

The kitchen is the central space in the Irish vernacular house, and gives access to the other rooms. The typical house is rectangular, one room deep with the windows mainly on the front, the gables or back wall often facing the prevailing wind. There are two main types of layout.

The “hearth-lobby” type has the entrance beside the main hearth in a small lobby. This lobby is divided from the fireplace by a “jamb wall” which has a tiny spy-window so those sitting by the fire can see out through the open door or typical half-door and observe visitors. This is the most common type in eastern and southern parts of the country.

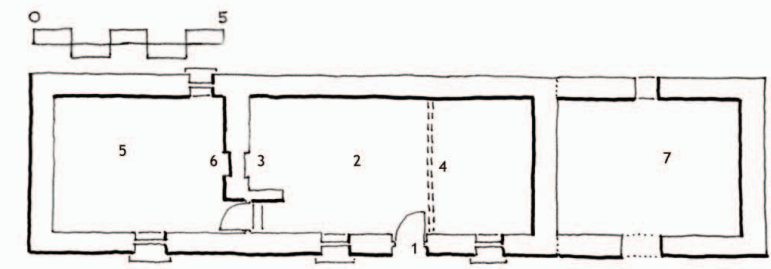
The “direct-entry” type has the entrance directly into the kitchen, but away from the hearth. This is the predominant type in western and northern counties. Wicklow has almost as many direct-entry houses as hearth-lobby houses, which is unusual for an eastern county. Both types sometimes have a slight projection at the door.

Many houses show signs of having been extended. Additions were often made at the chimney gable, in order to retain heat. In earlier times simple houses contained only one or two rooms, a kitchen with a door to a bedroom at one end. Sometimes a byre or cowhouse adjoined the house, located at the lower end to allow drainage away from the dwelling. As families became more prosperous it was common for this lower end of the house to be converted into a parlour or reception room, in imitation of grander houses. This gave rise to an elongated plan form, and it is interesting to see that the parlour is very often located at the lower end. In other cases a *sileail* or thin partition wall separates the parlour from the kitchen, showing that the animals may have formerly shared the living space.

Houses sometimes had lofts above the bedrooms reached by ladders from the kitchen.



A direct-entry house can be recognized by the position of the chimney away from the door



Plan of a Direct-entry house

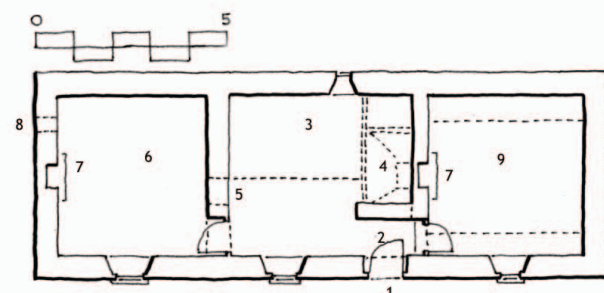
- 1. Entrance
- 2. Kitchen
- 3. Hearth
- 4. Dividing wall
- 5. Bedroom
- 6. Fireplace
- 7. Cowhouse



Direct-entry house extended at chimney gable



A hearth lobby house has the main chimney just to the side of the door



Plan of a Hearth-lobby house

- 1. Entrance
- 2. Lobby with jamb wall
- 3. Kitchen with high ceiling
- 4. Hearth and canopy
- 5. High door to roof space
- 6. Room with lower ceiling
- 7. Fireplace
- 8. Gable window to roof space
- 9. Room with raised ceiling



Lobby with “spy window”



Backs of houses had few windows