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National College of Art and Design

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THE DRESS OF RURAL IRISH WOMEN FROM 1850 TO 1920

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**Submitted to the Faculty of History of Art and Design and
Complementary Studies
in Candidacy for the Degree of Bachelor of Design**

1996

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to thank Hilary O'Kelly for all her help and advice with the compilation of this thesis. A special thanks must be given to Nellie Mulvey, Nanny Byrne and Iris Beaty for sharing their memories and recollections with me. My sincere thanks also to Clodagh Doyle, of the National History Museum for her invaluable help. Finally I am indebted to the staff of the Irish Folklore Department UCD.

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Introduction

The purpose of this discussion is to examine the dress of rural Irish women from 1850 until 1920. My interest in this area was inspired by the folk memory of those living near me. The folk division of The National History Museum, Dublin is at present in the process of arranging a permanent exhibition on this subject.

Methodology:

The areas I looked at included womens' attitude towards traditional dress in the latter years of the period studied. I was particularly interested in whether the focus of the dress was utilitarian or fashionable. In the course of this study I looked at the origins of fabrics and the colours and textures used. Childrens'clothing was studied to see if they were similar to that of their mothers.

I was limited by the fact that very little information was recorded on this subject, the dress of the wealthy was better documented as they were considered finer garments. For example, the fabrics used were expensive and of a high quality, also it was only wealthy women who could afford to have their portrait painted or photographed.

The main published sources used were Anne O'Dowd's work on *Common Clothes & Clothing* , which deals purely with the everyday clothing worn by rural communities. Mairead Dunleavy's account on *Dress in Ireland* was used as an insight to the dress and lifestyle of the poor. *Image and Experience* by Myrtle Hill and Vivienne Pollock was useful as background information on the lives led by women. Other sources are listed in the bibliography.

Unpublished sources such as the 1940 Clothing Questionnaires from the Folklore Department in U.C.D. were used to supplement this information. I also conducted interviews with three people, two of whom are elderly and remember some of the clothing mentioned. The other informant is a descendant of the wealthy Penn family. The interviews can be found in the appendices.

Chapter one discusses lifestyles of the poorer class in this period. Chapter two deals with the basic outer dress of rural women and their children, certain items of clothing are discussed individually. Chapter three analyses the undergarments worn by these people. Chapter four looks at footwear worn by both women and children. Fabrics are dealt with in chapter five from its natural state to the woven cloth. The thesis is drawn together in the conclusion.

Chapter One

The Daily Life of Rural Women

Irish Proverbs depict women as home-makers, "It's a cold empty house without a woman". What they failed to indicate was the role of women as earners and providers. A woman's main role was seen as looking after the home and providing her husband with a family. This allowed the woman to attain some power and influence within her own home. In the nineteenth Century many women did not marry, the reason for this was that often men did not have land of their own and this made marriage impractical and unattractive.

Womens' Daily Chores:

The household duties of women had great economic value, for example rural mothers never engaged a nanny. In large families the older girls would mind the younger children. Woman also tended the family's vegetables, fowl and pigs (Pl.1). The fuel for cooking and heating was gathered and prepared by women and children, it was generally the woman's job to make and repair the clothes for the household. The sale of surplus goods provided women with extra cash which was put into the household budget. Surplusses such as butter was paid for in kind by local shops in the form of fabrics, childrens' clothes or other necessary houshold items. (O'Dowd, 1994)

Rural women had an early start to the day, they arose at six o'clock each morning to light the fire and cook the breakfast. When the breakfast dishes were tidied away and the animals were fed and cleaned they baked bread. The bread was cooked in a large black pot over an open fire. Hot coals were put on the lid of the pot to help the bread bake. The fields had to be tended to and the cows milked. Clothes were washed and any repairs required were seen to. In the evening women prepared the dinner and at night might knit or crochet.

The work which women did in the fields was extremely strenuous. They saved the hay, cut turf and made small cakes out of dung which they dried for fuel (Hill & Pollock, 1993). Women living near the sea gathered seaweed and dried it. All this work involved stooping and bending which must have been uncomfortable whilst wearing a corset. Their skirts however were comfortable and allowed easy movement.

Care of Clothes:

Washing clothes was almost a days work in itself, clothes were washed either once or twice fortnightly. Monday was usually wash day as the clothes were changed on a Sunday. The night before washing the clothes were steeped in cold water which was drawn from a well. The next morning they were wrung out and placed in a wooden tub which was filled with warm soapy water. They were agitated, wrung and rinsed out. In the summer time, women would bring the washed clothes to a pond or river for rinsing. This place was know as the "ait" or "alt". If there were bushes nearby the clothes would be spread over them and left to dry. Sometimes clothes were boiled in a pot over the fire (see appendix one)

Washing soda or soap was used for cleaning clothes. In the eighteenth or nineteenth century wood ash and kelp ash (kelp is a form of seaweed) were used as soap, as they contain carbonate of soda. Carbonate of soda is an excellent cleaning agent and bleach. It took thirty tons of seaweed for every one ton of kelp(Pl.2). (Department of Irish folklore U.C.D., 1993, pg 18).

In Mahons book, *Dress in Ireland* it was the woman's responsibility to make necessary supplies of starch. This was made from the liquid of raw potatoes which she grated and pulped. The pulp was usually made into *boxty*", a form of potato cake. Clothes were ironed on the kitchen table, with a small iron which was heated in the fire. Some women had metal covers which clipped onto the bottom of the hot iron, this prevented the ash from soiling the clothes.



Pl.1 A man looks on as his wife feeds the pigs.



Pl.2 This painting by Samuel Lover, shows the gathering and burning of kelp.

Chapter Two

Basic Outer Garments

Throughout Ireland the dress of rural women between 1850 and 1920 shared many of the same characteristics, for example the basic silhouette was similar. However slight variations did occur in fabrics and colour throughout different regions.

When it came to fashion, practicality was foremost in the minds of rural women. Garments had to provide warmth and comfort although some symbolised position and status, for example the cap. Due to poverty rural women had to make most of the family clothing from whatever fabric available to them. Others relied on secondhand outlets and shops for their clothes. The basic dress of the rural Irish woman consisted of a bodice, skirt, apron, cap or bonnet and a cloak or shawl.

Bodices:

From the mid 1800's to 1920 there were two types of bodices being worn by women. The first being a high necked, tight fitted bodice made from a light cotton, this echoed the fashionable dress of the time. The second being favoured by older women resembled a tight fitted jacket which was made from a heavy woollen fabric. In rural Gaelic speaking areas bodices were referred to as *polci* or *corpan*.

Most bodices were worn inside the skirt. Those that were pointed at the bottom were worn over the skirt. High necked bodices sometimes had small turned down collars. Sleeves were long and straight and constructed from two pieces of fabric. Another sleeve which was fashionable throughout Europe in the 1800's was the *leg of mutton* sleeve (Pl.3). This was a straight sleeve which was gathered into a large puff at the armhole. Cuffs had either a button fastening or were simply hemmed. The bodice was tightly fastened in the front with small black buttons running from neck to waist. A corset which was worn under the bodice gave the wearer a neat appearance.



Pl.3 In this photograph the traditional dress is competing with modern fashion. Note the "leg of mutton" sleeves in the girl on the right dress.

Bodices were made from a variety of fabrics. When possible they matched the fabric of the skirt. Shop bought plain and printed cottons in floral and striped patterns were favoured. Flannels, freize, linen, calico, moleskin and corduroys were also popular. Darker colours such as black and blue were commonly worn among the older generation.

Most bodices had a yoke in the front and back which was squared or v-shaped. The yokes were often trimmed with a border of frills or lace. Lightweight bodices also had some other form of decoration with pintucking and gathering being the most common (Pl.4). An example of the heavier bodice which I saw in the National Museum was made from brown tweed. It originally fastened in the centre with nine buttons (Pl.5). Each front was made from a single piece of fabric which was shaped using two darts. The back was assembled from six pieces of fabric. Two pieces forming the top yoke and four sections in the main body. The collars and cuffs were trimmed with velvet(Pl.6).

The Skirt:

The skirt worn by rural women had plenty of fullness which was unrestrictive and warm. In Irish speaking areas the skirt was commonly known as the *cota*.. Most women would have had owned two over skirts, one for special occasions and Sundays, the other for everyday wear.

Large amounts of bought and home spun fabric were used for making a skirt (about 3.5 metres). Some skirts were made from a single piece of fabric with a seam down the back and a five inch opening. The top of the fabric was gathered into thick pleats of about three inches and sewn to a wide cotton waist band which had long tie-strings attached to each side. When fabric was scarce skirts were unhemmed and had ribbon or tape stiched to the end to stop the fabric from fraying (Pl.7).

Skirts were generally made by the woman of the house. The use of home spun or shop bought fabric differed from place to place. Those living near urban centres were lucky as they had the option to buy skirts, either from a secondhand shop or trader. Skirts were made from a variety of fabrics, those

making their own were happy to use any fabric that was available to them. Flannels, plain and printed cottons, linsey wool, durgget and tammy were popular choices (Pl.8). Tammy cloth was favoured for good skirts as it had a satin sheen.

By the late nineteenth century the colours of outer garments being worn by women, especially skirts, became brighter. This was more prominent in the western area of the country where red was extremely popular. In the east black was still a fashionable colour with bottle greens, blues, grey, and brown being introduced.

