ILLICIT DISTILLATION IN CONNEMARA

A Social Evil and a Garda Problem

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Garda Station,
Rosmuc.

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INTRODUCTION:

In the Hills of Connemara

Keep your eyes well peeled today,
the tall tall men are on their way,
searching for the mountain tae,
in the hill of Connemara.

Songs and stories and legends abound about a tradition that has existed from time immemorial in the mountainous parts of rural Ireland and still exists to some degree in remote parts of Connemara today.

The tradition of brewing one's own alcoholic beverages viz. *poitín* making, is an ancient craft dating possibly as far back as the Bronze Age and the consumption of these beverages played an important role in the social and economic ... history of Ireland. It was only when levies were introduced by Parliament in Great Britain in the seventeenth century that legal and illegal spirits became a reality.

In this report, which I hope will be both informative and humorous, I intend to trace the misty origins of distilling *poitín*, its chequered past which has an intriguing, colourful and controversial history, and the law as it relates to *poitín*.

I also propose to examine its supposed medical properties - its cures - and also its devastating effects on both the mental and physical well-being of its imbibers.

This is not intended to be a comprehensive work on the subject, nor as a dull and scholarly *opus*, rather it is a miscellany of items and photographs concerned with the

history of *poitín* making up to the present day where the ancient art of *poitín* continues to flourish in Connemara.

A notorious drunkard, the playwright Brendan Behan, who was no stranger to a drop of the *cratur*, is quoted as saying: "No matter what anyone tells you about the fine old drop of mountain dew, it stands to sense that a few old men sitting up in the back of a haggard in the mountains with milk churns and all sorts of impoverished apparatus cannot hope to make good spirits." Despite this reasoned view, he frequently partook of it.

Poitín making in Connemara will always have its advocates who will extol its virtues. It continues to appeal because it flies in the face of the **Church, State** and **Medical Profession**. In this exercise, I propose to explain why this is so and, hopefully, to reach some conclusion as to the best way to alleviate the problem, curb its influence and limit its production.

THE ANCIENT CRAFT OF *POITÍN* MAKING

1.1 What is *poitín?*

Poteen derives its name from *poitín* "a little port" of whiskey made in private stills, while the term *póit* usually refers to the act of tippling or drinking to excess. In Ireland, through time it has come to mean a strong colourless spirit, not unlike whiskey in taste, which is illegally manufactured and upon which no duty is paid. Distillation is the key to good *poitín* but if not properly distilled, it can result in a hangover, blindness, insanity, ruin, murder or ignominious death in a muddy ditch. It is simply made from the fermented mash of grain, or indeed any other substance which happens to be at hand. The best is made from barley, but the peelings from the common spud will do at a pinch and desperate men have been known to distil the scraps from yesterday's dinner.

Each area has its own recipe for making *poitín* involving malt and sugar or treacle or beet or potatoes, depending on the market price and the availability of whatever substance they prefer. Tourists seeking Irish souvenirs are not infrequently sold bad *poitín* and told it is "a drop of the quare stuff." The only "quare stuff" likely to be in it is Parazone or Bluestone.

Some parts of the country have their own particular ingredients for making *poitín* but most are variations on the standard one used in the Connemara area. This contains barley, sugar and yeast. It is the slowest method of all but, according to *poitín* connoisseurs, produces the best **moonshine** of all.

1.2 Equipment necessary for *poitín* making:

1. A Still (usually a steel barrel, copper cylinder etc.)

2. A Still Head (usually a Guinness barrel cut in half)
3. A Worm (piece of copper piping)
4. A Cooler (usually a steel barrel)
5. A Gas Cylinder with burner or, in olden times, a turf fire
6. Barrels for Wash
7. Container for *poitín* coming from still (usually a plastic bucket)

1.3 Ingredients required:

1. Water
2. Grain (usually barley)
3. Sugar
4. Yeast
5. Treacle
6. Sometimes potatoes are added

1.4 Distilling of *poitín*:

Barley is first steeped in water for a fortnight until it begins to sprout. Then it is taken out and dried over an open fire until the sprouts begin to recede. The next stage is crushing the barley and when this is completed, it is put into a 40-60 gallon barrel of water with yeast and sugar. The amount of barley used varies from 4-6 st. depending on the size of the barrel.

This mixture is left to ferment for 4-5 days. At first the mixture becomes warm during the early stages of fermentation but eventually goes ice-cold. The barley sinks to the bottom of the barrel and the liquid substance becomes beer.

Now it is ready for distilling. The beer is then placed in the still and heated by means of an open fire or a gas fire. The steam from this brew passes through the still head and into the worm which passes through a cooler full of water thus returning the steam to liquid. This liquid

is called *poitín*. The first **run** is called singlings and forty gallons of beer will yield only twenty gallons of this. It is then put through the process a second time (doubled). The brew is not usually put through a third time but, if it is, it makes about five gallons (thirds) - the best *poitín* of all.

Two other methods are also used in Connemara which produce very bad *poitín* but in a much shorter time. For these processes, beet pulp and treacle are the main ingredients. Beet pulp, sugar and yeast are put into a barrel and allowed to ferment for four to five days. Having been run through three or four times, the **hard stuff** is ready for market.

The third method is to mix treacle, sugar and yeast and allow them to ferment for a fortnight. Run it through the still a few times and it is ready for sale.

The last two methods are used extensively now because they avoid a lot of the tedious fermentation process which is all too open to discovery by the Gardaí.

Another ruse with moonshiners is to use high pressure cylinders of gas. This heats the still quickly and more efficiently than the old turf fire. It also makes detection by the Gardaí more difficult as the tell-tale smoke from a turf fire is no longer present.

* Illustration of Utensils used in the ancient craft of poitin making.

POITÍN - A CHEQUERED PAST

2.1 Past History

Poitín making, or illicit distillation, continues in parts of Connemara into modern times. The homemade spirit formerly made here was undoubtedly one of the best whiskeys produced in the whole of Ireland. It burned with a clear white flame and was as clear as spring water, but its distillation has been illegal for a considerable length of time. Prior to the year 1660 there was no levy on spirits. As a result of continuous warfare, the Crown endeavoured to raise taxes to finance their army. This led to a levy being introduced on spirits in 1661. This levy was completely ignored in Ireland. From 1664 onwards, the State attempted to regulate distilleries throughout the country by passing various Statutes. Towards the end of the seventeenth century, large distilleries were paying a duty of one and a half new pence on every gallon of spirits produced. In 1731 another Act was passed to prohibit distillation "in the mountainous parts of the Kingdom remote from any market town." The practice remained legal until 1760 when a third Act was passed making private distillation unlawful unless it was licenced by the authorities. By 1770 the duty on spirits or whiskey had risen to four new pence per gallon. It was raised to six new pence in 1775; and by 1815 it stood at thirty and a half new pence.

This high duty resulted in the creation of two new professions, those of the illicit whiskey distiller and their foes, the Revenue Police, established by the Board of Excise in 1818. People were unwilling to pay high prices for their liquor if they could purchase cheaper duty-free drink, especially since there appeared to be little difference in the quality of licensed and unlicenced whiskey, apart from the price. From that time onwards, a state of war existed between the *poitín* makers and the authorities, a war that has continued into modern times.

The Revenue Officers relied heavily on informers. By 1823 an official government report admitted that the *poitín* makers of Ireland were producing a drink "consumed principally by the better classes where price is of no consequence but quality is everything." The *poitín* maker worked at his own pace whereas the legal distilleries, makers of "parliamentary whiskey", sacrificed quality for quantity.

Fr. Mathew's (1790-1861) Temperance Campaign of the 1830s, the Geat Hunger of the 1840s, the Reforms instituted in the Land League times and pressure from the Catholic bishops led to the decline in the number of *poitín* makers. When Inspector H.A. Robinson called to islands on behalf of the Local Government Board in 1881, his arrival on the gunboat H.M.S. Bruiser "was at first regarded as a visit of a hostile nature.... The guilty consciences of the proprietors of the illicit whiskey stills felt troubled." Robinson was allowed to land after reassuring the people that there were no police aboard the vessel and there was no record of the Local Government Board "having betrayed any animosity toward the *poitín*." He wrote that "the illicit whiskey is manufactured to a considerable extent in the islands and sold in large quantities throughout the country." He also stated that *poitín* making was the main livelihood of the islanders as the land was of poor quality. Between 1919 and 1922, during the War of Independence, the R.I.C. were so preoccupied with fighting the I.R.A. that there was an upsurge in the production of *poitín*. The Sinn Féin courts established in this period prosecuted the *poitín* makers just as vigorously as their British counterparts had done with much the same type of results.

2.2 Present History

Poitín was mainly distilled in the early 1930s and 1940s in Counties Donegal and Antrim. It was also distilled in the Border Counties but with the outbreak of the Troubles in the 1970s, the practice declined. It was only in the late

1940s and early 1950s that illicit distillation commenced to any great degree in Connemara where it has flourished since. It is in the rugged terrain around Ballinakill/Lettermullen that you see the old craft practiced still. Christmas is the high point of the year for *poitín* manufacturers and salesmen in these parts. Much of the merchandise is brought all over the country and to England and America by holidaying exiles and it is the months leading up to the festivities that Garda activity is intensified to curtail the manufacture and supply of *poitín*.

POITÍN AREAS OF DISTILLATION

3.1 Places of Distillation

1. Lettermore/Lettermullen area including the uninhabited islands of Inis Eirc, Dinish, Friothlán Beg, Friothlán Mór and Caishen.
2. Carraroe and the Seanafeistin, Glionnain and Lochaunbeg areas of Inverin.
3. Derryrush and Camus area of Rosmuc.
4. Pillagh and Slieveaneanna areas of Moycullen.
5. Poll na Pheist and Phoill areas of Spiddal.
6. Collinamuck and Wormhole areas of Oughterard and the uninhabited islands of Lough Corrib, including Lee's Island, Gurlawn Island and Oileáin gan ainm.

3.2 Social Factors:

The reality of *poitín* making is bound up with the harshest facts of rural life in the rugged and windswept regions of Connemara - stoney land, small holdings and a water table which leaves much of the ground useless for agriculture. All the producers of *poitín* are unemployed and are in receipt of unemployment assistance. *Poitín* provides a second income and the remoteness of the terrain helps to conceal its presence. There are 480,000 acres of land in Connemara and about 60% to 70% is under commonage. The commonage affords a cover for *poitín* making and, unless caught in the act, it is very difficult to prove ownership of equipment or spirits found. *Poitín* making provides occupational theraphy in areas ravaged by the scourge of unemployment and devoid of any agricultural pursuits. It also provides extra finance particularly over the Christmas period having regard to the fact that a bottle of *poitín* can be produced for as little as £2 and sold for £6 while a litre of whiskey costs £17. Duty has to be paid on legitimate whiskey. The State takes a staggering £10.50 in tax on every litre of whiskey distilled (see overleaf).

Price of litre of Whiskey :

One (1) litre of whiskey ..... £17.00 (retail)

Duty paid on litre of whiskey..... £ 8.68 (excise duty

..... £ 2.50 (V.A.T.)

