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IRELANDS LIVING TRADITION

OF BASKETRY

BY

MAEVE NOLAN

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INTRODUCTION:

Basketry is a living tradition and it is an extremely important part of our heritage that should be encouraged to grow. It needs to continue, firstly because it is not a threat to the environment, as even in the construction of the baskets there are no glues or plastics. It is also something that is passed on in a personal way and encourages people to look to their roots and history. Lastly it is a thing of beauty that enhances the environment rather than destroying it.

Up to the early part of the 20th century, basketry played a vital role in the poorer rural communities of Ireland. As with many other ways and traditions in the latter half of the century it was taken over with the introduction of manufactured goods and plastic commodities. The important criteria became speed, and mass production and technology provided this. Baskets however, did not fill this criteria they were hand-made and slow to make and the consumer society did not want to pay for this slow process. They also did not appreciate its heritage and the relevance which basketry has held in the lives of Irish rural communities. I feel there has been a revival in old values and traditions. There is also now a keen interest in the environment and the safe guard of our resources. Basketry fulfills these needs and I hope through this thesis to show this.

In the late 19th century and early 20th century, baskets were produced with grasses and trees that grew locally,

so there was no need to be rich in order to have them. Baskets therefore were part of the poorer community. They replaced the more expensive containers that the gentry had, such as pottery, silver, and bronze. While the rich did in fact have some baskets they were not essential commodities. Nowadays, the wealthy urban societies use baskets. Today however, it is a freedom of choice to have them and use them rather than an economic choice. Apart from the aesthetic role basketry plays in society and the rich heritage it portrays, basketry has now also become part of the environmental issues we are all concerned with. Therefore it is once again playing a vital role in society.

When I began this thesis, it was a slow process, weeding through various books to try and find even some small piece of information. In many books there was much repetition in the information. Gradually, however the information grew. As the knowledge available on modern basketry was slight, as was the personal experience of the older generation who had used baskets in their daily lives, I therefore put advertisements in many local newspapers and it was the genuine caring response that I got to these advertisements that made me realize that it was a special subject that needed to be investigated. Some of the letters I received were written by old people who were not used to writing (see Illus.(1)) but who felt strongly about a tradition that was being renewed.

I hope to trace basketry through its rich and varied history, to show the important part it played in

everyday living, to show its eventual replacement by plastics and ultimately its decline. I then hope to show its slow revival and how I feel it can help with environmental issues which are becoming increasingly important.

In Chapter One I hope to show the earliest evidence of basketry and trace its path down to the late 19th century. I hope also to show the part it played in local religious rituals and ceremonies. I will discuss in Chapter Two willow growing and the wickerwork items made from willows in the late 19th century and early 20th century. Chapter three will show the many and varied items made from straw and rush. These items were mainly made by the women of the community particularly the rush items, whilst the wicker items were men's work. I will discuss present day basketmakers and the items they make for our modern world in Chapter Four. Chapter Five will show the general perception of basketry as a substitute for more expensive materials. Finally Chapter Six will show basketry's part in environmental design. It will show how basketry fulfills the criteria for designers who want to protect the environment rather than destroy it.

1. The first part of the report deals with the general situation of the country and the progress of the work during the year. It is divided into two main sections: the first section deals with the general situation of the country and the progress of the work during the year, and the second section deals with the specific results of the work.

2. The second part of the report deals with the specific results of the work. It is divided into three main sections: the first section deals with the results of the work in the field of agriculture, the second section deals with the results of the work in the field of industry, and the third section deals with the results of the work in the field of commerce.

3. The third part of the report deals with the conclusions and recommendations. It is divided into two main sections: the first section deals with the conclusions and the second section deals with the recommendations.

4. The fourth part of the report deals with the appendix. It contains a list of the names of the persons who have taken part in the work, a list of the names of the persons who have given assistance, and a list of the names of the persons who have given advice.

1924

26 Legilly^{Rd.}, Greystone B.T. 70.1 Og.
 Dungannon, Co. Tyrone, N.I.
 7th Dec 1992

Dear Mr. Hunter,

letter of Nov. ^{making} ^{21st} ^(F.J.) In your
 about ~~basketing~~ ^{inquire} about info:
 know that my father learned it from
 a book about the beginning of the
 century. I learned from him ⁱⁿ the
 twenties. He died in 1972 aged 92. I
~~got from him~~ I am a single man I will
 be 80^m a few months. We lived by
 farming. When times got hard we made
 shopping baskets and rod chairs
 about 1927. We worked at it on wet
 days and in the long winter nights.
 I only do a few repair jobs at present.
 There is no basket makers around here. If
 I ^{got} a few of my old baskets photographed the
 pictures might help you. I still have the
 book my father learned from. I might be
 able to get ~~a~~ parts of it photo

2

copied. you are welcome to write
 to me at any time.

I Remain Dear Mr Hunter,

Yours Sincerely

Geo. Mullar.



This is the shape of basket
 I used to make.



EARLIEST EVIDENCE OF BASKETRY.

CHAPTER 1

Basketry seems to have developed simultaneously throughout the world. Baskets can be made from any fibrous materials so long as they are flexible and not too short. It is a living tradition, a craft that is passed on from generation to generation through personal teaching and whose process has virtually unchanged in that time. It is still though being influenced by each new basketmaker who bring their own ideas and skills to the craft. Towards the end of the last century and the beginning of this century basketry was a thriving concern. It was only at the beginning of the second world war that it began its decline. Through the introduction of plastic commodities and the jobs that this new industry created.

According to Anne O'Dowd in David Shaw Smith's

"Traditional Crafts in Ireland"

"Evidence of basketry dating back to very early times have been found in Ireland. About twenty years ago in Counties Tipperary, Westmeath and Longford basketry items were found dating back to Neolithic times, Alder reeds were used in their making. One piece in County Westmeath was described as a circular purse like container, about 40cm in diameter" (Ireland's Traditional Crafts P.118)

It shows that basketry was always very much involved in the making of containers. This was probably because the materials were easily obtainable and pliable enough to weave into any shape. Basketry and wickerwork has also been found in excavations of Crannoges, which are early

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lake dwellings around Ireland. These date from the late bronze age to Early Christian times. In 1862 Crannoges were found around Lough Rea and excavations were made. George Kinahan writes "These explorations included a finding of horizontal basket flooring"

In our modern world we can compare this flooring with our basketry mats.

He says, "The basket flooring found in these Crannoges was found to be three feet lower than the lake. At the south end of this excavation there was a perpendicular single wickerwork wall or partition." (Kinahan 1863 P 7)

Basketry woven screens are the popular equivalent of today.

"The investigations showed that the basket flooring in these dwellings was made of hazel rods from 1" to 1/2" in diameter. Some were squeezed quite flat by the pressure of the overlaying mass and were so rotten that a specimen of the basketwork couldn't be saved" (Kinahan 1863 P 7)

This is one of the main problems of preserving old basketry items, the fact that they do come from fibrous materials they tend to decay. But through observation of these Crannog builders we are shown how the basketmaker employed his skills in the Construction Industry of earlier dwellings. During the eleventh century basketry was evident in the construction of houses as well. There is evidence of wickerwork being used in fencing as a form of dividing plots, walls of houses, as pathways, floor mats, internal kerbs for marking off bedding areas within houses and even wicker doors. The main materials used were willow hazel and birch. Wickerwork can also be found in the mortar of castle roofs. There have been fragments of willow rods found embedded in the plasterwork of an archway of

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Waterford's 1,000 year old Reginald Tower. (*Irish Forestry Vol. 13*)

Wickerwork was commonly used as support in dwellings. The wickerwork chimney was another common feature. It had a clay plastered wickerwork hood, another variation was a three sided canopy secured to the wall which formed the fourth side of the flue. They were hard to identify as they were white washed. It is reported that

"A stone cross was found sculptured in the fashion of a basketry cross, showing that an earlier cross of basketry may have stood on that spot. There are also reports of a finding of a cross of woven swigs in the church on the Island of Lough Derg which makes it seem possible that early Christians may have set up crosses of wickerwork" (*Basketwork Through The Ages, P.68*)

"Around 800 - 1,200ad wooden beds with straw and rushes were common. There is also evidence dating back as far as the 8th Century of straw door liners. These liners were made as large as the door and were fitted into the door frame when the house was shut for the night or on cold wet days. This type of straw liner was used to render the early wickerwork doors windproof" (*"Ulster Folk Life" Vol. 9 Katherine M. Harris*)

In 1602 the Lord of Bearehaven and his men were cut off by the Shannon near Portumna and escaped across the river by killing their horses and making two hide covered currachs. A currach is made in the form of an oversized basket which is then secured by twine and the tanned hide of a cow or bullock made pliable by soaking is stretched tightly over the basket and tied with twine. A seat is then put in the middle. These type of currachs were used mainly on the Shannon.

Estyn Evan reports that

"The large agricultural villages of the rich wheat growing plains of Europe were unknown in Ireland" (Estyn Evans, *Crafts Exhibition Cat. 1970*)

Ireland was primarily a rural based country.

Milk, cows and pigs were the main source of food and the animals were looked upon as almost members of the family. They even lived within the houses with the people themselves. In many districts the typical settlement unit was a small farm cluster - "the town" that gives the townland its name and this remained until the famine. It was occupied by kinsmen and was associated with the system of sharing out the land in equal proportions. As these settlements grew the holdings were steadily reduced by subdivision. Even before they were finally scattered by the 1847 famine. The occupants of these holdings were often only able to survive by specializing in some supplementary craft depending of local resources. So basketry was a useful craft to have then. They had no shops, Inns or public buildings. Word of mouth was their only means of displaying their craft. Indigenous materials determined the type of craft which was practiced in a given area. For example a town or clochan located in a coastal area with abundant marran grass might go in for making mats, ropes, footstools and baskets. A lot of items that appear as new inventions, have in fact often been discovered long before. Take for example barbed wire, which was supposed to be a modern mass produced product found in America. According to Estyn Evans

"There is evidence of its forefather in the twisted hay rope threaded with thorns".
(*Crafts Exhibition Cat. 1970*)

Perhaps the Irish emigrants during the famine brought this idea to America with them.

Basketry played a vital role in Irish rural life since

earliest times, particularly in the methods used for dwellings and related implements. I hope to expand on this further in the following chapters in greater depth. Through my research I have discovered that we are not very far removed from our perception of African Countries. Due to Ireland's general poverty and lack of materials many ingenious uses of straw and grasses developed. Ireland had Pagan rituals that compare to African Tribal dances today. One example the "May Baby" procession was part of the general May Day festivities, and centered on a straw figure in the shape of a woman covered with flowers and ribbons. This figure was attached to a short pole and carried by a female attendant to a chosen spot where a man and a woman also dressed in elaborate costumes performed an explicitly sexual dance around the figure. It was thought lucky for a barren woman to attend the procession and many would travel miles to see it.

(Calender of Irish Folk Customs 1981)

There was also the old custom of the appearance of "Straw Boys" at country weddings. They arrive at the party about dusk, masked and wearing their traditional costumes, high conical caps made of straw (illus. 2) capes of straw around their shoulders and straw tied up their legs. They were all young unmarried men and usually announced their approach by blasts on a cow horn. They would dance in complete silence with each guest. It was considered bad luck to speak. They accepted no refreshment and in about half an hour they departed as silently as they had come not realising that



ILLUSTRATION 2.

SAMPLE OF STRAW BOYS WEDDING
MASK. CO. MAYO

they had performed an ancient fertility rite.

(*"Ireland of the Welcomes"* May/June 1957).

Many ritual dances of this type are still carried out in part of Africa today.

In the mid 19th Century basketry fulfilled the functional and ceremonial requirements of daily life in Ireland. Its uses are extensive as ritual symbols and carriers of cultural meanings, but baskets were also practical objects and were used for the storage of liquid or dry goods, agricultural activities and transportation of food and fuel. Because of this rich heritage basketry holds a place in Ireland's traditional crafts which has not been taken very seriously. I hope basketry continues, because of this rich heritage and its help in the protection of the environment which is becoming increasingly important.

CHAPTER 2

SALLY GARDENS AND ITS USES IN RURAL IRELAND

The word willow is one of the oldest in the English language and the species includes many of the trees in the genus salix. In fact there are over 2,500 types of willow available. In Ireland the term "Sally" is used. In Irish that is "Saileach" while osier is "slat saile". Sally gardens were once a very common feature in Irish rural society, (illus. 3) being referred to in Irish ballads. Sallies grow very easily and very quickly. Although once abundant in Ireland with a decrease in use the sallies were no longer planted. Now however, with a revival of interest in basketry and related items, basketmakers are beginning to replace them. They were planted in Springtime and then weeded and thinned out. Cuttings were planted by pushing 25 - 30cm into the deeply ploughed soil. Where sally rods were grown in banks and hedgerows the cuttings were often grouped in threes. One was grown central and two at a 45 degree angle at either side. This helped the growth of the thick woody clump which was a common trait of sally growing in Ireland. As it grows easily it just needs careful weeding during the first two seasons and then annual cuttings of the more tender shoots to encourage fresh growth.

(Anne O'Dowd, "Ireland's Traditional Crafts")

Harvesting occurs annually and in Ireland the best cutting time is between November and February. If left any later the sap will have risen in the rods making them less easy to work with. When harvested, the rods



ILLUSTRATION 3.

TYPICAL SALLYGARDEN CO. MAYO

are tied in bundles and left in a dry and safe place for a certain length of time. A good place is a loft or outhouse where they are protected from both the animals and the elements, allowing the rods to dry more evenly.

Depending on what item is to be made the rods are either left as they are or peeled. Some growers if they were hard up for money harvested in the green season which occurs in September. Baskets made from these green unseasoned rods look attractive but are not very durable and eventually rot and decay.