As the skirt was generally very plain women took it on themselves to decorate them in various ways. The most common way was by attaching black or blue velvet ribbon to the bottom of the skirt. Another customary method when velvet was not available was to tuck or pleat around the bottom of the skirt. Often two to three bands or tucks could be found on the bottom of a skirt. Ribbons covered up any welts or stitching which was obvious on the outside of the skirt whilst tucks allowed the skirt to be lengthened or shortened when need be (Pl.9).

Skirts were either to the toe or just above the ankle. The latter was preferred by most rural women as it made working easier. When working in the field women would often tuck their skirt into the waistband of their apron where it was held in place. This prevented the skirt from becoming dirty (Pl.10).



Pl.4 This woman is wearing a light-weight bodice. Note the square shaped yoke and the gathering.



Pl.5 Brown tweed bodice from the National Museum.



Pl.6 Back of tweed bodice. Notice the panelling



Pl.7 A woman dressed in a Drugget skirt. Note the black band running around the bottom.



Pl.8 Woman spinning. Note her floral cotton print skirt.



Pl.9 A red skirt from the Aran islands, note the ribbon decoration.



Pl.10 Evicted by Lady Butler, shows a woman standing with her skirt tucked into her apron.

The Apron:

"Pegeen bustles about, then takes off her apron and pins it up in the window as a blind."

(Playboy of the Western World, J.M. Synge, p.14).

The apron was a functional accessory which had been added to the common dress of rural women throughout the centuries. Unlike other clothes the apron did not provide warmth. It was not worn for fashion, but instead for the many other practical services it provided. The apron protected the skirt when women were carrying out any dirty chores. It was also useful for carrying feed out to the hens and for holding eggs, chickens and other things (Pl.11). O'Dowd suggests that at the end of the 19th Century the apron had become so popular that many women in the West of the country abandoned their skirt for it, leaving them wearing a petticoat and apron (Pl.9). (O'Dowd, 1990, pg 8).

Aprons were generally homemade, even women who were not gifted with the needle could manage to assemble one. They were simple in construction and took little more than half an hour to assemble (see appendix two). A square piece of cloth gathered at the top and attached to a thin waistband with tapes long enough to form two strings was all that was needed. Depending on the quantity of fabric available aprons either covered the front or both the front and sides of the skirt. The average apron was usually three to four inches shorter than the skirt. They were either squared or rounded at the bottom and generally had some form of a pocket.

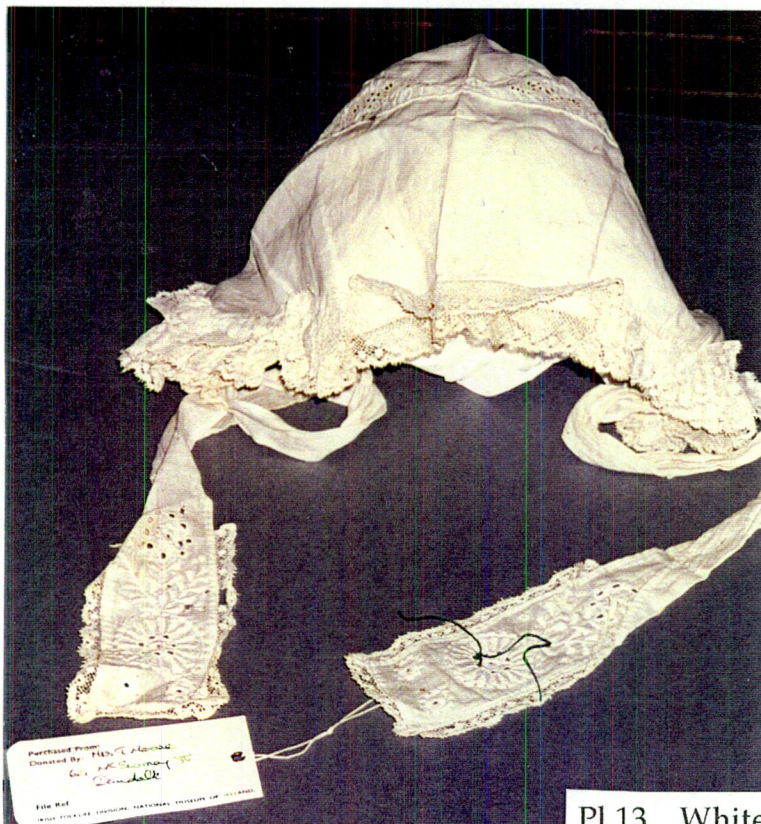
Women were not particular about the type fabric used for an apron, although darker colours were preferred. Cottons in white floral and striped prints were popular. Those who were less well off utilized empty flour bags and turned them into white aprons by attaching a tape to the sides. Some aprons were decorated with tucks which corresponded with those of the skirt. A second apron was worn by many women. These were generally made from hessian sacks. They protected the good apron from dirty chores which women did, such as feeding the pigs (Pl.12).



Pl.11 A woman holding a hen in her apron.



Pl.12 Women wearing bonnets, headscarves and sacking aprons whilst working out in the fields.



Pl.13 White lace bonnet.

Caps:

During the 19th Century most married women donned the fabric cap. Single women and girls went bareheaded, wearing their hair loose or tied in a ribbon. In some rural areas caps were commonly called *caipini lasa*. They were worn inside and outside the house. The cap was the least practical garment worn. Due to their lightweight fabric they maintained only a small percentage of body heat. They did however serve to show the seniority of married women and were thought to make the head look rather pretty. When working out of doors a cotton or dyed flannel headscarf covered the cap protecting it from dirt and dust

By the late 1900's caps were only worn by elderly women. The younger generation favoured the simplicity of the head scarf and the straw bonnet which they only wore for special occasions, for example going to mass, as all women covered their heads there. When working in the fields women wore either a headscarf or a large straw bonnet which gave some protection to their neck and face from the elements.(Pl.12).

Caps were made from cotton or linen. They were either black or white and were trimmed with ornamental lace frills around the front bordering the face (Pl.13). This lace was either hand or machine made. Caps were tied under the chin with either one or two ribbons or strings. There were up to five pieces in these caps which made them difficult to iron. According to Nellie Mulvey (appendix one) on Saturday nights the cap would be washed and starched for mass the following morning. A special iron called a tally iron was needed to smooth out the frills. A long hollow iron finger protruded from the iron. A round piece of iron was heated and put through the hollow. The frill was then pressed around this finger which gave the frill its crisp appearance. Those who did not have the use of a tally iron relied on their flat iron and their fingers to press the frill as best they could.

Bonnets were made from straw. Nanny Burn can recall her grandmother keeping her bonnet safe in a hat box under the bed until Sunday when it would be taken out and aired (appendix two). Bonnets were tied to the side of

the chin with ribbons and decorated with feathers and silk flowers bought from a peddler. The peddler travelled around from district to district selling a variety of goods (Pl.14). Straw and plaitmaking industries were to be found throughout the country in the nineteenth Century. Many women plaited straw for bonnets that they made and sold. This was a great help to the family budget (O'Dowd, 1990, p.9).

Cloaks and Shawls:

Over their outer wear rural Irish women introduced the cloak and later the shawl to their dress. These garments served as an extra layer of clothing providing warmth. The cloak was abandoned for numerous reasons (discussed below) in the nineteenth Century and the shawl adopted.

In the 1700's the only women to wear the hooded cloak were the well-to-do ladies. By the 1800's, the cloak was the common overgarment being worn by most rural women. The cloak was an expensive item of clothing and was handed down from mother to daughter and left in wills by neighbours (O'Dowd, 1990, p.10) Those who could not afford a cloak improvised by making their own version of a cloak. This was sometimes done by placing a skirt or petticoat over the head and letting the fabric fall over the shoulders and usually decorated using a crios (Pl.15).

Cloaks were generally made by a cloakmaker or tailor, this was considered a good trade at that time. The cloak was an ankle length sleeveless garment. It was fastened under the chin using a ribbon or with a hook and eye. One width of fabric went to the back and two half widths were sewn to both sides. Attached to the back neck of the tightly pleated cloak was a large hood. The hood was made from a rectangular piece of fabric which was also gathered into pleats at the back (Pl.16).

From surviving cloaks it has been noted that the majority of them were made from freize broadcloth. The most popular colour for a cloak was black with others being made from blue, red and green cloth. The cloak was always lined with silk, satin or sateen



Pl.14 Two pedlars on their way to a village. Note the poor dress of these people.

Pl.15 Woman wearing a make-shift cloak, using a flannel petticoat and a crios.



Pl.16 Back view of hooded cloak. Note the tight gathering.

The cloak as well as being a daily outdoor garment was also used as a blanket. It was also great as a cover up for dirty clothes. Cloaks were never washed and could sometimes cause infection and disease. It was these factors which caused people to favour the shawl in later years. According to Mitchell the cloak, thought to be Irish in origin, has many similarities with that of the cloak worn by early French shepherds (Mitchell, 1986). In the interval between the hooded cloak and the shawl the cape was introduced. This was similar to the large cloak, the main difference was that it was hip length and was available hooded or unhooded. The bottom of this garment was often decorated with braid (Pl.17).

