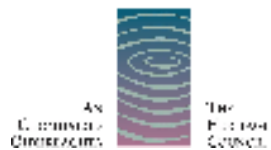


# TRADITIONAL HOUSES OF RURAL Co. WICKLOW

## *An Inventory of Vernacular Architecture*



*recorded and compiled by*

**Lotts Architecture and Urbanism**

*for Wicklow County Council with the support of The Heritage Council*



*Ake Campbell: Notes on the Irish house*

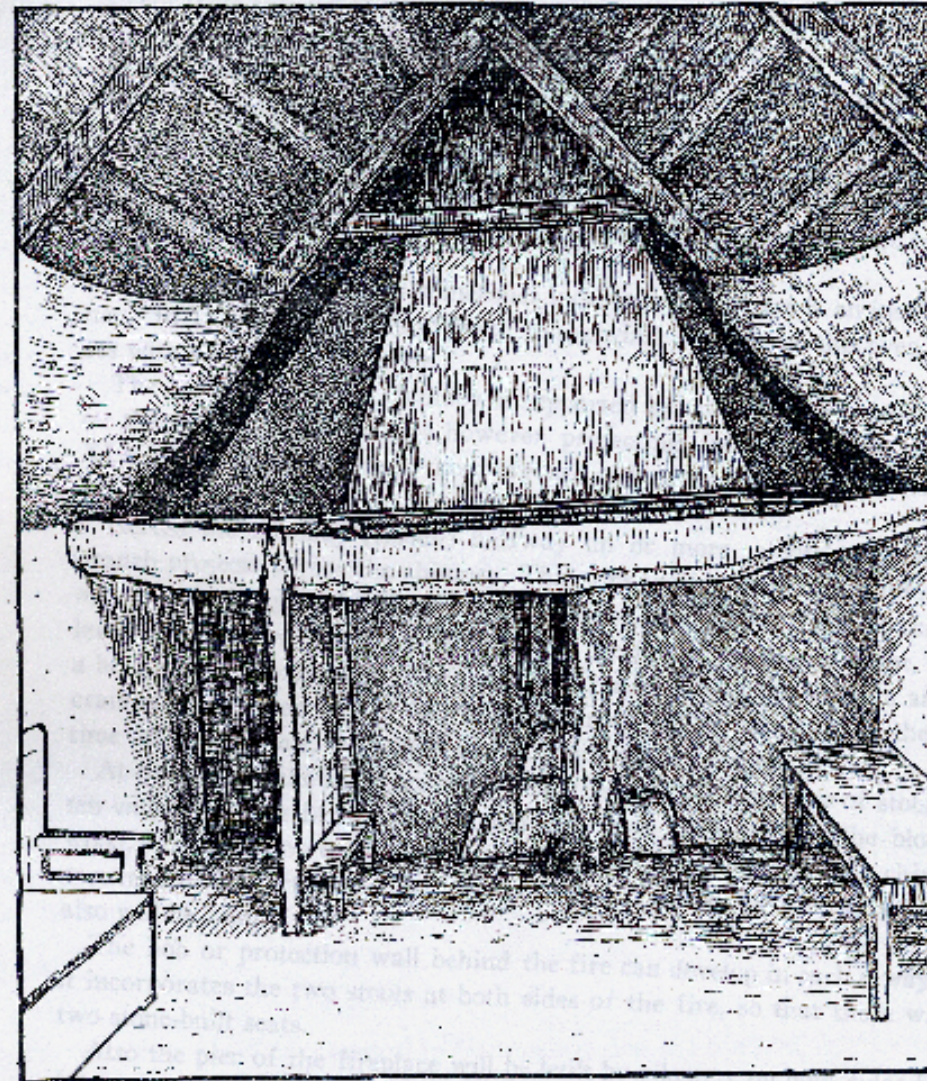


Fig. 6. Wooden side-wall of the fireplace. The kitchen corner, Kyle, Ballinglen, Co. Wicklow.

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## Executive Summary

This survey records a representative sample of the rural vernacular architecture of Co. Wicklow. 147 sites were recorded on site in July to October 2007. The records were entered into an MS Access database in the format devised by the National Inventory of Architectural Heritage (NIAH). A summary of each record is included in this report.

The present outlook for the stock of buildings surveyed was found to be bleak. The vernacular heritage of the county is seriously threatened by changes in the rural economy, modern expectations in housing and lack of understanding of the value of traditional houses. Most of the more intact or interesting examples surveyed were abandoned or derelict. If there is to be any hope for the future action will need to be taken in terms of legislation, pro-active planning policies, research, and raising of awareness through promotion of positive conservation models.

The following features were found to characterise the traditional houses of rural Wicklow.

- Gable-ended houses of stone construction were the most prevalent type, originally having had thatched or slated roofs.
- Hipped and formerly thatched roofs typical of south-eastern Ireland survive in some eastern lowland areas and close to the south Kildare border.
- Use of quarried granite in the stone masonry tradition of the county, particularly in gable ends.
- Examples of both hearth-lobby and direct-entry types, with an unusually high number of direct entry houses for

eastern Ireland.

- Scarcity of surviving thatched roofs, though these were formerly widespread for both dwellings and outbuildings. Many vernacular slated roofs.
- Houses integrated into sloping terrain, either built parallel or perpendicular to the slope.
- Variety of approaches to enlargement of houses, often an added upper storey extending over all or part of the house.
- Considerable number of more formal houses having strong vernacular character.

Farmyard layouts conformed to the norm for Munster and Leinster in the predominance of courtyard forms around three or four sides of a yard, though scattered layouts more common in the western half of Ireland associated with smaller holdings in upland regions were also common. Examples of linear extended arrangements were found in greater abundance than heretofore expected in the southern half of the country.

A number of interesting clustered arrangements and groupings were recorded which may merit special protection. Several forges located at crossroads, formerly a very widespread type, were recorded.

Six questionnaires for Wicklow from the Irish Folklore Commission surveys of the 1950s yielded much primary information on the construction of houses. These show that mud walling and thatch were traditional here as in other eastern counties. Slate quarries in the county meant that slated vernacular roofs are more typical here than elsewhere.

The study gathers information on the interiors of the houses,



and the manner in which they were furnished with the focus on the typical hearth with its wicker canopy.

An assessment of the future of the vernacular heritage of the county discusses the rapid rate of attrition and the pressing need for promotion of public awareness and understanding, better conservation practice and traditional building skills. Tourism, community projects, government aid and an innovative approach to use of public-sector funding towards conservation are seen as ways of securing the future of the houses.

The recommendations of the study can be summarised as follows:

- 41 sites are recommended for inclusion in the Record of Protected Structures (RPS)
- 19 sites are submitted for further consideration for inclusion in the RPS
- 4 groupings are recommended to be designated as Architectural Conservation Areas (ACAs)
- Any new development on the site of any of the 147 houses recorded should respect the vernacular nature of the buildings
- Adoption of a planning policy to refuse planning permissions where demolition of any vernacular house is proposed, including those not covered in this survey
- To recover lost significance of vernacular houses, planning conditions could be imposed to promote reinstatement of traditional features
- Detailed true measured survey, photographic record and written analysis should be a prerequisite for developments affecting vernacular buildings.
- Suggestion that Wicklow County Council acquire a good intact example and carry out a conservation project as a benchmark for good practice, to be publicised on TV.
- Demonstrate the capacity of the houses to meet modern living requirements to a high standard by means of a vernacular building exhibition showcasing the vernacular architecture of the county, traditional building skills, and illustrating ideas for extensions and adaptation.
- Suggestion for a Museum of Folk and Farm Life in Historic Wicklow, displaying traditional furnishings and farm implements, with possible grant aid from the National Museum or Fáilte Ireland.
- Seek permission from the owners of two successfully restored houses for inclusion in Heritage Week tours.
- Suggestion of collaboration with the Architecture Foundation to organise an event like Open House Dublin in Wicklow.
- Initiation of a scheme modelled on the Mourne Homesteads Project to provide social or affordable housing for local people using existing council funding.
- Collaboration with publicly funded bodies such as FÁS and Pobal to generate ideas for channelling existing public-sector funding to also benefit conservation of vernacular buildings.
- Target Conservation Grants specifically to benefit vernacular buildings. Possibility to make exceptions under

the scheme to fund endangered houses which are not protected structures .

- Publicise information on Heritage Council and Wicklow County Council grant schemes with owners of vernacular houses in mind by direct mail, local radio and newspapers, farming organisations and press or notices in public places such as shops and churches .
- Promote an appreciation of vernacular buildings for schools, building contractors, vocational training schemes, farming groups, auctioneers, district health authorities, churches, etc.
- Seek cooperation of the RIAI and ILI to highlight the importance of conservation of vernacular buildings and landscapes.
- Prevent damage to abandoned buildings through vandalism by collaboration with community groups, residents associations, neighbourhood watch schemes and Garda stations .
- Make contact to universities departments concerned with Conservation, Architecture, Landscape, Folklore, Archaeology and Cultural Geography to assist in further research into the sites identified in the survey.
- Study of religious memorabilia and evidence of folk beliefs and superstitions still surviving in many houses is needed.
- Carry out detailed measured surveys and comprehensive photographic records to document layout, construction, furnishings and finishes.

## Acknowledgements

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### Lotts Architecture team members:

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## Introduction

The ICOMOS Charter of the Built Vernacular Heritage, ratified in Mexico in 1999, opens with the following statement about vernacular architecture:

*The built vernacular heritage occupies a central place in the affection and pride of peoples. It has been accepted as a characteristic and attractive product of society. It appears informal but nevertheless orderly. It is utilitarian and at the same time possesses interest and beauty. It is a focus of contemporary life and at the same time a record of the history of society. Although it is the work of man it is also the creation of time. It would be unworthy of the heritage of man if care were not taken to conserve these traditional harmonies which constitute the core of man's own identity.*

The traditional buildings of Co. Wicklow share these characteristics with the vernacular architecture of all traditional societies. These unassuming buildings are expressions of the individual identity of the people of rural Wicklow, a “record of the history of society” in the county, and they form an essential feature of the unique cultural and natural landscape for which the county is renowned.

Recognising the importance of these modest yet vulnerable buildings, the Heritage Office of Wicklow County Council commissioned Lotts Architecture and Urbanism to record and assess the particular characteristics of the vernacular style of Co. Wicklow. The results of this survey are presented in this document.

### Aims of the survey

The aims of the study were to identify and make a detailed appraisal of a representative sample of the vernacular domestic buildings of Co. Wicklow. 147 sample houses were

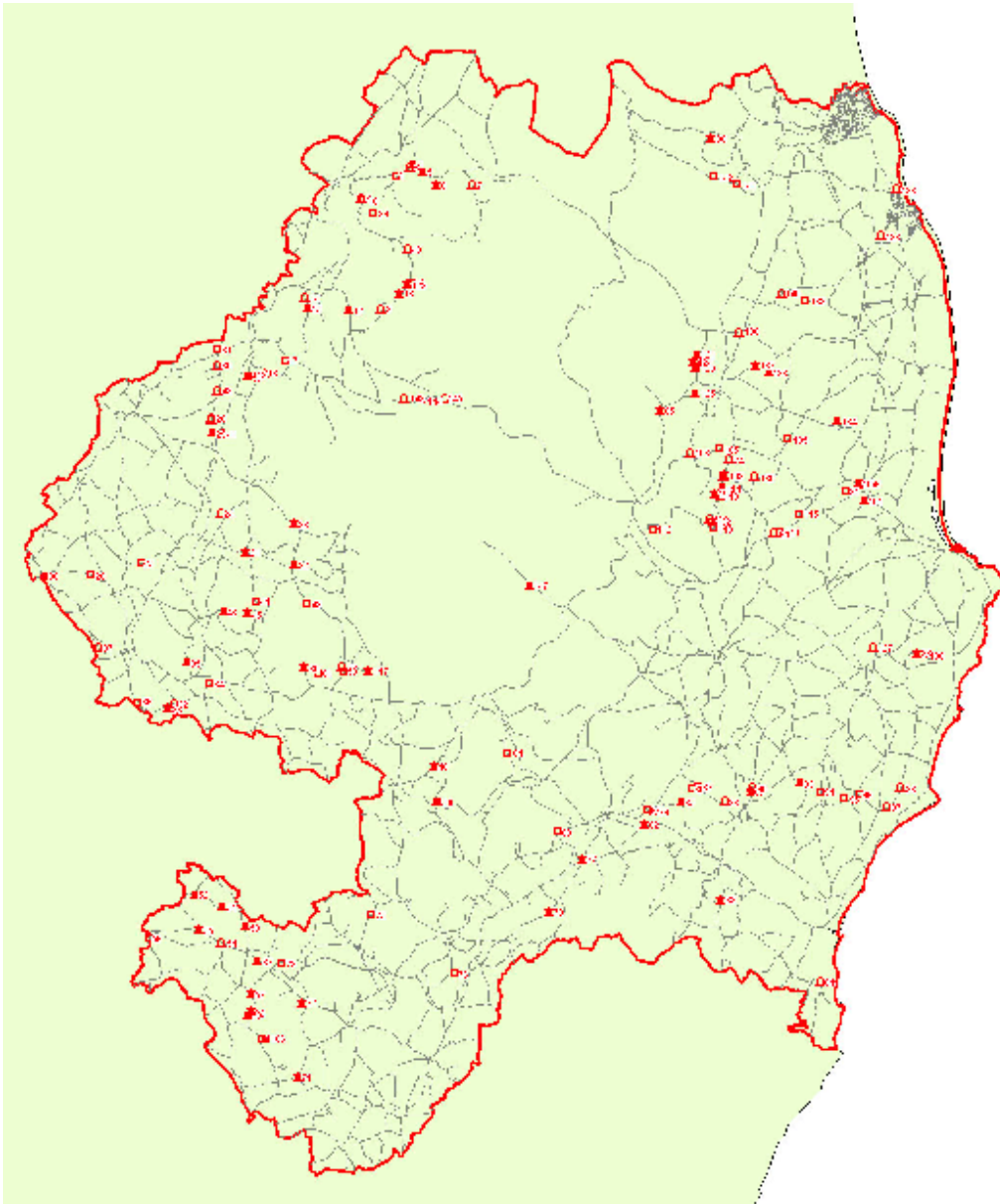
selected to illustrate the range of typical house types and farmyard layouts, the distribution of these types across the county, noting the influence of the position in the landscape on the form of houses and identifying prevailing trends within the county in the context of the vernacular architecture of Ireland. The survey was not confined to dwellings alone but sought to identify interesting site features which provide deeper insight into traditional ways of life, such as farm outbuildings, walls, gates, corn stands and lime kilns. House interiors were viewed where possible, as these give particularly valuable evidence of past times, though less likely to survive intact. Thatched buildings are not as common in Wicklow as in other eastern counties, so the survey aimed to identify as many surviving examples as possible. The houses identified in the OPW Survey conducted by Michael Higginbotham in the late 1980s were located where they survive.

