on a number of occasions, and Kevin Danaher and myself recorded tales, songs and prayers from her when she was in hospital in Dublin later on. Her son, Mícheál, died this year and is buried with his mother in the new graveyard in Dunquin, facing out westwards towards the island where they had lived. Tomás O Cricomhthain is buried in the old graveyard not far away, near the church, and admirers, and friends have erected monumental stones over both graves. *Go dtuga Dia solas na bhFlaitheas da n-anam!*

Christmas is near at hand now, and what a great change there is between its celebration and that in my own young days, not to speak of the fine, but simple description given of the Feast by Peig in her book. She was still a young girl, working in Ventry area, and she gives a vivid description of her wonder at seeing the Christmas shopping being done in Dingle, the drinking and singing of the Irish songs of Seán O Duinnlé, the Blasket poet, in the pub, and the arrest of one of her company by the police for singing a mocking song about the 'peelers'. She goes on to describe the decoration of the house on Christmas Eve, the lighting of the candles and the festival meal — these were all new to her — but her heart was sad as she remembered her mother, who was all alone in her distant home on that holy night.

Peig wondered at the Lamb in the seasonal cards which were displayed in the kitchen, and she enquired why the Holy Child should be pictured as a lamb. In her book, Peig tells vividly the explanatory story told to her by Nan, about the pursuit of the Blessed Mother and the Child by Herod's soldiers, and the miraculous manner in which the Child was changed into a lamb in her Mother's arms to deceive the soldiers. In narrative of this kind, Peig always showed her powers, and the hearers or readers would almost believe the story to be really true.

Next day, Christmas Day, she visited the Crib in the local church along with some companions. This again was a new experience for her. The Crib 'would remind even the blindest person of the Kingdom of God'. Her account of the day's wonderful events end with her own recital of the beautiful Irish poem, 'Welcome to the Child Jesus', eight verses, each of eight lines.

We are grateful to Peig, to her son, Mícheál, and to Máire Ní Chinnéide, all three of whom have gone to their reward, for leaving us these memories of times gone by, and to Bryan MacMahon, who has opened up this Irish world in miniature to those who are unable to read the original version in our native language.

SEAN O SUILLEABHAIN



An illustration of Catriona O'Connor from the book, *Peig at Christmas dinner on the Blaskets*.

them. Now money is given and afterwards there is a great party.

### Origin Unknown

As far as I can find out there is little or nothing known about the origins of the Bidy custom. Folklorist Kevin Danaher has the most interesting background information on St. Brighid's Day, her cross and the Biddies in his book *The Year in Ireland*.

"There's a custom very similar to this among the Aborigines in Australia" Raymond Piper told me. Undoubtedly the custom must predate Christianity but how could it have crossed from, or

to, the other side of the world?

The adaptability and ingenuity of the early Christian church is a constant source of amazement. Christ's mass to replace the adoration of the sun on the shortest day of the year; on May 1, the most important day of the year in the Pagan calendar, the feast of St. Joseph; and now St. Brighid changing this pagan pageantry into presenting Christ's cross to every home.

I came back to see the Kilgobnet Bidy many other years and on one occasion the eminent Belfast artist Raymond Piper came with me and drew the pictures on this page.



## Ned Myers takes a brief look at

# 1974 IN MUCKROSS HOUSE

In spite of the gloomy forecasts for the year the Trustees of Muckross House felt that while they would have to cut back on certain areas that development should continue. We started 1974 with an act of hope rather than anything else.

Unfortunately one of the items which had to be cut was the production of ROS and that is the reason why we are now appearing for the first time in 1974. However, our hope in 1975 is to be able to produce at least two issues.

One of the areas which had been causing some concern was the future tenure of Muckross House but as a result of a number of very happy meetings with Mr. Henry Kenny T.D., Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister for Finance, and Officials of the Office of Public Works discussions are now continuing in a very hopeful manner.

We continued to receive the usual, and in fact increased, co-operation from the Kerry Vocational Education Committee, the Killarney Urban District Council, The Kerry County Council, the County Development Team, Ivernia and Bord Failte. Through the new Agricultural Exhibition a very practical link has been forged with the County Committee of Agriculture.