Shawls:

Towards the end of the 19th Century both the large shawl and shoulder shawl had grown in popularity and was being worn by all classes of women. The shawl won favour as it was much lighter in weight than the cloak yet covered the body and provided as much warmth. It was quarter the price of a cloak and was much healthier as it was washable. Upper class women favoured the larger shawl as it was big enough to cover the width of the skirt without crushing it.

Large Shawls:

There were three types of large shawl or *seal mor* worn in Ireland. The Paisley, Galway, plaid and woven shawls were first worn by upper class women. Rural women followed this lead but they could only afford cheap quality imported shawls manufactured in Scotland, Birmingham and Germany. Eventually it was the quality of the fabric that distinguished the wearers position. These shawls were more colourful than the cloak (Pl.18).

Paisley Shawl

The paisley shawl worn by the upper class women was of fine quality. It was bright in colour and woven from wools and silks (Pl.19). A type of paisley shawl worn by the lower class was also referred to as a Galway shawl where

it was commonly worn. This was a heavy woollen overgarment which was woven in a double cloth weave on a jacquard loom. The right side was a fawn colour whilst the wrong side was a turf brown. The border was decorated with a large leaf pattern with smaller leaves inside them. This pattern was turf brown and had touches of crimson and green. The fringe bordering the end of the shawl generally alternated in brown and fawn. The paisley shawl was most popular in the western part of the country and up until about forty years ago it was possible to see women wearing this shawl in Galway (pl.20) .

The Plaid Shawl:

The plaid shawl resembled a heavy blanket. They were brighter and gaudier than the paisley shawl worn by the lower class. The pattern was bold and bright similar to that of Scotch tartan and was fringed around the end (pl.21)

Shoulder Shawl:

By the end of the 19th Century a shoulder shawl commonly called a wrapper, crossover or "hug me tight" were worn inside and outside the house. They served as an overgarment which kept the body warm. They were also used to cover the head and worn in the place of bonnets by pulling them over the head and pinning under the chin. They were knitted or crocheted by women, or more often they were shop bought.

The shoulder shawl was much shorter than the large shawl. They could be worn either around the shoulders or in the "hug-me-tight" fashion. The "hug-me-tight" was about 80cm square. It was folded into a triangle and placed over the shoulders. One end hung loosely down the back and the other two ends were crossed over the breast and were either tucked into the waistband of the skirt or simply brought around the back where they were tied in a knot (Pl.22).



Pl.17 Girl dressed in the red Claddagh cloak and a paisley shawl.



Pl.18 Women wearing a Galway and a plain shawl.



Pl.19 A Paisley shawl.



Pl.20 A Galway shawl.



Pl.21 A girl in a plaid shawl.



Pl.22 Women coming out of mass wearing both headscarves and crocheted shawls.

Headscarves:

Headscarves were much smaller than shoulder scarves. They were originally worn to protect the white cap. Scarves were made from tartan, flannel and plaid fabrics. They were worn cornerwise, with the large triangle hanging down the back of the head and the two other ends tied in a knot under the chin (Pl.22).

Cardigans:

The late 19th and early 20th Century saw a rise in the number of country women wearing cardigans as outerdress. They were worn over the bodice either with or without the shoulder shawl. Cardigans were mostly hand knitted from home spun wool, although in urban areas some were shop bought. Most had a button fastening running from what was usually a v-neck to the hip. They were usually of plain knit with two large pockets on the front (Pl.23). Black was a popular colour as it did not show the dirt (appendix one).

During this period we see the start of two conflicting attitudes towards female dress, one was a interest in the survival of a slowly changing traditional dress which was practical and had a long life expectancy. The other was the influx of the international modern fashions which were available from local shops and second hand markets (pl.3). By the late nineteenth Century dark coloured shawls, cloaks, caps and petticoats were worn only by the older generations and widows.

Basic Dress of Children:

The common dress worn by rural children of both genders was similar to that of their mothers until they reached an age of adulthood. O'Dowd suggests that in the case of boys this was between the age of twelve and fourteen and in the case of girls sixteen and seventeen years (O'Dowd, 1990, pg9). Other sources (1940 Clothing Questionnaires) suggest that the age at which adulthood was attained, seemed to differ in many parts of the

country. The age of change was decided by the parents whose economic situation often postponed this. This was especially true for boys as it was expensive to have a woollen suit made up. There was great excitement on reaching adulthood, as boys received a new suit and girls donned a separate bodice and skirt.

There are many pictorial references of boys being dressed as little girls. Nanny Byrne, (appendix two) can remember neighbouring boys being dressed in this fashion. This custom continued in Ireland for many years, in Inisheer Co. Galway it continued right up until 1960, though in eastern areas this died out much earlier. One mythical reason given for this practice was to disguise the boys as little girls as it was commonly thought that fairies stole little boys from their parents. A more practical reason was that when a child wet themselves everything got wet, therefore it was easier to change a child wearing a frock than that of a child wearing trousers

Children generally wore similar clothing. The skirt or one piece frock was known as the *cota cabhlach* which was either made from red or white flannel. Often mothers had to improvise by using cheap calicos, printed cottons and even worn out adult clothes. Like their mothers skirts they were also decorated with pleats. The skirt was attached to a cotton or linen bodice. Over this most infants and toddlers wore a light calico or cotton sleeveless pinafore. The dresses worn by children were usually calf length (O'Dowd, 1990, P.9). Newborn babies were warmly wrapped in soft cotton and wool fabrics. A binder was also worn for a few weeks after birth, this was "a long piece of clean cotton cloth which was tied around the babys stomach" (1940 Clothing Questionnaires, ms. 750, p.248-249). Its purpose was to keep the navel clean and prevent infection. Instead of wearing a pinafore the older boys would wear a woollen jacket or a jumper. The girls copied their mothers and wore a smaller version of the "hug me tight"(Pl.24).

It was a mothers duty to make their childrens clothes. When this was not possible a neighbouring woman would do so. Childrens clothes were hand sewn and took little time to make. Nanny Byrne remembers her mother making her frocks. The fabric would be laid out on the kitchen table. From

this, without the use of a pattern, the garment would be cut, with the measurements of the child roughly taken into account. It did not matter if a perfect fit was not achieved, as long as it covered the child. If time allowed the mother would decorate the girls dress with embroidery using different coloured threads.

New Clothes:

There was no special time in the year for a child to receive new clothes, only except for the sacraments of communion and confirmation. Apart from these rare occasions children only got new clothes when they had outgrown their old ones. When a child got their new clothes they would have been most thankful and extremely proud, showing them off to friends and neighbours. If they were lucky they would receive a handsel (a few pence from a neighbour or family member). People had many sayings relating to new clothes "*Go maire tu, is go gcaithe tu iad*" (well may you wear, gallop and tear" and some added "and soon may you tear). One never wore a set of new clothes to a wake or funeral, but would wear them to mass. This was true for young and old alike.



Pl.23 A Wicklow woman dressed largely in black wearing a cardigan.



Pl.24 The little boy is dressed in a frock, whilst the girls are dressed almost like their mothers.

Chapter Three

Undergarments

The underwear or linen, as it was referred to, of rural Irish women between the years of 1850 - 1930, is a subject on which very little information is available. Therefore I have had to rely more on interviews than on other sources.

The undergarments of rural Irish women were largely uninfluenced by those of upper class Irish women. Rural women wore underwear for its purpose, that being practicality, least of all for any aesthetic reasons. With the small amount of income available women could hardly afford to keep the household, let alone spend money on frivolous, high fashion underwear. The frilled undergarments being sported by the rich, would have been totally impractical for the lifestyle which these hard working women led. If one were lucky, the basic undergarments which a rural woman could expect to own and wear proudly were a chemise, a corset, a pair of bloomers or drawers, stockings and garters and between one and three petticoats depending on your fortune. As in previous chapters I have dealt with each garment individually.

The Chemise:

According to Anne O'Dowd this item of underwear was more commonly known in rural areas as a shift or *leine* (O'Dowd, 1990, pg.8). The function of the chemise was similar to that of today's vest or camisole top. It was a practical garment which gave extra warmth to the body. The chemise was worn under the corset next to the skin. It was also used as a protective layer to the body, as it was common for the corset boning to dig into the flesh. The chemise was a loose garment which stretched from the neck to the top of the pantaloons. It was a round necked garment which was either sleeveless or with quarter sleeves.

Most chemises were made from "cream or white flannel, cotton or linen" (appendix one). Mostly the women would make their own chemise out of whatever fabric was available to them. Unlike the chemise of the wealthy, it was a plain garment with virtually no decoration, unless time allowed for some embroidery (Pl.25). During the very cold winter months, many countrywomen exchanged their light chemise for a warmer, short sleeved, woollen vest. This was not unlike that of a mans, with a round neck and a short centre front closure of about three buttons.

The Corset:

From 1850 both women from rural and upper class backgrounds began to relax their rigid corsetry. Prior to this, tight corsetry had been seen as "a sign of wealth and good breeding" (Dunlevy, 1989, p. 170). To suit fashion trends upper class women frequently changed their style of corsetry. In contrast with this rural women were lucky to own any sort of corset. From pictorial references it seems that corseting was more popular with the younger generation .

