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Bog Wood: A Study in Rural Economy

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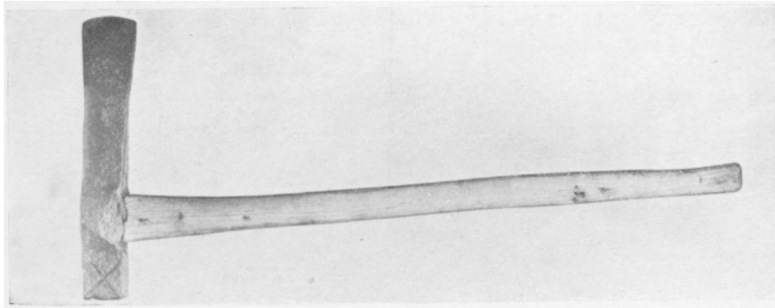
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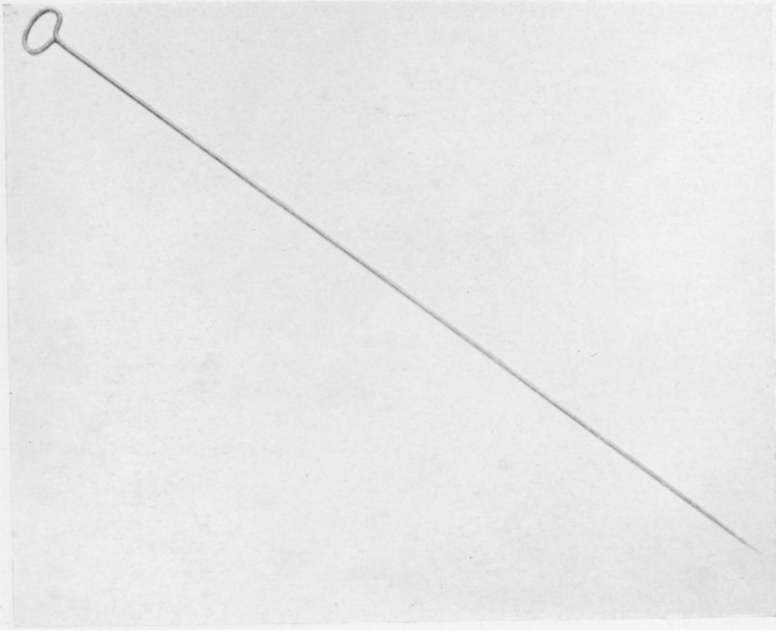
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PLATE I. Bog Deal Rope Opened Out to Show Strands.  
(*National Museum.*)



1. Bog Wood Axe.



2. Spit for Locating Bog Wood.  
Made by Con Manning, Ballingearry, Co. Cork, 1949.  
(*National Museum.*)

PLATE II



**PLATE III.** Joseph Coneely, Rusheeny, Oughterard, Co. Galway, with Bog Wood Axe and Spit for Locating Buried Wood. 1951.



**PLATE IV. Two-Ply Bog Deal Rope.**  
(*National Museum.*)

# BOG WOOD

## A STUDY IN RURAL ECONOMY

A. T. LUCAS

The following study deals with a single aspect of the exploitation of the natural resources of their environment by the people of a large part of Ireland: the utilisation of the sub-fossil timber found in bogs. The various activities connected with the winning of the timber and the different uses to which it was put are dealt with under separate heads and the history of each, in so far as it is discoverable, is traced.

### ORIGIN OF BOG WOOD

In many Irish bogs there exist remains of the forests which covered the country in post-glacial times. On the basis of geological and palaeobotanical studies the climate from the ice age down to historic times has been divided into a number of broad phases: Boreal (warm and dry); Atlantic (warm and wet); Sub-boreal (warm and dry); Sub-atlantic (cold and wet). These phases witnessed the growth and decline of successive types of woodland and it is the remains of a number of these which have been preserved in the bogs which are the source of the timber with the use of which we are concerned in this article.

These remains consist of a layer of stumps, preserved where they grew by the peat which has accumulated above them, together with the trunks of the trees themselves, fallen and buried in the peat beside them. The commonest and earliest species is the pine (*Pinus sylvestris*) which, as a constituent of the forest cover of the country, reached its maximum in the late Boreal period.<sup>1</sup> In many places, however, a rise in the water table, following the onset of a period of greater rainfall in Atlantic times, progressively killed not only the pine forests but also the younger mixed forest (with oak and yew), growing in hollows and basins. The stumps and fallen trunks were covered by the peat which gradually grew over them. After a considerable layer of peat had accumulated climatic conditions sometimes allowed the surface of the peat, particularly around the margins of the basins, to dry out enough to permit the growth of trees on its surface. Pine was still the commonest species, but there was also oak which was slowly ousting the pine and becoming the dominant tree in a mixed deciduous wood-

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<sup>1</sup> Jessen, Knud, *P.R.I.A.*, 52 B 6 (1949), p. 249.

land.<sup>1</sup> In the Sub-boreal period the oak attained its greatest spread while the same period witnessed the disappearance of the pine from Irish woods.<sup>2</sup> The trees on the bogs succumbed to the waterlogging of the surface which occurred during the wet Sub-atlantic phase which followed and their timbers were engulfed in a fresh growth of peat.

The result of these successive changes of climate and forest was to leave preserved in the bogs not only the stumps but also many of the trunks of the trees which formerly grew there. In general, the pine, having flourished before the growth of the greater part of the peat, is now found in the deeper layers of the bogs. Oak, yew and other species whose spread post-dated the growth of the peat which killed the pine forests, are either on the mineral soil below the peat or confined to higher levels in the peat near the margins.<sup>3</sup>

### HISTORY OF THE USE OF BOG WOOD

It is difficult to judge how far back in the history of the country the use of this timber may go. Large areas of the west must have been devoid of standing timber throughout the greater part of historic times and it is possible that in those places the practice may be of considerable antiquity. In such districts the lack of timber for fuel would have necessitated the use of turf and the digging of this would have exposed the bog wood, the possibilities of which would have been quickly realised. How old the use of turf may be in some parts of the country is unknown, but it is ancient enough to have been mentioned in the Brehon laws.<sup>4</sup> In those districts where the great woodlands remained there would have been no need to resort to the bogs for turf for fuel and still less for timber for any purpose, so that it is probable that in earlier times the use of bog wood was confined to the treeless areas of the west. Following the wholesale destruction of the native forests in the 16th and 17th centuries, however, the inhabitants of many districts in Ulster, Munster and Leinster must have been forced to turn to the bogs for turf and for wood as well. It may even be that the necessity for exploiting the bogs for wood for building and carpentry arose before that of doing so for turf since fuel could be still supplied by scrubland which would yield no timber large enough for wood-working. Moryson, writing of the period 1605-17, says :

“ The Irish having in most parts great woods or low shrubs and thickets, doe use the same for fier, but in other parts they burn Turfe, and Sea coales brought out of England.”<sup>5</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Jessen, Knud., *op. cit.*, p. 256.