The survey is taking place at a crucial time when radical change in the rural way of life continues at a rapid pace and many of the houses are disappearing. In this uncertain climate the survey aims to demonstrate the value of simple rural buildings, which have often been mistakenly associated with backwardness, their commonplace appearance belying the fact that they are often unique to the particular conditions of Co. Wicklow and distinct from the vernacular of other counties. The study hopes to raise awareness of the quality of this cultural heritage and to inform Wicklow County Council of the particular value of different types, in order to act as a guide towards more effective protection of the vernacular architecture of the county.

### Initial Desk Study

The first stage of the project involved a background study of previously published sources, historical maps and primary written accounts on the vernacular architecture and thatched buildings of Ireland, and specifically of Co. Wick-





low. The principal sources and authors whose research has informed the modern understanding of vernacular architectural in Ireland were consulted. These included the work of Kevin Danaher, F. H. A. Aalen, Claudia Kinmoth, the questionnaires compiled in the 1950s by the Irish Folklore Commission among others.

### Site Survey

The representative samples were identified in an initial tour of the entire county by car. This indicated the type and number of houses in existence and was the basis of the recording stage. Owners and local people were asked about the location of any other examples in their vicinity. The search was not exhaustive and the very nature of the houses embedded in their landscape settings often in remote places made many difficult to find. Some two hundred objects were visited in the initial stage, their positions marked on the Discovery Series maps and a photograph taken for easier identification in the recording stage.

The recording stage of the survey involved creation of written descriptions and photographs on site. 147 houses and farm complexes were recorded using the National Inventory of Architectural Heritage (NIAH) survey template and recording methodology. A sketch plan was made with the record of each building, noting information on the plan arrangement and roof form of the house and outbuildings, access, sloping terrain and orientation. This quick sketch proved to be a good *aide-memoir* in identifying the structures and the relationship between various buildings and their setting. Where possible, owners and occupiers were interviewed with regard to the history and future of the houses. Traditional building materials and elements such as roofs, windows, doors, were recorded and assessed. Where access was gained the record of interiors included analysis of finishes, inbuilt and movable furniture and characteristic hearths and fireplaces. The location of all the houses re-

corded was taken using a GPS Irish Grid reading.

Six examples were measured and drawn to scale. These were chosen to illustrate the variety of house types and clustered arrangements. The measured drawings are included in the appendix of this report.

### **Database and Report**

The next stage involved inputting the collected material into an MS Access database and numbering the objects and photographs accordingly. The standard database used by the NIAH for county surveys was used.

The data was analysed and characteristics typical for Co. Wicklow were pinpointed with respect to other counties and within the county itself. Some of the most important structures are recommended for inclusion in the Record of Protected Structures.

The final stage involved the preparation of this report which aims to present and illustrate the findings of the survey.

## House Types of Co. Wicklow

### Definition of Vernacular Architecture

The Mexico Charter of ICOMOS defines vernacular architecture as a manner of building shared by a traditional community with the following characteristics:

- recognisable regional character responsive to the environment
- coherence of style, form and appearance, or the use of traditionally established building types
- traditional expertise in design and construction which is transmitted informally
- effective response to functional, social and environmental constraints
- effective application of traditional construction systems and crafts.

### Irish House Types

Before studying Wicklow examples, it is worth looking at the vernacular house types of Ireland in general. The types and their distribution throughout the country have been researched among others by Åka Campbell, Kevin Danaher, the Irish Folklore Commission, Alan Gailey and F. H. A. Aalen.

Fidelma Mullane quotes a definition of Irish rural vernacular

architecture used in the Townlands Survey 1996-97 in Northern Ireland to be ‘the construction of small plain buildings in the countryside where the dominant influence is siting, materials, form and design in the local folk tradition.’

The prevailing characteristics of common to Irish vernacular house types can be identified as:

- an elongated rectangular plan of informal layout, not built to drawings
- a typical depth of six metres or less
- mass load-bearing walls of stone or mud
- hearths and chimneys located along the linear axis of the plan
- entrance door on the long side into a kitchen
- doors and windows on the long sides
- linear house form, extended along its length or by the addition of a second storey.
- lack of rigid symmetry with regard to doors and windows, especially on back walls

The Swedish observer Åka Campbell in his studies of Irish vernacular architecture in the first part of the twentieth century classified house types by dividing them into:

1. the central chimney house with the chimney located somewhere in the centre of the house
2. the gable chimney house with the chimney built into an



end gable of the house

The origin of typical vernacular features is difficult to trace, as traditions have been transmitted from generation to generation, and very early examples have not survived. It can be assumed that many features are quite ancient as comparison to vernacular features in other European countries have shown international patterns, an interesting example being the bed-outshots or alcoves found in the northwest of Ireland also present across other coastal areas of North Atlantic Europe.

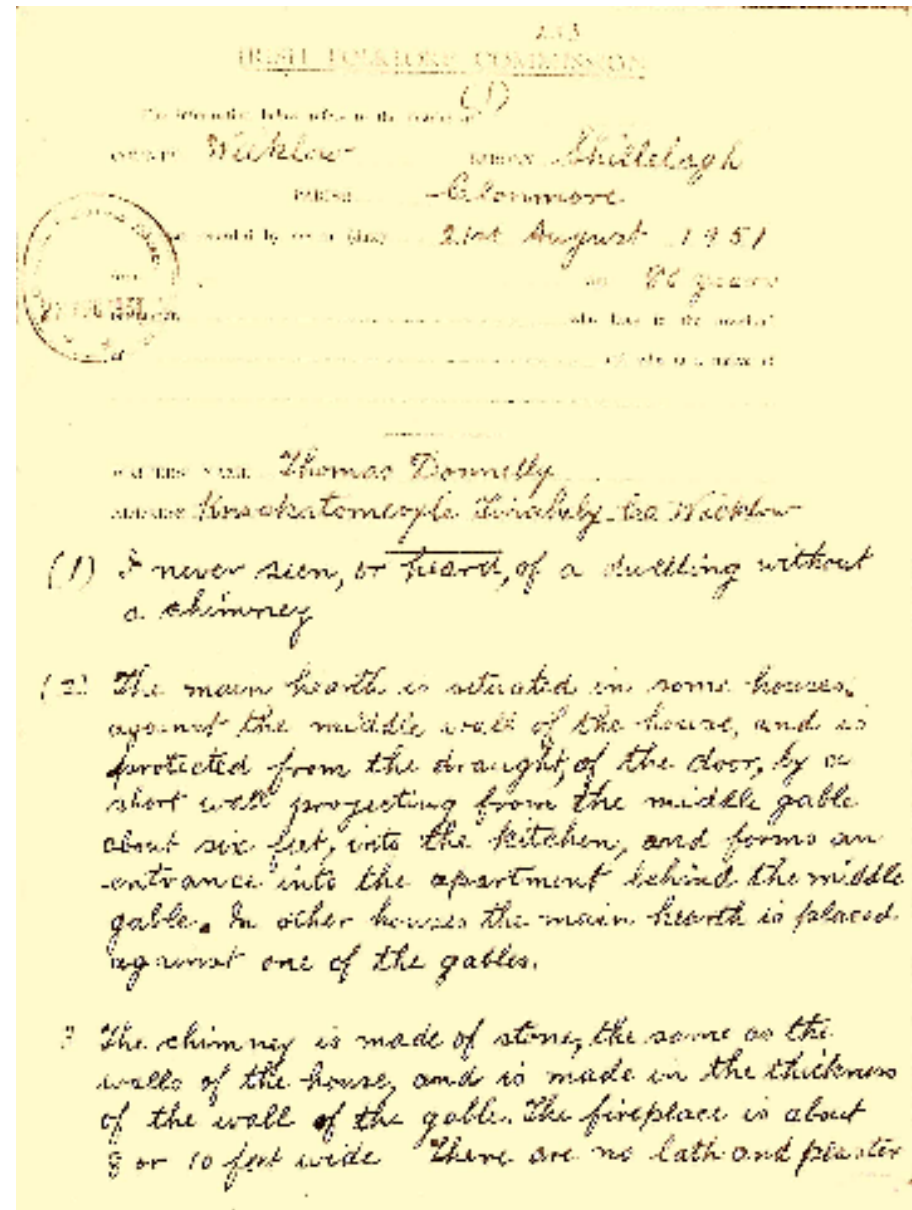
Alan Gailey later offered another classification with emphasis on the relationship of the front entrance and the hearth. He proposed two house types, now widely used in categorisation of Irish vernacular houses:

1. Direct-entry, with the hearth away from the entrance (see drawing no. 6)
2. Hearth-lobby entry, with a jamb-wall or internal porch inside the entrance (see drawing no. 5)

Campbell refers to the adjacency of fire and door with an intervening partition as being a well known feature in England and a relatively late innovation, which cannot be regarded an independent or original Irish type.

#### Irish Folklore Commission

A questionnaire survey carried out by the Irish Folklore Com-



mission at the end of 1945 provides a valuable primary source of information on house forms, materials, construction and of how the houses were occupied, giving first hand insight into rural ways of life which still thrived in that period.

The number of respondents was about four hundred across the whole country. Respondents were drawn from all walks of life with much help from primary teachers in particular. The main information sought was on roof forms, materials and thatching methods. Six answers were received from Co. Wicklow. These are referred to in detail later in this document.

#### **Landscape and Settlement Pattern in Wicklow**

The landscape in Wicklow contains a variety of topographies ranging from central mountains to lowlands and coastal settings with traditional farmland and more than usual amounts of forests. It also offers different building materials with an abundance of good quality building stone that was exploited by generations of skilled craftsmen from local quarries. As a general rule the east and lowland areas have traditionally been the more prosperous regions.

Like most of the rest of the country, domestic vernacular architecture in Wicklow is predominantly rural. Urban traditions were less strong in Ireland than in other European countries and the traditional farming way of life remained quite strong until relatively recently. From the seventeenth century farmsteads were dispersed, located on the lands worked

by the farmer and reached from the roads, sometimes by means of lanes, the holdings in lowland Wicklow, as throughout lowland areas of Leinster and Munster being of medium size.

Several clustered settlements found in the county are an interesting exception to this pattern. Clusters known as clachans are shown on the first edition Ordnance Survey (c. 1840) to have been widespread in northern and western Ireland, but in Waterford, Wexford and south Kilkenny where Anglo-Norman settlement was more concentrated, farm clusters following the model of mainland European mediaeval villages have a different and much older origin. A cluster of substantial farmhouses recorded at Muckduff Lower near Baltinglass may owe its form to this tradition (Record no. 60, drawing no. 1).

The massive expansion of the Irish population in century preceding the Famine saw intensive settlement expand into previously unsettled land and the emergence of the clachan, a nucleated group of houses where landholding was organised communally in a cultivated 'infield', and a less intensively farmed 'outfield' surrounded by grazed commonage. Clachans were a specific response to harsh ecological and demographical conditions and were generally located in marginal mountainous, hilly or boggy conditions, manure from cattle grazing providing essential fertiliser for potato cultivation in the infield, where the 'rundale' system of periodic redistribution ensured fairer distribution of all types of soil. Houses were built cheaply using local materials and heated with readily available turf. Though expansion into poor marginal

land was primarily a western phenomenon, Whelan points out that a tier of small farms operating the rundale system also developed in mountainous areas in the Wicklow, Blackstairs and Slieve Bloom Mountains above the larger lowland farms. These mountainous areas above the 150m contour had been communal mountain pastures until privatised in the 17<sup>th</sup> century, and these newer farms follow some patterns more common to the north and west of the country than to the surrounding lowlands.