Total..... £10.50

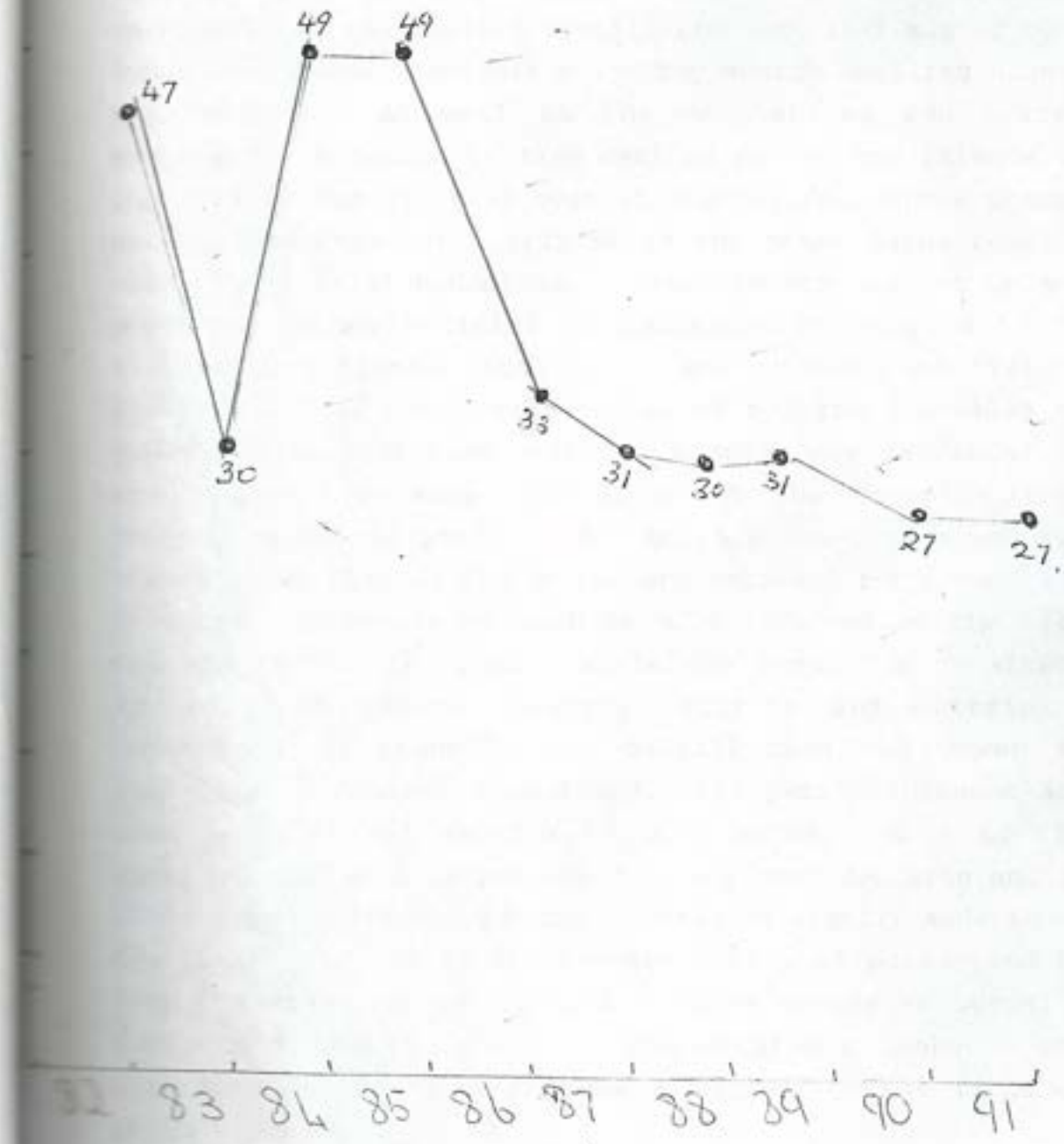
* Above figures are supplied by the Revenue Commissioners, Custom's House, Galway for year 1992.

3.3 Study of regions where *poitín* is made:

The main *poitín* making area in Connemara is in the Lettermore/Lettermullen region of South Connemara. It includes a number of inhabited islands joined by a series of bridges with a population of approximately 1500. Situated off the coast are the uninhabited islands of Inis Eirc, Domhainis, Friothlan Beg, Friothlan Mór and Caishen which are approximately 1/4 mile from the mainland. The region is composed of about 90% commonage. There are about twelve people making *poitín* in this area. The islands are visited by people from the mainland who make *poitín* there and transport it back home by boat. There were twenty successful raids for *poitín* in this region during 1991 and five were prosecuted in connection with breaches of the Illicit Distillation Acts. The islands are visited by the official Garda boat based at Oughterard during raids in the region. 3,500 gallons of wash (value £10,000) was discovered in the course of raids in this area in 1991 and £2,000 worth of spirits and equipment was seized and disposed of. *Poitín* is usually disposed of by selling the finished product in Galway city and county in bread vans, cattle trucks and trucks. Some of it is transported across the bay to Rosmuc and Kilkerrin for sale in Co. Mayo and the Aran Islands.

Collinamuck and the Wormhole areas of Oughterard have traditionally made *poitín*. This is an area that is more secluded and wooded than Lettermore/Lettermullen. The *poitín* is usually made along the shores of Lough Corrib and on Lee's Island and Gurlawn Island and Oileáin gan ainm. The official boat at Oughterard visits these islands and one seizure was made during 1991. The value of this seizure was £100. There are approximately five *poitín* makers in this region and again the area of commonage would be 60%.

* Number of seizures made under Illicit Distillation Acts iin Connemara between years 1982 - 1991 which show a marked decrease from a high of 49 in years 1985-86 to 27 in years 1990-1991.



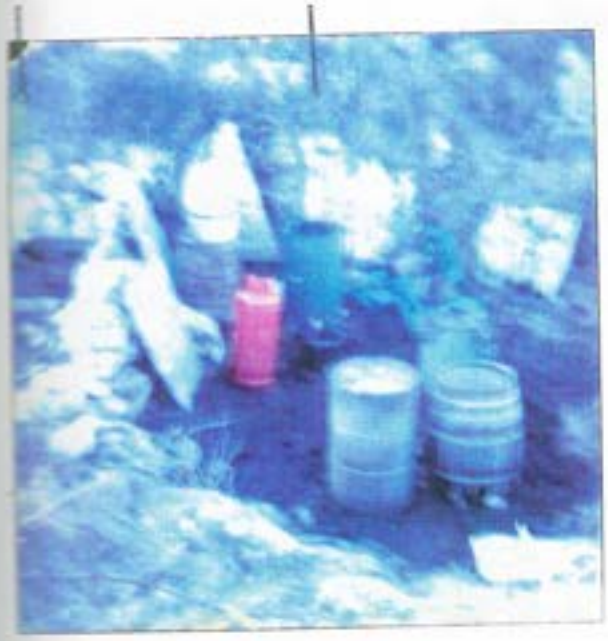
The factors that would cause *poitín* manufacture to flourish in the Lettermore/Lettermullen area would also be applicable in the Carraroe/Spiddal/Rosmuc/Moycullen regions of Connemara. They have the same geographical characteristics and socio-economic factors.

3.4 Garda Searches

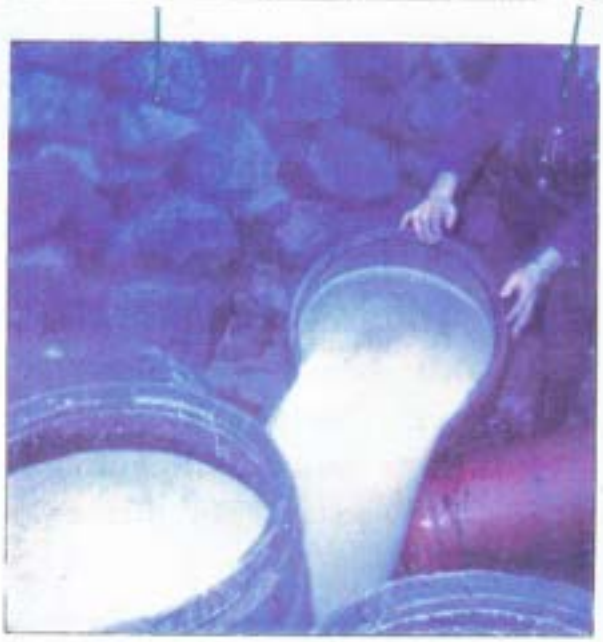
Garda activity in relation to *poitín* eradication usually involves four Gardaí and the official boat and car. Having reached their destination, they carry out a systematic search of the area for any signs of illicit distillation. They are usually in possession of search warrants under section 17 of the Illicit Distillation Act 1831 signed by a Judge or a Peace Commissioner. They search dwelling houses and outhouses as well as the uninhabited and barren wasteland. A search is also carried out on any islands in the area by the official boat at Oughterard. Three Gardaí usually undertake this trip while the other Garda remains with the official patrol car. Check points are set up and power to search vehicles is contained at Section 18 of Illicit Distillation Act 1831. Any evidence of illicit distillation is noted and samples of spirits distilled or other *poitín* equipment seized. Samples are forwarded to the Forensic Science Laboratory at the Phoenix Park, Dublin, to be analysed. All barrels are broken and two staves and a ring of the barrel are retained for production in Court. A sample of wash is also retained at the site and the rest is spilled. While the Garda may "scatter, spill, break up and destroy" spirits and materials, implements or utensils for distillation, no power is conferred to destroy a building. All persons present are usually cautioned and their reply noted. Most of the equipment and wash is concealed in any secluded area and is often found under the ground. *Poitín* is usually made in an area near water to facilitate the making of *poitín* and to ensure a quick escape by boat. Three people are usually involved in making *poitín* - one keeping a lookout, one attending to the fire and one attending to the finished product *poitín*.

1. Arrival of Search party

2. Discovery of Stillhouse.



3. Poitin equipment



4. destroying the brew.