<sup>2</sup> Jessen, Knud., *op. cit.*, p. 262.

<sup>3</sup> Forbes, A. C., *Clare Island Survey*. Dublin (1911-1915), vol. I, 9, pp. 9-10.

<sup>4</sup> *Laws I*, pp. 130-133.

<sup>5</sup> Moryson, Fynes. *Itinerary*. Glasgow, 1908, vol. IV, p. 196.

Disregarding the "Sea coales" which would have been used in the eastern coastal towns, the inference seems to be that turf was only used in those places where no wood-fuel was to be had. On the other hand, Petty, in 1691, reports :

" Their Fewel is Turf in most places ; and of late, even where Wood is most plentiful, and to be had for nothing, the cutting and carriage of the Turf being more easy than that of Wood."<sup>1</sup>

Taken in conjunction with Moryson's observation, this seems to indicate that in the course of the 17th century turf, having been recently forced upon the people by necessity, had then become so popular that it was used in preference to wood even where the latter was available.

Petty's remark on the universal use of turf at the end of the 17th century is borne out by Dineley who, in 1681, writes :

" The warres and their rebellions, which have been so frequent here, having destroy'd almost all their woods both for timber and fireing ; this want is supply'd by the boggs."<sup>2</sup>

Piers, describing conditions in Co. Westmeath in 1682, also mentions the use of turf as a commonplace of rural life :

" In towns [*i.e.*, townlands] set to farmers, every house hath appropriated to itself a share or portion of the bog for turf cutting, by known measures and bounds, which whoever comes to that house is to enjoy so long as he lives in it . . ."<sup>3</sup>

In the depressed Irish rural community of that time lack of wood for fuel also meant lack of wood for any purpose for that community had not the means to organise its import and distribution and had not the means to pay for it, even if it could. It may, therefore, be taken for granted that by the end of the 17th century, at the latest, the bogs over great areas of the country were being actively worked not only for turf but for wood to supply the local needs of timber for all domestic purposes and wood-working trades. The earliest reference to the practice known to the writer is that given by Dineley, in 1681, writing from Ballycar, Co. Clare :

" In Boggs here, as in most parts of Ireland, in digging for Turf, are found large firr Trees, and particularly in the Bishoprick of Cloyne, in the county of Corke, and Province of Munster ; in the Boggs are found such quantities of Firr timber trees that they make benches, tables, wainscoat, and floor Roomes therewith ; they use it also so much for fewell that the air smells of Turpentine."<sup>4</sup>

The mention of its use for floors implies that its use had extended to the large houses and the towns since the ordinary farmhouse of the time would have been a single storey building with

<sup>1</sup> Petty, Sir William. *The Political Anatomy of Ireland*. London 1691, p. 82.

<sup>2</sup> Dineley, Thomas. *Observations on a Voyage through the Kingdom of Ireland*. From *Jour. Kilk. & S.E. Ireland Arch. Soc.*, Dublin, 1870, pp. 11-12.

<sup>3</sup> Piers, Sir Henry. *A Chorographical Description of the County of West-Meath*. *Collectanea de Rebus Hibernicis*, No. 1. Dublin, 1770, p. 119.

<sup>4</sup> Dineley, Thomas. *op. cit.*, pp., 132-133.

earthen floors. The inclusion of "wainscoat" also points to this. As it would have taken a considerable time for the use of the bog wood to become as general as Dineley states, we may, on the strength of this reference alone, date the practice in south-west Munster to the middle of the 17th century, at the latest.

The change over in the course of a century from the use of standing timber to that recovered from the bogs is implicit in this observation on the Inchigeelagh district of Co. Cork in 1750:

"About 100 years ago, this country was all a forest. The woods consisted of large oak, birch, alder, some ash, and many yews of as great a bulk as the largest oak: Great quantities of fir are still taken out of the turf bogs."<sup>1</sup>

### LOCATING BOG WOOD

Already by the beginning of the 19th century we find over those areas of the country about which we have information on this subject that a uniform practice was in use for the location of the hidden bog wood, the practice being based on a uniform theory, whatever that theory was worth. The earliest account of this known to the writer is that given about 1796-7 by De Latocnaye with reference to the Renvyle district of Co. Galway:

"Hardly a tree is to be seen, but the country at one time must have been covered with them, for they are frequently found in the mosses, and the way of discovering them on the surface is very simple. The inhabitants go over the ground in the morning while the dew is on the ground, carrying with them long spits or rods of iron. They observe places where the dew has disappeared, and there they pierce the ground, nearly always finding wood, and being able immediately to say, pretty accurately, its length, size, and quality by renewing the operation at different places. When they have located the wood they proceed to dig. These trees are generally pretty sound, and furnish the only wood which the inhabitants can use in the building of their cabins."<sup>2</sup>

Fortunately, this early description of the theory and practice of the operation does not stand alone, as the following citations show.

Co. Clare, 1808.

"The manner of finding these trees in bogs is somewhat curious; very early in the morning, before the dew evaporates, a man with a long small sharp spear goes into the bog, and, as the dew never lies on the part over the trees, be it ever so deep, he can ascertain their length, and on putting down his spear can easily find, whether they are sound or rotten; if sound, he marks with a spade the spot where they lie, and at his leisure proceeds to extricate them from their bed."<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Smith, Charles. *The Ancient and Present State of the County and City of Cork*. Dublin, 1750, vol. I, p. 198.

<sup>2</sup>De Latocnaye. *A Frenchman's Walk through Ireland, 1796-7*. Translated by John Stevenson. Belfast and Dublin, n.d., p. 172.

<sup>3</sup>Dutton, Hely. *Statistical Survey of the County of Clare*. Dublin, 1808, p. 285.

Rev. John Grahame, writing in 1812 of the Kilrush district in the same county, palpably copies this description almost word for word, adding that the spear is "called in Irish Tharagher, or Bog Auger."<sup>1</sup> While tharagher (*tarachar*) is the correct Irish term for an auger, this is the only known instance of its application to the iron probe used in the operation. This bears no resemblance to an auger and the name must be wrong. The error probably arose from a confusion of the probe with the bog-auger in vogue at the period in efforts to drain bogs by piercing the impervious clay stratum beneath them and so allowing the superfluous water to percolate away.

Reed, in 1810, reports :

"Bog-timber is found in such abundance as to become an article of pretty considerable traffic in Dublin and other places. I have seen the peasantry perforating the ground eight or ten feet in search of these treasures ; and a large trunk of fir, firm and undecayed, and standing perpendicularly on its roots, has been the reward of their labour. It is said that in these pursuits they are guided by the dew, which remains unabsorbed much longer over the tree than on the neighbouring turf."<sup>2</sup>

The fact that only the stumps of the trees are found in a perpendicular position and that it is on the surrounding bog that the dew is supposed to remain "unabsorbed" does not diminish the general value of the writer's testimony.