Ann O'Dowd tells of -

"A basketmaker in Co. Kilkenny in the 1940's who believed the best kind of rods were cut during the winter month and stored until springtime. These were then taken and left standing upright in stream for several weeks when they were removed and peeled with an iron stripper or brake"

She also reports that in Rathsnadigan also in Co. Kilkenny around the same time the rods were usually cut with a sap still in them. They were then peeled with a brake of oak and left in the sun to dry for a day or so. They had to be careful to protect the rods from rainfall at these times or else they would become useless. Rods seasoned in this way were reported to last for years provided they were stored in a dry place. Some workers would never cut rods for white work in the non sap period, i.e. from September to March as it was very hard to prepare them and they would have to be boiled for some time before they could be peeled. The natural dye or tannin in the bark of the rod was also used by basketmakers and this gave a soft buff colour to the finished product. To achieve this the rods were cut in

the winter season, boiled for about five hours to impart the tannin and then peeled. For finer and more intricate work the rods were split into three or more sections. Then the inner pith of each split portion was removed thereby making the wood more pliable. But the baskets are not as durable when this is done.

The workers hands were his most important tools and even in these days of high technology the craft of basketry remains the same. Modern basketmakers still use virtually the same tools (illus. 4). I love the basketry craft because it is done mainly with your hands and a minimum of tools. The fibres are natural and sometimes even dictate the form the basket takes. The main tools were a bill hook to cut the rods, a pen knife to trim them, a bodkin which is similar to a needle or thick nail, this would be used for putting on nails. A fender was used for splitting the rods, and a draw knife for taking the inner pith from each portion. A break was used for stripping the bark or green willows. A picking knife was used to pierce a sally rod for bending. a beating iron was used for clamping the weave and the crimper for used for bending.

In the late 19th century nearly every man could make his own baskets and almost every dwelling house had a sally garden in addition to the kitchen garden. This smaller plot was set aside for the cultivation of osiers of different kinds. The sally garden was well tended. Even men who could not make baskets had their own plots so they could supply the material to the basketmakers when they needed his services.



ILLUSTRATION 4.

PRESENT DAY BASKET MAKING TOOLS

FROM LEFT TO RIGHT:
SKEINER, BODKINS, HAND IRON,
GREASE BONE, BODKIN, PLIERS,
WEIGHT, CLEAVE, LEATHER KNIVES.
PICKING KNIFE.

W15021
SEV



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SEV

Itinerant basketmakers went around the country selling their wares. This must have been in itself great excitement for the villagers. The basketmakers probably brought news and gossip as well as their skills. Good basketmakers were proud of their craft and they did not like people seeing them start or finish a basket as it was personal to them.

Sometimes before weaving the baskets, the rods were boiled and then peeled. The peeling came off in one piece just like a stocking. Apparently very strong ropes were made of these peelings, giving a good example of the economy of materials.

Wickerwork is simply woven osier or stripped willow. As with other Celtic peoples the Irish have made good use of this inexpensive material which has always been freely available. In Ireland, there were as many if not more different types of basket or wickerwork containers as varieties of materials which went into their making.

The staple diet of the Irish people in the 19th Century was the potato, and basketry played a very important part of this tradition, not only from a functional point of view but from a social one.

In Co. Wicklow potato baskets had hazel rims, ribs of split oak and a weft of black sally. In Co. Longford boat shaped potato baskets were made with sally rods and a rim of bucky briar or wild rose. Usually the worker began with the base and moved upward toward the rim, however a feature of most of the larger Irish baskets

was that the rim was constructed first and the base last.

The potato basket was used in Co. Longford up until about fifty years ago. My mother who hails from Roscommon remembers going to visit her aunt on a farm in Co. Longford and the potatoes being served in it.

Anne O'Dowd verifies this by her description -

"The potatoes were boiled in a pot and when they were ready they were brought outside with the basket to the drain. The basket was put on the flagstone by the drain leading from the kitchen door and the pot of potatoes was strained into the basket. The empty pot was taken inside and placed in the centre of the floor and the basket placed on top and then the family sat around on stools. It was a great family occasion when everyone got to hear news. A plate with a portion of butter was put in the middle of the basket. Each person was given a drink of buttermilk. Any leftover potatoes were kept to make boxty or potato cakes."

(Anne O'Dowd *"Ireland's Traditional Crafts p. 123)*.

"When I was attending a funeral in this part of the country I was told young girls didn't cut their nails on their thumbs so that they could peel the potatoes with them, (this story is also confirmed in the book *"Gold Under the Furze"*). As the nails peeled the potatoes nice and thinly there were no unnecessary vitamins or nutrients lost. The skins and the remaining potatoes were put back in the pot and pounded with meal for the hens. This basket was also known as a "basceid geal" in parts of Donegal and as a "ciseag" in Co. Galway.

The most common basket used in Irish household was "the skib" another version of the potato basket. It was made from peeled, unpeeled or red and white dyed rods. (Dyed from tannin) The word skib was applied indiscriminately to the boat shaped basket and to the cylindrical skib in Roscommon and East Galway. The cylindrical skib was a round flat bottomed basket with a rim about three inches deep so that it looked like a sand riddle, which is a large sieve. This skib varied in diameter from about twenty inches to about twenty four or thirty inches.

(Anne O'Dowd, *Ireland's Traditional Crafts P 220)*

The construction and weave of the potato basket was very different (illus. 5) to the skib. Before starting a stout ring or hoop about one inch thick was needed long

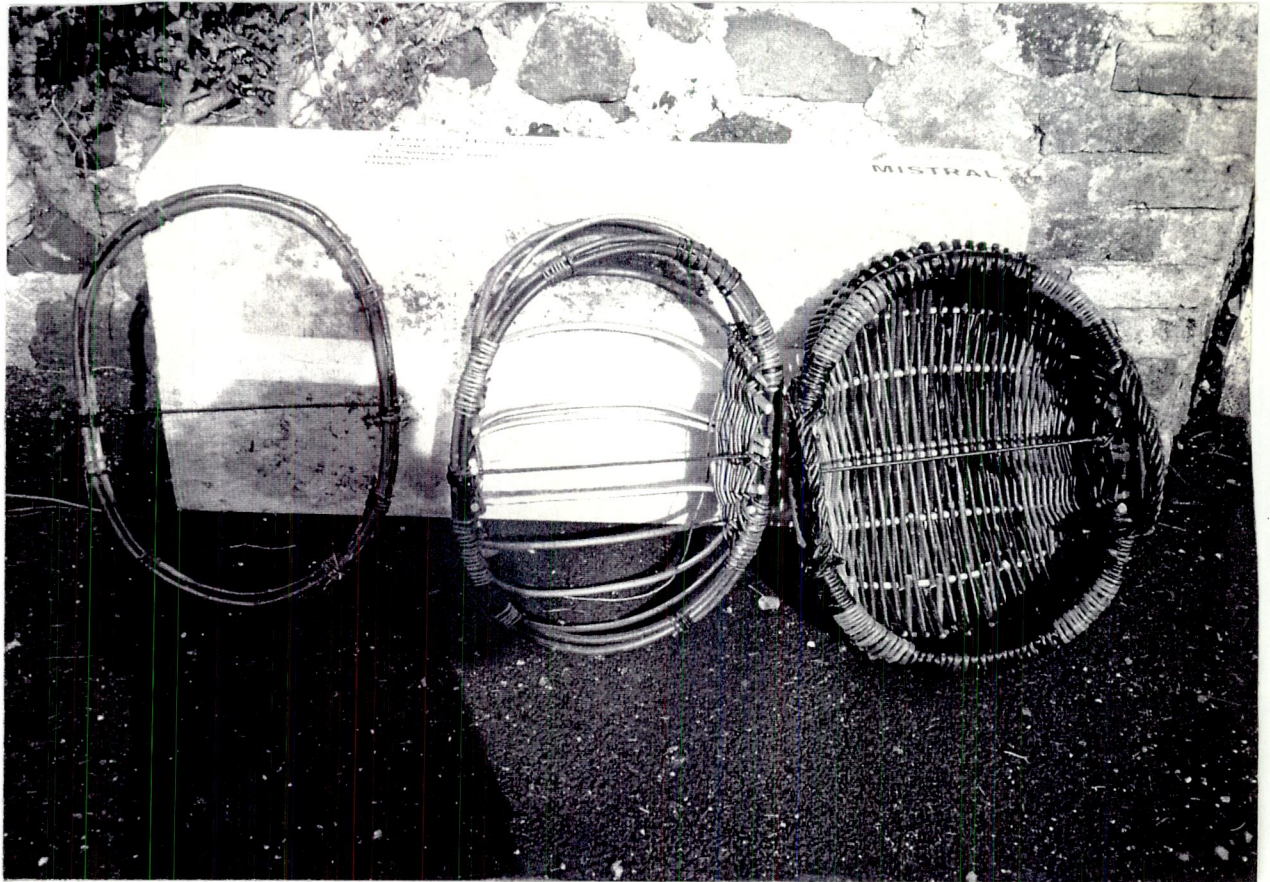


ILLUSTRATION 5.

POTATO BASKET, RIM, CAGE AND
FINISHED ITEM.

Three stages of making a
traditional potato basket,
demonstrated by DERMOT MULHOLLAND.



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enough to be bent into a circle or oval about twenty eight inches long. Traditionally the hoop was a "bucky briar" which is a thick stem of wild rose. Eventually this was replaced by a hazel rod or sometimes even the rim of a bicycle wheel was used which had the spokes taken out.

In parts of Munster and Wexford the potato basket looked like a shield as it was not very deep and it was called a "sciath" or "sciathog". It was u-shaped in plan being deepest in the centre and sloping upwards to both ends. The "sciathog" was also used for putting potatoes in when the crop was harvested and it was a container for seed potatoes at the time of planting.

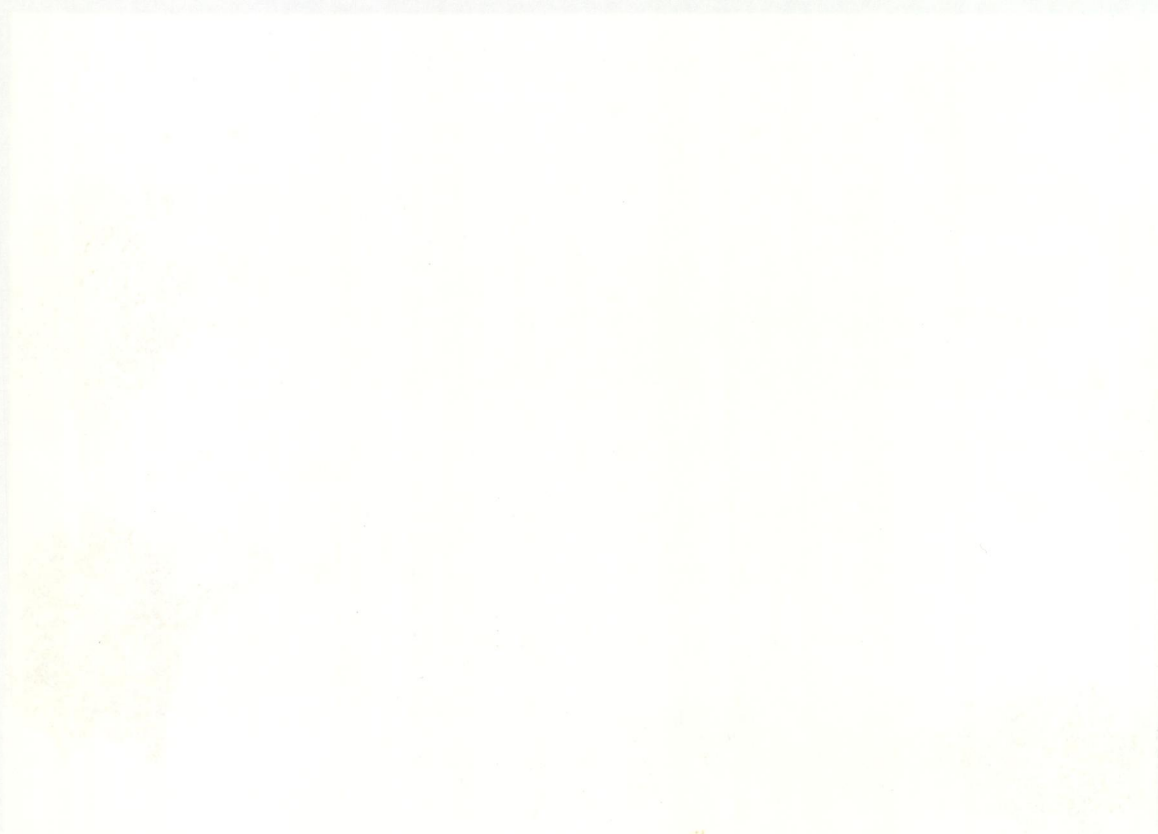
The skibs are also used for keeping clothes in after washing and if it was fitted with handles it was used for bringing washing to the line. Another version of the skib was used by egg merchants for putting eggs into a crate for export. Women in North Longford and Leitrim kept a special one in the house for collecting eggs and it was called a "flake". A similar basket in Co. Kerry was called a "birdeog". It was oval and measured about 60 x 40cm. It was about 25cm deep. It was used for carrying in turf, fetching potatoes, straining them etc. The basket was a vital household piece of equipment performing a variety of tasks and functions. Another basket was "the lusset" from the Irish "losoid", this was a rectangular basket with long sides made from wood. There was also the wheeling basket which was used with a turf barrow when spreading turf. (Illus. 7)



ILLUSTRATION 7.

TURF BARROW, BOHERBREE CO. KILDARE

The basket is placed on the barrow



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Cradles too were often made from wicker work (illus. 6) they are still made today and called Moses baskets, because of Moses found in the bull rushes. This applies to the wicker and straw cradles. The wicker cradles were sometimes suspended from the ceiling, and were also easier to carry from place to place.

Fishermen have traditionally made their own baskets and lines, but it is the inland lake and river communities of Fishermen who became commercial basketmakers, because of their fishing which was seasonal. In the Mourne countryside crab pots were made of hazel rods and the line baskets and creels were made of sally and laurels. Fishermen used wicker fish traps and baskets for holding spillet lines. The lobster pots had the greatest variety in shape, size material and construction. They were made from sally rods sometimes with galvanism wire, hoops of wood and green netting and heather. These lobster pots called heather lobster pots were used primarily in North West Mayo.