The relaxation of the corset whilst giving a more natural waistline also allowed for better movement and flexibility which suited the daily lifestyle of rural women. The corset would provide some support to the back, which was helpful for the heavy work which these women undertook. The corset was fitted under the breast and ended just below the stomach. At the back was a closure which was laced through eyelets in a criss-cross pattern. Laces for a corset could be bought from a peddler. The corset was generally shop bought but there is some evidence in the 1940 Clothing Questionnaires of women wearing their own make-shift version . In the days of rigid corsets men were the only people who made them. Much strength was required for the close tight stitching which was needed to close and hold the strong boning in the coarse body of the corset. With the relaxation of the corset less strength was required, enabling women to be employed to make them.

Three types of boning was used in corsets, either whale boning, steel strips or cane, commonly known as sallys. The corset when worn with a slim bodice

gave the appearance of a neat waist which contrasted with the full gathered skirt with which it was worn (Pl. 26).

Bloomers / Drawers:

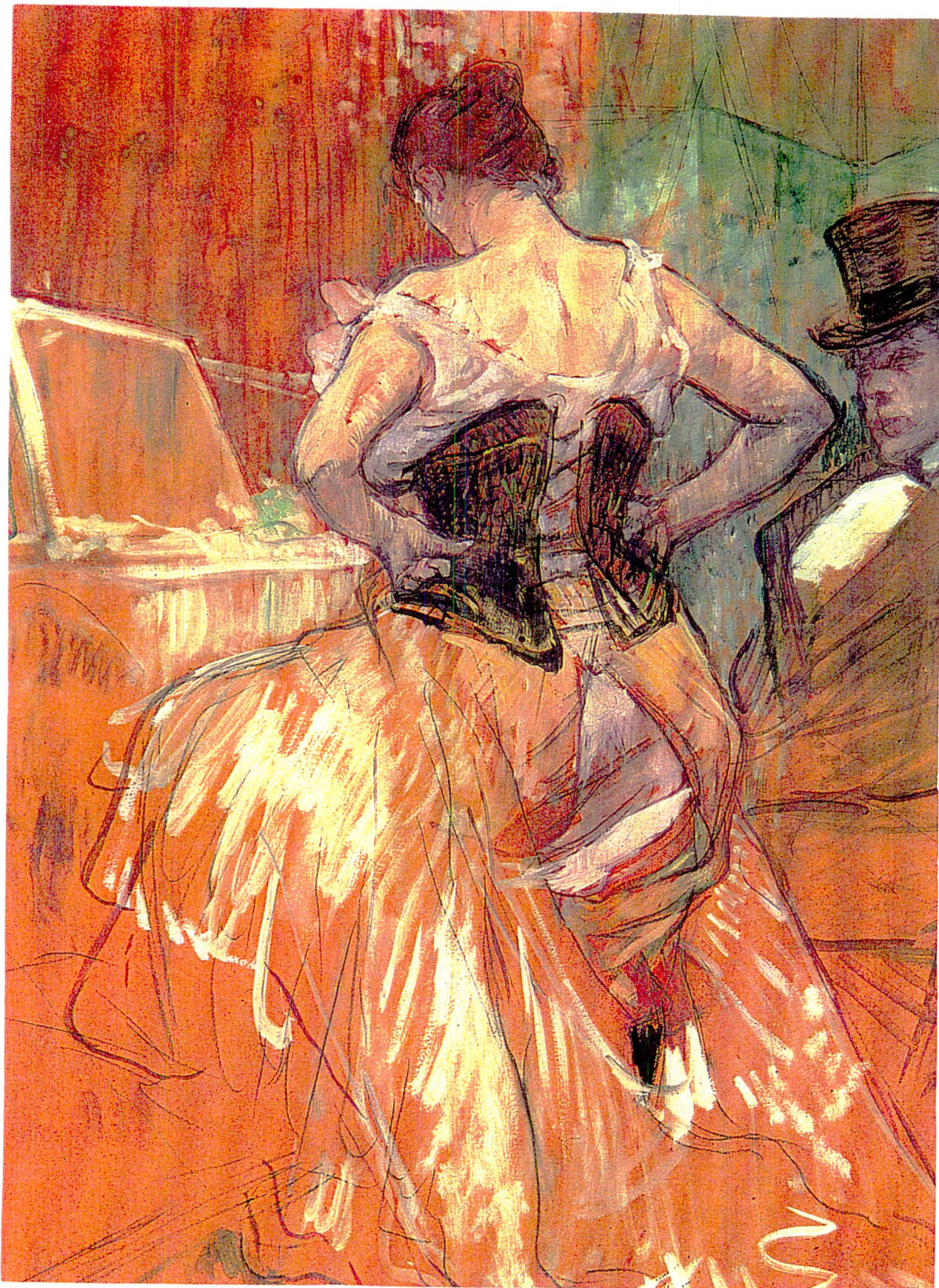
By the late 1870's, some form of drawers or bloomers were being worn by all women. They were comfortable and kept the lower body warm. Early bloomers worn by the upper and lower classes were known as open drawers, these survived up until 1900 when closed bloomers were introduced.

Open drawers had a split coming from the centre about four centimetres from the waistband, which stretched from the front all the way round to the back. One might imagine these coverings to be very airy and cause draughts, but with the layers of petticoats worn over them there was no fear of this. In my opinion these drawers were invented to make going to the toilet far easier. Another reason was that many rural houses had no lavatory facilities whatsoever and women were forced to urinate out of doors, and the drawers prevented the lifting of the skirts thus reducing the risk of chills (Pl.27).

Most rural women living in the West of the country would have made their own bloomers/drawers. Those living in Wicklow and villages bordering large cities and towns would have had the option of buying them. Douglas's of Camden Street, Dublin, was a popular shop for many Wicklow and Dublin women (appendix one). Bloomers were generally made from flannel and fleece lined fabrics. Popular colours were pink, blue, and white. They fastened at the waist and sometimes below the knee with a button. Generally attached to either side of the waistband was a tape for tying them. Buttons were also used as fasteners at the waist. Most rural women could not afford decorated bloomers, but those who could had ornamental lace frills or tucks at the bottom of the legs. From 1900, bloomers which were closed had elasticated waists and knees.



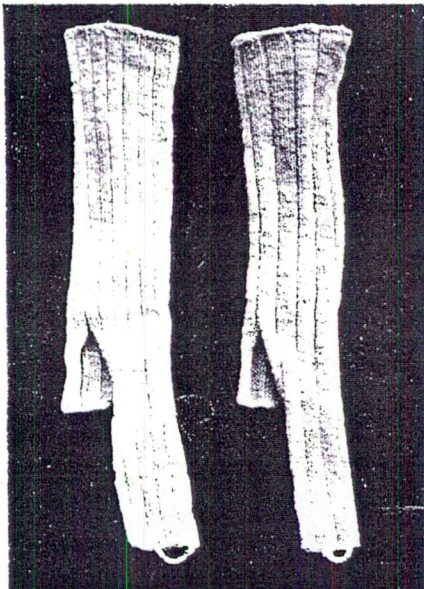
Pl.25 A long cotton chemise.



Pl.26 Whilst being out of context with the topic, this painting of a French prostitute, shows how a chemise was worn under the corset.



Pl.27 A pair of open drawers.



Pl.28 A pair of soleless stockings.

Stockings

Similar to the chemise and bloomers the stockings which were worn by rural Irish women in the early 1800's were unaffected by those of the high society ladies of London and Paris. Stockings which were being imported and sold in the large Irish cities were only for the extremely wealthy. With their bright colours, decoration and fine fabrics, for example silk, such stockings were far too expensive and impractical for those less well off. Instead rural women of the 1800's wore either soleless or closed hand knitted woollen stockings.

The soleless stocking was a very common form of footwear worn by rural people throughout the 19th and early 20th Century (Pl.28). Its popularity gradually died out during the early part of this century. Often referred to as *mairtini*, the stockings were knitted using home spun wool by the woman of the house or by a neighbouring woman. Stockings could also be bought at village fairs. The soleless stocking was similar in shape to what is thought as its predecessor, the footless freize legging (Dunlevy. 1989, p.88).

Soleless stockings were knee length and of rib or plain knit. The foot end was divided into two unequal parts which formed flaps. The large flap covered the upper part of the foot. Attached to the top of this flap was a woollen loop into which the middle toe was inserted. This held the stocking in place. The other flap was much smaller and covered the heel.

There was very practical reason behind the invention of the soleless stocking they were not worn to protect the feet or to keep them warm but instead to save the legs, which were so often exposed to the elements. They prevented the 'ire' from attacking the skin, a soreness which involved the splitting of the skin. Mahon believes that due to the work which women were involved with, they were the most likely to suffer from this (Mahon, Irish Dress). While working at home by the fire, it was common for a woman to scorch her legs, the sudden change in temperature when going out in the cold brought on the ire. Another factor which also caused this was walking through the wet meadows. The skirt would become wet and would slap

against the back of the legs when walking, thus causing the skin to become tender and susceptible to soreness.

By 1870, stockings in England were being made by machines in factories. Cotton, wool and silks were being knitted up on a circular machine which could make stockings with closed toes and heels. According to Farrell the price for manufactured stockings like these was three farthings less than the recommended government price (Farrell, 1992, p.56). Although the stockings produced were closed, the fabric still had to be finished. Cotton and merino stockings had to be scoured in soapy water to soften them and bring the wool to the surface. They then had to be dried, dyed and trimmed or stretched on a stocking shaped board and dried in a steam press to retain the shape. Before pressing, wool stockings were passed through wire brushes to raise the nap. After final inspection the stockings were stamped with the firms name and an indication of the fibre used. This mark done with ink or with a concentration of starch and launders blue. When washed the stamp came out. Farrell also suggests that stockings sizes were indicated by small holes which were knitted into the sock. One hole for size small, two for medium and three holes for large (Farrell, 1992, p.57).

