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**A Quilt from Carnanrancy:
A Social & Cultural examination of a
Nineteenth Century patchwork Quilt from
Northern Ireland.**

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INTRODUCTION

Over the years my embroiderer's interest in quilts and patchwork has grown, from my study of quilts, American, English and other wise in publications. What I had focused on was their obvious beauty, craftsmanship, excellence in technique and sophistication in design and colour. My view had become romantically coloured and I had some how forgotten that poverty played a part in their production. These quilts were constructed out of need with what ever fabrics were available to them. They hold a key to the past, and to a world that survives in memory, documentation, and oral tradition. The quilts were made and intended for use; now they are put away and not used. But they are not put away in order to preserve them carefully as they are bundled into a cupboard. Perhaps they are not clean enough or modern enough to use. No great sentimental value is placed upon them, but there is an awareness that they represent a different world, some considerable effort and also warmth in a time of need.

My aim is to examine the social and cultural importance of quilts and quilting in Ulster in the nineteenth century. In particular, I wish to focus on a family quilt from a town land in County Tyrone called Carnanrancy.

I will examine the background and social history of the region in which the Carnanrancy Quilt was made, to help in the understanding and appreciation of this era and this area. It will also, I hope lend some insight into the people of rural Ulster around the middle of the nineteenth century.

An examination of the technical qualities and design of the Carnanrancy Quilt, I hope will reveal insights into constructional and piecing techniques. Finally, I will compare the Carnanrancy Quilt to two somewhat later quilts from a neighbouring area, which is called Carrickmore.

I am not only interested in the quilts in terms of technique, design, colour and technical properties which are normally associated with successful patchwork or quilts. I am also interested in how they fit in with the lives of those who made and used them.

My information was gathered through different methods of research. I researched the social and historical background of the place and time that the quilt was made, by talking and interviewing family members who were closest to the production of the quilt. People such as Patrick "John" McRory, or Packy John as he is known, his sister Susanna McRory Bradley, and their cousin Sarah McAleer, all grand children of Biddy Stewart the maker of the quilt, I also spoke to a great grandchild Eileen Morris.

A great deal of my specific research was collected from the Ulster Folk and Transport Museum Cultra, Co. Down as well as from books, especially those by, Estyn E. Evans, Kevin Danaher, Timothy O'Neill and Olive Sharkey. These provided insights into social and historical aspects of rural life. Other authors like Janet Rae and Dorothy Osler were sources of technical information. Periodicals namely '*The Ulster Folk Life*' contained relevant articles and papers, on quilting and patchwork, written by Laura Jones and Deirdre E. Morton.

A questionnaire or quilt survey that was compiled and circulated within the nine counties of Ulster, by the Folk Museum at Cultra in the 1970's, revealed much about the social aspect of nineteenth and early twentieth century quilting as well as technical information. Further information came from a paper written by Valerie Wilson in 1991, and a later quilt survey conducted by her in 1990, again within the nine counties of Ulster. Valerie Wilson is a curator of patchwork and quilting in the

Ulster Folk and Transport Museum and was herself a source of much information, and gave me the opportunity to look through the archives and the quilt collection.

First hand experience of handling quilts, the Carnanrancy Quilt, the Carrickmore Quilts and some in the folk museums collection, provided me with relevant technical information. Theoretical knowledge comes alive and becomes useful only through seeing and handling patchwork quilts of all ages and origins. The experience that can be gained by looking at quilts cannot be replaced by a book, but the information that is gathered can be strengthened through reading. In exploring the social and cultural fabric of the Carnanrancy Quilt and not merely its technical qualities or craftsmanship. I hope to show the contrast between the economic poverty and the creative wealth of a people that were curtailed by poverty but liberated through their innovation and imagination.

CHAPTER 1: BACKGROUND & SOCIAL HISTORY

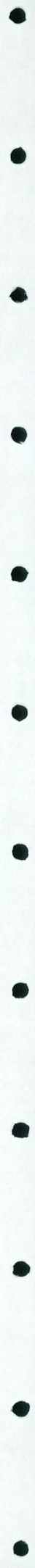
Ulster is the most northerly of the countries four provinces, it consists of nine counties. It is a province which in the past and still today is the source of much controversy.

Since the 1600's, Ireland in its entirety was under English rule. Plantations and dispossessions were widespread and people were forced from their homes and lands into smaller holdings. Rent was expected for these meagre homesteads or evictions were imminent. Land was divided and governed by a Landlord to whom everyone was answerable. These Aristocratic overlords, had seized the fattest lands, and resided in what was termed as the "*Big*" and "*Manor*" house. After centuries of political unrest and insurrection, the 1916 Rising was followed by the Act of partition in 1921. Six of the nine counties of Ulster, Antrim, Armagh, Down, Fermanagh, Derry, and Tyrone were combined under the official title of Northern Ireland to be governed as part of the United Kingdom. The remaining Ulster counties of Cavan, Monaghan, and Donegal then became part of the newly formed Irish Free State. County Tyrone lies in the Heart of Ulster, it is a very mountainous county with "*Hill*" or "*Glen*" making up in part almost every rural place name there.

Carnanrancy where this study is based is in the Sperrin area of County Tyrone (Fig. 1). It is known as The Sperrin Area because of the dominant Sperrin mountains. Carnanrancy is a small town land in the parish of Greencastle, a parish that was formed following Catholic Emancipation in 1829. There is no memory or physical evidence to suggest that there was a '*Big*' or '*Manor*' house in this area. However, it is suggested by the physical terrain that no landlord would have wished to settle here. These tracts of land were absorbed by them purely to collect rent. As a result these absentee landlords employed agents to collect the rent from tenants.



Fig. 1, Detail of map of East Tyrone, Showing Carnanrancy and the area.



Patrick "John" McRory remembers that Carnanrancy came within a large estate and it was thought that the landlord lived in London.

To many in rural Ireland '*townland*' is a term of great importance,

"Almost everyone of the sixty or seventy thousand townlands of Ireland is for some family, synonymous with hearth and home. It is their postal address and legal title for the individual farm carries a family name and its postal identity is merged in that of the townland. It is the name of the family is 'on the land', and every effort will be made to keep it 'there'". [Evans, 1996 Pg.45]

The inhabitants of the Carnanrancy townland were dotted along either side, up or down on the Carnanrancy road which runs for almost one mile. Townlands were usually defined by some physical feature, Carnanrancy being no exception. It begins at the Owenkillen River and ends just at the foot of the Keerin mountain. Patrick "John" McRory claims

"that there would have been no more than eight houses in the townland in the 1860's and six of the eight houses would have been Morris's and only two of the six Morris families would have been related". (McRory, 23.8.97)

This information illustrates something of the time, that when people were driven into remote areas, they settled in close proximity to each other in family groups for moral support. The houses were small and like that of the remainder of rural Ulster they consisted of only two rooms. A kitchen and a bedroom (Fig. 2). It would have been rare, if ever, to have seen a newly married couple beginning their life together, independent of their respective families. A house in nineteenth century rural Ulster would have contained a set of parents, unmarried brother(s) and sister(s), maiden aunts and bachelor uncles, who hadn't taken the boat or gone to the big city to try their luck. The dwelling house, the yard or '*street*' as it is known in most country

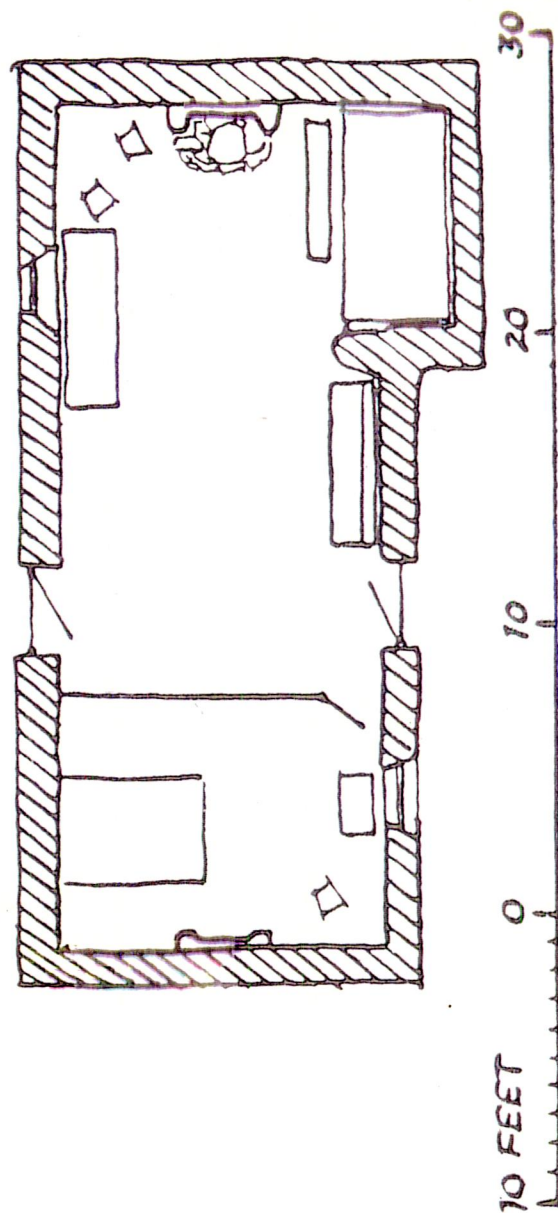


Fig. 2, A plan of a two roomed dwelling house;
Kitchen and Bedroom. (Evans 1957, Pg. 25)



places of the area, and out houses what few of them existed, formed the central point of the farm around which day to day events pivoted. The land on which they lived and worked was poor but could supply rough grazing. Smaller more fertile areas were given over for the growing of oats or corn as it is often known as well as hay and potatoes. As the land was poor a lot of it was bogland suitable only for turf, of which they needed a plentiful supply to keep their draughty houses heated.

