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A LAMENT FOR THE IRISH VERNACULAR COTTAGE

Thesis

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CONTENTS

	<u>Page No.</u>
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	
LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS	
SYNOPSIS	1
INTRODUCTION	2
SECTION ONE:	
RURAL HOUSING IN IRELAND TODAY	6
SECTION TWO:	
VERNACULAR ARCHITECTURE	11
SECTION THREE:	
HOUSE MATERIALS IN BOTH TRADITIONAL AND MODERN HOUSES	17
SECTION FOUR:	
CLASSIFICATION OF HOUSE TYPES	44
SECTION FIVE:	
SETTLEMENT PATTERNS	54
CONCLUSION	62
REFERENCES	64

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LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

- Fig 1, A cottage in Corbally, Limerick.
- Fig 2, A ruined cottage in Corbally, Limerick.
- fig 3, A "Southfork influence".
- Fig 4, A Georgian influence.
- Fig 5, An American style dormer bungalow.
- Fig 6, A Spanish influence.
- Fig 7, A bungalow.
- Fig 8, A mixture of materials.
- Fig 9, Cement walling.
- Fig 10, The new beside the old.
- Fig 11, The Golden Vale House.
- Fig 12, The houses of the Normadic herdsmen.
- Fig 13, The over use of different materials.
- Fig 14, A sod house.
- Fig 15, A clay house.
- Fig 16, Dry stone walling.
- Fig 17, Dry stone walling, white washed.
- Fig 18, The Shannon Farmhouse.
- Fig 19, A typical bungalow.
- Fig 20, A mock Georgian two storey.
- Fig 21, A mock Georgian bungalow.
- Fig 22, Stone cladding,
- Fig 23, "Crazy paving".
- Fig 24, Pebble dashing.
- Fig 25, Wood paneling.
- Fig 26, White lime wash.
- Fig 27, Tinted lime wash.
- Fig 28, Hipped roofing.
- Fig 29, Gable roofing.
- Fig 30, Classification of roofing systems.
- Fig 31, Collar beam roof trusses.
- Fig 32, Purlin roofing.
- Fig 33, A comparison of roof to wall height.
- Fig 34, A second comparison of roof to wall height.
- Fig 35, Rope thatching, scallop and thrust thatching, the materials,
and duration.

- Fig 36, Rope thatching.
Fig 37, Scallop thatching.
Fig 38, Stone roofing.
Fig 39, Real slate.
Fig 40, Asbestos slate.
Fig 41, Chimney canopy, Creepies and Stretcher table.
Fig 42, Stone hearth and chimney.
Fig 43, A hanging pot.
Fig 44, The Fool's stool.
Fig 45, The Windsor chair.
Fig 46, The Sligo chair.
Fig 47, The "Sugan" chair.
Fig 48, A Dresser.
Fig 49, A second Dresser.
Fig 50, A "Cleevy".
Fig 51, A Settle bed.
Fig 52, A Settle table.
Fig 53, A Settle chair.
Fig 54, A modernised interior.
Fig 55, A Byre dwelling.
Fig 56, The Hearth Lobby House.
Fig 57, The Bed Outshot.
Fig 58, Symetrically arranged chimney gables.
Fig 59, Chimneys not symetrically arranged.
Fig 60, Internal walled chimneys symetrically arranged.
Fig 61, An attic loft.
Fig 62, A house with formal elements.
Fig 63, Coloured glass in door head.
Fig 64, A cottage with Georgian windows.
Fig 65, A timber walled interior.
Fig 66, Before and after modernization.
Fig 67, Mock Georgian.
Fig 68, Another mock Georgian.
Fig 69, A house with Tudar elements.
Fig 70, A house influenced by the television program "Dallas".
Fig 71, The Spanish influence.
Fig 72, The Spanish Influence.
Fig 73, A mixture of house styles.
Fig 74, " " " "
Fig 75, A restored venacular house in Italy,
Fig 76, A cottage restored by The Historic Buildings Council of Northern Ireland.

SYNOPSIS

Ireland is fast losing all the buildings that went into making a vernacular style.

The buildings that are replacing the old traditions do not derive from the Irish tradition. Modern houses in rural Ireland are a mixture of styles from other countries such as America and the continent of Europe.

In an Irish setting these varied styles are out of context with each other and the Irish landscape which the traditional buildings so suited.

There is a need to preserve the traditional styles which embody our heritage and culture. An attempt needs to be made also to establish a style of rural architecture that is practical and sensitive to the Irish landscape. Above all, there is a need to develop a design that is distinctively Irish.

INTRODUCTION

The subject idea came about after I discovered that a house in Old Park Road, Corbally, Limerick, where I live, was about to be demolished.

Three semi-detached houses were to take the place of this house. The man, who presently lives in the house and who has done so for the part forty five years, is to be re-housed in a modern bungalow.

I was appalled when I heard because this house (Fig. 1) is one of the last of its kind within the Limerick suburban area, and gave a good deal of character to what was once a country road.

There is a small farming community in this area of Lower Park. Many of the houses that go with the farms are of a traditional vernacular style.

In recent years, the whole system has been threatened by the suburban developments from Limerick City, which have gained every possible site in the area to build houses that have nothing to do with the traditional vernacular style of the area.

The area has been destroyed with bungalows of every type and of every shape and size. Not one house stems from an Irish vernacular style and none have any sympathy for the surrounding cottages which are still slipping away, one by one. I am enraged by the situation and expected a similar feeling from the neighbouring people. However, most people felt that the cottage on Old Park Road was primitive and dirty. They felt replacing it with a bungalow was progress.

I set out to establish a number of things. Firstly, why



Fig1 " to be demolished " Old Park Rd. Corbally Limerick.

people have such negative attitudes to the cottages which I feel are beautiful, to find out about the new styles of buildings that are replacing the traditional styles and to prove that these new houses lack the qualities of the vernacular cottage, which are an expression of a culture, a rooted tradition and the beliefs of an Irish nation. I wanted to show that the cottage is a part of our heritage and history, to prove that it was more successful than modern day houses in adapting with the landscape.

I needed to prove that there were good reasons for preserving such buildings and for protecting them from the bulldozer. I needed to find, therefore, the various building methods and styles that made the cottage survive through the last century, to discover also what qualities the cottage had in its design and use of materials that made it so aesthetically pleasing, and, on the other hand, it was necessary to discover the facets that made modern housing so unsuccessful in the countryside.

As modern housing does not stem from the typical vernacular tradition, I needed to source the origin of such designs and to discover why they have become popular. In addition, I wanted to discover why the countryside has so many of these buildings.

It was also necessary to discover how the situation might be changed and to compare how other countries were dealing with their vernacular architecture. Finally, it was important to seek possible solutions for building sensitively in the countryside.

The first part of the research took me about the countryside photographing the old and new architecture. I found out as much as I could about the vernacular houses in terms of the

history, the design, the various materials and construction methods. I discovered how these aspects changed from region to region, depending on the beliefs and knowledge of the local people. Also, a variety of literature from libraries and especially the Irish Architectural archives gave me more information about vernacular buildings.

The majority of the work on modern housing was through observation but the Planning Office and the Irish Times gave me information as to why there is a spread of one-off houses in the countryside and the adverse effects they are having on the environment.

The study begins with an account of the situation of the country today, that being the onslaught of a mixture of modern houses without an Irish vernacular tradition all over the country. The designs are discussed here and the problems with them. The factors which influenced and caused the growth of such housing are also explained.

The following section of the thesis deals with the vernacular. The term is briefly defined and then a historical background to the country cottage is given.

The next section shows how the culture, and beliefs of the Irish were expressed in the construction of the houses. This is followed by a discussion of building methods and materials in the old and the new. The various elements of the house are discussed including their materials.

The next section deals with the classification of the vernacular style. It can be seen here that there were only a few different house types but from these, slight variations occurred giving a sense of uniformity yet individuality.

This is contrasted with the designs of the modern house. It is

shown that there are no particular styles but hundreds which are degenerated forms of more prestigious house styles or poor adaptations of traditional European styles.

The thesis goes on then to discuss settlement patterns and how impractical the "ribbon developments" on the major roads are.

Finally the thesis ends by showing that it is possible to preserve and live in a traditional cottage. Possible solutions to the existing sprawl are suggested, with some guidelines as to how to build a modern house which incorporates sensitivity to its rural environment.

Most of the illustrations were taken in County Limerick and County Clare. Although I have concentrated mainly on these areas, I know that what is happening here is also happening in the rest of the country.

SECTION ONE:

RURAL HOUSING IN IRELAND TODAY

RURAL HOUSING IN IRELAND TODAY

Romantic and idealistic images of Ireland are being spooned out to tourists each year by Bord Failte. They are images of dramatic landscapes and seascapes: a nation of easy going, friendly people living simply off the land. There is also the image of little rows of thatched cottages with brightly coloured doors and sills, whitewashed walls and turf fires. However, the tourists are not accepting this because, unlike many Irish people, they realize the reality of our countryside and that Ireland does not have anything specially individual and cultural to offer as it did up to twenty five years ago. It may have had that appearance up to twenty five years ago but sadly not now.

The reality is that our country has been environmentally destroyed with fungoid lumps of concrete. One-off designed bungalows and large monstrosities are sprawled across the entire countryside in a ribbon development between towns and villages. They are referred to as the "Bungalow Blitz" and the "Palassi Gomberi". (McDONALD, Frank, The Irish Times, Friday, 12th September 1984).

Ironically, the worst hit area is the West Coast. The countryside has been destroyed. No matter what road you travel along in the West, there are monstrosities blocking scenic landscapes and seascapes. The sad fact is, that beside some of the ostentatious buildings lie the ruins of the cosy homesteads being promoted to the tourists. (See Fig. 2). Nobody cares for the quaint gables, walls and chimneys, built by truly skilled craftsmen. Who cares if this was the form of house building right through the last few centuries, near extinction now.



Fig 2 A ruined cottage from Corbally Co. Limerick.



Fig 3 A house influenced by "Southfork" in Castletroy Co. Limerick.



Fig 4 An ostentatious Georgian style in Castletroy Co. Limerick.

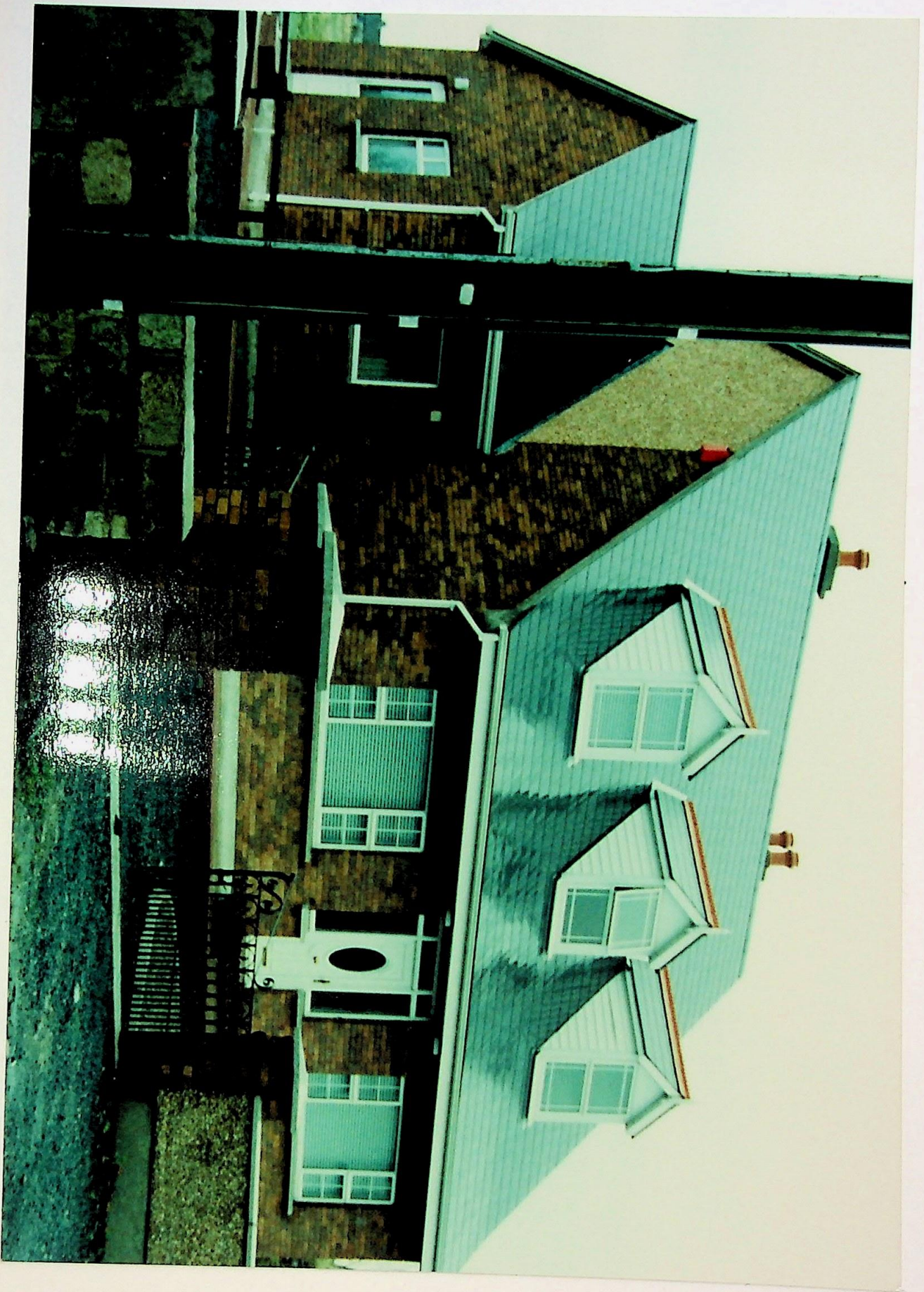


Fig 5, An American styled dormer bungalow from Lower Park, Corbally, Co. Limerick.



Fig 6, A house reflecting Spanish origins, Lower Park Corbally Co. Limerick.

The attitude of the Irish is evident in the new constructions. It is, to hell with you all. I found this bit of scenery and I want to build my house in front of it! These people want to show they have made it, and seem to believe that living in a Spanish Hacienda proves them to be cultured and well travelled.

The house styles consist of the split level, Mediterranean type house, South Forks (See Fig. 3), ranches and, of course, the neo-classical and Georgian concoctions, built of red brick and often sited in areas where local stone is abundant. The American and European influence is very much in evidence. Fig. 5 shows an American style dormer bungalow.

Where do people get their ideas? The media obviously has a lot of influence, with such TV programmes as Dallas and Dynasty. It seems that the Irish are only too ready to adopt the prestigious styles of other cultures, believing that they are pushing themselves up the social ladder. Take, for example, a builder from Westmeath, who holidayed in Dallas, went to see South Fork, took dimensions and photographs and built a replica in Co. Meath. Oh, how envious we all are. But the embarrassing thing is that this type of thinking is creeping into other aspects of Irish life.

Nearby where I live, in Corbally, Limerick, I know of two children christened Alexis and Crystal, after characters in Dynasty. The crunch came when I heard of a child who was baptised Omar Sharif Kelly.

The increase in travel over the last twenty years has been a major influencing factor on modern housing in the countryside. The Spanish Hacienda (Fig. 6) cropping up here and there around the countryside is a sure result of package tour holidays to Spain.

Accommodating the desires of the public are the books of house



Fig 7 A bungalow from Lower Park, Corbally, Co. Limerick.

plans such as:

Bungalow Bliss, Jack Fitzsimons, 1989,
Kells, Co. Meath, and

The Irish Bungalow Book, Ted McCarthy,
1985, Mercier Press, Dublin.

These books proved to be the source of foreign house design. Hardly any of the designs in the books dealt with an Irish style house typical to our vernacular tradition. There were, (Fig. 6), however, plenty of Spangish Hacienda, which one author would adapt to any surrounding. There were the Ranch style houses, with "Vista" view windows. The larger houses were generally of a pretentious and often ostentatious design of either a mock Georgian or Tudor style (Fig. 4). There is also a bungalow adorned in a variety of materials or left plain (Fig. 7).

Even the materials used in these houses are unnatural, imitation stone is stuck on facades with crazy paving, pebble dash and aluminium windows. Many of these houses are located near deposits of natural materials. (Refer to Fig. 8, a bungalow in Corbally, Co. Limerick).

The West of Ireland was always noted for its dry stone walling, yet hardly any bungalow builders are bothered to retain this one feature, so characteristic of our countryside. (Fig. 9 is a house in Corbally, Co. Limerick).

People in the country are too quick to reject their past, evident in the new bungalows which stand beside the cottages of their parents, now converted to animal shelters.

Figures compiled by Foras Forbartha in 1984 illustrate the alarming growth and spread of bungalow blight. They show that the output of one-off houses in rural Ireland doubled from 5,530



Fig 8 The use of different materials from Lower Park, Corbally Co. Limerick



Fig 9 Cement walling replaces stone walling, in Corbally Co. Limerick.

to 11,050 between 1976 and 1983. They now account for 53% of all newly built houses compared to just 35% ten years ago. By the year 2007, the number of such houses is expected to double.

There are a number of reasons for the upsurge to the countryside:

"What I really love to see in rural areas at night time are the lights at the end of the lane".

These were the words of the former Labour Minister for Local Government, Mr. James Tully. It was he, who in pursuit of Eammon de Valera's dream of cosy homesteads dotting the countryside, encouraged the "Bungalow Blight". Mr. Tully in 1973, after just eight months in office, issued a policy directive to the Local Authorities, telling them to be less restrictive in planning applications. He said,

"Proposals for residential development in rural areas should be granted if at all possible. Also, builders of one-off houses in the countryside are eligible to the same first time house purchaser's grant as someone who buys a semi detached home in the suburbs".

People of urban profession are moving to the countryside simply to be in an amicable environment. The availability of cheap petrol in the Seventies, and the willingness of farmers to gain financially from sites are all contributing factors to the growth of the Bungalow Blight. Also, people involved in farming are donating sites to members of the family. (See Fig. 10).

Fig 10 The new beside the old in Lower Park, Corbally, Co. Limerick.



Fig 11
The Golden
Vale House
Bunratty,
Co. Clare.



The sprawling concrete across the countryside is not only destroying the appearance of the countryside but the pockets of the people. As will be discussed later, these houses are wasteful on land, contribute to pollution in the countryside, they are safety hazards on major roads, and also, the cost of supplying services, such as electricity and gas etc. is a greater expense than for urban houses.