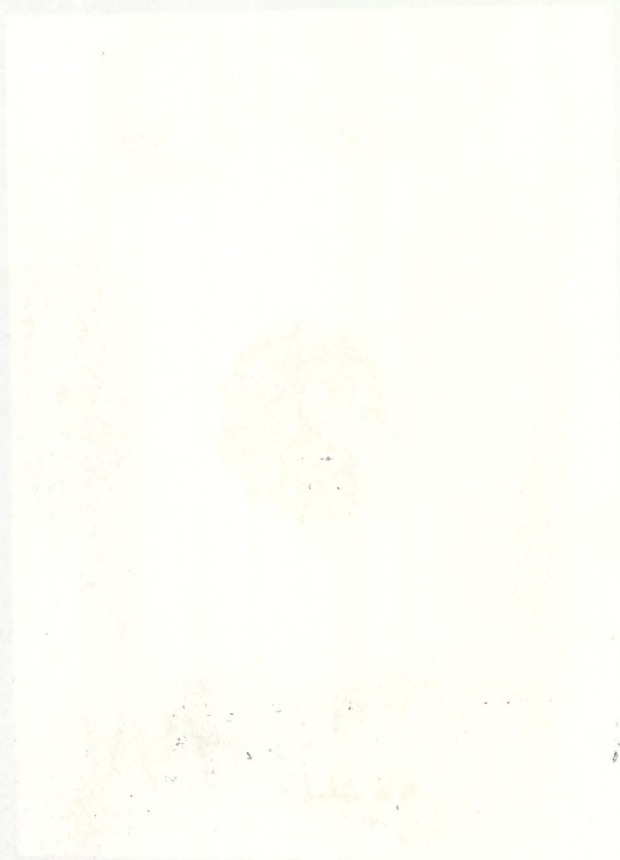
(Anne O'Dowd, "Ireland's Traditional Crafts".)

Creels and carrying baskets were made of hazel or black sally and were used for farm transport before wheeled carts came along. There was a very large basket called a "kish" which was set ^{on} wheels slide cars to serve as bodies for loads like turf, seaweed and manure. (Illus. 7a). Creels are made by putting the standard rods upright in the ground. The ground is used as a base to keep the rods firm, when the rods are woven, the warp



ILLUSTRATION 6.

WICKER CRADLE, INISHERE,
CO. GALWAY



ALICE

WILLIAM BRADLEY LYNCH
CO. 100

WILLIAM BRADLEY LYNCH

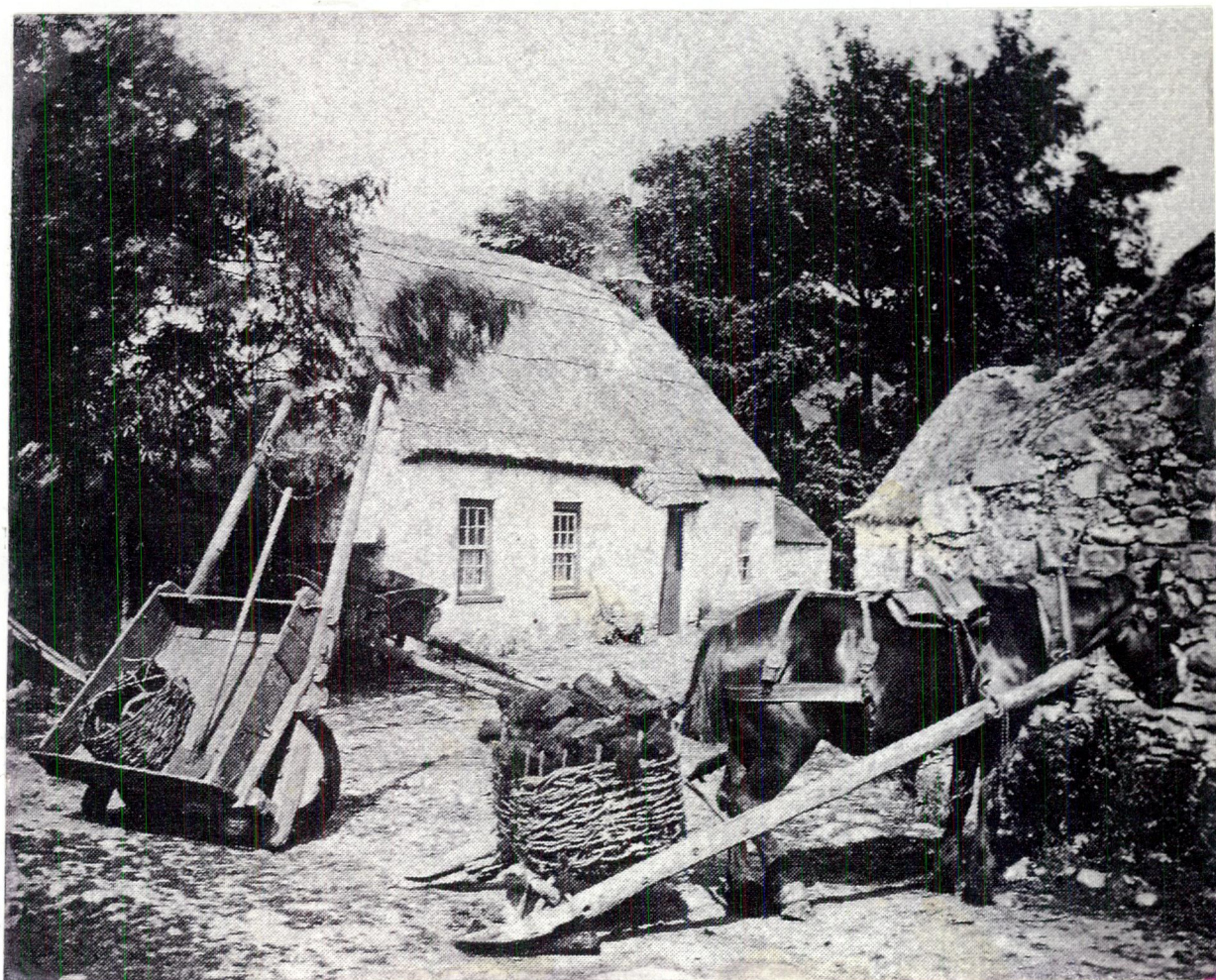


ILLUSTRATION 7a.

WHEELLESS SLIDE CAR, CO. ANTRIM

A wheeless slide car is two parallel poles serving as both shafts and runners fastened together by cross pieces which form a carrying platform. The basket is then put on. They were used for transporting turf, seaweed, etc.



rods are pulled out of the ground and bent over and woven to form the bottom of the basket. For lightness and for ease of lifting one or more rows of open "windows" are left in the warp in the side of the creel. Those used for seaweed were sometimes quite open in construction and like the manure baskets were fitted with hinged bottoms for unloading. It was also called a "donkey cleeves". This donkey cleeve was usually used with a pair of straw plaited mats (illus. 8) which were put on the donkey's back and a wooden straddle provided with wooden pegs on which the creels were hung. In Mayo, Sligo, Leitrim and Cavan a creel was called a "pardog" (illus. 9). In Co. Monaghan it was called a "bardock". These were creels with collapsible bottoms, the base of each pardog being made separately and hinged to one side of the pardog by two rod hinges. The base was held shut by a stick fixed at one side and held in a loop at the other. It meant that the basket could be emptied without taking it from the donkey's back.

Lobster pots, stock pots, fruit and fish hampers are made on a perforated wooden frame which is a substitute for using the ground. The wooden base has holes in it so the warp can be kept steady. Among other constructions from basket making techniques Estyn Evans describes a yarn holder for holding large hanks of yarn in Antrim is made from basket weave. There is also a calf basket which prevents the calf from taking the cow's milk, this is also known as a "puicin" in West Clare and was sold at fairs. This was confirmed by a phone call from a Mr. Eamon Guinan who remembers them

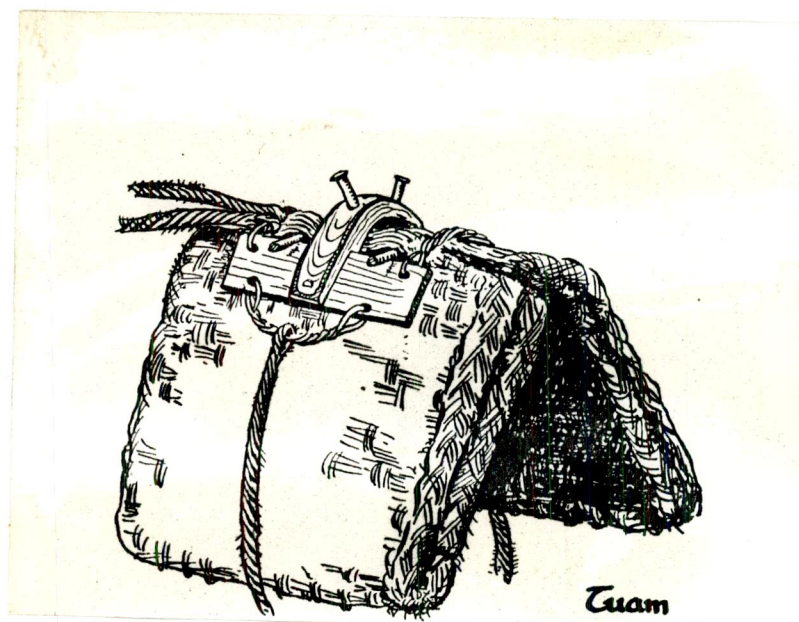


ILLUSTRATION 8.

STRAW PADS AND STRADDLES FOR
CREELS.

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10:10

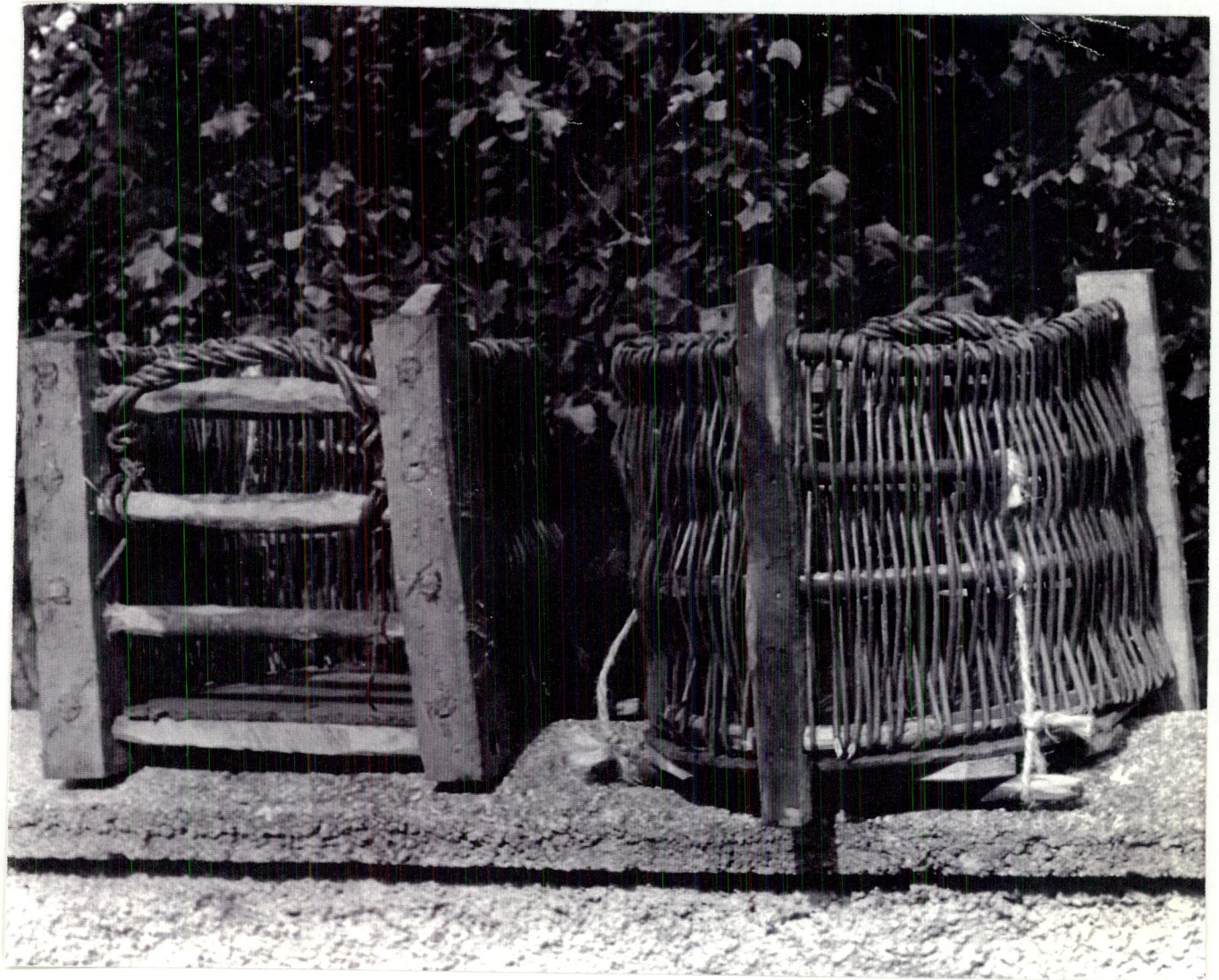


ILLUSTRATION 9.

A PAIR OF PARDOGS.
COURTESY OF NATIONAL MUSEUM OF
IRELAND

120911AM

120911AM

LIBRARY OF THE
U.S. AIR FORCE
OFFICE OF THE
JUDGE ADVOCATE GENERAL
WASHINGTON, D.C.

personally. Muzzles were made for all kinds of other animals too and wicker calf muzzles can still be bought today.

Galway fisherwomen carried flat woven baskets on their heads to carry fish. In Limerick too, oval trays or floats were used for hawking shell fish or fruit at street markets, today's street sellers use barrows or prams.

Estyn Evans also reports that:

"shallow baskets were used for wool dying"
(*Irish Heritage P. 126*)

Baskets were used as tables, the potatoes were served in them and the people sat around. If the baskets were turned upside down they were used as seats. This shows just how strong the constructions were.

In Co. Armagh tall baskets were used for collecting apples in the orchards, these tapered down to a barrow base.

In the Aran Islands off the West Coast of Galway baskets had a shape adapted to the conditions on the Islands. All the baskets were shaped into a narrow mouth, as the contents might have easily spilled owing to the number of loose stone walls which had to be crossed on the way to the fields. So the baskets in general were dictated by conditions and materials available.