Out of the corn they made meal for porridge or '*sturrabout*' which amounted to the same thing, and cornbread which together were the main components of their diet. Hay provided palatable fodder for cattle and horses and enough potatoes would have been grown to see the family through the year. Livestock would have been limited to a small group of fowl, one cow some sheep and possibly a horse.

There were many periods of famine throughout the eighteenth and nineteenth century due to crop failure. Potatoes were, the staple diet of the majority of the population. Due to a fungal growth in the 1840's, they rotted in the ground which resulted in starvation or disease, which in turn caused over two million people to either die or emigrate. During the famine, the rural Irish people had little or no material wealth and what little material possessions existed had lost their significance to serve only as currency for food or as fuel.

The famine had undermined much of their slowly acquired confidence, but not completely as they were resilient people that were in some ways strengthened by the many harrowing events that occurred on a national scale, like the famine or on a personal level in the lives of individuals. In many of his publications, E. Estyn Evans, Professor of Geography, and an Authority of Irish Folklores and Irish Studies, talks of the strength of will, that the Irish possessed. He captures in written word the soul of the Irish, and the relationship between the Irish people, their land

and their environment. He tells us that inspite of the difficulties and hardships that life presents the Irishman with...

"He has fashioned the land, moulded it to his needs and absorbed its nature in doing so." [Evans, 1996 Pg. 42]

The daily routine of life on a remote farm presented most people with few opportunities for seeing or speaking to anyone from outside their immediate neighbourhood. There was however many special events that would have created opportunities for a gathering to meet, to gossip, sing, dance and of course to court. Weddings, wakes, chapel on a Sunday, fairs, ceiling and quiltings are but a few of the gatherings that would have been worked into one's social calendar. These were events which would have made life a little more enjoyable in the midst of poverty, sickness and death.

One example which illustrates the sporadic distribution of settlements and the importance for social interaction is that according to Eileen Morris,

"People would have to walk anything up to ten miles to Sunday Mass, some may have used a horse and cart but most wouldn't have had that facility." [Morris, 27.8.97]

In turn perhaps the large attendances at rural churches and chapels owes much to the social need of a scattered population. Estyn Evans also illustrated this need for social interaction with reference to someone who arrives late to chapel, with the phrase

"He missed the mass but hit the gathering, he had something worth while for his trouble". [Evans 1957 Pg. 24]

A market or a fair day in a specific town was held one day every month. It is recorded that a fair took place on almost every day for the month of January in the

year 1880 in the County of Tyrone. [Henry, 1990 Pg. 45] These fairs occurred in almost every large town in County Tyrone on one day a month. The country people would travel, sometimes to as many as three fairs in any one month, which was plenty considering their work loads. But the Irish Countryman would find any excuse to go.

"It is his proud boast that he has seen so many fairs, it is by the fairs and not by the calendar that he measures time and dates, important events in the life of the community" [Evans, 1957 Pg. 260]

The kitchen was the nucleus of the Irish homestead and its warm hearth-fire drew in many visitors which is where most of the social gatherings of the day took place.

"The warmth of the hearth coupled with the aroma of freshly baked bread welcomed friend and stranger alike". [Sharkey, 1985 Pg.23]

Ceiling is one such gathering that would have taken place by the hearth of a ceili house. Winter evenings would have been whiled away with neighbours and friends, old and young. In the exchange of news and stories some of which was practical and factual and much of which was of a supernatural nature. There is a strong oral tradition in Ireland where many things are relayed, stories of times past and family history, fictitious stories and embroideries of the truth. In searching for the secrets or times past written records do not always exist so we must turn to oral tradition and the lore that was passed by word of mouth. This is possible according to Estyn Evans as the Irishman Countryman has,

"Remarkable facilities of speech and memory" [Evans, 1996 Pg.42]

The old came to tell and listen to the stories and exchange news while the young had a double agenda, they were there to listen but also to court under the strict supervision of the older generations. Not every house was a ceili house, it had to earn this title and justly so. It had to have the right mix of people, those who lived there have attracted neighbours and friends usually a '*character*' would have been

unfavourable task it became a social occasion where people actively supported each other, and shared not only the work involved in the quilt but also the enjoyment that arose from the gathering.

present. A storyteller, a practical joker, a musician, a dancer, it was an amalgam of roles.

Another gathering which took place in the warmth of the kitchen was '*The Quilting*'.

"The most popular time of the year for "A Quilting" would appear to have been around or after harvest time, when frequent activity in the fields would lessen slightly and the fruitfulness of the crop was celebrated in fitting fashion". [Wilson, 1991 Pg. 158]

Gatherings like many other things in rural society altered from area to area.

Anything from between four to twelve women came to the quilting. When a quilt was finished in one house the party went on to another house where the procedure was the same. There was always a quilt in the making. On one's own, this job could be tedious and a lengthy occupation. But shared by friends and neighbours of the area it became enjoyable and a more light-hearted occupation and one in which they whiled away long winter evenings, entertaining themselves and friends.

Quiltings were arranged for the sole purpose of producing and completing a quilt, but that is not to say that there was not an element of enjoyment by the provision of some food, drink and of course entertainment, all of which would come in return for assistance with the needlework and later would have been reciprocated.. The quilts were made for use and may have been used to replenish the bed coverings for an ever increasing family. Men's role at the quiltings were varied depending again on the area. Some set up the quilting frame, some attached the fabric to the frame to make ready for quilting, some came simply to collect their wives after the quilting, but most attended to join in on the gossip and merriment, following the completion of the quilt.

Quiltings were an enjoyable way of dealing with their immediate needs to produce warm bedcovers for their sizeable families. Instead of it being a long and

CHAPTER 2: THE CARNANRANCY QUILT

The Carnanrancy Quilt, which was a starting point for this thesis was made on the farm at Carnanrancy, County Tyrone by Biddy Stewart Morris known to her family and neighbours as '*Burley Stewart*'. The Morris family into which she married have been on that land since about the 1700's. Carnanrancy is where the Morris clan went after being disposed in the sixteenth century. It is still unclear where they originated, but it is thought to have been Sligo. The history of one Biddy Stewart who is important in this story is recorded in oral history, which I learned from her grandson Patrick "John" McRory. The Protestant background of Biddy Stewart Morris was that of a land owning, landlord family who were from Castlecaulfield, Co. Tyrone during plantation time. During the time of the plantation in Castlecaulfield, County Tyrone, an ancestor of Biddy Stewart's committed the ultimate sin in the eyes of his class by marrying a catholic. He was dispossessed and banished to Dunamore, a rocky, poorer tract of land in the foothills of the Sperrins. He was given tenure and the right to collect rents. This illustrates within one family, some of the social, cultural, religious and economic circumstances within mid Ulster from the plantation era onwards.

Biddy Stewart repeated the sin of her ancestors by marrying into a catholic disposed family in Carnanrancy, where she ruled as I am told by Patrick "John" McRory as a '*fiersomely strong*' matriarch. She laterly received her nickname '*Burley*' after a general in the Boer War [1899], which goes further to illustrate how strong she was and how she ran her house hold.

Little is known of her husband Michael Morris who would seem to have played and insignificant part in life in general, however not overlooking the fact that he fathered at least ten children that we know of, that is, known by name. It would seem that he was overshadowed by '*Burley*' Biddy Stewart. Once again underlining the strength

of this woman and the significance and importance of her role in the house, the farm and their children's lives.

To create a provenance for the quilt, I have recreated a family tree which illustrates the family relationships [Fig. 3].

Biddy Stewart was born in 1817 and died in 1920 at a hundred and three years of age.

Susanna McRory Bradley ^{great?} her granddaughter was born in 1917 and is now 81 years of age. She owns this particular quilt but does not live in Carnanrancy and never did, the quilt came to her through her mother Biddy McRory who was Biddy Stewart's, eldest son's younger daughter, i.e. Biddy Stewart's granddaughter.

Many quilts like the Carnanrancy Quilt were made during a period when people had little, but when innovation, improvisation and pride were in the working vocabulary of every day life. Everything had a function and almost every item that existed in a rural house hold served a dual purpose. Often as an object exhausted its life performing one task, it would be cut up or dismantled and remodelled into something else to perform a different function. Fabric certainly fell into this category. The life of some such fabrics -

"Worn out bed sheets, old garments and the like were torn up into handy pieces to serve as dishcloths and cleaning cloths, which might be seen to descend in the social scale until finally discarded, first used to dry the table ware, then to scrub pots and so downwards until torn and stained they were grabbed up to wipe tar off hands or old grease off of a cart axle" .[Danaher, 1985 Pg. 75]

An example of one such fabric which had many functions throughout its lifetime is the flour bag or as it is known the '*flour poke*' .