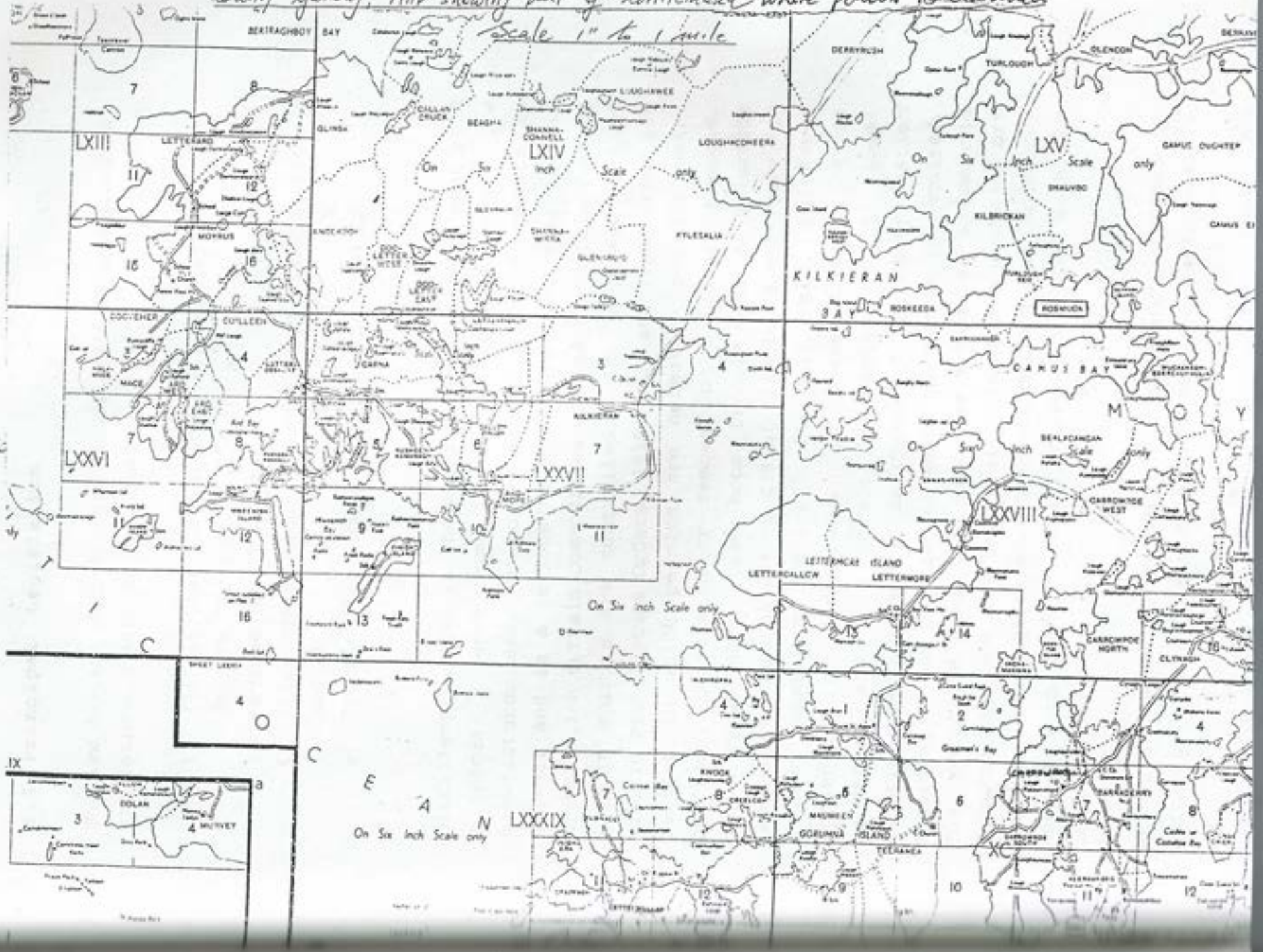
In the Lettermullen area, barrels of wash have been found buried in the sand on the shore above high water level and are completely covered with sand. The only indication that they are hidden there is a black P.V.C. pipe which extends from the top of the barrel onto the beach. It always faces east. This pipe releases the gas resulting from the fermentation into the open and the reason it faces east is to prevent sand from blowing into the barrels. It is not uncommon to come on several of these pipes visible in the sand during searches. In fact it is a common practice to conceal barrels of wash underground and can be difficult to detect. They are usually covered with lumps of earth or sheets of galvanise and can be very well concealed at times.

The map overleaf shows areas where *poitín* is distilled in Connemara.

3.5 Frequency of Garda Searches:

Garda searches usually take place once a week throughout the year and are increased to twice a week at Christmas. The element of surprise has always to be a factor plus the availability of Gardaí to search islands when organising searches. Night searches, particularly to *shebeens*, are dangerous and it is important that a sufficient number of Gardaí are available for this duty. Early morning checkpoints are invaluable when arranging duties as they prevent *poitín* from being transported out of the *poitín* making areas and thus limit supplies.

County Galway, Map showing part of Connemara where poteen is distilled



POITÍN AND THE LAW

4.1 Principal Legislation

The law dealing with illicit distillation is contained in the following Acts of Parliament:

1. Illicit Distillation Act, 1831 and 1857
2. Spirits (Ir.) Act, 1854
3. Revenue (No.2) Act 1861
4. Intoxicating Liquor (General) Act, 1924 Section 26 and 27
5. Intoxicating Liquor Act, 1860, Section 22

Distillers engaged in the manufacture of spirits must hold a special licence from the Revenue Commissioners. The manufacture, sale or possession of illicit spirits is illegal and is a serious offence. To counteract illicit distillation certain commodities used in the manufacture of illicit spirits are controlled. In the prevention of Illicit Distillation Orders, 1928, 1929 and 1930, areas are defined in which permits are necessary for the sale, purchase, possession or removal of molasses, treacle, golden syrup, malt, yeast, hops, treacle meal and molassine meal which contains 65% or 45% of treacle respectively. A permit (specimen overleaf) for the sale, purchase, possession or distribution of these commodities is necessary and this permit is issued by the local Superintendent or member in charge of the Garda Station according to the purpose for which the permit is required. The controlled areas are known as **scheduled areas** and Connemara is such an area. Dealers in such commodities are bound to keep registers of transactions and the Gardaí may inspect such records at all reasonable times with the trader's consent.

Provision is made for the issue of search warrants to authorise entry by force, search for and seize illicit

spirits manufactured or partly manufactured, the containing vessels and any stills etc. used for the manufacture of such spirits. Provision is also made for searches without warrant. Sec. 18 of the Illicit Distillation Act 1831.

The principal Act which is used by the Garda Síochána for enforcing the law in relation to breaches of the above is the Illicit Distillation Act 1831. The main provisions of this Act are as follows:

Sec. 16	Persons having a still, wash etc. in their possession without a licence.
Sec. 20	Garda may spill and destroy all spirits seized.
Sec. 22	Persons keeping or concealing spirits on which duty was not paid.
Sec. 23	Proof lies on person that duty has been paid on spirits.
Sec. 24	Selling or delivering illicit spirits.
Sec. 26	All vehicles, including cars, containing spirits may be seized.
Sec. 27	Persons having interest in wash etc. used in illicit distillation commit offence.
Sec. 28	Persons who permit illicit distillation at any place.
Sec. 29	Persons armed with any offensive weapons or use force or obstruct Gardaí.
Sec. 30	Persons who cause any signal to be given to person involved in illicit distillation.
Sec. 38	Persons coming forward to claim still may be convicted on own confession.
Sec. 47	Permits all goods seized to be sold.

4.2 Powers - Illicit Distillation

(a) Search Warrant:

If any member of the Garda Síochána shall know or cause to suspect that any still, vat, cooler or other vessel used in distillation, or any spirits or low wines or other

AN CHÚIRT DÚICHE THE DISTRICT COURT

Information

Director of Public Prosecutions *Complainant.*	*District Court Area of* Derrynea.
Defendant.	*District No.* 7.

The information of Sergeant [redacted], of An Garda Siochana, Oughterard, Co. Galway who says on oath (or affirmation)

(I swear by Almighty God that the evidence I shall give in this case shall be the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth).

I am a member of the Garda Siochana stationed at Oughterard, Co. Galway. As a result of information I have received and facts in my possession I have cause to suspect and I do suspect that Illicit spirits, beer, worms, wash, still, still head are being kept in the dwellinghouse or outhouses of one

I therefore pray for a warrant to ~~xxxxx~~ enter and search for the said spirits and etc. and to seize same in the dwellinghouse or outhouses of the said

AN CHUIRT THE DISTRICT COURT

District Court Area of Derrynea. : District No. 7

SPECIAL WARRANT TO SEARCH

SECTION 17 OF THE ILLICIT DISTILLATION (IRELAND) ACT, 1831 (1 & 2 WM. IV, CAP. 55) AS EXTENDED BY SECTION 22 OF THE INTOXICATING LIQUOR ACT, 1960

Complainant: Director Of Public Prosecutions.

Defendant :

No in Minute Book :

WHEREAS it appears on the oath of Sergeant [redacted],

of An Garda Siochana, Oughterard, Co. Galway

that there is reasonable ground to suspect that (†) any private or concealed still, or any back, vat, cooler, or other vessel used in Illicit distillation, or any Illicit spirits, low wines, wort or wash, or other materials preparing or prepared for distillation

(*) *is are set up or kept* at

within the court area and district aforesaid, in the house or premises

of

of

THIS IS TO AUTHORISE AND EMPOWER you, by day or by night, to break open the doors or any part of such house or place where you so (*) *know suspect* that such (†) any private or concealed still, or any back, vat, cooler, or other vessel used in Illicit distillation, or any Illicit Spirits, low wines wort or wash, or other materials preparing or prepared for distillation

(*) *is are so set up kept* and to enter into such house or place and to seize all and every such (†) any private or concealed still, or any back, vat, cooler, or other vessel used in Illicit distillation, or any illicit spirits, low wines, wort , wash, or other materials preparing or prepared for distillation

which shall be there found and discovered and either to detain and keep the same in the house or place where found or to remove the same to the office of excise next to the place where the same shall be so discovered and found.

Given under my hand at Oughterard, Co. Galway

this day of 19 86

[redacted]

~~Justice of the District Court~~
(PEACE COMMISSIONER)

To ~~the Superintendent~~ of the Garda Siochána

materials prepared for distillation are set up or kept at any house or place, he shall on information on oath before a District Justice or Peace Commissioner apply for a warrant. Such warrant shall authorise such officer or Garda by day or night enter any place where he shall know or suspect such private or concealed still etc. or spirits are concealed or kept. He is authorised to seize all such stills or spirits and to detain or keep same in the place where found or to remove to office of exise or Garda Station. The proprietor of such place shall be guilty of offence. If any person shall obstruct, oppose or hinder any officer of excise or Garda in searching or seizing such stills or spirits, he shall be guilty of any offence contrary to Section 17 of the Illicit Distillation Act 1831.

Section 22 (1) of the Intoxicating Liquor Act 1960 extends the powers mentioned above to carry out a search of dwelling house and outhouses.

(b) Arrest without warrant:

Persons found in the room or place where illegal distillation is in process, may be arrested and taken before a District Justice.

Section 19 Illicit Distillation Act 1861.

Any member of the Garda Síochána may stop and detain any person who shall be found removing any still or any spirits of any kind and may examine such still or spirits and any such permit accompanying such spirits and if such spirits have been illegally distilled, they may be seized by a member of the Garda Síochána and the offender may be arrested without warrant.

Section 25 Illicit Distillation Act 1861.

Note:

There is no time limit as to when proceedings may be instituted. If any person liable to be arrested and detained shall not be detained at the time of committing the offence for which he is so liable, or after detention shall make his escape, any Garda may stop, arrest and detain such person at any time afterwards. (Section 37 Illicit Distillation Act 1831).