In contrast, the Irish cottage, (Fig. 11), is a result of the deep rooted tradition of a nation. It has withstood a very turbulent history. The traditional cottage is a part of the Irish Heritage and reflects a deep culture, ways and customs, and the skills and knowledge of the people who built them.

Unlike modern housing, the traditional vernacular house was built for practical reasons. It provided shelter, warmth and insulation from a harsh environment. It is the symbol of a historic culture that has existed in Ireland for centuries. Only in the past twenty years has this been rejected for something alien to our culture and environment.

Many modern house builders do not realize that there are practical reasons for preserving the cottage and using it as a basis for modern house building. It is a practical and realistic home to a natural environment. It does not demand of this environment but yet asserts a presence of continuity and endurance against harsh weathering and time.

Much of the destruction of vernacular houses and the large estate houses is due to an indifference and a historical prejudice among the Irish. The Irish vernacular house was often influenced by British settlers in Ireland. The Irish have been conditioned to see this as a regrettable deviation in their past. Contradictory to this is the adoption of European and American house styles.

SECTION TWO:

VERNACULAR ARCHITECTURE

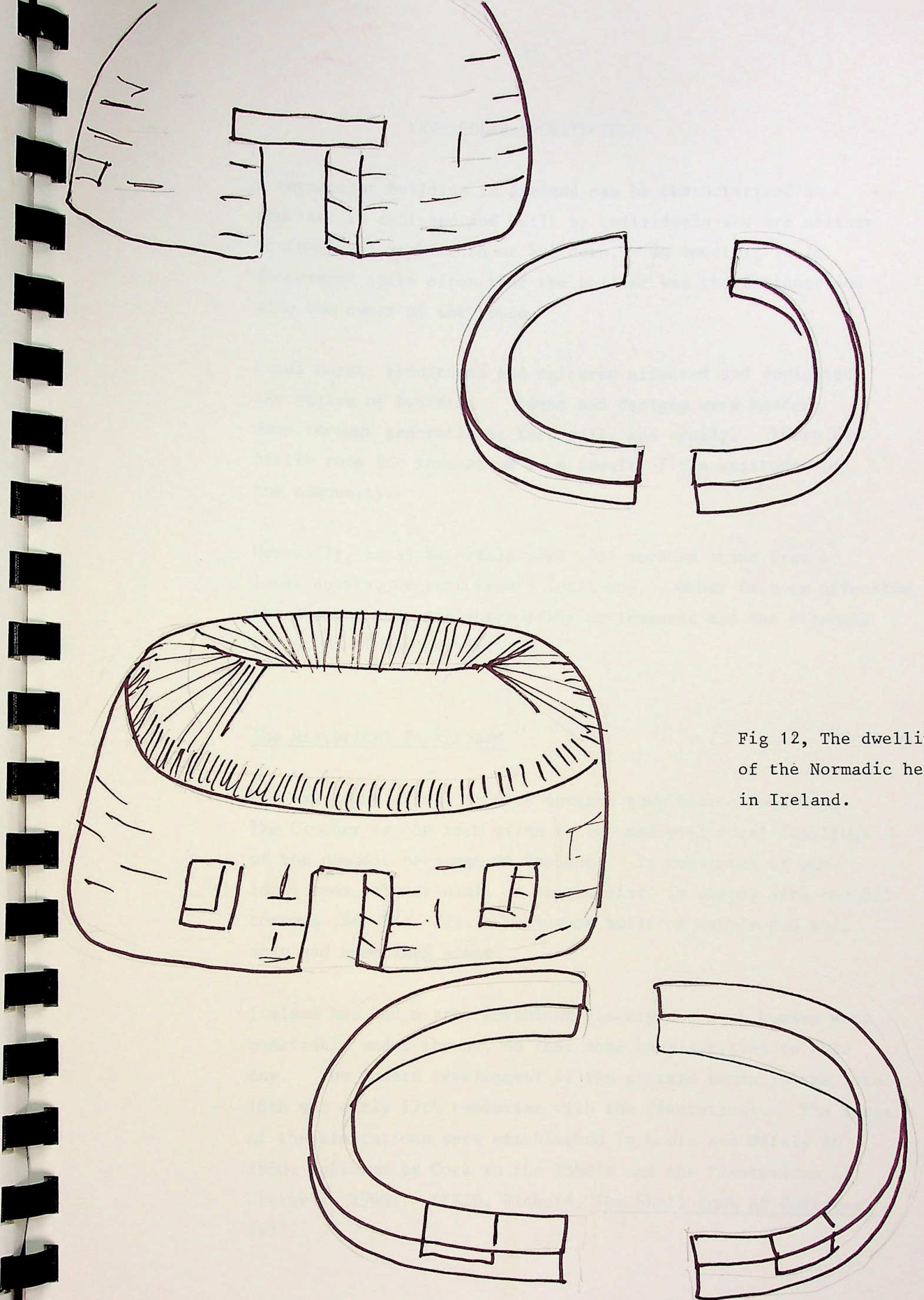


Fig 12, The dwellings
of the Normadic herds
in Ireland.

VERNACULAR ARCHITECTURE

A vernacular building in Ireland can be characterized as one that is designed and built by individuals who are neither professional architects or builders. On enquiry, it is discovered quite often that the builder was the designer and also the owner of the house.

Local norms, traditions and cultures affected and dominated the styles of building. Ideas and designs were handed down through generations, informally and orally. There was little room for innovation as a result of the attitudes of the community.

Generally, local materials were used such as stone from a local quarry, or turf from a local bog. Other factors affecting the designs were the surrounding environment and the economic resources of the people.

The Historical Background

The existence of the country cottage goes back a long way. The Clochar is the term given to the medieval rural dwellings of the nomadic herdsmen in Ireland. It consisted of one large room, either oval, or rectangular in shape, with rounded corners (See Fig. 12). They were built of wattle and mud, sods and sometimes stone.

Ireland has had a very turbulent history and such houses were constantly under threat, so that none have survived to this day. The modern development of the cottage began in the late 16th and early 17th centuries with the Plantations. The first of the plantations were established in Laois and Offaly in 1560, followed by Cork in the 1580's and the Plantations of Ulster in 1590. (REID, Richard, The Shell Book of Cottages, 1977).

The Plantations created a demand for employment in the countryside, which, until then, was very sparse and underdeveloped. Large tracts of countryside were redeveloped and improved by the new landowning gentry. Extremes of social classes existed and with this, extremes in houses. On one hand, there were the huge estates and gardens of the landlords. On the other, were the landless rural workers with little stake in the economy and social structure living in hovels. It was among this class that a huge increase in population occurred early in the 19th century. This was due to the demand for labour by the landlords. The population of that century almost doubled to ten million before the Famine.

There was an increase in the sub division of small tracts of land. The countryside became denuded of its forests in a ceaseless quest for materials for building, firewood, and other necessities. In many parts of the country, the environment had declined. It was full of people and without vegetation. The contrast to this of the intensely planted estates and strong tenant farmers must have been a dramatic sight. (CULLEN, L.M., Life in Ireland, 1968).

The countryside was dotted with housing of different types. There were the walled estates covering bountiful acres of vegetation. Outside these walls the landscape, sparse and bare, stretched for miles, and all that was to be seen were small hovel like cabins of mud or clay sods. Surrounding these were the potato fields which kept these people alive. (LANE, Padraic, Ireland, Past into Present Series, 1974).

Some families were better off than others and maintained colourful pretty cottages of the postcard type. However, all this was to change with the Great Potato Famine of the 1840's. These traumatic years, of starvation, death and

mass emigration, affected the cottiers and landless labourers more than any other segment of the population. Their numbers rapidly declined and with them their houses, which were soon to be just a heap of stones alongside a road. (Patrick and Maura SHAFFREY, Irish Countryside Buildings, 1985).

With this came a growing concern for the plight of the poorer classes, particularly with regard to housing standards. The Land Acts of 1870, 1881 and 1903, transferred the ownership of land from the landlord to tenant and redistributed land more equally. Planting of trees and hedgerows began to give the country its appearance up to the 1960's. Prior to the ill-conceived developments of modern day housing and industry, new houses were built throughout the country, of a much higher standard. This was the beginning of the modern day cottage which has continued to the present day, and which is the type studied here.

Constructing a Cottage

As has been outlined, the cottages were not designed or built by professional builders until the end of the 19th century. Most people had first-hand knowledge of vernacular houses since they lived in them, and most people had helped someone or other in the building of a dwelling. Therefore, the house was usually built by the intended occupant with the help of the neighbours.

Site Selection

Unlike most modern day houses the design and construction of the cottage was purely functional. The walls were generally thick and solid and the windows small to keep the weather out,

rather than to let the light in. The houses were located with their backs in a protective stance to the prevailing winds. Where feasible, natural barriers were used, such as hills and trees to protect the cottage from harsh weather. Most houses, particularly along the West Coast, face the North East, with their backs to the South-West prevailing winds.

Modern day rural houses are not solely functionally designed. These houses assume protection. Travel around the West of Ireland and observe large picture windowed bungalows, facing onto scenic areas, such as the sea. Instead of assimilating and enhancing the environment, modern rural housing has sprawled across the countryside, it stands on top of hills and obstructs the views of historic and scenic countryside.

Superstitions Affecting House Building

The Irish were once a race which held a deep rooted folklore of beliefs and tradition. Houses would not be built on a fairy pathway or a graveyard. Tokens and money were often buried within the house for good luck. Sometimes it was customary to place two stones on the ground where gables were to be. Lighting lamps were placed on the stones and if they were not interfered with after a few nights, the house was considered safe.

The strangest practice, however, was to bury horses' skulls under the house. In those days, ceilis, singing and dancing were common forms of leisure and entertainment. A horse's skull is a rigidly enclosed largish space, and once placed under a piano or dancing feet creates a sound box to give a better tone to the music.

Something which was very common and is still to be seen on the occasional house is the "House Leek". In summer it blossoms

with a bright flame-coloured flower. It was believed to protect the house against fire and lightning. It was also believed to have curative properties, particularly for eye complaints.

Many beliefs were equated with the fire. It was never allowed to burn out, for a cold hearth was equated with ill fortune, if not even with death. Fire was not to be borrowed as to let it leave the house was to let the luck go with it.

Keeping holes around the fire were common for storage. Those holes were referred to as "arches" or windows. The one on the left belonged to the woman of the house. This was her side of the fire and the side of the pot for cooking. Also, seats nearest the fire belonged to the older occupants of the house. Food was always eaten around the fire.

These were just some of the norms, beliefs and customs associated with traditional houses. Now such traditions and folklore have vanished. Once, we were a nation that spoke our own language and built a style of housing which reflected our culture.

Today, there is a remarkable change in the approach to house design and building in Ireland. There is no longer a vernacular tradition. Modern houses are the perfect example to illustrate a nation that has abandoned its history, its culture and beliefs.

The Spanish Hacienda, the Tudor houses, the South Forks and Ranch style prove that anything other than Irish is desirable. In adopting such styles, there appears to be a pretentiousness in attempting to rise socially by looking for something European or American to copy. Cheaper travel and the media have allowed this to happen with the increase in wealth during the past twenty years.

Throughout history, the Irish, it would seem, have always played

the role of the underdog as can be seen in the final section. Unfortunately, the vernacular architecture is associated with those hard times so that people wish to ignore it.

The manner by which a vernacular tradition can again be achieved in this country largely depends on the nation's coming to terms with reality. We should be able to accept all aspects of our architectural history regardless of its origin and associations.

SECTION THREE:

HOUSE MATERIALS IN BOTH TRADITIONAL
AND MODERN HOUSES



Fig 13 The over use of different materials in a house from Corbally Co. Limerick.

HOUSE MATERIALS IN BOTH TRADITIONAL AND MODERN HOUSES

The traditional cottages are very successful in making our countryside an aesthetic and charming environment. It is not only their scale, location and design that make them so, but their use of materials.

The traditional cottage uses simple and natural materials that allow the building to be assimilated in its environment. Rugged walls of stone, clay or sods are washed white with lime and crowned with a cropped tidy fringe of thatch. The building is enhanced cheerfully by brightly coloured doors and window sills. The result is the simplicity of a house that a young child might draw. Such cottages have been the inspiration of many an artist such as Jack B. Yeats.

Just as these cottages have a rough hewn look so is our landscape rugged and worn. Small uneven surfaces of land are enclosed with low rubble walls or hedgegrows. The cottage is thus very much a part of the natural landscape. These are the images I'm sure that Eamon de Valera had in mind when he spoke of cosy homesteads to lighten the darkened lanes of our countryside. I very much doubt that he could have foreseen the present day situation.

My main criticism of modern housing in the countryside is the use of modern materials. The widespread adaptation of concrete into everything, as in natural stone wall cladding, pebble dashing, "crazy paving" etc. Red brick has also been dragged to the country to add prestige to a degenerated form of Georgian architecture.

Some buildings, as in Fig. 13 from Lower Park in Corbally, use a combination of as many different materials as would be imagined possible to decorate the facades and surrounds of houses. The house incorporates cement stone cladding, pebble dashing,

spatter dashing, red brick, wooden panelling, lead latticed windows and iron railings. All these types of buildings are placed side by side along country roads.

Aesthetically, such a mixture of materials across the landscape looks disastrous. Instead of assimilating in the environment, these buildings become loud obstructions to the beautiful landscape. There is a need to return to look at the natural materials of the vernacular buildings and to see what are the characteristics that make them so aesthetically pleasing and integrated with the landscape. It is also necessary to establish if modern materials can be used sensitively and whether it is practical to use them in preference to natural materials.

* * * * *

The Materials of Traditional Houses

Wattling:

Earlier cottages used wattling as a building material. This consists of weaving pliable branches, horizontally or vertically, through larger timber frames. It was then usually plastered with clay or mud for sealing. This was used up to the 18th century, until the depletion of forests. After the 18th century it was restricted to doors and chimney canopies. This method is fairly crude and basic and was used generally in the humble dwellings, except for small areas such as interior roofing and on chimney canopies within the larger houses.

Timber:

Timber was used mostly and is still used for roof construction. Entire box-framed houses existed but these were few and restricted to one period. These houses were built in the 17th century by British settlers in Ireland, who availed of the locally abundant forest materials. However, few of them survived the 1641 Rebellion by the Irish and the last few disappeared in the 19th century. (GAILY, Alan, Rural Houses in the North of Ireland, 1984). They had horizontal and diagonal bracing. The spacing between the structural timber was about the width of the braces. The spaces were nogged with oak and plastered over.

With its insulating and aesthetic qualities, timber is a very practical structural material and when properly treated is very durable. It is however vulnerable to fire. It has many applications in interiors, for example, in panelling, roofing and furniture. Sadly, the tradition of using this natural material has declined greatly.

In modern housing it is now being replaced by a variety of artificial, plastic-based materials. Such materials can never

capture the warmth and quality of natural timber. Other reasons for the decline in its use are declining standards of craftsmanship, the over-pricing of quality hardwoods and a scarcity of forest materials, due to the constant denuding of our forests during the 18th and 19th centuries.

Turf or Sod:

Turf or sod is the top layer of soil, including grass and roots (See Fig. 14). It is a very humble and unstable material and not to be recommended for modern housing. Its two advantages were,

- a. It was cheap
- b. It was readily available.

So tenants evicted from their houses could construct a turf or sod house within a day elsewhere. Entire constructions of sod and turf were generally used only by the poor but sods had their use in other construction details.

Occasionally, a house was found where the inner portion of the hearth gable was faced with sods, to serve as a holding material into which the wattle ends of a chimney canopy were stuck.

A layer of sods was widely used as under-thatch. They were useful for anchoring thatching pins (scallops) in place. Sods and turf were not always the materials of the poor but were used for construction within traditional patterns. (EVANS, Estyn, The Ulster Farm House, 1955).

Tempered Clay:

This was used widely in constructing buildings amongst all



Fig 14, A sod house.



Fig 15, A clay house.

classes of cottage dwellers during the 17th and 18th centuries. (See Fig. 15). Such houses could last for centuries, provided that the materials were of good quality and that the roof was maintained.

A wide overhanging at the eaves was necessary to protect the walls. A clay wall would degenerate more quickly than a stone wall if exposed to frost and rain. Neglect of walls could lead to dampening and so weakening and softening. Crumbling would then develop or cracks at the corners. Butresses were common supports in clay walled houses. Stone was also used to strengthen corners, doors and window surrounds. Fireplace and chimney were also often of stone.

Clay is a simple material, which makes for the construction of large and complex dwellings but walls cannot be carried to a great height, so gable walls of clay are rare. Most people preferred clay housing to walled. Jonathan Binns describes the reaction of an old man's move from a clay house to a stone one,

".....We called on an old man who was having a stone cottage built for him at Lord Gosford's expense; he said, 'I would rather live and die in my old cabin; the mud walls are warm; it is the warmest hut in all Ireland'".

(BINNS, Jonathan, The Miseries and Beauties of Ireland, London, 1837).

Making a Clay House:

The clay was dug, water was added and the mixture was kneaded to a doughy consistency. Binding materials were added. These were straw rushes, grass or hay, animal hair, cow dung and lime.

There was a belief that milk, buttermilk, ashes and animal

blood would strengthen the clay. This mixture was allowed to temper over a couple of days.

Meanwhile the site was prepared. A foundation of clay mortared stone was laid down. The height of the foundation varied from a few inches to a yard. The thickness of walls and foundations could be from 18 inches to 3 feet. The foundation saved the wall from ground moisture and the burrowing activities of rats and mice.

The clay was then laid down in layers of about 18 inches. This was then either patted compactly with a fork or walked on by a child. A layer of straw or twigs was placed on this and left to set. This was repeated the following day until the walls were the required height. Twigs were layered at corners for extra strength. When dry, the clay was pared with a sharp knife. Stonework could then be applied at windows and corners etc. Rough openings were spanned by wooden lintels to make doors and windows, or they were pared smooth when the clay had set. Sometimes a mould was used for doors and windows, sometimes they were carved out at the end.

Stone was laid on top of clay walls to support rafters and beams. The finished wall was well whitewashed inside and out. Occasionally moulds were used to shape walls, a similar process to building a contemporary mass concrete wall. (BARROW, John, A Tour Round Ireland, London, 1836).

Stone Wall Construction:

Traditionally, the most common building material has been stone, which varies in quality from field stones to finely worked granites.

