

Ardfield/Rathbarry Journal

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Ardfield Folklore Collection agus Gaeltacht an Aird

Our Proud Heritage: Part II

le Seán Ó Coileáin agus Donncha Ó Donnabháin

When I wrote the article under the above title for the 1999–2000 journal, I had been under the impression that the folklore contribution from Ardfield Boys' School – as collected during the 1930s as gaeilge – had been compiled by senior pupils in Pat O'Donovan's school. I know better now. I have learned since that the collection of all that work – nearly 200 pages (foolscap) – was the work of one enthusiastic young scholar: none other than Donncha Ó Donnabháin, Principal Pat's own son who, thank God, is still with us and resides in Malahide, Dublin. Not only that, Donncha has now taken this collection a stage further. In my previous article, I remarked on the superb handwriting in the beautiful old script. Well, during the past few years, Donncha has undertaken and succeeded in transcribing the full collection into modern Irish script. This collection he has sent to Tim Feen who, in turn, loaned it to me. To quote from his letter to Tim: 'I have written the whole lot here in modern Irish script to make it more legible to readers of today and now I return the whole collection to where it came from: Ardfield.' This gem of a collection is now contained in a hardbound foolscap-sized copybook. I quote Donncha again: 'May this collection of the lore of their day stand as a memorial to those last native speakers of our own language in Ardfield. They were the end of a long line stretching back nearly 200 years: and here we have Irish as they spoke it.' And what Irish – such richness and fluency. Indeed, this collection, which Donncha has titled *Seanchas Ard Ó Ficheallaigh*, will also be a memorial to Donncha Ó Donnabháin himself and to his late father, Pat. I would say that *Seanchas Ard Ó Ficheallaigh* is to the Ardfield Gaeltacht what *An tOileanach* is to the Gaeltacht of Corca Dhuibhne. 'Ni bheidh a leithéidí arís ann.'

There follows the foreword written by Donncha, and a random selection of translations of various stories and poems contained therein. They speak for themselves. Happily, future issues of the *Ardfield/Rathbarry Journal* will include further extracts from *Seanchas Ard Ó Ficheallaigh*.

Gura fada buan tú féin agus do shaothar a Dhonncha.

Seán Ó Coileáin



(l-r): Den Feen / Donncha Ó Finn (Dunowen) with Paddy O'Donovan (brother of Donncha Ó Donnabháin) at the Glebe; Den Feen (close-up); Donncha Ó Donnabháin.

PHOTOS SOURCE: DONNCHA Ó DONNABHÁIN

Foreword by Donncha Ó Donnabháin

This is a collection of stories, poems and lore recorded by me between the years of 1936 and 1940 from the mouths of some of the last surviving native Irish speakers who lived in this parish of Ardfield.

By that time, Irish as the main spoken language of the people had almost disappeared except for a small handful of older people whose first encounter with the English language was when they started school. It was from those few and from some of their neighbours who were reared in Irish that I made the collection.

I would like to single out especially that king of storytellers, Denis Feen – a most pleasant and highly intelligent man without pretensions, who could cite without falter long, involved poems and stories which he had heard many years before. I got more from Denis than from anyone else because he used to call to the house where he would relax and recite and ‘spin’ to his heart’s content.

Let’s be grateful to them all for this collection; they have left us with an insight into life as lived by our ancestors a hundred years ago, and their attitude to life.

Their departure saw the end of the Ardfield Gaeltacht – the end of an era.

They’re all silent now, but let this little anthology – from their own mouths – remains as their fitting memorial for posterity.

Donncha Ó Donnabháin / Denis O’Donovan

Uisce na gCos / Water from a foot-bath

In the olden times, long ago, no man or woman-of-the-house would allow anyone to throw out water, after nightfall, in which someone had washed and especially water in which they had washed their feet for fear of the Good People.

If a member of the household had not come in, the water would not be thrown out until he had. They all used the same water. But then, if it got too late and he still hadn’t arrived, a spark from the fire would be put into the water and then thrown out. If that were not done, the Good People would try to track down the person outside, and the spark from the fire would take the power from the water.