Weld, writing in 1812 of the Killarney neighbourhood of Co. Kerry, states :

"The peasantry are in constant practice, with the permission of their landlords, of raising trees out of the bogs in this part of the country. They first search for them by pushing down long spears through the spongy superincumbent mass ; and having ascertained their exact position, they open a large trench. The trees are sometimes easily taken up by these means ; but occasionally it happens that a large lateral branch, or a spur underneath, holds the stem firmly down, contrary to the expectation of the adventurers. Additional trenches must then be opened, corresponding with their direction ; and even these efforts in complicated cases proving abortive, they are ultimately reduced to the necessity of abandoning altogether the object of their pursuit, or of resorting to the painful and unprofitable labour of severing it into small pieces by the axe."<sup>3</sup>

In 1824 Dutton notices the practice in Co. Galway :

"Timber buried in bogs is discovered by going on them early in a dewy morning, as the dew never lies on the bog over the tree ; they ascertain with a long spear if the timber is sound and worth extricating from the bog."<sup>4</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Grahame, Rev. John. In *Parochial Survey of Ireland* by William Shaw Mason, Dublin, 1816, vol. 2, p. 419.

<sup>2</sup> Reed, William. *Remains of William Reed, late of Thornbury ; including Rambles in Ireland*. London, 1815, p. 47.

<sup>3</sup> Weld, Isaac. *Illustrations of the Scenery of Killarney and the Surrounding Country*. London, 1812, pp. 46-47.

<sup>4</sup> Dutton, Hely. *Statistical Survey of the County of Galway*. Dublin, 1824, p. 452.

In 1832 Weld describes it in Roscommon :

“ In an elevated valley to the west of Mount Allen, now overgrown with bog, I saw oak timber of large dimensions taken out from the bottoms, where it is found in such abundance, as to be a source of considerable gain to those who are engaged in the search. It is discovered by forcing spears or probes of iron through the bog ; and by repeated soundings, the exact position of the tree is ascertained, after which it is dug out.”<sup>1</sup>

In 1846 it is mentioned at Dungloe, Co. Donegal :

“ Excepting here and there a small patch of potatoes growing, the only sign of industry I saw was a couple of men on a hillside boring the bog with an iron-rod and searching for timber.”<sup>2</sup>

Coulter, in 1862, records an intensive search for bog wood in Conamara, following the failure of the turf supply as the result of an exceptionally wet season :

“ Even in the districts to the north of Clifden, where turbarry is abundant, the scarcity is felt with the utmost severity ; for the turf, though cut, is lying wet and worthless in the bogs ; and I have seen the people in every direction looking for ‘ bogdeal,’ sounding for it with long iron rods, and digging it up, when found, with great difficulty and labour.”<sup>3</sup>

Finally Kinahan, in 1908, describes the process :

“ How to locate the buried timber, as practised in some districts, is interesting.

“ The customary course of procedure is the following :—During a heavy frost the bog is traversed, and the buried log staked out. In the spring a bog hole is opened along the site of the log. This answers two purposes : the turf cut out lets the operator get at the log to raise it, while a clamp of turf on a wild mountain in a distillation district is very handy if a still is to be ran (*sic*) at a neighbouring coom or lough.”<sup>4</sup>

These extracts give us at once a general idea of the technique followed and some indication of its wide distribution. In addition to these the archives of the Irish Folklore Commission contain a large number of descriptions of the process. Since, however, except for minor matters of nomenclature, these are all substantially alike and, with few exceptions, add little to the information already given, it will be sufficient to segregate them on a geographical basis. To save needless repetition those districts where the story about the dew not lying on the ground above the buried wood is current are indicated by having (x) placed after them.

<sup>1</sup> Weld, Isaac. *Statistical Survey of the County of Roscommon*. Dublin, 1832, pp. 271-272.

<sup>2</sup> Foster, Thomas Campbell. *Letters on the Condition of the People of Ireland*. London, 1846, p. 107.

<sup>3</sup> Coulter, Henry. *The West of Ireland : Its Existing Condition and Prospects*. Dublin, 1862, p. 91.

<sup>4</sup> Kinahan, G. Henry. *Superficial and Agricultural Geology. Ireland, No 2. Soils*. Dublin, 1908, p. 43.

## ULSTER†

- Armagh* : Crossmaglen<sup>1</sup>  
*Tyrone* : Parish of Bodoney Lower (x)<sup>2</sup>  
*Donegal* : Districts of—  
 Gweedore (x)<sup>3</sup>  
 Kincaslough<sup>4</sup>  
 Rosses<sup>5</sup>  
 Glenties (x)<sup>6</sup>  
 Termon (x)<sup>7</sup>  
 Kiltcevoge<sup>8</sup>  
 Inishkeel (x)<sup>9</sup>

## CONNACHT

- Mayo* : Ballycroy District (x)<sup>10</sup>  
*Galway* : Parishes of :  
 Ross (x)<sup>11</sup>  
 Kilcummin (x)<sup>12</sup>  
 Moycullen (x)<sup>13</sup>  
 Killeenadeema (x)<sup>14</sup>  
 Kiltomas<sup>15</sup>  
 Ballynakill (x)<sup>16</sup>  
 Ballindoon (x)<sup>17</sup>

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† Throughout the article the civil parishes have been indicated in the topographical references, wherever possible.

<sup>1</sup> I.F.C., Ms. 1112, pp. 85, 311.

<sup>2</sup> I.F.C., Mss. 1215, pp. 171-172; 1216, p. 351.

<sup>3</sup> I.F.C., Ms. 539, p. 299.

<sup>4</sup> I.F.C., Ms. 479, p. 267.

<sup>5</sup> I.F.C., Mss. 392, p. 8; 458, pp. 502-503; 477, p. 373.

<sup>6</sup> I.F.C., Ms. 464, p. 211.

<sup>7</sup> I.F.C., Mss. 311, p. 177; 398, p. 289.

<sup>8</sup> I.F.C., Ms. 169, pp. 624-626.

<sup>9</sup> I.F.C., Mss. 185, p. 501; 311, p. 32.

<sup>10</sup> I.F.C., Ms. 805, p. 281.

<sup>11</sup> I.F.C., Ms. 526, p. 64.

<sup>12</sup> I.F.C., Ms. 527, pp. 298-299.

<sup>13</sup> I.F.C., Ms. 1025, p. 135.

<sup>14</sup> I.F.C., Ms. 538, p. 355.

<sup>15</sup> I.F.C., Ms. 537, pp. 240-241.

<sup>16</sup> I.F.C., Ms. 707, pp. 457-461.

<sup>17</sup> I.F.C., Ms. 271, pp. 72-73.