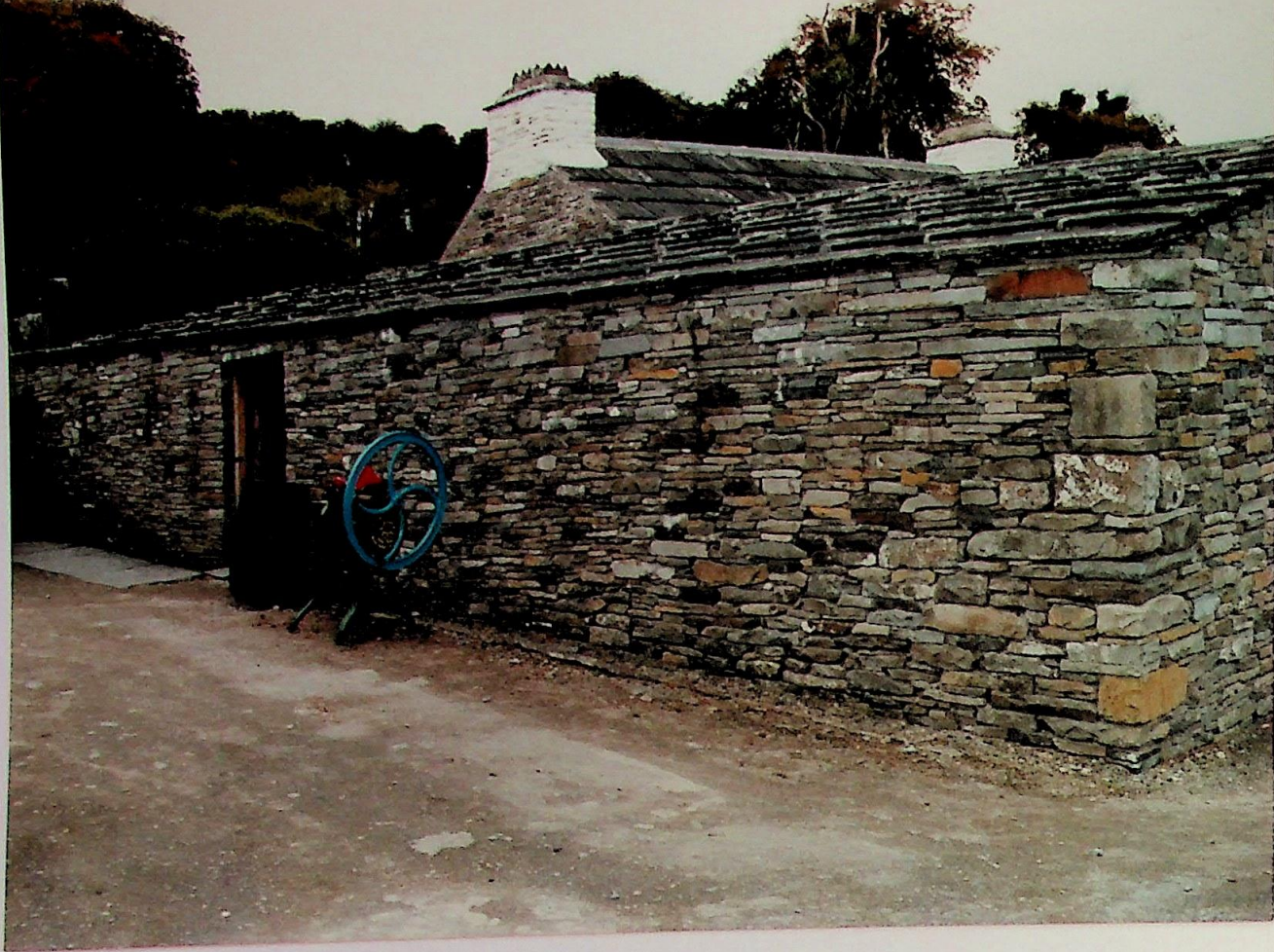
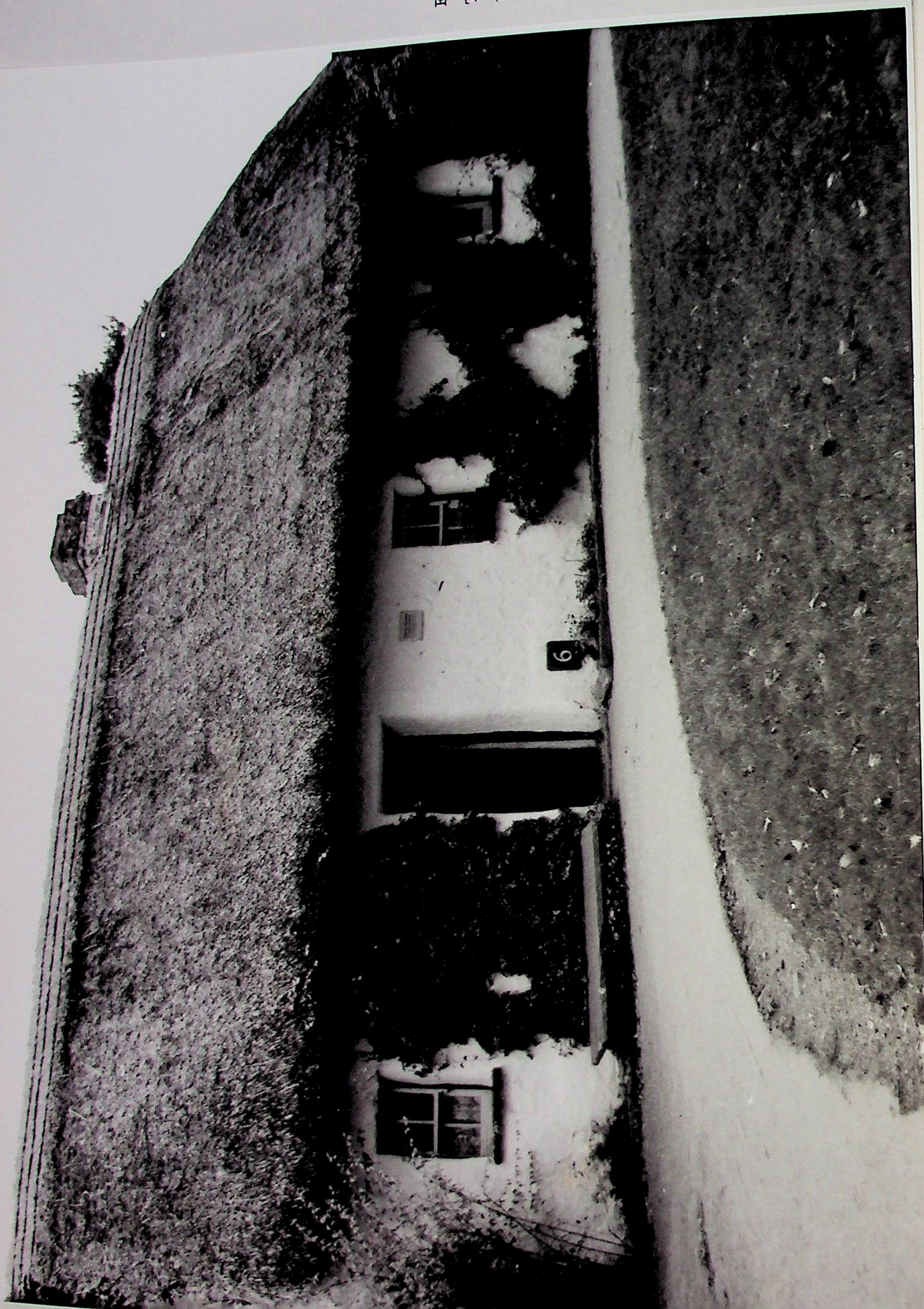


Fig 16 Dry stone walling in a house and out building, Moher Co. Clare.



Fig 17 A Clare dry stone walled house now in bunratty Co Clare .

Fig 18,
The Shannon
Farm house,
of mortared
stone,
Burratty,
Co. Clare.



Dry Stone Walling:

This is typical of the areas of Sligo, Mayo, Galway and Clare. (See Fig. 16). The best stones of sufficient size, worked to rectangular shapes for a good fit, were reserved for the interlocking quoins or corners. (See Fig. 17). Field Stone constituted the remainder of the wall material. Quoins were often rounded, as with certain types of stone a sharp corner was not secure and stones dislodged easily. In extreme cases of rounded corners, commonly found in County Galway, the outer perimeter of the walls assumed an almost oval shape. The house was then whitewashed or left plain.

A particular type of house was distinctive to Achill Island. A traveller to the Island in 1838 commented:

"A dry stone wall was built in the form of an obtuse oval, for they had not yet arrived at the act of making a square quoin, or erecting a gable end. Outside this wall and at about a foot distance, another loose wall was run up and the space in between the two filled with sea sand. This was generally roofed with timber washed on shore from wrecks. Eaves rested on the inside wall, so that moisture was soaked through the sand".

(O DANAHAIR Caoimhin, Material and Method in Irish Traditional Building, 1957).

Socially superior houses used mortared stone which was regarded as the best material of all. Mortar could be of clay or lime. (See Fig. 18).

Brick:

This was rarely used in vernacular architecture except for chimneys, fireplaces and in vaulting as it was expensive and not a naturally deposited material as was stone or clay. To have transported this would have meant an extra unnecessary cost.

Modern Materials

The previously discussed materials are virtually redundant in modern rural housing. The following have taken over.

Concrete:

Concrete is the result of mixing together cement, sand, gravel and water in different proportions. As a structural material it was first used at the end of the 19th century. It is the base material for virtually all modern rural housing. Concrete may be used in a variety of forms, in block form like stone and brick, and as a dense material like clay. Concrete does not require the same laying skill as stone or brick, and as blockwork is not generally accepted as a suitable finish, they are usually plastered over. This has resulted in the decline of the mason's craft, and there is a widespread feeling that the plasterer will cover up bad workmanship and inferior materials (SHAFFREY, Patrick, 1985, Dublin).

Concrete has its disadvantages. It does not have the same lasting properties as stone. In damp climates, as in Ireland, it is prone to staining. Aesthetically, plastered concrete can never achieve the appearance and texture that natural stone can give. Many rural houses use a surround of unplastered concrete blocks which has a very ugly appearance. (See Fig. 19).

Brick:

Brick is among the oldest and most widely used material. It has been used in the larger towns since the 18th century. Brick is rare in the countryside. Some early great country houses used brick. However, recent years have seen a trend towards red brick in the countryside. It is generally to be



Fig 19, The typical concrete bungalow with surrounding concrete walls, Corbally, Limerick.

found in the pastiche Georgian/neo Classical style house, (See Fig. 20), both single and two-storey.

Red brick is highly successful in towns, in rows of terraces where there is a sense of uniformity, and regular proportion. In Fig. 20 and Fig. 21, the result is in bad taste. These houses are dominating the landscape. There is no sympathy for surrounding buildings and landscape. Red brick has always retained a prestigious image, and its use in such houses in the countryside shows a pretentiousness on the part of their owners, people who simply want to shout out that they have a lot of money.

I do not blame the architects too readily for this. All lay people to some extent believe they can design a house quite easily. And where there's money, there's a way.... Many wealthy people in today's society believe in showing off in the only way they know how. They build a red brick, neo-Georgian style house in the countryside. The sad thing is they are unaware that red brick is quite commonplace as an urban material, they don't realize that their houses fall short of being classical and are really a mixture of Irish vernacular, Georgian and classical without the proper proportions. These houses are ostentatious and pretentious trying to be what they can never be.

Finishes:

Stone Wall Facing

In recent years, an artificial stone, produced and supplied by Roadstone, made from cement and various stone aggregates, is being indiscriminately used everywhere in Ireland. (See Fig. 22). The effect is somewhat like the stone came off a roll (like wallpaper). The colour looks anything but natural.



Fig 20, A mock Georgian red bicked house, Golflinks Rd, Co. Limerick.



Fig 21, The bungalow version, The Mill Rd. Corbally, Co. Limerick.



Fig 22, Imitation stone cladding, Golflinks Rd. Co. Limerick.



Fig 23, " Crazy paving" up the walls, Corbally Co. Limerick.

This mixture of regular stone, trying to look naturally irregular, lacks the texture and grandeur of real stone. The difficult part to understand is the fact that many of these houses are situated near stone quarries where, with a little foresight, the house could have been of the real thing, instead of a contrived imitation.

"Crazy Paving"

Crazy paving derived from the flagstone floor. It consists of flat faced artificial stone, usually set within plaster. This type of structure is most commonly found in patios, where it can look reasonably attractive. To put it on a horizontal plane up the facade of a house is a different matter. In Fig. 23, and Fig. 6, there is an attempt to create the effect of structural stone arches. The attempt fails miserably. There is nothing wrong with decoration until it tries to appear as something more than it is, as in the contrived efforts of this building.

Spatter Dashing

This consists of a mixture of cement, sand and small pebbles, which are mixed together and then thrown at a wall. It gives a pleasant, subtle texture and can be painted afterwards. (See Fig. 24). This type of finish can look well in larger houses to give a textured surface that does not detract from the architectural lines of a building as the above finishes do; on the other hand, the extreme version of this is a process called pebble dashing. Here, glass is combined with the cement; this gives a shiny, almost glittering surface to the building, and takes away from any architectural qualities the building may have. Such a finish usually looks obtrusive.



Fig 24, Pebble dashing in a cottage in Lower Park, Corbally, Co. Limerick.



Fig 25, Wood paneled cladding, Golflinks Rd. Co. Limerick.

Timber:

Timber is a natural material so can look pleasing on a building, to give a rustic look. However, it only works on simple, natural looking surfaces. The combination of artificial stone and panels in Fig. 25 looks laboured and over-clad. The two different materials do not relate and are out of context with each other.

Many houses are to be found around the countryside that consist of a mixture of the above finishes. I often wonder if this is an effort to hide poor quality architectural features. The result is a building that lacks any sympathy with the environment. Such buildings are obtrusive in that they demand attention and ignore the pleasing qualities of surrounding vegetation. They are contrived in that they try to create the image of grander houses by being ornate. As the rural house is so ubiquitous, its use of material should be subtle to allow it to blend with the landscape.

In contrast to the use of such materials is the limewashing of the vernacular houses. Most houses following the 18th century were limewashed inside and out. The wash was generally white but could be tinted on the more prestigious buildings, a pink, red or blue colour (See Fig. 26). Occasionally a subtle texture was given during the application, as in Fig. 27.

The use of whitewash or limewash was for practical reasons: to protect the walls from weathering, to make for better cleanliness, in keeping away dung and stagnated water from the doors. And, it was also used for aesthetic purposes. EVANS, E. Estyn, The Ulster Farmhouse, 1955).

Attempts should be made in today's environment to build houses that integrate similar materials. Mixtures of materials such as pebble dashing and "crazy paving" should be avoided.

Where natural materials are accessible they should be used.
Imitating natural materials should be avoided.

The indiscriminate use of the above materials in such a pretentious way shows a lack of awareness in the people of Ireland of how to use building materials sensitively. There is a real need to educate people to become aware of what does and does not adapt and enhance our environment. The media and schools should make use of the opportunity to educate the Irish people to sensitive building in the countryside.

* * * * *

Fig 26, White lime washing, Bunratty Co. Clare.



Fig 27, Lime washing with a tint of pink, Bunratty, Co. Clare.

The Roof

Roofs can be hipped or gabled. The gable roof has two surfaces, front and back, at the end of the house the gables rise up to the ridge of the roof. The hip roof has four roof surfaces, the roof slopes at the ends as well as the sides. All four outside walls are the same height. Some houses are half hipped, therefore end walls are a little higher than side walls.

The gable roof was introduced to the Irishland by British settlers in the 18th century. (See Fig. 28). In Ulster, houses of the 1600's were dominated by hip roofs (See Fig.29), a century later it was the opposite with the gable roof dominating. Gable roofs are also to be found in certain other parts of the country. They are in Counties Down, Cavan, Roscommon, East Galway, the coastal districts of Clare, Kerry and West Cork. Gable roofs are also common in portions of Counties Westmeath, Offaly, Leix, Tipperary, Kilkenny, Carlow, Wexford and Wicklow. In the remainder of the country, Munster and Leinster hipped roofs dominate. (O DANAHAIR, Caoimhin, 1945, The Questionnaire System).

In modern building, there is a mixture of roof styles. Gabled roofs are generally found in all modern bungalows. In the larger two-storied houses, where the plan is more square than rectangular, the roofs are generally hipped. Pitched roofs are typical of two-storied houses in Ireland. Here the roof slopes to the side walls and the facade becomes what was usually the gable wall. Again, a combination of roof styles in modern housing is also to be found.

Roof Construction:

Traditionally, native oak commonly provided the principal



Fig 28, Hipped roofing in Adare Co. Limerick.



Fig 29, Gable roofing, Corbally Co. Limerick.

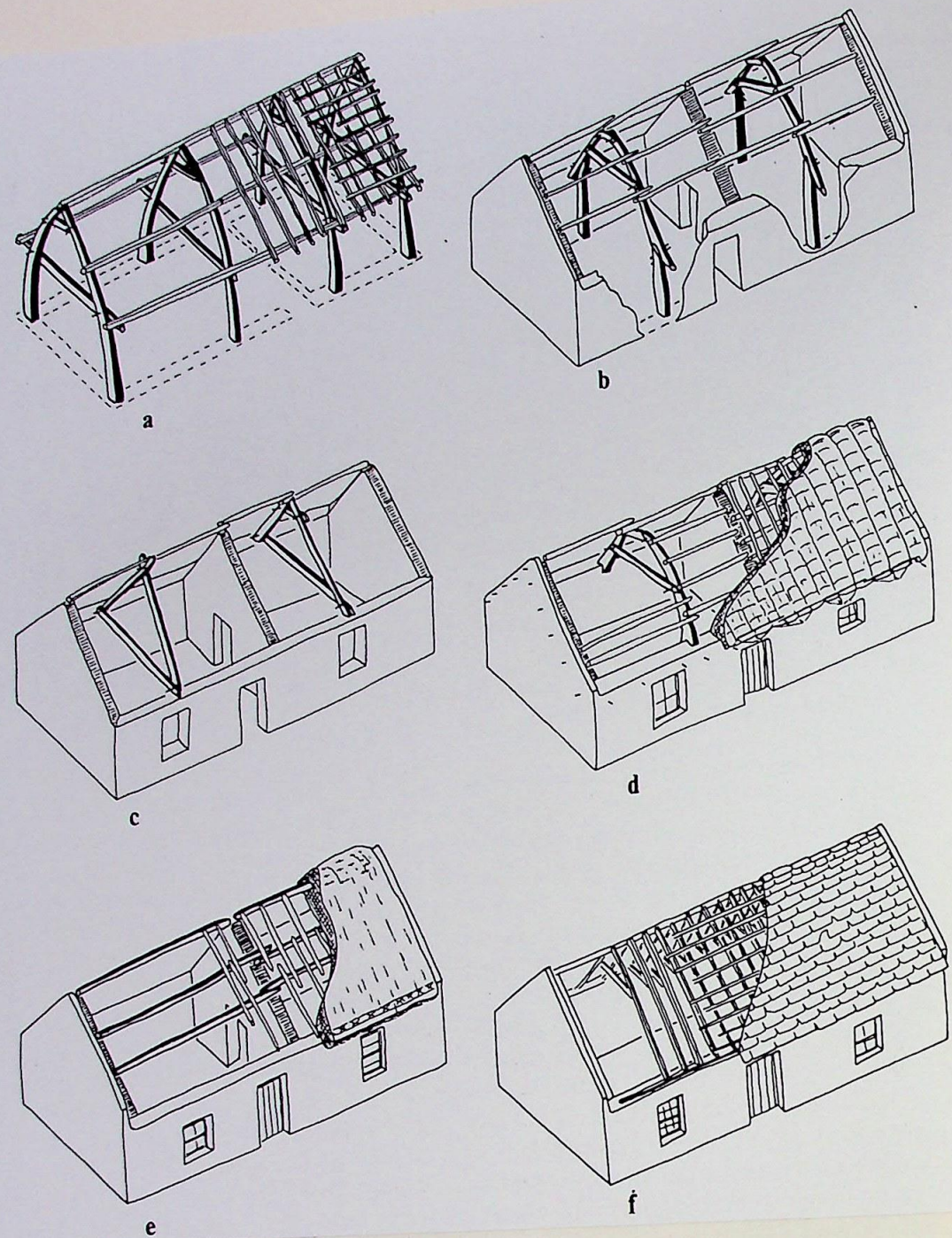


Fig 30, Classification of the traditional roofing systems.