Sarah McAleer maintains that it was,

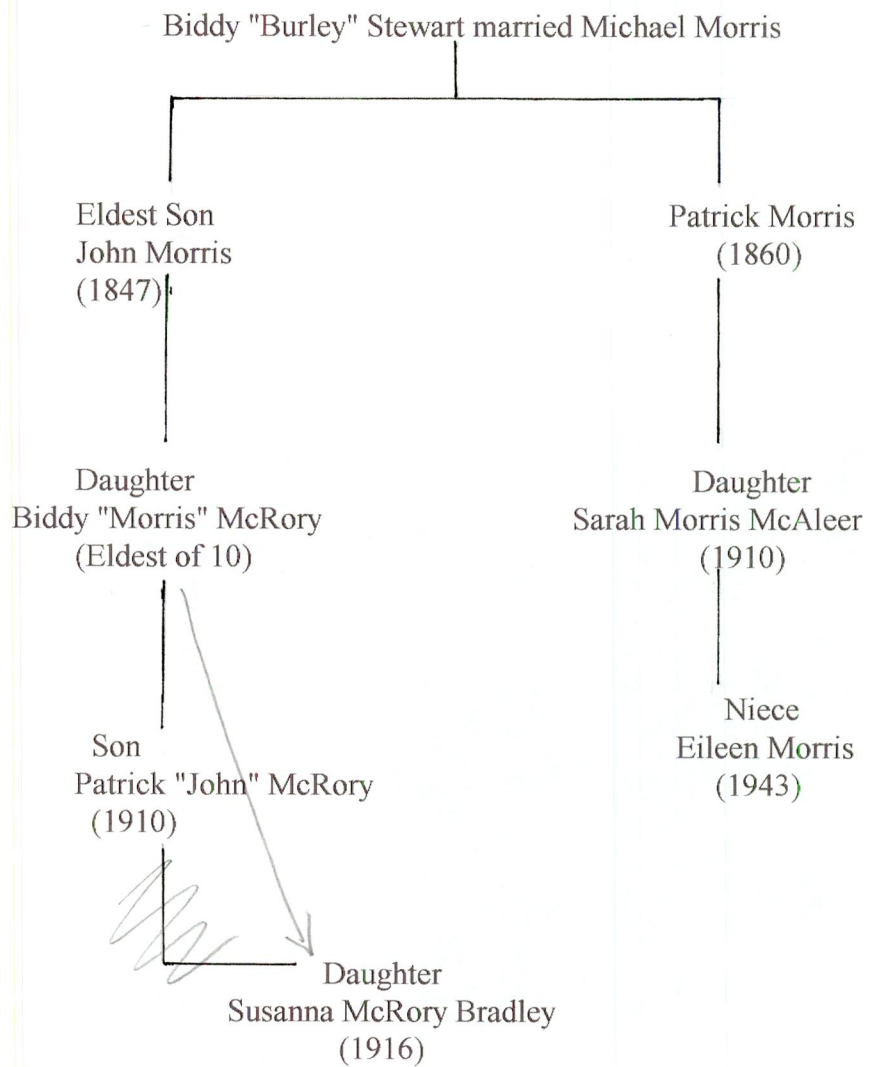


Fig. 3, Family Tree which illustrates family relationships.

"Possibly the most valued and well used piece of cloth in a rural household, especially in the North of Ireland". [McAleer, 22.8.97]

It was a soft white sack across which was written the weight and source of the flour. Once the bag was empty its reincarnation began.

Before being reused, the print on the flour bag was removed. There were many methods used for this. Two of the methods used were for example soaking the flour bag in boiling water containing washing soda which bleached out any identifying marks or the bags were scrubbed with paraffin oil to remove the lettering. After this they were left sitting for a few days, then they were then boiled in soda and soap powder until all the lettering had disappeared and the cotton was considered clean enough to be used. An informant from Enniskillen that completed the questionnaire circulated by the Ulster Folk and Transport Museum in 1973 remembers a saying which referred to strong fabric, like flour bag fabric,

"It would wear forever and line quilts afterwards."

As I have said all the quilts made in the area were made for use and were generally used to replenish the bed coverings of an ever increasing family. There is no recollection of the quilts being sold or of there being '*as in the North of England*' professional itinerant quilters [Jones, 1975 Pg. 3]

Sarah McAleer remembers that

"The women of the neighbourhood sometimes made one, as a gift for a man living alone". [McAleer, 22.8.97]

Little is known with regard to the origins of quilting in Ulster. It has been suggested by some however, that it was perhaps first introduced here by the English Aristocracy. Dorothy Osler in '*Traditional British Quilts*' and Laura Jones in '*Patchwork Bedcovers*' both suggest this.

In *'Traditional British Quilts'* Osler posed two questions upon which one can only speculate,

"was quilting taken up, domestically by the person or class only after it had been abandoned by the upper and middle classes? Was quilting abandoned in the big house and manor house because it was associated with the lower classes?" [Osler, 1987 Pg. 105]

In this speculation Osler seems to overlook the basic need of man. A basic need which is to protect oneself and to keep oneself warm. '*Quilt*' is derived from the Latin, *Culcita* - a stuffed sack, mattress or cushion'. [Oxford Dictionary 1959] The dictionary describes the word as a '*bed-coverlet made of padding enclosed between two layers of linen etc. and kept in place by cross lines or stitching*'. [Oxford Dictionary, 1959 Pg. 990]

"The insulation qualities of layered fabrics were known to the Egyptians, the Chinese and the Turks, who used quilted materials for warmth as well as for cushioning in their armour". [Fisher, 1987 Pg. 15]

I believe that quilting was practised right through the different social levels with obvious diversity in materials used and in end products. Quilting and the execution of quilts is many things to many people. To the rich and powerful it is a form of adornment and an expression of lady like skills, to the peasant and working class communities, it was part of a traditional culture, also expressing womanly skills and sometimes adornment but more often expressing practicality. Need, hope and poverty were the driving force behind utilitarian bed covers. Vernacular quilts in some cases would have been made by recycling old clothes and blankets into these functional covers. But poverty meant that the recycling of old clothes for the construction of quilts in most cases was impossible. An informant from County Tyrone who replied to the 1973 questionnaire on quilting stated that the family would not have had new clothes often enough to do this and when a garment was out grown or too worn for its original owner, it was passed on or remodelled for

someone younger and so it began its life again. She also stated that she was inhibited in designing the patchwork for the quilt by the limited range of fabrics at her disposal but that she always did her best like so many others,

"to make the thing look well". [The Ulster Folk and Transport Museum, Questionnaire 1973.]

It was often that these covers and the construction of them were crude. A very basic quilt would have been sewn together until an adequate rectangle, enough to cover a bed, was achieved. This would have varied according to the availability of materials, time and planning. All of these ingredients would have dictated the appearance of these utility covers. Despite their crudeness they provided security, comfort, warmth, and a humble covering for many who lay under them.

The practice of neighbouring women helping each other to quilt was very popular in the North of Ireland. '*The Quilting*' would have taken place during the day or more frequently during moonlight night periods. A quilting could be a day long event with the quilt work finished in the early evening before it became too dark, this saw the arrival of the men to begin the second part of the quilting party.

"The quilting season lasted from after harvest to early Spring when work on the farms was slack. No special night of the week was reserved for a quilting, but a time near the full moon was often chosen as the participants walked there and back at night" [Jones, 1975 pg. 4].

When a patchwork quilt top was ready for quilting the invitations to the quilting were issued throughout the area verbally. Generally it was only within a townland that people would come. Anything within one to three mile radius would be travelled by foot to help and enjoy a quilting. Family, friends and neighbours made up the party. Information from the Ulster Folk and Transport questionnaire

sometimes shows vast differences in quilting practice between areas that geographically are very close together.

Most quiltings were done in the house of the person who owned the quilt but a correspondent from Cookstown, County Tyrone, suggests that occasionally

"for reasons of better facilities or accommodation the quilting was done in the house of a friend".

The numbers attending the quilting party varied also, from as few as four to as many as twelve were reported and in the case of the latter they took turns working on the quilt. Obviously the larger the numbers at the quilting the larger the number of men that would arrive after the quilting session to take part in the social activities. The night according to the same correspondent was pre-arranged,

"but not always on the same night of the week and during moonlight periods the parties would meet perhaps two or three nights a week".
[The Ulster Folk and Transport Questionnaire, 1973.]

In the heyday of the quilting party, late in the last century according to Laura Jones upwards of twelve people could be involved and when a particularly large crowd was expected the party after the quilting was held in a suitable outhouse. Numbers began to diminish and members began to decline as emigration gripped the general population, as a result older women mostly attended, the entertainment aspect that the quiltings are remembered for, disappeared and quilting sessions ended up with a cup of tea and a gossip.

By all accounts, relayed in the questionnaires and information I have gathered from the Carnanrancy area, a mix of ages was needed so that they could enjoy each other, a blend of tall embroidered stories of the old and youthful excitement. It was the party that followed the quilting where much of the fun was had. In these strict times

courting and flirting of the younger members commenced under the watchful eye of their elders. Old and young attend the quilting, young girls and accomplished needlework women, most of whom were self taught, worked side by side. The old women advising the novices and so passing on their skills for another generation.

News of a quilting in Carnanrancy would have travelled quite quickly according to Patrick "John" McRory,

"as there was always a forge at Carnanrancy, therefore there being no shortage of visitors to the farm in the course of a day". [Patrick "John" McRory. 23.8.97]

The blacksmith's was a popular place and a rich source of current news and comment. The blacksmith was generally a '*Character*' and people from the locality would come to have him fix or make implements generally for farm work not to mention shoeing horses and donkeys,

"It served as a meeting place for the men who followed the plough. Plough shares and coulter needed to be laid or squared periodically. In fact any problem relating to farm work and involving the shaping and bending of iron was solved on the blacksmiths anvil". [Daly,1995 Pg.85]

Just as a social and cultural history is important, in understanding the people so to is an examination of what helped keep them afloat economically.

The manufacture of textiles was central to the economy of Northern Ireland. From producing the raw materials like flax, to the carding, spinning and weaving of cotton, linen and wool, to the printing of cloth and finally the addition of white work embroidery which has claim to international fame. The Textile Industry before extensive mechanisation relied heavily on the cottage worker. These people were self sufficient which derived from their impecunious state. Beside the hearth fire the implements or tools for fabric production with the exception of a loom could be

found in almost every house, implements to card, to spin, to sew, to knit and to crochet.

Textiles were produced mainly for family use but also for sale. The equipment they had to work with was simple and what some might call primitive but it succeeded in doing the job. Olive Sharkey claims that although,

"weaving is as old as civilisation itself, the early looms were doubtless badly made and produced poor quality cloth. Only the very wealthy would have had machines capable of producing tapestries, fine rugs, and soft fabrics". [Sharkey, 1985 Pg. 64]

Patrick "John" McRory from Carnanrancy remembers that

"equipment regardless of how simple, it would have been loaned and borrowed within an area between neighbours". [McRory 15.10.97]

It was not until the early twentieth century that the economy reached a level where ordinary farmers could afford the luxury of better quality equipment, like a loom or a spinning wheel, so that finer fabrics could be produced by the lower classes. The fibres used for the production of fabrics were usually indigenous, prepared flax, wool and some wild cotton

"along with imported cotton and silk which was blended with wool to produce a fabric known as Poplin" [Sharkey, 1985 Pg.64].