Penalty:

The amount of every fine imposed or other monetary penalty incurred for an offence under the Illicit Distillation Act 1831 or authorised to be imposed by this Act is £1,000 per Customs and Excise (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 1988.

Section 27 (5) of the Intoxicating Liquor (Gen.) Act 1924 also provides that a person convicted of an offence under the Act of 1831 may, in lieu of any penalty imposed, be sentenced, in the case of the first offence, to six months imprisonment, and, in the case of subsequent offence, to twelve months imprisonment. Section 39 of the Illicit Distillation Act 1831 provides for the mitigation of penalties.

4.3 Disposal of illicit distillation equipment and material

Seizures made under the Illicit Distillation Acts 1831 and 1875 will be disposed of as follows without prior reference to the Revenue Commissioners:

(a) Seizures of wash, spirits and malt and such materials will be destroyed locally.

(b) Still, still heads and worms seized and forfeited will be cut up and broken into pieces. If of commercial value, sold by tender.

(c) Equipment of commercial or scrap value, piping etc. and materials will be sold by tender. Gas cylinders will not be sold but a report will be forwarded to Commissioner (Operations) Legal Section.

(d) When a small quantity of spirits (not exceeding one gallon) is found in a vehicle where there is no previous conviction by the offender concerned, the Revenue Commissioners will not object to the restoration of the vehicle. In every other case the question of a disposed vehicle should be referred to the Revenue Commissioners.

(e) Equipment and materials of no commercial value will be destroyed.

(f) Articles seized should not be disposed of until after Court hearing.

(g) Tenders for purchase of equipment and materials will be submitted to the Divisional Officer who may authorise the acceptance of the highest tender.

(h) Proceeds of sales submitted at the end of each quarter to Office of Revenue Commissioners.

4.4 Rewards for Revenue Duty (Illicit Distillation Acts):

Rewards for good detections and seizures under the Illicit Distillation Acts are made periodically by the Revenue Commissioners to members who are responsible for the conviction of persons found engaged in illicit distillation, or in the possession of the products thereof, or for the seizure of materials and articles used in the manufacture of illicit spirits. The Reward Board will decide the amount to be paid. The seizure of molasses does not qualify for a monetary reward under the Illicit Distillation Acts.

Rewards will be claimed by Garda Headquarters from data on Form C. 12 submitted and signed by all the detecting Gardaí in respect of each detection. Forms C. 13 will be submitted when the offender is convicted in Court. All C. 12s and C. 13s have to be forwarded to reach Commissioner Operations (Rewards) Headquarters not later than fourteen days from the date of seizure or the date of the Court, whichever is applicable.

A consolidated Annual Return on Form C. 79 in respect of seizures, prosecutions, convictions etc. under the Illicit Distillation Acts will be forwarded by Divisional Officer for year ending December 31st to Commissioner Operations (Rewards) before February 1st.

Value of Illegal Dist. Materials etc (For completion of C 12)

Still head	£3. 00p
Worm	£15.00p
Still	£15.00p
Bottle of Poteen	£6.00p
Gallon of Poteen	£25.00p
Wash 60 gallons	- £100.00p
Cooler	£15.00p
Barrel (Timber)	£15.00p
Barrel (Steel)	£12.00p

POITÍN AND YOUR HEALTH

5.1 Effects of drinking *poitín* in Connemara:

Poitín, when consumed, is a depressant not a stimulant. It acts on the control centres of the brain to depress them. This allows the person to exhibit certain kinds of behaviour and attitudes that are usually repressed. The most common picture of acute intoxication is one of confusion, disorientation and an unsteady gait. Sometimes these manifestations are accompanied by disturbing hallucinations. Often the chronic drinker of *poitín* exhibits *delirium tremens*, a disturbance that is frequently fatal. Frequently also the individual becomes confused, has hallucinations and develops various kinds of paralyses. As brain deterioration continues from persistent consumption of *poitín*, the individual may develop various kinds of mental illnesses.

5.2 Deadly reality about *poitín*:

The deadly reality about drinking *poitín* is the number of deaths that it causes. The *poitín* is also believed to be largely responsible for the high incidence of psychiatric problems as well as contributing to marital and family difficulties in the Connemara area. The reality is that *poitín* drinking is responsible for battered wives, abandoned children, stripped homes and hospital beds filled with men whose liver or hearts are irreparably damaged.

5.2 Views of Fr. Martin Long, formerly curate of Tír an Fhia, Lettermore:

Fr. Martin Long, formerly a curate in Tír an Fhia (1982-1990), states that while serving as a priest in the South Connemara area, he has known of seven deaths which were directly related to drinking *poitín*. "*Poitín* is being badly abused in Connemara and there is great local concern among the people about it. Once people start drinking it,

they stick with it. All age groups are now drinking it. It has increased in popularity with young people. The price factor is a major consideration as is the terrible unemployment problem. Up to 80% of all men over 18 are unemployed in this area and this has to be taken into account. There is also some very bad *poitín* being produced - I'm told some of it is pure poison. Apart from the seven deaths in my time from *poitín*, it has also been responsible for an amount of family breakups and so is a dangerous problem indeed."

5.4 Views of Dr. Pat O'Malley, Carraroe, Co. Galway:

Dr. Pat O'Malley who is a native of Béal an Daingin, Lettermore, Co. Galway, has been practising in Carraroe since 1977 and said that he could recall at least twenty deaths as a direct result of *poitín* during his time as a G.P. "But it could as easily be double that figure," he claimed. "It is not unusual for a *poitín* drinker to spend a week or a fortnight drinking *poitín* solidly. It wouldn't be unusual for these people to fall into a boghole and be found later suffering from exposure. The problem with it is the availability and the price. You can buy nearly four bottles of *poitín* for the same price as a bottle of whiskey. That fact probably accounts for the increasing number of young people turning to it. I've seen a fourteen year old unconscious from *poitín*. The most common problem with hardened *poitín* drinkers would be alcoholic gastritis, problems with the liver, depression, withdrawal symptoms or, very often, they have to be admitted to hospital for detoxification. In certain areas of Connemara there would be a very high percentage of the people admitted to hospital as a direct result of drinking *poitín*. This would also apply to admissions to psychiatric hospitals. The stuff is addictive and the problem has got worse. Young people with no jobs to do can easily wind up in a shebeen for an all-night party. The hardened drinkers would be capable of putting away two or three bottles a day. But much of the modern *poitín* can't be of good quality. It is

made too fast to be good, according to older men, many of whom would not touch the stuff made in a couple of days. Years ago it took 4-6 weeks to make to ensure purity."

5.5 Stronger and deadlier than brandy:

Whiskey and brandy which is sold over the counter is 70% proof (40% by volume). A sample of *poitín* which is always analysed at the Forensic Science Laboratory, Phoenix Park, Dublin, can contain a staggering 100% proof or 60% alcohol by volume. The higher the concentration of alcohol, the greater the danger of acute alcoholic poisoning, particularly in the hands of inexperienced drinkers. Acute/chronic intoxication can result from rapid digestion of alcohol, particularly on an empty stomach and this can result in coma, brain damage or death. Pure (100%) alcohol could not be drunk because it is an irritant to the lining of the stomach and intestines. The higher the concentration, the greater the irritant effect. An incorrect cut of the distillate could also result in some potentially toxic materials being distilled over into the *poitín*. This is more likely to increase the chances of a hangover than to cause permanent damage. The higher the concentration of alcohol, the greater the danger of acute alcoholic poisoning, particularly in the hands of the inexperienced drinker. There is no form of quality control in the production of *poitín*. The *poitín* is usually distributed in old whiskey bottles or other bottles and there is complete absence of quality control in the production procedures.

The cork is usually unsealed and (not surprisingly) the source/manufacturer is often unknown. Adulteration by dilution either with water (possibly of doubtful purity) or by the addition of other liquids is always a significant risk. There is also the possibility that toxic materials such as weedkiller have previously been stored in the bottles used for distribution and that contamination can occur. The addition of Parazone or other such substances in *poitín* can have a fatal result.

FOLKLORE AND *POITÍN*

6.1 Anecdotes and *poitín:*

There are many hilarious stories told about *poitín*, some true, others perhaps fictitious, but I would like to recall here some of the stories as related to me by my colleagues in Oughterard District:

1. Two members were on *poitín* duty in Lettermullen. They carried out a search of a *shebeen* known as Bradley's. They seized a half bottle of *poitín*. While the owner of the house was being questioned by the members, Bradley knocked the bottle of *poitín* on the floor and broke it. One of the members soaked up the *poitín* with a handkerchief which contained enough to convict him.

2. While searching a house in Lettermullen for *poitín*, bottles were found in the cot where a child slept and two were found under the mattress in a pram where a baby was asleep. A bottle was found between a woman's legs in the same locality. A woman was also known to conceal a bottle of *poitín* in her bosom when questioned by Sergeant Crofton.

3. There are many strange places where wash or *poitín* have been concealed - 4 barrels of wash was found concealed underneath the floor of a hayshed - the hayshed was full of hay.
7 bottles were found in a pile of chips dumpted outside a house.
Bottles of *poitín* were hidden in the washing machine while more bottles were hidden in dirty linen in the middle of a kitchen floor.

4. D/Garda walked into Bradley's shebeen. The owner of the house did not recognise him as a Garda. He mistook him for *fear na mbeithíoch* (Dept. of Agriculture official) and gave him a cup of *poitín*. He was convicted for same.

5. While on point duty a Garda stopped a man on a Honda carrying a satchel on the carrier. When asked what was in the satchel, he answered, "A rabbit." It contained a gallon of *poitín*.

6. While on a search of a house at Lettermullen the Gardaí were seeking to gain admittance but were refused. On looking in through the window they observed the owner at the kitchen sink with a bottle of *poitín* in each hand, pouring it down the sink. Both taps were running at the same time. He then allowed them in but no *poitín* was found.

7. On recent *poitín* duty a shebeen was found in a most unusual place on top of an outhouse with a ladder extending from the ground to the roof of this outhouse.

8. While on *poitín* duty in Lettermore a man on a pedal cycle threw away a bottle of *poitín* when he saw the approaching patrol car and cycled as fast as he could up a bye-road. When the patrol car caught up with him he was questioned as to what he had thrown away. To which he replied, "A snot." The bottle of *poitín* was recovered and he was convicted.

9. While on *poitín* duty at Ballinakill £150 in cash was found in a jacket at the scene. There was nobody present. The jacket and money were removed to Lettermore Garda Station. Some time later a man came and claimed his jacket and money. He was convicted under the Illicit Distillation Acts.

10. Keys with the Reg. No. of a car were found at a stillhouse at Trabane on commonage. The car belonged to suspect and one of the keys opened his caravan. He was convicted.

11. A raid was carried out on an illegal distillery in the Inverin area. All the equipment and spirits seized were removed to Inverin Garda Station - a lock-up Garda Station.

On the following day a break-in was discovered at the station and all the equipment and spirits were stolen.

