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Built and Natural Heritage



TRADITIONAL BUILDINGS ON IRISH FARMS



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Foreword

In my many years of travel around the farms of Ireland the survival of a wide array of farm buildings has been striking. These range in size and shape but are found the length and breadth of the country. In many cases some farm outhouses remain as isolated fragments on a remote mountainside, still used for occasional shelter, but also remaining when the former house has washed away into the soil. In many well-maintained and prosperous farms such outhouses survive where the old farmstead itself has been rebuilt or, as in the case of the mountainside cottage, have been eroded by the winds and rains of time.

That the outhouse has survived shows two things. Firstly they have been extremely adaptable and secondly they were sometimes built of stone or superior materials not least as they guarded the livestock or valuable crops, and therefore, the whole economic base of the farming system. Their adaptability has matched the social progress found across much of the country. The former cowshed may have become a shelter for cut timber. And with the move to central heating the timber store has now given way to a garage for the ride-on lawnmower. All the while the building itself has remained reasonably intact. A secure roof and dry walls has ensured its survival through varied uses and it remains, often, as the only built structure on the farm, which goes back through generations before. For the most part such buildings

were usually built of readily available local materials and erected to suit local conditions and prevailing winds. They were built by local builders, or the farmer himself, and are truly vernacular architecture – architecture of the people. Just as local accents betray the specifics of place so too such architecture betrays its roots in the locality. We might even say that farm buildings of this type were sustainable before the concept was even considered!

The great poet Patrick Kavanagh (1904-67) understood more than many the realities of rural life and small-scale farming, especially in times of economic and social hardship. But he was always attuned to the fact that great events can happen in the simplest places, not always in great palaces and cathedrals. This sensitivity to everyday objects was already evident in his first published poem (1929) 'An Address to an Old Wooden Gate.' Later in his evocative 'A Christmas Childhood' (1940-43) he writes how 'Outside in the cow-house my mother / Made the music of milking; The light of her stable -lamp was a star / And the frost of Bethlehem made it twinkle.' In drawing parallels between the stable of Bethlehem and a cow-house in Monaghan Kavanagh is not only drawing a biblical parallel but also, perhaps unconsciously, locating small simple farm buildings at the heart of our existence.

Dr Tom O'Dwyer Chairman



Introduction: The Significance of Farm Heritage

Ireland's landscape is enriched by its heritage of farmhouses and outbuildings, its field patterns and the nature of the boundaries that divide them. The landscape of Ireland is predominantly an agricultural one, and farmers have been its guardians. In times past, the occupants of traditional farmhouses and their associated farmsteads were often also their builders. They made clever use of materials available locally and they built in accordance with a language of construction that was shared by their community. These 'vernacular' buildings are usually relatively small and simple single or two storey structures. The traditions followed were founded on experience; of the climate, the locality and its resources. Thus these buildings appear very much in harmony with their local setting. Regional differences in walling or roofing materials used in buildings are echoed in features of the farmed landscape. For example, hedgerows and earthen field boundaries in the lowlands and east of the country contrast with the smaller dry stone-walled fields of the west.

Our older farm buildings provide a direct link to the farming methods of previous generations. Their size and

scale bear witness to an era before the advent of modern 'industrial' agriculture. The materials and craftsmanship displayed in the buildings, gates and walls are a testament to the ingenuity of our forebears in making the most of the resources available to them. By recognising the value of this heritage, we can respect the work and craft of our forbears, as well as remembering a more sustainable way of life than is the case in the last several decades. The farm economy has changed radically and new buildings will continue to be required. We are faced with the challenge to make changes without damaging the legacy of past generations.

The physical infrastructure of traditional farming methods are the cultural expression of 'the ordinary people' and should be valued for that very reason, alongside the grander buildings designed for the wealthy land-owning class. The everyday farm heritage generally does not have as many champions and consequently is much more vulnerable to decay, disuse, dismissal or perhaps ill-advised alteration. The historical value of these buildings is steadily being lost.

Inis Meáin, Aran Islands, Co. Galway. (below left)

Typical Landscape of dry-stone limestone walls bounding small, irregular fields and narrow stone-walled 'green' roads.

Baldongan, Co. Dublin. (below right)

Tillage land in the east comprising very large fields having hedgerow boundaries.



The Rural Settlement Pattern

Before looking at farmyards and their buildings, it is worthwhile pausing to consider how our settlement pattern came into being.

BEFORE THE NORMAN CONQUEST

Prehistoric farming has been revealed at Céide, near Ballycastle, Co. Mayo, where Ireland's earliest agricultural landscape has been preserved beneath the blanket peat for over 5,000 years. Field walls and occasional houses, huts and stock enclosures have been recorded. However, the most visible signs of ancient farming on the Irish landscape date from the Early Christian Period (AD 500-1200). These are the many thousands of ringforts, whether of earth (raths) or stone (cashels), whose circular enclosures, typically about 30m (100ft) in diameter, were essentially protected farmyards. These farmers practised a mixture of pastoral farming and tillage, and traces of field fences and ploughing are sometimes also found.

THE MEDIEVAL PERIOD

The arrival of the medieval monastic orders and of the Anglo-Norman settlers, in the twelfth century, brought considerable change and new technology to Irish agriculture. They and their descendants changed the face of the landscape, clearing woodland, founding considerable numbers of towns and villages, as well as implementing the practice of infield/outfield farming, with granges and manor farms. Aerial photographs and archaeological excavations show these medieval field systems underlying those of the present day, emphasising the presence of the past all around us.