## MUNSTER

*Kerry* :

Parishes of :  
 Ballincuslane (x)<sup>1</sup>  
 Kilfeighny (x)<sup>2</sup>  
 Kilmalkedar (x)<sup>3</sup>  
 Dromod<sup>4</sup>  
 Kilcrohane<sup>5</sup>

*Limerick* :

Athea District (x)<sup>6</sup>

*Cork* :

Parish of Ballyvourney (x)<sup>7</sup>  
 Parish of Clonfert<sup>8</sup>  
 Parish of Kilmocomoge (x)<sup>9</sup>  
 Ballingearry District<sup>10</sup>

*Clare* :

Parish of Feakle (x)<sup>11</sup>

As will be seen the curious story about the dew is to be found in the majority of the districts. The formula is quite standardised : the dew does not lie on the ground above the tree and inspection of the bog in the early morning will reveal the dry place to the practised eye. While slow to disbelieve something which seems to be the fruit of direct observation and which is recorded so often as having yielded practical results, the writer has been unable to discover anyone who could offer any scientific explanation for the supposed fact. He knows only a few variants of the formula : one from Gougane Barra, Co. Cork, which states that the timber can be located during a white frost as, like the dew, the frost does not lie on the ground above the tree<sup>12</sup> ; one from Ballyknockan, Co. Wicklow, which states that during a dry spell in summer the vegetation above the place turned brown thus disclosing the outline of the tree ;<sup>13</sup> one from Feakle Parish, Co. Clare, which asserts that snow as well as dew will not lie on the spot.<sup>14</sup>

<sup>1</sup> I.F.C., Ms. 469, p. 295.

<sup>2</sup> Information from James McDonnell, County Kerry Field Club, Tralee, 1953.

<sup>3</sup> I.F.C., Ms. 911, pp. 500-501.

<sup>4</sup> I.F.C., Mss. 126, pp. 252-254 ; 175, pp. 139-141 ; 768, pp. 76-77.

<sup>5</sup> I.F.C., Ms. 777, pp. 541-543.

<sup>6</sup> I.F.C., Ms. 1081, p. 234 and Information from Colm Danaher, Athea, Co. Limerick, 1953.

<sup>7</sup> I.F.C., Ms. 937, pp. 112-113.

<sup>8</sup> I.F.C., Ms. 469, p. 370.

<sup>9</sup> I.F.C., Ms. 864, pp. 173-174.

<sup>10</sup> *Béaloides* III, p. 165.

<sup>11</sup> I.F.C., Ms. 707, pp. 179-180.

<sup>12</sup> Information from Daniel Sweeney, Derreenlunnig, Gougane Barra, Co. Cork, 1949.

<sup>13</sup> Information from John Brady, Laurel Lodge, Ballyknockan, Co. Wicklow, 1953.

<sup>14</sup> I.F.C., Ms. 707, pp. 179-180.

The probe which was used to locate the buried timber (Pls. II, 2 and III), was a stout iron rod six to ten feet long and about half an inch in diameter, pointed at one end and with a T-handle, often of wood, at the other. In Irish-speaking districts this is always called a *bior* (spit), but in Donegal the word *maide* is invariably added: *bior maide* (stick spit). In parts of Co. Galway, e.g., Ballynakill Parish, it is called a *bior giúsaighe*. In the Ballingearry district, Co. Cork, however, the word *treagh* ("a trident or eelspear, a 'try,' a piercer": Dinneen) appears to be the common name. The English versions recorded are: *fir searcher* (Armagh and Tyrone), *spit* (Co. Kerry) and *try* (Co. Cork). The use of the implement for the initial location of the timber was only the first step towards the extraction of the log. Repeated soundings at short intervals had then to be made to determine the direction and length of the trunk after which a wide trench was cut to expose it. As such a trench might be up to ten feet deep and over twenty feet in length involving the removal of a huge amount of bog-stuff, the exercise of great skill and judgment was called for on the part of the men operating the spit if enormous unnecessary labour were not to be risked. It is not surprising to find them credited in the folk-memory with almost superhuman powers so that, in the Brosna district, on the Cork-Kerry borders, for instance, it is said: "They could judge by the ring of the spit on the bog-deal what kind of timber it was, whether it had knots or not."<sup>1</sup>

If part of a tree was exposed, on the face of a cutting, for instance, and it was doubtful if a piece of timber located by sounding nearby was portion of this tree or a separate length, the man operating the probe, having made contact with the buried wood, placed his teeth against the probe while another man struck a smart blow of an axe on the exposed piece. If the two pieces formed part of the same tree the vibration of the blow was transmitted to the probe and the man there "heard" it through his teeth.<sup>2</sup>

When the main log was exposed and freed from any branches which might obstruct a clear lift, the work of raising it to the surface of the bog was begun. The procedure, naturally, varied according to the number of hands available for the task, the nature of the bog and the depth at which the timber lay. In the Kiltcevoge district of Donegal, where the wood was found at a depth of six to eight feet a chain was fastened around the thinner end of the log. A stout stick, called a *crann teanntáin*, was then laid across the mouth of the trench, extending well over the surface of the bog to each side. Another stout pole, six to eight feet long, was obtained and its end inserted in a loop of the chain attached to the log. Using this as a lever, and the transverse stick as a

<sup>1</sup> I.F.C., Ms. 469, p. 370.

<sup>2</sup> Information from Daniel Sweeney, Derreenlunnig, Gougane Barra, Co. Cork, 1949.

fulcrum, the end of the log was lifted in stages, sods being built up under it after each successive lift to maintain it in position. When this end of the log had been raised to ground level further sticks spanning the trench were placed under it and the chain transferred to the other end which was raised in a similar manner.<sup>1</sup>

From the Parish of Ballynakill, Co. Galway, the same procedure is described, but here the log laid across the hole and used as a fulcrum is called the *maide taca*. From the same place comes an account of an ingenious method of transporting the log over the surface of the bog by rolling it. A length of rope was coiled around each end of the log, being wound in the same direction in each case and having the free end lying across the top of the log in the direction in which it was to be moved. The free ends were then grasped by a number of men and as they hauled the unwinding of the rope caused the log to roll. When the ropes had completely unwound themselves they were again coiled on the log ends and the hauling renewed.<sup>2</sup>

Where conditions did not lend themselves to the use of this method, or in cases where the log was too heavy or too firmly embedded to respond to a direct lift, the trench was allowed to fill with seepage water which helped to free the log, if stuck, and on which it was sometimes possible to float it nearer ground level. This is reported from the districts of Athea, Co. Limerick,<sup>3</sup> Dromod, Co. Kerry,<sup>4</sup> Ballyvourney, Co. Cork,<sup>5</sup> and Ballindoon, Co. Galway.<sup>6</sup>

### Tools

The various tradesmen who used bog wood as a raw material naturally worked it with their own peculiar tools, but the only ones used in dealing with it on the bog were the probe, just described, and the "bogdeal" axe (Pls. II, 1 and III). The latter has a long, narrow blade, 2 feet to 2½ feet long and about 3—4 inches wide at the cutting edge, with a handle about 3 feet long. These implements were always made locally and were designed expressly for dealing with the timber, the long blade affording great power of leverage. Coulter, writing of The Mullet, Co. Mayo, in 1862, and describing the frantic efforts of the people to provide themselves

<sup>1</sup> I.F.C., Ms. 169, pp. 624–626.