12. The bell in Lettermullen Church which is situated on a hill has been used on occasions by an anonymous local to warn *poitín* makers of the approaching Garda raid party.

13. A man returning to America from Connaught International Airport was carrying a gallon of *poitín*. When questioned by the Customs as to what was in the bottle, he replied, "Water from the blessed well in Knock." The smell of the contents revealed that this was not the case.

14. While the patrol car at Carraroe was pursuing a car in the Lettermullen area, a bottle was thrown from the car into a quarry. The bottle somehow survived the impact and the occupants of the car were convicted under the Illicit Distillation Acts.

6.2 *Poitín* and Cures:

Poitín is alleged to be a versatile spirit. A practice that has been common for years is the selling off of **singlings**, the first run, which is harsh, strong and undrinkable to people suffering from sprains, hacks and cuts. Just rub the **singlings** on and the pain will disappear like magic, it was widely believed. **Singlings** was also sold to farmers as cattle food and they thrived on it. Unscrupulous people would often add sulphuric acid to it. If put in a retort, the early distillate of this apparently appaling mixture was ether.

The **triosc** which was the solids which remained when the beer was removed from the barrel (a mixture of barley, sugar and yeast) was fed to pigs and cattle. This, by all accounts, is alleged to be the best food that can be fed to animals. The *singlings* and *poitín* itself is alleged to be a "cure" for sick animals.

Poitín was also supposed to be a "cure" for all kinds of ailments in people - asthma, rheumatism, arthritis, bad colds, the flu and all aches and pains in old people.

Children going to school in the morning were given a spoon of *tús an phota* (the beginning of the last run of *poitín*) which was supposed to protect them from all colds etc. for that day.

Embellishing the myth, *poitín* is supposed to be "good for anything."

CONCLUSION

I have examined the different aspects of *poitín* making - its uses and its effect on society. As with many products which confer benefits on society such as medicines, motor vehicles etc., misuse of alcohol can have devastating effects for families, employers and society in general as well as for the drinkers themselves. In general, the consumption of *poitín* can have a detrimental effect on a person's health as it is distilled with materials and in a manner which would be questionable by any standards, not to mention the damaging effects on the mental well-being of a person and consequently the psychological damage caused to her/his dependants.

In dealing with the problem as a Garda, I can state with conviction that its consumption, particularly at Christmas, is responsible for the high ratio of psychiatric patients attending University College Hospital, Galway, and St. Brigid's Psychiatric Hospital, Ballinasloe, Co. Galway, from the Connemara area. It also creates the climate which leads to family problems and who knows what damage is caused to children after suffering such traumatic experiences. It is also a contributory factor to deaths in Connemara and medical statistics available to me bear this out. It is also a factor in crime which leads to erratic behaviour, resulting in brawls and consequently assaults, often of a serious nature which eventually lead to prison sentences. It is certainly an evil which I would like to see eradicated from our society in the interest of peace, harmony and stability.

The sooner the myth and romantic notion concerning *poitín* disappears, the better. The alternative would be to take it out of the closets of illegality and licence it. At the moment, some hope of this looms on the horizon as very recently Euro. M.P.s voted to allow citizens to distill 50 litres of pure alcohol a year for their own consumption, and the benevolent bureaucrats have also decreed that you do not have to drink on your own but you can share your

hooch with family, guests and even employees. The only condition is that everyone has to drink under the same roof. So *poitín* parties and bootleg barbecues could soon be the in-thing on the social scene and it all will be perfectly legal.

Until the above legislation is enacted in the legislature of this country, the Irish Government might give consideration to the following suggestions:

* Elevate *poitín* to cottage industry status. Grant it special tax incentives. Enforce controls and standards acceptable in the distilling industry in Ireland. For the first time give *poitín* makers a sense of worth and recognition of their ancient craft which they have valiantly guarded despite all government efforts to stamp it out. Legalise what is best and eliminate all sub-standard products.

* Invite the Health Education Bureau to educate the public of the dangers to society from the consumption of *poitín*. Perhaps the primary and secondary schools could be a starting point for such a programme in the areas where *poitín* is distilled. Youth clubs could also be visited and alerted to the danger of *poitín*.

* Involve the Medico-Social Research Board in examining the properties of *poitín* and in making healthy and helpful recommendations to people involved in *poitín* making while keeping the identity of *poitín* makers anonymous.

* Encourage the National Council on Alcoholism to set up branches in the different *poitín* drinking localities of Connemara. These would offer advice, ease the problem and counsel the families distressed by *poitín* abuse.

The Gardaí could give talks on Raidió na Gaeltachta outlining the dangers attached to drinking *poitín*, especially when hazardous additives such as Parazone or Bluestone are added to the drink. The local G.P. could

also be invited to reinforce the message that *poitín* can be as lethal as some of the hard drugs which are presently on the market.

The laws of the land will continue to be enforced as they are enacted at present. The increased penalties of £1,000 maximum fine has lessened the number of *poitín* makers. They are being pursued with all the vigour of the law by the Oughterard Garda District Force led by Supt. T. Murphy.

Only the foolhardy continue to distil *poitín*.

> Gather up the pots and the old tin cans,
> the mash, the corn, the barley and the bran.
> Run like the devil from the Excise man.
> Keep the smoke from rising, Barney.
> - *The Hills of Connemara.*

I hope you have had as much enjoyment reading this essay as I had in writing it.

"Nuair a bhíonn an t-ól istigh, bíonn an chiall amuigh."

SLÁINTE!

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A P P E N D I X / A

AN GARDA SIOCHANA

RETURN OF SEIZURES, PROSECUTIONS, CONVICTIONS, ETC., UNDER ILLICIT DISTILLATION ACTS DURING YEAR ENDED 1986 to 1991

Year	County	NUMBER OF CASES					NUMBER OF PERSONS						Total amount of fine impos
		in which seizures were made	Where Prosecutions instituted	Where one or more convictions secured	Where no convictions secured	Pending	Prosecuted	Convicted	Imprisoned	Fined	Whose Prosecutions were dismissed	Involved in cases	
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)	(9)	(10)	(11)	(12)	(13)
86	Galway	33	9	7	24	2	9	--	--	7	--	2	£498.0
87	Galway	31	12	8	--	4	12	8	--	8	--	4	£1050.
88	Galway	30	9	9	21	Nil	10	5	Nil	8	5	--	£3897.
89	Galway	31	9	4	1	4	9	4	--	4	1	--	£3500.
90	Galway	27	7	3	2	2	5	4	--	4	1	--	£3200.
91	Galway	27	6	2	1	3	5	2	--	2	1	3	£2000.

	Gals.	Pts.
Total quantity of SPIRITS seized:	422	5
Total quantity of WASH seized:	15,515	

Above return is in respect of seizures, prosecutions and convictions for the Connemara

C3995.148397.3,000.11/86.WSMI. G10-01.

FORM C. 12
(Duplicate)

GARDA SÍOCHÁNA

REVENUE REPORT

COUNTY.....

Division of..... District of..... Sub-District of.....

Excise Collection..... Excise District.....

1. A report is to be made on this Form of all offences under the Illicit Distillation Act, 1831; the Spirits Act, 1854 and the Inland Revenue Act, 1880.
2. It is to be borne in mind that Justices are not empowered by law to dispose of *any* spirits, or other articles seized under *any* of the Acts quoted above.
3. It is to be stated whether the holes in which illicit matter may be found appeared to have been recently made and whether the illicit matter was *fresh* or *otherwise* at the time of seizure.
4. It is to be stated whether a still, still-head, or worm, is *new* or *otherwise*, and whether made of *tin* or *copper*.
5. It is to be stated whether wash is the produce of malt, molasses, or other material.

STATEMENT OF THE CASE

Date.....

The Superintendent,

.....

I have to report that I proceeded with the men who have signed this report at.....o'clock.....m. on the.....day of.....19..... to the Townland named in Table II, and seized the undermentioned articles, acting*.....private information.

We returned to our Stations at.....o'clock.....m.

.....Sergeant.

* State whether "without" or "on" private information.

FOIRM C. 13.

AN GARDA SÍOCHÁNA

TUARASCÁIL (IONCAIM) BHREISE.

ROINN..... CEANTAR.....

Tuarascáil Bhreise ar*

An Dáta ar ar chuir an Ceannfort an chéad Tuarascáil C. 12 Isteach.

Dátaí Tuarascála Breise seachas an ceann so, agus Uimhreacha Tagartha an Phríomh-Árais á lua, más ann dóibh.

.....19.....

Maidir lem thuarascáil den

.....Ceannfort.

.....19.....

Cuirtear so faoid bhráid.

.....

Ard-Chednnfort.

Don Choimisinéir

.ionnuisce,
Atha Cliath 8.

Telephone: 771156 Ext. 2910 / 2911
Fax: 794667

The Forensic Science Laboratory
Department of Justice,
Garda Headquarters,
Phoenix Park,
Dublin 8.

Our Ref: 120/91
Your Ref:

RE: EAMON O' DONNELL.

Attached is the statement of evidence of Ms. E. Hughes, Forensic Scientist of this laboratory.

The exhibits in this case are being returned via the Garda Forensic Liaison Office, Garda Headquarters, Extension 2640. Please ensure that the exhibits are available in court if required.

The laboratory's case number and the forensic scientist's name should be quoted in any communication regarding this case or its exhibits.

Dr. James Donovan,
Director.

Dli-Eolaíochta
Dli agus Cirt,
Gárda Síochána,
Páirc an Fhionnuisce,
Baile Átha Cliath 8.

Telephone: 771156 Ext. 2910 / 2911
Fax: 6794667

The Forensic Science Laboratory
Department of Justice,
Garda Headquarters,
Phoenix Park,
Dublin 8.

Statement of evidence of E. Hughes, B.A. (MOD) M.Sc., Forensic Scientist at the Forensic Science Laboratory of the Department of Justice, pursuant to Section 21 of the Criminal Justice Act, 1984.

Age: over 21 years

Our Ref: 120/91
Your Ref:

RE: EAMON O' DONNELL.

On 22nd January 1991 I received from Sgt Joseph Boyce a bottle labelled "Sample of clear liquid substance taken from a five (5) gallon plastic container seized by Sergeant Joseph Boyce and Garda Colm Kavanagh, Oughterard from a shed adjacent to Eamon O' Donnell's dwellinghouse at Teerane, Lettermore on the 11th December 1990 Signde J Boyce Sergeant (J. Boyce)". This bottle contained 750 mls of a clear liquid. I analysed this liquid and found it to contain 37.5% ethanol by volume.

Report

This item contained 37.5% ethanol by volume.

I declare that the above facts be true to the best of my knowledge and belief and I have made the above statement knowing that if it were tendered in evidence I would be liable to prosecution if I stated in it anything which I knew to be false or did not believe to be true.

Enid Hughes

Ms. Enid Hughes
Forensic Scientist

G 321

(3) In this section "pipeline" means a pipe together with any apparatus and works associated therewith, or system of pipes together with any apparatus or works associated therewith, used for the conveyance of goods into or out of the State.