In the Pale, and in parts of east Munster and south Leinster, a farming system known as 'open field' was developed, consisting of three large fields, used in rotation for autumn-sown wheat, spring corn and fallow. It is associated with a settlement type similar to the European model of medieval villages and unlike the better-known, but more recent 'clachán' clustered settle-



Ringfort at Kilaraght, Co. Sligo. (left)

Aerial photograph of the medieval moated site at Kilaraght, Co. Sligo. (National Monuments Section, Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government)



Hurle, near Tullyallen, Co. Meath. (below)

Traces of deserted medieval village in later landscape of large fields. (Leo Swan)

ments of western and upland parts of Ireland. Some of these survive as villages today and include Licketstown in south Kilkenny and Whitestown on the Cooley Peninsula, County Louth. Upstanding remnants of nationally-important medieval field boundaries can be found on the edges of some of these villages.

In the social unrest and economic decline of the late medieval period, the tower house and linked bawn, or enclosure, emerged as the farmstead type of the relatively wealthy landholder, whose wealth was expressed in terms of cattle.

THE PLANTATIONS

In the sixteenth and seventeenth century, the ownership of large areas of the country were forcefully redistributed to English 'planters' and others. The smallholders were not displaced but generally became tenants. From the 1660s the centralisation of English power in Ireland resulted in the emergence of the estate system, a com-

modity-based economy with considerable numbers of new fairs and markets and many new villages. This all led to sweeping settlement reorganisation and changes in the purposes of tenants' agriculture. Cash crops had to be produced alongside the staples necessary for subsistence.

The 'agricultural revolution' involved the introduction of new crops, vegetables, trees, improved breeds of sheep and cattle and new systems of crop rotations (for example, clover and turnips replacing fallow). From this time also, the prevalence of absentee landlords and a tenants' reluctance to upgrade property for fear of attracting increased rents, undoubtedly contributed to a lack of reinvestment in farms and farm buildings. As a rule, where landlords were resident and interested in their workers, better and more uniform farm buildings were the result, as was the improvement and drainage of land. The agricultural boom of Napoleonic times, when there was a major shift from pasture to tillage, helped fuel the explosion of population in the century up to the 1840s.

Plan of the village of Licketstown, Co. Kilkenny. (below left)

Such 'farm villages' appear to have their roots in the medieval period and are found in areas heavily settled by the Anglo-Normans. (Courtesy Patrick Shaffery)

Tower house and bawn. (below right)

Tower houses date from the period AD 1400-1700. This one at Ballynabinch, near Cashel, Co. Tipperary is 15th century and has a 16th century bawn with round bastions at the corners.



Typical medium-sized farm-house of c.1800. (above)

This distinctive house is three-bay, two-storey with a bipped roof and further accommodation in the return at the rear. Clyduff House, near Dunkerrin, Co. Offaly.

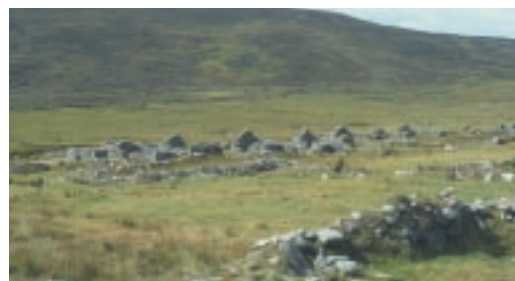


In the west, co-operative, essentially subsistence, farming was practiced based on the 'Rundale' system of land ownership and distribution, and the nucleated 'clachán' settlement. This led to the settling and farming of former marginal lands. The potato, a nutritious food crop, thrived in the poor soils and facilitated the growth in population.

The farmhouses, farm buildings, and field patterns of the post-plantation era remain the backbone of the cultural landscape of rural Ireland to this day. It has always been difficult to date farm buildings because of the simplicity of their decoration, and the continuity of the building tradition from which they emerge. Study of the first edition of the Ordnance Survey maps of about 1840 shows that many of the locations of existing farmsteads had buildings at that date, and challenge the assumption that our rural buildings are of nineteenth-century date. A growing number are recognised as being older.

The deserted village of Slievemore, Achill Island, Co. Mayo. (below left)

An evocative landscape: the ruined houses of this late 18th/early 19th century rundale settlement are surrounded by abandoned cultivation ridges.



Curragh House, near Tullaroan, Co. Kilkenny. (below right)

This 'bitchbed mansion', the principal house of the townland, is of traditional type but with some influences from the 'Big House'.



19TH CENTURY

The economic and social changes mentioned above led to the subdivision of land into ever smaller subsistence farms, as well as the farming of previously marginal land. Reliance on the potato as the staple food crop and its failure in the 1840s resulted in the catastrophic great famine. Emigration, changing social patterns in family size and the consolidation of land holdings in the surviving population led to a flight from the land, and an image of an under-populated countryside. Consolidation led to a greater number of larger farms. The houses and out-buildings that survive today tend to be the better-built and more commodious dwellings, but still small by the standards of other parts of Europe.

Farmsteads became increasingly autonomous and isolated for a variety of reasons: the loss of most of the medieval villages; the consolidation and enclosure of land (particularly in the West due to the operation of the Congested Districts Board); the building of new roads

(along which many new farmyards were laid out). The activities of landlords and, later, of the State, especially the Land Acts of the 1880s, led to much reorganisation of holdings and dispersal of farmsteads from old pre-Famine clusters. The Congested Districts Board, operating in western counties from the late-nineteenth century, and the Land Commission, from the 1920s, began the process of redistributing the lands of the great estates and thus greatly increased the number of tenant farmers.