<sup>2</sup> I.F.C., Ms. 707, pp. 458–461.

<sup>3</sup> Information from Colm Danaher, Athea, Co. Limerick, 1953.

<sup>4</sup> I.F.C., Ms. 768, pp. 76–77.

<sup>5</sup> I.F.C., Ms. 937, p. 113.

<sup>6</sup> I.F.C., Ms. 271, pp. 72–73.

with bog wood as an alternative fuel to the turf which had been lost in a disastrously wet season, states :

“ There is hardly a man in the country who has not bought a hatchet for the purpose of cutting bog timber. One shopkeeper in this town [Binghamstown] sold 150 hatchets this season, and the smiths in town and country are kept constantly employed in making them.”<sup>1</sup>

In the Athea district of west Limerick two kinds of axe were used. The larger one was made of spade iron tipped with steel and was used to split up the trees into rafters and also to cut up the very hard kernels of the roots for fuel. The lighter axe was made from the head of a worn pickaxe to each side of which a length of iron was welded with, between these at the cutting edge, a few inches of a smith's rasp. This tool was used to dress the timber to its final shape as rafters, door jambs or other items.<sup>2</sup> In the Lackan district, near Blessington, Co. Wicklow, disused picks from the granite quarries at Ballyknockan had steel edges welded on to them to make hatchets for cutting the bog wood raised in the local bogs.<sup>3</sup> In the Annascaul district of Co. Kerry, a disused pick was also used to make the hatchet which is described as having an adze blade at one end which could be used for clearing away the bog-stuff from round the trees as well as for dressing the timber.<sup>4</sup>

It is remarkable that the tool is more frequently referred to as a “ hatchet ” than an “ axe. ” In west Cork it is called a “ ver hatchet, ”<sup>5</sup> “ ver ” being the local pronunciation of “ fir, ” while in the Muff district, on the Meath-Cavan border, where the raising of bog timber has been for long discontinued, it is called a “ furze hatchet, ”<sup>6</sup> from a confusion between “ furze ” and “ fir. ” In Irish the common name is *tuagh gúise*, but from the parish of Kilcummin, Co. Galway, the term *pitséar* has been recorded.<sup>7</sup>

## USES OF BOG WOOD

### BOG WOOD FOR ROOFS

From the opening of the 19th century onwards there is abundant evidence for the use of bog wood, both pine and oak, for the structural timbers of houses. For three or four hundred years

<sup>1</sup> Coulter, Henry. *The West of Ireland: Its Existing Condition and Prospects*. Dublin and London, 1862, p. 230.

<sup>2</sup> Information from Colm Danaher, Athea, Co. Limerick, 1953.

<sup>3</sup> Information from John Brady, Laurel Lodge, Ballyknockan, Co. Wicklow, 1953.

<sup>4</sup> I.F.C., Ms. 843, pp. 347-348.

<sup>5</sup> I.F.C., Ms. 937, p. 140.

<sup>6</sup> I.F.C., Ms. 1176, pp. 399-400.

<sup>7</sup> I.F.C., Ms. 527, p. 298.

at least the structural use of timber in the Irish house has been virtually confined to the roof. These roof timbers consist of a number of sloping beams fastened together in pairs, called "couples," the ends of each pair resting on the opposite walls, their tops pegged together and further braced by a tie beam some distance below the apex. A roof tree joins the tops of the couples and lighter horizontal timbers are fixed along their sloping sides to support the thatch. The amount of timber needed for a single house was, in consequence, relatively small. On the other hand, almost the only standing timber left in the country was to be found in the rigorously preserved woodlands on the landlords' estates while for a rapidly increasing population, living mainly in conditions of extreme poverty, the price of imported wood was prohibitively high. It is not surprising, then, that over large areas of the country the people were completely dependent on bog wood for their requirements in house building.

M'Evoy, writing of Co. Tyrone in 1802, records the final phase of a local transition from the use of standing timber to bog wood :

"I have remarked, that a cabin may be built, for from three to five pounds; the difficulty of procuring the roof, of bog timber, is the greatest the builder has to encounter with. The woods of Munterloney are almost cut down, which, for many miles round, and for a great number of years back, supplied the country with timber for roofing, cars, plough timber, with every other article the country stood in need of; now the principal dependence is on the bogs . . ."<sup>1</sup>

Its use for this purpose has, most likely, a far longer history in the country as a whole than we can judge from our present sources. An indication that the transition which M'Evoy notes had been already long made in less fortunate districts is found in the fact that in some cases even the supply of bog wood was itself in turn giving out, since, in 1816, it is stated about the Parish of Ballymyre, Co. Armagh: "Their cottages are in general neatly thatched, and many of them whitewashed, and roofed with foreign timber (as the bog oak, which formerly supplied them is nearly exhausted.)"<sup>2</sup>

As the evidence which has come down to us is too generalised to warrant any analysis in the hope of discovering regional differences of practice or opinion in this aspect of the use of bog wood, it only remains to tabulate it geographically to see what distribution pattern may emerge.

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<sup>1</sup> M'Evoy, John. *Statistical Survey of the County of Tyrone*. Dublin, 1802, pp. 147-148.

<sup>2</sup> Ferguson, Rev. Joseph. In William Shaw Mason's *Parochial Survey of Ireland*. Dublin, 1816, vol. II, p. 82.

## ULSTER

*Antrim*

Parishes of Glenavy, Antrim and Tullyrusk (1816).<sup>1</sup>  
Toome District.<sup>2</sup>

*Armagh*

Co. Armagh (1804).<sup>3</sup>  
Parish of Ballymyre (1816).<sup>4</sup>  
Barony of Upper Fews (1838).<sup>5</sup>

*Derry*

Parish of Dungiven (1814).<sup>6</sup>

*Down*

Parish of Kilkeel.<sup>7</sup>  
Mourne District.<sup>8</sup>  
Ballynahinch District.<sup>9</sup>

*Tyrone*

Co. Tyrone (1802).<sup>10</sup>  
Barony of Dungannon (1802).<sup>11</sup>  
Glenhull District.<sup>12</sup>  
Greencastle District.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Cupples, Rev. Edward. In *Parochial Survey of Ireland* by William Shaw Mason, Dublin, 1816, vol. 2, p. 247.

<sup>2</sup> I.F.C., Ms. 1079, p. 209.

<sup>3</sup> Coote, Sir Charles. *Statistical Survey of the County of Armagh*, Dublin, 1804, p. 134.