Amendment of Illicit Distillation (Ireland) Act, 1831.

N.B.

14.—(1) The amount of every fine imposed or other money penalty incurred for an offence under the Illicit Distillation (Ireland) Act, 1831, or authorised to be imposed by that Act, is hereby increased to £1,000.

(2) The following section is hereby substituted for section 39 of the Illicit Distillation (Ireland) Act, 1831:

"39.—(1) Any Justice of the District Court may at his discretion mitigate any penalty incurred for any offence under this Act, but no such mitigation shall in any case reduce such a penalty to less than one half thereof.

(2) The period of a term of imprisonment to which a person may be sentenced in default of payment of a penalty incurred for an offence under this Act (including non-payment of a mitigated amount of any such penalty) shall not exceed three months.".

Amendment of Customs and Inland Revenue Act, 1881.

15.—Section 12 of the Customs and Inland Revenue Act, 1881, is hereby amended by the substitution of the following for so much of that section as follows subparagraph (6):

"A person who commits an offence under this section shall be liable on summary conviction thereof to a customs penalty not exceeding £1,000, and he may either be detained or proceeded against by summons.".

Amendment of Finance Act, 1929.

16.—Section 31 of the Finance Act, 1929, is hereby amended—

(*a*) in subsection (1), by the insertion after "duty of excise" of "or a prohibition or restriction on the importation or exportation of any goods" and

(*b*) in subsection (3), by the substitution of "£1,000" for "fifty pounds",

and the said subsections, as so amended, are set out in the Table to this section.

TABLE

(1) Whenever an officer of customs and excise is authorised by any enactment relating to a duty of customs or a duty of excise or a prohibition or restriction on the importation or exportation of any goods and contained in a British Statute or any Act of the Oireachtas passed before or after this Act or by any regulation heretofore made or hereafter to be made under any such enactment to demand the production of or to inspect or examine any book, account, letter, voucher or other document such officer shall if he has reasonable ground for suspecting fraud in connection with any entry in or omission from such document or in connection with any transaction to which such document refers also be entitled to remove and detain such document.

(3) Any person who resists or obstructs an officer of customs and excise in the exercise of any of the powers conferred on him by this section shall be guilty of an offence under this section and shall be liable on summary conviction thereof to a penalty of £1,000 and such penalty shall be a customs penalty where the officer in respect of whom the offence was committed was exercising the said powers for the purposes of the Customs Acts and shall be an excise penalty where such officer was exercising such powers for the purposes of any British Statute or Act of the Oireachtas relating to duties of excise and the management of those duties.

Uimh. A 944

SAORSTÁT EIREANN.

Rialacháin chun Stilléireacht nea-Dhlistineach do chosc, 1925.

Cead chun abhar fé smacht do dhíol, abhar atá le tabhairt isteach i liomatáiste sceidealta.

Uimh. A 944

Udaruítear leis seo do (1) ..... as (2) .....

an t-abhar fé smacht so leanas, eadhon, (3) ..... do cheannach ó

(4) ..... agus/no do thabhairt ar (5)

..... go dtí (6) ..... áit

atá laistigh de liomatáiste sceidealta, chun (7) .....

.....

Dáta: an ..... lá so de ..... 19 .....

Sighnithe .....
Ceannphort, Gárda Síochána.

N.B.—Caithfear an bun-chead díola maraon leis an gcóip a chur chuig an deighleálaí gur uaidh a ceannuítear an t-abhar. Ba cheart don deighleálaí sin an bun-chead do choimeád agus an chóip do chur ar aghaidh i dteannta na consighneachta d'earraí.

(1) Cuir isteach anso ainm iomlán scalbhóra an cheada.
(2) ,, ,, ,, scoladh iomlán scalbhóra an cheada.
(3) ,, ,, ,, tuairisc iomlán ar an abhar fé smacht.
(4) ,, ,, ,, ainm agus scoladh an deighleálaí.
(5) ,, ,, ,, mion-eolas iomlán ar an modh iompair (*i.e.*, cc'ca ar an mbóthar iarainn, ar luing nó ar chanáil é).
(6) ,, ,, ,, ainm na h-áite chun a bhféadfar an t-abhar fé smacht do thabhairt.
(7) ,, ,, ,, mion-eolas iomlán ar an gcrich chun a bhféadfar an t-abhar fé smacht d'úsáid.

(3819).L.10055.Wt.6159—85.3.100Bks.5/25.A.T.&Co.,Ltd. G.28.*

[illegible]

have an interest in a certain quantity of spirits, that is to say about one and a half gallons, found in a shed at the rear of your house, the full duties whereon had not been fully paid, contrary to section 27 of the Illicit Distillation (Ireland) Act, 1831 as amended and extended by the Intoxicating Liquor (General) Act, 1924 and the Intoxicating Liquor Act, 1960. Also section 14 of the Customs and Excise (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act, 1959

Oughterard

2 th February 84.

II a

31/1/84.

XXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXX

A P P E N D I X B

Irish Independent, Wednes

Poteen drinker fined £500 as new law bites

A CONNEMARA man has been fined £500 for having a bottle of poteen in one of the first convictions carrying stiff new penalties.

The fine was imposed on Anthony Finnerty of Sruthan, Carraroe, after District Justice John Garavan was told at Derrynea Court that he had been found with a bottle of poteen in his possession on August 3 this year.

Increased penalties for possession of poteen under the Customs and Excise (Miscellaneous) Act 1988 mean offenders are liable to a minimum fine of £1,000, although District Justices have the power to mitigate this to not less than £500.

Justice Garavan imposed the lesser fine after he was told by Supt. Joseph Ward that Mr. Finnerty, who did not appear in court, was neither a dealer nor a distiller and only had the moonshine for his own personal use.

However, another man, who was described by Supt. Ward as being a long established dealer in poteen was fined £1,000 for possession of eight gallons.

Mairtin Joyce, of Ballinakill, Lettermullen, was before the court on three charges of possession, having an interest in, and knowingly keeping or concealing illicit spirits at his home on August 1. He pleaded guilty.

Supt. Ward told Justice Garavan that Joyce was a long-established poteen dealer who did not make the moonshine himself but bought and sold it. He had two previous convictions, having been fined £200 in 1978 for having 56 gallons in his possession, and £400 when he appeared in court in 1985.

Justice Garavan said he was considering sending the defendant to prison and asked Supt. Ward wh thought. The Superintendent sugg a stiff fine might be sufficient o occasion.

Afterwards, Supt. Ward w that gardai would be stepping up drive against the traditional p making in Connemara leading Christmas and expressed confi that the new stiffer penalties wou a major factor in their battle.

1-Press.

POITIN WARS

Despite heavier moonshine fines, it's Christmas supplies as usual

By CORMAC MacCONNELL

A MAN NAMED Tony Finnerty from Carraroe will go down in history as the first to pay the sky high 1988 price for a bottle of poitin. At Derrynea Court in Connemara, last month, he was charged with being in possession of a single bottle of the local white lightning.

He was fined £500 under the stiff new laws aimed at stamping out the distillation of the firey mountain dew among the mountains of Connemara. Under the terms of the new legislation, £500 is the minimum fine which the Court could impose. The new financial penalties add a new dimension to the ancient tradition of moonshining in the Gaeltacht area of the far west.

That same afternoon, only a few miles away from the little courthouse on the shores of Galway Bay, even as the TV news cameras were recording the new blitz against poitin-making, a local moonshiner was disposing of ten bottles of the hard stuff to an eager market.

It was a fact recorded later by local broadcaster Mairtin Davey on Radio na Gaeltachta. The price per bottle depended on the ability of the customers to pay, but all were between £6 and £7.50 a bottle. The transactions, in a very direct

being replaced by an alloy pipe, and other changes in the design of the still and worm, the moonshiners hope will enable them to carry out the illicit distillation at a much brisker pace.

According to Mairtin Davey, too, the disappearance from the scene of the "cowboys", who frequently put potentially lethal poitin on the Christmas market, will also result in the mountain dew being of a better quality.

Medical

Irish Times 4/12/88

Tough laws hit poitín sales

XT 4/12/88

By Rory Godson

TOUGH new laws have devastated the traditional Christmas poitin trade in Connemara. Fines of at least £500 for the possession of a single bottle mean that few people are travelling west for seasonal poitin supplies, say gardai.

"One of the biggest suppliers in Connemara was complaining recently that he had not sold a bottle for a month or more," says Garda Superintendent Joe Ward of Oughterard. "With the new laws and the efforts of the gardai we can put an end to poitin."

The 60-year-old law on illegal distillation was updated by the Customs and Excise Act of last May. Fines for producing, concealing or possessing poitin or poitin stills rose from between £60 and £200 to a maximum of £1,000. the £1,000 fine can be mitigated to £500 in special circumstances.

Traditionally November and December are the busiest

are comparatively light. One of the biggest producers in the North, John Wilson of Ballyclare was caught in the act by a custom raid in September 1986, filmed by television crew. It was his fifth conviction but he eventually escaped with a fine of £450 and a suspended jail sentence.

Gardai made 100 seizures of poitin last year. In the North, there were less than 15 seizures.

TIMES 8 NOVEMBER 1987

Crispin Rodwell

ators McCrossan (left) and Patterson

extent

There was a bureaucratic objection to its quoting of an anonymous Irish doctor of 1760, who listed the following good reasons for drinking poitin: "It killeth fleshworms; strengthens youth; casts off melancholy and breaketh ye wind."

McCrossan says the trading standards people "nearly died" when they read it.

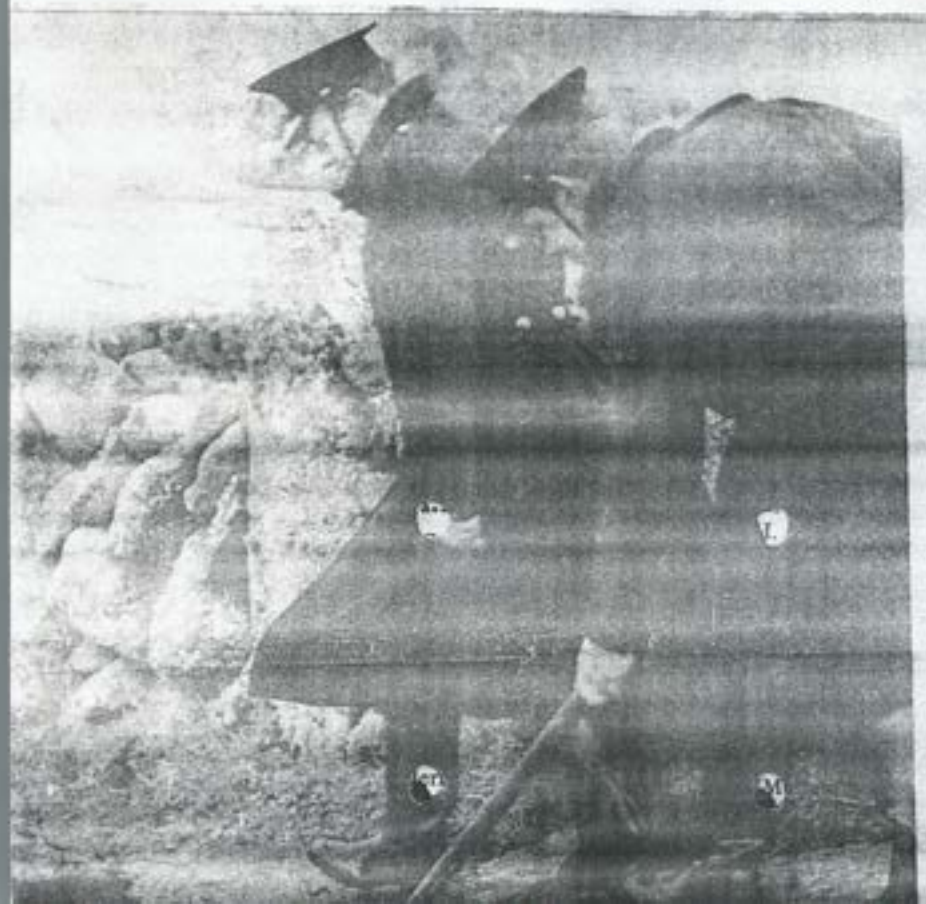
Garda Raid On Poteen

Top left—Down to the sea: The Gardai take the first step in t
James Buckley, Michael Dowd, Michael Ward and Joe Boyce n
rocky way to the shore.