Also, since about 1900, the State provided grant aid for the construction of haybarns. Funding of repair and construction of farm buildings began in earnest in January 1948 with the Farm Buildings Scheme. The main other building types funded were: produce houses, cattle byres, machinery sheds, calf houses, and poultry houses. From the 1940s there was a major campaign to cover yards with tarmacadam or concrete, both for hygiene reasons and also to provide farm roadways.

19th Century smallholding.

Nineteenth century smallholding in billy landscape near Mount Gabriel, Co. Cork.



Iron Hay Barn.

Very typical iron hay barn of three bays near Cloghan, Co. Offaly. This is probably the most familiar type of farm building in Ireland.



Field patterns in Ireland.
(below left)

The size of fields is directly related to location, those of North and Mid-Leinster and East Munster being considerably larger than elsewhere. (Figure 8 'Field Patterns' p137 in Atlas of the Rural Irish Landscape © 1997 Pierre Flatrès; F.H.A Aalen, Kevin Whelan and Matthew Stout eds., by permission of Cork University Press)

Formal courtyard farmyard.
(below right)

Formal courtyard farmyard next to Bantry House, Co. Cork, displaying fine architectural details and echoing the features of the accompanying country house.

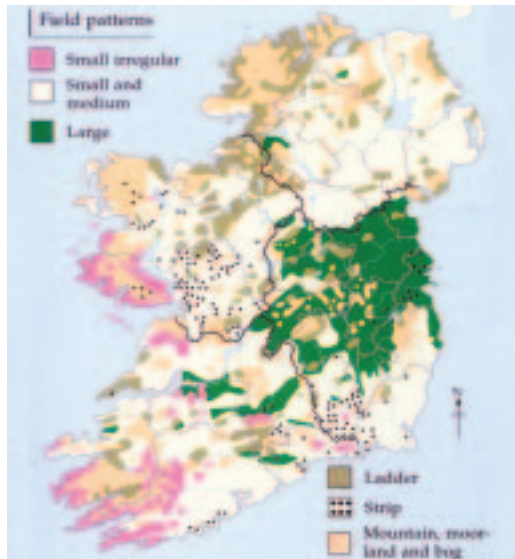
Farmyard Layouts

It has been estimated that there are about 200,000 farms in Ireland of between 5 and 50 acres (2-20 hectares) and about 80,000 of more than 50 acres (20 hectares). Large farms tend to be found in the driest and sunniest parts of Ireland where the soils are well drained. These farms are mostly situated in Leinster and eastern Munster. Some very large farms in western counties encompass thousands of acres of rough grazing land.

The larger farms were historically associated with landlord estates; the medium-sized with strong tenant farmers, the designs of whose buildings were often strongly influenced by those of the landlord; and the smaller farms with less prosperous tenant farmers. Not surprisingly, the smaller farms tend to have smaller farmyards and a less diverse range of building types. At the bottom of the ladder were the landless labourers who had no land of their own and worked for the other classes of farmer.

THE 'BIG HOUSE' FARM

The farm buildings associated with a 'big' house situated in a demesne were usually designed as a self-contained farmyard within the boundaries of the formally-designed landscape. Many were built as model farms, exemplars of best farming practice at that time. Within the demesne, they were located where rational planning principles were easily implemented, often at a remove from the main house. Frequently they reflected contemporary architectural fashion, with two-storey ranges on orthogonal plans, perhaps entered through an archway topped with a clock tower or weather vane. Farm work was designed to be separated from the life lived by the occupants of the principal house. Many estates provided housing for their workers and labourers.



SMALLER FARMYARDS

Unlike the custom-designed big house farmyards, the smaller farmstead is likely to have a less formal layout that reflects the constraints of its site. The house is more directly related to the outbuildings and often forms part of the farmyard. Often the buildings are sited so as to shelter the farmhouse from the prevailing wind. Their materials and plan form lie somewhere between the vernacular and the formal. They can be the principal houses in their townlands.

TYPES OF TRADITIONAL FARMYARD LAYOUT

Kevin Danaher was the first to study the layout of farmyards in Ireland. He drew together information from hundreds of localities to describe and map the various types. Some layouts are very unequally distributed across the country, but the reasons for this phenomenon are not clearly understood. The basic types of layout are as follows:

EXTENDED FARMYARDS found mainly in the northern half of Ireland, with a single row of buildings (bottom left)

PARALLEL FARMYARDS typical of mountainous areas. Sometimes a public road cuts across a farmyard. The buildings may all be disconnected and form a loose form of courtyard. Many parallel yards started life as the extended type

SCATTERED FARMYARDS mainly found in mountainous districts, particularly in the west, where level ground can be in short supply (Top left)