### Survival of Vernacular Houses in Wicklow

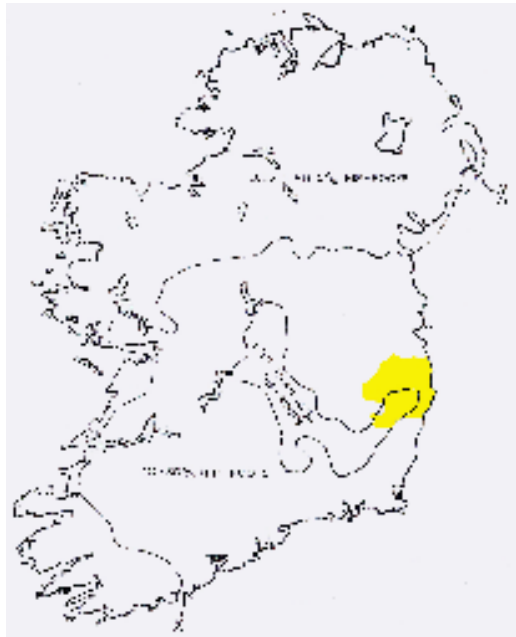
Proximity to Dublin has changed traditional relationships to the land to a greater degree in northern and eastern parts of the county. As in other counties many vernacular houses have disappeared in Co. Wicklow due to a combination of depopulation and replacement with modern dwellings.

To a certain degree historic events play a role, and Aalen points out that many of the older dwellings in the west and south of the county were destroyed in the rebellion of 1798.

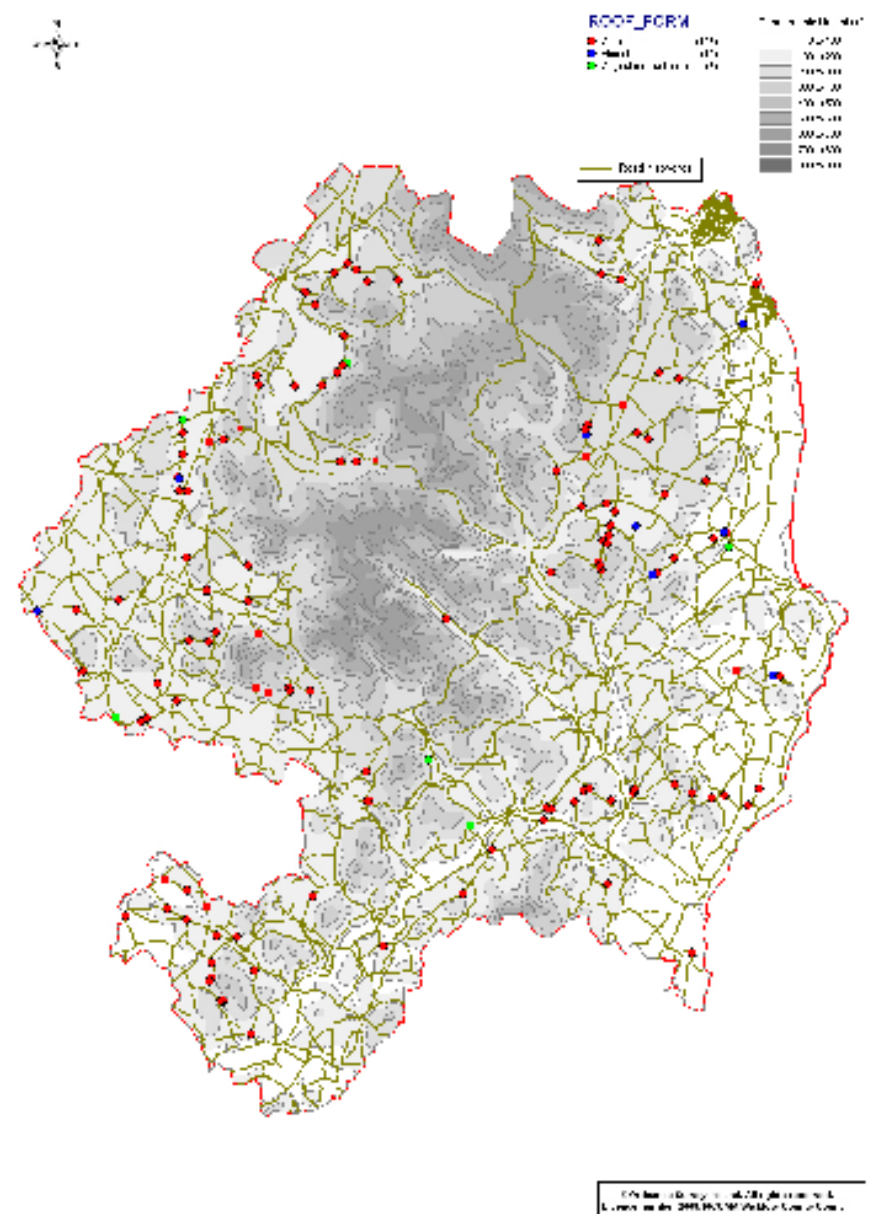
A feature of the vernacular architecture of Wicklow today is the low number of surviving thatched houses in the county. Although the neighbouring counties of Wexford and Kildare have considerable numbers of thatch roofs, Wicklow and Carlow are notable in having very few. The OPW Higginbotham Survey of 1987 recorded only 15 examples of thatch in Wicklow but over two hundred in Wexford. This survey found only 10 thatched houses, and few of these retain the traditional thatching methods of the local vernacular. A further 51 ex-







Map of the distribution of roof types in vernacular houses based on The Questionnaire System



amples were judged to have been formerly thatched, compared to 41 originally slated. The original roofing of 39 houses could not be ascertained to any degree of certainty.

The disparity between Wicklow and other eastern counties may be attributed to the local availability of other roofing materials in Wicklow. Aalen suggests as a reason that slated roofs were long-established in Wicklow and Carlow. In upland Wicklow an explanation may be the relative scarcity of arable land to produce wheaten straw and requiring fewer workhorses, resulting in less production of oaten straw.

#### Roof Forms in Co. Wicklow

Based on the results of the questionnaire survey of 1945 a map was drawn up by the Folklore Commission (see below) showing the countrywide distribution of houses with characteristic hipped or gable-ended roof types. This showed that gable type houses predominated in the northerly and westerly parts of the country, the remainder having predominantly hip-roofed houses.

A variation emerged within the hip-roofed region with an area having less than 10% hipped roofs forming a C-shaped belt along the boundary of Leinster and Munster, stretching up into the southern part of Co. Wicklow. The questionnaire survey offers no explanation of this phenomenon.

The present survey vindicates this finding for Co. Wicklow, as the overriding majority of houses surveyed had gabled roofs, in all 124 houses or 86% of the total recorded. Only 10 hipped or formerly hipped roofs were found to survive. These gener-







ally had either a thatched roof, or a replacement roof of corrugated iron, although gable-ended thatched roofs were formerly the prevailing form. Slated roofs were almost invariably gable-ended.

### Plan Arrangements and House Types

In both direct-entry and hearth-bobby types the kitchen was the central functional and circulation space in the Irish vernacular house. In the hearth-lobby plan type the point of entry is separated by a 'jamb wall' to one side of the fireplace with a distinctive spy-window for those sitting by the hearth to see out through the open door or typical half-door and observe visitors. In the direct-entry plan form the entrance into the kitchen is unshielded from outside. The survey showed that Wicklow has examples of both entry types in similar proportion, 51 direct-entry and 63 lobby entry. 25 houses had other layouts (e.g. two-storey with central stairs) or had lost the chimney and could not therefore be categorised without access to the interior. This confirms Aalen's assertion that the number of direct-entry houses in Wicklow is unusual in eastern Ireland.

Earlier houses contained one or two rooms. In others the kitchen gave access to bedrooms at one end and sometimes the lower end was used as a byre for cattle, the slope allowing drainage away from the dwelling. A common development over time was that the cattle were moved to an out-house and this lower end of the house was converted to use as a reception room or parlour as seen in grander houses, giving rise to an elongated plan form. The houses visited in







Wicklow have predominantly one access doorway to the house with some adapted and altered houses having a rear doorway from kitchen.

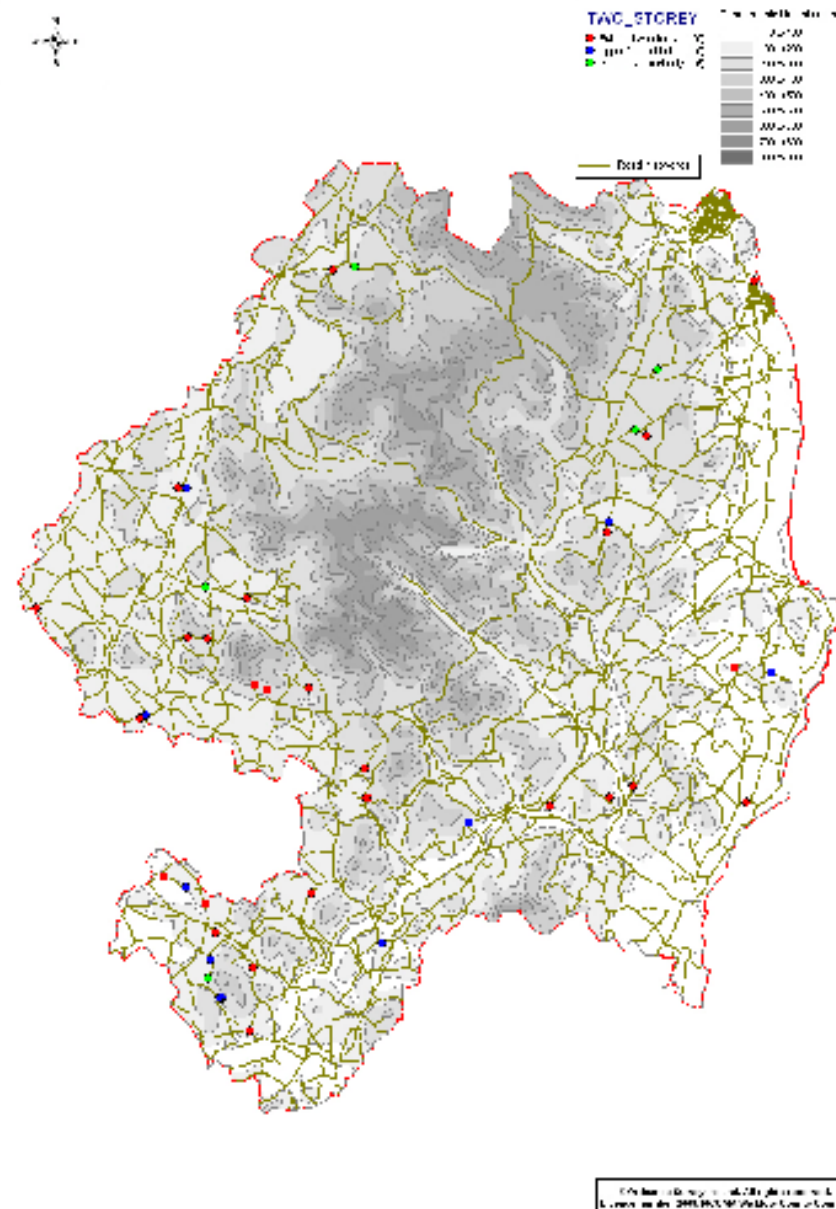
Campbell refers to the subdivision of rooms in Irish houses with a thin partition wall or *síleail* occurring at the lower end of the house. He believes that additions tended to be attached to the chimney gable, as would make sense in terms of retaining heat. Further accommodation is sometimes provided by insertion of lofts above the bedrooms reached by ladders from the kitchen.

#### **Addition Houses**

Economic development in the nineteenth century led to the enlargement and improvement of many houses. Many existing houses were extended in length as described above or had an extra floor added, and some two-storey houses have undergone considerable evolution in length and height to reach their present size. Addition of an upper floor helped conserve heat and provide more privacy. Sometimes the upper storey was added over a part of the house only, often above the existing sleeping quarters. Isolated examples of this were recorded across the county, mostly in the lower slopes of the mountains (Records no. 5, 21, 70 137 and 140). A full two-storey house demonstrated social status and the addition of an upper floor was often a way to attain a grander appearance, emulating the formal houses of mainstream architectural styles associated with the gentry and nobility.

The added upper-storey gives interesting instances of place-









ment of the stairs. In some of the examples surveyed these were situated in the corner of the kitchen. The later addition of an upper storey can be identified by the position of the chimney or layout of the upper floor determined by the vernacular direct-entry or hearth-lobby plan. Irregular fenestration, seeking to correct the lack of symmetry in the original ground floor, lends such houses an individual and idiosyncratic appeal, a good example of which is located at Mulycagh Lower near Blessington (Record no. 41).

#### Developed Vernacular Houses

During the nineteenth century two-storey slated houses were increasingly built by ordinary farmers. Although typically symmetrical in elevation, many examples conform to the old pattern of being one room deep with few rear windows and traditional hearth arrangements. These houses fuse formal and vernacular features to varying degree and many must be seen as belonging in the vernacular tradition. Simpler examples have gable-end chimneys, others chimneystacks on either side of a central hall and stair, sometimes with a hipped roof. The latter tend to be more formalised, often having a fanlight over the front door. Aalen refers to these houses as Developed Vernacular Forms and many interesting examples of the more vernacular variety were recorded in the survey (See Map 3: Two-storey houses).