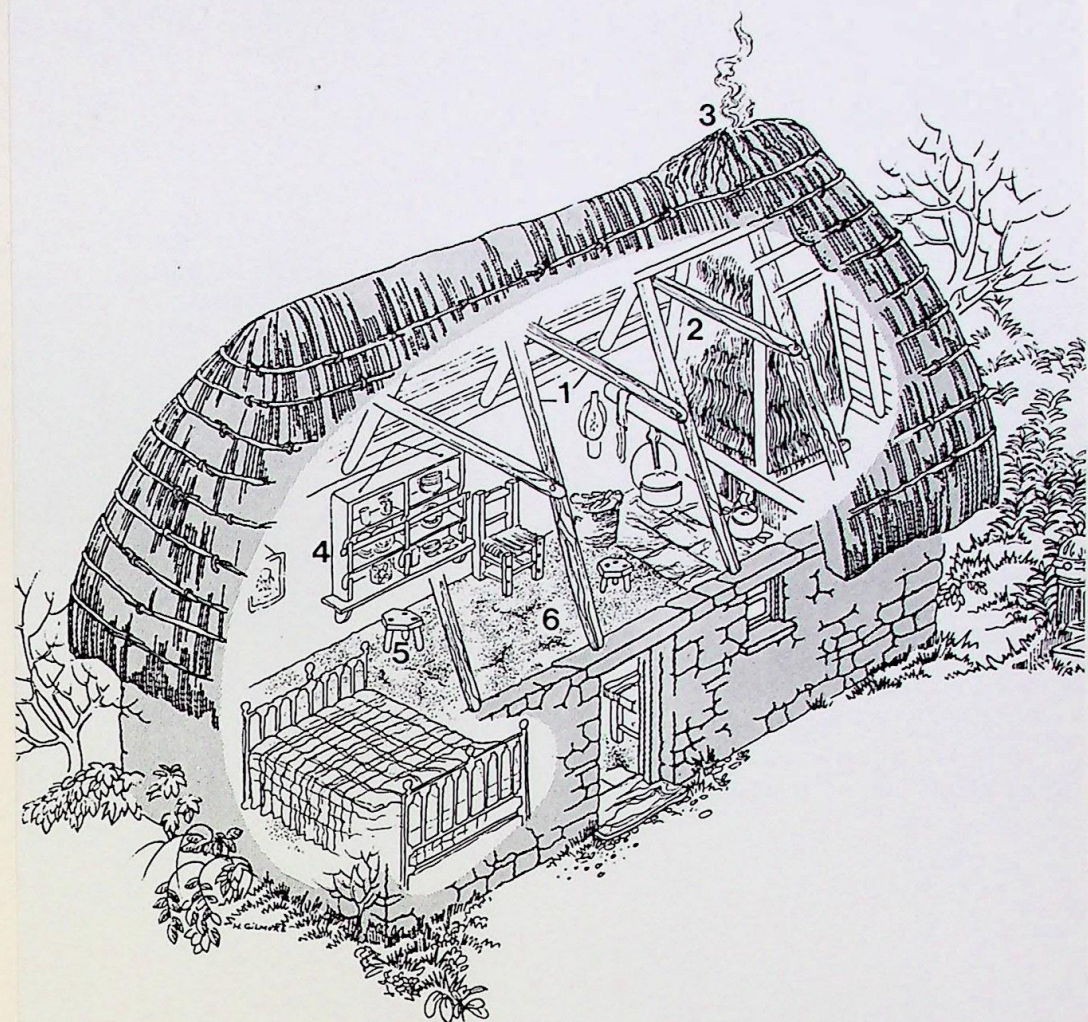


Fig 31, Collar beam roof trusses, this originally from Athea, Co. Limerick.

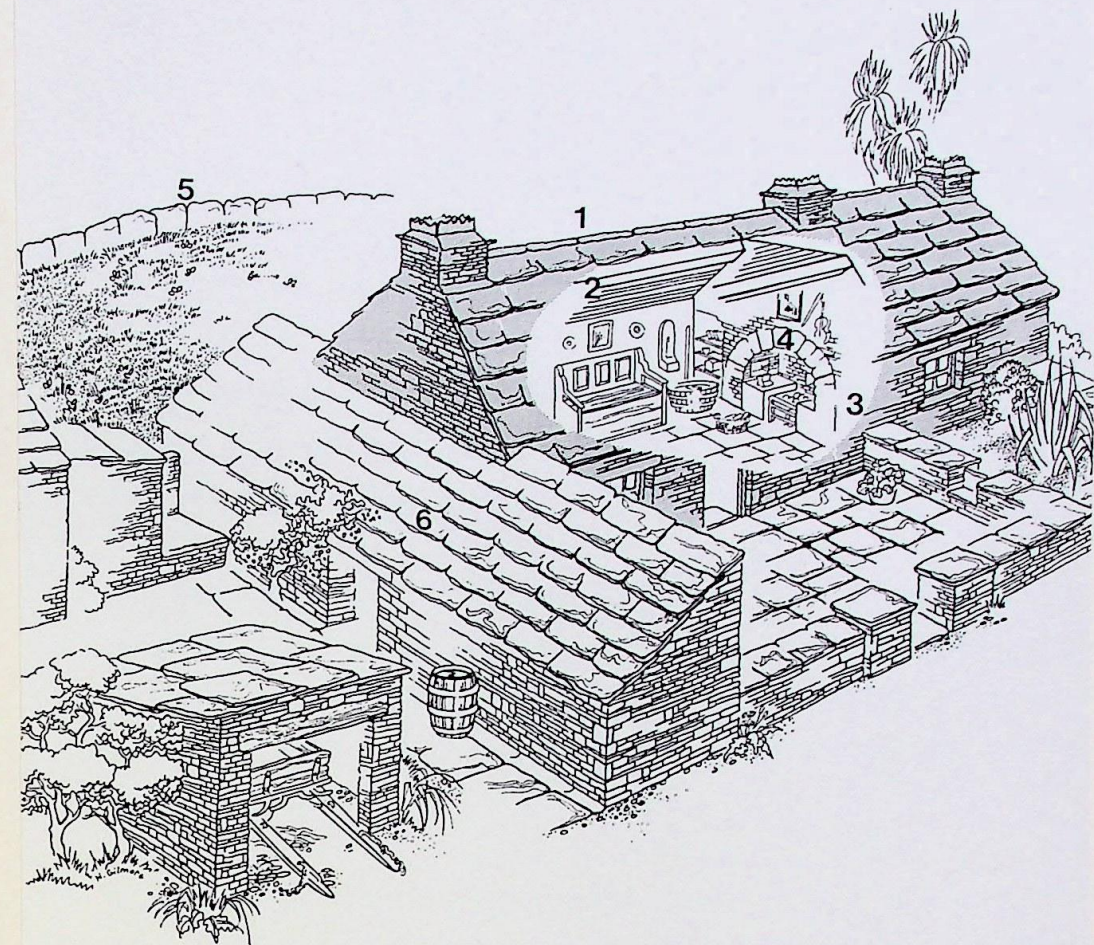


Fig 32, An example of purlin roofing.

load bearing members in many areas until about the middle of the 18th century. This was then followed by fossil timber, recovered from peat bogs as forest timbers declined.

Generally, there are six different types of roofing support systems. (See Fig. 30). The first can be characterized by continuous bladed cruck trusses through purlins and underlying rafters. The cruck trusses consist of the large horizontal constructions, the purlins lie perpendicularly across them and the rafters consist of the remaining construction. (GAILY, Alan, Regal Houses in the North of Ireland, 1984).

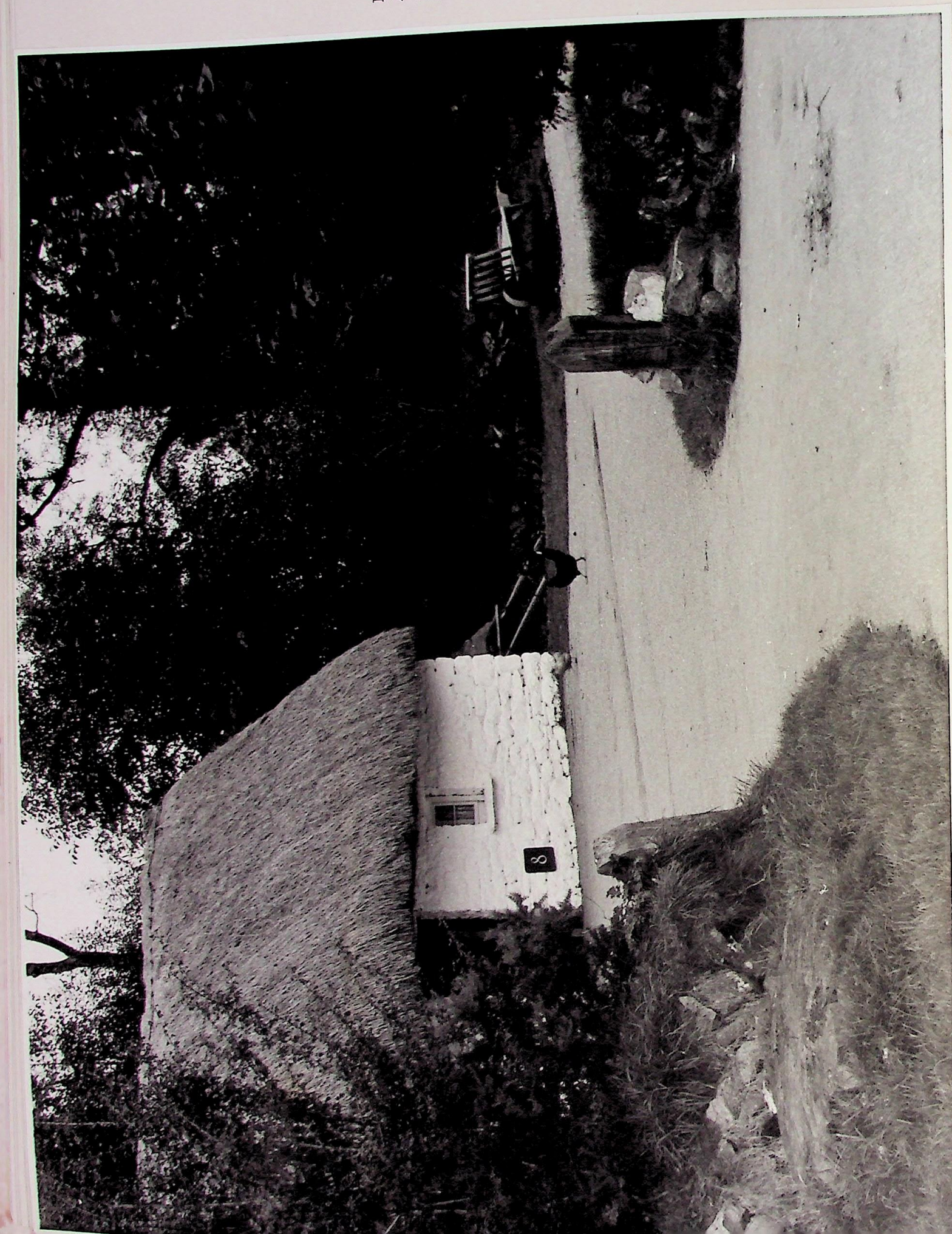
The second type is very similar except the cruck trusses have jointed rather than continuous blades. Both of these systems were found to be from the 17th and 18th centuries, mainly in Ulster. Some were found in Clare, Kerry and Galway during the last century.

Type C shows the tie beam trusses with through purlins at the top. Here, the exterior walls of the house form a larger part in supporting the roof.

Type D is the collar beam truss with through trusses found commonly throughout traditional houses. (See Fig. 31 is an example of a Co. Limerick house which has now been reconstructed in Bunratty Folk Park. The roof timbers of this house are of bog oak. It is a one-roomed cottage that belonged to a labourer in the earlier half of this century. Such a cottage is called a Bothan.

Type E can be characterized by a purlin roof. Long beams of timber are supported by gable walls and internal partition walls. Transverse beams were not used. Lack of forests and timber resources in the middle of the 18th century made the use of the purlin roof popular, for it minimized the amount of heavy timbers required to roof a house. Such roofs were

Fig 33,
A comparison
of roof to
wall height.



often on mud-walled houses as the purlins bore much of the weight and thrust of the roof. However some stone walls had purlin roofs such as the house from Moher in County Clare, now situated in Bunratty Folk Park. Two huge beams, salvaged from the seashore were needed to hold the great weight of the stone roof. (See Fig.32).

Type F shows the common rafter trusses with ridge piece for slating. This method of building is used in modern house building.

Again, these building techniques are typical of the vernacular method. The progression of building methods was due to an oral tradition where methods were passed down by word of mouth, and by settlers who brought British methods such as the cruck trusses.

Other factors which affected the choice of structure for a roof was the availability of timber. The West Coast lacked supplies of timber and as in the house from Moher, depended on materials washed ashore by shipwrecks. As the purlin roofing method minimized the amount of material used, this became common to the West Coast.

Some parts of the country progressed faster than others, particularly the North, with the influence of British methods. Such roofing constructions were a result of the surrounding environment and available materials, the time in history, the part of the country and the customs of that region. All this is a part of our heritage, our identity and our history. For this reason alone, examples of traditional houses should be preserved, not bulldozed to the ground, as Jack Fitzsimons, author of the best-selling book, Bungalow Bliss, would have it.

There is another difference between traditional and modern roofed houses. Traditional vernacular houses seldom had ceilings, so the house height could be much lower than the modern single-storied bungalow. Thus, the proportion of roof to wall height was different. In Fig. 33, the wall height is half that of the roof, giving the cottage its quaint and charming characteristic. This is enhanced by the use of thatch. The



Fig 34, A comparison of roof to wall height.

result is an aesthetic simplicity, with a rugged texture of natural materials. Fig. 34, shows a house outside Limerick City. The angle formed by the roof is about double that of the previous house and thus shorter. In comparison, this house looks much barer, the eaves do not fall thickly over the walls of the house as in Fig. 33, but stops at the top of the walls. The drains running across the under roof and down the facade wall don't add to its aesthetic appeal either. The corrugated concrete tiles can never, despite their practical uses, achieve the outstanding beauty of thatch.

This leads me on to the discussion of exterior roofing materials.

Thatching

"Couchant for days and sods above the rafters
He shaved and flushed the butts
Stitched all together,
Into a sloped honeycomb,
A stubble patch
And left them gaping at his Midas touch.

(The Thatcher by Seamus Heaney,
Door into Dark, Dublin 1969)

Until the 19th century thatch was the most common vernacular roofing material. In most cases, a layer of thin tough grass or heather sod is used to form a base for the thatch. In some areas of Limerick and other parts of the country, sods were not used and the first layer of thatch was secured to the timbers instead of the sods.

Types of Thatch Materials:

Thatch can be of reed, oak, barley or rye straw, marram grass or sedge and flax.

Flax was used widely in the North due to its availability.

Wheat straw is the most popular material in most parts of the country. Rye straw comes second to this, and is usually cut when still green, before ears develop, so threshing was unnecessary. Oat straw was also common to Counties Kildare, Louth, Leix, Offaly and Westmeath. In Limerick and other Munster counties where reed grows in lakes and rivers, it is used in preference to other materials. The life spans of these materials vary, (Fig. 35),

<u>Material</u>	<u>Average Duration</u>	<u>Optimum Duration</u>
Norfolk reed	30 - 40	80 - 100
Flax	15	24
Rye Straw	8	12
Oat Straw	5	6 - 7
Marram	3	7

(O DANAHAIR, Caoimhir, Materialand Methods in Irish Traditional Building, JRSAl, 1954).

There are a number of different methods of securing thatch:

Rope Thatching

Fig. 36 is an example of rope thatching on a house from Loop Head, Co. Clare. In this, the thatch is not fastened directly to the roof underneath but held down by a net of ropes. The ropes are then secured by tying to pegs of wood, iron or stone. Alternatively, they are held down by stone. Generally when laying thatch the first layer is placed at the eaves, above this another layer is laid and above this, and partly covering it, another layer is added until the house is covered.

Rope thatching is rarely found in hip roofs as its distribution is confined to part of the areas where hip roofs are rare, along the West Coast, which is exposed to the strong prevailing winds. This method owes its origin to climatic conditions.



Fig 36, An example of rope thatching.



Fig 37, An example of scallop thatching.

Pinned Thatching:

This is common to most parts of the country except the East and West Coast. Instead of roping down the thatch, it is pinned to the roof immediately underneath with scollops (reeds of willow or hazel).

The thatch is laid as for rope thatching. A good thatcher will lay the thatch in layers such that scollops are not visible. In many districts a row of neatly twisted bobbins are placed on the ridge or the eaves of the roof. 'Bobbins' are wisps of straw, looped and knotted in the middle, strung on a rod which lies along the ridge or eaves, the free end of the wisps are pinned down on each side with scollops. (See Fig. 37). Scollop thatching varied from district to district as opinions varied to the best method of using scollops and the best material for them.