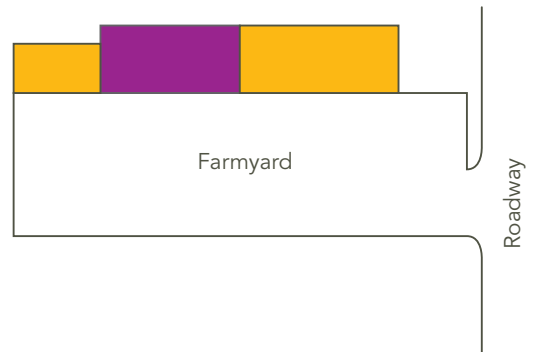
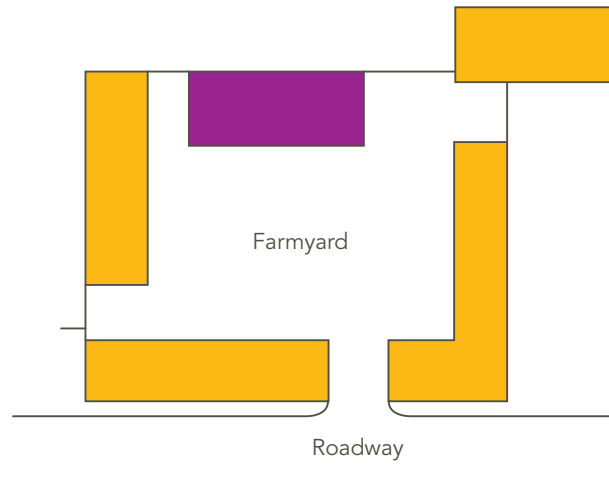
COURTYARD FARMYARDS by far the most common and with several variations:

- *Full courtyard*: ranges of buildings close off all four sides of a rectangular yard, or three sides of a triangular yard (fig. 1 following page)
- *Half courtyard*: buildings form two ranges at right angles to each other (fig. 2 following page)

- *Detached courtyard*: mainly associated with the landlord estates, but also found on some of the larger traditional farms. The yard, or sometimes back-to-back yards, is at a remove from the dwelling house (fig. 3 following page)
- *Small courtyard*: buildings on three sides; the fourth side is a boundary wall. The dwelling house usually faces the road. Not as common in Ulster, western Connacht, or south-west Munster (fig. 4 following page)

Some typical Farmyard Layouts.
(below)

Courtesy Patrick Shaffrey, redrawn by Catherine Martin.



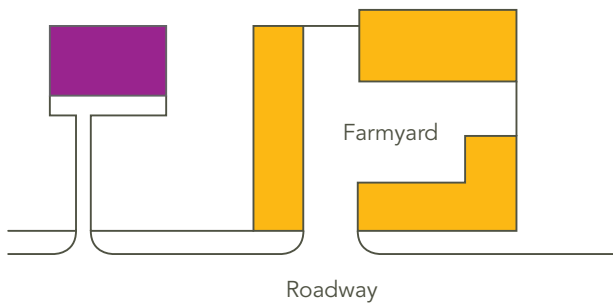


Figure 1

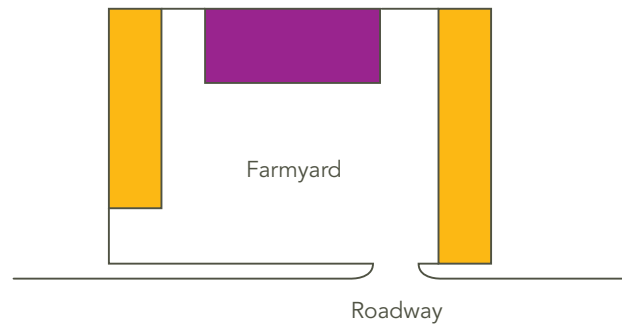


Figure 2

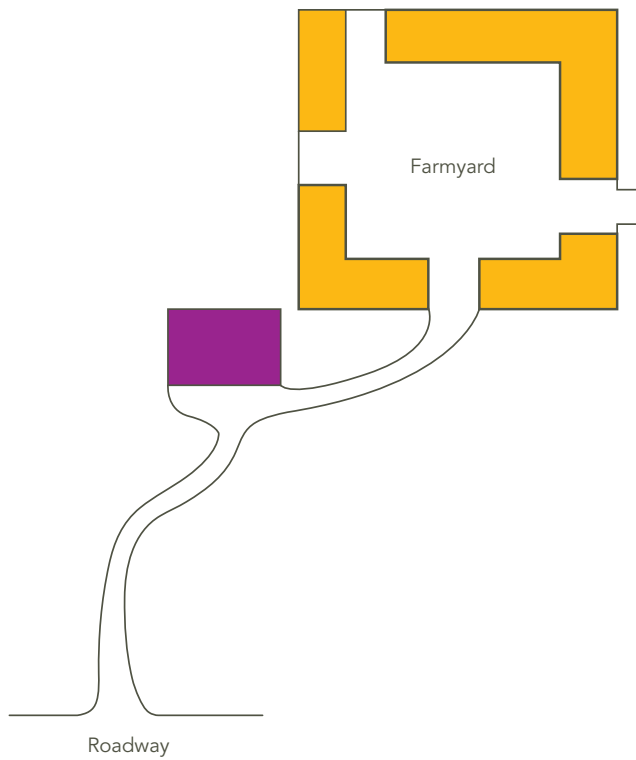


Figure 3

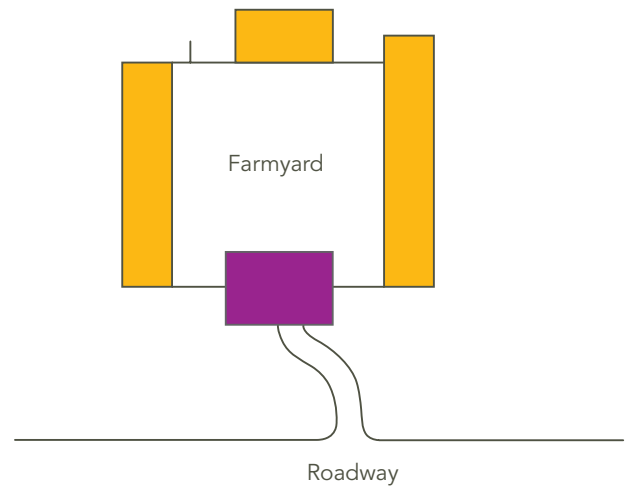
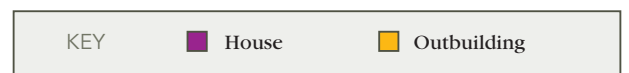


Figure 4



Some typical Farmyard Layouts.