## MUSEUM SEMINAR

The first major undertaking by the Trustees of Muckross House this year was the organising of a very successful seminar on A Museum Service for Kerry. Our chairman at that time, Sean O'Connor, explained why the seminar was run: "I hope that we Kerry people have an opportunity to:

- Have explained to us in greater detail the recommendations contained in the report by the people who compiled it.
- More importantly we should come away with a better understanding of what is meant by effective museum service.
- Voice our opinion on the type of Museum Service we wish to have.
- Have an opportunity to make a contribution to the inevitable study which I believe the Government must conduct in their preparations to initiate a proper Museum Service.
- Finally, Kerry is away ahead in the Museum field in this country. Both the service we offer at the moment and our plans for the immediate future are much more advanced than any other county in Ireland. We feel that the Government must listen to what we have to say. Kerry must be considered in a good light in any new situation, but this will depend largely on the force and effectiveness with which we express ourselves at this time and in the period immediately ahead."

Bishop Casey very kindly agreed to chair the Seminar and it was officially opened by Mr. Michael Begley, T.D.,

Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister for Local Government, who made a very firm commitment to the ideals of the Trustees of Muckross House.

The Seminar was attended by 130 people from all over Kerry and the main speaker was Mr. John Teehan, a Kerry man from Coom, Gneeveguilla who is Keeper of the Art and Industry Division of the National Museum. After a discussion period a panel answered questions. The panellists were, Mr. John Teehan, National Museum; Mr. John O'Sullivan, National Museum; Capt. Kevin Danaher, Folklore Dept. U.C.D.; Mr. Seamus McDwyer, C.E.O. Kerry Vocational Education Committee; Fr. Pat Ahern, Siamsa; Mr. Laurence Flanagan, Ulster Museum; Mr. Sean O'Connor, Trustees of Muckross House and Mr. Ned Myers, Manager, Muckross House.

All in all it was an exceptionally interesting and lively seminar. The proceedings of the Seminar were subsequently produced which are available in a very limited supply at 50p per copy.

## MAPS

The Hilliard collection of maps are now on display in Muckross House. The purchase of this collection was made possible through the generosity of Mr. John McShane.