One night, around midnight, a man from this area was sitting by the fire, when he developed a great thirst. He went out and headed in the direction of the well and he left the door open behind him. He reached the well, without delay, and when he had filled the can, he saw a man standing beside him. He recognised him immediately – it was a relation of his own and he had been dead for many years. The dead man spoke to him. ‘What has brought you out, so late in the night?’ he said. The poor man was afraid and he was dumbstruck. Then the other man spoke again and said, ‘Go back home quickly. Your home is full of Good People and when you come near the house, say this, at the top of your voice, “The Glen of the Fair Women and the mountain above it are on fire,”’ he said.

After a while, out came a big crowd of women, in a great hurry and hundreds more behind them. ‘My husband and my children,’ they all said together. The poor man went in then. The man at the well advised him, also, to close the door when he went in, and when the water from the foot-bath was thrown out, to put the head of the tongs in the fire. He did as he was told. In a short time he heard commotion outside. The Good People were back again in greater numbers and they were furious. They asked him to open the door for them, and he refused. A long discussion take place among them and, at last, he heard a loud noise outside. ‘Tongs,’ they all said, ‘open the door for us.’ ‘I cannot,’ answered the tongs, ‘because my head is in the fire.’ ‘Water of the feet,’ they said, ‘open the door for us.’ ‘I cannot,’ answered the water, ‘because I’m spilled under your feet.’ They understood then, he had got the better of them, and they decided the best course of action would be to let him go, that he had learned his lesson. Needless to say, he never left the house with the door open ever after.

ó Shean Ó Donnabháin (Bán), Fearann

Léim Bhairbre agus Cath Thrá Gainiú / Barbara’s Leap and the Battle of the Red Strand

There’s an old castle at the Galley Head called Dundeady Castle. ’Twas built at a time when the axe and the sword and the spear were the best weapons of war. Tradition has it that a chieftain of the Barry Rua clan lived long ago. He owned a large tract of land south-west around the castle and kept a great garrison of soldiers permanently to protect him from land and sea.

He had an enemy from the mid-Cork area called Barry Bán, and both had been watching one another for quite a long while.

Once, a soldier of Barry Rua's had an injustice done to him by his chieftain and turned traitor. He immediately made his way to Barry Bán's castle, and told of him of the affair. He was received with open arms. He promised Barry Bán he'd give him all the assistance he needed to capture Barry Rua's Castle, and that he would fight by his side. Barry Bán conceded without delay, and a day was appointed to capture the castle.

Barry Rua had a horse called Barbara which had magic powers. Barbara would only graze in two church fields in Dunowen and would only drink from a special holy well in Gahanive called Tobairin na Daonachta. It was said if she was deprived of the grass of the fields or the water of the well for one night, she would die on the spot, as soon as she set foot on the island.

On that particular morning that Barry Bán and his hosts were approaching the castle, Barry Rua and his mount departed for the church-fields. After a short time his horse wakened him. He felt afraid because he knew something must have happened. He leapt to his feet and looked west in the direction of the castle and saw the hosts of Barry Bán descending on it. Barry Rua suddenly realised that his own soldier had betrayed him. Jumping on Barbara's back, and she didn't hang back but galloped towards the castle. On reaching the well at Gahanive, Barbara made an attempt to stop but Barry Rua didn't allow her.

On reaching the castle, the enemy were there and he was unable to enter. His only alternative was to jump the channel and the water deep beneath him. He attempted the jump and landed safely on the other side, and his horse left the print of her hoof on the spot where she dropped dead because Barry Rua, in his haste, did not allow her to drink at the well on their way. To this day, that jump is called 'Léim Bhairbre' and the print of her hoof is still to be seen. The poor man was heart-broken

after Bairbre, but he had to face his enemies. He gained entrance from the western side of the castle. His men were on the point of defeat because there was nobody in command. Many died from each side, but after a while, when the neighbours heard the fighting, they came, one by one, and in the end they routed the enemy from the castle.

Barry Rua and his men gave chase for a mile and had the Barry Banns on the run. Then, on a sandbank above high water on the sand near the Red Strand, they stood their ground again and inflicted great slaughter. Some years ago, when the sand was being drawn in trucks from that place, they found swords and spears and skeletons in profusion there, and they again found buttons when they were building the big wall.

Barry Bán was defeated there and they drove them ahead of them up the slope of Ballyva, where the final blow was delivered. Both parties made peace and the terms of the peace were that neither would interfere with the other ever again. The hill is called 'Mullach na Sióchána' ever since.

ó Dhonncha Ó Finn, Dún Eóin



Top: East of Barry's Castle, Dundeady. Bottom: Forge just before Cnochán a' Chrocháire, between Ellen O'Mahony's Bar and the Chapel Cross.