Courtesy Patrick Shaffrey; redrawn by Catherine Martin.

THE MODERNISED FARMYARD

Since joining the EEC in the 1970s, intensification in agriculture has seen the provision of milking parlours on dairy farms and of new buildings for winter housing and cattle fodder. The bounded space of the yard is difficult to extend; this can lead to the need for further yards, or, more often, the demolition of the least useful of existing buildings to make way for haybarns and cattle sheds. Many farmyards have been modified in this way. Large-scale pig production units have replaced the humble pigsty. The slurry tank has replaced the dung heap of earlier days.



Parallel farmyard.

*Consisting of dwellinghouse facing farm buildings.
Valentia, Co. Kerry.
(Courtesy Department of
Irish Folklore, UCD).*



Scattered farmyard.

*The buildings were
constructed where a level
surface was to be found.
Near Inch, Co. Kerry.
(Courtesy Department of
Irish Folklore, UCD).*



Half Courtyard Farmstead.
(right)

Half courtyard farmstead, typical of much of the Golden Vale. Near Oola, Co. Limerick.

Full Courtyard Farmstead.
(below left)

Such arrangements form a completely closed yard of buildings and are possibly an echo of defensive 'moated site' farmsteads. Near Templemore, Co. Tipperary.

Modern Farm Buildings.
(below right)

This large structure has been formed by duplicating the typical iron barn and adding on lean-to sheds, in keeping with the needs of modern farm enterprises.



Farm Houses

Farm houses range in scale from the most modest labourers' cottages to the substantial houses of the well-off farmer. All have the potential to have heritage value. Many older farmhouses are being replaced by more modern dwellings, as current lifestyles require generous spaces or 'open-plan' arrangements unsuited to the thinner houses whose size was determined by small-section roof and floor timbers. Very often the house is not entirely abandoned but used as an ancillary building, the interior cleared out to allow space for animals to move around or large machinery to be stored.

BUILDING MATERIALS

Building materials and methods changed little until the mid 20th Century. The use of roughly-dressed stone and even boulders in walls; of thatch and rough boughs of

trees in roofs; of compacted clay in floors and walls; and of wattle and daub in chimney hoods and partitions makes such buildings look quite primitive. Latterly, slate has displaced thatch and concrete block has taken over from rubble stone. Almost all recent extensions and repairs are carried out in modern materials.

LOBBY-ENTRY AND DIRECT-ENTRY FARMHOUSES

The typical vernacular farmhouse is 'four-bay' with a door and three windows in the front wall. Irish vernacular farmhouses tend to have one of two traditional layouts, **lobby-entry** or **direct-entry**.

i. **LOBBY-ENTRY** houses have a small lobby between the kitchen hearth and the front entrance. A screen (jamb) wall or partition parallel to the long axis of the building, and containing a small 'spy' window, separates the hearth



Lobby-entry. (above)

Single-storey thatched farmhouse of 'lobby-entry' type at Ballycallan, Co. Kilkenny, with farm buildings to one side and ranged along the roadside.



Direct-entry. (right)

Large two-storey vernacular farmhouse of 'direct entry' type, having farm buildings tucked behind. Fanad, Co. Donegal.

fire from the doorway. Doors were traditionally left open for most of the day. A person seated at the fire could see who was entering the house by looking out through the 'spy' window. This window also admitted some light to what was often a fairly dark part of the kitchen. The jamb wall protected the fire from draughts. Lobby-entry houses tend to have clay walls and hipped or half-hipped roofs, which spread the weight of the roof structure more evenly than would gabled roofs. These houses are found in much of the lowlands, especially the east, south-east, and midlands.

ii. **DIRECT-ENTRY** houses are entered directly and rarely have a lobby or jamb wall. The front entrance is located at the opposite end of the kitchen to the hearth. These buildings tend to have gabled roofs and stone walls, and are typically situated in mountainous and western coastal areas.

POST-FAMINE HOUSE DESIGN

i. **A VERY COMMON HOUSE TYPE**, built mainly after 1850, has a symmetrical façade of a door flanked by a window each side on the ground floor; and three windows upstairs. Farm buildings are usually located to one side of, or behind, the house.

ii. **LABOURERS' COTTAGES** have replaced many vernacular houses since the turn of the twentieth century. Those built by the local authorities are extremely plentiful and instantly recognisable.

iii. **ESTATE COTTAGES** were built by landlords for their workers, in towns as well as in the countryside. They are similar in appearance to the labourers' cottages, but usually have ornamental features such as carved 'fancy' bargeboards to gables and dormer windows.



Typical three-bay two-storey hip-roofed farmhouse. (above left)

Dating from the 2nd half of the 19th Century, such farmyards are not far removed from the vernacular. Near Ballingarry, Co. Tipperary.



Labourer's cottage. (above right)

Well-preserved labourer's cottage, near Manorhamilton, Co. Leitrim, dating from around 1940.

Semi-detached cottages. (below)

Near Abbeyleix, Co. Laois, associated with the de Vesci estate. The decorative ridge cresting, latticed windows and carved bargeboards over the entrances betray the formal design of such cottages.



