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DONEGAL COUNTY ARCHIVES

The Past in the Present

HOMESTEADS

Traditional thatched cottages were once a common sight on the Donegal landscape. These modest homesteads were generally built by tenant farmers and consisted of one or two rooms leading off a central kitchen and living area. Built from locally available materials these homes were practical rather than comfortable and often overcrowded with large extended families living under one roof. Rural cottages had no running water, electricity or proper sewage disposal but many were gradually modernised in the 20th century.

The heart of these homes was the kitchen with its open fire, where food was prepared, milk was churned and wool was spun. It would also have been common to have a bed in the kitchen, possibly hidden behind a curtain or in a loft area above the kitchen.

The home in Donegal was the centre of social activity. It was common for people to go 'raking' or 'ag airneail' to other houses in the locality in the evenings. There, local news would be discussed, stories about fairies and ghosts were told, music was played and singing and dancing occurred.

In the towns and villages of Donegal, streets generally consisted of terraced buildings, which included houses and shops. The shop owner and family often lived in an apartment above the business.

A small number of larger country houses, the homes of the wealthy minority, were also once part of the landscape. The size and style of these houses and their demesnes was largely dependent on the owners' wealth.

The County Archives holds a large number of records relating to homes and housing, including plans and reports. There are also photographs and postcards of houses, cottages, villages and towns throughout the county.



Main Street, Letternenny, c1900; Lifford, c. 1900; Traveller Family, Ballyshannon, c. 1950; Modern Housing, Letternenny, 2008



Quay Street, Moville, c. 1900

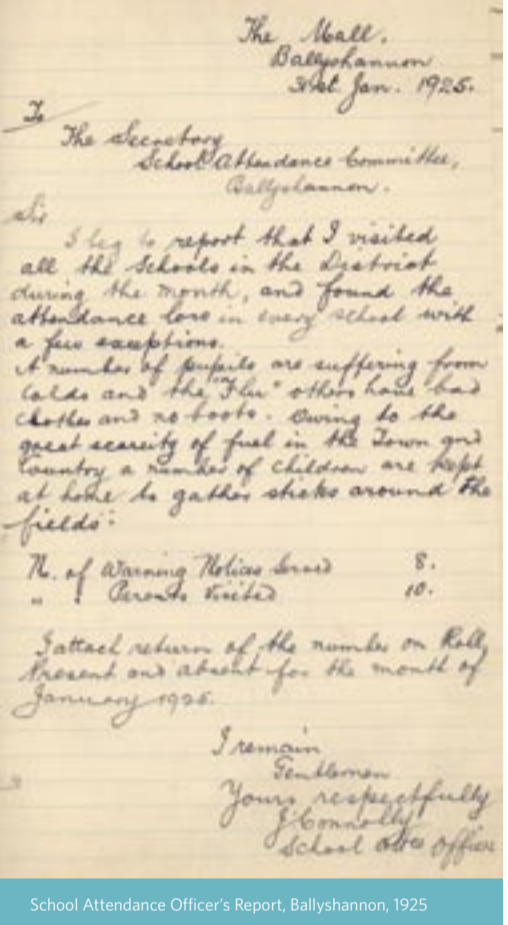


Stranorlar Boys' National School, 1928-31



Register, St. Mary's National School, Ramelton, 1922

Ballybotley and Stranorlar School Boys, Féis Tírconall, 1921.



School Attendance Officer's Report, Ballyshannon, 1925

DONEGAL WAINS

The life of children in the past, just like children today, was divided between education and leisure. However, in the past agricultural and domestic chores took up most of children's time, outside of school hours. The national school system in Ireland was introduced in 1831. Prior to this the only schooling available to most children was through hedge schools, although wealthier families often sent their children to private and/or boarding schools, for example Lifford Endowed Prior School and Ray Charter School.

After 1892, compulsory education was introduced to areas where the local authority took responsibility for its administration, ensuring that children attended school on at least 150 days of the year. Even the children resident in the county's workhouses received an education. Discipline in schools was strict and corporal punishment was permitted until 1982.

Children were an important part of agricultural life, providing labour for their parents, relatives and neighbours, particularly during the busy seasons when sowing and harvesting occurred.