PHOTOS: DOMINIC CARROLL

May Day

On a May Day morning about 100 years ago, a farmer turned in the cows to milk them. He called his wife to give him a hand. They got two buckets and set to work but if they did, not a drop of milk was forthcoming. At first they thought the cows were in some form of fear, so they let them be for a while. When they tried again, they had the same story.

They had to leave them without milking and set about churning. It was bad news again. If they were turning the barrel since, no butter would form. They had to give up in amazement as to why the cream wouldn't turn for them. They told the story to an old woman in the house, and she told them if they knew if anything was removed from the farm that morning. They replied they didn't know yet and went off to search, and what was stolen but the goat. They came in and told the old woman the goat was missing. 'Go and find her,' said she, 'for if you don't you'll never again have milk or butter.' The pair searched from farm to farm and in the evening found their goat. The thief tried to persuade them that the goat was his but they brought the goat back despite his protestations. On hearing that the goat had arrived home, the old lady told them to milk the cows again, which they did, and the milk instantly began to flow. She told them to attempt the churning again. They did, and in no time the cream turned and they had butter aplenty.

The old woman addressed them again. 'Were it not for me,' said she, 'ye'd be without butter or milk. That farmer who stole the goat ever had bad luck – when he stole your luck he stole belongings on May Day because there is magic pertaining to that particular day.'

ó Dhonncha Ó Finn, Dún Eòin

*An turas go dtí an Rinn / The Voyage to Ring le Séainín Ó
Donnabháin (Tobac) do chán ó Dhonncha Ó Finn*
Sé Brigeansaí an captaen is léanta insa taoibh seo
Is aige atá an 'navigation' ar Éirinn mór thimpeall
Tá an bád aige is néata ó Cheann Chláire go Sweden
Agus criú breá máirnéalach aige chun a' mainsail a shíneadh.
Sé Séamus an stiúrd is bríomhaire le fáil
Cead glóire le h-Iosa tá sé snoite go cnámh
Mar Oscar na Féinne ba thréine sa tír seo
Ní iomparódh féin í mar a bhfaghadh ós na guaillibh.
Go deimhin, a dhaoine mhuinteartha do mhillfeadh sé an saol
Regiment daoine ní chuirfeadh chun chinn í trí ghaoth
Tá criú inte féinig chomh traochta le caoirigh
Agus crann agus seol do chuirfeadh náire ar na daoine.
Chuaigh buachaillí an bhaile seo ag aeríocht inte lá
Ag aeríocht 'dtí an Rinn ó bhí an Domhnach chomh breá
D'fhagadar ar a gcé i gan éinne in a cúram
Agus deallramh laidhléir uirthé 'as í ag réabadh na sráille.
Bhí áinleóirí an lá san go flúirseach ar a dtráigh
'Sníor stadadar choiche chun gur dheineadar Shíobhán
Agus is é Téid a' Bhothair, ár gcomharsa breá aoibhinn
D'fháise suas le córdaibh í feach a sheólfadh sí arís dúinn.
Ní déarfainn sé an méid sin mar 'tréasan' 'sea a lán
Ach d'fhagadar ar a 'Méis mé is mo dhrae agam lá breá
D'fhagadar ar a 'Méis mé gan éinne beó im thimpeall
Ach madraí ruadha na hÉireann ag béicigh is am chaoineadh.

Brigeansaí is the captain with a great store of knowledge
He can navigate Ireland, from sea to sea
His boat is the neatest from Cape Clear to Sweden
And a fine crew to raise the mainsail has he.
Séamus is the steward, most powerful of all
Glory to Jesus, he is hewn to the bone
Like Oscar of the Fianna, the strongest in Éirinn
Couldn't shoulder his burden, or carry his load.
For sure, my good people, 'twould be the world's ruination
A regiment of men couldn't steer her through storm
Her very own crew like sheep are as weary
Her mast and her sail would fill you with shame.
Boys from this village, one day, went a-cruising
Cruising to Ring on a fine Sunday
They left her on the quay side, with nobody caring
Like a lighter cleaving the waves.
Ruffians that day on the strand were disporting
Nor falter did they, till they wrecked poor 'Siobhán'
And 'twas Téid a' Bhothair, our handsomest neighbour
Who bound her with cords, to carry us home.
I wouldn't say this much, for much of it's treason
But they left me on the Méis with my dray, one fine day
They left me on the Méis, with no living soul round me
But the foxes of Ireland, who howl and who bay.