One interesting house visited was a three-bay two-storey house built at right angles against the end gable of an older single-storey hearth-lobby house (Record no. 86). Functioning as two houses these were interconnected by a central pro-

jection at the back of the newer house and the kitchen of the original house seems to have been used for the newer house as well.

### Houses of Labourers and Small Holders

Landless labourers were historically housed in small cabins built of mud or sod with one or two rooms, often lacking doors, windows or chimneys and sometimes built on the road margin or the edge of commons or bogs. Examples of these impermanent dwellings have not survived.

On large estates landlords frequently provided housing for labourers employed directly in the demesne. These dwellings with stone walls and slate roofs can be readily identified by their formal architectural style, and belong firmly in the mainstream architectural tradition.

The Labourers Act of 1883 sought to alleviate the wretched living conditions of most landless labourers by enabling state subvention to be provided for building small houses for rural labourers. Such houses were built across Ireland by local authorities, the Congested Districts Board, the Land Commission and County Councils. They are more widespread in southern and eastern areas where larger farm sizes gave rise to more labourers. House designs varied somewhat according to region, date and the authority that built them, but they were often derived from vernacular forms, and make a valuable contribution to the rural environment. However, as these houses were constructed to conscious pattern designs they remain outside the vernacular tradition and were there-







fore not recorded in the survey.

### Topographical Relationships

As Wicklow is a hilly, mountainous county it is not surprising that its topography has influenced the form of many of its traditional houses. Features influenced by the sloped topography include the embedding of houses into slopes. Many houses are placed parallel to the contours of a slope with few or no windows on the high side of the terrain, generally the back of the house.

Several of the houses visited are placed at right angles to the contours and have stepped or sloped floors inside. The roof ridge often sloped parallel to the ground and the window openings stepped down along the elevation to follow the terrain. Internally some houses have steps at the doors between rooms. Others have sloping floors or in the case of the latter, a steeply sloped floor and steps beside the hearth. An example at Carriggower near Greystones (record no. 140) takes advantage of the slope to provide two levels at the lower end of the slope.

### Site Features

An interesting feature found at some locations and worthy of further investigation is the existence of thick boundary walls with trees planted at regular spacing. The grand scale of the trees almost conceals one house from view (see plan). In other locations walls of this type have been removed between fields leaving the trees to appear to stand on pedes-

tals. One house owner told of planting trees close to the house to provide shelter for birds in the hope that they would prefer this to nesting in the thatch.

Interesting wall features include the placing of bright white coloured quartz stone on the tops of walls near houses, said to have been for superstitious reasons. One example had quartz stones placed to either side of the path across the garden to the front door, the bright stones perhaps intended



to guide the way in poor light.

Farm and field gate posts in some parts of the county are made of tall single pieces of squared granite firmly anchored into the ground. Sometimes these columns of primitive appearance were found as door posts and lintels in the dwellings themselves as well as in outbuildings in almost boastful abundance. These distinctive features attest to the strong stone-cutting tradition in Co. Wicklow.

### Characteristics of Wicklow Houses

In his essay on the Vernacular Rural Dwellings of the Wicklow Mountains, Aalen points out that historical circumstances and the necessity of adapting to the upland location caused the development of distinct regional characteristics in the houses of the Wicklow Mountains. He notes that, while the role of landlords was influential in the building of houses, this was not decisive and gives this as one of the reasons for the survival of a regional vernacular.

Several features distinguish the Wicklow house from most of the lowlands of south-eastern Ireland. The following characteristics can be noted in the vernacular houses of rural Co. Wicklow:

- Hip-roofed formerly thatched, and possibly mud-walled houses typical of south-eastern Ireland survive in some eastern lowland areas and close to the south Kildare border.
- Gable-ended houses of stone construction are more prevalent, with thatched or slated roofs.
- Use of quarried granite, particularly in gable ends.
- Examples of both hearth-lobby and direct-entry types, with an unusually high number of direct entry houses for eastern Ireland.
- Scarcity of surviving thatched roofs, though these were formerly widespread on houses and outbuildings.
- Many vernacular slated roofs.
- No examples of the “thatched mansion” type known to survive.

## Farmyards

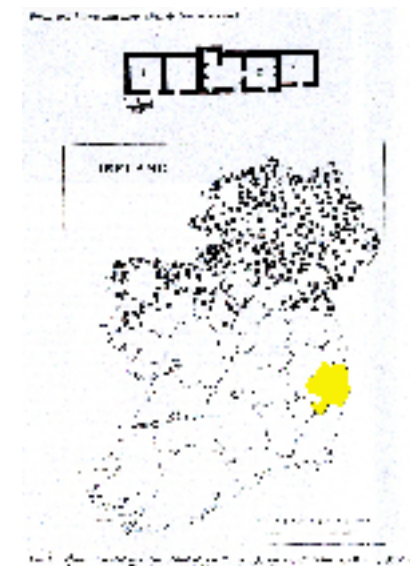
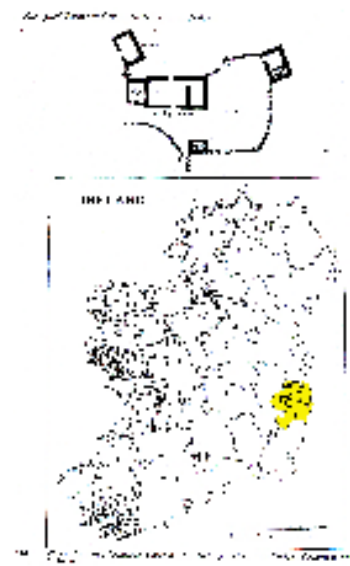
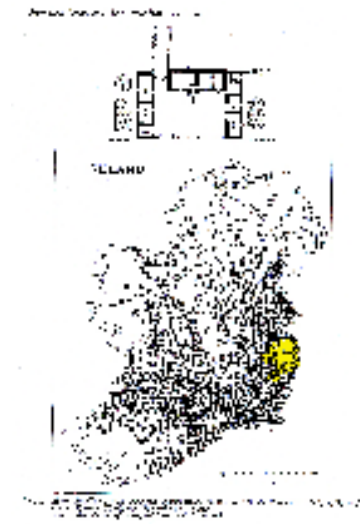
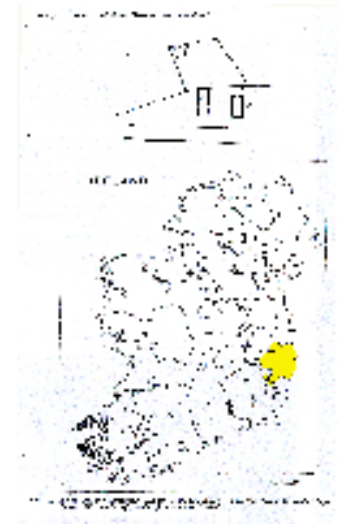
In his article 'Irish Farmyard Types', Kevin Danaher gives a general description of farming activity in Ireland and its needs in terms of buildings. He categorises farms by acreage, as small (less than 30 acres), medium (30 to 100 acres) and large (over 100 acres). In Leinster and Munster he noted the prevalence of medium-sized farms, and Wicklow appears not to have been an exception.

As a general rule he found that crops played a secondary role relative to dairy and stock-raising. The size and form of an Irish farmyard depended on the number of milking cows kept by the farmer. Although most livestock could remain outside almost all year round, shelter needed to be provided in the farmyard for dairy cows during the winter.

Danaher classifies vernacular farmyards into four types and has mapped their distribution across Ireland to show regional differences. These are:

- Courtyard layout
- Extended layout
- Scattered layout
- Parallel layout

Examples of all types were found in Co. Wicklow in the survey (See Map of Farmyard Layouts).









### Courtyard Layout

Danaher identified that the main type of farmyard arrangement used in Munster and Leinster for farms of medium size was the courtyard layout, with dwelling and outbuildings forming three or more sides to a courtyard. The survey found this to be the predominant form in Co. Wicklow also, and 55 examples were recorded, excluding 15 further examples where an orthogonal arrangement suggests the remains of a courtyard.

In the case where buildings do not form all sides of the yard, walls and gates complete the enclosure, often located at the roadside. The dwelling house is usually parallel to and facing the road with buildings to either side or it is placed perpendicular to the road with a similar relationship to the outbuildings. The house and outbuildings usually stand separate to one another and are connected by gates and walls to control animals. The gate size is uniform and often gives the width between buildings. Investigation of one of the arrangements (record no. 127) found that subdividing walls in courtyards had been removed from the courtyard, giving a larger scale appearance than had originally been intended.

Modern steel haysheds, by nature of their size and the space needed for access with modern machinery, are usually placed in haggards beyond traditional courtyard arrangements, even if the original outbuildings remain and are no longer in use. Some owners also said that outbuildings had



been removed to provide access for vehicles and machinery or simply because buildings fell into disuse.

### Extended Layout

Danaher comments that this form was usually for arrangements of fewer farm buildings and primarily located in the north of the country. However, the survey found 27 examples, though some of these may be remnants of parallel or courtyard layouts. A very long extended type set parallel to the road was recorded at Killeagh near Arklow (record no. 87), its form possibly the result of the topography or the desire to have several gates on to the road.

### Scattered Layout

Danaher's map shows that examples of this layout are most numerous in the western part of the Ireland. Of interest to this survey are isolated concentrations in the Galtee Mountains, Blackstairs Mountains and throughout Co. Wicklow. Topography would therefore appear to be the determining factor, as scattered arrangements are sometimes determined by irregularities in the site. Thirteen examples of this type were found during the survey, coinciding with Danaher's findings.

### Parallel layout

Most numerous in Kerry and West Cork, Danaher shows that this type was also found across eastern Ireland and Ulster. Only one of these was found in the survey at Oldcourt near





Blessington (record no. 5). The position corresponds to one shown by Danaher.

### Farmyard Outbuildings

Farm outbuildings were often thatched. One thatched example was found in the survey (Record no. 40), but remnants of the scraw underlayer were noted beneath tin roofs in several farmyards. The outbuildings served as cow houses, stables, pigsty, hen house, barns and other stores. Structures for smaller scale accommodation of pigs, dogs and poultry were usually found close to the house, as their use was closely associated with the running of the household. Another feature found were ground level recesses in walls, also close to the house, which provided nesting spaces for hens, geese or other fowl. Cart houses were found during the survey, some with remains of carts and old farm machinery. Of the examples visited several had stone arches to the cart house, this may have come with increasing prosperity, making use of the Wicklow mason's skills.

Even where farmhouses are still occupied, most outbuildings have fallen out of use with the modernisation of farming methods. The emergence of tractors and larger scale organisation of milking cows called for more flexible structures. Vernacular cow-houses which had to be cleaned out manually with dung forks were superseded by larger milking parlours and cattle-sheds, often replacing the vernacular outbuildings and making the original layout difficult to discern.

### Other Arrangements



An unusual example found at Coolkenna near Tinahely (record no. 67) does not conform with any of the main farm-yard types described above. An arrangement of some fine stone outbuildings behind a dwelling house facing to the road, formed a sequence of small and roughly equal-sized courtyards, one behind the next, reached by a laneway along the side (see drawing no. 4).

Two examples of farmsteads were found in very close proximity to one another, one at Lemonstown near Hollywood (record no. 31) was a collection of three farms and outbuildings whereby the farm dwellings were arranged in a cross-type arrangement, so that the land directly to the rear of two of the houses belonged to their neighbours.

A further example found at Muckduff Lower near Baltinglass (record no. 60) was of a collection of four two-storey houses of more or less same size and type in a close arrangement on a hillside with a good number of outbuildings to give an village-like atmosphere, possibly a farm cluster in the mediaeval tradition which survives in parts of the south-east. According to one owner the farms were been traditionally small and their close layout gives an interesting incidence of stone paths, steps and water ways. The Ordnance Survey map shows pathways out of the settlement to fields or possibly other houses in the vicinity. Two-storey houses of the type found in the cluster also existed in at least two other locations not far away on the same hill slope (see drawing no.1).

For the most part, dispersed settlement predominates throughout Wicklow and this conforms to the pattern

throughout the country. However, other non-farm arrangements are worth noting. A house at Ballyknockan (record no. 13) forms part of a ruined settlement, possibly associated with quarrying.

Four examples of forges associated with houses were found, generally at crossroads (records no. 2, 12, 49 and 83), which in former times must have been a very widespread type.

Some examples of cottier's houses were found, located parallel and close to the road with no outbuildings, as at Ballytunny near Arklow (record no. 98).





## Materials

### Walling

In 'Vernacular Rural Dwellings in Ireland' Patricia Lysaght points out the lack of suitable timber for building purposes due to the destruction of the Irish forests in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. This meant that stone or clay have predominated as building materials for mass walls in vernacular house construction. Clay walling required a base of stone and the eaves had to project beyond the facade to protect the walls from water run-off from the roof. Clay houses were found mainly in the drier east and south-east of Ireland. Despite the better thermal qualities of clay and less condensation or 'weeping' of walls, mud structures seem to be fewer in number in Wicklow, perhaps due to the ready availability of other forms of wall construction.