Farm Outbuildings

Traditional farm buildings were most typically used as byres, stables, barns, and stores. They tend to be very modest in size and detailing, generally built of stone or mud, or a combination of both. Some farm buildings are quite roughly made, of light timbering or small tree trunks and sheathed in corrugated iron. Roofing is frequently slate or corrugated iron, and occasionally pantile. Farm outbuildings with thatched roofs are now very rare. Flooring was mainly of stone cobbles or mud, frequently replaced by concrete as better hygiene standards were demanded. Windows are scarce, except for narrow slits splaying inwards to maximise the light. Later outhouses of more formal design and appearance have more finely built stone walls. They may also have dressed quoin stones at the corners, brick surrounds to the doors and windows, and hipped slated roofs. Nowadays, if they are not disused or dilapidated, old outhouses are likely to be used for storage.

HAYBARNs

The iron haybarn, now a common and accepted presence in the landscape, was introduced in the mid-nineteenth century. Early examples were made as a kit of parts, shipped from Britain to agents in Ireland. They have been grant aided by the State since the early twentieth century and are undoubtedly the most common type of farm building in the Irish landscape. Their numbers can only be guessed at, but Department of Agriculture statistics suggest a total of between 50,000 and 100,000. An indication of the pride that went into their construction is the frequent presence of a plaque with the name and address of the firm that produced it affixed to the gable end.

In strong tillage areas, barns generally have lean-to extensions; some are multiple barn units placed side by side. While mainly used for the storage of baled hay, their high interiors may also be subdivided to provide housing for



Cow byre in farmstead.
(left)

At Loop Head, Co. Clare. Thatched farm buildings are now very rare and particularly important to preserve.

Haybarn. (above)

Built from round poles supporting a pitched roof structure clad in corrugated iron. It is unusual for the cladding to enclose so much of the sides.



Manger. (above)

Manger made from rough round poles and branches. Near Greystones, Co. Wicklow.

Stone farm building. (left)

This most attractive stone farm building takes maximum advantage of the fall in ground. Eyeries, Co. Cork.

livestock, to shelter tractors and other machinery, and to store a wide range of equipment and materials. The addition of concrete or sheet metal sides turns these open-sided structures into usefully-enclosed farm buildings.

ANIMAL HOUSING

Long after the famine, many a dwelling was shared by a family and its milk cows, the latter tethered to the end wall of the building. A door in the rear long wall opposite the front door facilitated getting the cow into and out of the building. Some of these byre dwellings survive in a modified form: the byre end turned into a bedroom; the cattle relegated to another building. Purpose-built byres will generally have a loft for the storage of fodder. Some interesting examples of byres are constructed into a slope, the hayloft at road level and cattle entrance at a lower level. Single-storey buildings with simple lofting are more plentiful.

STABLES

Often a farm had only one horse, stabled in part of a byre or other farm building. Larger farms, in contrast, had whole stable blocks. Stable buildings almost always have a hay loft overhead. Stables in more formal yards are often two-storey with brick surrounds to all openings and square windows to the loft floor.

CART HOUSES

These are marked out by their wide arched openings to allow access for farm carts and machinery. Cart houses are usually stone buildings with arches of stone or red brick and were built from c.1850 onwards. Some of them combine stabling and haylofts.

OTHER TYPES OF FARM BUILDINGS

Many buildings on the farm were for the storage of potatoes, turf, and other produce. Parts of some buildings were used as accommodation for farm labourers.

TURF SHEDS were usually lightly built structures of timber posts and railway sleepers with lean-to roofs and sides clad in corrugated iron sheeting and timber planking. Turf was also stored in unroofed stacks, carefully constructed with sods pointing downwards to shed water.

THE DAIRY, when not part of the dwelling house, was a small building distinguished by being to the north of the house in the most shaded location available. Some had chimneys.

SMALL-SCALE HEN HOUSES AND PIGGERIES usually date from the mid-twentieth century 'emergency' when much effort was put into the local production of food at a time of scarcity.

LARGER FARMS had their own forges

CORN-DRYING KILNS were sometimes to be found on larger farms; however, they were superseded by the kilns attached to the corn mills

PIGEON-HOUSES OR DOVECOTES ranged from the elaborate round structures of some medieval abbeys to the insertion of a few holes in the upper gable of a farm building

CLOCHAUNS

Clochauns are an ancient type of round stone-built structures whose conical roofs are a continuation of the walls and rise to be capped by a single slab. On the Dingle Peninsula, hen-house clochauns were built close to ancient monastic cells. The form was also used for covered wells and sweat-houses, the latter particularly to be found in Counties Cavan, Leitrim, and Louth. Soot-houses on Achill, small gabled structures, were built to manufacture soot and ash to use as fertiliser. Field shelters in upland areas are sometimes incorporated into field walls; they have lean-to roofs and a doorway, but no windows. The remains of shepherds' huts are to be seen in upland areas.



Dovecote near Tacumshane, Co. Wexford. (above)

This unusual building accommodated birds in its upper part and a toilet at ground level. The small square holes provided access for the birds.

L-plan drystone structure. (left)

This structure is one of several types of turf shelter on the Great Blasket Island, Co. Kerry. The others are 3-sided or fully enclosed with a doorway in one wall, the latter being quite elaborate.





Carthouse and stables. (left)

These buildings show some influences from more formal farmyards in the use of arches to the doorways.

Near Clonmel, Co. Tipperary.