By the beginning of the 20th Century many women, especially those living near cities bought manufactured wool stockings. These stockings were made from coarse wool and were hard wearing. The most popular colours of stockings were black and cream. By 1900 black stockings were so popular that out of twenty pairs of stockings manufactured, nineteen were black (Farrell, 1992, p.60). The reason for this must have been the practicality of the colour in relation to the dirty work which these women were involved with. Upper class ladies also favoured black stockings, this was due to the increase of dirt and dust in cities and towns. Prior to 1900, black stockings had been unreliable as the dye was noted to change colour and to stain the feet. Around 1900 stocking manufacturers came up with a reliable black dye which would not stain .

Although manufactured stockings were readily available many women in the early 20th Century still knitted stockings for the family. The wool used for these stockings usually came from the families own wool. The wool was washed, carded, spun and then knit. It took about one hour to spin an ounce of wool. For an average pair of stockings it would take about four ounces (appendix two). Stockings knit from homespun fleece were generally white or grey but sometimes they were dyed dark brown by using "log wood chippings" (1940 Clothing Questionnaires). Mrs Nanny Byrne can remember her mother spinning and knitting stockings for the whole family (appendix two). The wool spun for stockings generally came from a black and white fleece, this gave the wool a brown and cream fleck. When spinning wool for the men of the house, it would be spun slightly thicker. The stockings were generally rib knit and had reinforced or double heels to give them extra strength.

Garters:

Women's knee length stockings were held up by garters. These were generally made from black elastic. Those who could not afford to buy garters used "strips of linen or cotton" (1940 Clothing Questionnaire, ms.746), which they tied around the top of the stocking to hold them up.

Petticoats

"No one who has not lived for weeks among these grey clays and seas can realise the joy with which the eye rests on the red dresses of the women especially when a number are to be found together, as happened early this morning" J.M Synge

Rural Irish women were known to wear up to as many as three petticoats together. Although, according to Dunlevy many women were thought to have insufficient underclothes and were lucky to own one petticoat (Dunlevy, 1989, p.142)

Petticoats were full skirted garments. They were worn ankle length by the older women and slightly shorter by the younger generation. Petticoats were practical, as they kept the wearer warm and protected the overskirt. An example of this being, when working out of doors women could tuck their skirt into their waist band, leaving the petticoat to hang (Pl.10).

The red petticoat was probably the most common as it was worn by women rich and poor. It dates from at least the sixteenth Century. The red petticoat was commonly referred to as the Connemara Petticoat and in Gaelic speaking areas as the *cota beag* and *cota dearg*. The wealth of the wearer was indicated by the quality of the fabric.

Traditionally they were made from either homespun woven fabric, shop bought *bainin* or flannel. The fabric was often dyed with a madder red dye (see chapter five) to give the petticoat its characteristic scarlet hue. Mitchell informs us that three yards of thirty six inch wide fabric was needed to make a petticoat. The fabric was divided into three lengths. The top of the fabric was pleated into a cotton band of about three inches deep (Mitchell, 1978, p. 51). A narrow waist band or tape with tie strings were attached to this band. The ties held the petticoat closed. Most red petticoats were decorated with bands of black velvet circling the bottom of the skirt (Pl.29). There are some references in the 1940 *Clothing Questionnaires* that single women had more bands than married women but there is no real evidence to back this

suggestion. Tucks in the fabric was another form of decoration commonly used. If time allowed women would embroider the tucks with a feather stitch or french knots.

Women had a red petticoat for week days, but on Sundays would wear either a white petticoat or the *cota coiri* (red petticoat). The latter was made from a good quality fabric, far better than that of the everyday red petticoat, it was expected to last a lifetime, and was only worn on special occasions. In Galway it could form "....part of a dowry" (Dunlevy, 1989). One reason suggested to me for the popularity of the red petticoat by Nanny Byrne, was it had been thought that red was a good colour for insulation and kept arthritis and rheumatism away. The red petticoat was more popular in the west of the country in the 1900's. In the Aran Islands its popularity grew so much that the red petticoat soon took the place of the darker overskirt. One red petticoat which I saw was very different to any others mentioned. It was worn chiefly as an under garment, and had no decoration. The waist band was made from red cotton and was only about one and a half inches deep. The tie strings were made from white cotton (Pl.30).

A white cotton and flannel petticoat was sometimes worn over the red petticoat. These petticoats would have been made similarly to the red petticoat. The skirt section was gathered into a thin waistband which had tapes attached, for tying it closed. At the back of these petticoats there would have been a four to five inch opening. From c.1900 many rural women living in the east of the country abandoned their red petticoats for the lighter flannel and cotton petticoats. These could be found usually in blue pinstripe, grey, blue and white. The white petticoat was often decorated with lace bought from the peddlar.

Nightwear:

Whatever little regard rural women had for underwear, nightwear held even less importance. As long as it covered you and kept you warm in bed, that was all that mattered. They were commonly referred to as shifts or chemises. In bed women often wore old dresses. Others were made from

flannel. When no other fabric was available, women would use old calico flour bags to make nightdresses. In a description of their making by Mrs N Mulvey, a circle was cut in the top of the bag, and at the bottom two slits were cut up each side to allow for extra movement. At the top two small slits where small cap sleeves were inserted (appendix one).

Childrens nightwear:

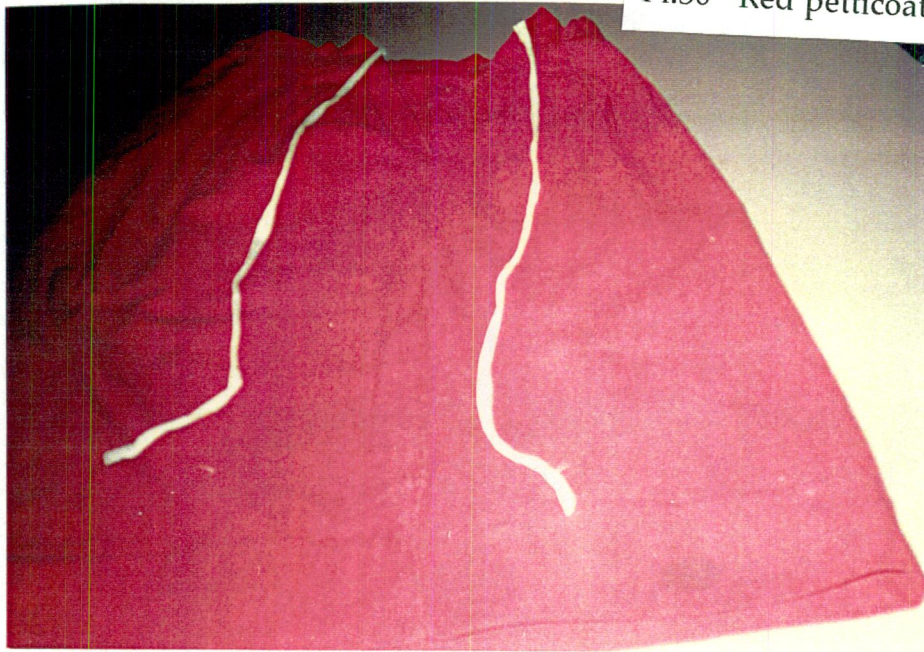
Children nightgowns were sometimes made from their mothers worn out petticoats. The tucks found on the bottom of the petticoat were sometimes used in a vertical fashion on the front yoke of the nightdress.



Pl.29 Red petticoat, belonging to the National History Museum.



Pl.30 Red petticoat.



Chapter Four

Footwear For Women and Their Children

Through interviews, pictorial references and literature, it is evident that footwear in Ireland became widespread after the famine of 1847. Barefootedness was not uncommon however in most parts of the country even until the 1920's and 30's. The most popular form of footwear after 1860, for both male and female, was the boot. Before the boot a built up shoe had been worn. This shoe had separate upper and sole-heel pieces, commonly referred to as the brogue. The brogue stayed popular for a short period after the famine, until it was later abandoned for the more fashionable strong boot or shoe. The footwear preceeding the brogue was the ancient style of footwear popularly known as pampooties. The pampootie survived until recent years on the Aran Islands. It was a single piece, single soled rawhide shoe.

Barefootedness:

Barefootedness has been a feature of Irish history, many Irish folk paintings have illustrated this (pl.31). It has been noted, that the early part of the nineteenth Century was more renowned for this than any other century. This widespread barefootedness was caused by the increase of population and declining living and economic factors. By the 1870's the numbers of people without shoes of some description had been reduced dramatically. Even the poorest labourer had, as Dunlevy puts it "a pair of well polished boots on Sunday" (Dunlevy, 1989, p.165).

Men were only rarely seen barefooted. This was due to their involvement in outside work, that is, farming and labouring. In contrast to this, it would not have been uncommon for a woman to be seen working barefoot around the family home up until 1900. Though most of these women would probably have owned a pair of boots, which would have only been worn on special occasions for example going to mass or devotions (appendix one). After 1900, it was common for most women to possess either two pairs of boots or strong

shoes. These would have been known as her working boots and her Sunday boots.