In Cape Clear off the West Coast of Cork a "rishawn" was

made of osiers and that was the only table they had for potatoes. "Sheehogues" were used for picking of potatoes from the ridges at harvest time. "Kleevawns" and "Sharagawns" a more common form of baskets made from the osiers were used for general purposes. Carrying potatoes, washing, seeds etc., (*Life Traditions of Rural Ireland p 30.*)

The making of fancy basketwork from sally rods also forms part of the traditional craft of Ireland and has been associated with two areas in particular, In the North on the shores of Lough Neagh and in the South in the Suir Valley.

The making of baskets was largely carried on a home basis or by visiting journey men and this practice continued up until the first world when Big James Mulholland took basket making out of the home and into industry on Lough Neagh's banks. (illus. 10)

However the basket making craft of today has gone back to the homes and most of today's basketmakers have their workshops at home. Patrick Smyth writes that just before world war 1, Big James hired men to handcraft baskets in a factory. He provided constant insurable employment for over thirty men for thirty years or more. His parents had been in the trade of making potato baskets. They made them at home and marketed them themselves. They went to market up to twelve miles away from their home. They also made yeast hampers which they sold to Judge, a Belfast Merchant. James started



ILLUSTRATION 10.

BASKET WEAVING ON THE SHORES OF
LOUGH NEAGH



ILLUSTRATION 10. BASKET KEYING ON THE SHORE OF
LOUGH KEADH

making yeast hampers for Avoniel Distillery. They were also called "skips". It was a big order and that is why he started to employ many men. During the first world war demand for yeast hampers was good and the business was profitable. Unfortunately at the outbreak of the second world war, wire baskets were replacing the sally rod potato basket and the workers were looking to higher paid employment. But this did not deter Big James. He was astute and a fighter and he looked to other ways for employing basketry techniques. He extended his mixed farming activities and became involved in the making of fancy wicker ware like chairs and cradles etc., He also experimented with textile dyes, these however did not work but he moved on to wood dyes which he perfected and created many colours. Big James had the foresight to experiment with traditional methods in a modern world. At present his grandson David Moore is continuing the craft and I will speak of him in more detail ⁱⁿ Chapter Four.

In Carrick On Suir Joe and Michael Shanahan continued the business with their grandfather had started over one hundred years ago,

"John Shanahan of Kilmacthomas Co. Waterford was apprenticed to a basketmaker in Carrick on Suir in 1888. He started making potato baskets but then became supplier to British Rail of hampers for transporting fowl. He died in 1916. The business was continued by his son Edward, Joe and Michael's father. In 1922 the contract with British Rail expired. The Shanahans then began making cane furniture and yeast baskets. The yeast baskets were used to transport yeast from the Watercourse Distillery in Cork to the Bakeries around the country.

(Anne O'Dowd - "Ireland Traditional Crafts" P 127)

Although times were bad in the 1920's a scarcity of

containers during the second world war increased demands for basketmakers and the Shanahans employed up to twenty men at a time. Then as times changed they made modern baskets for today's world. Joe Shanahan was the last in the line to make baskets. But unfortunately he died last year. However he lives on through all the people to whom he had the patience to pass on his skills.

I hope this shows that wickerwork was a very important part of Irish society. In the beginning wickerwork was woven mostly by men. The women were involved in the rush and straw weaving. Today however it is woven equally by men and women "however, men are better able to mould the strong willows" according to Barbara Kelly.

Wickerwork has become a modern commodity that fits in well with our awareness of the earth and its beauty. The modern items made vary from turf baskets to linen baskets and cradles. In Chapter Four I will discuss this at greater length. But in reality the baskets are being used for the same sort of convenience they always have with more up to date names.

CHAPTER 3

RUSH AND STRAW WORK

"Rush Weaving is the father of all Crafts" according to Murial Gahan, it is probably, one of the first plants to have been used in basketry. The rush basketmakers of Ireland have no shortage of materials, there are plenty of rivers and lakes suitable for growing rushes otherwise known as "Scirpus Lacustris". It is tall slender and spiral like, and when dried it is a soft sedgy colour. The best rushes grow in running water. They are harvested in July with a scythe and floated to Shore. The rushes are then sorted into bundles of similar widths and heights. The rushes vary between five and seven feet high. Before they are used they are cured in an airy loft for six to eight weeks. Every now and then they are loosened and turned. Before weaving the rushes are washed rolled in a damp cloth and left to mellow. They are normally wetted overnight. Some basketmakers prefer to leave them out in the rain for about an hour. But whatever the method care has to be taken so that they don't shrink.

Anne O'Dowd describes that

"In the Erris district of Co. Mayo there was a container for laying eggs called a "tiachog" made from rush plaits. The plaits may have been of any width providing it was made using an odd number of rushes. One form of "tiachog" was made from rush strips about 20cm wide and sufficient in length to form both back and front of the container. The strips were then sewn together along the edges to form a continuous piece which was folded on itself in the form of a sack, an open mouthed bag was the end product and the two edges were sewn. Then usually a hem was turned down and a rush rope being

put in it to become a draw string to close the bag. Another form of tiacchog was made by taking a very long strip of this plait and then coiling it in itself in lipe work fashion as was done with straw baskets. Lipe work was plaited straw and straw bound into rolls with brambles. the tiachog was always a container for household goods. It could be a clothes basket which hung on the wall, it could be lined with cloth for holding meal or salt. It could be a hens nest or an egg basket. (illus. 11) It could also be made of straw". (Anne O'Dowd *"Ireland's Traditional Crafts"*)

Basketry was utilised in many other form and among those described by Estyn Evans are temporary wind breaks erected by Turf Cutters in Co. Fermanagh which were made of birch rods bent over and neatly thatched with branches and rushes. (illus. 12)

There were butterfly cages made by bending long rushes held upright between the fingers over others placed transversely. One side of the cage may be left open and a dock leaf inserted as a door. The ends of the rushes are bound together to make a handle . This pastoral playing can be found in many parts of the world.

This toy and many other rush toys were made in the evening by children in Booley's. Booley's were the huts that poor people erected in the mountains in summer where they went to graze cattle. Living in Booley's they also made rush rattles for babies. (Illus. 13)

Bundles of dried rushes were tied to make swimming aids along the Shannon. These were in the shape of the modern swimming ring.

There were rush candles, long thin rushes dipped in tallow and placed in a special iron rush stand. These

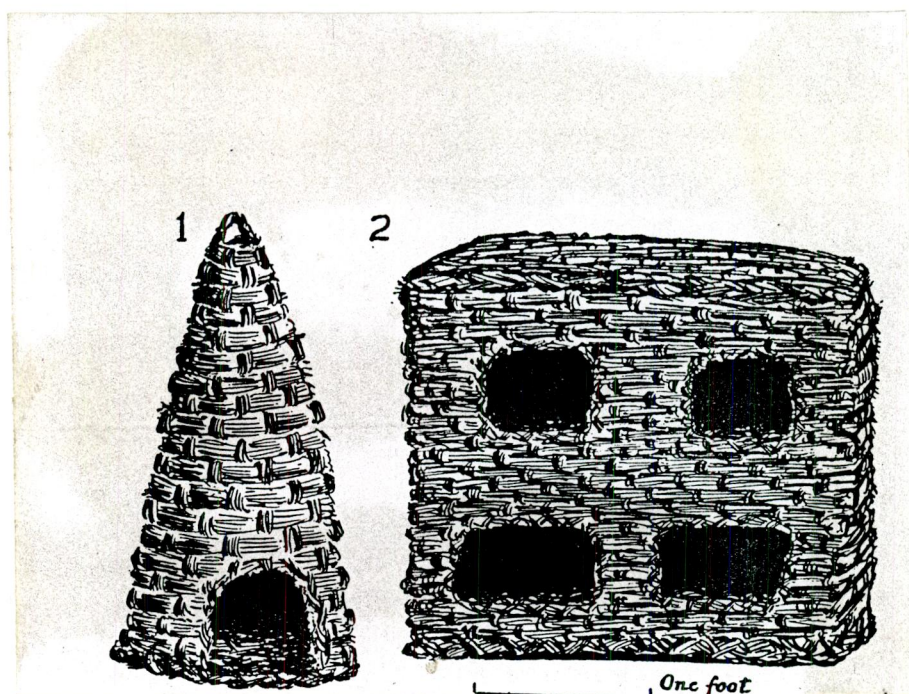


ILLUSTRATION 11.

STRAW HEN'S NEST

(1) Co. Clare

(2) Co. Leitrim



WATFORD
12071AM
ATLANTA
INVESTIGATION
UNIT
FBI

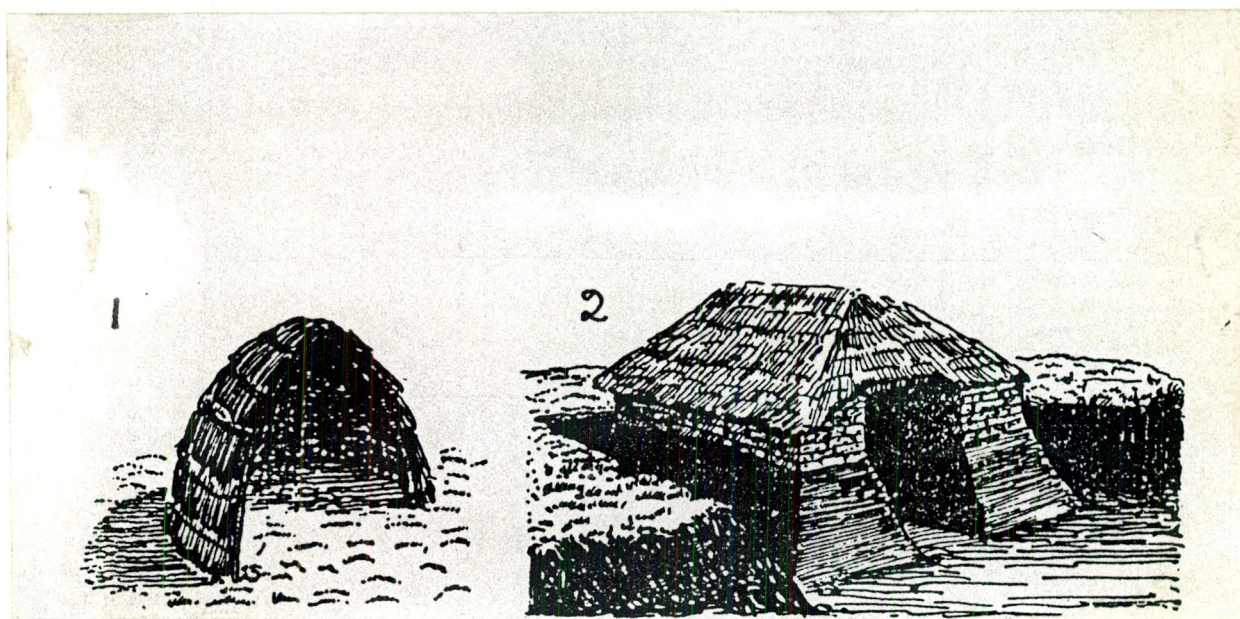


ILLUSTRATION 12.

BOG SHELTERS, CO. FERMANAGH

- (1) For Turf Cutters
- (2) Partly Dug Out of the Bog for Cattle



INVESTIGATION OF THE
RECORDS OF THE
FEDERAL BUREAU OF INVESTIGATION
FOR THE YEAR 1964

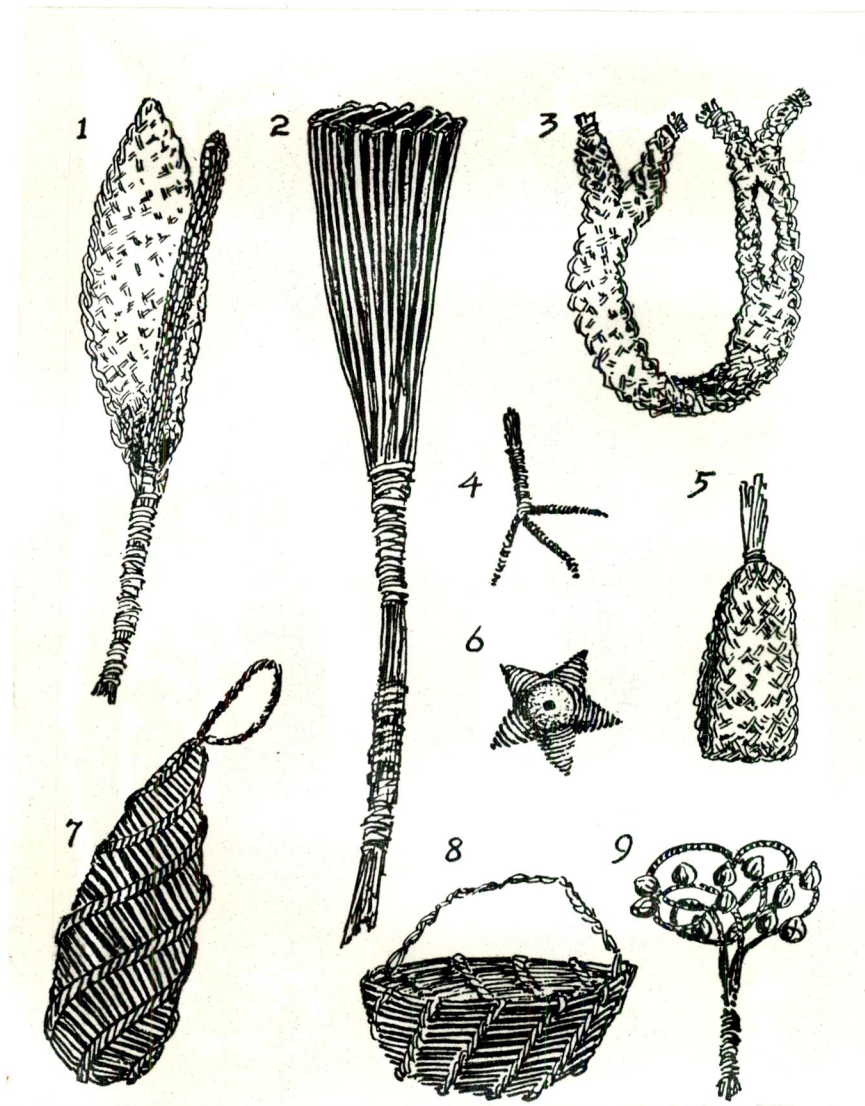


ILLUSTRATION 13.