In County Tyrone and in the Sperrin area both spinning and weaving were traditional home based crafts. The land is poor in the area, and luckily sheep are resilient and not only survive but thrive on poor land. The sheep provided the wool that was spun and woven into cloth. Weaving was usually man's work and James Meenan from the neighbouring townland of Glenlark remembers his grandfather who was a weaver,

"He wove cloth in a small room which was attached to the then two roomed dwelling house" [Meenan, 1995 Pg. 96]

Most rural weavers houses were like this, the dwelling house which might have consisted of two or three rooms in total, out of this, one would have been dedicated to housing the loom, this was known as '*the Loom House*'. The raw material had to be carded and spun into more manageable fibres. This was done by the women who spun and carded.

The spinner, according to Sarah McAleer,

"was often an elderly woman living alone, depending solely upon what little money her spinning made for her, if she was productive and surviving, she could afford to buy her wool from the farmer, but if she was not productive enough to afford to buy her wool, she would steal it from hedges and fences, where sheep had lost clumps while they were passing through fields or while they were scratching". [Sarah McAleer, 22.8.97]

The land, as I have mentioned, was poor and much of it was bog, the poorest spinners of the area collected bog cotton for spinning. It was also used to stuff pillows when goose-down was not readily available. Looms of the time varied in size, from the small hand looms to huge floor looms. Few homes contained both loom and spinning wheel,

"for the weavers generally worked as a small village community and the spinners worked from outlying cottages". [Sharkey, 1985 Pg. 68]

Because of the impoverished times in which they lived craftwork was an integral part of any rural community, as clothes and other cloth items were all home-made. The extras that they made were sold, bartered or swapped for something that was needed in return. The craftwork that Northern Ireland is perhaps synonymous with

is white work embroideries. It was a staple in most houses in order to survive. It is renowned the world over for its fine, delicate and intricate qualities. White work flourished throughout the 1800's. It was a form of needle point lace work, according to Olive Sharkey muslin was embroidered mostly in summer, as I assume it was lighter and

"it lent itself very well to embroidery of this kind, incorporating white sprigs or even more elaborate patterns, always in white".
[Sharkey, 1985 Pg. 70]

Linens and cottons were also used for white work embroideries.

Linens were used as it was the main fabric produced in Northern Ireland at this time, it was distributed throughout the rural homesteads of the Province by agents.

"It was distributed, and to be worked by the woman of the house, and or her daughters and then collected again by the agents with a view to export". [Sarah McAleer, 22.8.97]

It was from this work that many households survived as they depended upon the money which it brought in, however, this like many things had its negative side as it often prevented young women from being married. Eileen Morris recalls a cousin, Mary "John" Morris, who never married or who was not permitted to marry as the money she earned from her white work was of a huge economic benefit to the household. According to Valerie Wilson, the commercial output of linen reached its peak in the nineteenth century with tens of thousands of men and women employed across the province in bleaching, spinning, weaving and embroidering of linen for export world wide.

A measure of the scale of this industry can be visualised through an account from the Belfast firm J. N. Richardson, Sons and Owden Ltd., in 1888:

"Messrs. J. N. Richardson, Sons and Owden Ltd. are large employers of labour in nearly all the northern counties of Ireland, directly or indirectly. There is a special department for embroidered cambric and linen handkerchiefs and this also has become successful by

encouraging women in cottages throughout Ulster to persevere in cultivating proficiency in Needlework". (Basset 1888, Pg. 225)

Cottons, were in the possession of most, the main source of which was from flour bags. In the same way as described earlier, the bags were prepared by bleaching and cleaning until snow white and ready for working. These common place flour bags with simple embellishment were transformed into decorative pillow cases and sheets.

"Not every sheet and pillow case would have been treated in this way only ones, that on an occasion of a funeral or a wedding would have been brought out". [Sarah McAleer, 15.10.97]

As I have mentioned craftwork was an integral part of any rural community, but for those living in remote areas it wasn't easy to buy fabrics or materials they required. The tradesman whom many depended upon was '*The Peddler*' he was a familiar figure on the high roads and by roads of the country. Peter "*the Packer*" Smith was the name of the peddler that Christopher Morris remembers who would have roamed the Sperrin hilltops, selling or buying, only fifty seven years ago. There would have been generations like Peter "*the Packer*" Smith who like him would have provided that link between the mills and the consumer. He would have moved about the countryside with his packs full of flannel, linen and cotton. On market and fair days he would set up temporarily to buy and sell from people in the larger towns.

History clearly shows us that crafts and the supply and demand for materials was a significant part of everyday life in Ulster in the nineteenth century. It also shows us that for people who were situated in remote areas relied on Social Interaction through the "*grapevine*" represented by the travellers i.e. Peddlers and people like the

blacksmith. Even more so occasions like "*quiltings*" offered the opportunity for a large social gatherings which were greatly valued.

CHAPTER 3: TECHNICAL INFORMATION ABOUT THE CARNANRANCY QUILT

I visited the Ulster Folk and Transport Museum, which gave me not only an opportunity to see objects like quilts in the context of reconstructed period houses around the grounds of the Museum. But also through the help of Valerie Wilson, a patchwork and quilting curator at the museum, it gave me the opportunity to look through their archives and have hands on experience of quilts and bedcovers.

The collection now includes over five hundred quilts, almost entirely gathered from donations. The museum, its archives and library houses information collected over thirty years. Fieldwork and collecting from across the nine counties of Ulster and occasionally beyond has resulted in one of the foremost collections of quilts in the British Isles. The mission of the Ulster Folk and Transport Museum is to acquire and conserve artefacts and information to illustrate and interpret the way of life, past and present, and the traditions of the people of Northern Ireland. There by enriching the lives of the people and supporting Northern Ireland's economy, especially in the leisure and tourism sector.

Quilts like many other objects reflect a social history, they provide a window through which we can visualise our ancestors. Many problems were presented to the rural housewife in times preceding mass production, consumption, electricity and easy mobility. It was the duty of the woman, wife and mother to feed, cloth, protect and keep her family warm. Among other things she was faced with the necessity of producing warm bed covers in the most efficient manner possible. These jobs were all undertaken and executed by the '*good housewife*' with a sense of pride and with a wish to make things as well and as pleasingly as possible. These are the sort of considerations which engaged my interest in the Carnanrancy Quilt (Fig. 4). To me

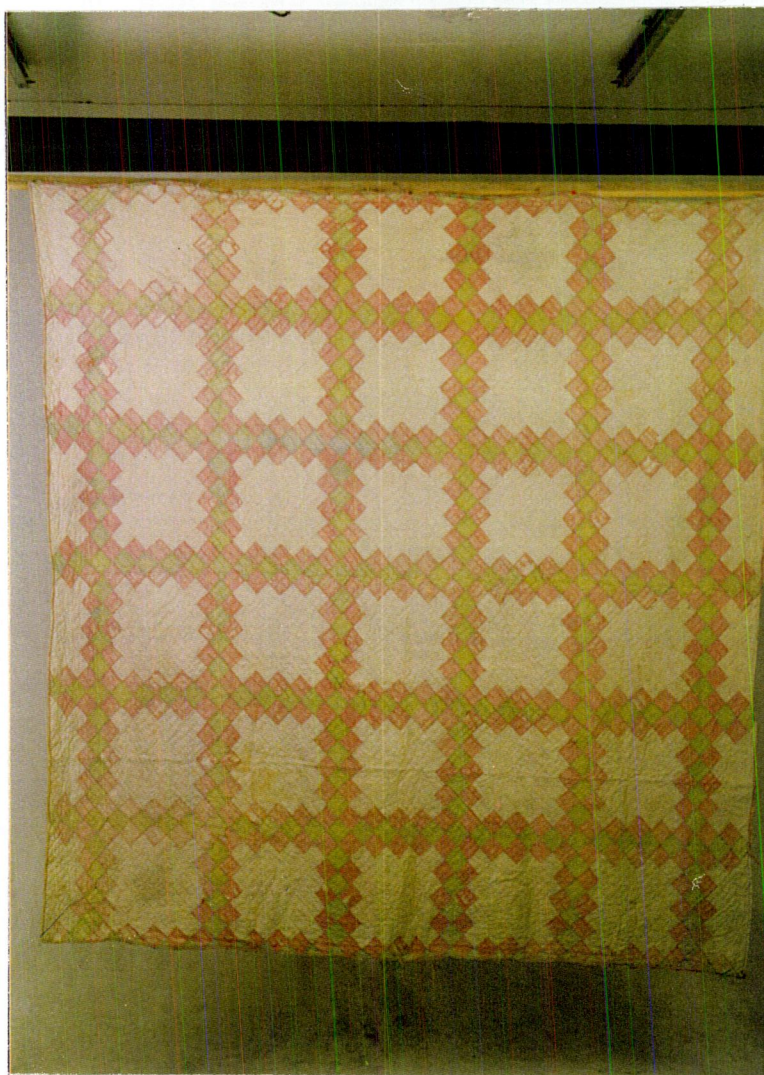


Fig. 4, The Carnanrancy Quilt

it reflects the social and economic circumstances in which it was produced and also embodies the pride and spirit of the people who made it.

A technical analysis of the quilt will reveal important indicators about dying, construction and the piecing of the quilt. It will also provide an insight into the economy of the specific household where it was made.