Thatched hen house. (left)

Thatched hen house with corrugated-iron and timber board cladding, built c.1950. Near Ballinagar, Co. Offaly

Two-storey outbuilding. (below)

This outbuilding is typical of the Mayo/Sligo coastline near Enniscrone. It has separate access to ground and first floors.



Protecting Farm Heritage for the Future

Traditional farmyards are increasingly seen as an important part of the national heritage. The Planning and Development Act 2000 introduced the concept of the Protected Structure, and gave planning authorities greater power to control development where buildings have special interest and character of an architectural, archaeological, artistic, cultural, social, technical, historic or scientific nature. Many or all of these qualities are to be found around older farms. Some of the more intact traditional farmyards are included in the local authority's Record of Protected Structures (RPS) as historic buildings and sites, and agricultural development exemptions that apply elsewhere do not apply to them. Where any building owner has been made aware of the inclusion of their building in the RPS, it is necessary to discuss any development proposals with the planning authority at as early a stage as possible.

Hay barn of mass concrete and corrugated-iron. (below)

The relatively modern pre-materials of such buildings should not mitigate against their recognition as historic farm buildings.



Small mud-walled house, Rolestown, Co. Dublin. (right)

This house has a well preserved old thatch roof under the corrugated-iron and has an attic lit by the tiny window in the gable.

YARDS

If it is necessary to make changes, consider how they will affect the old farmyard, even if it is not a protected structure. New buildings, such as slatted cattle sheds, could respect the heritage value of the existing farmyards if they are sited at a remove from the old yard. Yard buildings in the Record of Protected Structures can attract grant aid for repairs and conservation.

HOUSES

If renovating and extending the farmhouse, an effort should be made to hold onto the character and special interest of the older structure, and to retain original features. The layout of rooms (for example the position of the hearth wall relative to the door, a distinguishing feature in traditional farmhouses) can of itself carry social meaning. 'Gutting' of such houses would obviously have





Labourer's cottage, near Freshford, Co Kilkenny. (above left)

This particular type, single-storey with attic, dating from c. 1895, was the result of a campaign by Anna Parnell, sister of Charles Stewart Parnell, for better housing for farm labourers.



Abandoned farm building, near Mount Gabriel, Co. Cork. (above right)

A cleverly designed farm building which must be capable of many different uses today.

a serious impact. If larger spaces are needed, these could be built as an extension to a small-roomed house, rather than being carved out of the original. The small older spaces can continue to be used as bedrooms, bathrooms, stores or as a computer room. Such an approach makes full use of the economic and cultural value of the old structure.

i. **TIMBER BATTENED (MATCHBOARD) DOORS, PANELLED DOORS, AND HALF-DOORS** should be retained and repaired where necessary. The same applies to windows. The most common older window type is the sliding timber sash (up-down window). Replacement of old doors and windows with more modern types and materials, such as uPVC, negatively affects the look and interest of old houses. There is growing evidence that plastic windows and doors don't last as long as the older timber ones that have the undeserved reputation of being 'past it'.

ii. **OLD TRADITIONAL FURNITURE** is part and parcel of traditional houses. It is a reminder of an older way of life. Why not retain these memories of the previous owners' part of the history of the building?

iii. **TRADITIONAL HOUSES** were plastered inside and out with lime plaster. If the lime has been replaced with hard cement render, moisture can build up behind it and cause dampness inside the house. The reputation for dampness that older houses now have often is the result of inappropriate cement-based re-rendering in the last hundred years. The vast majority of Irish buildings were lime-plastered outside from the time they were built. The craftsmen involved knew what they were doing! Resist the temptation to strip off render to show off stonework or to replace it in a cementitious render.

iv. **IT IS AN EASILY-FOLLOWED AND BUILD-SMART PRINCIPLE TO 'REPLACE LIKE WITH LIKE'** timber with timber, lime with lime, and so on. Old buildings continue to perform to reasonable standards due to the satisfactory interrelationship of these traditional materials and the introduction of more modern ones can cause difficult-to-predict problems that are more trouble in the medium- to long-term.

v. **LACK OF DRAINAGE** around an old houses, or inadvertent alteration to a previously-working system, can be a cause of dampness inside. It may be advisable to investigate if there was an old drain close to the walls and repair it if so, or put in a new one to ensure that the base of the wall (there may be no foundations) doesn't have water collecting at it to be drawn upwards and inwards by capillary action.

vi. **AVOID 'CURE-ALL' SEALANTS** and 'no maintenance' products. These may cause more problems than they solve, and are not usually appropriate for older buildings.

OUT BUILDINGS

Continuing to use old farm buildings for a purpose as near as possible to the original function for which it was built is the best way to protect them. Retain cobbled floors and yard surfaces where these survive. Retain old windows, doors and roofing. When adding new buildings, use traditional colour schemes and roof forms to help new buildings fit more easily into the overall complex. Keep corrugated iron roofs and claddings in good order by painting with appropriate paints, (red oxide is a typical colour).

THE FUTURE OF FARMYARDS

Changes in farming have rendered many old farm buildings underused or redundant. In earlier times, it was not uncommon for farm buildings to be adapted for new uses, or extended as the demands on them increased. Today, however, the requirement is for very large buildings, such as slatted sheds, which can 'swamp' the older buildings by their scale and proximity. Such intensification is not easi-



ly accommodated in old farmyards. Where the amalgamation of two or more holdings takes place, one becomes the centre of the larger enterprise, perhaps with substantial addition of new buildings, and the other is let decline. In time it becomes derelict or ruinous. It is important to:

- Consider the effect of such changes on old farmyards and their buildings
- Site new buildings, such as slatted cattle sheds, at a remove from the old yard
- Where the planning authority require new access, ensure that it that does not impact on the old buildings or require the widening of old gateways

ALTERNATIVE USES FOR OLD FARM BUILDINGS

The current focus on rural development provides an opportunity to see old farm buildings as an asset in finding alternative income for farm families. A range of small-scale uses for old buildings may be possible without substantial alteration.