Cnocán a' Chrocháire / The Hangman's Hill

There's a hillock in this place which is called 'Hangman's Hill'. It is near the site of the postman's hut. It so happened there was a man 'on the run' from the yeoman in '98, and he was captured near that place and he was hanged from a tree at the side of the road. Ever since then, when one is walking past that place, the footstep makes a great noise for three or four yards, and it is said that is where the poor man was buried, about halfway between the post-hut and Plib' Óg's boreen, at the same side of the road as Máire Phaid's house.

If you were walking there on a fine, still night, you would hear the echo of your footstep quarter of a mile away.

ó Dhonncha Ó Finn, Dún Eóin

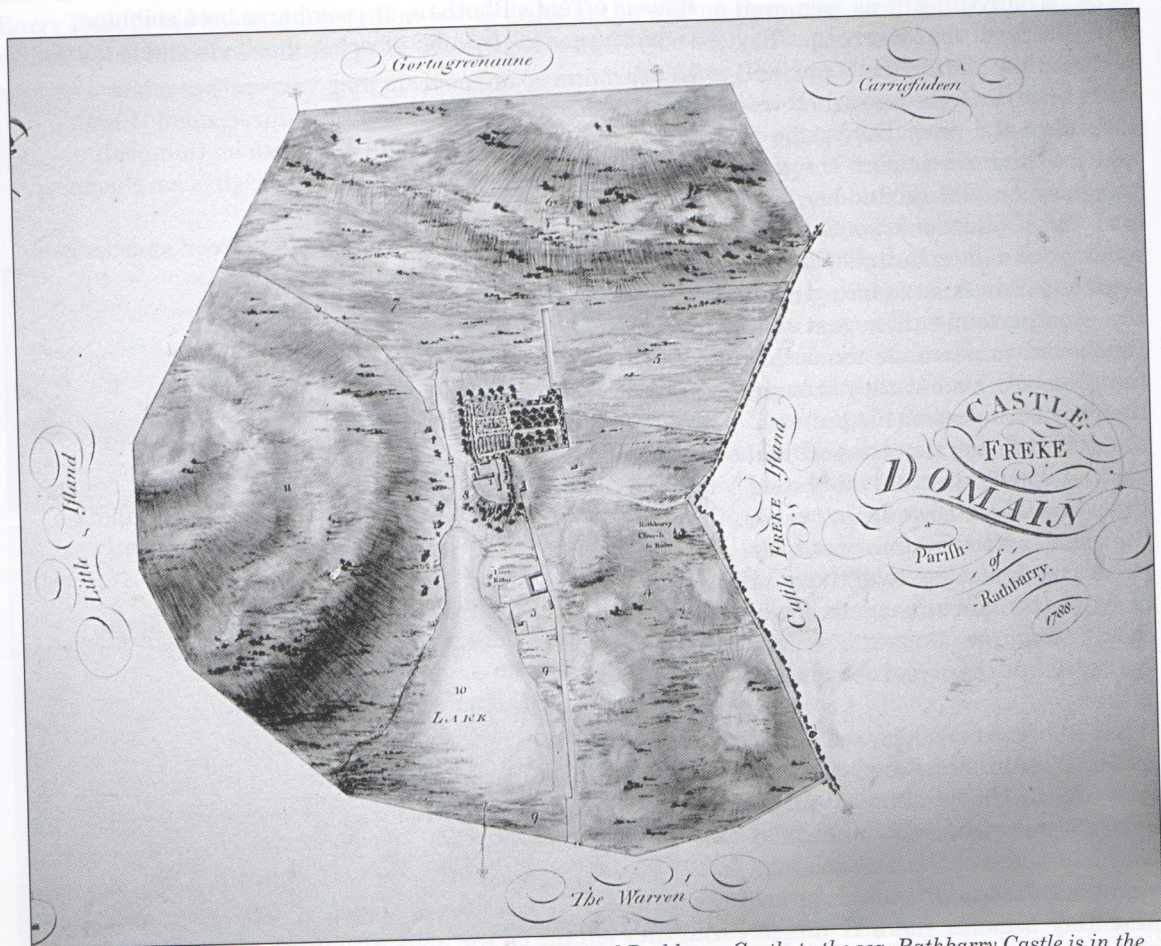
Castlefrecke Wood and the Curse

Rathbarry Castle was once owned by Barry and he was dispossessed by force, and then it was the Frekes who were in possession for a number of years. The Frekes paid annual rent to the Barrys who had moved to a dwelling near Cork.