A distinction of houses in Wicklow is the use of quarried granite from the Wicklow hills, with boulders and quarried stone. Aalen points out that stone gables are a very dominant vernacular feature in Wicklow, this was borne out by the examples found in the survey. The use of stone extends to the use of granite for gate posts, corn stands and other outdoor features. Their use shows a wide range of sophistication in building details. An example at Coolkenna near Tinahely (record no. 67) of a stone dwelling and outbuildings has recesses cut in the lintels of the dwelling windows facing the road to imitate a flat stone arch.



Sills are in most cases of granite. A strong tradition of stone mason's work was found in the sites recorded. Lowland limestone was also used for walls, these were also constructed of rubble stone and of clay and combinations of both. Examples of mud-walled houses were found at Aghowle Lower near Tinahely and at Ballinahinch near Wicklow Town (records 66 and 102). Rubble stone walls are generally of 600mm to 700mm thickness. Sometimes the stone is exposed but most usually has a protective coat of render and lime wash. The following information on building materials was taken from entries in the Folklore Commission Questionnaires of 1945.

*They were built chiefly from yellow clay and mortar, and the majority of them were composed of only one or two rooms. When the walls were being built straw was put into them to keep them from slipping in. (N.F.C.S. 914, p. 294) Joseph Perkins, Merginstown, Dunlavin*

*Long ago houses were built with yellow clay and stones but wealthier people had them built with lime and sand. Some of these houses may still be seen in farm houses and in the mountains poor people still inhabit them.*

*To obtain this clay people had to dig a considerable distance into the ground and when they came to the yellow clay they had to get a pick to break the clay. When this clay was mixed with water it became very soft and took about a week to set. (N.F.C.S. 914, p. 339) Eddie Sinnott, Dunlavin*

The foundations are often a strong feature of the houses, being wider than the walls and often with pronounced corner stones.







### Roofs

Roof structures were traditionally of thatch on a wooden structure erected on the mass walls and stabilised in part by the chimney and gables. Wicklow had significant forests that provided oak and birch. Limbs could be used for structure, these were pinned together using timber dowels, and later on metal pins were used. An underlayer called 'scraw' consisting of sod, peat or heather was laid over the structure, into which the thatch was fixed using 'scallop' or bent hazel and willow twigs. Examples of crude timber structures and scraw were found in many buildings where thatched roofs have long since been replaced with corrugated iron.

Thatch requires periodic renewal. Many different materials were traditionally used across Ireland: wheaten straw, flax, rye straw and oaten straw, river locations provided reeds, and heather and grasses were used in some locations for out-houses. These all have different life spans as thatching materials.

A recent report on thatch in Ireland, presented to the Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government makes three classifications of historic thatch material:

1. Scavenger Thatch: for the poorest houses, of heather, broom, bracken, marram grass etc. This type of thatch is non-existent outside the museum context.
2. Vernacular Thatch: for most applications of locally grown wheat, oats, rye, barley or flax in local styles.
3. Landlord Thatch: consciously romantic and picturesque as

found in lodges and estate cottages, generally based on English decorative styles and often using reed. This is an emerging phenomenon with houses that are being thatched for the first time or rethatched, often using English thatchers.

From his researches Kevin Danaher mapped the methods of thatching (see plan left) as:

- Rope thatching: mostly confined to Atlantic coast districts and fulfilling the need to combat wind loosening of the thatch.
- Thrust thatching: used throughout Leinster this involves thrusting thatch into layers of thatch already attached to the roof and securing a ridge with straw in one of several ways.
- Pinned thatching: in parts of the country this was the most popular form of thatching. Here the thatch is pinned to the roof structure below by using scallops of willow or hazel. At the ridge the straw is bent over and fastened on each side with rows of scallops

According to Danaher pinning and thrust thatching existed together in Wicklow. The following entries from the Folklore Commission questionnaire survey give insight into a thatching tradition which has now all but disappeared in Co. Wicklow.

*The roof of old houses was supported by couples, made larch poles, fastened together at the top by wooden pegs, the couples were placed on the walls, five or six feet apart, and*

*connected by what was then called ribberies, light poles running from one pair of couples to the other, these ribberies supported the scraws, to which the first coat of thatch was stitched, with straw ropes. The scraws were tough sods, cut in a bog in lengths of 5 or 6 feet, and laid evenly on the ribberies. The scraws kept out the wind, and kept the thatch from showing through the roof. (N.F.C.S. 1309, p. 234) Thomas Donnelly, Knochatomcoyle, Tinahely, 1951.*

*A framework was made of oak poles, the stronger ones being used for the "couples" and the lighter ones for the ribberies. These poles were chopped down in the wood and just lightly dressed with an axe. The ribberies were fastened with oak pegs. A hole was made in the ribberies and the couple (lapping) and the oak peg was put in. Even when the roof was gone these oak pegs were to be found quite good. A "bog-scrav"... was cut, and cut long enough to come from the top to the wall. (Best cut in summer when the scraw is light) but thin, about 1½" thick and 2' wide. These were put on to cover the framework, and to hinder the heather from falling through.*

*Next came the heather. The people burned patches in the bog, so as to have "roofing heather" in a year or two. Then when it was about 2 years old, nice and fine and young (so as to "go together"), it was pulled - and a stiff job it was to pull it. It was put on, about 6" depth of it. They began at the wall and thatched up to the point of the roof with it. (If it were kept dry, it would, and did, last 100 years). Over this came the thatch-straw, rushes or "flaggers", which grew on the banks of rivers. Poor people went off to the*



*hills and cut rushes and carried them home in bundles. They too, (the “poor”) used flaggers which were more enduring than straw. (N.F.C.S. 1309, pg. 247) Rose Byrne, Rathcoyle, Kiltegan 1952.*

The OPW Higginbotham Survey of 1987 listed some 15 thatched houses in Co. Wicklow, all of which could not be found in the current survey. Of the 10 found only 6 of the still had thatched roofs, some of which had been extended or remodelled. One had disappeared in a fire a few years ago (Higg. No. 5 in Delgany), two were in ruins (Higg. Nos. 6 and 13) and one had been slated.

Three thatched houses and one thatched outbuilding were recorded which had not been included in the Higginbotham Survey (records 40, 43, 100 and 111). The owner of house 111 showed photographs of what had once been a corrugated galvanised metal roof, presumably originally thatched. The house had since been extended and dormers added and the new thatch roof bore little relation to the vernacular form and style of the historic original.

To ensure a water-proof joint with gable walls, the thatch can oversail the wall as at the eaves. The use of thatch softens the roof form and makes the roof the visually dominant element by projecting over the walls. This contrasts strongly with the more regular architectural shape of a house and roof when slate or metal is the roofing material.

The Mourne Heritage Trust refers to the use of copper as a flashing material for roof junctions in the Dublin region because of the copper mines in the Wicklow mountains; this is



in contrast to other areas where lead is used. This may warrant closer examination in a more detailed survey to see if it also applies to Wicklow itself.

Chimneys were originally without pots and this was evident in some examples in the survey. Later pots of metal appeared in the Georgian period and clay pots became the standard thereafter. Many of the latter are to be seen in the houses visited. No houses were found without chimneys though some were still remembered in the 1952 Irish Folklore Commission Survey.

*Between Carrig-a-theme and Ballinguile (proper) is a place called Mullawn Socair. There must have been about 100 families living there. The little walls are there still and the marks of the little haggards. The little apartments were only 8' x8' as can be seen from the grassy foundations. They must have been little huts put up to house the people chased at the time of the Planters.*

*All the houses in the town has chimneys except two – David Brown's house in Slieveboy and Cassidy's in Carrig-a-theme. David was a hand loom weaver. His house had no chimney. The fire was on the ground at the end wall. The smoke went up the wall and out through a hole in the thatch - over which was placed an old wooden box (no bottom of course!)*

*The second house, Cassidy's - was owned by a widow. She and her son came from the midlands and lived in a tiny hut, with no chimney .... there was no chimney to be seen from the outside, but the smoke went through a hole. However there was a kind of chimney inside, built into a hollow in the*





*wall, and the smoke went up along it. (N.F.C.S. 1309, pg. 244) Rose Byrne, Kiltegan, 1952*

No gutters were used in thatched houses and they were often not used in slate roofed houses either. Sometimes guttering was used in the latter in order to provide relief of water flow from the roof at the front door. Traditionally gutters would have been of cast iron. In time galvanised metal roofs became a replacement for thatch with the benefits of ease of application, low maintenance and low cost. It has become part of the iconography of the traditional Irish house with its ribbed structure and red or green painted finish.

One house visited had recently replaced the galvanised roof finish with Canadian shingles to overcome the problem of providing a lightweight and cost effective material for a roof with sparse timber structure. The Home Owners Handbook published by the Mourne Heritage Trust refers to the wide use of wooden shingles in that region, stating that their popularity waned when suitable timber could no longer be found. The visual effect of the shingles is one of lightness and the 'blond' effect is in some ways not unlike thatch.

Many of the houses visited had slate roofs and their owners claim that they had not been previously thatched. In the Irish Folklore Commission Survey Mr. Thomas Donnelly further describes roof construction and the use of slate as follows:

*The houses built in this locality inside the last two hundred years were roofed with bog deal, and the lofts supported by bog oak beams, which are still as sound as a bell, they were slated with slates from Killcavan quarries. The slates were*

*secured to the laths with one nail, and the bog deal pig over the lath, and the nails are nearly rusted away, but the bog deal pig is still sound. (N.F.C.1309 pg. 235)*







### Doors and windows

Entrance doors are usually without glazing and made of sheeted wood, a vulnerable construction, this often needs reinforcing and repair at ground level to be weatherproof. The most well-known type was the half door. In the Irish Folklore Commission Schools Collection reference was often made to this as a feature of old houses. It had the advantage of allowing ventilation and controlling the movement of animals and poultry. Another variation found to survive in two houses surveyed was a folding entrance door of sheeted wood. This door folds back and so it does not narrow the space in the lobby behind and block the way to the room behind the kitchen.



Windows were originally non-existent or minimal in size. Like chimneys windows were formerly taxed and light was provided by opening the door. The small window openings were often closed with boards, fleece or straw. When windows became a normal part of the house they were often located away from the prevailing wind. Surviving windows found in the survey were for the most part of wooden sliding sash type with one-over-one or two-over-two pane format. Many houses had enlarged window openings identified by the use of concrete window sills. Some examples had boarded lining to the inside of the window openings.

Glass, unlike most other building materials in a vernacular house, was not readily available. It was traditionally expensive, subject to tax and a hence a luxury. Information from the Irish Folklore Commission Schools Collection of 1937-38 in



regard to Wicklow refers to windows being small due to taxation and openings being filled variously with slates, sheepskins, kid-skins, bags of straw and boards. Windows are rare in gables, even when no chimneys are located there, except sometimes at high level for lighting a small habitable space in the roof.

### Hearths

The interiors of most houses visited have been heavily adapted over time. Many of the kitchen hearths are now occupied by solid-fuel cookers. However, some examples exist of kitchen hearths in their original construction. In some examples the original large openings survive, where modern cookers and heating have been placed elsewhere in the kitchen. Canopies of wattle and daub, interwoven twigs covered with earthen plaster, were the main feature of the traditional kitchen hearth. Several examples were found of large stone arches over the hearth that exhibit Wicklow's strong tradition of stone masonry.

*Every house in Ballinguile had the wicker chimney - "black" sallies interwoven. Then a coating of marl clay about 2" thick (to protect it from the fire). The rougher the sallies were woven, the better the clay stuck. A fellow named Hinch worked at nothing else – making and repairing these chimneys. There were, and are, chimneys in the district same as above, but without the marl plaster. In later years, when the old sally chimneys – or the beams underneath got moth eaten or worn out, they were replaced with lath and plaster chimneys or wood. (N.F.C. 130,9 pg. 246) Rose Byrne,*





*Rathcoyle, Kiltegan 1952*

The wattle and daub canopies projected out from the chimney wall with additional support provided by a wood beam resting in the side walls of the house or on wooden posts or on the jamb wall in the case of a lobby- entrance. A storage shelf often found to one side of the canopy on this beam was called a thawluck or táilleog.

*The táilóg, still called that, is a roomy shelf near the chimney cowl on one side. Things to be kept dry are kept there. Salmon salted and smoked used to be stored in the táilóg till the mine water (Avoca mines) prevented them from coming up our rivers from Arklow. (N.F.C.1309, pg. 238) 1951*

The large opening beneath the heart canopy could provide seating places for people beside the fire as well as nooks for fuel and ash storage, wheel bellows and cooking cranes. Some benches were found in the survey along the lobby wall side of the openings.