- Unoccupied houses in working farmyards may be inhabited by a member of the family rather than converted to agricultural use
- Old farmyards can be converted for craft workshops or tourism and self-catering; this may be especially viable in suburban areas or close to tourist or walking routes
- Small-scale manufacturing industry, such as cheese-making, small-scale engineering, furniture making, and car maintenance offer other possible uses
- Extending dwelling houses by incorporating adjoining farm buildings is sometimes possible without undue removal of cross walls and other elements of the buildings
- Use of converted outbuildings for dwellings, holiday and self-catering accommodation may be permitted by the planning authority depending on the policies in the development plan.

B&B dining-room

(Previous page & below left)

B&B dining-room converted from farm outbuildings. Abakista, Co.Cork.

Burren Perfumery

(Below)

Perfumery outbuildings, from left to right: Distillation Room, Mixing Room, Organic Tearooms



Guidelines for the Repair and Maintenance of Traditional Buildings and Farmyards

IN THE FARMYARD

- Consult your local authority conservation officer for advice on the repair of 'listed' farm buildings (those included in the RPS) and any grant aid available for such work.
- Continue to use old farm buildings where possible
- Avoid 'gutting' old buildings as this erases much of their historic value
- Carefully site new buildings so as to avoid damaging an old yard
- When repairing old farm buildings, like for like should apply. Therefore similar materials to those used historically should be employed. These include stone, lime plaster and lime mortar, clay/mud, thatch, stone slates or flags, corrugated iron (round profile)
- Retain old roof structures – these are all too easily lost during re-roofing
- Retain old windows and doors
- Protect buildings from fire by ensuring that electrical installation is to modern standards
- Keep all stone walls in good repair, using stone similar to that in the wall if it needs to be repaired, and lime mortar with flush or recessed finish. On older buildings, it is generally not a good idea to use cement-based mortar or render to repair or plug gaps in old walls

- Retain cobbled floors and yard surfaces where these survive
- Maintain and repair old timber and iron gates along with their piers and flanking walls
- Keep old farm machinery under cover to protect it from the elements
- Use traditional colour schemes and roof forms to help new buildings fit more easily into the overall complex
- Keep corrugated iron roofs and claddings in good order by painting with appropriate paints
- Keep a good source of water close by for dealing with fire
- Keep all wells and springs free of pollutants

SUMMARY

Traditional farm buildings:

- Were built by our forbears who had an intimate sense of the climate and local environment
- Were built from local materials by means of traditions handed down through the generations
- Are aesthetically pleasing features of our countryside
- Are likely to be some of the oldest buildings in the district



Stone-cutters settlement.

The buildings and entrance gates in this settlement, near Blessington, Co. Wicklow, are of a very high standard of craftsmanship. The gateway displays the work of the blacksmith as well as the stone cutter/mason.

CONTACTS

THE DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE, FISHERIES AND FOOD
www.agriculture.gov.ie
Lo-call: 1890 200 510

THE DEPARTMENT OF THE ENVIRONMENT, HERITAGE AND
LOCAL GOVERNMENT
www.environ.ie/DOEI/DOEIHome.nsf
Lo-call: 1890 202 021 (*for advice on conservation of protected
structures, conservation grants, thatching grants*)

TEAGASC
www.teagasc.ie
Tel: 059 9170200

THE HERITAGE COUNCIL
www.heritagecouncil.ie
Tel: 056 777 0777

DEPARTMENT OF IRISH FOLKLORE University College Dublin.
Their archives contain a lot of information and photographs
relating to traditional farming, housing and folklore.
Tel: 01 716 8216

For advice about conservation grants consult your local
authority conservation officer

LINKS

www.buildingsofireland.ie is operated by the National Inventory
of Architectural Heritage. It contains information
and photographs for many historic structures, including farm
buildings of architectural interest in a number of counties.

MUSEUMS OF RURAL HERITAGE

BUNRATTY FOLK PARK Bunratty, Co. Clare.
Tel: 061 360 788

IRISH AGRICULTURAL MUSEUM Johnstown Castle, Co. Wexford.
Tel: 053 42888

MUSEUM OF COUNTRY LIFE (National Museum of Ireland)
Turlough Park, Castlebar, Co. Mayo.
LoCall: 1890 687 386 (ext. 392)

ULSTER AMERICAN FOLK PARK Omagh, Co. Tyrone.
Tel: 048 8224 3292

ULSTER FOLK AND TRANSPORT MUSEUM
Cultra, Holywood, Co. Down BT18 OEU, Northern Ireland.
Tel: 048 9042 8428

FURTHER READING

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Tyler, Gerald, 'The iron gate - relic of a forgotten craft',
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02

Built and Natural Heritage

TRADITIONAL BUILDINGS ON IRISH FARMS

This book describes and celebrates the traditional and historical farm buildings that are to be found in the Irish countryside. These buildings bear witness to the skill and craftsmanship of our forebears before the advent of modern industrial agriculture, and add distinctiveness and character to our landscapes. When we look around, we discover that they are disappearing. We hope this book highlights their importance and their potential for re-use into the future.