<sup>4</sup> Ferguson, Rev. Joseph. In *Parochial Survey of Ireland* by William Shaw Mason, Dublin, 1816, vol. 2, p. 82.

<sup>5</sup> Donaldson, John. *A Historical and Statistical Account of the Barony of Upper Fews in the County of Armagh*. Dundalk, 1923, p. 49.

<sup>6</sup> Ross, Rev. Alexander. In William Shaw Mason's *Parochial Survey of Ireland*, Dublin, 1814, vol. I, p. 289.

<sup>7</sup> I.F.C., Ms. 976, p. 563.

<sup>8</sup> Evans, E. Estyn. *Mourne Country*, Dundalk, 1951, p. 185.

<sup>9</sup> I.F.C., Ms. 1079, p. 265.

<sup>10</sup> M'Evoy, John. *Statistical Survey of the County of Tyrone*. Dublin, 1802, p. 119.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.* pp. 146-147.

<sup>12</sup> I.F.C., Ms. 1079, p. 240.

<sup>13</sup> I.F.C., Ms. 1216, p. 351.

*Donegal*

Parish of Templecrone.<sup>1</sup>  
 Gortahork District.<sup>2</sup>  
 Cloghaneely District.<sup>3</sup>  
 Gweedore District.<sup>4</sup>  
 Rosses District.<sup>5</sup>  
 Parish of Kiltreevoige.<sup>6</sup>  
 Glenties District.<sup>7</sup>  
 Teelin District.<sup>8</sup>

## CONNACHT

*Sligo* Parish of Kilmacteige (1816).<sup>9</sup>

*Leitrim* Parish of Cloone.<sup>10</sup>

*Mayo*

Parish of Kilcommon.<sup>11</sup>  
 Ballycroy District.<sup>12</sup>  
 Corraun.<sup>13</sup>

<sup>1</sup> I.F.C., Ms. 479, pp. 267-268.

<sup>2</sup> *Béaloides*, XIII, p. 134.

<sup>3</sup> I.F.C., Ms. 435, p. 197.

<sup>4</sup> I.F.C., Mss. 539, pp. 299-300; 479, p. 51.

<sup>5</sup> I.F.C., Mss. 477, pp. 376-377; 478, p. 287; 392, p. 8; 458, p. 496.

<sup>6</sup> I.F.C., Ms. 169, p. 624.

<sup>7</sup> I.F.C., Ms. 464, p. 210.

<sup>8</sup> I.F.C., Ms. 539, pp. 455, 486.

<sup>9</sup> Neligan, Rev. James. In *Parochial Survey of Ireland* by William Shaw Mason. Dublin, 1816, vol. 2, p. 351.

<sup>10</sup> I.F.C., Ms. 844, p. 5.

<sup>11</sup> I.F.C., Ms. 706, p. 270.

<sup>12</sup> I.F.C., Ms. 805, p. 282.

<sup>13</sup> I.F.C., Ms. 827, p. 17.

*Galway*

Renvyle District (1796-7).<sup>1</sup>  
 Co. Galway (1824).<sup>2</sup>  
 Conamara (1825).<sup>3</sup>  
 S. Conamara (1892).<sup>4</sup>  
 Clifden District.<sup>5</sup>  
 Parish of Ross.<sup>6</sup>  
 Parish of Kilcummin.<sup>7</sup>  
 Carna District.<sup>8</sup>  
 Cois Fhairrge District.<sup>9</sup>  
 Recess.<sup>10</sup>  
 Spiddle District.<sup>11</sup>  
 Parish of Ballynakill.<sup>12</sup>

## MUNSTER

*Clare*

Co. Clare (1808).<sup>13</sup>  
 Parish of Kilrush (1816).<sup>14</sup>  
 Co. Clare (1835).<sup>15</sup>  
 Co. Clare (1837).<sup>16</sup>  
 Kilkee District.<sup>17</sup>

*Limerick* Athea District.<sup>18</sup>

<sup>1</sup> De Latocnaye. *A Frenchman's Walk Through Ireland*, 1796-7. Translated by John Stevenson, Belfast and Dublin n.d., p. 172.

<sup>2</sup> Dutton, Hely. *A Statistical Survey of the County of Galway*. Dublin, 1824, pp. 451-452.

<sup>3</sup> *Letters from the Irish Highlands of Cunnemarra*. London, 1825, pp. 318-319.

<sup>4</sup> Gaskell, W. P. *Congested Districts Board for Ireland. Confidential Reports No. 51*, 1892, p. 7.

<sup>5</sup> I.F.C., Ms. 271, p. 72.

<sup>6</sup> I.F.C., Mss. 1158, p. 280; 819, p. 296.

<sup>7</sup> I.F.C., Ms. 527, pp. 271, 298.

<sup>8</sup> Mac Giollarnáth, Seán. *Annála Beaga ó Iorruis Aithneach*, Dublin, 1941, p. 266.

<sup>9</sup> Mac Giollarnáth, Seán. *Peadar Chois Fhairrge*, Dublin, 1944, pp. 64-65.

<sup>10</sup> I.F.C., Ms. 314, p. 407.

<sup>11</sup> I.F.C., Mss. 177, p. 416; 1025, pp. 134, 163.

<sup>12</sup> I.F.C., Ms. 707, p. 457.

<sup>13</sup> Dutton, Hely. *Statistical Survey of the County of Clare*, Dublin, 1808, p. 284.

<sup>14</sup> Grahame, Rev. John. In *Parochial Survey of Ireland* by William Shaw Mason, Dublin, 1816, vol. 2, p. 418.

<sup>15</sup> Knott, Mary John. *Two Months at Kilkee*, Dublin, 1836, pp. 32-33.

<sup>16</sup> *Dublin University Magazine*, vol. 9 (1837), p. 667.

<sup>17</sup> I.F.C., Ms. 537, p. 185.

<sup>18</sup> I.F.C., Ms. 1081, p. 234.

*Kerry*

Parish of Brosna.<sup>1</sup>  
 Castlegregory District.<sup>2</sup>  
 Parish of Killorglin.<sup>3</sup>  
 Cahirdaniel District.<sup>4</sup>  
 Parish of Dromod.<sup>5</sup>

*Cork*

Ballyvourney District.<sup>6</sup>  
 Leap District.<sup>7</sup>  
 Ballingeary District.<sup>8</sup>

## LEINSTER

*Laoighis* Ballyfin.<sup>9</sup>

*Longford*

Parish of Rathdine (1819).<sup>10</sup>  
 Edgeworthstown District (1842).<sup>11</sup>

*Wicklow* Lackan-Ballyknockan District (1953).<sup>12</sup>

## IRELAND : NOT LOCALISED

Connacht (c. 1812).<sup>13</sup>  
 Munster (1830).<sup>14</sup>

If the majority of the foregoing instances refer to the use of bog wood in farmhouses, large and small, it was by no means confined to them. Dineley's account of 1681, quoted above, indi-

<sup>1</sup> I.F.C., Ms. 469, pp. 295, 305.