The quilt shows evidence of being well used, through its faded colour but probably more so from the areas that have become thin and worn to holes which reveals the filling (Fig. 5). To the eye and to the touch the fabric is soft. The coloured squares of green and red which are worked throughout the quilt are a soft almost pastel colour. The curled and frayed edges of the quilt however, reveal a much more vibrant colour. Almost the whole of the quilt is made up of squares of approximately 2" x 2" in red, green or white fabric. These small squares are combined to create two different types of 9 1/2" square panels. (9 1/2")

1. The first type of nine and a half inch panel is made up primarily of green and red squares with four white pieces incorporated. There are forty-one of these (Fig. 6).
2. The second type of panel is a single white 9 1/2" square with four red 2" squares appliquéd at each corner of which there are forty-two (Fig. 7).

The panels occur alternately. This provides the overall effect of a green and red chain breaking up a white base. The overall visual effect is far more complex than the actual structure of the quilt top.

The patchwork pattern for the quilt top is known as the '*Irish Chain*' pattern. The pattern is described by Laura Jones as,

"a simple arrangement of interlocking squares forming diagonal lines or a plain background". [Jones, 1978 Pg. 40]



Fig. 5, Detail of Quilt, torn and worn areas
revealing the middle layer/filling



Fig. 6, Detail, 9" panel of green,
red and four white 2" squares.



Fig. 7, Detail, single white 9 1/2"
panel, with four red 2" squares
appliquéd at each corner.

The Carnanrancy Quilt was pieced using the "*Irish Chain*" pattern, it is an "*arrangement of interlocking squares*" but which form horizontal and vertical lines over a plain background. The quilt was pieced and set on the diagonal (Fig. 8), therefore the pattern is behaving quite differently to an '*Irish Chain*' set straight (Fig. 9).

The '*Irish Chain*' pattern was very popular in Ulster according to Valerie Wilson as

"it was taught within the National School system from about the 1840's". [Wilson, 21.11.97]

This piecing pattern was also quite popular in America and therefore is sometimes known as '*American Chain*'. According to Valerie Wilson the two names are interchangeable. Wilson also talks about the theory behind the name and the symbolism within the piecing of the pattern.

Many members of rural communities made their way to America and those that could write did write, forming a network or a chain of communication. It is sometimes felt that this pattern of interlinking squares symbolises the pattern of communication between relatives and friends in America and Ireland.

The small 2" squares in the quilt top have been hand stitched using a running stitch. This and their slight irregularity of size and shape would indicate that a paper template was not used. Valerie Wilson suggests that this could be an American influence and that later nineteenth century quilts were more inclined to be made using a running stitch, than a paper template method. This would go further to suggest that paper was, if not precious, that it was more useful for something else. It is unknown who, if anyone from the family at Carnanrancy was in America at this time. If someone was in America it is possible that constructional tips and ideas were sent back, it is also possible that construction tips were shared and swapped at quilting sessions.

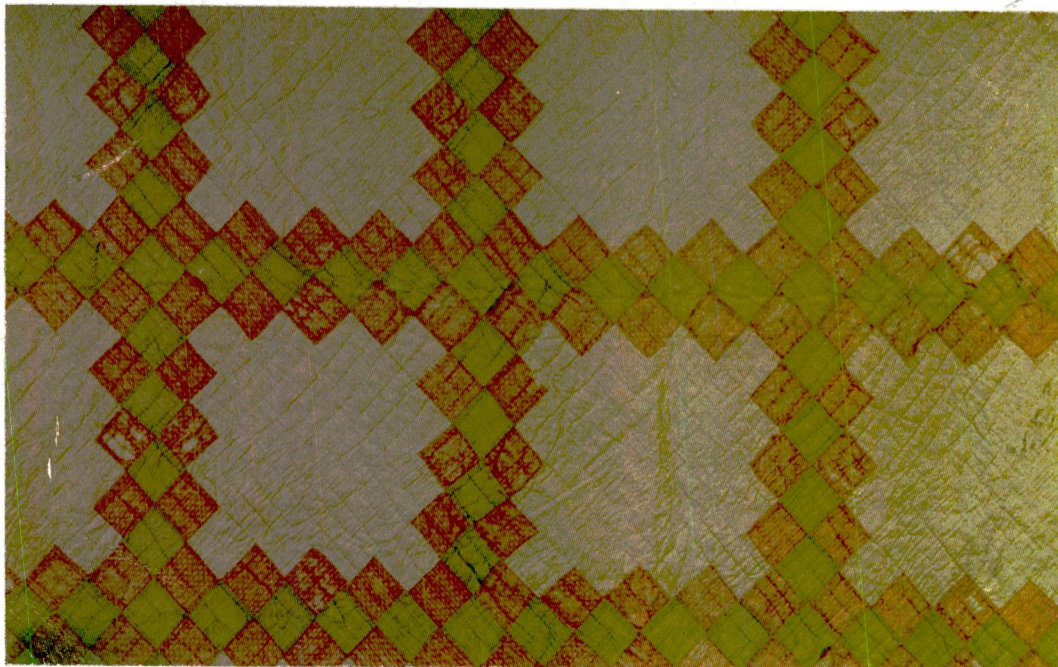


Fig. 8, Detail, pieced and set on diagonal "Irish Chain"
Quilt creates, vertical and horizontal lines.

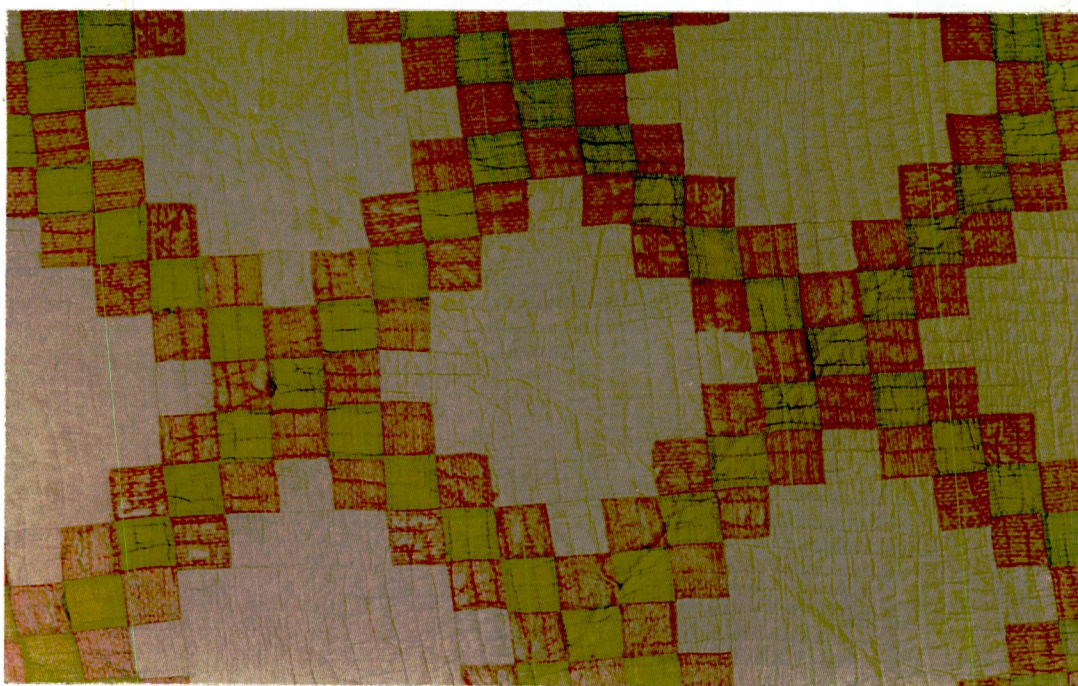


Fig. 9, Detail, same area photographed at an angle,
to show straight set "Irish Chain", which creates
diagonal lines.



The quilt is made up in the most part of flour bags. Most of which, with the exception of the green fabric, remains in its bleached white state. The red fabric is a printed cotton. The print is small, a small diamond shape flanked by yellow diamond shapes of the same size, this is repeated to give a thin stripe impression (Fig. 10). The red squares in the centre of the quilt have faded, so that only a faint white impression exists. Vivid evidence of colour in the print exists only in the frayed edges of the quilt (Fig. 11), where it obviously has been protected from the damaging effects of light.

The green fabric has been quite possibly dyed. Evidence to suggest this is that the patches in the quilt have faded to varying degrees. The green fabric evident in the frayed edges of the quilt is again more vibrant and of a uniform colour. However the green 2" squares which are contained in the main part of the quilt have faded unevenly (Fig. 10). The green squares are different tones of the one colour indicating that dying was uneven which would go further to suggest that it may have been home dyed. According to Olive Sharkey,

"the ancient peoples loved bright colours and these they derived from Natural sources such as roots, leaves, berries and flowers, all of which produced a harmony of colour no chemical dye of modern times can rival". [Sharkey,1985 Pg.65]

Red and white, and red, white and green quilts were popular colour combinations in Ulster. The former more so than the latter. Red, white and green quilts according to Valerie Wilson, were probably only popular after about the eighteen fifties and she also suggests that there is an American influence regarding these colours as this was a popular colour combination in America.