Children in Kincasslagh, 1938



First Holy Communion, Inch, c1955

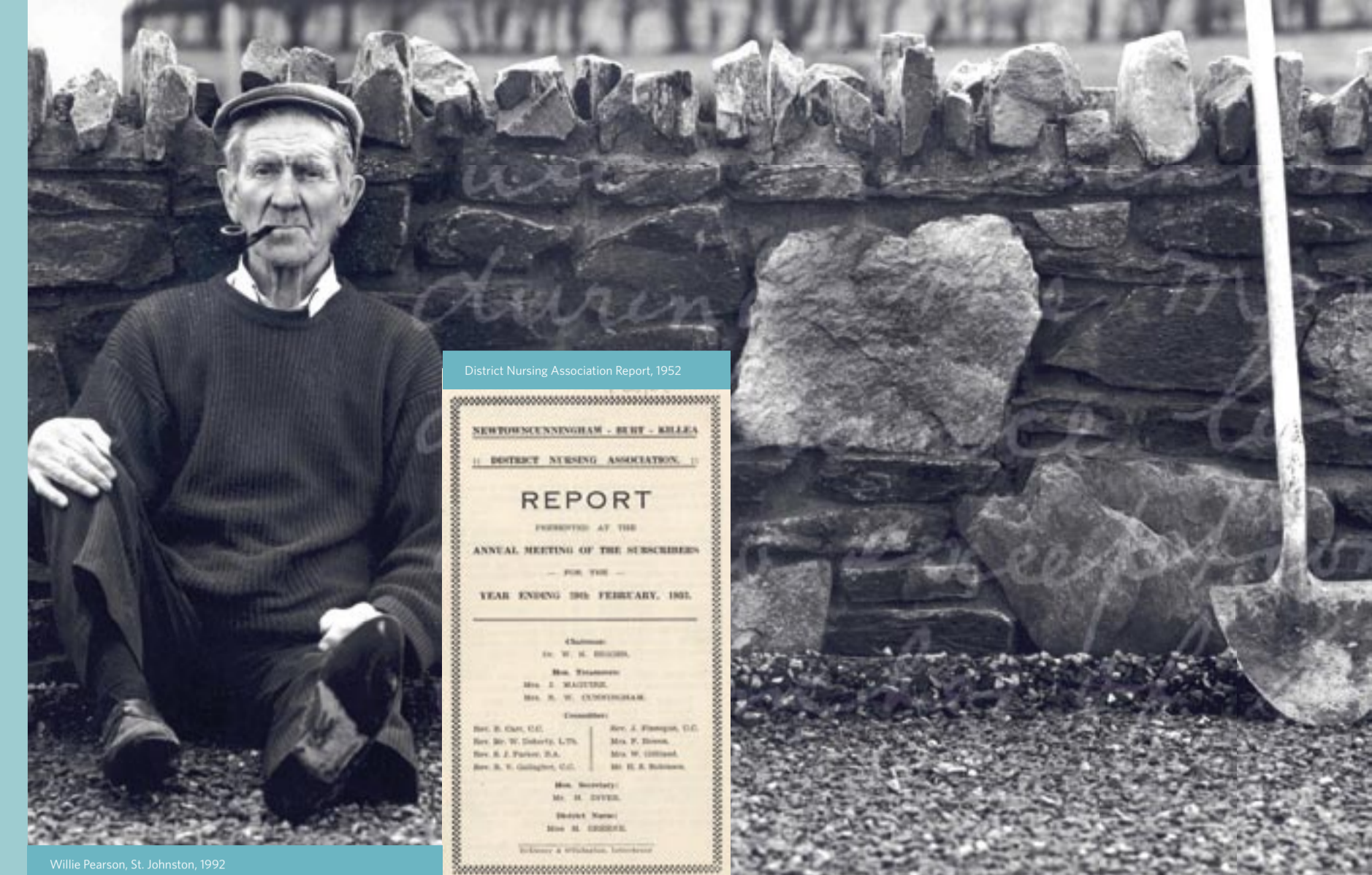


Labourer's Cottage Plan, 1909

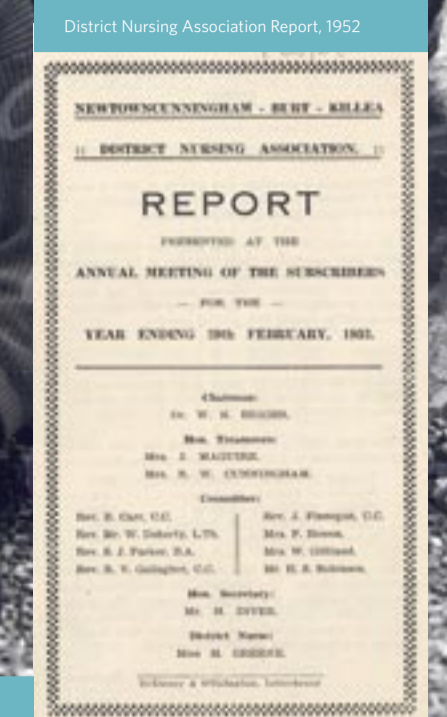


School Play, Ballybotley & Stranorlar, c1930

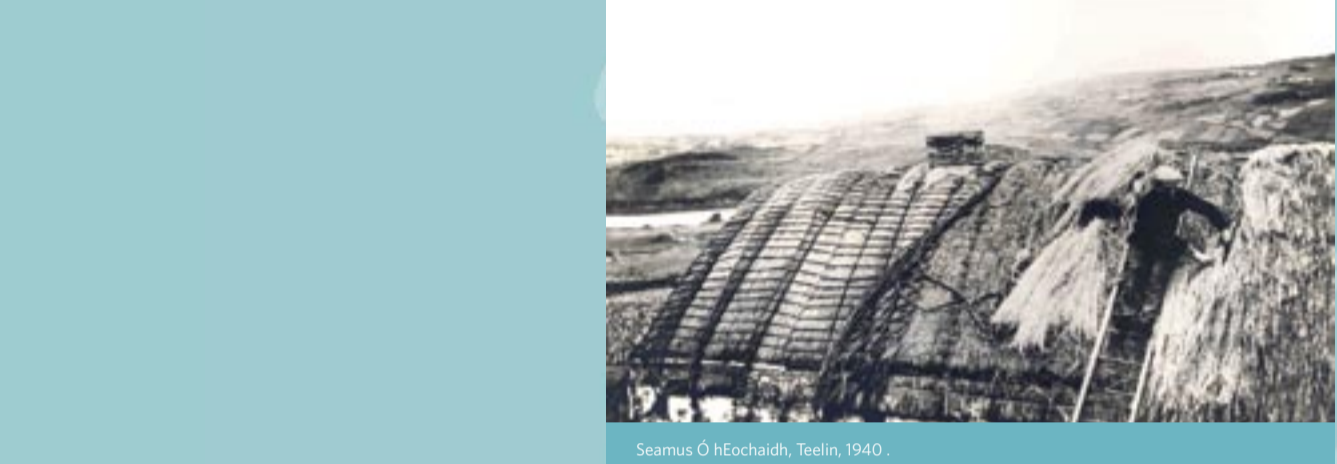
Drawing Day, Donegal County Museum, 2008



Willie Pearson, St. Johnston, 1992



District Nursing Association Report, 1952



Seamus O'Heochuidh, Teelin, 1940

DAYS OF TOIL

Agriculture and fishing has long supported life in Donegal. Throughout the 18th and 19th centuries the rural population of the county worked small farms of mixed use and were also kept busy thatching and maintaining their properties and cutting turf.

Fishermen in the past were predominantly small farmers and farm labourers who supplemented their income with fishing, by hiring boats and sharing equipment. Skilled artisans, coopers and carpenters were also to be found in urban areas along with merchants who supplied the rural areas with manufactured goods.

Women, for their part, ran the households and helped on the farms, making dairy produce and raising chickens. They were also employed in traditional crafts such as knitting and weaving, making for very self-sufficient communities. Work for women outside the home was generally confined to the very traditional roles of teaching, nursing or joining a religious order.

The working life of the people of Donegal is reflected in a variety of material held by the County Archives. Collections include photographs of people at work, records of the County Committee of Agriculture, and also the Fanad and Newtowncunningham District Nursing Associations. Records of public works can also be found in the Grand Jury collection, which records major road and bridge building works in the County since 1753.