Centre above—All aboard and manoeuvering for the move-off
Michael Needham, Gardai Jim Buckley, Michael Ward, Joe B

Top right—The search of the hidden places. The poteen-mak
use, is often concealed in drains, in rocky clefts or beneath th
Needham turns a keen eye on an overgrown corner

Garda Raid On Poteen



Garda Raid On Poteen

Garda James Buckley probes beneath the surface of a stream accompanied by Garda Michael Ward.

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Connacht Tribune

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the poitin patrol

IAM DILLON

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rs of a mile out,

the tiny wooded island of Gurlaun looked uninviting.

On the island, the four gardai were quick to score.

They came on a small clearing where the air was heavy with the rich smell of fermenting barley.

Concealed beneath makeshift coverings were four wooden barrels of "wash" ready for distillation.

The casks contined an estimated 240 gallons which would yield approximately 24 gallons of poitin with a boreen value of about £500. By normal Connemara standards, however, it was a relatively small find and, according to the gardai, crudely put together.

The squad believe this particular operation was the work of a known local poitin maker.

But in the absence of any firm evidence the best they could do was pour the pale-coloured liquid into the ground and try to smash the equipment.

The gardai estimated that the wash had been fermenting for a week to 10 days and that its owner would have been along soon to carry out the final stage.

His outlay on raw materials would have been between £100 and £150.

Back on land, the squad waded through muck to reach another possible site a short distance up the lakeshore.

The small lonely wood was the scene of a big haul more than a year ago when 12 barrels were discovered, along with a small hut in which to store the gear.

This time, however, they drew a blank.

The poitin makers had not been back, though they were probably in business nearby.

Poitin is a tradition going back many years in certain families and there are plenty of hiding places.

Back in the warmth of the station, the gardai said possessing even one bottle of poteen could result in a £200 fine, though in practice it was no more than about £20.

The most common excuse was that the illicit liquor is for treating a sick calf.

● The barley wash destroyed and the gardai proceed to smash up the barrels buried in the ground.

One poteen maker recently told a court he needed the money to pay his car insurance.

● Customs men seized one of Northern Ireland's biggest illegal stills yesterday.

A team of 10 officers swooped on an isolated farm in the hills above Ballyclare, Co. Antrim, and found nearly 40 gallons of poitin and a further 750 gallons of wash.

The supplies could have been worth up to £IR24,000.

● Gardai say they will bring prosecutions after a poitin still, 200 gallons of wash, a still head and a copper worm were seized near Crossmolina, Co. Mayo, yesterday.

In two other raids nearby they found a barrel of wash and three bottles of poitin.

iday, February 23, 1990 Connacht Tribune

Caught redhanded poteen maker gets £1,000 fine

A poteen maker who was caught with his hands up" in a istillery in his shed in 'onnemara, was fined the aximum amount of £1,000 hen he appeared before a sitting f the District Court in Derrynea n Tuesday.

Seán Seosamh (John Joe) oighe pleaded guilty to three arges of illegally distilling itin in a shed near his home at 'á Bán, Leitir Mór on January last in which 6 pints of poteen d almost 30 gallons of nglings' were seized by Gardai. e court also learned that he had revious conviction for being in ssession of potin.

Sergeant Seosamh O adhaigh gave evidence to the rt of visiting Seoighe's house about 11.30 p.m. on the night the seizure, accompanied by rda Sands. They approached a d near the house, and though door was closed, they noticed t there was a light on inside.

On entering the shed they nd Seoighe, who was in the ocess of distilling poteen. rgeant O Buadhaigh gave dence of finding three stills, three coolers, and three worms in the shed — each of which was set up and ready for the distillation of the illicit spirit.

In an adjacent shed the Gardai also found four wooden barrels, each containing approximately two stones weight of grain. When they charged Seoighe with the offence, the accused replied that he had nothing to say. The Court heard that he was fined £200 for possession of illicit spirits in 1986.

District Justice John Garavan described the seizure and arrest as a "hands up situation, with the accused getting caught red-handed in the act." He said that it was obvious that Seoighe was an experienced poteen maker, and had engaged in this activity from time to time.

Said Justice Garavan: "We know how serious this particular situation is. Very heavy penalties have been imposed by legislators to cut out the illegal distillation of poitin.

"It was a professional set-up. There were approximately 30 gallons found, containing 3 stills, three coolers, and three worms, and though I have powers of mitigation I find myself with no alternative but to impose the maximum fine of £1,000," he concluded.

£300,000 go-ahead

MR. Noel Treacy, T.D., Minister of State has this week announced a series of Social Employment Schemes for the Galway East area. He stated that r. Bertie Aheam, Minister for Labour, on the recommendation of FAS has sanctioned 17 Social Employment Schemes with an employment content of 75 workers and a Budget of circa £300,000.00 for the Galway East area.

Schemes have been sanctioned for the following groups: Abbeyknockmoy Community Centre; Abbey Community Development Association; Bullaun Sportsfield, Ballinakill; Community Council; Duniry Parish Development Association; Killimor GAA Club; Kilconeron GAA Club; Kilconly Church Committee; St. Brendan's Training Centre; Loughrea; St. Joseph's Library, Ballinasloe; Leitrim Parish Council, Laurencetown Tidy Towns Committee, Mountbellew Golf Club, Tuam Golf Club, St. Benin's Training Centre, Tuam and Tuam Enterprise Committee.

Tuam is priority

Continued from Page 1

town and this is why he has it earmarked for special attention this year. "And I am going to ensure that it will come this year", he added.

He said that the Minister was also anxious to get Homecare Fabrics Limited, which is in receivership at the moment, up and running again and had given his full support to the proposed Enterprise Centre in Tuam.

"Seeing that the Minister has given his commitment to Tuam, things are moving in a very positive direction but the building of advance factory facilities does not automatically mean that an industry will be provided", commented Deputy Kitt.

However, Tuam Chamber of Commerce President, Martin McDonnell said this morning said that he was suspicious that the IDA and the Department of Industry and Commerce seemed to come out with two contradictory statements within a matter of days.

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and had 18 applications from various consortia for the project which is estimated to cost about £8m.

Five of these have been shortlisted and the Environmental spokesperson claimed that the Minister, Mary Harney, will issue the tough regulations required in the EC directive long before the final decision is taken.

■ Tess Eyre of the Rotc

Unpaid fines mock drive against poitin

By CORMAC MAC CONNELL

DESPITE stiff new legislation, despite all the odds, there is still moonshine to be had in Connemara this Christmas season.

It could be the most expensive "short" of all time for some drinkers. Nowadays to be found in possession of even as much as would brim a thimble leaves one open to an automatic fine of a staggering £1,000! With a bottle of the hard stuff costing an average of £6 this Christmas, the total potential cost of £1,006 should have dealt a death blow to the illicit industry since the Customs and Excise (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act of 1988 became law last winter. It hasn't.

As an Anti-Poitin Squad based in Oughterard Garda Station swung into action last week for the pre-Christmas swoops which are now as ritual as the moonshiners themselves, there was ample evidence that, though some illegal distillers may have been put out of action by the new law, the majority are still working away.

As Supt. Joe Ward of Oughterard, the man in charge of the Garda Operation, dispatched teams led by veteran poitin-trackers like Sergeant Joe Boyce, out into the highlands and islands, both could be certain that there would be seizures of fermenting wash, (locally called beer) — and that a number of hidden stills would be discovered and destroyed.

The actuality of an industry shrouded in legend and folklore, is sharply different from the common perception of it. For example, when the harvest of court cases from the Christmas swoops came before Justice John Garravan in the Connemara Courts last spring he cracked down on the culprits with all the force of the new laws.

Convicted defendants, including one found with only about enough poitin to fill a glass, were slapped with the automatic £1,000 fines instead of the £20 and £50 fines which had been the rule under the old legislation. In a number of cases the Justice, warning of the social evils of poitin, refused to exercise his very limited powers under the Act to reduce the fines, by mitigation, to the minimum £500.

Yet in Connemara, heartland of the poitin industry, it is commonly known that not a single fine has yet been paid almost a full year later!

In real terms the crackdown with stiffer penalties hasn't cost the moonshiners or their customers even one extra penny! And nobody has gone to jail either.

A SUNDAY PRESS check with the Department of Justice at the weekend, even as energetic Garda parties were out scouring the South Connemara area, revealed that the rumour is totally accurate. The fines have not been paid because, to a man, and woman, those convicted of poitin-related offences last winter exercised their right to petition the Department for further mitigation of the heavy fines.

The legal machinery moves slowly. Some of the petitions were not lodged until quite recently. They are still with the Department for consideration.

■ The end of this illicit operation. Picture by Stan Shields

To say that the Gardai are unhappy with the existing situation, as they chase the equivalent of the needle in the Connemara haystack, is to put it mildly, although there is no comment from those who are daily in contact with the sinister side of moonshine, wrecked families and broken lives, but their drive to stamp out the industry would certainly be much easier if those against whom they secure convictions were seen to suffer financially as a result.

Once again this Christmas the doctors serving the people of the region have warned against the very real dangers of consuming this hardest of "stuff". Said one doctor with lengthy experience of dealing with the problems which follow the empty bottles: "It should never be glamourised at all. It is a deadly and dangerous drink which is causing untold misery, and loss of health. In scores of homes in my area alone. It's an evil to be avoided".

There have always been admissions to local mental hospitals each January resulting from abuse of moonshine. Recently, under circumstances which are likely to be soon examined in court, a Dublin youth on holiday in Connemara came into possession of a bottle. Had he not been discovered in time, and rushed to Galway Regional Hospital, he would have died.