Thrust Thatching:

This method is found in Leinster and East Ulster. A layer of thatch is sewn to the roof timber directly or over a sod layer. The thatcher then takes a bundle of straw, twists the ear end into a knot and thrusts it in a layer of straw already placed on the roof, with a small iron or wooden fork. With this method, the straw is dampened and beaten to make it lie flat.

In all the above methods, treatment of the ridge depended on the material used. Reeds do not bend so they are butted at the top. It is butted by bending it over a rod of willow to form a horse tail that is then pegged down.

Thatching in Ireland is in constant decline except for the odd house and tourist accommodation. Skilled thatching is a dying trade and thatchers are hard to find. Like our native language



Fig 38, Liscannor stone roofing from west Clare.

Stone:

The whole of the north of County Clare used the famous Liscannor stone in all of its building construction, including the roof. Fig. 38 shows a house built entirely of stone, from the Moher area.

Slate:

Slate again, was used where it was locally available in Clare, Kerry and West Cork. The qualities of slate are its lightness, workability and durability. The dark roofs and whitewashed walls of the traditional house gave a sharp and aesthetic contrast to the houses along the coast. Asbestos cement slates have taken over from real slate. Aesthetically, they are acceptable as a substitute to real slate yet their uniform shape and texture are very bland. Compare Fig. 39 with that of Fig. 40.

Tiles:

Tiled roofing in traditional architecture is rare and when used was made from baked clay. Tiles are used widely today, yet again they are exclusively manufactured from concrete.

It can be thus concluded that one of the reasons why modern housing does not integrate with a rural environment aesthetically is due to the use of unnatural materials. Natural materials are already a part of the environment. They are simply just relocated. The materials used are rugged and irregular like the surrounding environment. The colour is naturally integrated. These already weathered materials also enhance the house's assimilation in the landscape.

Modern housing is the opposite, and the reason that they are obstructions in the landscape. Materials have unnatural colours,



Fig, 39 Real slate roofing.



Fig, 40 Asbestos slating.

and textures, regular and even shapes and patterns which are alien to this environment.

* * * * *

Fig 41,
note the
chimney canopy,
Creepies, and
stretcher table



The House Interior

The vernacular house can be classified by the positioning of the fireplace. It could be placed in the centre or to the gable end of the house. The hearth was always considered to be the social centre of the home and the design of both types reflect this.

The Gable Hearth Type:

This was developed from being a fire placed against a wall with a hole in the roof, to the next stage of incorporating a chimney flue and a wood or plaster canopy over the fire. Fig. 41 is an example of a chimney canopy made of hay rope, woven on a wooden frame and plastered with clay. The house is from Athea in Co. Limerick. More changes included the addition of a stone chimney stack. Finally, the whole chimney was replaced by stone.

The Central Hearth Type:

Again, this started off as being a fire on the ground with a hole in the roof over it. The next stage incorporated a four-sided funnel over the fire. It rested on the side walls of the house.

The next stage saw the hearth wall reaching fully across the house. A door pierced at one end gave access to a room above. A hollow truncated pyramid forms the funnel. The final stage here is when the funnel of light materials are replaced by a chimney of stone as in Fig. 42. Here, the chimney takes the form of steps which narrow towards the top in a series of offsets.

The fire has lost its importance in modern housing. Firstly, with the integration of alternative cooking methods and alternative heating arrangements such as electric, gas and oil heating.



Fig 42, Stone hearth and chimney from the Shannon reigon.

Again we have the hearth being imitated in electric and gas fires. The ultimate achievement was supposedly in the latest gas fire which resembles a real hearth. I would rather clean away ashes and experience the smell and sound of intense flames of a proper roaring fire.

Most homes have at least one hearth but when its original function is dropped, it becomes a decoration. Hence, the stone cladding and the over use of ornamentation materials to be found on most fireplaces.

Cooking Facilities:

Associated always with the vernacular fire was the pot crane. It stood at one side of the fireplace and from it pots were suspended for cooking over the fireplace. (See Fig. 42). Not all houses had the luxury of a crane. In such cases a pot hung over the fire suspended from a chain wrapped around a "Rantle tree", set across the inside of the chimney. Fig. 43 demonstrates this.

These arrangements persisted widely until the beginning of this century with the introduction of ranges and enclosed stoves. The fire has now lost the major function, of cooking, with the use of modern hobs and cookers in modernized housing. (GAILY Alan, Furnishing of Traditional Kitchens, 1966).

Furniture:

The past twenty five years have not just seen the loss of the vernacular houses but also the very interesting and valuable pieces that go with the house.

It was not until the 18th century that Ireland came to make vernacular furniture, while in Europe and America it had been

Fig 43,
Hanging pot.



flourishing for centuries. The British Plantations brought with them samples of furniture whose designs and construction influenced the starting point for Irish vernacular furniture.

The designs followed a decorative tradition of classical proportions, but after adapting a grandeur that was distinctively Irish. The furniture tends to have an archaic quality in its Irish distinctiveness. The quality of the work depended on regional variations of style and quality of workmanship.

Nevertheless, whether crude and badly constructed or elaborate and sophisticated, such pieces are worth saving. They were produced by skilled craftsmen that fulfilled the needs of a section of the peasant community. Such skilled craftsmen are rare today.

The Chair:

Many of the smaller dwellings had simply "creepies" which are small three-legged stools. Placed around the fire, as in Fig. 41, they were suited to uneven floors such as clay in this case.

A variety of chair styles were found in the more prosperous farmhouses. A type common to the West of the Shannon is the Famine Chair or Fool's Stool. (See Fig. 44). It is crude in appearance and derived from the creepies.

Another development of the creepie is a chair developed in England, the Windsor, a curved back rail with spindles and armrests have been added. It was a cheap, strong, yet comfortable chair. (See Fig. 45).

The most common type of chair perhaps may be the "Sugan" chair. This term refers not to a type of chair but the material of seating and back. It is a woven straw rope, woven over and back to produce a set and back. Fig. 47 shows three West of Ireland armchairs with sugan seat and backs.

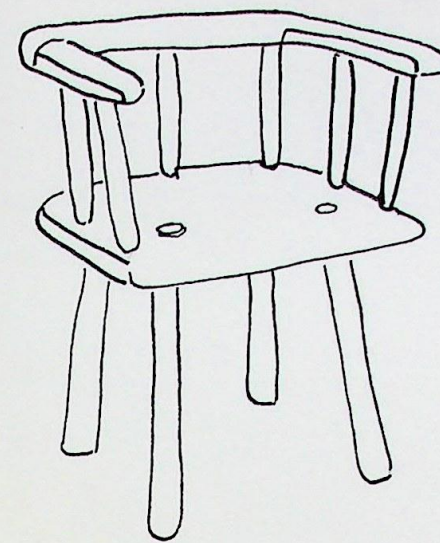


Fig 44, The fools stool.

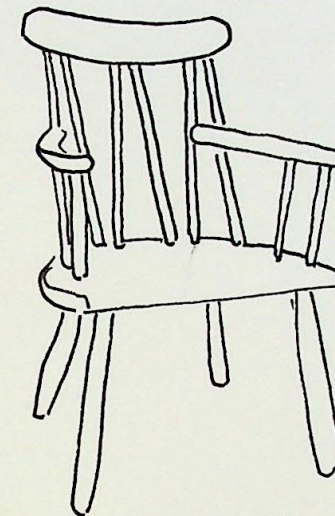


Fig 45, The Windsor chair.

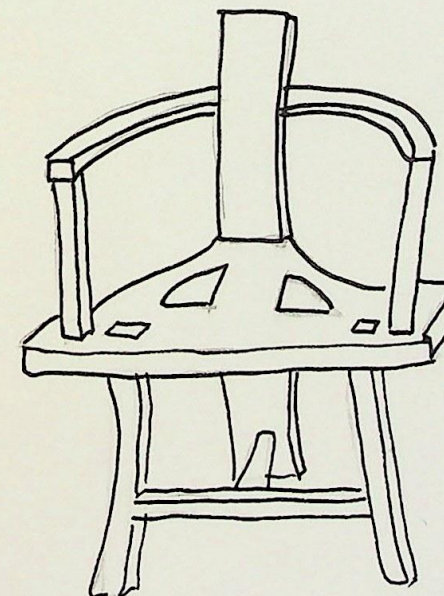


Fig 46, The Sligo chair.

Fig 47,
"sugán chairs,"

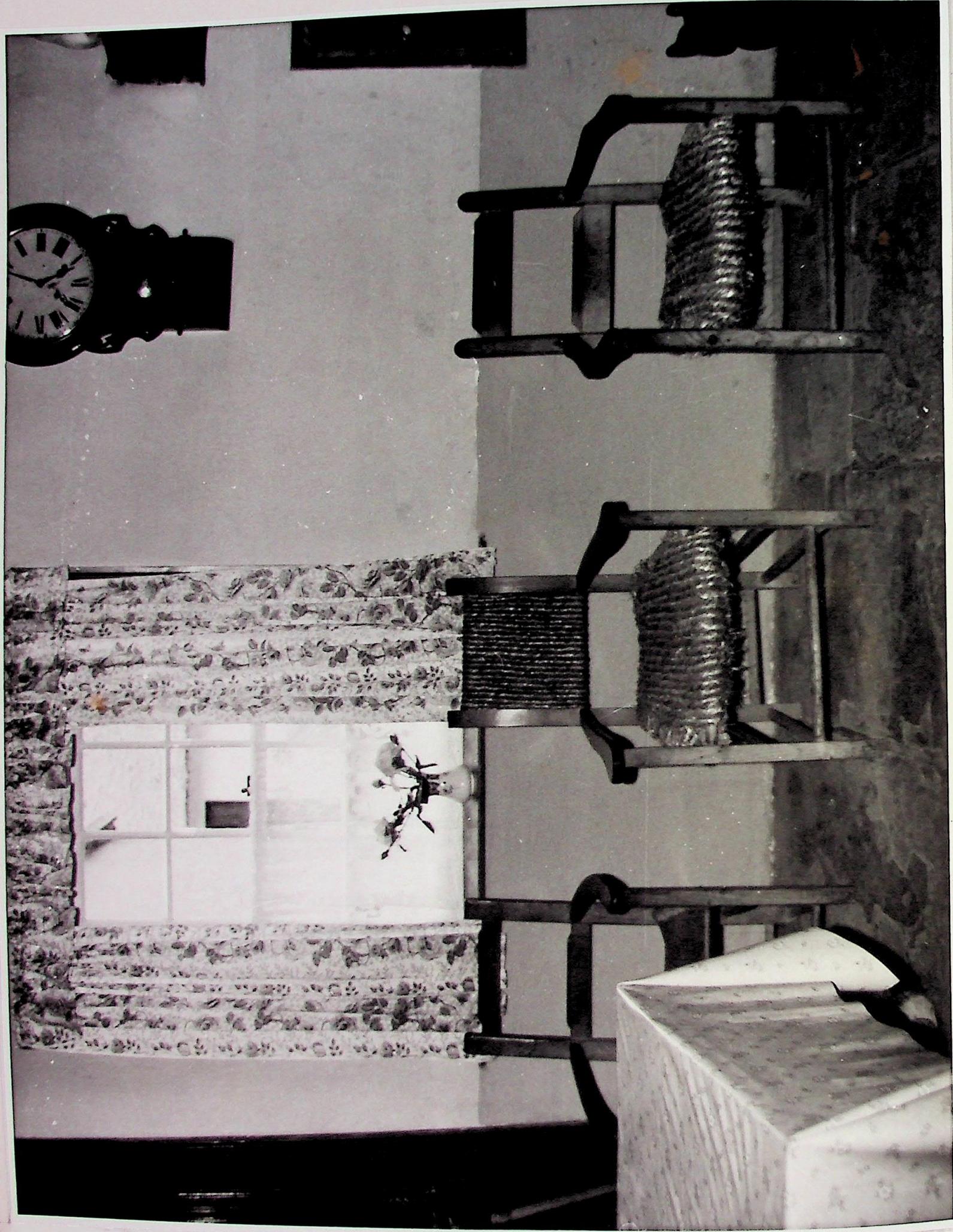


Fig 48,
Dresser from
Shannon,
Co. Clare.

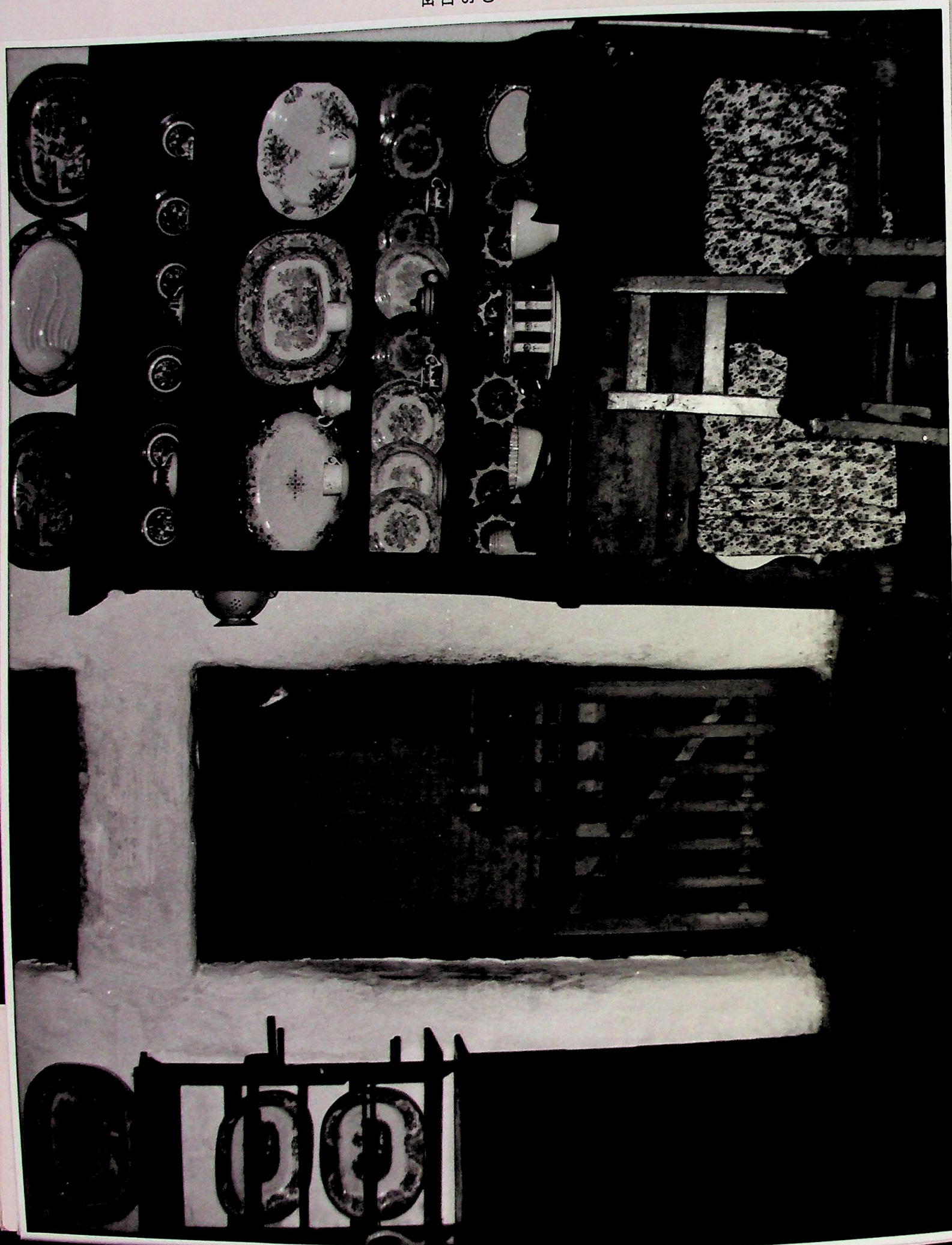


Fig 49, Dresser from Kilfinane Co. Limerick.

A distinctive vernacular chair was produced in Sligo. It is a three-legged corner chair. (See Fig. 4.6). It appears to date back to a Dutch tradition in the 16th century. (LOUGHAN, Nicholas, Irish Country Furniture, 1984).

Dressers:

By the end of the 19th century, the dresser was established as being the most important item of domestic furniture. As the fire was the main focus in Irish life and the dresser the most important piece of furniture, housing the "delph". They were usually placed beside each other.

The dresser originated in England but when designed in Ireland, it took on an individual and rich Irish vernacular expression. Fig. 48 is an example from a house in Shannon, Co. Clare. All decorative possibilities have been explored with the stepped cornices surmounting split moulding columns, and the elaborate crow board across the top. It is carved and pierced decoratively with an abstract and Celtic design. The space below the counter was subject to specialised adaptation. A fiddle front, as in this case, provided storage space for milking or cooking vessels.

Fig. 49 is an example of a dresser in a house from Klfine, Co. Limerick. As is typical, decoration is applied to above the counter except for the cupboard doors as in this case. The decorative motifs relate to a Celtic design. The door panels are simply decorated using diagonal panelling.

Most dressers did not have wooden finishes as in the above cases. Dressers were generally brightly painted which added to the rich and finished appearance of many pieces which, since stripping, appear drab and shoddy. Houses that couldn't afford dressers had a box of shelving similar to the upper part of the dresser. As in Fig. 50, it hung from the wall and carried a few humble pieces of delph. This was known as a dlevvy. This one from Athea, Co. Limerick is purely functional and without ornamentation.