The middle layer of the quilt which is exposed in areas through use, is like a cotton wool. This was used throughout Northern Ireland but perhaps not as extensively as

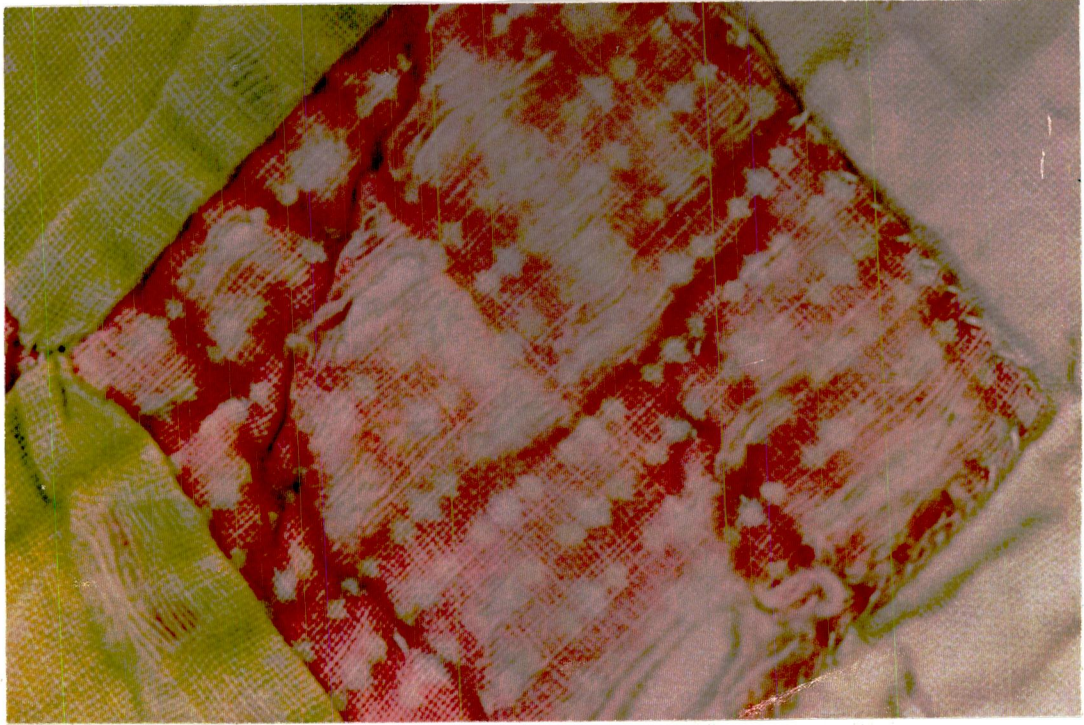


Fig. 10, Detail, Red fabric faded, Fabric print also faded to thin stripe impression.

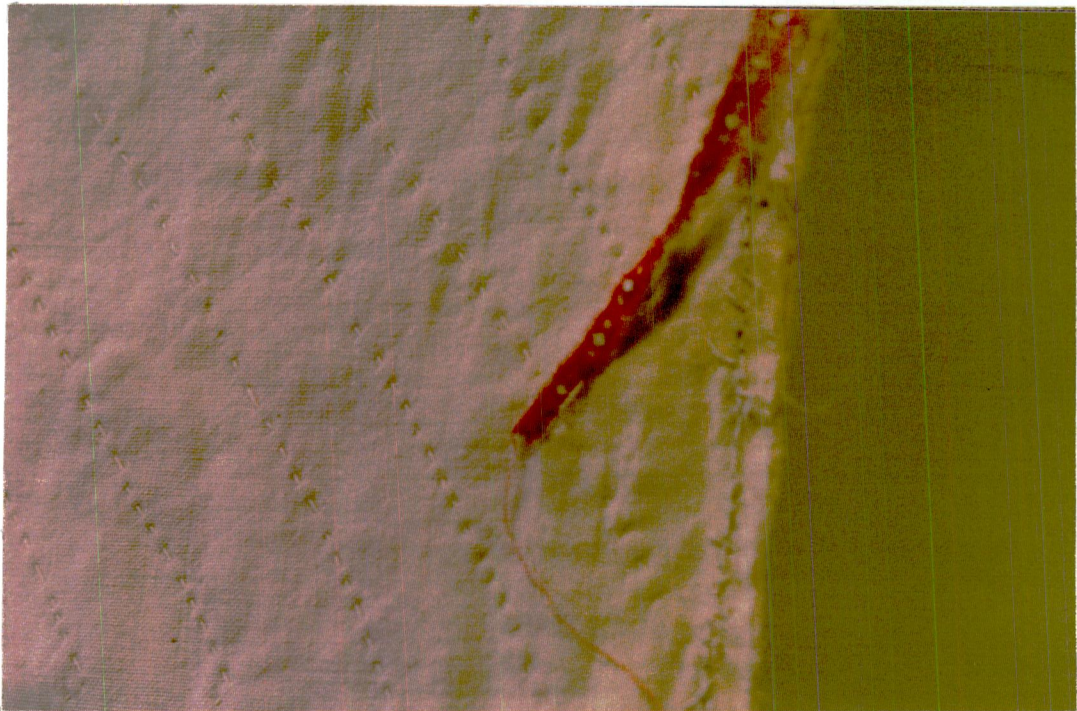


Fig. 11, Detail, piece of fabric from frayed edges of quilt, revealing a more vivid colour.

worn blankets or anything else it seemed, that could act as a wadding. Because of its light middle layer the quilt appears much thinner, than a quilt that would have an old blanket as its filling. Susanna McRory claims that,

"Quilts like this one, and others would be piled on top of each other to provide warmth, up to as many as six in extreme cases in winter, and one or two in summer months". [Susanna McRory, 23/08/97]

The backing is hand pieced flour bags, they were pieced and hand stitched together again using running stitch. This is an indication of a household that did not possess or have access to a sewing machine (Fig. 12).

When all three layers were prepared, i.e. the quilt top, the filling and the backing. The quilting stitches were applied to keep all three layers in place. Before quilting the three layers of fabric together they were attached to a frame which made the quilting more manageable. The type of frame that seemed to be universal, comprised only four pieces of wood.

"Four slats of lightweight but strong wood, two measuring about six to seven feet in length and two between three and five feet. These were secured with bolts at the corners where they overlapped". [Wilson, 1991 Pg. 159]

The function of the frame is to secure the materials to prevent them from moving, but also to support the weight of the materials as they are being quilted. Deirdre E. Morton points out that,

"the frame is not an essential requisite of quilting, the materials can be sewn together without any supporting structure, but the task of coping with some thirty-six square feet of materials is no mean effort". [Morton, 1959 Pg. 62]

It is not known what kind of frame was used in Carnanrancy but Sarah McAleer suggests,

"that it was probably a simple structure consisting of four lengthy pieces of wood supported by chairs or stools in the kitchen". [Sarah McAleer, 22.08.97]



Fig. 12, Backing of quilt, showing
connection of flour bags.

In County Tyrone according to Laura Jones,

"in both the nineteenth and early twentieth century quilters obviously worked from one side to the other instead of starting in the middle all three thickness of fabric were basted together at one end and this end was attached to one bar. Only the backing, however, was attached to the opposite bar and kept firmly rolled. The filling and top layer were kept loose and held in place as the work progressed'. [Jones, 1975 Pg. 2]

The quilting stitch pattern used in this quilt is one used throughout Northern Ireland.

It is the 'wave' pattern. Valerie Wilson claims in *Uncoverings '91* that, a common feature in these early quilt examples is the presence of 'wave' quilting.

"In over eighty percent of the bedcovers in this study the hand-quilting pattern most often employed was a series of chevron lines worked a half inch/three quarter inch apart, known as 'waves'." (Wilson 1991, Pg. 150)

The quilting stitch, is the running stitch which binds the three layers of fabric together. The stitch lengths are quite uniform as is the space between them (Fig. 13). One wave measures approximately 14", until it intersects with the next wave and so on. The space between the rows of quilting are also quite uniform. They have been measured, but not using our conventional measuring tool i.e. A ruler. Valerie Wilson revealed that the space between the rows of quilting are,

"a fingers worth apart, a rule of thumb quite literally". [Wilson, 20.11.97]

This she learned herself through fieldwork i.e. the quilting survey.

It is clear from evidence within the quilt itself, that it was made from what ever materials were at hand. Quilts are like documents and they can relay certain information when examined. Information such as, constructional, the piecing of



Fig. 13, Quilting stitches, showing the "wave" pattern and the uniformity of the stitches.

panels to create the overall pattern and the materials used to do so. This quilt narrates to me the value of fabrics and cloth that we today might take for granted.

The quilt is composed in most part of flour bags, that would have been bleached, cut, pieced and perhaps dyed to create the quilt top and the backing.

To use such a common place item like a flour bag to create something decorative but more importantly something useful, outlines not only a creativity but the need to protect and keep their families warm which was the driving force behind so many quilts.

CHAPTER 4: THE CARRICKMORE QUILTS

Carrickmore lies almost directly south of Carnanrancy and they are approximately ten miles from each other. (Fig. 14)

The two quilts from Carrickmore, that I had the opportunity to examine are owned by Marcella Sheridan. Although living in County Meath now, she was born 1944 and raised in County Tyrone in the parish of Carrickmore. She lived in a small townland about one mile outside Carrickmore called Innishatieve. Her family name was Kelly and both her mother and father came from families that were long established in Innishatieve. The quilts, according to Mrs. Sheridan were made by her grandmother. Her grandmother was born in 1873 and died in 1948 at the age of seventy five.

The exact date of the quilts is unknown as no accurate documentation exists.

"Dating quilts can be quite difficult and quite often they can only be dated within a generation unless very accurate documentation exists. Fabrics are not a reliable dating source as people can keep fabrics for many years or they may have been worn in costume for a number of years before being discarded and used in patchwork. It can only tell you if something could not have been made before an certain date".
[Valerie Wilson, 20/11/97]

It is fair however to say that these quilts were made later than the Carnanrancy Quilt, because the birth date of the maker of the Carrickmore Quilts is 1873 and the approximate date of construction for the Carnanrancy Quilt is in the 1860's. Also the Carrickmore Quilts are pieced almost entirely with the use of a sewing machine. According to Janet Rae,

"Quilts that include machine stitching often only to finish the edges instead of the traditional two parallel lines of running stitches date after 1856. When

Isaac Merrit Singer opened his first agency in Glasgow to sell the new singer machine, but they were not widely available in Britain until the 1860's." [Rae, 1987 Pg.34]

This would suggest further that they were not available until much later in the two roomed dwellings of rural Ireland. It is possible however that the quilts were pieced by hand earlier and then machine stitched over at a later date to secure the layers together. As everything in rural homesteads were being constantly reused and remodelled for economic reasons.