Aalen notes that *'more commonly, in Wicklow, the cooking pots were suspended on a metal hook and chain which was pegged high up on the back wall of the fire or attached to a roof couple and hung down the chimney'*. In addition to the remains of cooking cranes, one example at Kilbride near Wicklow (record 127) had high level recess for baking to one side of the fire with a dome-like ceiling in the stone construction

*Turf was always used in this townland. Wheel bellows were not used and were not necessary! They would blow the light*





*ashes of the turf around the place. Mrs. Farrell got one in, and had to take it out again. There was not, or is not one in the townland. There was nothing used to “blow” the fire – and no ventilation except what came from the door.*  
(N.F.C.1309 pg. 245) Rose Byrne, Rathcoyle, Kiltegan 1952

### Interiors

Internal doors are of the same type of construction as the external doors and several examples still exist. Some remains of screen walls in wood were found. Ceilings were generally of wood sheeting with wooden structure above. Examples observed were of large beams with joists notched into the beams. At a houses in Kilbride near Wicklow and Park near Arklow (record 92 and 127) the joists have a rough profile indicating how they had been cut with an adze.

Some wooden wainscoting was found, but very little. Most floors were of concrete or tile with some clay or turf floors found in abandoned houses. Many fireplaces still had their hearth stones. Two examples were found of large stone-paved floors, but both of these were to outbuildings.

Various recesses in the external walls were observed, they varied in size and location in rooms throughout the houses visited. They usually have wooden frames and shelves with doors for concealment. The example at Kilbride near Wicklow (record no. 127), formerly a Quaker-owned house had an elaborate arched wooden screen to an opening behind double doors in a room believed to have been used for religious meetings.







Some wooden stairs and balustrades were found in different states of repair. They ranged from simple examples at Park near Arklow (record no. 92) to the Quaker-owned example at Kilbride (record no. 127) of pre- or early Georgian balustrades and handrails. Several examples were found of access to roof spaces for sleeping accommodation. Access to the roof space was by several different means:

1. From a kitchen of full height to the underside of the pitched roof by means of a door to one side, above the ground floor bedroom door. This would have been reached by a ladder.
2. Through a similar arrangement, but from a lower kitchen, the doors in this case are directly above one another and the lower door is especially low.
3. Through a hatch in the ceiling of one of two small bedrooms at the end of the house.



### Furniture

Furniture was traditionally narrow and placed around the kitchen walls, no article occupies the central area of the room and this is a general characteristic of vernacular farmhouses in Ireland, even in larger houses where space was not the reason. Aalen put forward as one possible explanation that the hearth originally lay open in the middle of the floor and served as the focal point of the room. In these early phases of development the family would have slept on the floor around the fire, and when the fire moved to one end of

the room a void was left that has not been filled since. The displacement of the furniture to the perimeter continued, even when separate bedrooms were provided at the ends of the house.

As in other Irish vernacular houses, the main pieces of traditional furniture in Wicklow houses are the settle-bed, falling table, open-fronted dresser, fireside seat and benches. Settle-beds and falling tables were space-saving devices. Dressers traditionally offered a practical way of screening rooms from the kitchen and generally face opposite the fireplace with a door to one side to the space beyond. In one example in Carriggower near Greystones (record no. 140) the house runs against the sloping topography with two levels at one end. A sitting room is located at the lower level with sleeping rooms above and the stairs to the upper level from the kitchen is screened by the dresser.

*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 pg. 249) Rose Byrne, Rathcoyle, Kiltegan 1952.*

In ‘Furnishings of Traditional Houses in the Wicklow Hills’, Aalen states that there was no evidence of box-beds having been used in the region. He remarks on the surprising uniformity of arrangements examined. The position of the furniture in three fine examples found in the survey (records no. 89, 123 and 124) corresponds with Aalen’s description of their placement in his plan diagrams. In one a folding table was placed at the foot of the settle-bed, the dresser stands







opposite the fire against the wall to the bedroom. Aalen notes that this reflects its early use as a means of dividing the original chamber-house into separate compartments.

In Ireland tables were traditionally placed against the kitchen wall and folding tables are a fixed location for these. One house owner spoke of an example where the table in the upright position covered a wall recess that was used to contain food. Åke Campbell remarks that the table in Ireland did not supplant the fireplace as a place of social focus and eating, hence its peripheral position in the kitchen.

Benches were often placed beneath the hearth canopy on either side of the fire, or a bench facing a wooden seat. The houses with jamb-walls frequently had wooden seats fitted into the jamb-wall and sometimes structurally integral to it, especially in south Wicklow. Campbell noted it as a feature in his well-known sketch of a fireplace near Rathnew (see frontispiece). It seems that no seats or benches were ever customary in front of the fire, but pushed back against the walls when not in use. Aalen believes the settle and dresser are relatively recent in Ireland, possibly dating from medieval times.

On each side of the fire were two wooden benches resting on four blocks set in the floor. It was not unusual to see a flag for a seat. Sometimes a flour bin was to be seen near the fire.

*Beneath one of the benches near the hobstone was a deep hole called the ash hole. The ashes was taken out every morning and swept into this hole and also dust off the floor*



*was brushed in here. The ashes was taken from this and threw on the manure heap. The floors of the old houses were made of clay and sometimes flag floors were to be seen. These flags were got in the slate quarries which are numerous in this district. (N.F.C.S. 914, pg. 340) Eddie Sinnott, Dunlavin*

Some of the houses surveyed had been vacated very recently, as was evident from newspapers and calendars left behind in the house. These houses were in a 'just-left' state with all furnishings and belongings, possibly after elderly occupants had died or could no longer live there. Such vacated houses still contained many items of religious memorabilia which may warrant study and recording of the kinds of items, where they were positioned, and which saints or holy figures they referred to. One owner found a child's shoe and a wreath in the thatch when it was being removed for renovation. Such records of traditional folk superstitions and religious faith are key to the understanding of traditional ways of life in these houses.





## Site Features

### Corn stands

Some of the examples surveyed yielded examples of features such as stone footings of traditional corn-stands. These were usually located in haggards close to the farmhouse. The remains of examples were found with the stone uprights still in position. Stones from corn-stands are popular as decorative garden features throughout the county, and in many cases the circular stone caps had been removed. At a house in Holdenstown Upper near Baltinglass (record no. 33) a collection of stone caps were stored in the farmyard. At a farm in Oldcourt (record no. 1) at least three sets of corn-stands exist with uprights of more or less the same width and breadth. At farms in Ballagh near Tinahely and Ashtown near Wicklow (records no. 78 and 123) the uprights are more rectangular and primitive in character, reflecting perhaps that these are less fine houses.

At a farm in Lemonstown near Hollywood (record no. 31) a lot of old farm machinery is stored in the farmyard and out-buildings with an example of a metal corn-stand.

### Paving

Little remains in farmyards of any paving and it appears probable that this was limited to an apron at the entrance to the house, or was not present at all. In some cases cobbles were noted close to the house. One elderly owner whose





farmyard is now entirely grassed over stated that his yard had never been paved.

### Haysheds

Outbuildings are discussed above in the context of farmyard layouts. Apart from vernacular outhouses of stone, steel haysheds with rounded roofs of galvanised metal are numerous within the county, constructed throughout rural Ireland by specialist firms throughout the twentieth century. Though not strictly vernacular, these structures are an example of modest structures which have acquired significance through the passage of time. Their striking form and position in farm building ensembles has become an iconic feature of the rural landscape, and as they are becoming increasingly vulnerable further consideration of their importance is now warranted. Their position in ensembles was not noted in the survey.

### Forges

A building type found at several locations is the forge. These continued to function in at least one case up to the 1960s. The examples found were sometimes detached and in other cases attached to dwellings. They were located at roadsides and road junctions for the convenience of customers.

One of the forges visited, at Rostygah near Arklow (record no. 83), had a considerable amount of equipment and forged material inside and the owner can relate its history in great detail. This example also had sleeping accommodation in the roof space for journeymen. Throughout the county there are







fine and varied examples of locally forged gates.

### Gates and Gateposts

Large granite profiles were found throughout the county used in doorframes, lintels to wall openings, and importantly as gate posts in farmyards and fields. As many of the fields in Wicklow are used as pastures, the traditionally narrow gate openings have not been widened for combines and other very large farm machinery, as has happened in parts of the country where arable farming is more widespread. Some gates are hung from projecting stones in the walls and gables of the houses and outbuildings separated by a gate width from one another. Gate pillars of various forms were observed. The gates themselves were often forged locally with a good number still existing and still in use.

### Other Structures

A fine limekiln was found within the site of a farmhouse at Athgreany near Hollywood (record no. 19). This large structure opens directly onto a lane and incorporates large granite slabs (see sketch in record sheet).

An interesting constructed field drain incorporating walls, channels and a corbelled chamber was recorded at Ballinagee near Dunlavin (record no. 145).

A farm courtyard at Knockraheen near Greystones( record no. 136) at the end of an access road had a prominent tree at its centre.





## The Future for Vernacular Houses in Wicklow

### Recording What Exists

Åke Campbell, who made important studies of Irish vernacular architecture in the first part of the twentieth century, had pleaded then for a systematic investigation of vernacular architecture. Only when a comprehensive study is made can an informed approach be made on the part of individuals or public bodies on how to best protect vernacular houses, their setting and grouping, interiors and furnishings.

John Feehan argues that the buildings should not be considered without also looking at their settings in the wider vernacular landscape with such elements as walls and hedges, as these are vulnerable too often are taken for granted.

This survey can provide a starting point for such a record, but is only a representative sample. The survey found that the examples retaining the most interesting features tend to be abandoned and in an advanced state of decay.

### Occupiers and their needs

Many of the houses visited are occupied by elderly and those involved in small scale farming. Others are repaired lovingly by people with urban professional backgrounds, many of whom are foreign-nationals. The number of houses still being used by rural families of average income and background is very small. The desire for living in the countryside seems to be met preferably by building new houses or by making very

heavy alterations to the vernacular houses that leave them with very few of their distinctive features.

The houses seem to meet with very few of the spatial, technical or image needs of the contemporary rural dweller. Often houses are demolished and replaced with new dwellings, and many planning application signs were observed at houses during the survey. Help and information are urgently needed on the proper maintenance of building elements, as well as advice on how sensitive alterations and extensions can be made possible.

Other pressures include the decline in farming as a full time occupation for smaller farmers. Many interesting vernacular houses belong to farmers who live off site and are used for storage of animals or farm equipment. Outbuildings no longer fulfil the needs of modern farming and are let fall into disrepair. As their function does not warrant the expense, they are generally not maintained, for example in the case of traditional slate roofs.

### Understanding and Conservation

Although many owners and neighbours appreciated the importance of vernacular heritage there is a severe dearth of understanding of the possibilities available for their conservation.

Few of the houses have received the sympathetic consideration which is needed if their vernacular qualities are to be conserved. There is little evidence of any understanding of the need to conserve and repair simple or modest features,



or to repair in the same material and manner of construction. Even well-meaning interventions seeking to preserve a rustic atmosphere fail to recognise essential vernacular features or authentic techniques. Modern construction techniques which do little to enhance the character of the buildings are the norm in restoration works.

This lack of understanding is common to owners, building contractors, tradesmen and those involved in designing alterations or extensions (rarely architects).

A better understanding needs to be promoted of the positive role that conservation experts can play. Some of the owners visited in the survey expressed fear that their house might become a protected structure and that they would be restricted in their use of the building or expensive conditions would be imposed on them.

If a sustainable future for the vernacular houses of the county is to be achieved a change of perception will be needed to be engendered. The model of good renovation and alteration versus new build needs to be promoted, both in terms of economic sense and the cultural benefit of safeguarding buildings of vernacular heritage interest. With the current immense popularity of building and architectural design topics on television, there may be a case for promoting the understanding of vernacular architecture to a greater degree in the media.

### **Traditional Skills**

Traditional skills may not exist in enough quantity and qual-

ity to be easy at hand and economic for repairing and maintaining traditional houses. Replacing items such as traditional timber windows and doors seems more convenient to finding a skilled carpenter, or one who is even willing to repair them. Other trades such as thatching require a great deal of organisation and cost on the part of the owners. They also have to deal with other issues such as the difficulty of obtaining insurance at reasonable rates and on reasonable terms. During the survey one owner stated that his house is not insured for this reason.

The need to support traditional skills in areas such as joinery, thatching, lime plastering, lime washing, etc. need to be supported at a local and national level and issues such as financial support and insurance need to be addressed seriously.

### **New Uses**

Innovative thinking and learning from good practice elsewhere can do much to find solutions to a problem which is not unique to Co. Wicklow.

The Mourne Heritage Trust operate a scheme for the preservation of rural vernacular in the Mourne Mountains. Like Wicklow the Mourne area is a mountainous landscape renowned for its natural beauty and associated with a strongly traditional vernacular heritage. With considerable success the Mourne Heritage Trust has sought to address the needs of maintaining a traditional building stock by marrying it into a scheme to subsidise provide affordable housing for families

and individuals who wish to continue to live in the area. This scheme enables modest housing to be provided for a local population and must therefore be seen as more sustainable than use as holiday accommodation. A scheme of this type has the added advantages of fostering traditional building skills locally and providing models of best practice examples to others which can generally raise standards and make owners of abandoned or disused houses aware of the possibilities for conservation.

### **Government help**

The Heritage Council provides generous grants under the Buildings at Risk scheme, but none of the owners visited had heard of the scheme.

A new grants scheme specifically for the Conservation of Traditional Farm Buildings has been introduced this year under the Rural Environmental Protection Scheme (REPS 4) with the support of the Heritage Council, and it is to be expected that this can provide a future for many endangered buildings, as a great number of farmers are signed up to the REPS scheme. The scheme does not however cover repairs to dwellings, which are often the more endangered element of the vernacular farm.