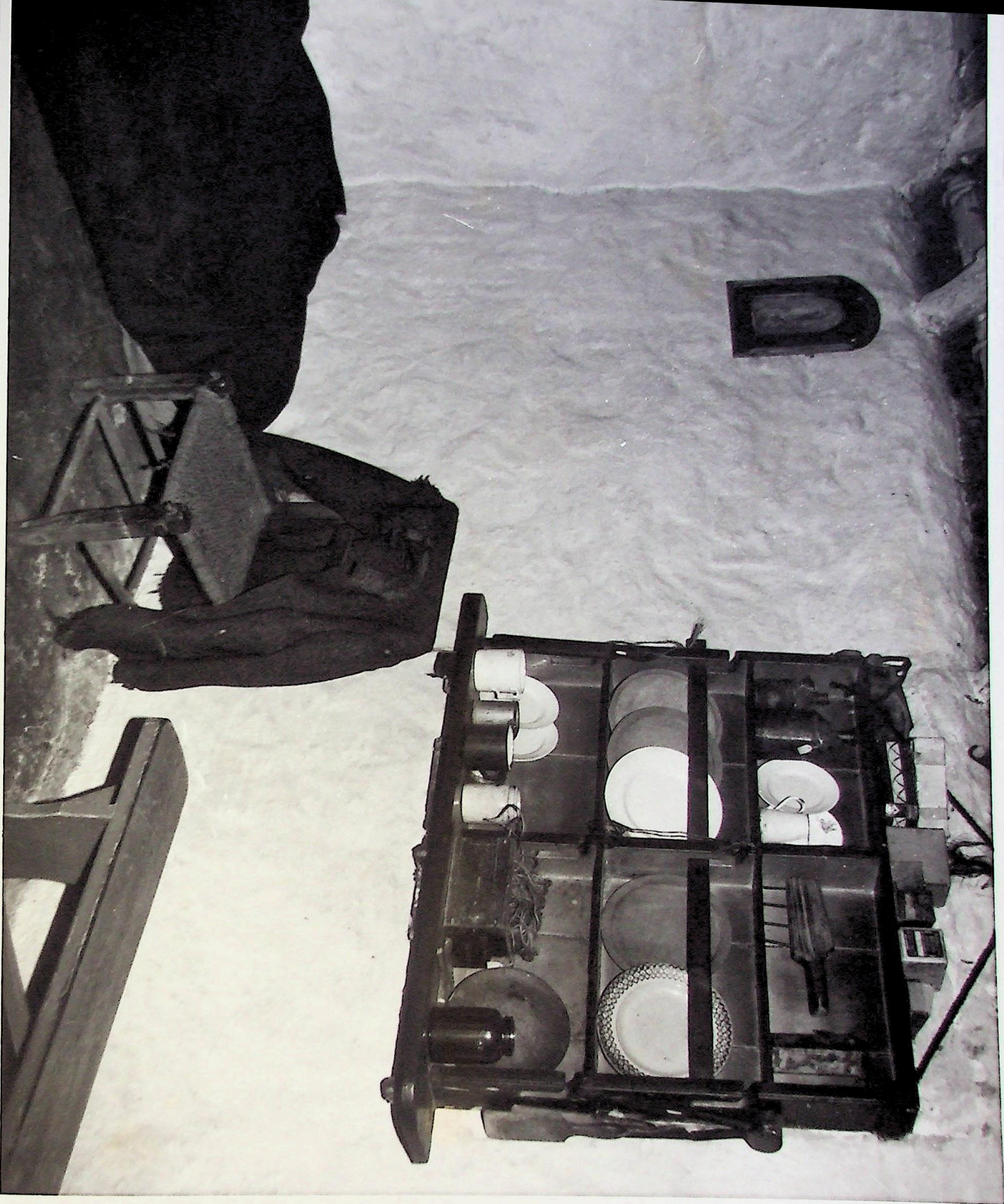


Fig 50,
A Cleavy.

The second most significant piece of furniture was the settle bed.

The Settle:

Again, the origin of the settle is from England. However, in the course of the transition into the Irish vernacular tradition, the settles underwent a number of changes in form, and an enlargement of function.

The settle bed in Ireland had a dual function. A box-like bench can open out to become a bed. The settle was locally termed "The Tramp's Bed", and was used by wanderers of the road who could depend on Irish hospitality. (See Fig. 51).

Tables:

The table, until the Famine, was an insignificant piece of furniture, due to the priority of the hearth for cooking and eating around. However, those of the prosperous post Famine houses, tended to be long stretcher- types, to accommodate family and servants. They were of a good quality: pine, with well-morticed joints. Another type was the double stretcher found in the smaller houses. See the corner of Fig. 41, where the double stretcher was used as a pot ledge.

Dual functionality comes again into tables in the settle table and the settle chair. The settle table is a bench seat with legs extending upwards to support arms. A large flat back can pivot down to form a table surface. A long drawer is often fitted into the seat of the bench, thus table seat and storage are provided in one. (fig. 52).

The settle chair is constructed on the same principle though the seat is not fitted with a drawer. (See Fig. 53).

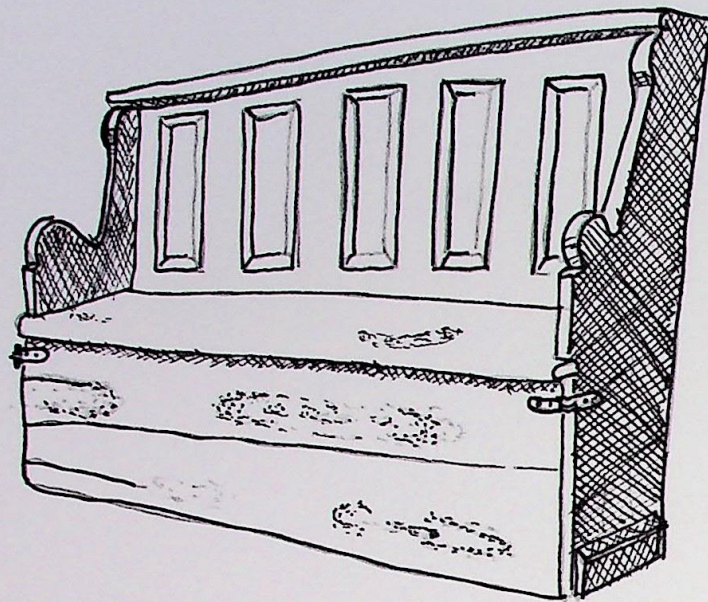


Fig 51, The Settle Bed.

The use of multi-functional furniture is practical in the confined space of small farmhouse kitchens. During the day when not in use most of the furniture was placed around the side walls to allow space in the centre of the floor.

All the above items of furniture and various other articles are the result of the work of skilled craftsmen building for a local community. Despite its origin, they reflect a distinctively Irish style. The customs and activities of the daily life are expressed in these styles. The detailing in decoration is something that has been lost today in this age of industrialized mass production. Quality natural hardwoods have been sacrificed to the uptake of a plastic look, found in veneered woods. Take, for example, the interior of this cottage in Fig. 54. The hearth has now been enclosed with a white plastic-looking covered wood. Both the Irish distinctiveness and vernacular have been lost.

Most modern homes have a style of furniture now which is more common to America and to other countries. Many houses are also cluttered with various types and styles of furniture. There is a need to preserve what is left of our vernacular tradition. We should then use this as a starting point for the redevelopment of a furniture style that is instantly recognised as a distinctive Irish style. I am not proposing that we reconstruct what was suitable in the last century, yet the traditional style could be developed to meet modern day requirements. The idea of multi-functional items of furniture is an interesting approach to solving the problem of cluttered houses.

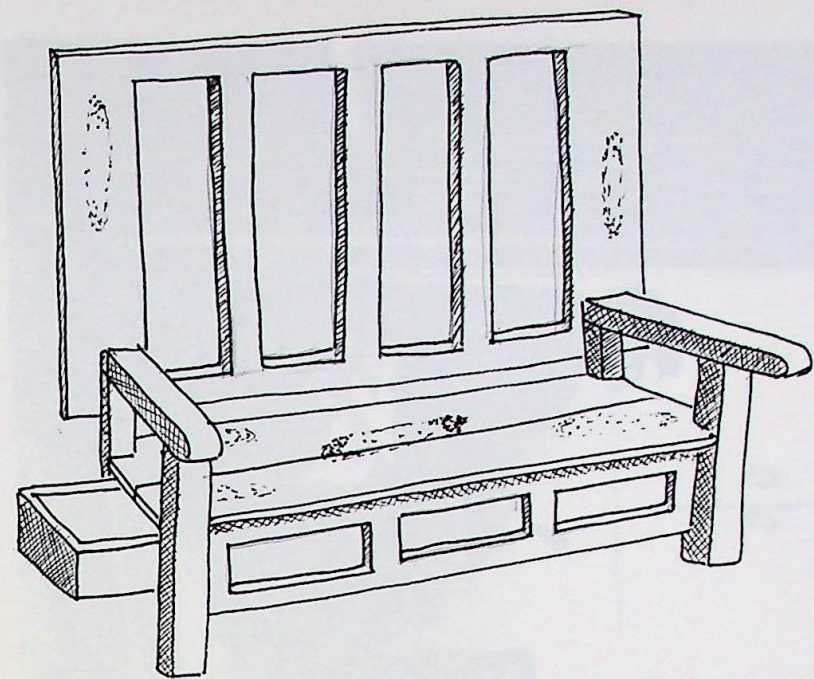


Fig 52, Settle table .

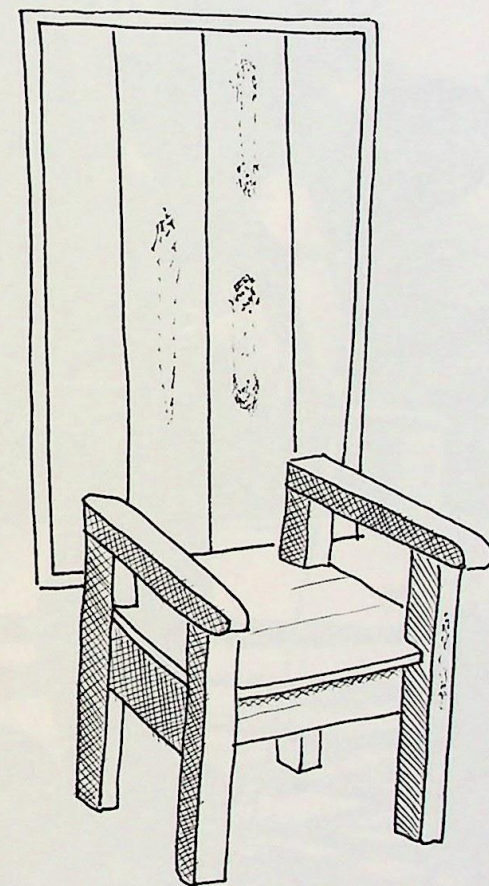


Fig 53, Settle chair.

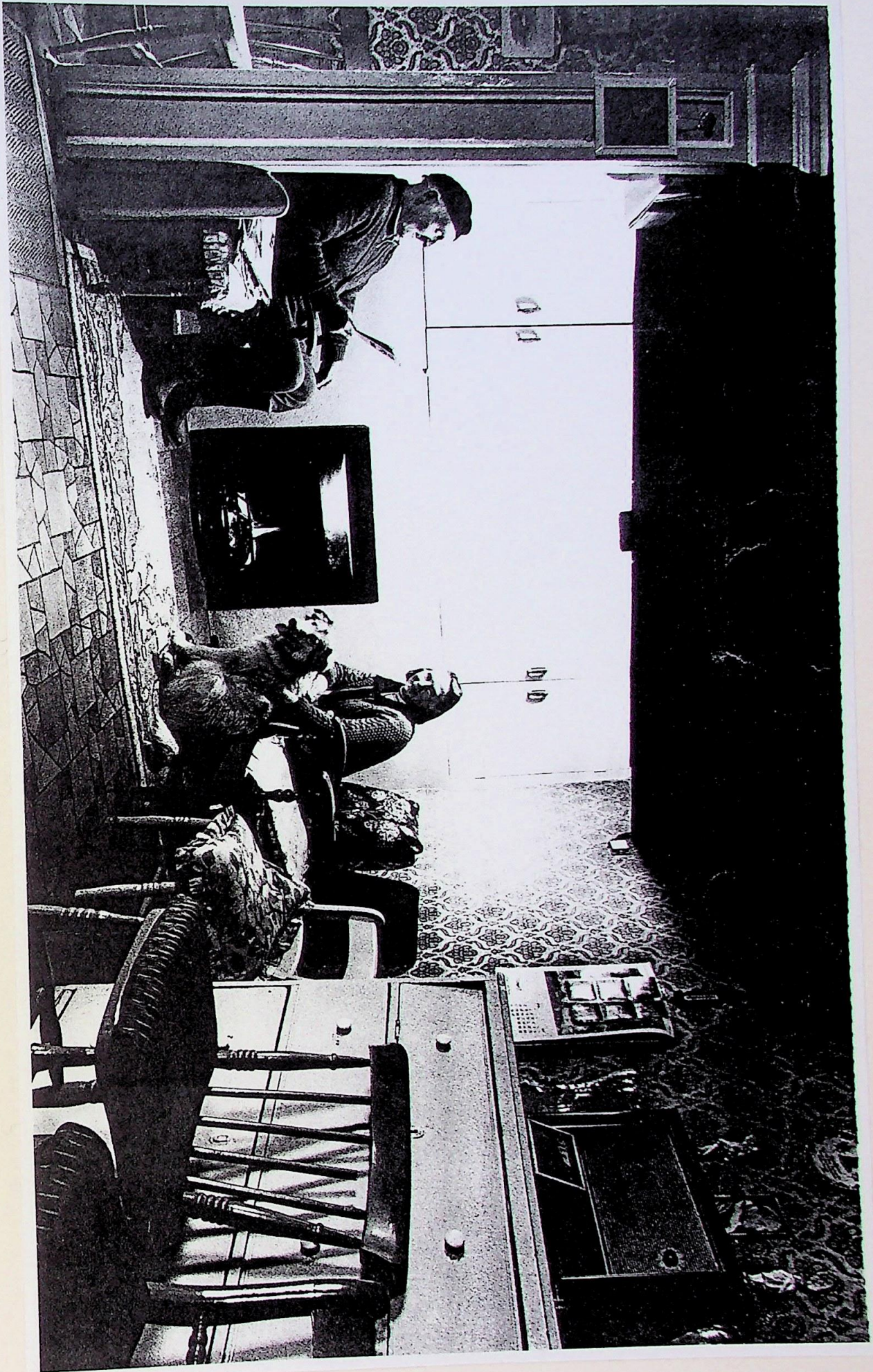


Fig 54, A modernised interior, Waterford, 1984.

SECTION FOUR:

CLASSIFICATION OF HOUSE TYPES

CLASSIFICATION OF HOUSE TYPES

All traditional vernacular houses in Ireland share some fundamental characteristics. They are generally long, of low height, single storied buildings. Walls were generally whitewashed, with roofs of thatch, slate or corrugated iron. The windows were small to keep out the weather rather than to let it in. Doors were usually wooden and brightly painted. They were normally a single room deep from front to rear. End walls were seldom pierced by doors or windows. Chimneys were usually placed on the ridge of the roof. These houses, however, can be split into three types. (GAILY, Alan, Rural Houses in the North of Ireland, Edinburgh, 1984).

The Byre Dwellings (or Direct Entry House:

Fig. 55 shows a house from west County Mayo. In these houses the family shared the house with the milking cows. There was no physical difference between byre and house end. Houses like this were common in the North West of Ireland up to the 19th century.

The house was characterized by opposite doors placed nearer the byre and away from the hearth end. There was usually a flagged walkway between the main house and the byre and, having two doors, meant that either could be used as occasion required in order to prevent the prevailing winds entering the house. In summer, the kitchen was also used as a milking place. The cow was driven in the front door, milked as she ate bribe which is a type of grass, placed for her on the floor, and then driven out the back door. The next one followed after. Some larger examples had another unit used for sleeping behind or above the hearth wall.