<sup>2</sup> I.F.C., Mss. 513, p. 195; 557, p. 68.

<sup>3</sup> I.F.C., Ms. 716, pp. 246-247.

<sup>4</sup> *Béaloideas*, XV, p. 47.

<sup>5</sup> I.F.C., Ms. 768, pp. 71, 76-77.

<sup>6</sup> I.F.C., Mss. 282, p. 298; 937, pp. 62-63; 476, p. 304.

<sup>7</sup> I.F.C., Ms. 408, p. 358.

<sup>8</sup> I.F.C., Ms. 864, p. 171.

<sup>9</sup> Adams, J. *The Irish Naturalist* XIV (1905), p. 34.

<sup>10</sup> Farrell, Rev. James. In *Parochial Survey of Ireland* by William Shaw Mason, Dublin, 1819, vol. 3, p. 288.

<sup>11</sup> Kohl, J. G. *Travels in Ireland*: Translated from the German, London, 1844, p. 42.

<sup>12</sup> Information from John Brady, Laurel Lodge, Ballyknockan, Co. Wicklow, 1953.

<sup>13</sup> Wakefield, Edward. *An Account of Ireland Statistical and Political*, London, 1812, vol. 1, p. 524.

<sup>14</sup> Bicheno, J. E. *Ireland and its Economy*. London 1830, pp. 24, 29-31.

cates that it was then already being used for more ambitious buildings and there are some other references which show that it continued to be so used in later times. Bog oak is said to have been the principal timber used in the old church at Brosna, Co. Kerry,<sup>1</sup> and all the timberwork of the church at Killorglin in the same county is said to have been similarly obtained from the local bogs.<sup>2</sup> When the manse near Adare, Co. Limerick, was being built, sufficient "black stick," *i.e.*, bog oak, was found locally to provide all the timber required.<sup>3</sup>

Although by far the greater number of records of this use of bog wood refers to the north and west we must, in assessing its former extent, make allowance for the haphazard nature of our earlier sources, which in this, as in other matters relating to the life of the people, are very deficient for the whole centre of the country, and for the fact that the preponderance of the data hitherto collected by the Irish Folklore Commission comes, naturally, from the western seaboard where tradition is richest and the traditional pattern of life best preserved. Taking this into account and bearing in mind, also, the general uniformity of social conditions throughout the country during the first half of the 19th century, it can be accepted as certain that bog wood was used for this purpose wherever it was obtainable.

As a building material it was, of course, in some respects superior to fresh timber, whether native or imported, and the disparaging tenor of some of the writers who refer to it is due to mere prejudice and ignorance.

#### BOG WOOD FOR FURNITURE

It will be recalled that in 1681 Dineley reported that in counties Cork and Clare "benches" and "tables" were made of the fir dug out of the bogs, and it is not surprising, in view of this early evidence, that by the beginning of the 19th century there is proof of the use of the timber for domestic carpentry over a large part of the country.

M'Evoy, writing of Co. Tyrone in 1802, having said that the woods of Munterloney formerly supplied the district with wood "for roofing, cars, plough timber, with every other article the country stood in need of" goes on to add that "now the principal dependence is on the bogs."<sup>4</sup> This implies that the bog wood was being used to supply the items he mentions and other domestic needs as well.

<sup>1</sup> I.F.C., Ms. 469, p. 305.

<sup>2</sup> I.F.C., Ms. 716, pp. 246-247.

<sup>3</sup> I.F.C., Ms. 1081, p. 234.

<sup>4</sup> M'Evoy, John. *Statistical Survey of the County of Tyrone*. Dublin, 1802, pp. 147-148.

In 1813, Richard Griffith, writing of the Kilcashel district of Roscommon and the neighbouring area of Co. Galway, enumerates fir, oak and yew as the chief kinds of wood found in the local bogs and states :

“ The Scotch fir trees are also very large, and appear to have grown to a great age. The timber is excellent for household purposes and laths. The yew found in the bogs has lately been much used for furniture ; it resembles rose-wood, but is superior to it in beauty of colour and firmness of texture.”<sup>1</sup>

The reference to rosewood implies that the wood was used for high-class furniture and cabinet work and not merely to supply farmhouse needs.

In 1814, David Aher, writing of the series of bogs in the counties of Tipperary, Kilkenny and Laoighis, also mentions the commercial value of bog timber for the furniture trade :

“ The yew is much esteemed for its neatness and durability in furniture, being perfectly sound and retaining its natural colour. The oak, some of which becomes black, is highly valued for its great hardness and strength, and therefore always brings a high price.”<sup>2</sup>

In Co. Clare, in 1814, Rev. John Grahame, describing the parish of Kilrush, writes :

“ The bog timber consists of fir, oak, and yew, but chiefly of the two former kinds, which are often found of large dimensions, and serve to roof houses and supply the simple furniture of the peasantry.”<sup>3</sup>

In the same year, another writer contributing to the same work, and speaking of the bog timber found in the Parish of Kilmacteige, Co. Sligo, states :

“ . . . and one kind of them, namely, the fir, very valuable, affording timber for roofing houses, making joists, and other domestic uses.”<sup>4</sup>

The “ other domestic uses,” we may take it, included furniture and fittings for windows and doors.

In 1824, Hely Dutton witnesses a similar use of bog timber in Co. Galway in general :

“ Bog timber, such as is usually dug up out of bogs, is in great request ; it consists of oak or fir ; the first is greatly esteemed for any work executed in damp situations ; and the fir for all kinds of carpenters' work, for which it is excellent ; also for laths, which are thought to be much more lasting than those from foreign fir.”<sup>5</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *Fourth Report of the Commissioners on Bogs in Ireland.* 1813. Appendix No. 6, p. 113.

<sup>2</sup> *Third Report of the Commissioners on Bogs in Ireland.* 1814. Appendix No. 2, p. 64.

<sup>3</sup> Grahame, Rev. John. In William Shaw Mason's *Parochial Survey of Ireland.* Dublin, 1816, vol. 2, p. 418.

<sup>4</sup> Neligan, Rev. James. In William Shaw Mason's *Parochial Survey of Ireland.* Dublin, 1816, vol. 2, p. 351.

<sup>5</sup> Dutton, Hely. *A Statistical Survey of the County of Galway.* Dublin, 1824, pp. 451-452.

Bicheno, in 1829, speaks of it as in general use in the country :

“ Bogwood is so abundant that it is everywhere used for lighting the turf, and among the cotters it is employed for making their roofs, doors, posts, and indeed for all their scanty carpentry.”<sup>1</sup>

At Edgeworthstown, Co. Longford, in 1842, it is reported :

“ The bog-wood, too, which the Irish dig out of their morasses, and use for a variety of purposes, interested me much. At first it is somewhat soft and wet, but afterwards becomes hard as iron, and is then extensively used in their buildings and furniture.”<sup>2</sup>

The Irish Folklore Commission archives contain a number of accounts of the use of bog timber for the provision of furniture, door and window fittings and other semi-structural features of the house. To obtain a picture of the general distribution of the usage all the references, including those above, are incorporated in the following topographical list, the details of the use to which the timber was put, where available, being given in brackets after each entry.