Local Authority conservation grants under the National Conservation Grants Scheme apply only to protected structures, though most vernacular buildings are not protected.

The UK government outlined a response to decline of the agricultural industry in a recent Rural White Paper. The first

response was to boost support for environmental land management and the second to encourage and facilitate diversification of agricultural programmes. One point of this was the conversion and re-use of historic farm buildings. Planning Policy Guidance (PPG7) has been revised by the government to ensure that local authorities are able to take a more positive approach to farm diversification proposals. The Country Stewardship Scheme can contribute up to 50% of eligible costs to those undertaking the restoration of traditional farm buildings and up to 80% of the costs for projects in Environmentally Sensitive Areas. The Redundant Buildings Grant Scheme, operated by Regional Development Agencies, is designed to support the conversion of redundant farm buildings to business use and can contribute up to 25% of the cost of necessary building works.

Also in the UK the government has also recently announced that farmers considering the future of their farm buildings will be eligible for the costs of a day's advice from a planning consultant in order for them to apply for a grant under the Rural Enterprise Scheme. Such schemes can prove useful models for Ireland and for Co. Wicklow, and advice from those experienced in them may yield options which could be suitable to Wicklow.

Where domestic use is not possible, grant aid for commercial or service-based uses sympathetic to dwellings and outbuildings may provide a means of funding towards conservation.

### **Tourism uses and the local economy**

Tom Hobson, research officer of the Rural Development Council for Northern Ireland, wrote in 1993 of the establishment of a development company on the French 'Gîte' model under the direction of the Northern Ireland Tourist Board to develop houses for tourist use for the local economy. The Rural Development Council in Northern Ireland provides grants for growing rye straw without application of nitrogen so that the farmer has the possibility to convert to organic farming and make money at the same time. Such ideas show that creative thinking can provide interesting ways of promoting conservation of vernacular buildings.

Wicklow's location close to Dublin and its largely unspoilt character in contrast to other counties bordering the capital, opens possibilities for promoting the availability and awareness of rural quality dwellings for holiday use. In particular eco-tourism can play a role, promoting holidaying in Ireland over travelling abroad for environmental reasons.

The architect Philip Geoghegan, owner of one of the houses recorded (no. 127) has converted an outbuilding beside his own house for use as a holiday home with grant assistance from the Leader Wicklow Rural Partnership. This was done in a manner sympathetic to the vernacular character of building where efforts were made to retain as much as possible of the historic fabric.

The Irish Landmark Trust has a track record of conserving historic buildings of modest size for holiday accommodation following the highest standards of conservation. Owners

lease their endangered buildings to the Trust over a long period, and the Trust undertakes the full cost of restoration. The model has proved extremely successful, hinging around the immense appeal of the historic properties. Such a model would ideally suit traditional vernacular houses in an area of such natural beauty as Wicklow.

### **Thatch**

In his book 'The View from the Roof', thatcher Hugh O'Neill discusses the maintenance of thatch, consideration of when to re-thatch, as well as design detailing for architects. O'Neill illustrates problems surrounding the decline of materials available in terms of quantity and quality and the increasing rarity of thatchers skilled in regional thatching techniques. Reed, not traditional to Wicklow, is fast becoming the only thatching material available, and from information given by some owners this is often imported. The change from straw to reed took place in Ireland in the 1970s and 1980s and to imported reed since the 1990s.

Tom Hobson addressed the need to train more thatchers. He argued that thatching needs to be developed as an industry and that a concerted effort in cooperation with the Republic could reap benefits for the country at large.

### **The Pace of Change**

The decline of the vernacular heritage of Wicklow is progressing fast, and a great many houses are in imminent danger of disappearance. At the beginning of the survey in July



2007 an initial tour was made of different parts of Wicklow to review prevailing house types and to select the representative sample. By the time houses were revisited in September for recording, one of the houses initially viewed had fallen victim to redevelopment with the loss of significant internal features and a second house had been boarded up because of vandalism.

### Collaboration

Possible collaboration between Wicklow County Council and the Royal Institute of the Architects of Ireland, the Irish Landscape Institute, or the Architecture, Conservation and Landscape departments of University College Dublin could provide insight into greater possibilities for conservation. Studies with students could be a means of gaining greater understanding of issues, and could develop possible models for reuse of houses, how the buildings and their settings can be and sensibly adapted with sensitive guidelines on extending houses, gaining light and updating services. Such a programme can foster interest in the emerging generation of architects and serve also to raise awareness of the plight of this aspect of the county's architectural heritage.

Several publications and user's handbooks are now available such as that published by Kildare County Council, the OPW and the Mourne Heritage Trust, which could be used as a basis for this study.





## Recommendations

### Statutory Protection and Planning Policies

1. The following sites were found to be of regional significance and are recommended for inclusion in the Record of Protected Structures (RPS): 1, 6, 13, 19, 29, 31, 32, 41, 45, 46, 54, 57, 58, 59, 60 (cluster of 4 farms), 61, 63, 64, 66, 67, 69, 70, 72, 78, 83, 86, 87, 88, 89, 92, 112, 117, 123, 124, 127, 129, 132, 136, 139, 140, 145, 147.
2. The following sites may merit inclusion in the RPS: 14, 18, 20, 24, 47, 65 (significant garden), 71, 76, 79, 84, 85, 90, 95, 105, 122, 125, 133, 134, 135, 137. Further inspection is recommended to determine if these buildings are of regional rather than local significance.
3. The following groupings are recommended to be designated as Architectural Conservation Areas (ACAs):
  - Record no. 1, Oldcourt: House and farm complex, trees on both sides of road, stone walls and stone corner seat (see drawing no. 3).
  - Records no. 20 and 21, Davidstown: Two farmhouses, former shop, school and church (see drawing no. 2).
  - Record no. 54, Killinure: House and long approach road flanked by stone walls.
  - Record no. 60 Muckduff Lower: Cluster of 4 farms with outbuildings, paths etc. (see drawing no. 1).
4. All sites recorded in this survey were deemed to be at

least of local significance, and therefore important to the cultural heritage of its locality. Any new development on the site of any of these houses should respect the vernacular nature of the buildings and retain all significant features, including traditional farmyard layout and other site features.

5. Examples of well-maintained vernacular houses are becoming so rare that the architectural identity of rural Wicklow is threatened. We therefore recommend the adoption of a planning policy to refuse planning permissions where demolition of any vernacular house is proposed. This should extend to houses not covered in this representative sample.
6. We recommend a policy to aim to recover the significance of vernacular houses where this has been lost. Where planning applications are made for such houses, planning conditions could be imposed to promote reinstatement of traditional windows and doors, renders and lime-washes, roof coverings etc. Such measures can greatly enhance the visual quality of the rural landscape, or of the urban or suburban context where vernacular sites are now subsumed into built-up areas.
7. Provision of a detailed true measured survey, photographic record and written analysis should be a prerequisite for developments affecting vernacular buildings. This could be made a condition of planning to be submitted before commencement.

#### Promotion of Conservation

8. It is recommended that Wicklow County Council acquire a good intact example of a vernacular house and

carry out a conservation project to act as a model and benchmark for good practice. This could be featured in TV programmes such as About the House, Grand Designs, Nationwide or the projected Restoration Ireland series planned by Coco TV productions. The finished house could be presented as a showhouse and remain open to the public over a period of months as part of a vernacular building exhibition showcasing the vernacular architecture of the county, traditional building skills, and illustrating ideas for extensions and adaptation which would demonstrate the capacity of the houses to meet modern living requirements to a high standard.

9. A restored complex of good quality could form a Museum of Folk and Farm Life in Historic Wicklow. Many houses retain traditional furnishings and farm implements which could be acquired and thereby preserved for posterity in their intended setting. Such a museum would add to the tourist experience of a much-visited county which is easily accessible from large population centres. Funding for such a project could be sought from the National Museum or Fáilte Ireland.
10. A number of houses have been successfully restored by their owners and already provide models of best practice, notably houses no. 92 and 127. We recommend that Wicklow County Council make contact to the owners to seek permission to include tours of their houses during Heritage Week.
11. Open House Dublin, a successful event organised by the Architecture Foundation since 2006 has demonstrated the enormous interest among the general public in architecture and heritage. Assistance could be



sought from the Architecture Foundation to organise a similar event in Wicklow, or to expand the programme of the Dublin event to include sites in the county.

12. A scheme similar to the Mourne Homesteads Project may be ideally suited to Wicklow. This could allow existing funding for provision of social or affordable housing to be used in the interests of conservation. Suitable candidates could be interviewed to ensure interest in such accommodation and to select families or individuals from the localities in question.
13. Existing public-sector funding for training or community development could be used to also benefit conservation of vernacular buildings. Collaboration with publicly funded bodies such as FÁS and Pobal could generate ideas in this respect.
14. The National Conservation Grants Scheme should be specially targeted to cover vernacular buildings. This would promote better practice in conservation and provide benchmarks for others.. Additions of significant numbers of structures to the RPS would make more houses eligible. The possibility to make exceptions under the scheme to fund endangered houses which are not protected structures should be investigated.

#### Public Awareness

15. Information on Heritage Council and Wicklow County Council grant schemes could be targeted particularly at owners of vernacular houses, as these are very often unaware of the existence of grant aid. Direct mail, local radio and newspapers, farming organisations and

press or notices in public places such as shops and churches could increase awareness of the existence and benefit of these schemes.

16. Any policy which would promote an appreciation of the heritage value and threatened nature of vernacular buildings should be pursued. This could target schools, building contractors, vocational training schemes, farming groups, auctioneers, district health authorities, churches, etc.
17. Contact with the Royal Institute of the Architects of Ireland (RIAI) and the Irish Landscape Institute (ILI) could highlight the importance of conservation of vernacular buildings and landscapes. Architects accredited in conservation could play an important role in the promotion of best conservation practice. Existing professional award schemes could be sponsored to add a category for vernacular buildings.
18. Vandalism: To prevent damage to abandoned buildings through vandalism, collaboration or raising of awareness among community groups, residents associations, neighbourhood watch schemes and Garda stations .

#### Further Research and Recording

19. Before endangered houses disappear or are renovated or altered, detailed measured surveys and comprehensive photographic records to record layout, construction, furnishings and finishes should be carried out.
20. A study of the religious memorabilia and evidence of folk beliefs and superstitions still surviving in many houses should be conducted.

21. Contact to universities is recommended to assist in further research into the sites identified in the survey. Relevant departments would include the MUBC post-graduate course in Conservation at UCD, the Architecture schools of UCD, DIT and WIT, the Landscape school of UCD, as well as Folklore, Archaeology and Cultural Geography departments of the universities.

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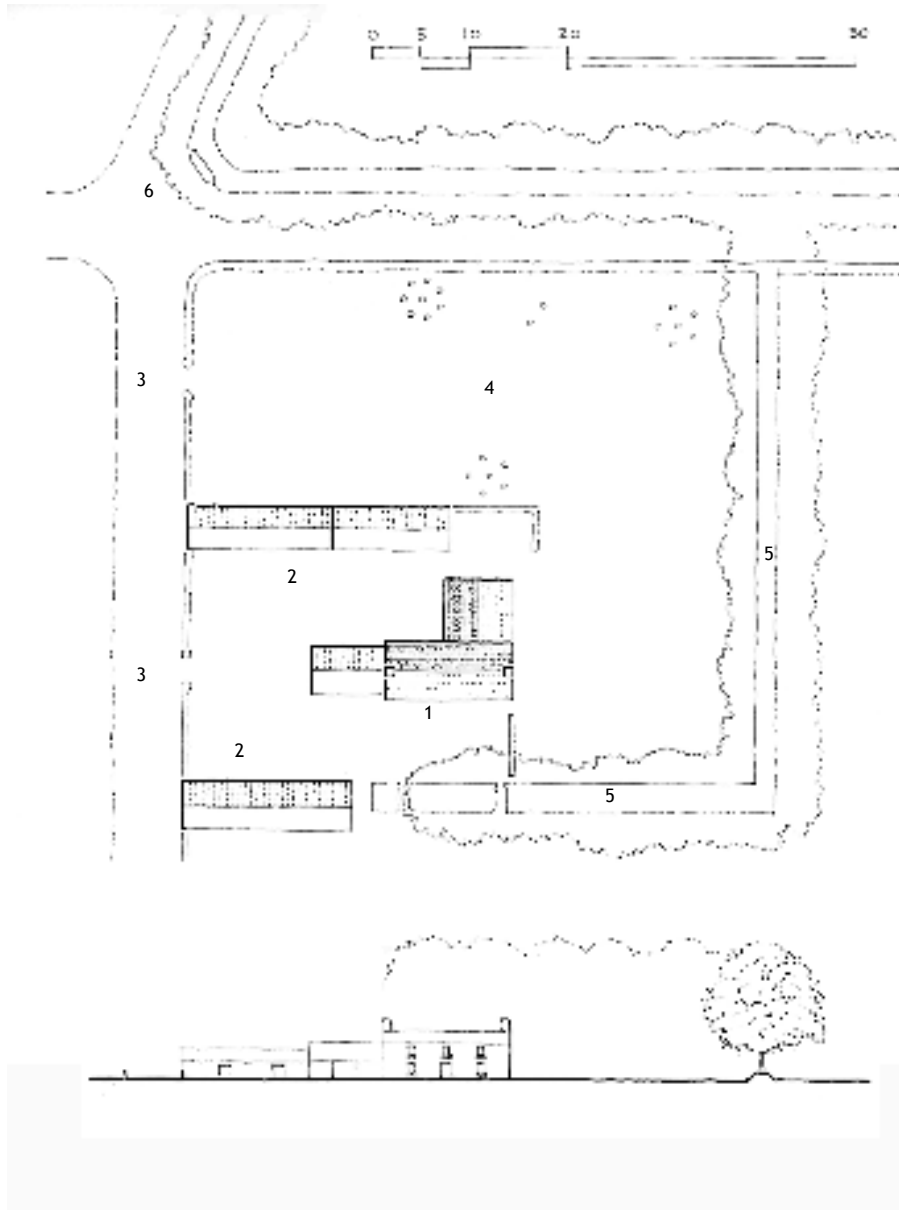