MEPs' slip could be boon for poitín makers

By Katherine Butler in Brussells

FANCY a drop of the hard stuff but can't afford the prices at the off-licence? Never mind you could soon be allowed to distil your own bootleg booze courtesy of the European Parliament.

MEPs last week voted for a recommendation which, in effect, would mean every EC citizen could distil up to 50 litres of pure alcohol each year.

And, even more amazing, the powerful Brussels Commission, which is responsible for policy making raised no objections when the recommendation was tabled in Strasbourg by MEP's on the Economic and Monetery Affairs Commitee.

If the recommendation goes through poitín parties could replace the pub as the centre of social activity in Ireland.

50 litres

According to the text, an individual manufacturer would be allowed to distil up to fifty litres of spirits each year for personal consumption or shared with members of his family, his employees (well he would probably need a few hired hands once word got around) or guests.

The only condition is they would have to drink under the same roof.

Sources in the European Parliament said many MEPs were horrified when they realised the implications of what they had voted for. The recommendation is in fact shrouded in a legal text on the exemption of certain alcoholic drinks such as home brewed beer from excise taxes. The drafting of the text however to include privately distilled alcohol would implicidly legalise poitín.

Flourishing

Several Euro MPs predicted the move would lead to a flourishing of "back yard distilleries" but Dublin MEP Niall Andrews said: "At last the poitín makers can come out of the closet."

Officials pointed out that any one member state can block the proposal when it comes up for approval by the twelve EC finance Ministers. But this could also mean banning home brewed wine and beer which of course are entirely legal.

Increase in cases

Mountbellew and Ballygar devided honours in the North Board minor and junior football league ties at Pairc an Chreagain on Sunday. Ballygar winning the minor tie and Mountbellew taking full points in the junior game.

Wednesday the Galway County Vocational Committee passed votes of sympathy with Mr. Anthony O'Donchue, Athenry, on the death of his brother, with Desmond Maher on his brother's in Dublin and with Sean O Domnhaill on the death of his brother in law.

clared the Justice.

He fined Dooley £10 for th insurance charge; £48 mitigate to £3 for the tax offence; £2 fo failing to have a current drivin licence and £1 for not having th necesary rear white and re lights.

CONNEMARA MEN ARE FINED £110

Poteen Is Still A Problem —Superintendent Told Court

A District Court in Connemara heard last week that poteen is still a big headache for Gardai in the area.

Superintendent Patrick J. Gallagher told Justice T. G. Burke at Derrynea Court: "We still have a lot of trouble from poteen in this district."

Before the court were charges connected with poteen against a number of men. They were fined a total of £110 and one of them had particulars of the offence endorsed on his driving licence.

First of the three cases was that against Anthony Egan, Gleann Bricin, Rosmuc, who was charged with conveying poteen in his car at Anach Mheadhain, Bealadangan on December 9.

Garda Joseph Boyce told the court he was on duty at Anach Mheadhain on that date. He was stopping cars and searching them for poteen.

A car approached and the driver tried to reverse away when he saw him. Garda James Buckley took a box out of the car containing bottles of poteen. Garda Boyce then produced to the court a Cidona bottle containing poteen which, he said, was one of those seized.

Ex-Garda Joseph Buckley said he was a member of the force on December 9. He got the box containing bottles from the boot of Egan's car. He was satisfied that it was poteen. In all there were eight Cidona bottles containing two gallons of poteen.

Egan told the court he was transporting it for a relation and a friend who had asked him for a bottle. This was "a Christmas gift." He appealed to Justice Burke not to suspend his licence saying he was working in Laney boro and needed the car to get home at week-ends.

Superintendent Gallagher then made his remarks about their trouble with poteen and said it was a "bad case." He asked that Egan be disqualified.

Justice Burke fined Egan £200 mitigated to £50, endorsed particulars of the offence on Egan's licence and asked him to pay £3 expenses.

Second man charged was Patrick Audley, Lettermullen, who admitted an offence of having poteen in his possession an January 14 at Troscan, Lettermullen

Garda Boyce said on that date he stopped a car in which there were three men. Audley was in the back and there was a bottle in the back. He had to pull this bottle from one man. Garda Boyce then produced a small Guinness bottle containing the poteen.

Justice Burke fined Audley £20. Cases against the other two men were dismissed.

Third man charged was Michael O'Flaherty, Aird, Lettermullen. He was charged with being in possession of poteen at Aird on February 12, 1969.

Garda Pat Carney told the court he visited an old house in Aird owned by Martin O'Flaherty, Aird, on February 12. In it he found forty gallons of beer.

The defendant Michael O'Flaherty came in and said it was his. He was making poteen to "buy cigarettes." Martin O'Flaherty admitted that the old house was his but said he did not know anything about the beer.

Justice Burke fined Michael O'Flaherty £40 for being in possession of the poteen and dismissed the charges against Martin O'Flaherty.

Mr. R. G. Emerson, solicitor, appeared for Egan. Superintendent Gallagher prosecuted in all three cases.

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month) from Bank of Ireland, and 29.6 pc (2.20 pc per month) from AIB. This — it's so much handier than using cash."

Carol-Ann Quinn, of ... reckon the others are just creaming the profits. But I won't give up my card."

Poteen 'could have killed pupils'

A MAN who supplied poteen to two teenagers at an Irish language summer course was told by a District Justice that he could have ended their lives.

One of the boys, a 17-year-old Dublin youth, spent three days in the poison unit of a Galway Hospital after drinking three-quarters of a bottle of the illicit liquor, Derrynea District Court was told.

Pauraic Bradley, of Lettermore, Co. Donegal, was fined £2,000 and witnesses' expenses by District Justice John Garavan, after being charged with possessing, supplying and delivering four bottles of poteen to the teenagers on two separate occasions last July.

Sgt. John Folan, of Lettermore, told the court that he received a report from the Director of a Summer College in the area, Colaiste Samhraidh Tir an Fhia, that one of their students had been moved to the poison unit of Galway's Merlin Park Hospital, after drinking poteen on the local beach.

After making inquiries, he took statements from three students attending the college and, accompanied by one of their teachers, he went with two of the three to Bradley's home in the island's district of Lettermore.

Solicitor Sean MacGiollarnaith, defending, argued that the chain of evidence was incomplete in that three of the bottles used by the prosecution had been supplied by a woman after she had searched her home and he sought to have the charges thrown out of court.

He also argued that one youth in his evidence, described the bottles as litre vodka bottles, while those presented in court were clearly not litre bottles and there was also some doubt as to whether they were vodka bottles.

ottery chiefs may 'ace 'effects' quiz

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chairman

Deputy Dick Roche (FF) said he believed a number of members would want to talk to the Lottery people about the report. "This report suggested that all was well and there were no social consequences from it."

On another aspect of the Lottery operation, Deputy Roche said he felt it was "extraordinary" that the "scratch" cards were still being imported.

He said he understood there was an undertaking in the first part of the Lottery contract that these cards should be made here.

The committee has also been urged to look into the affairs of Great Southern Hotels by Fianna Fail Senator Patrick McGowan, who is concerned about tax on their profits. Sen. McGowan said their accounts published recently showed a substantial profit return.

Spirits drop as fines hit poteen makers

By Michael Finlan

THERE has been a fall-off in the traditional Christmas traffic in poteen around Connemara and other parts of the west, due not so much to the recession as the heavy court penalties facing anyone caught in possession of "the quare stuff."

A minimum fine of £500 for first offenders, increasing to a mandatory £1,000 for a repeat offence, has put a damper on illicit moonshining which normally would peak at this festive time of the year.

But some more intrepid poteen-makers are still running off the drop in the mountains and valleys and on uninhabited islands. They have found new ways to outwit the law.

"Oh yes, it's still going on to some extent, though not on the same scale as in the past," said Superintendent Tom Murphy, in charge of Oughterard Garda station in Connemara whose poteen patrols were once possibly the busiest in Ireland. "The heavy fines are a big deterrent but, still, hardly a week passes that we don't carry out an excursion in search of poteen. I'd say that over the year, we'd average two seizures a week."

Nowadays, according to Superintendent Murphy, the moonshiners conduct their activities on commonage land, owned jointly by many people. This means there is nobody to prosecute when a still is discovered unless the poteen-makers are actually caught in the act. What the poteen patrols usually find is a still with the wash and other ingredients in readiness to run off the potent spirit, but nobody at the scene.

At this time of year, there has been a tradition in Connemara of adding a drop of poteen to the Christmas cake, a custom that is now fast disappearing because of the increased hazards of possessing the stuff.

The growing scarcity has meant a market-led increase in the price of a bottle to £8 this Christmas, £2 more than a year ago, but still cheaper than a bottle of legalised Irish whiskey. Poteen purchasers, though, should be warned of the dangers of getting a bad drop that may have been made by disreputable chemical means. And even if they chance upon a good drop, they should treat it with caution and respect.

A P P E N D I X C.

Copy of Inspection Minute of S/Commr. Coogan - Corofin Garda Station

11th _____ 1923.

Visited station in conjunction with Divisional Tour. Sergt. Lennon, 231 and Station party present. When I arrived at the Station the Sergt. sat glowering at me and refused to call the party to attention. I called the Party to attention myself, and Garda O'Neill tried to rise but fell into the fireplace. I asked the Sergt. to account for the state of affairs existing at the Station but he replied in such a manner as would do more justice to the worst cornerboy in the slums of London.

I searched the Barracks and found that a seizure of poteen (3 Gallons) made on the previous day had now been almost consumer by the Station party. The Barrack servant sat with a baton in her hand, protecting the remainder of it, and refused to move. She also had possession of the Station books and records and she refused to allow me to examine them. In my examination of the Barracks I found that the W.C. was filled with Station Records, apparently used by the Station party on their visits there. I heard noise coming from a cell and when I went to investigate I found three young ladies there, from whom I took statements, they complained that when passing the Barracks they were forcibly taken in by Sergt. Lennon and Gardai Bourke and O'Toole for a purpose better imagined than described.

In the station kitchen I found Garda Bourke, he caught me by the uniform and would not let go of me until I promised to refund him a fine of £5 imposed on him and have record of same erased. When I returned to the front of the Barracks, I found the Sergt. urinating from the front door into the street and he started to argue with me on the footpath with his person exposed.

On leaving the Station I was approached by a local trader who demainded that I made the Station party pay some of their mess debts for the preceding 12 months now amounting to some £70.

The whole situation at Corofin Garda Station, Co. Galway, was disgraceful. I returned to Tuam and had all the Station party at Corofin suspended immediately.

I hope that the Divisional Officer will ensure that these men discharge their local debts before they themselves are discharged from

The Art of Distillation

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The new Whiskey is then put away in oak casks to mature in dark cool warehouses for at least three years, but in practice for between 7 and 12 years. It takes on its golden colour and maturity of taste during these years and is then sent for vatting and bottling. Each aromatic cask adds its own particular characteristic to the maturing Whiskey and more than 700 casks are represented in each bottle.