The first of the two quilts from Carrickmore is similar to that of the Carnanrancy Quilt in that the pattern used to piece the quilt top is '*The Irish Chain*' or '*American Chain*' piecing technique. (Fig. 15) The quilt although it is stained, shows few signs of wear. It has survived normal wear and tear through its protection by two other pieces of cloth, as it was used, but it is not known how long for, as a filling for another bedcover. This was done, not to intentionally protect the quilt but to cover the stain and possibly to create extra heat by sandwiching it between two other pieces of cloth. The quilt has a very subtle appearance and on first impression one might think that it is a white on white quilt. But a closer look reveals that it is a composition of white and subtle grey squares.

As I have mentioned earlier this is also an '*Irish Chain*' quilt. This and the Carnanrancy Quilt have perhaps only one strong similarity which is their piecing pattern name. Despite the same name of pattern marked differences exist between them, for example they are different in the size of panels, the number of panels, how they were pieced, the quilting stitch pattern and most importantly the placement of panels. The Carrickmore Quilt is set or placed straight but the Carnanrancy Quilt is set diagonally thus adding and extra visual complexity.



Fig. 15, Carrickmore, "Irish Chain" Quilt.

The Carrickmore '*Irish Chain*' Quilt is composed of forty two 10" square panels, of which there are two types pieced to create the pattern.

1. The first type of panel is a single white 10" square with four grey 2" squares appliquéd at each corner. The quilt contains twenty one of these panels. (Fig. 16).
2. The second type of panel which is also a 10" square comprises of thirteen white 2" squares and twelve grey 2" squares. (Fig. 17)

The panels occur alternately and visually give a subtle impression of a grey and white chain which forms diagonal lines on a white surface. Again like that of the Carnanrancy Quilt its appearance is more complicated than the actual piecing structure of the quilt. But it is perhaps more legible than the Carnanrancy Quilt as it is pieced straight not on a diagonal. The quilt is a mixture of hand and machine stitching. There is some evidence of hand stitching in the piecing of some of the 10" panels. But the stitching of these 10" panels to each other was executed with the aid of a sewing machine.

The fabrics used are cotton and linen. The white fabric is a cotton and is soft to the touch, and it is thought by Mrs. Sheridan that it is bleached and pieced flour bags, which makes up the larger portion of the quilt. The subtle grey squares are linen and contrast with the white. Another similarity to the Carnanrancy Quilt is that it is thin and its middle layer or filling is like a cotton wool. The Quilt is backed with one entire piece of cotton cloth.

The quilt is not quilted using the usual '*wave*' quilting pattern as in the Carnanrancy Quilt and almost every other Irish quilt. It is hand quilted using two quilting patterns the '*wine glass*' pattern (Fig. 18) which is in the centre area of the quilt and the '*cable*' pattern (Fig. 19) is worked around this, towards the edge of the quilt, to make a border feature. The "wine glass" pattern is a circular shape which is repeated and over lapped to achieve an interlocking structure.

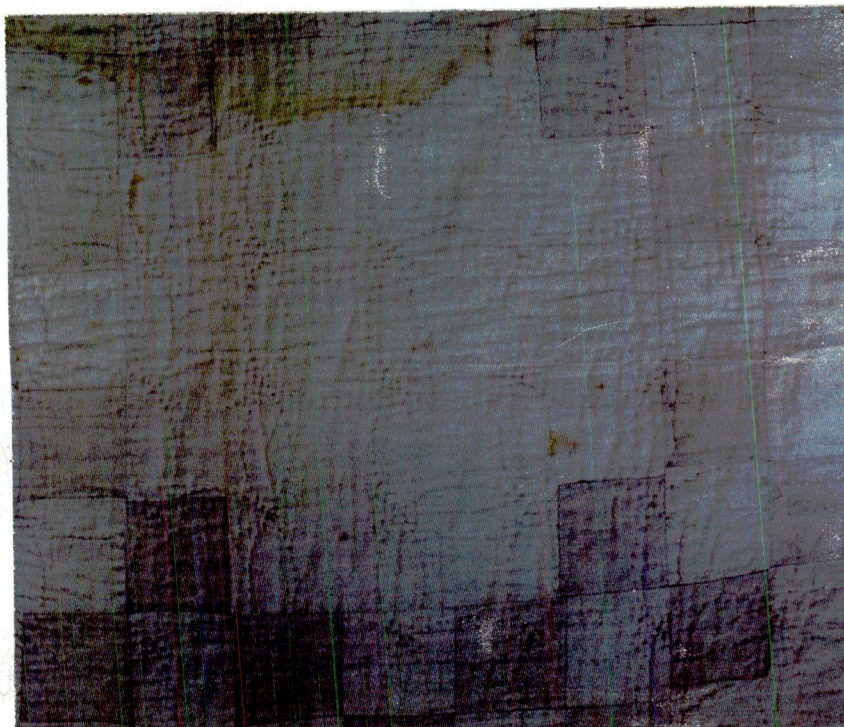


Fig. 16, Detail showing 10" square white panel with four grey 2" squares appliquéd at each corner.

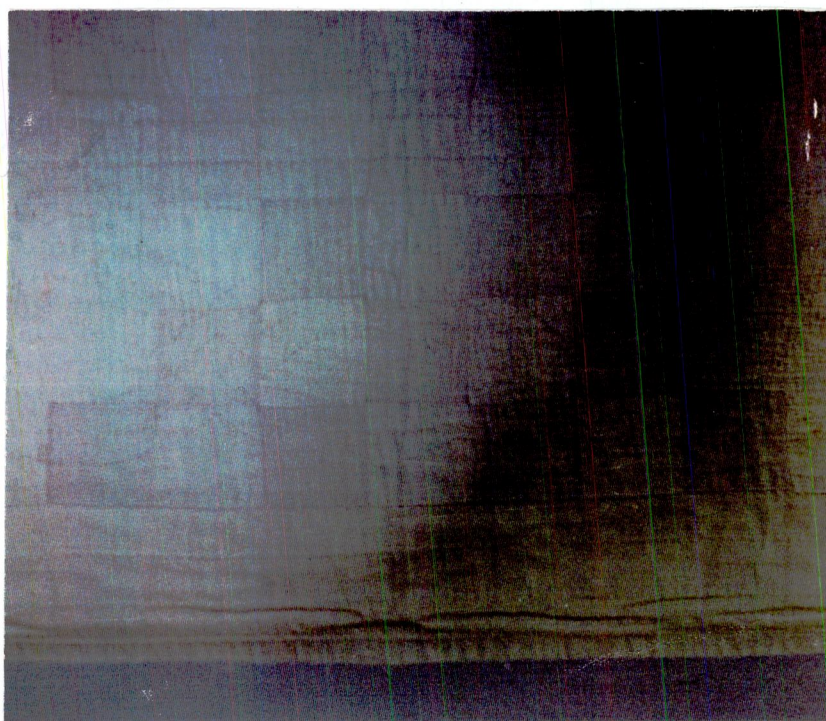


Fig. 17, Detail showing 10" panel comprising thirteen white 2" squares and twelve grey 2" squares.

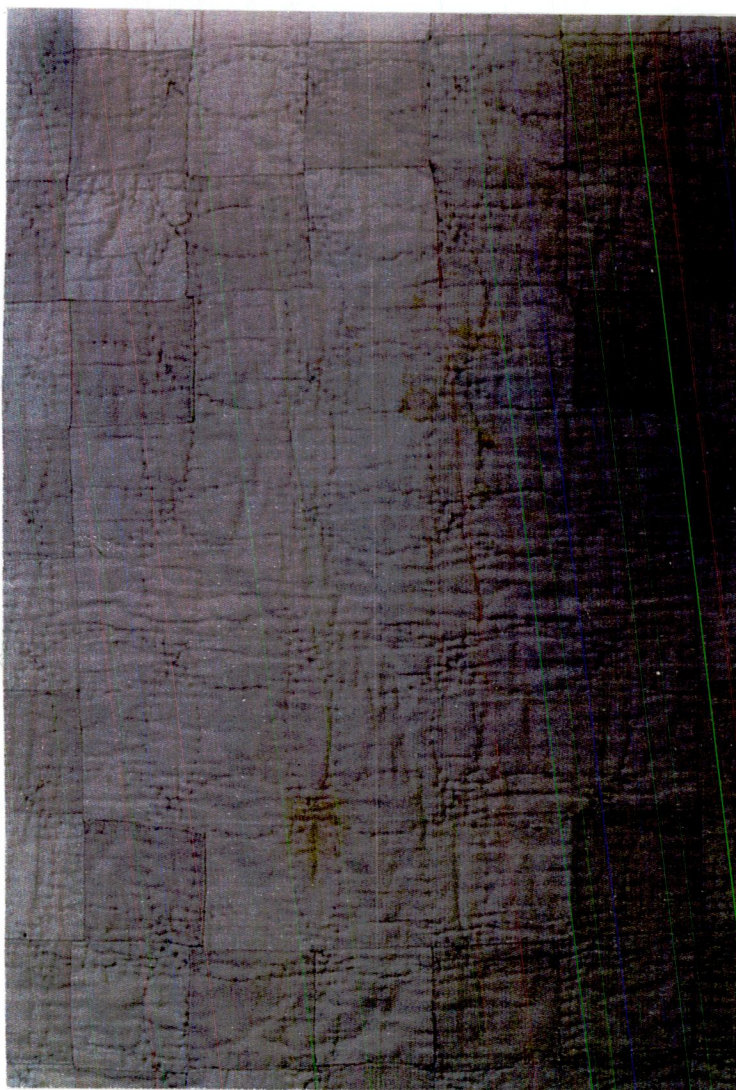


Fig. 18, Detail of quilt, illustrating
"wine glass" quilting pattern.