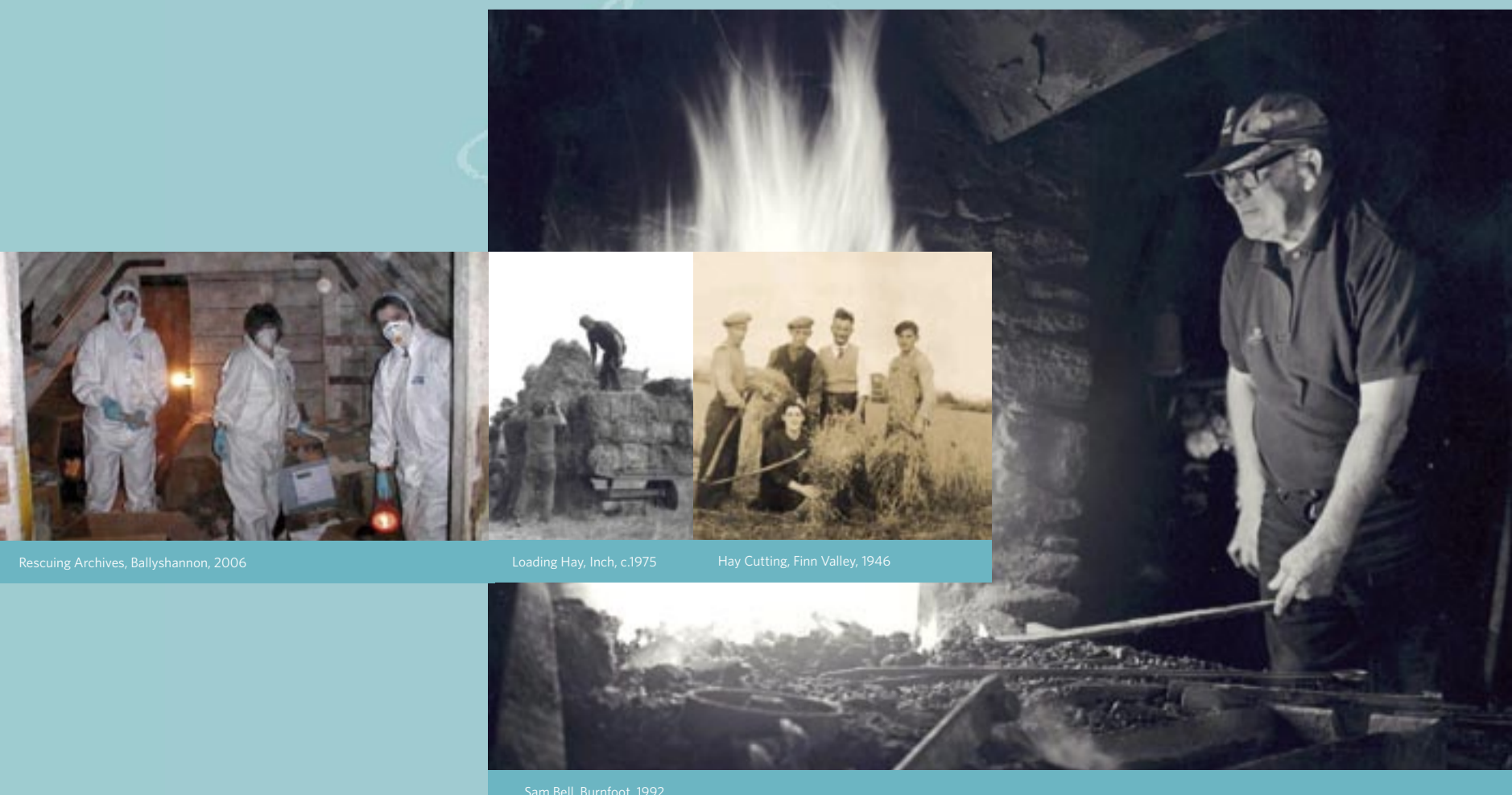
Fishing Boat on the Erne, 1933



Nurses, St. Conal's Hospital, c1940



Stranorlar Railway Bridge, c. 1940



Rescuing Archives, Ballyshannon, 2006

Loading Hay, Inch, c1975

Hay Cutting, Finn Valley, 1946

Sam Bell, Burnfoot, 1992