Children it seems, were generally the only people in Irish society whom after 1900 could be seen barefoot. Generally these periods of barefootedness would only last for short intervals, until their parents had saved enough money to buy a new pair of boots for them. Mrs Nellie Mulvey, can recall her own mother selling eggs or sometimes a pig to raise the price of a new pair of badly needed boots for her and her older sister May (appendix one).

Working and Sunday boots:

The tradition of owning a pair of working boots and Sunday boots seems to have been the norm for most rural women throughout Ireland, from 1900 up until the late 1940's.

The working boot and shoe worn by women were generally of the same design. Women neither had the money nor the time to worry about style. Such footwear was made from strong black leather and was laced up the front. Both shoes and boots of this nature had thick, hardwearing flat leather soles. These working shoes resembled those worn by boys. Footwear had to be tough, hardwearing and practical (N Byrne, appendix two) for the type of hard house and farm work which women undertook. Rubber boots, for outside work did not become available until around 1930. Most people were unable to afford such luxuries as modern waterproof footwear.

'Sunday boots' were literally only worn on Sundays or on very rare occasions. After returning from mass on Sunday these boots would be taken off and not displayed until the following week. Ms N Byrne, as a child remembers her father on his return from Galway telling her that when he was outside a church one Sunday he saw women stop to put on their boots before entering the church and remove them on leaving (appendix two). Ms Nellie Mulvey describes how Sunday boots generally consisted of a high block heel and were shank length (above the ankle). They were made from black leather and generally buttoned on the outside leg. They had up to

twelve buttons, all of which had to be fastened. As these buttons and button holes were so small, one had to use a button hook to fasten them. Some button hooks were foldable, and could be stored in a bag. The button hook had a long shaft which enabled the user to reach down and button her boots without too much stooping which was made difficult due to the corsets. To button the boot one slipped the hook into the button hole, caught the button and pulled it through the hole. These boots were more in tune with those being worn in fashionable towns and cities.

Childrens Shoes:

Children generally wore boots, as shoes were neither fashionable or as hardwearing. These boots were known either as "strong nail boots" or "hob nail boots" (Appendix one). Boots could be bought in the city or from local shoemakers. Winstanley was a common brand worn by Wicklow children in the early part of the twentieth century. These boots were originally made for boys but were commonly worn by children of both sexes. They were made from black or brown leather and were extremely strong, able to endure all the hardship to which they were exposed. They were similar in shape to todays hiking boot. Their soles were made from thick strong leather and were hammered in place with metal studs or nails (Pl.32) These nails could be seen when one walked and would make a clicking noise. Children would sometimes be scolded for loosing a nail from their boot. When a child received a new pair of boots there was usually a leather tag at the back which was sewn to the top of the boot. Girls it was noted, often cut this tag off for fear other children of the locality might laugh and jeer them for wearing boys boots (appendix one).

Boots were usually bought second-hand if a good pair could be had. One might only be lucky enough to receive a brand new pair of boots for a special occasion such as confirmation or communion. Children and adults, living on the border between Dublin and Wicklow, would usually have bought their second-hand boots in the city. Two of the more common places which were renowned for their boots were the Ivy market and a Ms Loughlann of Kevin Street (appendix one).

Children weren't generally brought shopping for their shoes. It was more common for a parent, in many cases the father, to return home with a new, or at least new to them, pair of boots. There was great excitement when receiving a new pair of boots. In many homes it seemed to be the fathers job to measure a childs foot for his or her new boots. In order to do this the child would place their bare foot on the floor. With a penknife their father would make a mark at the childs' toe and heel. He would then take a stick, place it at one end of the line and measure it to the other mark, there he would cut the stick. The father would put the stick into his inside pocket and return in the evening with a new pair of boots .



Pl.31 This painting by Daniel McDonald (1821-1853) shows people going barefoot.



Pl.32 This photo taken of Wicklow schoolchildren. Note the nails in the soles of the boots, and the two boys with no shoes on.

Chapter Five

The Importance of Wool

Homespun woollen fabric, and shop bought cottons and linens were commonly used for family clothing and household furnishings. Poor circumstances forced women to be thrifty in their utilization of cloth. Old clothes were never thrown out, but instead used to repair other garments or converted into nightwear.

Wool was the most popular fabric worn by the poorer class. It was hardwearing, warm and above all commonly available. The process of shearing to the final stage of cloth was a lengthy one, and took up a lot of time.

The Use of Flour Bags:

When woollen fabrics were unavailable women would often utilise the flour bags. These were used for many practical household and clothing items. In Wicklow, the most common brand of flour came from Bolands mill, Dublin. Flour bags were made from white calico. The brand of the mill was usually stamped on the outside of the bag with black or red ink. Women would rip the bags open. In order to remove the writing, women would boil the bags in a pot with washing soda (appendix one). Girls would help their mothers with this. The bags were then scrubbed and rinsed in cold water. Even after all the scrubbing, a red or black hue would sometimes remain. The calico was usually very hard and rough even though it had been boiled.

From the bags, women would make bed sheets. This was done by joining enough bags together until it was large enough to cover the bed. Many of the aprons worn by women were made from the bags. These were converted into aprons by attaching strings to either side of the waistband. It was also common for nightdresses and pillowcases to be made from the bags. Pillows were made from the goose down, which would have been collected from the

farm birds. Sometimes large double pillows called bolsters were made. All the stitching was done by hand.

Sheep:

In rural areas even the poorest households usually kept sheep, they cost little or nothing to rear, and in return provided their owner with wool. This was either sold or used in the production of cloth for the household. The Galway and Cheviot were the most common breeds of sheep found in rural Ireland (Pl.33). They could survive in the bleakest of environments, hilltops, boglands and stony ground. The wool sheared from these sheep was of a good quality and from it the fabrics for skirts and jackets were woven. Black faced sheep were not as popular as their wool contained large quantities of hair, commonly called kemp (Mitchell, 1978, p.13). Wool spun from this breed was therefore of a poor quality and did not dye well. It was however suitable for coarse fabrics, for example rough tweeds.

Sheep shearing took place at the beginning of the summer. It was considered a man's job, with neighbouring men throughout the community helping each other with this task. For this they were rewarded with a fine dinner and a glass of porter prepared for them by the woman of the house (Mitchell, 1978, p.54). The wool sheared from the stomach of the sheep was usually dirty and very matted.

Fleece/Wool:

When shearing had been completed the wool for the family's use was handed over to the care of a woman. There was much preparation involved with wool prior to spinning. Firstly it had to be washed. This was done by placing the fleece into a tub of luke warm water. Mitchells' account of this, involves women getting into the tub and using their feet to wash out the dirt (Mitchell, 1978, p.54). When the wool was clean, it was removed from the tub and rinsed. Rinsing removed any loose dirt from the fleece. This was sometimes done by placing the fleece in a rod basket which in turn was held in a flowing river. The wool was then gently wrung and spread out on a

clean area to dry (Mitchell, 1978, p.54). Fleece was always washed before it was spun as dirt would be difficult to remove after spinning.

Teasing:

Following this process the wool was usually teased, this involved separating the fibres in a lock of fleece. Teasing took place before the wool was carded, its purpose being to ease the work of the carder, by producing soft and light wool (Anderson, 1987, p.255).

Oiling

Washed fleece was oiled to restore lost oil (Anderson, 1987, p.180). Wool was oiled before carding using either stale butter or an oil bought specially for wool. When oiling, the wool was spread out and the butter or oil rubbed in thoroughly. It was then put into a pot with a weight which kept it pressed down so the oil could soak in. This was left for three to four days and made spinning easier (Lucas, 1970, p. 42).

Carding:

Carding was one of the last and most important preparations that wool undertook before spinning. Poorly carded wool produced yarn which was unequal in thickness, thus causing irregularities in fabrics woven from it. Carding was sometimes used for the purpose of blending coloured wools. It also introduced air, creating volume in the wool. Any remaining tangles were removed during this process (Anderson, 1987, p.29). From the carded wool, some women would make quilts. The wool was placed between two sheets. A quilting frame held the quilt in place. They were hand sewn into small square patterns. Quilts were generally sold (Pl.34).

Spinning:

It was women who were associated with spinning. A variety of different spinning wheels could be found throughout the country. The Big Wheel

could be found throughout the country. The Big Wheel was a common spinning wheel which was mostly found in the Aran Islands and Galway regions. However, Ms N Byrne from Co Wicklow still possesses a Big Wheel belonging to her mother. This wheel now stands as a piece of furniture and is about four feet from the ground, standing on four legs of about nine inches. She is not sure of the origins of this spinning wheel (N Byrne, 11th November 1995).

The spinner had to be standing when using the Big Wheel (Pl.35). The right hand was used to turn the wheel by its spokes, whilst the left hand drew out the thread. In her book *Irish Spinning, Dyeing and Weaving* Lillias Mitchell writes "to begin spinning take a carded roll and wrap one end round spindle, draw out from this roll producing spin yarn. Remove unspun carded roll from spindle and then wrap the spun end round it. You are then ready to spin. Draw out the remainder of this roll and join a second carded roll before the yarn is spun to its final requirement" (Mitchell, 1978, p.18,). When the required amount of wool was spun it was sometimes dyed before being knitted or woven.