RUSH, GRASS AND STRAW WORK

- (1) Cuckoo Pint-Rushes Co. Armagh
- (2) Butterfly Cage-Rushes Co. Down
- (3) Rush Bracelets in Nine Strand Plait. Co. Armagh
- (4) Hen's Clan-Grass, Co. Mayo
- (5) Brigid's Rag-Oat Straw, Tory Island
- (6) Harvest Star, Flax, Co. Antrim
- (7) Rush Rattle, Co. Mayo
- (8) Blackberry Basket-Rushes, Co. Down
- (9) Harvest Knot-Flax, Co. Armagh

gave house light in the 17th and 18th Century. Rushes being so plentiful you can see they were put to many varied uses.

In the early 1960's the Strokestown Guild of the Irish Country Womens Association got together making rush baskerty items and gradually their enterprise grew and they formed a Co-Op. In 1968 they had their official opening of the Slieve Bawn Co-Operative Handcraft Market in Strokestown, Co. Roscommon. They continually strived to improve their skills by attending courses and helping others learn. So it was that a firm educational foundation in craft work and co-operation was laid. But there was also a social aspect when they got together to weave and also when they had picnics down by the Shannon at rush harvesting time.

They wove baskets of every shape and size, desk trays, flower baskets and containers, bases for table lamps, potted plant holders, bread baskets, table mats, coffee tables and stools. (illus. 14/15) They merged the old tradition of basketry with the new more modern wants. Over one thousand people were involved in the production of Slieve Bawn Crafts, all over Ireland. they placed strong emphasis on traditional rural crafts and on the use of natural materials. Strong quality controls were applied and the handcrafts could be bought at most quality shops throughout Ireland. Unfortunately it no longer trades.

Straw is another common material used for basketry making. It can be worked by coiling, plaiting, or straw

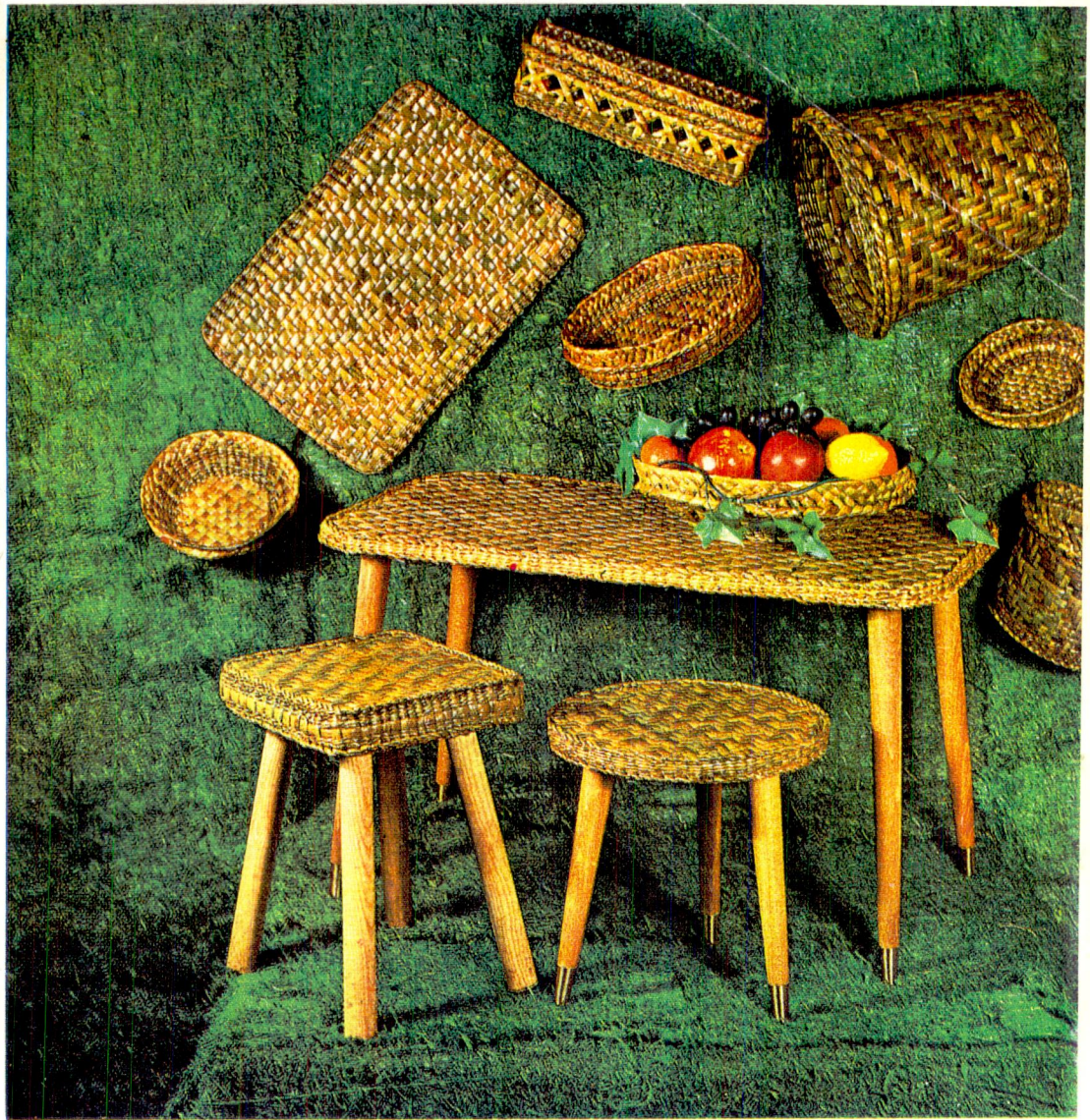


ILLUSTRATION 14.

SAMPLE RUSHWORK FORM THE SLIEVE
BAWN CO-OP. STOOLS, TABLES, FRUIT
BASKETS, MATS, WASTE PAPER
BASKETS, FLOWER BASKET



TABLETS, PINK, ROUND, MARKED
TABLETS, PINK, OVAL, MARKED
TABLETS, PINK, OVAL, MARKED
TABLETS, PINK, OVAL, MARKED

TABLETS, PINK, OVAL, MARKED



ILLUSTRATION 15.

SLIEVE BAWN CO-OP SHOP

ZETA
MATTPOST



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ZETA
MATTPOST

marquetry. Straw does not give quite the same solid structure as willow, but then it is more flexible and can be put to a lot more uses. Straw is the collective word for the stalks of corn, barley oats and rye. In Ireland it is referred to as "Sugan". Originally all chairs had seats of this. In small farm houses coiled straw chairs were once a very usual sight. The seat was made of wood covered with straw ropes. Some of the old straw chairs and stools had their seats stuffed with densely packed straw, this avoided the need to use valuable timber, but made the whole thing surprisingly heavy. Others had a framework of rough timber around which the straw coils could be wound. (Illus. 16.)

Firstly straw is made into a rope. It had many direct uses and served as the basis for the making of mats, baskets, bee skeps, mattresses, hen roosts, pidgeon's nests and horse harnesses. It was used for hobbles and tethers for animals and for ties for holding down thatch. A straw rope was also used as a clothes line in the kitchen. Torches were made from straw, but when straw was coated with mud it made a fireproof smoke canopy. Chopped straw or layers of straw were used in constructing mud walls. Fowlers of the Mayo Coast would let themselves down the cliffs on straw ropes. Straw ropes were also used as belts. Straw ropes with a centre of rags or corks were used as footballs. Straw Mats were used as draught screens, the equivalent in other countries were hanging skins, carpets and tapestries. (*"Irish Folk Ways"* P. 201)

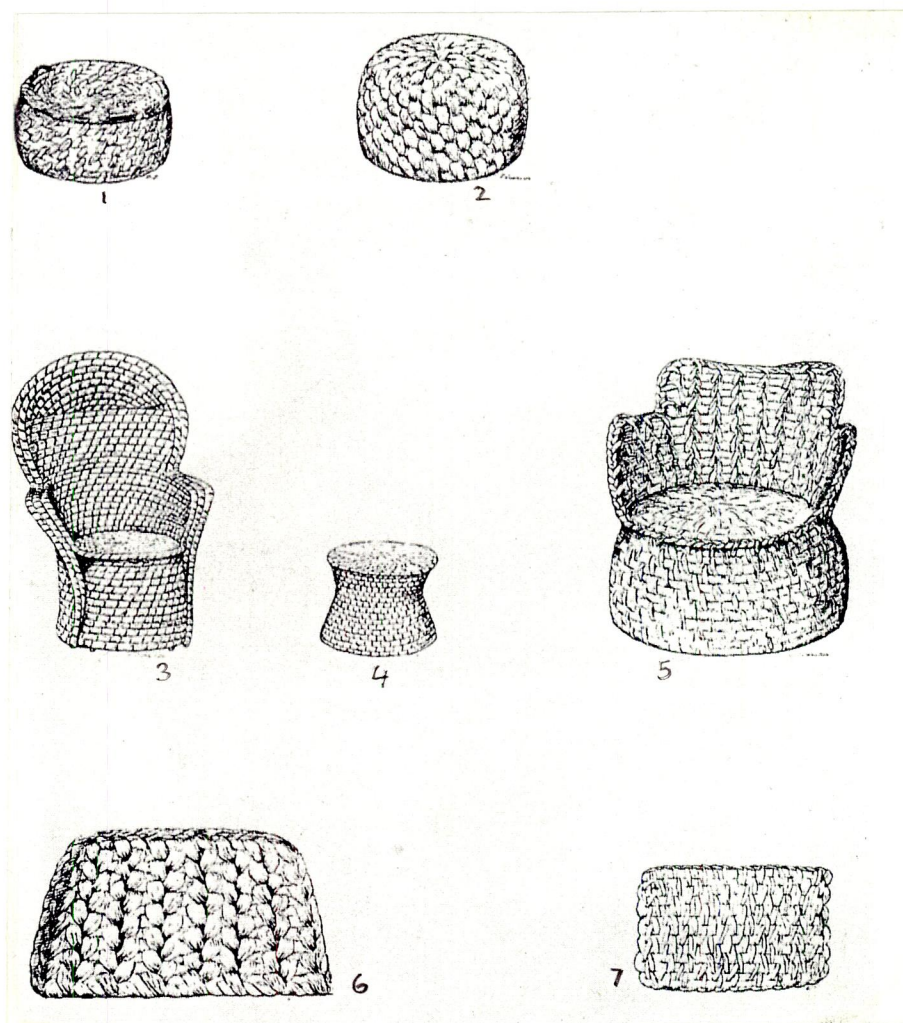


ILLUSTRATION 16.

- (1) Straw Seat, Doolin Co. Clare
- (2) Straw Seat, Killeenaran,
Co. Galway
- (3) Straw Chair, Gardamus, Co.
Wexford
- (4) Straw Seat, Tuam, Co. Galway
- (5) Straw Chair, Cape Clear,
Co. Cork
- (6) & (7) Straw Mats, Co. Galway

The Sughan (illus. 17) was made of twisted hay coiled in the shape of a circle. It was used on the head for conveying liquids such as milk without spilling, and also for carrying fragile items such as eggs. This tradition of carrying things on the head was widespread in Ireland until the beginning of this century and is something we now only associate with African Countries.

Straw mats were made to make outbuildings more comfortable for animals. It was also used as underthatch in a house in Co. Down. The modern equivalent today is the use of fibreglass for insulating roof space. Thatching of course was widely used for poor men's dwellings while today purpose built cottages are thatched, such as Bord Failte cottages and cottages in folk parks, bringing a return of a romantic notion of thatch.

Hurdles were woven from straw to put at doors, the modern equivalent is the knitted sausage dog or draught excluder. Mats were made too for the floor, for prayers, for cleaning boots and for the dogs to lie on.

Katherine Harris in "Ulster Folk Life" describes how in "Co. Antrim, a special circular mat was woven for the top of apple barrels to protect fruit from bruising. Thatchers sometimes used a mat to protect their knees. It was called a "wheeze". In the hedge schools punishment for inattention or stupidity was the wearing of a suggan or Dunces' muff. It was a collar of straw put around the Dunces' neck who was placed at the door of the hedge school. Carpenters tool kits were also woven with straw". (*Harris Vol. 9*)

In the book of Irish Countryside there is a description that in parts of Cork and Kerry an outdoor granary was

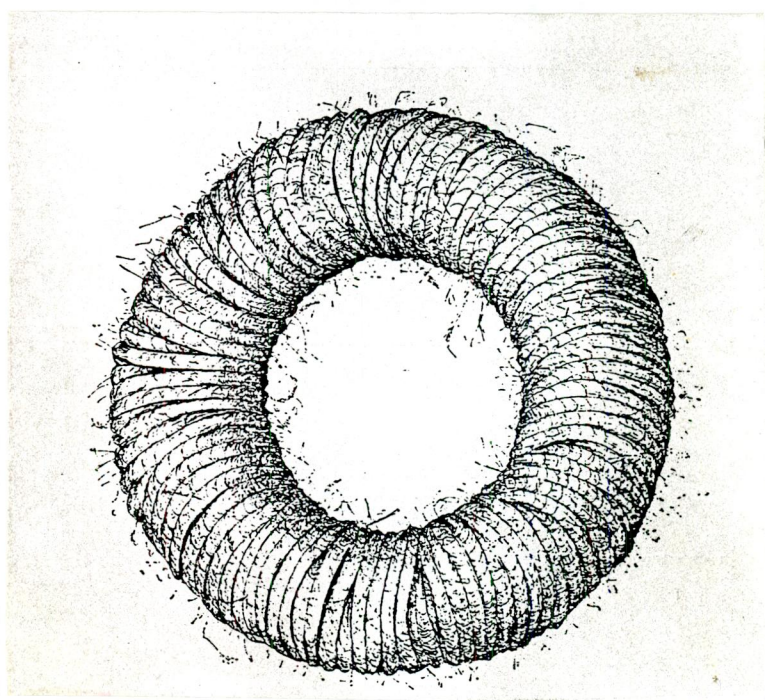
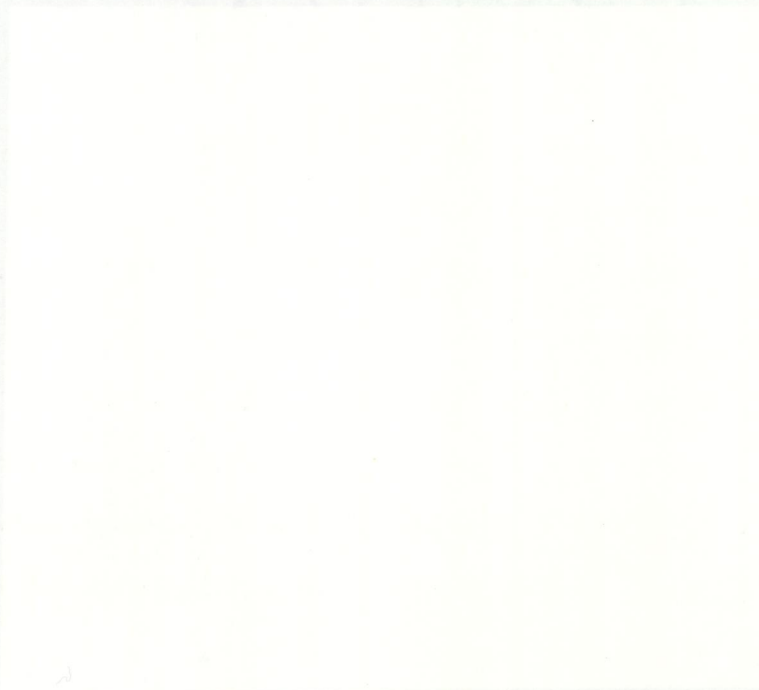


ILLUSTRATION 17.