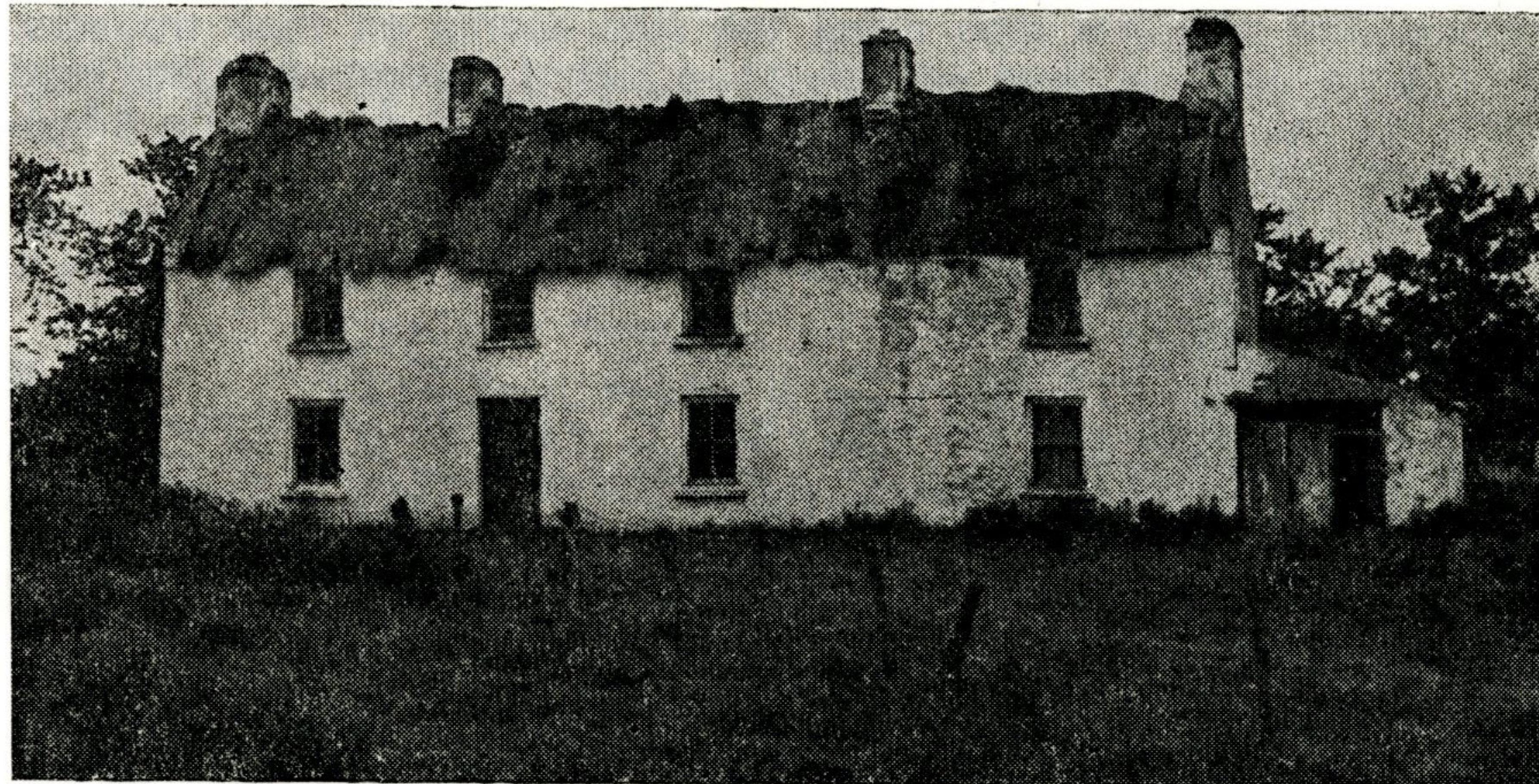
## CRAFT WORKERS

Our apprenticeship scheme which started with a trainee blacksmith/welder and weaver is in its third year. We now feel it has been proved workable and that we should recruit further apprentices especially one for the harness maker.



At the Museum Service for Kerry Seminar were Michael O'Connor, Duagh; Desmond Fitzgerald, Knight of Glin, and Liam de Brun, Ballyburion.

## HOUSING SURVEY AND EXHIBITION



Class 1 House: The residence of a strong farmer in the North Kerry area.

At the end of 1973 we set out guidelines for a survey of traditional houses in Co. Kerry. This was a two-fold exercise. It was an opportunity for school teachers to do a local project with the children. It was also a much needed survey of the type of houses, the materials used, the building methods and even something about the builders.

The survey itself was intended to be a rather long term idea as it was a very ambitious scheme and could not be expected to be finished quickly. However, enough materials came to hand with the help of our Folk-Life Adviser, Dr. Kevin Danaher of the Department of Folklore U.C.D., and we were able to set up an exhibition on Housing in Kerry.

This includes graphs, legend and photographs. It is regarded as one of our best attempts at representing an aspect of social history.

The exhibition begins with the classification of housing in the 1841 census and goes to 1851 and illustrates the grim results of the Famine decade in Ireland when the population was reduced by at least one third. It demonstrates the almost total annihilation during those ten years of fourth class houses — the one roomed houses in which the landless labourers lived. Some sixty per cent of these houses disappeared in that period. At the same time it shows that classes 1, 2 and 3 actually increased in number.

Side by side with this house population there are graphs showing the number of people. This is very striking. The photographs are used to show the different types of houses and some of the regional variations. Plans of the most popular types of houses are also on display.



Class 4 House: One roomed dwelling of a landless labourer.

## Agriculture in Kerry

For some time we have been endeavouring to do an exhibition on Agriculture because this of course is the most important means of livelihood in Kerry. In 1972 the County Committee of Agriculture produced a resources survey which was an immediate success. In the course of discussions with the Chief Agricultural Officer, Jerry Moyles we felt that based on this resources survey we should set up an exhibition dealing with Agriculture in Co. Kerry. An Education sub-committee of the staff of the County Committee of Agriculture headed by Seamus Murphy worked very closely with us on setting up this exhibition.

It deals firstly with the main farm enterprises in Co. Kerry. It shows the climatic factors and the different soils of the County. It also illustrates the way in which the population of Kerry is employed, demonstrating especially em-

ployment in agriculture.

In dealing with the farm population as such the exhibition shows the age structure and particularly the decline in farm labourers. It also shows the way the standard of living has changed over the past 125 years. Viability of farms, education and voluntary organisations are also dealt with.

Another section deals with the history of farm enterprises from 1850 up to the present time. This is interestingly illustrated with notes on International events which influenced the volume of any given produce. The very dramatic technological changes within farming form another section.

The exhibition shows how Dairying emerges clearly as being the predominant farm enterprise as against tillage which has reduced dramatically over the past number of years.