In the 19th century, growing pressures of hygiene standards led

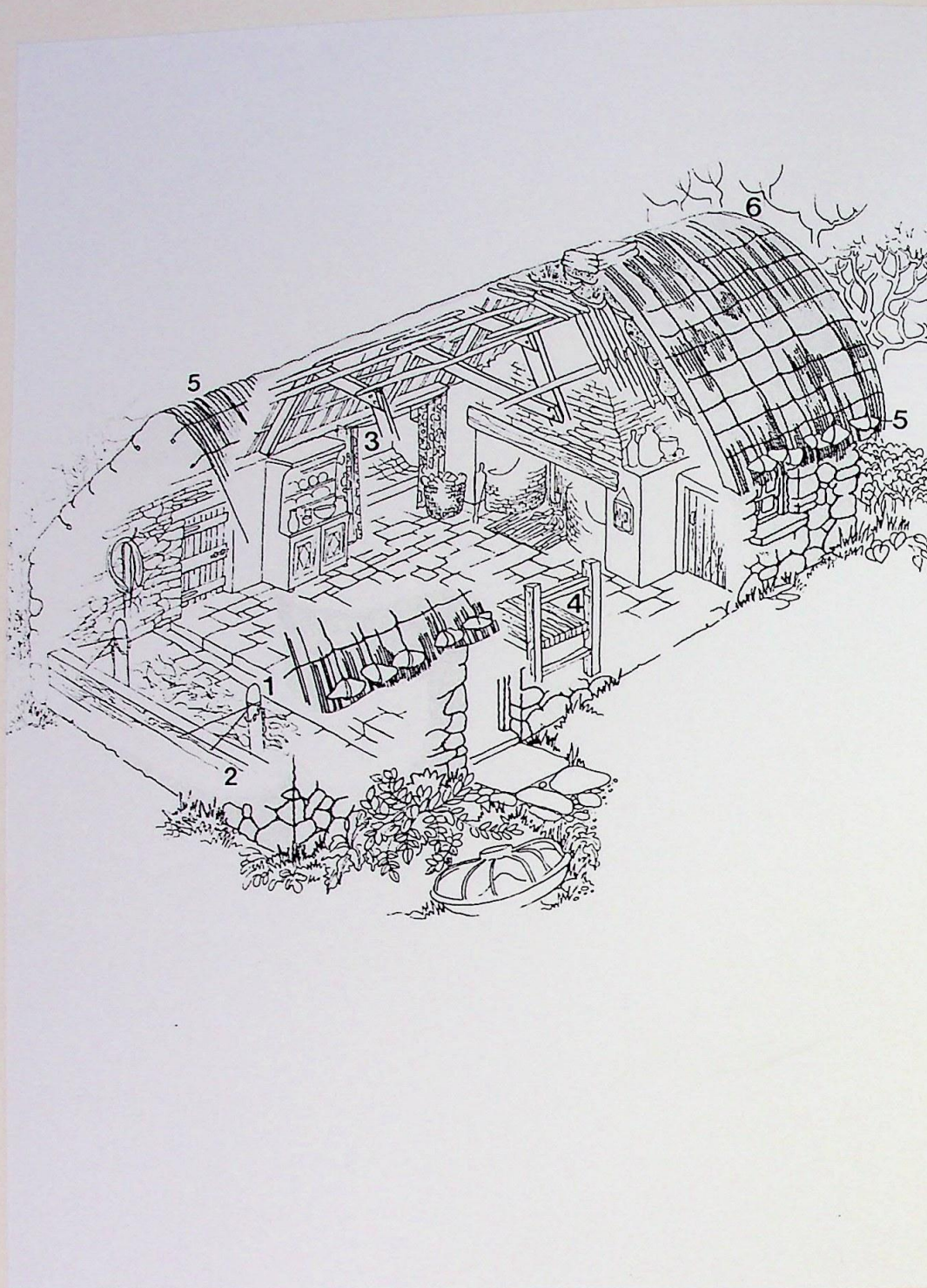
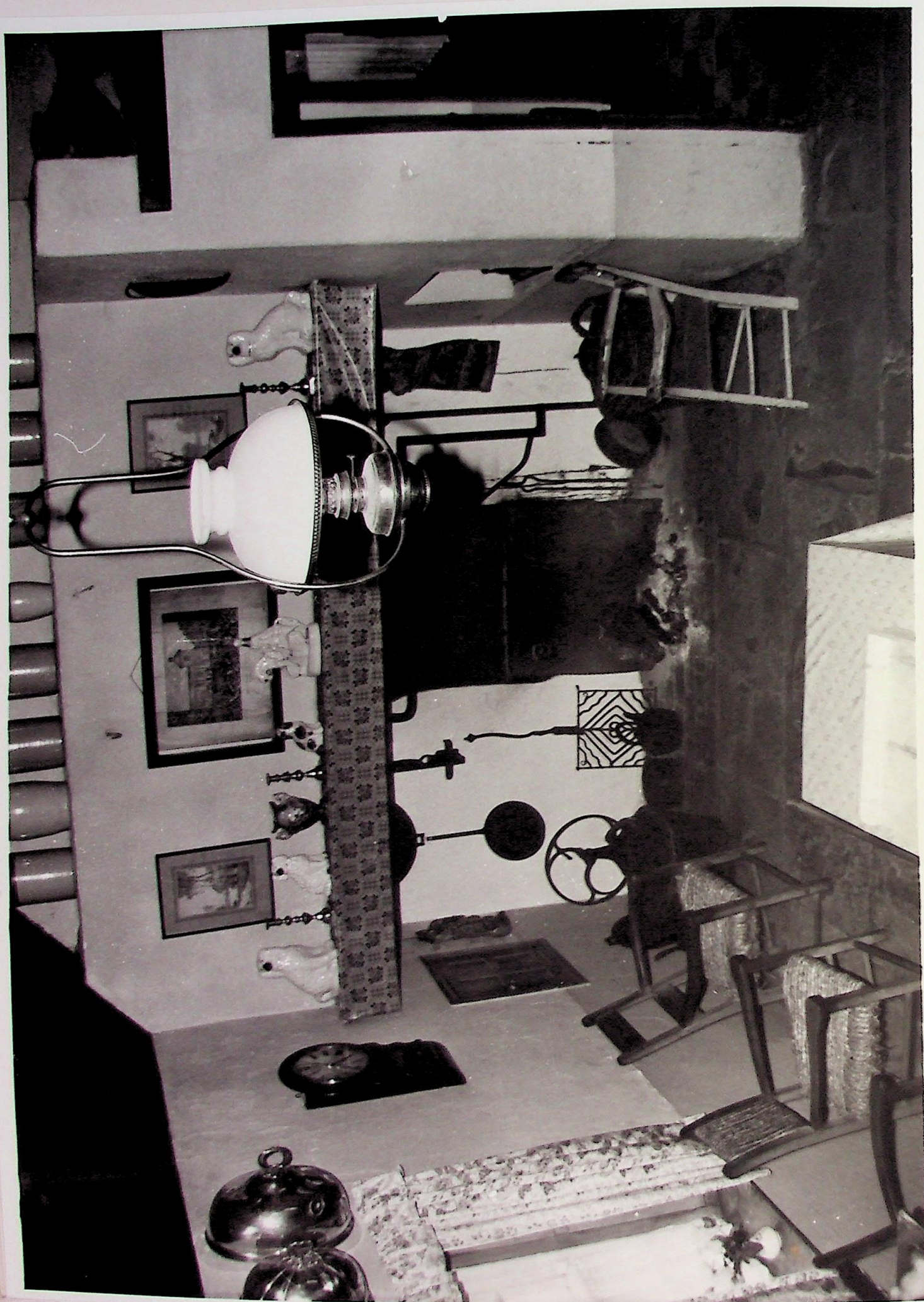


Fig 55, A Byre dwelling.

Fig 56,
Hearth Lobby
house.



to the byre being partitioned off from the living quarters, though the cattle and humans still used the same door.

Further separation of man and cow was had by building a separate byre with its own external entrance into the end of the house, but internal access to byre and house was maintained. Finally internal communication between byre and house was omitted as two and three unit houses with a byre at one end became popular. It is this animal association that has led many people to connect all vernacular housing with poverty and squalor and thus their reasons for rejecting all vernacular houses.

The Hearth Lobby House:

Common to the eastern part of the country is the hearth lobby type of house. It is defined in Fig. 56 by the fact that the front entrance to the kitchen unit is adjacent to the hearth position and the two are separated by a hearth wall, "The Jamb Wall". Sometimes there is a unit behind the kitchen hearth, entry to which is through a door in the hearth wall. The jamb wall often contained a window or spy hole. Sometimes a door was placed perpendicularly to the end of the jamb wall and the front wall to form a closed lobby.

Hearth lobby houses were of various sizes, lengthening being possible at either end of the kitchen unit simply by adding further structural units. The commonest arrangements were of two units with the hearth placed almost centrally and of three units with a central kitchen.



Fig 57, The Bed Outshot.



Fig 58, Symetrically arranged gable chimneys.



Fig 59, Chimneys not symetrically arranged.



Fig 60, Internal walled chimneys symetrically arranged.

The Bed Outshot (Fig. 57)

This is a distinctive element among houses in Connaught and Ulster. A small walled portion of the house stepped out of the main rectangular shape. It was large enough to house, internally, a bed. It was normally at the corner of the kitchen nearest the hearth at the rear wall. In Donegal, the outshot could be screened off from the kitchen by timber doors. Elsewhere, curtains were used.

Outshots on the front of houses were occasional. They had windows and provided a well lit sitting out area for people working at linen, embroidery and drawn thread work.

Development of House Styles

At the beginning of the 19th century, more than one hearth was unusual in a vernacular cottage. However, by Victorian times fireplaces to heat other rooms became common. Two unit houses with two chimneys became symmetrically arranged. (See Fig. 58).

However, symmetry was not maintained in the three unit house where chimneys occurred on internal cross walls. (See Fig. 59). In some three unit houses, with the exception perhaps of door placing, symmetry could be maintained where the two chimneys were both on internal cross walls. (See Fig. 60).

In general, houses were enlarged by extending units on either end but many enlarged houses had lofts or attic rooms contained within the roof space. Fig. 61 is a house in Doolin, Co. Clare. In this case, two windows embedded in the roof gave lighting to the loft. Other attic roomed houses had windows piercing gable walls.



Fig 61, Attic loft, from Doolin Co. Clare.



Fig 62, A house with formal elements.

In the prosperous farmhouses permanently fixed stairs replaced ladders. So long as there was no great desire for privacy in dividing internal space, stairs could be opposite the hearth end of the kitchen across the room widthways or around the angle in a corner of the kitchen.

A common position for stairs in the hearth lobby house relates to the extension of the jamb wall the whole way along the front of the kitchen. A hallway is formed cutting off the stairs and kitchen. The stairs often rise to a landing to the back of the house, paralleling with the ground wall, giving entry to the upper rooms.

As elements of formal Georgian architecture became incorporated into vernacular houses, (see Fig 62), facades became symmetrically arranged with centre placed doors and symmetrically placed windows. It soon became difficult to differentiate between houses derived from the vernacular tradition or the degenerated form of formal architecture. One main difference is that the formal designs had a wider distance between front and back wall - internal plans were the only other difference.

The house to some extent reflects the status of the people living in it, and as people maintained a vernacular tradition, there was little scope for an individual statement. Vernacular architecture was associated with a peasant tradition and thus, those wishing to express a higher social status borrowed from classical formalism, firstly in doors and windows, and then in facades.

The vernacular door was usually a simple boarded one. Doors could be full or halved. Door head windows were common and could be decorative, using coloured glass. Fig. 63 shows a typical simple vernacular door, with a door head window and a door knob. The door latch is the trademark of the vernacular door.



Fig 63, Coloured glass in door head.



Fig 64, A cottage from Doolin Co. Clare
with Georgian windows.

Fig 65.
The facing with
timber on a bed
room wall.



Those borrowing from the formal, incorporated fanlights and side lights around the door. Doors were also panelled.

The vernacular windows were usually small and narrow, glazed glass with four, timber-fixed panes. Most were later replaced by the Georgian sliding sash type window of six and sometimes eight panes in each sash. (See Fig. 64). (GAILY Alan, Rural Houses in the North of Ireland, 1984).

The most elaborate attempts at formalism was the placing of dummy chimneys on roof ridges to achieve balanced facades. The dummy chimney is saying that another hearth exists, and that the house inside is warm and luxurious. Other changes that betokened ostentation and needless waste of resources, was the facing of parlour and bedroom walls with timber; (See Fig. 65). Also, the alterations of fireplace and chimney to accommodate coal when the houses were still burning turf. The division of the house into private rooms is another example.

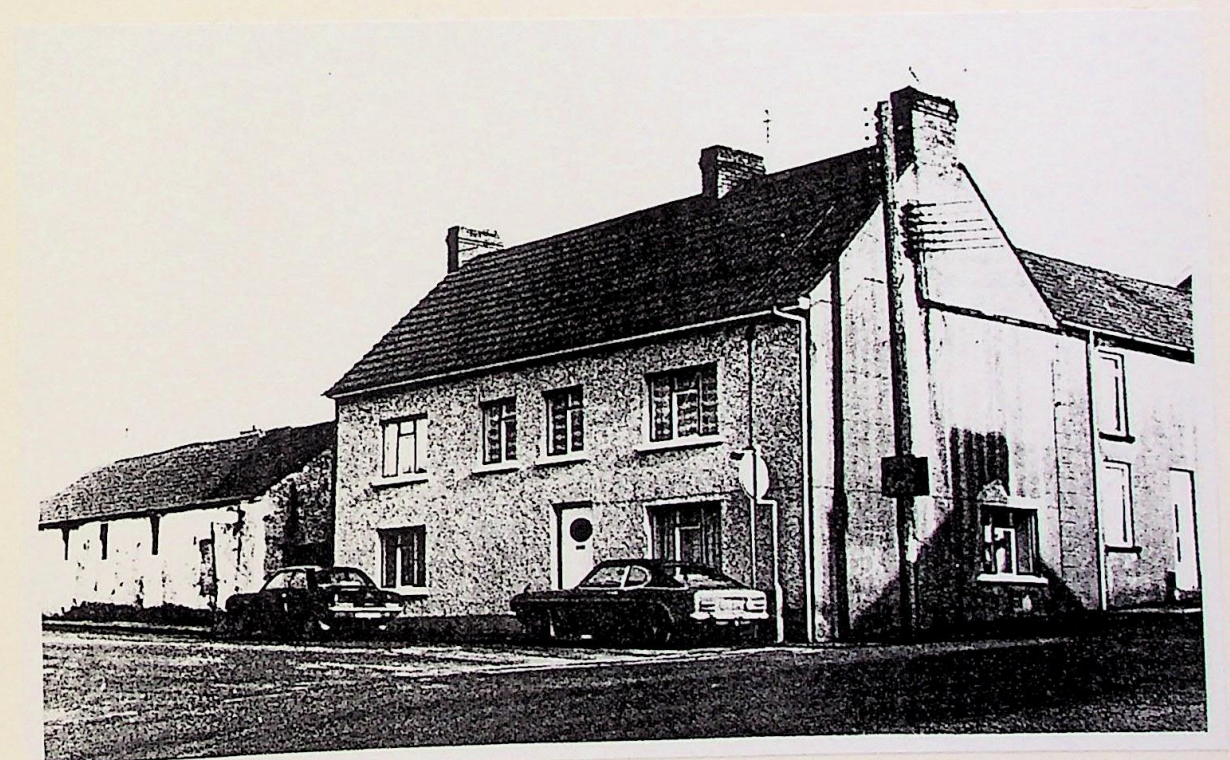
All this is the mask of a society that has always been the underdog. This type of borrowing is a statement that the vernacular is peasantry. There is a strong desire to climb the social ladder. In the past twenty years, this is only too evident in the styles of modern architecture and of the way old vernacular buildings are restored.

So far as one-storied buildings are concerned, most attempts to upgrade the properties are disastrous. There is a desire among owners to treat houses with flat roofed porches, pebble dashing, large picture windows (typical of the bungalow), and the replacement of thatch for coarse textured tiling. These are just some of the unsympathetic and obtrusive treatments of so-called improvements.

Take, for example, this house from Co. Tyrone (Fig. 66), which



Fig 66, Before and after Modernization.



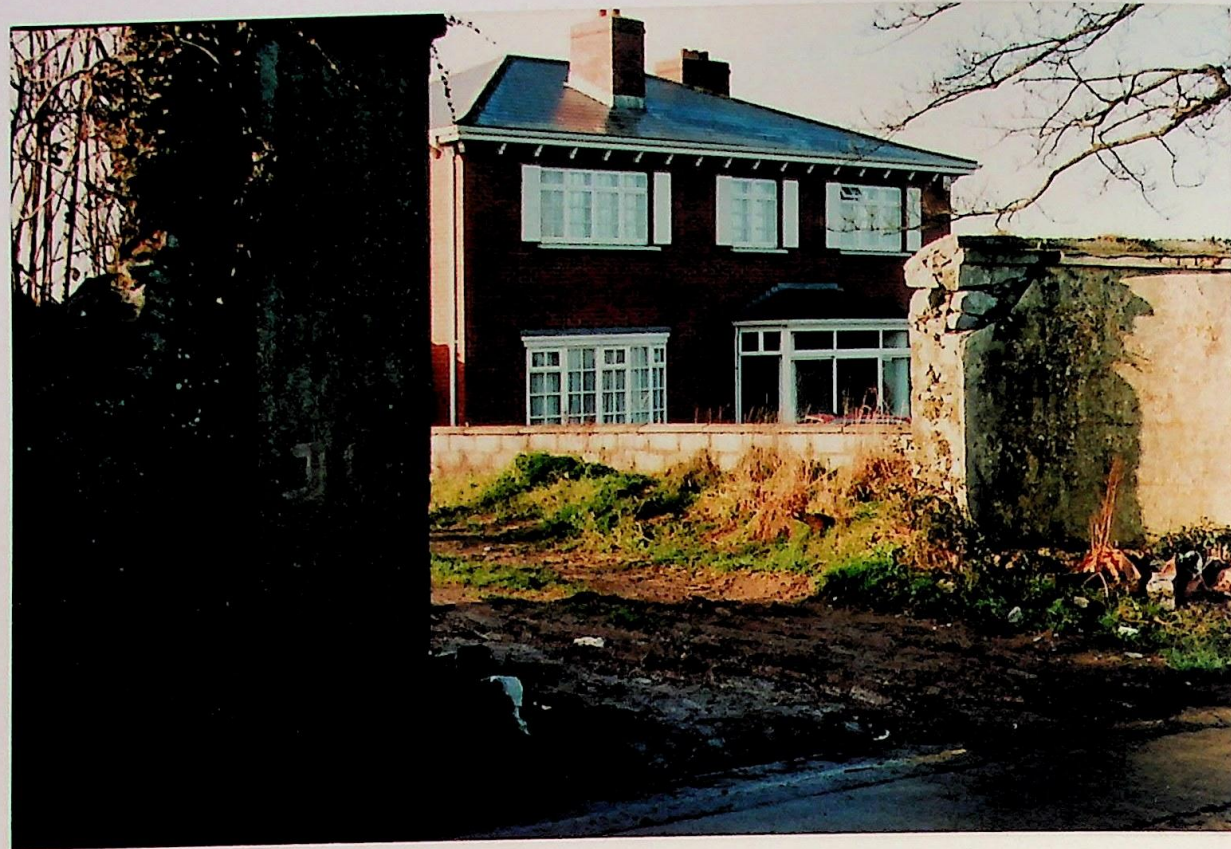


Fig 67, Mock Georgian, Co. Limerick.



Fig 68 Another mock Georgian from Co. Limerick.

underwent improvements which can only be described as severe. The pinned thatch roof was removed and replaced by tiling. Pebble dash has replaced the white wash. The adjoining shop was removed and the balance of void to mass completely changed with modern windows. The house is unrecognizable from the original picture. All elements of a vernacular tradition have been ignored. What was once a proud standing vernacular house, now looks like two urban semi-detached houses, with one missing a door!

This house could have been changed in a practical yet aesthetic way. Modern cement based paints can be as acceptable as limewash. If the thatch was found to be a problem, then this could have been replaced by slate. It would have been cheaper and proportionally aesthetic if two sash windows had replaced the shop front, instead of one large one which creates a mass of voidless wall, making the house appear to miss a door. Also, small windows instead of one large picture one would have been more pleasing to the eye.

Many modern houses are equally severe in abandoning the limited range of criteria of the traditional vernacular, to adopt a degenerated and individual style of socially, "superior" house styles.

Take for example, Fig. 67 and Fig. 68, depicting houses from County Limerick. Both are degenerated forms of urban Georgian architecture. Firstly, red brick in the countryside can be very obtrusive, as can be seen in these specific cases. Sympathy and adaptation with the landscape has been ignored. These houses took only prestigious elements of Georgianism and applied them to the common square plan, two storied house, or the standard bungalow. These details being red brick, supporting columns, pediments, balusters and small paned glass. These houses are pretentious in that they fail to meet true Georgian proportions, the size and shape of the windows are



Fig 69, A house with English Tudor elements.



Fig 70, A house influenced by the television soap opera "Dallas".

are the shape and irregular placing of a bungalow. The imitation shutters of the first house add to the feeling that these houses are pretentious and ostentatious, lived in by people who snub the traditional in an attempt to appear discerning.

The same criticism applies to Fig. 69, on Golf Links Road, Limerick, a monstrosity with Tudor elements. Again, only details of the Tudor style are applied to a non-conforming style. The glass latticed windows and overhead eaves are Tudor, the rest does not belong to any style in particular. There is nothing extremely distasteful about this house, but it points to only one thing. People with a degree of wealth feel obliged to show it by adopting the prestigious styles of other houses. Such a building insults the traditional vernacular by ignoring to incorporate any of its successful elements in the design. Their sense of would-be superiority makes them ignore the surrounding landscape and buildings.