Dyeing of Wool:

Wool was dyed either before or after spinning. Many women left the fleece in its natural colour as time for dyeing was not available, instead to introduce colour they would spin a black and white fleece together giving the wool a two tone fleck. When the time was available rural women mostly used the natural dyes that were available to them. Colours were decided according to what dyes were available. Bark, soot, berries, flowers, lichens and roots were widely used. These produced most colours worn by rural women (reds, browns, indigo and mauve).

Madder Red:

Madder red is a variety of red dye extracted from plants. In the Burren and Aran Islands, where the wearing of red by women was predominant, red dye was found in the plant ".....*Rubia pregrina*". This plant lives near rocky

costal environments. Its leaves are evergreen and has a rough stem. Some colouring is found in the stem but mostly in the roots (Pl.36).

Lichen Dyes:

Lichen dyes come from flowerless plants which were grow on stones and tree trunks. One variety used by the rural women of Connemara was *Parmelia saxatilis* (Mitchell, 1978, pg 22). This was also found growing on rocks near the sea. The colour produced from this was brown (Pl.37)

Purple Dye:

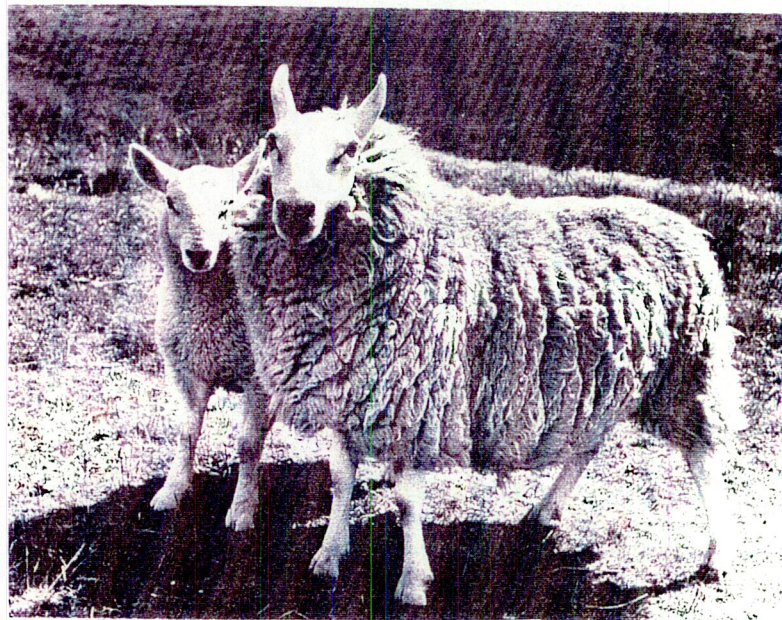
In bogland areas women picked the tops from heather to produce a purple dye. There is evidence that in early years costal areas used the juices from shells eg; the *Purpura lapillus*. These gave a small amount of dye which had to be taken from the live fish, otherwise it was of no use. The dye came from a gland and was left for approximately three days until it had changed to a purple colour.

Indigo:

Indigo was a popular blue which was especially favoured by older women. It was made from a herb which was put into a pot containing water. This was left to rot and was then put into the sun to evaporate into a thick paste (Mitchell, 1978, p.24).

Knitting Yarn:

Women knit stockings and jumpers from dyed and undyed yarn. Knitting is thought to have been introduced to Ireland during the 17th Century (McQuillan, 1993, p.15). In many parts of the country it was a part of everyday life. Knitting took up a lot of time, causing those who knit for extra income to do so when any free time was available to them (Pl.38). Handknit jumpers were usually plain and extremely warm. Stockings were difficult to knit and were made on the round using three or four needles.



Pl.33 Blackface and Galway sheep.



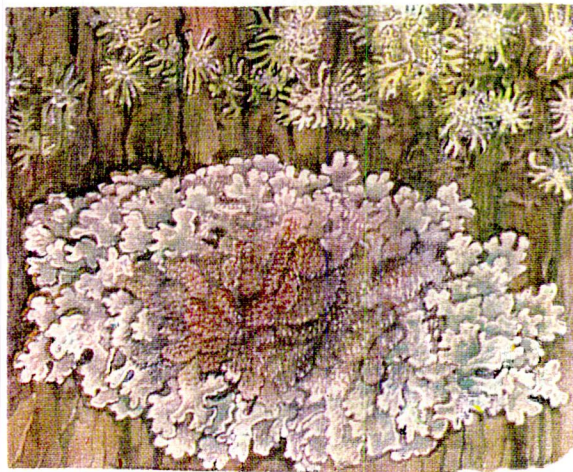
Pl.34 A woman carding.



Pl.35 A woman spinning on a big wheel.



Pl.36 Rubia Pregrin, the plant from which Madder dye comes from.



Pl.37 Lichen plant.



Pl. 38 Woman walking to a fair knits while having a rest.

Weaving:

From 1895 a loom incorporating a fly shuttle was introduced for wool weaving. This produced a higher quantity of quality fabric. Prior to this there had been a throw loom which involved the weaver hand throwing the shuttle across the loom, between two sets of warp thread (Mitchell, 1978, p.20). The thickness of cloth woven depended on two factors. The first being the thickness of the spun yarn and the second being how closely the weaver packed the threads. The warp threads were attached to the loom to take the strain. The threads of the weft ran at right angles to them. When cloth was woven it was usually loose enough for the wind and rain to go through. To prevent this, woven cloth was fulled (thickened).

Scouring:

Cloth was sometimes scoured to remove dirt and grease before being fulled. The woven fabric consisted of the natural oil from the wool and the extra oil which was added during spinning. It was however more common for scouring and fulling to be combined.

Fulling:

"An account of fulling of cloth ... survived in a few districts in the west of the country within living memory" (Lucas, 1970, p.18). The combination of scouring and fulling cleaned the cloth giving it greater density and a softer finish. This was partly effected by shrinkage but mostly by the loosening of fibres from threads. This closed the spaces between the warp and weft.

The process of fulling involved the kicking of cloth by two or four people. Fulling usually took place indoors. The cloth was placed in a make-shift rectangular box which had open ends. The kickers sat in either end of the box, opposite each other. Before the kicking of fabric took place, warm soapy water was added. This moistened the fabric and acted as a lubricant. If the fabric had not been previously scoured a stronger detergent was needed to deal with the build up of grease. Stale human urine was most popular as it

was favoured for its strong alkaline properties. Even when other detergents were available urine was still favoured in many parts of the country. It was heated before being mixed with salt, warm water and soap. The cloth was immersed in this liquid and kicked vigorously by the bare footed kickers. "No one was allowed to urinate outside or throw out urine" (Lucas, 1970 p.43-45). The duration of fulling varied with the thickness and purpose for which the cloth was required.

After fulling the cloth was washed in clean warm water and rolled. Rolling was done to remove wrinkles and to stretch the fabric. Lucas in his account on cloth finishing is uncertain if the cloth was rolled while still wet. For rolling the cloth was placed on a chair at one end of a table. One man fed it onto the table where two men, either side made sure it was free from wrinkles. There was a fourth man at the top of the table who rolled it onto a stick.

Napping:

After fulling cloth was sometimes napped. This involved a wire toothed wool card, curling the fibres of woollen cloth. In Lucas's account a few drops of golden syrup was used to help gather the fibres into curls (Lucas, 1970 p. 53)

Conclusion

From this research I have learned that women's lives centered around feeding and clothing the family. It could take from early morning to late in the evening to finish all the chores. This was one of the reasons rural women's clothing in the eighteenth and nineteenth Century was utilitarian rather than fashionable. Their clothing also had a certain uniformity. Clothes were mostly homemade and hand sewn. Fabrics were either homespun or shop bought. The colours worn by women living in the west were far brighter than those worn in the east. It was not until I saw rural clothing in the museum that I could really appreciate such dress. The texture and colours of fabric and the simplicity of design is what makes such clothing so naive and appealing. Children's clothes were similar to those of their mothers. Clothing displayed women's social status and sometimes their rank within the family. Barefootedness was common amongst the poor but in the latter part of the period studied generally only children went barefoot. In Wicklow it seems women accepted new fashions and were quicker to change their traditional style of dress than their counterparts in the west of Ireland. What I found most interesting was that the elderly women I interviewed can remember a life so different to today's. It is surprising to see how quickly long lived traditions can disappear.

Appendix One.

Interview with Nellie Mulvey 10/10/1995

Q. Nellie in what year were you born?

A. I was born in 1912

Q. Can you remember the clothes worn by your mother and grandmother?

A. I can remember what my mother wore and remember seeing photos of my grandmother when she was a young girl.

Q. What clothes did your grandmother wear?

A. I remember seeing granny Quigley in a photo dressed in a black hip length cap and a black bonnet with loops around the face. She also had a black ribbon around her neck.

Q. Can you remember your granny wearing any other clothes?

A. Granny died about three years before I was born, but I remember older women in the area wearing black stockings, drawers, corsests with bones which were laced in the back and white aprons.