SUGGAN, A Hay-Rope Pad on the
Head by Women, Carrying Goods,
Kiltoom, Co. Roscommon

ZETA



2000-01-01 A large box of food
found by women carrying food
Kilimanjaro, Tanzania

made from thick coils of straw rope built up around an internal filling of grain, when thatched the granary looked like a haystack. (*Irish Countryside Townhouse 1987*).

In the Aran Islands there was a basket known as a ciseain made of rye straw. It was used for bringing dinners to men working in the fields and it was preferred to a wicker basket as it kept the food warmer just like our insulated bags today.

On St. Brigid's Eve a small straw doll (Brideog) was dressed up and carried from door to door in the South West of Ireland. A charm of plaited straw known as Bratog Brighde is carried (Brigid's rag) by fishermen of Tory Island as a protection against storms. (illus 13) There was also a Brigid's Girdle, a two strand rope made of straw with a circle of crosses attached which was put on the body as a protective charm. And of course the St. Brigid's cross. (illus. 18) St. Brigid's day is February 1st and crosses were made for every room in the house by interweaving straw, or indeed rushes. This is now a typically Irish souvenir to be brought home by foreigners. The crosses then ensure the saint's blessing and protection on the household, animals and crops for the coming year. It was also at one time an emblem on our national television - Radio Telefis Eireann. So it is very obvious that straw and rushes were used for a great variety of useful items in the household. The materials were abundant and freely available to the

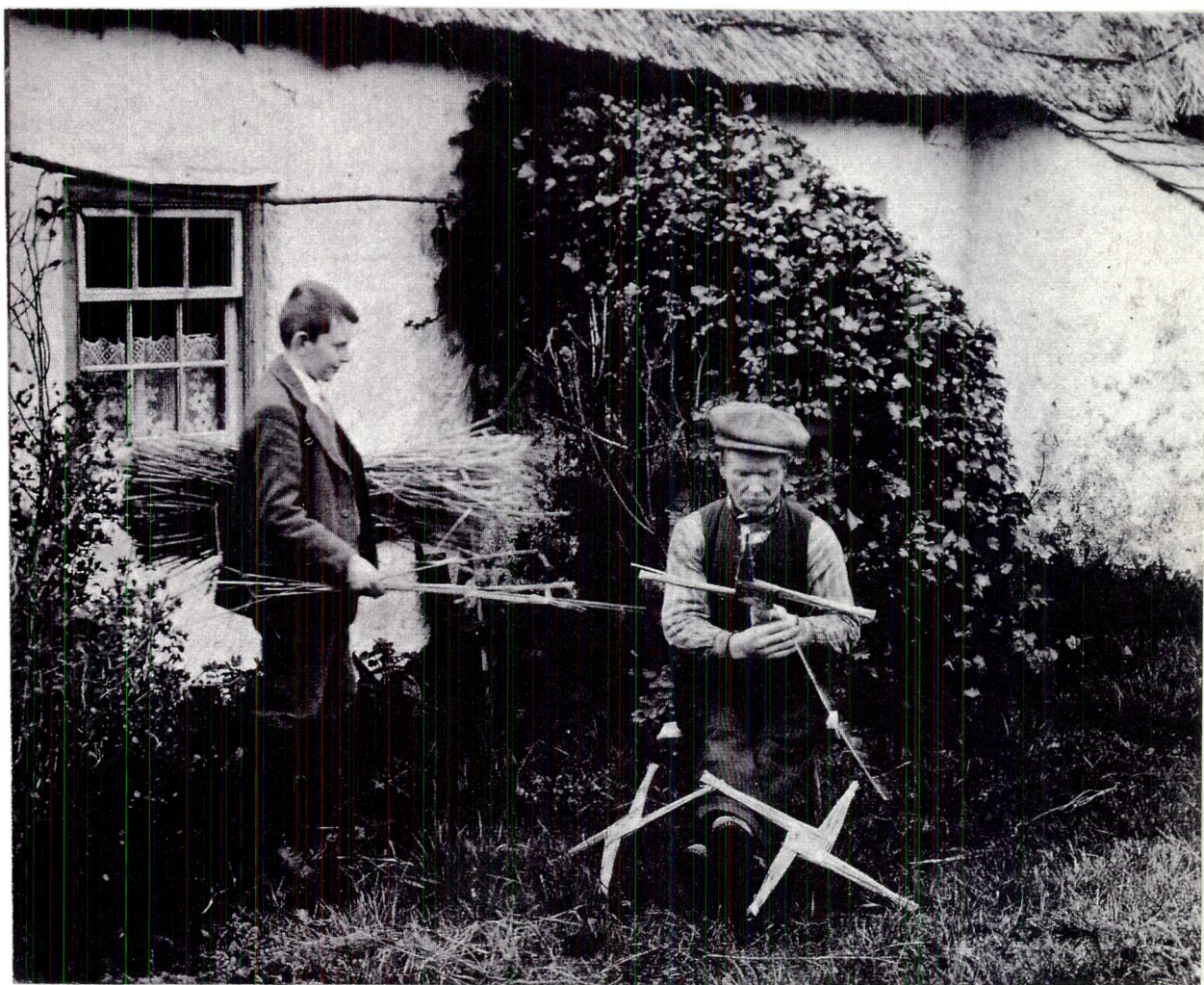


ILLUSTRATION 18. The Making of St. Brigid's Crosses



ILLUSTRATION 18 The Making of the Spine of a Book

poor thus making life a little easier for them. They could make many utensils as the material was pliable enough to form into most shapes. It was also something that could be made either inside the house or when they were in fields and no extra equipment was needed.

CHAPTER 4

PRESENT DAY BASKETMAKERS

There is an upsurge of interest in the craft of Irish traditional basketry albeit a slow one.

The Irish Craft Council have a list of only six fulltime basketmakers in Ireland. Unfortunately one man on the list a Joe Shanahan from Carrick on Suir who had continued a craft his grandfather had started, has since died. Although his skills live on in the many basketmakers he taught. I however have found a few more.

When I started researching Irish Basketry around the country I got a tremendous response from both basketmakers themselves and from elderly people who were glad to see an interest in the craft being revived. People who would not normally put pen to paper, put themselves out and wrote to me. For many it was not an easy task. I am extremely grateful for this. What I surmised from the exercise, was that Irish Basketry is re-emerging despite the competition from cheaper foreign imports, and that the older generation are proud to hand on their skills and traditions. Even in this day and age basketry is bringing people together and helping them to learn from each other.

The main reasons the present day basketmakers seem to have got involved in the craft are 1. to create employment for themselves. 2. It is an ideal rural

pursuit away from the busy city life. 3. The ultimate satisfaction of working with one's hands. The baskets of today have been adapted for modern use mainly by a small adaption in the shapes. But basically they remain the same which makes them so precious.

JOE HOGAN from Galway is self taught and makes turf and log baskets, hampers, potato baskets (now used for a variety of things), dried flowers, fruits etc.) shopping baskets, flower baskets, linen baskets, cradles and sieves. Joe has taken such a great interest in the tradition of the craft, he is now writing a book on it. (Correspondence January 1993)

ALISON FITZGERALD from Armagh, again self taught, also makes a wide variety of baskets but her favorite is the working basket whose simple dignity she feels is enhanced by the choice of the wide range of colours of the sally rods. Simple dignity is a word that to me sums up basketry as a whole. Alison now also passes on this craft by teaching and she is constantly interested in Irish baskets both past and present. In general I found that the modern day basket makers are not just interested in making baskets and its financial rewards, but they have a love of the materials and the whole tradition that go along side basket making. It is a rare trait today and is wonderful to see. Alison also exports her baskets and all are sold with the simple advice -

"remind your grandchildren that this product is made to be used and benefits from being left out in the rain once a year"
(Irish Basketmakers Association Newsletter P 6)

NORBERT PLATZ who came to Ireland from Germany is now living in West Cork. Another self taught individual, although he discovered later that his grandfather in Germany used to make baskets in the winter months. His range of baskets include traditional turf and potato baskets, log. linen, shopping and flower baskets, hampers, fishing creels, cradles, lamp shades, willow chairs, display baskets for the food industry and willow fencing.

Norbert definitely feels there has been an upsurge in interest, as he says,

"helped by baskets being used in glossy advertisement for all kinds of goods, the support for Irish made baskets, the awareness of the beauty of the natural environmentally friendly material that is used for sentimental reasons of time gone by"

He also maintains that "the big turning point for our business has been the interest from bakery's supermarkets, vegetable shops and the catering industry for the decorative value that is given to their produce displayed in baskets". (Norbert correspondence, 30th September 1992)

ALISTER AND JANIS SIMMONS are another couple who gave up city life to move to a remote part of Donegal, where they started making baskets timidly and eventually through the help of other basketmakers established their own Sally garden and now have a basket making business. (Irish Basketmakers Newsletters) Winter 1991 No. 56

HARRY McCARRICK from Co. Sligo is another basketmaker who makes a variety of shopping baskets, flower baskets and potato baskets using different colour rods. (Illus. 19)

PATRICIA D'ARCY runs a rush basketmaking business in Co.



ILLUSTRATION 19.

SAMPLE OF HARRY McCARRICK'S
BASKETS, CONTEMPORY BASKET MAKER

MAITPOST



REGISTRATION 19... SAMPLE OF BAREY-AGGREGATE...
/ TASKS / CONTEMPORARY BASKET BALL

MAITPOST

Cavan and exports her baskets all over the world. She has also started a Heritage Craft Visitors Centre with a Museum, audio visual room and a collection of old baskets. (Irish Baskermakers Newsletter, 1991)

CATHY HAYDEN from Tramore Co. Waterford was taught by the now deceased Joe Shanahan also makes baskets for a living.

DAVID MOORE grandson of "Big James" Mulholland continues the craft his grandfather taught him. Unfortunately he does not have the same interest his grandfather had. David says there has been an increase in the last two years in Pidgeon Hampers and Moses baskets, but he does not feel this is because of a growing concern for the earth, I feel otherwise and will develop my discussion further in Chapter Six. David feels that although the younger generation are interested, they do not keep up this interest. He himself now only makes baskets as a hobby. This I feel is a terrible shame considering the tremendous family history of basket making that he has. (Moore Correspondence November 1992)

JIMMY McPARTLIN Co. Leitrim learned his craft from an Uncle who lived alone. He says

"Making baskets and creels appears to have been a male preserve and there was no social occasion just routine" .

Most of the work he did was for neighbours. He only makes creels now occasionally. He says

"the rush for them in the forties was due to a scarcity of bags for turf and potatoes on the farm and the short supply of paper for wrapping in the

shops. After the war, bags and paper got more plentiful and the people had a little more money and the need for creels died out".