I have already spoken of those houses which are copies or perfect replicas of houses from television soap operas. "South Fork" from Dallas is one of the most popular. Take a look at Fig. 70. It is not a replica like the one from Co. Meath, yet its source is more than obvious. The rustic railings, arched sun protected veranda, and dazzling white walls suggest what it is attempting to be - a house that belongs to a hot sunny climate, like in Dallas. Such a stature of a house is also missing something, rows and rows of stables and acres and acres of land, full of the Morgan, Pinto, and Palamino horses of America. It is an aesthetically pleasing house but its source makes it embarrassing. Again, the surrounding houses have been ignored but there is an attempt however to landscape the site, which many homeowners neglect to do.

This leads me to Fig. 71 and Fig. 72: The Spanish Hacienda. This is another house expecting the sun. The Spanish arched veranda, whose function is to protect the house from the sun, is yet again, a statement of anything but Irish. The eagles are an extra embarrassment. Most people's response on seeing them was, "Oh my God, I don't believe it!" The tourists are in for a shock or a really good laugh.

A design problem among many modern houses is that they combine more than one style in the one house. Take, for example, this one on the Golf Links Road in Co. Limerick. (See Fig. 73). It is a combination of Irish vernacular, Spanish and Georgian. The quoins at the corners are a derivative of the Irish vernacular as is the main facade. The Spanish influence comes from the arches and Georgian in the small paned bay windows, and the balustered balcony. This house is a cocktail of proportions in attempting to incorporate too many styles. There is no attempt to integrate the different styles. The proportions are unrelated. There was no attempt to line the centre of the arch with the right corner of the main facade. The balusters above do not relate either to these placements. The off-centre placing of the garage window puts the finishing touch to this unaesthetically proportioned home. It is trying too hard to look impressive and thus fails. Successful houses are always those that remain faithful to one style and are often simply and sparingly decorated.

Another example of a house mixing styles is Fig. 74. It is another monstrosity taking details of various other styles. It has modern vernacular window sizes with Tudor style latticing. Tudor type timber is placed on the upper facade wall while the lower facade is treated with red brick, normally associated with a Georgian style. Other details incorporated from the Tudor style are the eaves and chimney details. A Tudor style has strong English origins and its non Irishness emphasises the attitude of the Irish that anything from another country will



Fig 71 and 72, The Spanish influence.

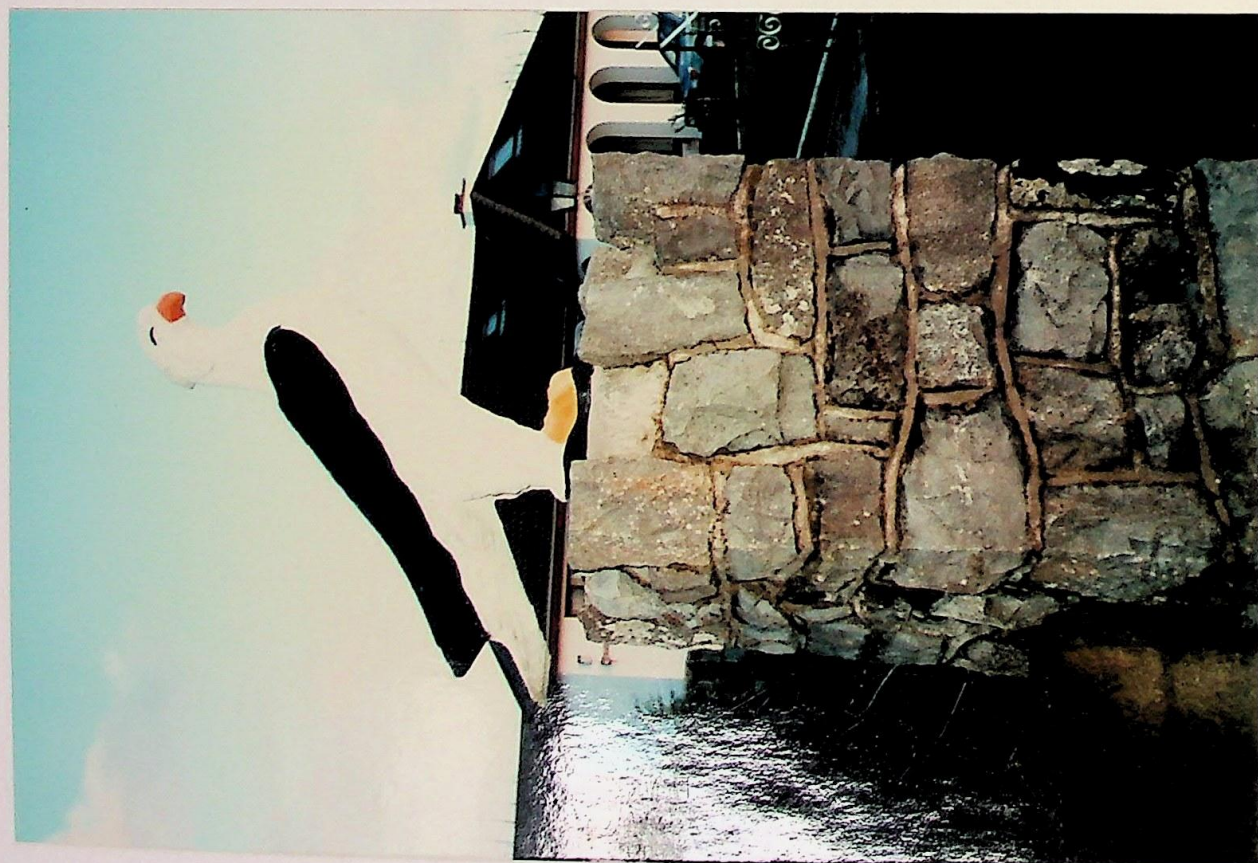




Fig 73 and 74, A mixture of house styles.



be held in higher esteem than an Irish vernacular building.

Figs. 68, 69, 70 and 73 all come from the same road in County Limerick. Fig. 60 is an example of one of the many small cottages also on the road. Some of them have now been demolished and replaced by these new nondescript style houses. The surrounding countryside and traditional houses have been unsympathetically treated by these houses. Every one of these houses is completely different from the other, in an attempt to be individual. Within these houses are combinations of styles. There is a sense of a chaotic desperation to be individual. There is no sense of a theme or uniformity in the area. Such obstructions impose on and detract from an otherwise very flat landscape. The cottages from this road, on the other hand, harmonise with the landscape as they are single storied and do not obstruct views of the distant landscape. They are landscaped to enhance and establish them as a part of the natural setting.

The bungalow has become the most common type of house in the country. Its origins: There is a little of the American ranch and a derivative of the cottage. The standard bungalow can be found everywhere in Ireland, the same type cropping up here and there as a result of the books of plans. The most notable change from the traditional vernacular are the picture windows, which are generally large with a horizontal emphasis. The emphasis on shelter has been shifted and full advantage is taken of the scenic views. Generally, windows are more aesthetically pleasing when they are of a vertical format. The proportion of void to mass should not be so great. Again, the large textured tiles are a dominating yet attractive feature. This bungalow, however, is not pompous or ostentatious. It has been subtly treated and does not attempt to aspire socially.

Jack Fitzsimons, the author of the book, Bungalow Blitz, 1989, has been held responsible for much of the elaborate and

fussy rural buildings. He claims that his designs were simple rectangular shapes to cater for the individuals without big bank accounts. He feels that he has helped people to build their own little home in the countryside. Jack Fitzsimons also claims that "most people would have the attitude that the traditional cottages should be bulldozed to the ground, and proper houses built in their place".

Jack Fitzsimons does not have a degree or diploma in architecture yet he has taken it upon himself to acquire this profession. Architecture takes five years training. Presumably there is a good reason for this, to teach people the wide and varied aspects to architecture which are necessary to gain a good sense and understanding of design.

It can be argued that vernacular buildings were not designed by architects. The difference lies in the approach taken. As has been stated the cottage used natural materials. The houses of Jack Fitzsimons assume protection and have tried to copy architectural qualities of superior buildings. When used on these modern houses, these elements become degenerated. Attempts at decoration and ornamentation and the imitation of natural materials, suggests Mr. Fitzsimons lacks any education in aesthetics. Why would anyone bother spending five years studying architecture if the lay person can try it and become profitably successful. Considering that a large percentage of houses built in the country come from Bungalow Bliss, I'm surprised that more of us haven't jumped on the bandwagon.

SECTION FIVE:

SETTLEMENT PATTERNS

SETTLEMENT PATTERNS

A major problem in the country is the settlement patterns of the houses in a ribbon development. This is where housing is spread out along the roads entering towns and villages. These houses are not built back but extend for miles along roads. Belfast born architect, Denis Anderson, commented on Connemara,

"The whole place has been destroyed. No matter what road you go down there are monstrosities here, there and everywhere, and what's just as depressing is that you see all these signs advertising sites for sale to build more of the same" *1 ref.*

The upsurge of ribbon developing occurred during the sixties for a number of reasons:

- a. Wealthy people wanting a prestigious site in a prime location.
- b. Farmers donating tracts of land to relatives.
- c. The willingness of farmers to gain financially from sites.
- d. The availability of cheap petrol during the seventies.
- e. The lack of rural land policies.
- f. The difficulty of acquiring sites in urban areas.

The bungalow spread is subsidised and even encouraged by the Planning Authorities. Bungalow purchasers are eligible

refer. } for the same first time house purchaser's grant, as someone who buys a semi-detached house in the city suburbs. Some blame may also be attributed to a Mr. James Tully, the Former Labour Minister for Local Government. As has been stated, he granted every appeal for the building of bungalows in his local area of Meath. He issued a policy directive to the Local Authorities to approach planning applications in a far less restrictive way, and to grant permission unless there were serious objections on important planning grounds, such as traffic safety, public health or amenity. He also claimed that the restriction on ribbon development in several county plans should not prevent a liberal approach to individual cases. Furthermore, he declared that it was,

"inappropriate, as a general rule, to go into detail on the design features of one-off housing or on the control of septic tanks".

Mr. Tully also triggered the political abuse of Section 4 of the City and County Management Act, 1955. This provides a procedure where councillors like Mr. Tully can override the disapproval of Planners, in securing planning permission for a house already refused planning permission. This is very advantageous for councillors who have cheaply gained the support and gratitude of another rural house owner. Thus, the spread of housing goes on and on.

There are a number of drawbacks with ribbon developing.

1. It is wasteful on agricultural land. At an average of half an acre per house site, the 11,050 one-off bungalows, built in 1983 alone, would have consumed over 5,500 acres of potential farming land.
2. If ribbon houses occur in sufficient quantities they can sterilise and make access to farm land difficult.

3. Ribbon development increases the damage to crops and animals as a result of rubbish dumping and trespassing on farm lands.
4. The capital costs of laying on such services as telephones, sewerage, footpaths and lighting for one house in dispersed locations are at least double the equivalent for housing estates.
5. The ongoing costs, again, at public expense, of providing such services as refuse collection, mail delivery and school transport are almost five times higher.
6. There is a growing threat to ground water supplies from the problem of contaminated septic tanks.
7. Developments along primary and secondary roads are creating a safety hazard in increasing the risk of traffic accidents.
8. The move to the countryside has caused an architectural hold in the middle of cities. With so many people moving out the upper floors of traditional three and four storied buildings, which in the past would have been lived in, are now left empty, thus leading to the demolition of architecturally interesting buildings such as the Georgian houses that gave such distinction to our major towns and cities.

The ecological balance of the countryside has been upset with an increase in the level of pollution caused by noise, people, cars, hearthfires and various technological devices. Ribbon developments on the entrance roads to towns increase the length and costs of bypasses built to avoid them.

Possible Solutions

As has been stated, cottages are but a handful in Ireland. Such buildings mark a strong heritage, a deep culture and Ireland's turbulent history of the last few centuries. For this reason and to boost a declining tourist industry they should be preserved.

Ireland has no equivalent to the Historic Buildings Council found in Northern Ireland and Britain. It has no Heritage Fund, no Civic Trust, no Royal Fine Arts Commission, no Council for the Preservation of Rural Ireland, no official National Trust, and no Statutory National Monuments Record.

In 1988, however, An Taisce was set up,

"It is not an official body with funds and prestige acquiring and standing guard over wide areas of beautiful countryside but a struggling group, led by a handful of people working part time for it".

(Architects Journal, 7 September 1966).

An Taisce has yet to list a cottage for preservation. But how can they be expected to? They received a grant of £750,000 in 1988 to cover not only architecture but also archaeology, architecture/flora and fauna, landscape, heritage gardens and inland waterways. Compare this with a yearly grant of £7 million for architectural purposes alone in Scotland. There is a need for an official body and larger grants.

Bunratty Folk Park has done much by relocating houses due to be demolished in the Folk Park. However, visitors and ourselves should be able to travel the countryside and observe samples of the past in their natural environment as opposed to enclosing them in an outdoor museum.



Fig 75, A restored vernacular house in Italy.

It is necessary to show the original siting and location of these dwellings and reasons why they were built in that position. The house in its original siting and location will show the regional difference of housing depending on the available materials and deposits of a location, the climate, knowledge and skills. Why should I, or anyone else for that matter, have to travel 230 miles from Dublin to Bunratty to see something I could have seen on every road and lane twenty years ago?

Many people will argue that a cottage is a primitive, dark and unhygienic place, lacking modern amenities and facilities. This is not necessarily so. Fig. 75 is an example of a farmhouse from Northern Italy. When painter, Teddy Millington Drake, found it, it was a shell with no roof or windows. Like hundreds of houses in Italy, it was restored and converted into a house equipped for modern day living, with all modern facilities. Yet, it has still retained its vernacular features in the stone floor and open fireplace, roof trusses and purlins, and the consistent use of natural materials. Surely the same can be possible for Irish cottages?

There are a number of cases where vernacular buildings in Ireland have been restored yet the amount is still very few. In the North of Ireland, however, a large amount of vernacular buildings have been restored and listed due to the work of the Historic Buildings Council.

Since its existence, the Council has listed 6,500 buildings to be conserved. The total is expected to reach 8,000. The Northern Ireland Historic Building Council has made it their policy to recommend for listing not only great buildings but also the more humble vernacular dwellings. Fig. 76 is an example of a vernacular house restored by the Council.



Fig 76, A cottage restored by the Historic Buildings
Council of Northern Ireland.

"Civilized man, must believe that he belongs somewhere inPlace and Time before he can plan his own future or that of his environment with any sense of purpose. Our ancient monuments, be they cottage or castle, mud hut or mansion, fulfill that need for identity and just for this reason alone deserve to be maintained".

(PIERCE Richard, A Celebration of 10 Years of Historic Buildings Conservation)

Before the remaining vernacular buildings in the Republic are bulldozed something should be done on the same lines as what the Historic Buildings Council are doing for the vernacular houses of Northern Ireland.

Much can be done to help the situation of indiscriminate building of modern houses in the countryside. There is a need to curtail the problem of ribbon developments. A complete refusal for new urban generated housing (except where there is an existing building beyond repair) might alleviate the situation.

One solution to improve appearances is to cluster or group houses together in a community. This could be in the form of a cul de sac similar to the Claháns, still in existence especially in the Kilkenny area. This type of arrangement creates a clear distinction between urban and rural housing along roads linking towns and villages. The servicing of such houses would be cheaper than it is for ribbon developing.

Houses should be laid out informally, rather than rigidly lined with exactly the same distance between them. The houses could look better if grouped at an angle from each other.

Location and Siting

The siting and location of a house is often responsible for the unsympathetic appearance of a house with its environment. The

landscaping of a site, such as vegetation cover, field and hedgegrow and tree planting all help to harmonize a building with the landscape.

The siting or positioning of a building in a third dimensional context: A house should not break the sky or water line when seen from a main road. Landscaping and screening by the planting of trees and hedgegrows will do much to prevent this.

The design of modern housing and the use of materials has much to do with the inappropriateness of them in relation to other houses and the landscape. I do not propose that we revert to building traditional houses, yet efforts should be made to blend the new with the old to establish a sense of uniformity, harmonization and totality. Rebuilding the old would stifle the progress of architecture.

The New Houses in the Lough Derg Area, 1984, is a publication which gives guidelines to building sensitively in the countryside. It firstly advises against mixing house styles in the one area as this creates a visual disunity. Combining several different styles in the one house is a degeneration of the styles which they represent. Thus the appearance can appear confused, overworked and obtrusive.

Houses with square plans, hipped and pyramidal roofs are less satisfying than rectangular planned houses, with simple gabled roofs. A single storied building is less likely to break the sky or water line and thus can be screened more easily with vegetation.

The overuse of different unnatural materials is often the cause of making a building look overworked and fussy. The number of materials used should be kept to a minimum and where the use of natural materials is possible, the opportunity should be taken. Contrasting materials should only be used to highlight

rather than to mask.

Recommended colours in The New Houses in the Lough Derg Area are whites and greys, with only small patches of bright colours on doors and window sills etc. Roofs should be of a dark colour such as black, grey, blue, brown or red.

CONCLUSION

Unless drastic immediate action is taken Ireland will continue to lose its historic and interesting vernacular buildings.

There are many solid reasons for preserving what is left of the rapidly declining traditions. Firstly, the vernacular buildings embody a history, culture, individuality, uniqueness, and a deep tradition that is distinctively Irish. It is these qualities that 30% of our tourists come to see every year. The cost of preserving these buildings would not outweigh the cost of a declining tourist industry.

Traditional houses, as has been stated, can be restored, updated to modern living whilst still retaining all the old and charming characteristics of the vernacular style.

There are a number of obstructions which prevent Ireland from following the example of its neighbour, Britain, and Europe in preserving historic buildings. They are the negative attitudes of the people who associate these buildings with poverty and squalor, and believe in adopting anything other than Irish to be an improvement. The unwillingness of the government to grant aid these buildings is a major obstacle.

People must be educated through the media and schools to appreciate and take pride in the modest vernacular buildings of this country. The public should be made aware what are suitable and successful designs of building in a rural situation.

Having architects to design these buildings would hopefully eliminate the compulsory need to incorporate various European and American styles in a dengenrated fussy and distasteful way.

Politicans such as James Tully, who do not have an architectural background, should not be given such control over the granting of Planning. Section 4 should be abolished.

With regard to future designs, the successful aspect of the traditional styles should be used to influence the progression of new architectural styles. Rebuilding the old in a pastiche way is not recommended as the building becomes out of context with time in history. It is this which characterizes buildings and once demolished the same qualities cannot be replaced. Architecture must progress but let us be sensitive about it and Irish.

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