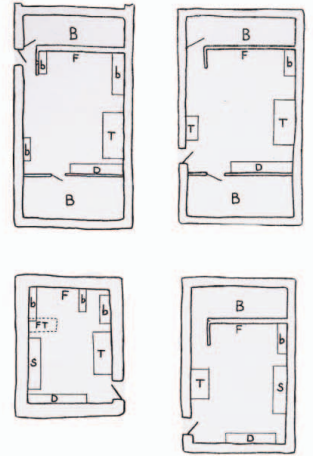


# 6 INTERIORS

The space at the centre of the kitchen floor was not occupied in Irish vernacular houses, and furniture was traditionally placed around the walls, even in bigger more formal houses where space was not the reason. This curious tradition may originate in early times when the hearth lay open in the middle of the floor. When the fire moved to one end of the room the position of furniture around the edges continued. In Ireland the table did not take over from the fireplace as the social focus of the house and it therefore remained at the edge of the kitchen sometimes as a “falling table” which folded up against the wall.



Traditional interior with dresser opposite the hearth



Examples of furniture positions in Wicklow houses (from F.H.A. Aalen)

F, fireplace; T, table; FT, falling table; b, settle bed; D, dresser; B, bedroom.

Other traditional furnishings in Wicklow houses were the settle-bed, *súgán* or straw-seated chairs, benches, fireside seat and the open-fronted dresser. Box-beds do not appear to have been used in the county. Dressers, displaying arrays of delph dishes, offered a practical way of screening rooms from the kitchen and generally face opposite the fireplace with a door to one side to the room beyond, an arrangement developed from subdivision of earlier single-room houses. Other storage was in a variety of wall recesses sometimes with wooden shelves or doors.



Settle bed with carved arms and cornice brackets and high panelled back



Bi-folding door folds back against the wall to save space in the entrance lobby

Benches were often placed beneath the hearth canopy on either side of the fire, sometimes integrated into the jamb wall. Seats or benches were not kept in front of the fire, but were pushed back against the walls when not in use.



Falling table and settle bed



Typical wall cupboard



Wood and metal lock

Stairs to upper levels or to sleeping places in lofts or the roof space had simple balustrades and generally led directly from the kitchen.

Some of recently vacated houses still contained items of religious memorabilia which are a valuable record of traditional ways of life and popular folk beliefs of former generations.

*The hens and geese were put “to set” in the kitchen—generally under the dresser, and were kept there while the chickens and goslings were still young. (N.F.C. 1309 ps. 249) Rose Byrne, Rathcoyle, Kiltegan 1952.*



Carved detail on a traditional dresser