He also says

"I did not enjoy making baskets, its just a job to be done"

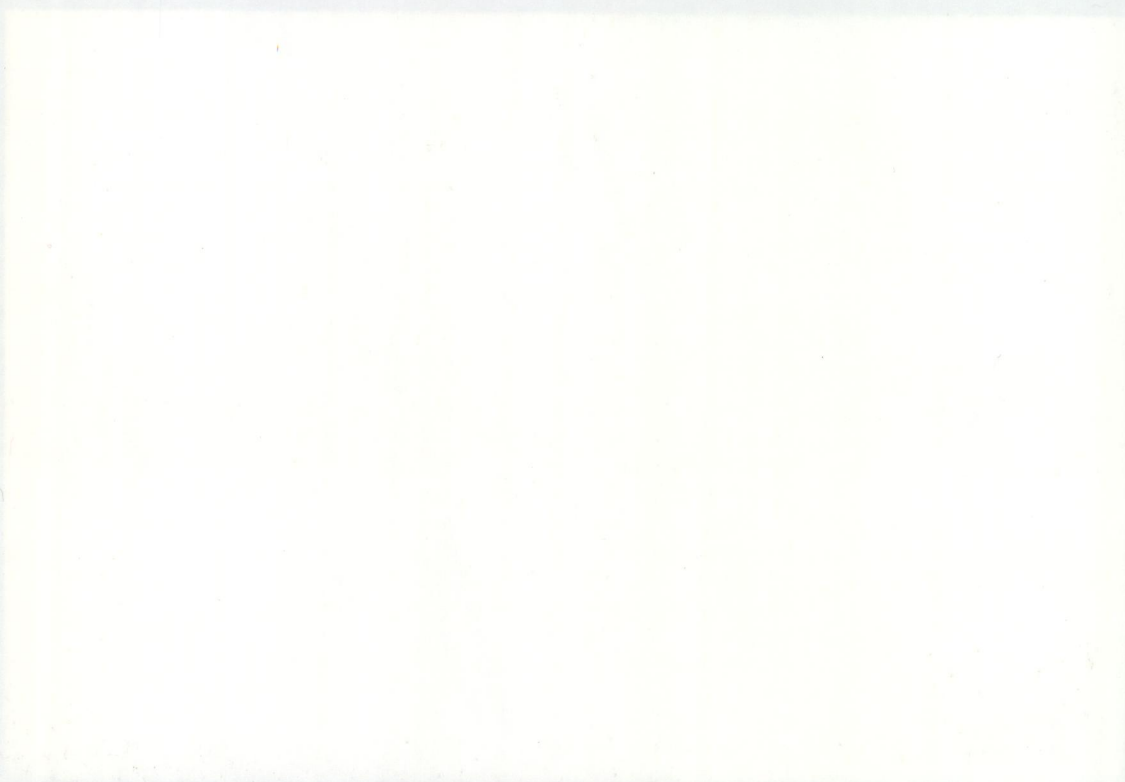
I think it is unfortunate that he feels this way, but I suppose that it is natural when he had to make baskets rather than wanting to. He also feels that the resurgence of interest in it today is because "it is run as an almost dead craft" (McPartlin Correspondence 26th November 1992)

GEORGE MULLAN (now eighty years of age) used to make shopping baskets and rod chairs. He learned the craft from his father who in turn learned it from a book at the turn of the century. They made the baskets on wet days and long winter nights. He now only does repair jobs. (Mullan Correspondence 7th December 1992)

BARBARA KELLY, Fethard on Sea, Co. Wexford runs a thriving basketry business. I first read about her in the Irish Farmers Journal and consequently wrote to her and arranged an interview. She gave up a glamorous life style working for Aer Lingus Holidays all over the world to concentrate on basketmaking. She was thirty and had earned enough money to build her house. Barbara comes from a family of doers. Her workshop is attached to a small craft shop at her parents home. Her father and one of her brothers are wood turners. Her mother makes soft toys and dried flower arrangements, one of her sisters Irene, makes baskets with her. Actually it was Irene who started the basketmaking business but due to



ILLUSTRATION 20. AND 21. BARBARA KELLY, FETHARD ON SEA,
AT WORK ON LAUNDRY BASKET FOR
LOCAL LAUNDRY.



REPRODUCTION OF THE
ORIGINAL MANUSCRIPT
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ILLUSTRATION 29.

SAMPLE OF HOW LID IS WOVEN FOR
LARGE LAUNDRY BASKET



INVESTIGATION OF THE
LARGE LAUNDRY BUSINESS

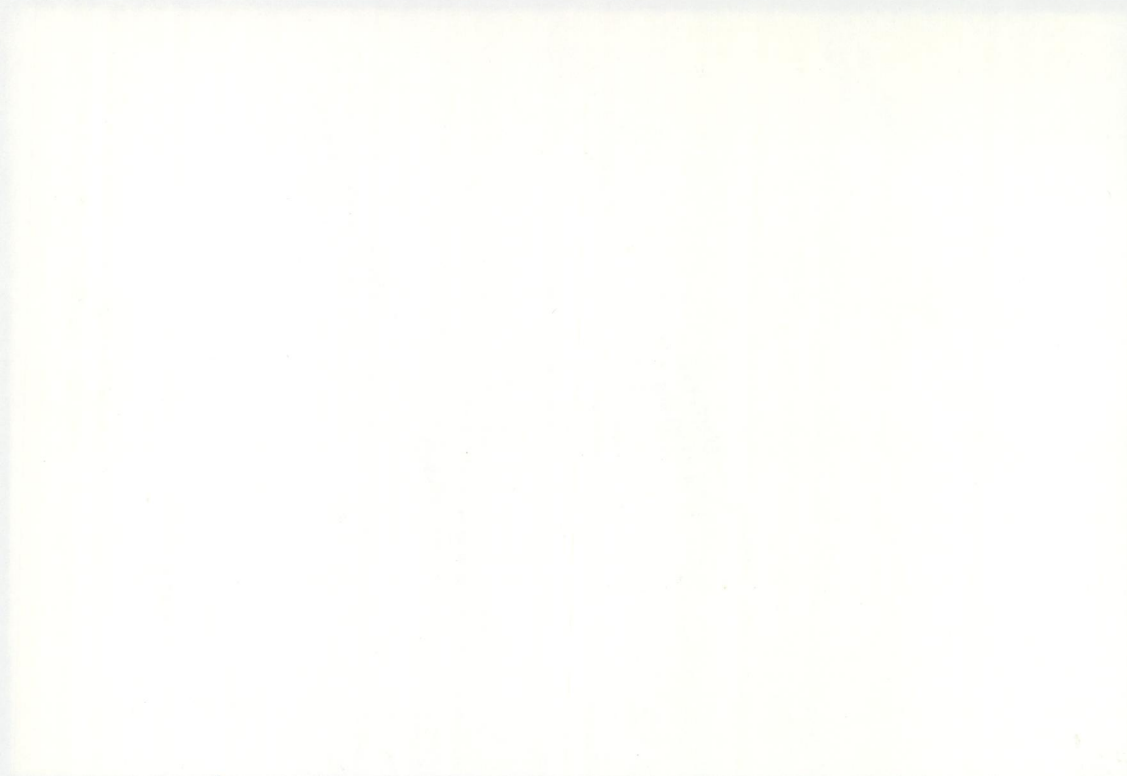
family commitments had to reduce her time in it. Another sister, who in fact built the workshop with an I.D.A. Grant to make soft toys in now doing a Business Studies Degree in England. Another one of her brothers makes furniture and the last one runs an Organic Farm. They are all extremely creative and have always drawn and painted. The craft shop is full of crafts made by the family, baskets, soft toys, wooden furniture and pottery.

Barbara buys some of her willows from England. But she has also started her own willow growing. Barbara went to Somerset in England to see how to grow and maintain willows. Hecter who was the grower there has been growing "Sallies" or Willow all his life. He is now over 80. He has never made a basket in his life. Barbara quoted his saying "if you grow willows, you have'nt time to make baskets".

Barbara now grows her willows on her brothers organic farm. They are very fast growers and grow up to ten feet in one season. They need a lot of sunlight and therefore regular weeding is imperative as the weeds grow up and block the sunlight, making the growth of the sallies shorter. Barbara did try and find someone to weed the trees for her but unfortunately it did not work out. So now Barbara is going to move the trees from the organic farm in order that she can use weed killer. The willows will continue giving growth for up to forty years. Barbara also goes around the locality in her "yellow van" collecting sallies from the hedgerows. Barbara and her sister were trained by Joe Shanahan,



ILLUSTRATION 22. AND 23. SAMPLES OF BARBARA KELLY'S BASKETS.



whom I have already discussed. She became concerned that old basketmakers were beginning to be few and far between and therefore there would be no one to pass on this craft. So she went to England again to learn more techniques. However, she discovered that her own knowledge was quite extensive. She now teaches quite a lot with her sister to Women's Groups, Fas Courses and individual groups of eight to ten people. I feel that she must be an excellent teacher as she has a great understanding of the needs of different people.

Barbara makes baskets of all shapes. Her biggest one was for horses tack in a horse box. The biggest seller is by far the shopping basket. She varnishes some of her baskets if they are to be left outside for long. She also does commission work and repairs old baskets. She loves baskets so much that if a basket can be repaired she would rather do that than throw it out. When she has time she experiments and at the moment is making a wicker frame doll with papier mache over it. Barbara does not feel that she has too many problems with cheaper imports as she says "they aren't as sturdy and many people will pay extra for Irish made goods". She also feels her market is growing all the time as her reputation grows. In fact she does not exhibit at the R.D.S. Craft Show as she has more than enough customers. She does exhibit at local and ploughing championships. She says that basketmaking helps the green awareness "by elimination of supermarket plastic bags, plastic laundry baskets etc."

At the moment she and her sister are the only employees



ILLUSTRATION 24.

WICKER FRAME FOR DOLL WOVEN BY
BARBARA KELLY, READY NOW FOR
PAPIER MACHE CLOTHES.



WICKER TRAMM FOR DOCT. TAYLOR
HARRIS, ARNOLD - RICHARDS FOR
BARKER-NASHVILLE CLOSING

REGISTRATION NO. 11

in the business, but she hopes to take on a trainee if the business continues to improve. Barbara feels traditional crafts are one the way back and that it will last. She says

"People are beginning to be aware of the damage being done to the environment by the use of plastic, also the individuality of hand-made traditional goods is very appealing. Nowadays when so many items are turned out by the 1,000's in factories, there is also going to be a big turnabout in the present day approach to high production in consumer goods. More time, better education in appreciation of environmental problems etc., all contribute to public awareness. People now are beginning to take an interest in things that their grandparents took for granted, their parents forgotten". (Barbara Kelly, Wexford, 12th February 1993)

I think Barbara's summarization of the present basket making business is proven in the attitudes of some of the other basketmakers. I also feel it is seen on the trends and styles of the modern homes. People are now interested in natural materials in their furniture and utensils in their houses. Her reference to the older generation is also true and this can also be seen in the fashions of the young. Barbara seems totally committed to her craft as do most of the other basketmakers. They show tremendous interest in the traditions of the past as well the present and the future and I think their enthusiasm is shown in a very positive way and it can only enhance the basketry industry as a whole.

CHAPTER 5

THE PERCEPTION OF BASKETRY

The very name basketry in itself conjures up to many the idea of a boring pastime used for occupational therapy and the use of cheap materials. It is a poor relation of other artistic pursuits and precious materials. I do not however share this view. I feel baskets have a simple beauty that have been created with nature's own products and our most precious tools, our hands.

Although through its history basketry was a poorman's craft. Basketmakers were held in very low esteem, next above the hackler and the tinker and basketry items were used mainly by the very poor. Earliest furniture in rural Ireland was of a fundamental kind catering for a man's needs when sitting, sleeping, eating and cooking. There was nothing artistic or ornamental about it and visual impact was unimportant. Therefore even in the early Exhibitions at the Royal Dublin Society basketry and strawwork did not even merit a section of its own. Now however it has a place in the Crafts Section of the society's Annual Competition. In the Great Industrial Exhibition of Dublin 1853, the different categories exhibited from "The Queen's Contributions, ^{included} Animal Substances, Manufacturers from Flax and Hemp, Printing, Book Binding, Paper and Stationary, Lace and Embroidery, including carpets and floor cloths, Glass Jewellery, Fine Art, etc., the list is endless. The committee of the Exhibition felt that straw work and basket work among other manufacturers from animal or vegetable substances would involve a series of essays which would

go far beyond their limits, therefore they have put these exhibitors among other allied classes. It is ironic really as the craft is so beautifully simple in its aesthetic form.

To give an example of their inclusions in the exhibition there follows an extract from the 1853 exhibition catalogue -

MISCELLANEOUS :

- 1041 Cooper, Mrs. I. A. M., Newtownbarry, Co. Wexford
Prop. Hat and Bonnet plait in imitation of Tuscan
made of Irish "Traneen Grass" in the cottages of
the Irish Peasantry.
- 1065 Smyth, O. 12, Upper Granby Row, Dublin, Manu.
Wicker Chair Screen, Work Basket and Soiled
Clothes Basket.
- 1122 Ogle, J. Hayes, Navan, Co. Meath, Work and
flower baskets.
- 1124 Preston, O. 17, Christchurch Place, Dublin.
Manu. Basketwork Cars, Cradles, Fire and Hand
Screens, Bedroom and Baby Baskets.
- 1127 Richmond Institute for Industrial Blind, 41 Upper
Sackville Street, Dublin. Manu. Game and Work
Baskets, Fire Screens and other articles in
Basketwork.

So though the items were many varied and obviously of a high standard to get into the exhibition in the first place, they did not however warrant a category of their own.

By the very fact that basketry has such a rich tradition and that it played such a vital role in society I feel it is a treasure rather than a poorman's craft.

Although the baskets of today are very functional, they are still a thing of beauty. The simplicity of their shape and their materials can only endorse this fact. In this modern world they are slowly being appreciated by

all part of society for many reason, their utility, beauty, aestheticness, craftsmanship and use of natural materials. In other cultures they are fast becoming part of the art world as well. The American Fibre Artist Ed. Rossback particularly has brought basketry into the Fine Art area. His book "Baskets As Textile Art" shows a variety of ideas, concepts and methods of construction. The art basket also now appears as a medium in the Biennal Textile Exhibition in Lausanne, Switzerland.

I hope this upward trend continues in Basketry for a number of reasons, such as an artistic point of view, their environmental contribution, a rekindling of our heritage and from a purely functional point of view. If one craft can encompass all this surely that proves their worth.

You do not need high technology to create the baskets. Rare materials are not being extracted from the earth that cannot be replaced. No toxic substances are used in their construction. They are biodegradable and they speak of culture, commitment, magic and spirituality. There simple yet rich qualities make baskets one of life's treasures.

CHAPTER SIX

DESIGN FOR THE ENVIRONMENT

The environment has become a very important issue in today's society and we are constantly striving to discover ways to design products that won't harm the environment. Designers have a very important roll to play.

"In this age of mass production when everything must be planned and designed, design has become the most powerful tool with which man shapes this tools and environments (and by extension society and himself). This demands high social and moral responsibilities from the designer. Therefore the designer is in the powerful position of helping to create a better world and to refrain from destroying what is left of the environment. Twenty years ago if you were interested in saving the environment you were thought of as a hippy or eccentric do-gooder. Today however is a different story, everybody is concerned. It cannot be ignored anymore, Governments are getting involved. Up to now environment issues were personal taste and up to the individual, not a moral responsibility. Take for example waste disposal, it is becoming as issue in its own right. Even supposedly biodegradable materials are not decomposing properly in the airless atmosphere of landfill sites. The only workable solution is to produce less waste."

(Green Design for the Environment),
Dorothy McKenzie.

I feel that basketry items fulfill the criteria mentioned above very successfully. Firstly, wholly natural materials are being used with no additions, therefore they are biodegradable. They are also reusable time and time again so they cut out the need for mass production. They also take the place of damaging materials like plastics. In areas such as packaging this is becoming increasingly important. It is a natural craft returning to classic simplicity. Baskets have many uses and are adaptable for many purposes, they can be used for carrying, as floor covering, as insulation.

The environment is not simply a practical issue but a moral one as well. and basketmakers play a very vital role in this. They can also influence the environmental performance of the things that are packaged in them. If the commodity you use is packaged in the baskets there is no need for extra plastics and foils.