Q. Where did these old women get their clothing?

A. They bought their white aprons in Douglas's.

Q. What clothes did your mother wear?

A. I remember mammy wearing white fleece lined woolen drawers to the knee. These had elastic waist and knees. As far as I can remember she wore thick black rib knit stockings, and wore black elastic garters above her knees to keep them up. She wore a white apron but when she was working she put an apron made from a hessian sack over this.

Q.. Did your mother wear a cape?

A. No No only granny.

Q. Did your mother wear a bodice or blouse?

A. Yes mammy wore a black bodice.

Q. Can you describe this bodice?

A. As far as I can remember it was high necked and had buttons up the front it had long sleeves and was made from soft material.

Q. Did she wear a shawl?

A. No, but granny wore a black crochet one.

Q. Can you describe the skirt which your mother wore?

A. It was very wide around the waist, it must have been gathered. I think it was made from a heavy black material. Sometimes she wore a pinafore which had a tight top and wide skirt.

Q. Did your mother wear shoes?

A. Yes of course.

Q. What were these like?

A. Well on Sundays she wore low ankle boots which had a high heel and buttoned to the side. During the week she had a pair of strong black shoes.

Q. What sort of shoes did you wear?

A. We wore strong hob nail boots commonly called Winstanley. [She laughs] as a girl I remember cutting the tags of the top of these boots for fear the other children would jeer me. Ah I remember the time my mammy had to sell a pig to buy my shoes.

Q. Did your mother make or repair any of your clothes?

A. No mammy wasn't great at the sewing, but she did repair the knees of trousers and darned stockings. Oh! I do remember her making our nightshirts from old bags.

Q. What sort of old bags?

A. Old Bolands calico flour bags. She would rip them up and put them into a pot with soda to scrub out the red writing that was on them.

Q. Did your mother make anything else from these flour bags?

A. She often made pillow cases, sheets and chemises from them.

Q. Can you remember how she made you nightdress?

A. She cut a hole for my head in the top of the bag and cut two slits up either side. Sometimes she added small sleeves.

Q. Did your mother wear any head coverings?

A. Ah only on Sundays when she wore a head scarf.

Q. In winter time did she wear any extra clothing?

A. I can remember a heavy cream wool vest with buttons in the front. In winter I can kind of remember her wearing an extra v-neck black cardigan.

Q. How did your mother wear her hair?

A. Mammy would always have her hair clipped back in a bun.

Q. Do you remember any myths or stories connected with hair?

A. Only that hair was cut on a first Friday and never washed on a Sunday. I remember my mother telling us not to throw our hair in the fire because when we went to heaven we would have to come back and find it.

Q. Did people have a set of good clothes for Sunday?

A. Oh yes most people had two sets of clothes.

Q. How did your mother care for your clothes?

A. You mean wash them..... Mammy washed the clothes in a wooden tub in medium hot water with washing soda. When our clothes were very grubby she boiled them in a pot over the fire. Mammy sometimes brought the clothes to the river, we knew it as the alt or ait to rinse them and laid them to dry on the bushes.

Q. Was there an particular day for washing clothes?

A. Monday was usually wash day, but on Saturday night the caps were washed and starched.

Q. Were your clothes ironed?

A. They were ironed on the table, we were lucky as mammy had a tin cover on the bottom of the iron.

Q. What did people do in their spare time?

A. People in those times had very little spare time. Ah but I remember house dances, and hay drawings at the end of August. There would be set dancing and a malodin playing. Wait till I tell about the hay dances. No woman was allowed to go unless a boy who had taken in the hay that day called for her. One night me and May my sister knew there was a dance in Kennys but by 10 O'clock no boy had called so we went to bed. We were in bed about half an hour when a man came so I got May out of bed and of we went.

Q. Nellie can you tell me were women recognised for the hard work which they were involved with?

A. Not at all it was taken for granted, but sure wasn't it all in a days work.

Appendix Two.

Interview with Ms Nanny Byrne 27/11/1995

Q.. Would your mother make for your own house only?

A. Ah she would sell quilts to Fitzsimons in Glencullen, they often bought them and took them to london.

Q. What was the wheel this was for quilting was it?

A. It was for quilting it would go down all the stitching.

Q. And what kind of wool would you have in this, sheeps wool?

A. Ah yes sheeps wool it would be teased out with a card the same as she would tease it out for spinning.

Q. They woud shear the sheeps wool and then card it?

A. Yes Yes.

Q. Was it your own wool?

A. Yes it was our own wool.

Q. Did she knit Aran or Plain Jumpers?

A. Ah plain there were six of us where would she be going and cows to milk and everything. My father would be gone at all hours in the morning to the quarry. Then when he came back in the evening he would have to mow a field of grass.

Q. Would she have sold the jumpers she knitted?

A. No no she would have just kept them for ourselves, she wouldn't have had time sure she baked all the bread and sowed all the vegetables. and with the hens, turkeys and ducks.

Q. She never sold the wool?

A. No she didn't but I did during the war years when there was none to be had, I sold it for a shilling an ounce. You would get five pounds for a fully grown sheep or lamb.

Q. Would your mother have knit socks ?

A. Oh she used to knit their socks.

Q. Would they have been double soled?

A. No she use to just put double heels in them. She used to get the black fleece of a sheep and she would mix this with white fleece make this into a ball which turned out to have a fleck in it.

Q. Did your mother do any embroidery?

A. No she had no time to do it, she use to make our little dresses, put the matreial out on the table and cut it out without a pattern.

Q. Did your mother make her own clothes?

A.No. She didn't have the time, no machine or anything. When she made ours she would have to hand do them.

Q. Would you have had shoes all the time?

A.We had boots, shoes weren't fashionable then.

Q Would they have been second hand boots?

A Yes my mother would have got second hand ones if she could have got decent ones, but she would have got new ones for communion or something like that.

Q. Do you ever remember going barefoot ?

A. No. We had hard wearing boots or shoes. As we are talking about shoes I remember my father telling me a story of a time when he was in Galway and he saw women putting on their shoes before entering the church and taking them off as soon as they left.

Q What sort of clothes would your mother have worn?

A She bought the clothes whatever she wore, she would have a coat for seven or eight years, and they were longish. No short skirts then I tell you.

Q. Would she have worn a red petticoat or anything underneath her skirt?

A. No she never wore flannel at all, a lot of the older women did

Q. Did your grandmother at all or can you remember?

A. I don't remember her with a red petticoat to be honest with you but a lot of older women did, because they said you would get arthritis or rheumatism. They would put a little bit of lace or calico around the bottom or put a bit of embroidery on it.

Q. Would your mothers skirts have been embroidered?

A. She used to put a little flower out of French Knots but sometimes she wouldn't have had the time.

Q. Would your mother have mostly worn black?

A. Ah yes, she mostly wore black.

Q. Another thing, would she have worn an apron?

A. Ah yes nearly always a white apron, unless she had a bit of cotton and she would make up one in half an hour with her hands just gathered at the waist and put a band on it.

Q. Would there have been pockets on the apron?

A. Oh she'd always have a pocket on her apron.

Q. Have you any memories of your mother or grandmother wearing a shawl?

A. No, my mother never wore a shawl and I don't think my grandmother did.

Q. Did she wear a scarf or hat?

A. She wore a bonnet, I remember that, and she had it in a little hat box, and she used to put it in under the bed of all places, and she couldn't get it out, and she had me under the bed. I remember one morning one of the springs caught in my hair.

Q. Do you remember any little boys dressed as little girls?

A. Ah yes sure I remember the Welsh boys being dressed in frocks.

Q. And what was the reason for this or do you know

A. No to be honest with you I only remember seeing them

Q. Was your mother ever paid in kind for her home produce

A. She might have got material or something.

Appendix Three.

Interview with Mrs. Iris Beatty 24/11/1995

Q. Iris I believe your great- grand mother was a Penn.

A. Yes her name was Alice Mary Penn, she eloped with man, a man who was the stable boy.

Q. She would have been a quaker wouldn't she?

A. Yes so she never wore anything but dark brown or black . She was five foot and her one passion in life was coloured shoes. She always had red coloured shoes sticking out under her long clothes.

Q. What else would she have worn under these long clothes?

A. Underneath this skirt, and top which would have been boned she wore a white cotton petticoat, and underneath that she wore a white flannel petticoat.

Q. That would have been heavier wouldn't it, sort of woollen?

A. Yes, and under that she wore a coloured flanneled petticoat.

Q. Would it have been red?

A. Well they had red, blue and pink, and under that she wore pantaloons.

Q. Were they the ones that came down to the knee?

A. Yes, with stockings up to the knee, they were held up with garters.

Q. Would the stockings have been black?

A. They would have been black, then over her pantaloons she would have wore a camisole which went to the top of the pantaloons.

Q. What would the camisole been made from?

A. Cotton, and over this she would have wore the boned corset

Q. Would she have ever referred to it as a stay?

A. She did I think, over that she would have worn a blouse to match the skirt.

Q. Would her blouse have had puffy sleeves?

A. Yes the leg of mutton

Q. Is that what it was called?

A. Yes, leg of mutton

Q. Would they have been one piece or two piece?

A. They were made in two halves I'm sure.

Q. Then would there have been a yoke in the front?

A. From the photographs I remember the tops were seamed

Q. Would her skirt have had a waistband?

A. Yes it would have had a tie waistband

Q. Would her pantaloons have had an opening in the back?

A. Yes

Q. Did she wear a cape?

A. I'm sure she did

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