Once, when Barry called to the Frekes to collect his dues, he vanished. No trace could be found of Barry and the parish priest in Ardfield was very involved. He gathered the parishioners together because he feared that he had drowned in the lake – in Rathbarry Lake

They drained the lake, discovered Barry drowned, and without his coat. Then the priest put a curse on the place, and from that day to this, no crow will nest there and no heir has been born since in that place.

ó Dhonncha Ó Donnabháin, Béal a'Chuaisín



This drawing from 1788 shows the lake which once connected Rathbarry Castle to the sea. Rathbarry Castle is in the centre of the drawing. The small rectangle area below it is identified as 'Lime Kilns'. To the right can be seen 'Rathbarry Church In Ruins'.

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Caoine an Phaoraigh / Lament for Father John Power ó Donncha Ó Finn, Dún Eóin

Ar bhruach trá dhom do thárla im aonar
I gCuan a' lámhaigh lámh le Béara
O d'fhuar mo lámha agus mo chnámha le chéile
Nuair a chuala trácht thar bhás an Phaoraig.
Do chuireas chun reatha go h-allusmhar
traochta
'Gus níor stadas de'n stáir sin go ndeaghas thar
Léim soir
Mar a gcuala an cúmha Gallda 'is Gaelach
Ó Bhiollach go Ros ag gol le chéile.
Tá a dhóirse dúnta anois mar a mbíodh flúirse
is féile
Fé ghlaiseannaibh dúbha gan Connradh gréine
Sagart thar . . . ós cionn a thréadtha
Ach ba lúghaide den chúmha iad dá bhfaighidís
an Paoraig.
Tá loch Oidhin ar fiuchaidh ó ghrinneal le
tréimhse
Agus Faill an Iolair dá dheascaibh go bpléasc-
faidh
Tá na daill gan radharc ag léighe ar na craob-
hachiaibh
Agus mná na leanbh ag screadaig 's ag géarghol
Tá biollach a' Logha féna morning ciar'dhubh
Agus an Rúrach fé chúmha choíche ta an
Chananach go h-atuirseach scíosmhar
I ndiaidh a'tsagairt do leigheasadh na mílte.
Níl cuan na caladh ná cathair in Éirinn
Do chuala trácht thar bhás an Phaoraig
Ná fuil dá dheascaibh go treascartha traochta
Ag dortadh an leanna is ní bhlaifidís Braon de.
Tá an Paorach uasal a'dul 'n a thuaman
grádhmha
Níor ghnáth riamh buairt air is ba shuaire a
cháile.
Is a bháis an aoilchnis 'bhain an croí den
Phaorach
Do ghaobhfaí díol ann dá ba ghnaoi leat 'éileamh
Mar na céadta míle bhíodar buioch de
Mar do bhainfeadh sé saighda 'e dhaoinibh
saolta.

On the water's edge, I strayed alone
In the bay that nestled close to Beara
Oh, my hands grew cold and my bones did
quiver
When I heard of the death of Power, the great
one.
I ran like the wind, while my sweat did bathe
me
Tired and exhausted, until Leap was behind
me
I heard the lament from stranger and neigh-
bour
To Ross from Barley Hill, they wept together.
His doors are closed, which once stood open
With welcome bright, now doused and dark
A priest of priests, above his people
His blessed return would soothe his flock.
Lough Ine, for some time, has simmered and
bubbled
And the Mount of the Eagle is ready to blow
The blind are now sightless amid the green
branches
And the mothers of children are shrieking their
woe.
The hill of the barley is swathed in mourning
And Roury is clad in a garment of grief
Cononagh, tired and depressed and defeated
Without their good priest, their healer and
hope.
There's no harbour nor bay nor city in Ireland
That has heard of the death of Power, the great
one
That isn't laid low in grievous mourning
Spilling the beer and no heart to taste it.
O pale-faced Death, which took him from us
You could have bargained if you wished to
plead
Hundreds of people were deeply grateful
For the way he helped them in times of need.



Red Strand.

PHOTO: DOMINIC CARROLL