Drawing no. 1: Map of the cluster settlement of four farms at Muckduff Lower, Baltinglass (record no. 60)

1) Farm houses, yards and outbuildings 2) approach road 3) stream 4) disused route



Drawing no. 2: Map of the cluster settlement at Davidstown crossroads (records no. 20 and 21)  
1) Farm houses, yards and outbuildings 2) road 3) school 4) church

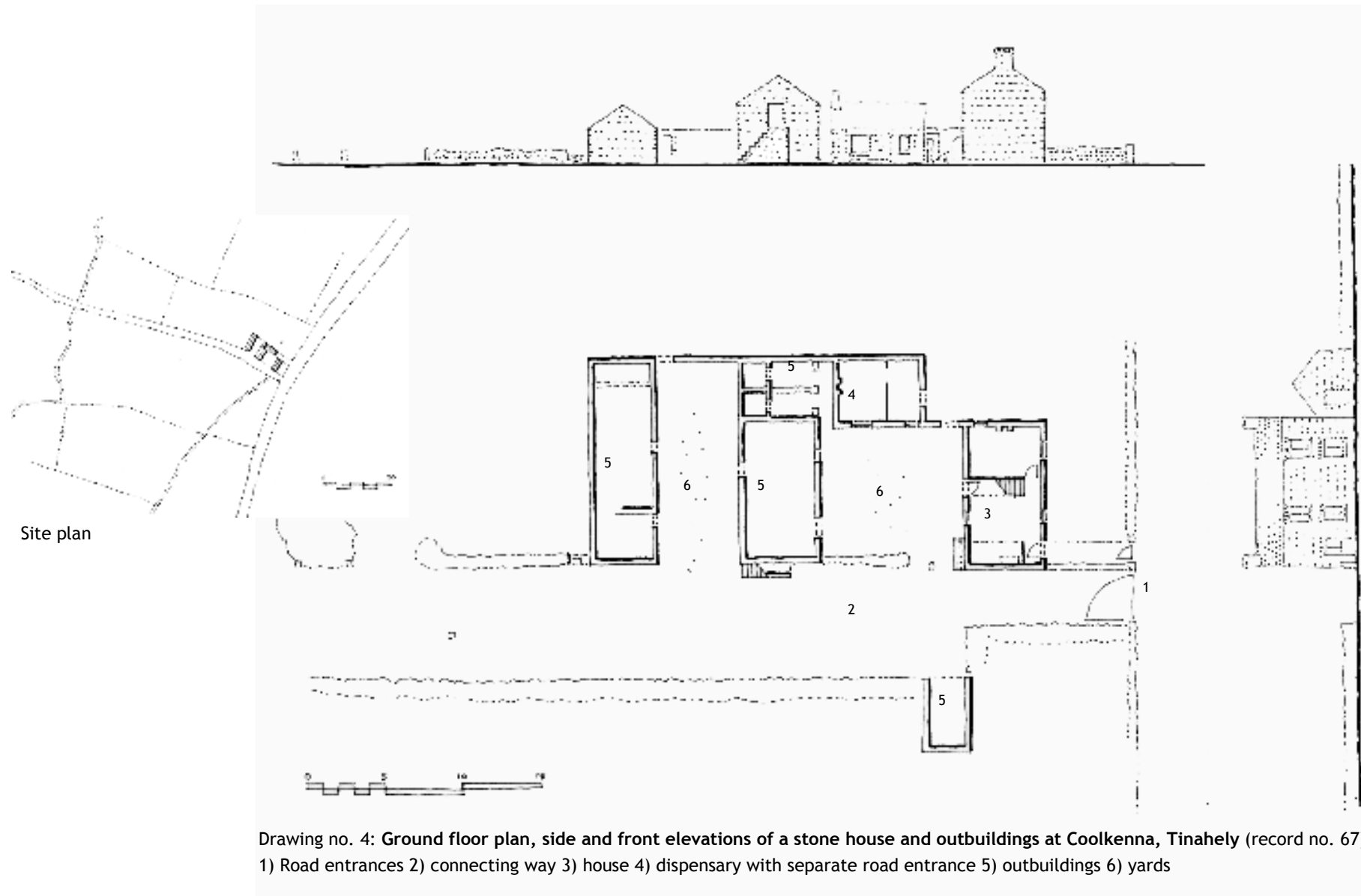


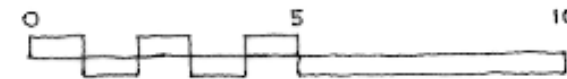
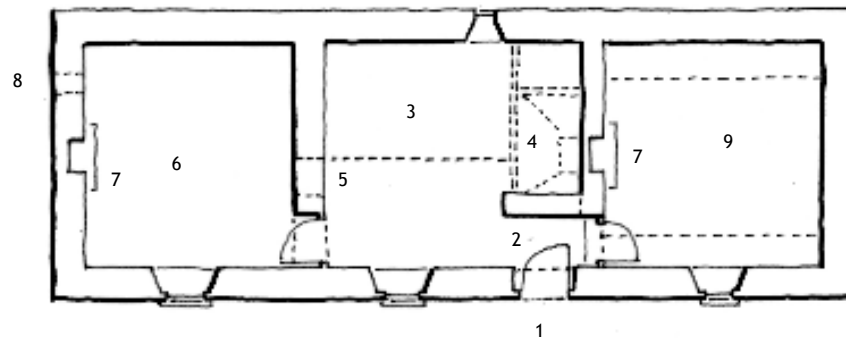
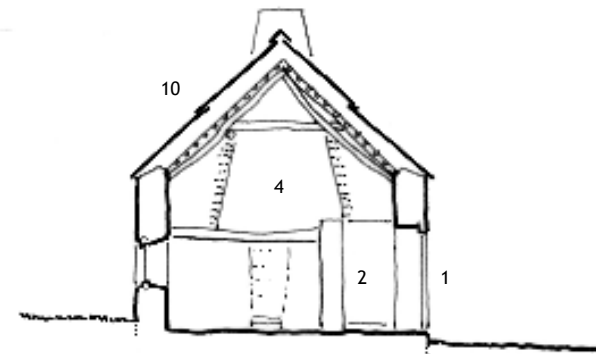
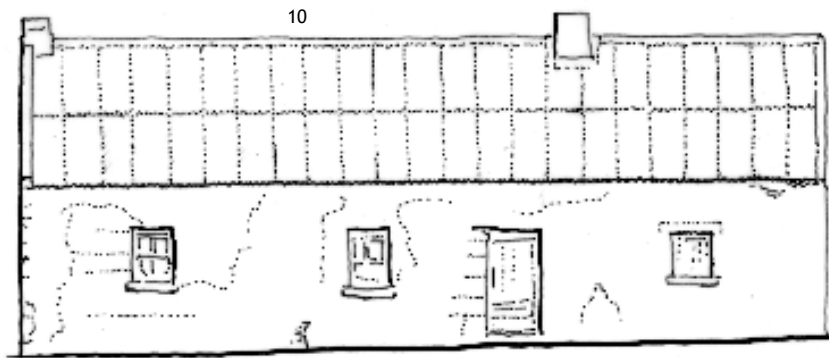
Drawing no. 3

Site plan and elevation of a farm and setting at Oldcourt, Blessington  
(record no. 1)

- 1) Farm houses
- 2) Outbuildings
- 3) Gate entrances from road
- 4) Haggard with corn stand remains
- 5) Stone faced embankment with regular spaced trees
- 6) Stone walls and embankments along the road with a corner ledge seat

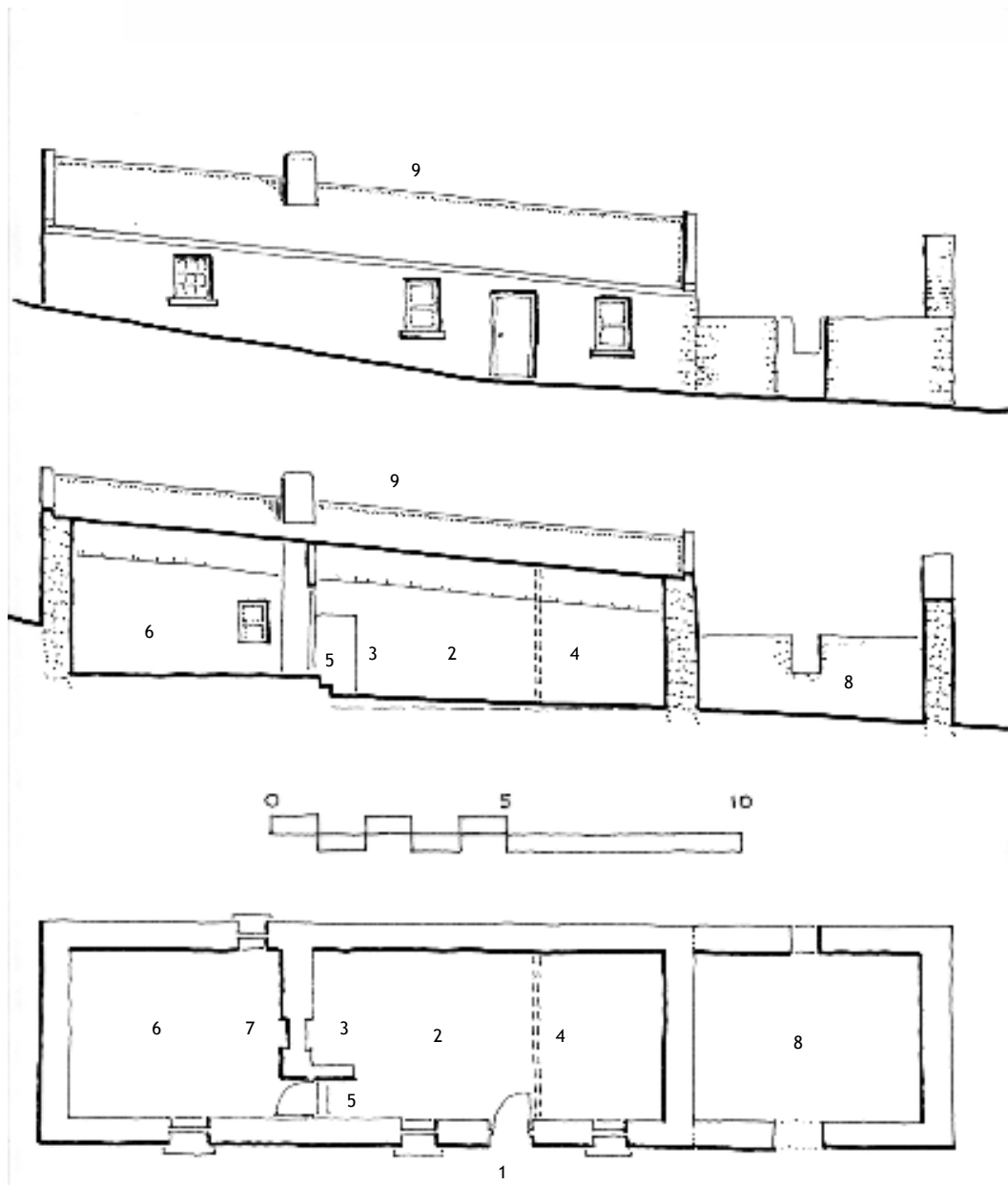






Drawing no. 5: Plan, section and elevation of a lobby entry house at Cornan West, Baltinglass (record no. 59)

- 1) Entrance 2) lobby with jamb wall 3) kitchen with high ceiling 4) fireplace and canopy 5) high door to roof space 6) room with low ceiling
- 7) fireplace 8) gable window to roof space above 9) room with raised ceiling 10) galvanised metal sheeting on existing thatch



Drawing no. 6:

Plan, long section and front elevation of a direct-entry house on a slope at Knockalt Lower, Hollywood (record no. 143)

- 1) Entrance
- 2) Kitchen with sloped floor
- 3) Fireplace, the canopy has been removed
- 4) Probable position of dividing wall
- 5) Steps beside jamb wall
- 6) Bedroom
- 7) Fireplace
- 8) Cowhouse
- 9) Galvanised metal roof, replacing thatch