I feel the basketry craft is definitely helping the environmental issues, therefore the industry is bound to keep growing. It enriches not only our environment but also our lives. This enrichment comes through the social contact and the passing on of traditions and values that were once nearly extinct. They also enhance our environment by their beauty. Baskets are definitely ozone friendly.

CONCLUSION

"Baskets speak of Culture, Commitment, Magic and Spirituality"

I hope that I have shown how very important Basketry is both to our present day environment issues and to the traditions and heritage it imparts to us. One small simple basket can conjure up a wealth of history and tradition and it can then go on itself to be part of a continuing story. We should be ready to embrace this richness and continue to pass it on from generation to generation. We do not need modern technology to continue this craft, but by the very fact the modern technology exists it helps us to understand just how important a simple craft like basketry is.

As I have already said I received a lot of positive reaction to this craft during my research and I think it is a craft worthy of merit. We are ever anxious about our environment and the damage we are causing it and as I have shown basketry plays a vital role in helping this. Also by the very fact that we are continuing this craft and tradition we are gaining an immense insight into the history of our people and a better understanding of our forefathers and the way they lived. We can appreciate their adaptability and their ingeniousness.

As basketry items are made from fibrous materials they tend to disintegrate eventually, which although helping the environment could leave no trace of heritage. We

can prevent this by keeping it a living tradition. By passing on our skills, and our history in the uses of baskets. It is a wondrous thing to know that we are using utensils that fit in the modern world and yet are virtually the same in appearance and construction as they were a hundred years ago. It proves the point that Irish Basketry is a living tradition.



ILLUSTRATION 25. AND 26. TWO DIFFERENT SHAPED TURF BASKETS WOVEN BY BARBARA KELLY



ILLUSTRATION 2. TWO DIFFERENT SHAPES (LEFT) AND TWO DIFFERENT SIZES (RIGHT)



ILLUSTRATION 27.

CLAMPS FOR HOLDING WILLOWS UPRIGHT
And Circle Frames for Starting
Circular Type Baskets

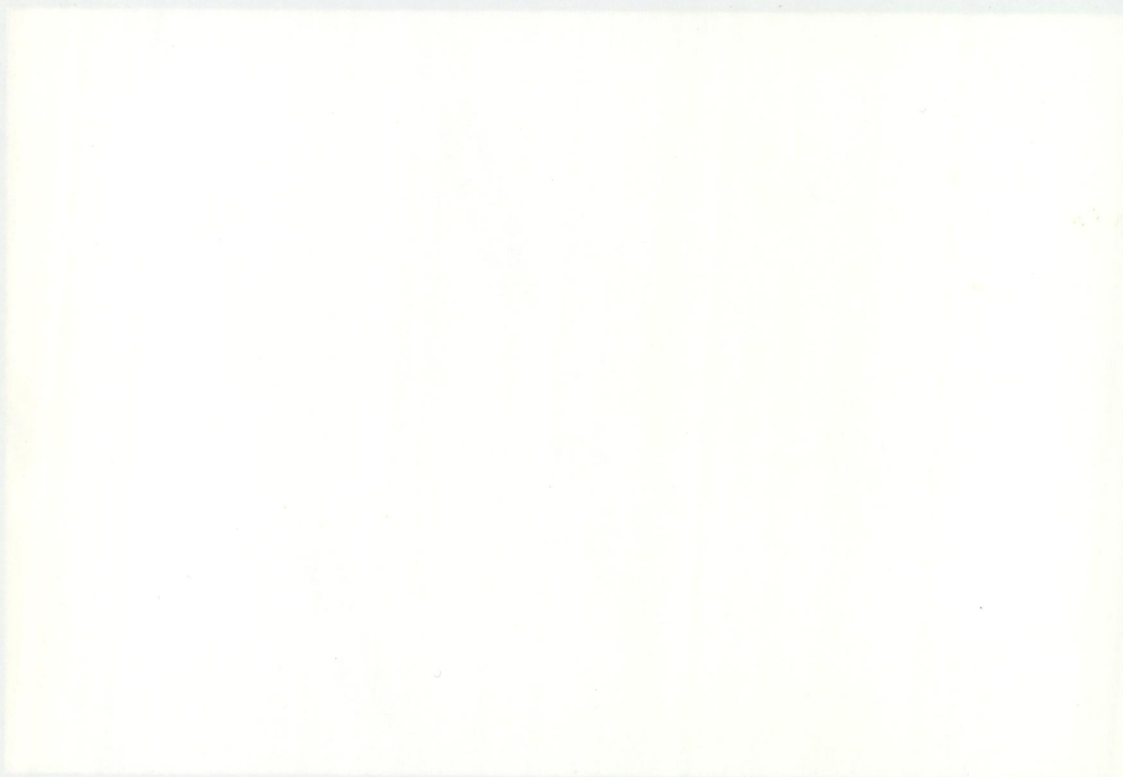


ILLUSTRATION 23. 1. CHART FOR BOILING WATER (continued)
The chart is a line graph showing the boiling point of water at different altitudes. The x-axis represents altitude in feet, and the y-axis represents boiling point in degrees Fahrenheit. The line shows that as altitude increases, the boiling point of water decreases.

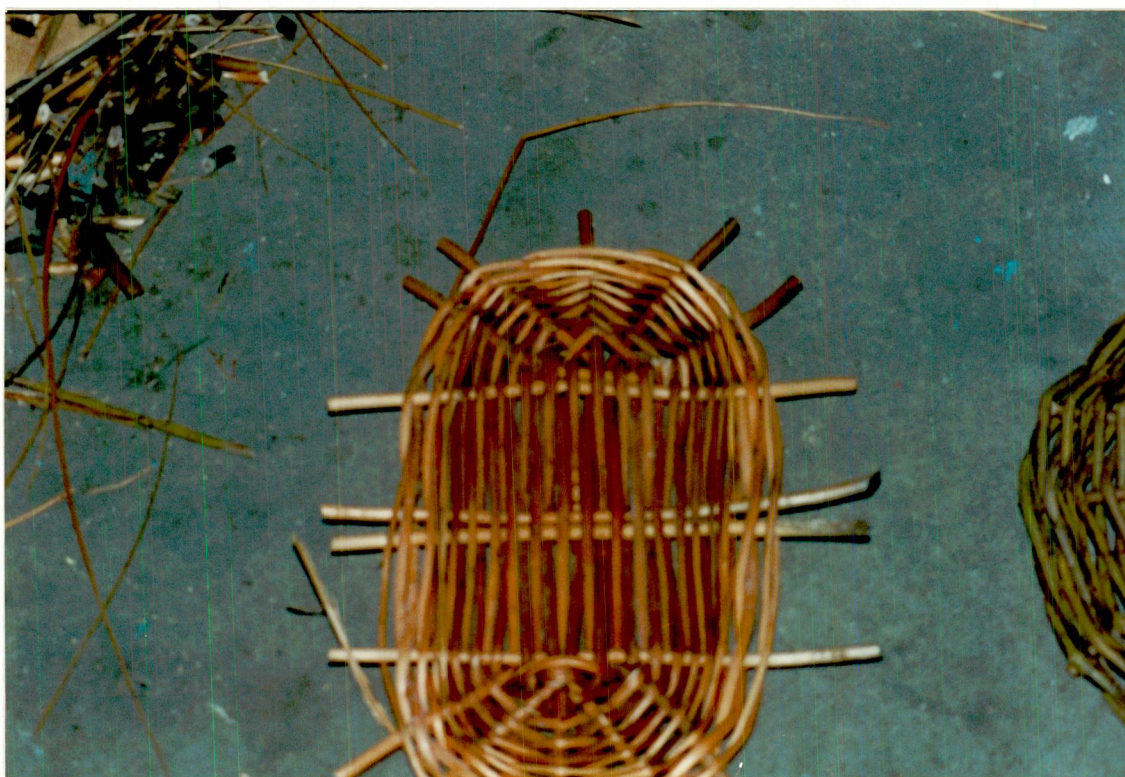
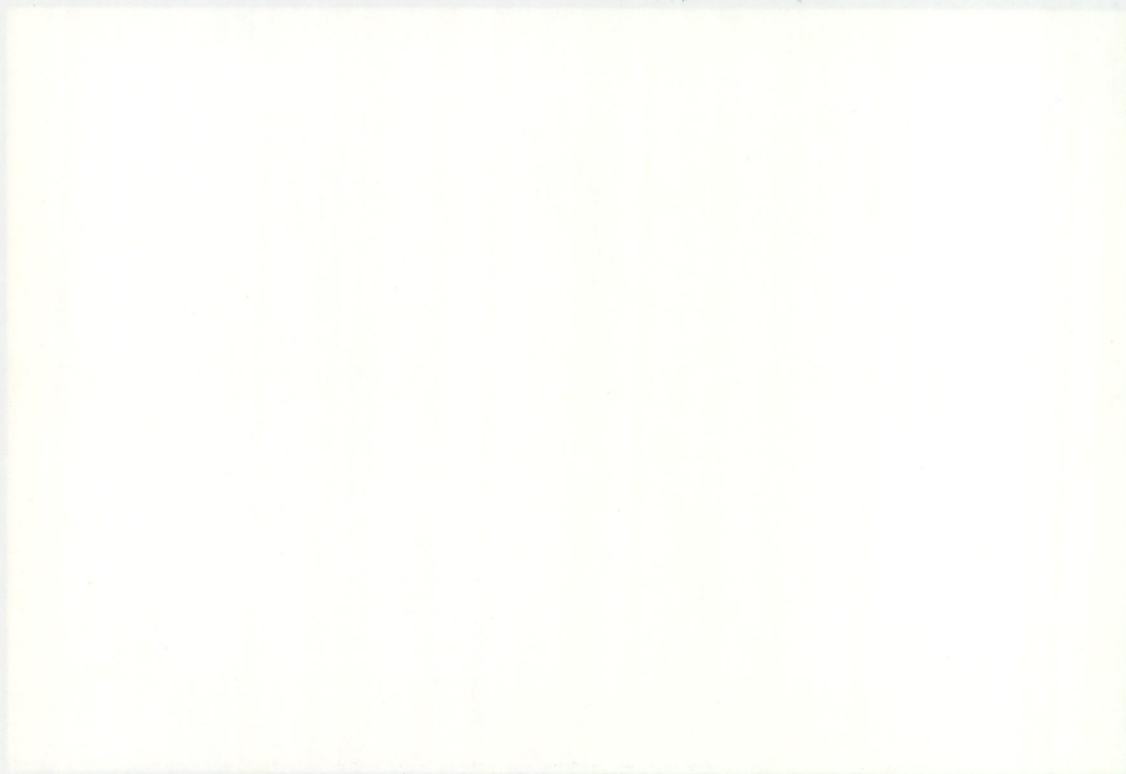


ILLUSTRATION 28.

WOVEN BASE STARTED FOR WILLOW
BASKETS, MORE WILLOW WILL BE
ADDED FOR THE UPRIGHTS



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ILLUSTRATION 30.

JUST A SMALL SAMPLE OF DIFFERENT
WILLOWS BARBARA KELLY HAS IN
STOCK FOR WEAVING BASKETS



JUST A SMALL SAMPLE OF DIFFERENT
WILSON'S WARBARA KILBY WAR BAR
STOCK FOR WEAVING BAZELLE

INVESTIGATION 30



ILLUSTRATION 31.

SAMPLE OF A CHAIRBASE THAT BARBARA KELLY HAS WOVEN, This is one type of basket weaving that machines have tried taking over. However they can only do three stages of it my machine.



WATTFOST

INVESTIGATION OF A CHURCHMAN THAT BARBARA
KELLY HAS WRITTEN THIS IS ONE TYPE
OF PAPER WRITING THAT WORKS
HAVE BEEN TAKEN OVER HOWEVER
THEY ARE ONLY SOME KINDS OF
IN MY READING



ILLUSTRATION 32.

SOME EXAMPLES OF BASKETRY
COURTESY OF NATIONAL MUSEUM OF
IRELAND
B. ROW: Crandy and Skib
F. ROW: Skib and Butter Basket



SOME SAMPLES OF BASKETRY
COURTESY OF NATIONAL MUSEUM OF
IRELAND
B. ROW: Cane and Split
F. ROW: Split and Buckle Basket

ILLUSTRATION 31

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TRANSPORT
MUSEUM EXHIBITION
CATALOGUE 1986

Crafted in Ireland

CORRESPONDENCE:

DAY, ANGELIQUE

9/11/92
Institute of Irish Studies
Queens University
8 Fitzwilliam Street,
Belfast, Bt9 6AW.

DELANEY, W.

10/11/92
Corrawn, Clough, Portlaoise,
Co. Laois.

DUIGNAN, PATRICIA

30/9/92
Strokestown, Co. Roscommon.

HOGAN, JOE

Loch Na Fooey, Finny,
Clonbur, Co. Galway.

HAYDEN, CATHY

12/11/92
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Co. Waterford.

McCARRICK, HARRY

8/11/92
Cloonbaniff, Lavagh, Ballymore,
Co. Sligo.

McPARTLIN, JIMMY

26/11/92
Rahubin, Kiltyclogher
Co. Leitrim.

MOORE, DAVID

27/11/92
8, Moss Road, Gawley's Gate
Aghalee, Co. Antrim.

MULLAN, GEORGE

7/12/92

26 Legilly Road, Greystone
Dungannon, Co. Tyrone BT70.10G.

MULLIN, MARY

30/11/92
Moylough, Ballinasloe.
Co. Galway.

PLATZ, NORBERT

30/9/92
Ballymurphy, Innishannon,
Co. Cork.

ROWE, VERONICA

30/10/92
Irish Guild of Weavers Spinners
& Dyers, Glenfarn, Woodside Road,
Sandyford, Co. Dublin.

SMYTH, PATRICK

22/10/92
Marymount, 3, Nr. Circular Road,
Lurgan, Craigavon,
Co. Armagh. BT679EB.

INTERVIEW:

KELLY, BARBARA

12/2/93: 4.30 pm.
Fethard On Sea
Co. Wexford.

TELEPHONE CALLS:

GUINAN, EAMON

7/11/92

ROGERS, DEL

5/11/92 SLIGO 071-62702