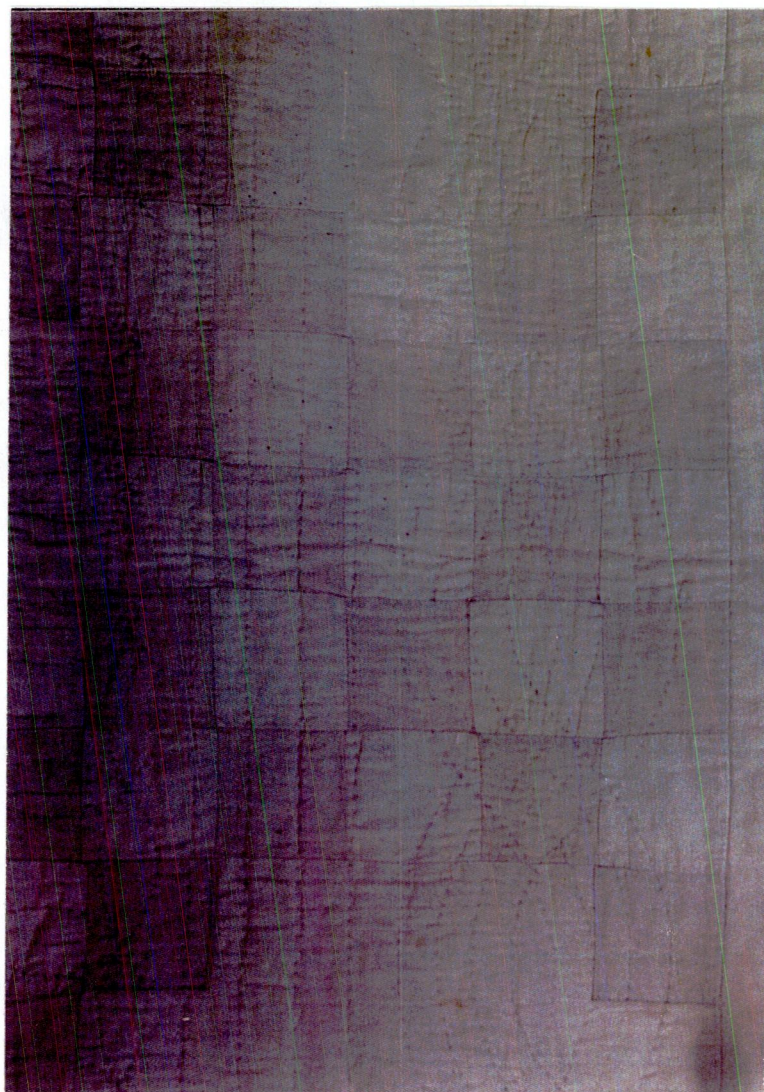


Fig. 19, Detail of quilt, illustrating
the "cable" quilting pattern.

The "cable" pattern is worked around the edge of the quilt, and again is a shape that is repeated and interlocked to provide a fluid pattern. These are more decorative forms of quilting and not common to Ulster. Valerie Wilson suggested that the pattern was perhaps sent over from America, as she claims that it is a pattern more likely to have been found in America.

The second quilt to be examined is a '*strip*' pattern quilt (Fig. 20) which was a popular choice of pattern for many obvious reasons. It is simply composed of long strips of fabric, because of its simplicity it would not have presented the maker with many design or piecing difficulties that perhaps the other two quilts discussed would have. It was also, according to Valerie Wilson,

"A good way of using up strips of fabric left over from dress making or making up sheets or curtains, because you would invariably be left with long strips of fabric". [Valerie Wilson, 20/11/97]

The quilt is made up of two coloured fabrics, Red and Black.

Within the quilt there are five red strips, three of them are 7" wide and the remaining two which are pieced along each side of the quilt are 3" wide. It also contains four black strips, and each one is 7" in width. The strips are all of equal length. They are 68" long. According to Valerie Wilson this colour of red cotton is not unusual to find as it was used for cape and coat linings, bed curtains, and many other things. So it is not surprising that this fabric has been used for the piecing of patchwork quilts. The black fabric

"is like fabric used to line mens jackets". [Valerie Wilson, 20/11/97]

The quilt top which is composed of these striped panels is entirely machine sewn. It is not known exactly where the fabrics used to piece the quilt top came from.



Fig. 20, Carrickmore, "Stripe" Quilt

But Mrs. Sheridan speculated that they were bought already pieced together, so all that was remaining was to find a middle and a backing and quilt them together.

The filling of the quilt is a wool and is woven to create quite an open texture that is similar visually to a hessian or a sacking cloth. The filling has the appearance of herringbone weave, and according to Valerie Wilson

"it looks home made". [Valerie Wilson, 20/11/97]

It is soft to the touch, strong and heavy which would have provided not only heat but also weight for the person or persons who lay under it.

The blanket (Fig. 21) which is used for the backing of the quilt is again soft to the touch. the fabric is a mixture of cotton and wool and like that of the filling has quite an open texture. The owner, Mrs. Sheridan, describes it as an army surplus blanket and to her knowledge both it and the filling were purchased in Carrickmore on market day.

The three layers were quilted using the 'wave' quilting pattern. The stitches are applied quite crudely, which is perhaps more obvious in the red panels as it is quilted with a black thread. The thickness or space between the quilted waves are approximately 1" apart (Fig. 22). The quilt has obviously been well used and through wear some of the quilting stitches are missing.

The quilt has a simple make up, and less designing and piecing was involved than with the other two quilts discussed earlier though it is quilted quite crudely it has obviously been well-used and has served its purpose as a warm bed cover.

Like that of the Ulster Folk and Transport Museum, The Ulster-American Folk Park in Omagh, on a some what smaller scale offers a similar view into the past.



Fig. 21, Backing, Detail of blanket.

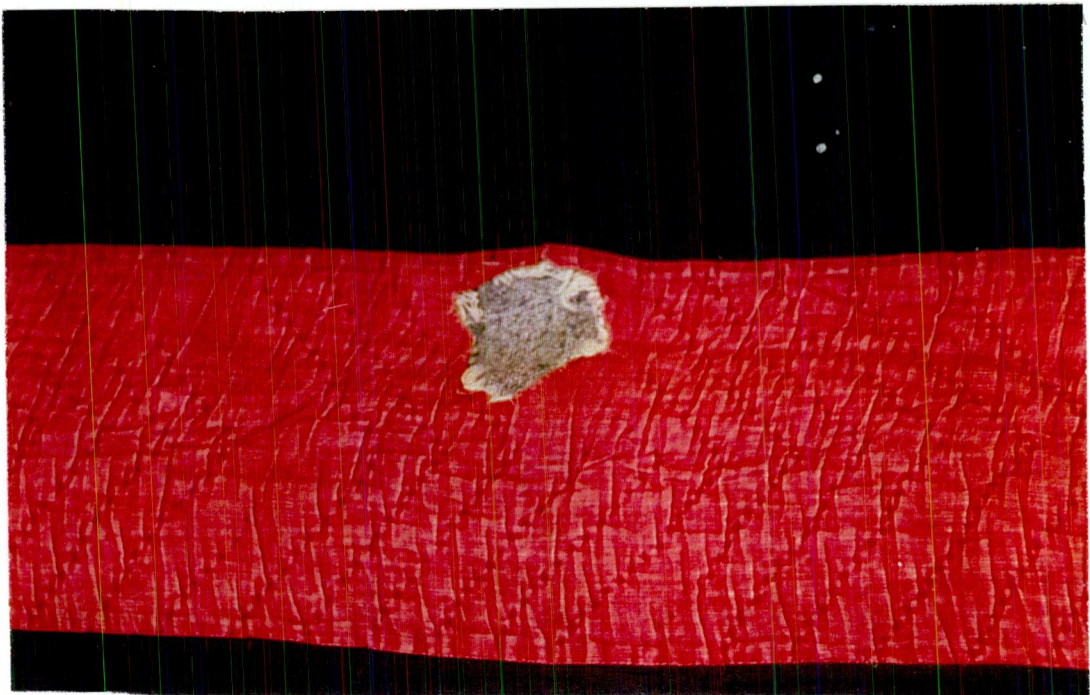


Fig. 22, Detail showing quilted "waves" and also some missing through wave.



With the aid of both their outdoor museums they place the quilts in context of period houses re-erected for this purpose.

Fig. 23, and Fig. 24 are an "Irish Chain" quilt from the Ulster Folk and Transport Museum and a "stripe" quilt from The Ulster American Folk Park in Omagh respectively. Both of these examples are not unlike the quilts already discussed, in piecing and in pattern. All of these quilts illustrate a manipulation of cloth to create simple, yet very beautiful quilts that have kept many warm for generations.



Fig. 23, "Irish Chain" quilt from the Ulster
Folk and Transport Museum
photographed within a period house.



Fig. 24, "Stripe" quilt from the Ulster American
Folk Park, Omagh
photographed in a mock up Emigration Ship.

CONCLUSION

Perhaps the most beneficial and pleasurable aspect of researching this thesis was the discovery of one's past through the quilt, as the quilt itself posed questions. Who made it? Why and How?. Through information gleaned from family and friends as well as other sources, an understanding of the lives of those who made and used the Carnanrancy Quilt was formed. It was for me a journey to collect information and also to make a connection with the past. For my mother's generation and my grandparents generation it was an opportunity to reminisce, to regain memories that had been forgotten through lack of use or reference.

The appeal of the Carnanrancy Quilt was greatly deepened through examining its physical make up. Through holding and looking at the quilt the immediacy of production became apparent. Everything was measured or gauged by the hand and the eye. Squares and panels were cut and pieced free hand and stitched initially in sizes one could work on the lap. Quilting stitches were also applied without the aid of design tools as they were measured with a finger width spacing.

Within Ulster's traditional Culture the past exists and survives through a strong oral tradition and the memories of our ancestors. The Folk museums are a reassurance that the past will survive. The information amassed within their archives is animated by the re-erection of period houses which contain the physical past in objects like quilts. These museums are the guardians of yesterday and it is comforting to know that the past is being conserved and preserved and present to new generations.

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