#### ULSTER

*Co. Cavan*

Parish of Mullagh (marriage chests of bog deal).<sup>3</sup>

*Co. Derry*

Parish of Cumber (bedsteads of bog oak).<sup>4</sup>

*Co. Donegal*

Parish of Kiltcevoge (tables, presses, chairs, etc.)<sup>5</sup>

Parish of Tullaghobegly (chair—“ *cnaiste* ”—out of solid).<sup>6</sup>

*Co. Tyrone*

Parish of Bodoney Lower (laths for wattled chimney or “ brace.”)<sup>7</sup>

Co. Tyrone (various).<sup>8</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Bicheno, J. E. *Ireland and its Economy*. London, 1830, p. 24.

<sup>2</sup> Kohl, J. G. *Travels in Ireland*. Translated from the German. London, 1844, p. 42.

<sup>3</sup> I.F.C., Ms. 831, p. 443.

<sup>4</sup> *First Report Commissioners Poorer Classes Ireland. Parliamentary Papers, vol. 32 (1836), Appendix E, p. 368.*

<sup>5</sup> I.F.C., Ms. 169, p. 624.

<sup>6</sup> I.F.C., Ms. 435, p. 211.

<sup>7</sup> I.F.C., Ms. 1216, pp. 281-282.

<sup>8</sup> M'Evoy, John. *Statistical Survey of the County of Tyrone*. Dublin 1802, pp. 147-148.

## MUNSTER

*Co. Clare*

- Parish of Kilkeedy (hen loft in kitchen,<sup>1</sup> beds and chests).<sup>2</sup>  
 Parish of Kilrush (furniture).<sup>3</sup>  
 Parish of Tomfinlough (benches, tables, wainscot, floors).<sup>4</sup>

*Co. Cork*

- Parish of Ballyvourney (settlebeds, dressers, etc.)<sup>5</sup>, (dressers, beds, settlebeds, tables, chairs),<sup>6</sup> (beds, settlebeds, dressers).<sup>7</sup>  
 Cloyne District (benches, tables, wainscot, floors).<sup>8</sup>  
 Parish of Kilmacabea (cupboards, dressers, tables, chairs, stools).<sup>9</sup>

*Co. Kerry*

- Parish of Ballincuslane (framework of wattle doors—*scolpáin*),<sup>10</sup> (beds, hencoops, settlebeds, tables, chairs).<sup>11</sup>  
 Parish of Dromod (kitchen lofts).<sup>12</sup>  
 Parish of Kilflyn (beds, presses, dressers).<sup>13</sup>  
 Parish of Killiney (tables, chairs, etc.).<sup>14</sup>  
 Parish of Kilmalkedar (cupboards, dressers).<sup>15</sup>  
 Cahirdaniel District (kitchen lofts).<sup>16</sup>

*Co. Limerick*

- Athea district (window frames, doors, partitions, tables).<sup>17</sup>

*Co. Tipperary*

- Roscrea district (furniture).<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> I.F.C., Ms. 537, pp. 260–261.

<sup>2</sup> I.F.C., Ms. 537, p. 185.

<sup>3</sup> Grahame, Rev. John. In William Shaw Mason's *Parochial Survey of Ireland*, Dublin, 1816, vol. 2, p. 418.

<sup>4</sup> Dineley, Thomas. *Observations in a Voyage through the Kingdom of Ireland*. From *Jour. Kilk. & S.E. Ireland Arch. Soc.*, Dublin, 1870, pp. 132–133.

<sup>5</sup> I.F.S., Ms. 535, pp. 337–338.

<sup>6</sup> I.F.C., Ms. 476, pp. 303–304.

<sup>7</sup> I.F.C., Ms. 937, pp. 148, 154, 159.

<sup>8</sup> Dineley, Thomas, *op. cit.*, pp. 132–133.

<sup>9</sup> I.F.C., Ms. 408, p. 358.

<sup>10</sup> I.F.C., Ms. 468, p. 296.

<sup>11</sup> I.F.C., Ms. 469, p. 295.

<sup>12</sup> I.F.C., Ms. 768, p. 53.

<sup>13</sup> Information from James McDonnell, County Kerry Field Club, Tralee, 7.10.1953.

<sup>14</sup> I.F.C., Ms. 513, pp. 230–231.

<sup>15</sup> I.F.C., Ms. 911, pp. 499–500.

<sup>16</sup> *Béaloides*, XV, p. 47.

<sup>17</sup> Information from Colm Danaher, Athea, Co. Limerick, 1953.

<sup>18</sup> Aher, David. *Third Report of the Commissioners on Bogs in Ireland*. 1814. Appendix No. 2, p. 64.

## LEINSTER

- Co. Kilkenny*  
Not localised (furniture).<sup>1</sup>
- Co. Laoighis*  
Not localised (furniture).<sup>2</sup>
- Co. Longford*  
Edgeworthstown District (furniture).<sup>3</sup>

## CONNACHT

- Co. Galway*  
County in general (various uses).<sup>4</sup>  
Parish of Ballindoon (chairs, tables, etc.).<sup>5</sup>  
Parish of Ballynakill (beds, etc.).<sup>6</sup>, (presses, tables, beds).<sup>7</sup>  
Cois Fhairrge, Conamara (doors, door jambs, window frames, dressers, chests, presses, mantle shelves).<sup>8</sup>  
Parish of Killannin (kitchen lofts).<sup>9</sup>  
Parish of Ross (beds).<sup>10</sup>  
Conamara (Recess) (beds and furniture).<sup>11</sup>  
Garumna and Lettermullen Islands (beds).<sup>12</sup>  
Parish of Kiltomas (chairs, dressers, chests, presses).<sup>13</sup>
- Co. Leitrim*  
Parish of Cloone (doors and door jambs).<sup>14</sup>
- Co. Mayo*  
Ballycroy District (kitchen lofts).<sup>15</sup>  
Corraun, Achill (doors).<sup>16</sup>  
Parish of Kilcommon (stools).<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Aher, David, *loc. cit.*

<sup>2</sup> Aher, David, *loc. cit.*

<sup>3</sup> Kohl, J. G. *Travels in Ireland*. Translated from the German. London, 1844, p. 42.

<sup>4</sup> Dutton, Hely. *Statistical Survey of the County Galway*. Dublin, 1824, pp. 451-452.

<sup>5</sup> I.F.C., Ms. 271, pp. 72-73.

<sup>6</sup> I.F.C., Ms. 707, pp. 455-456.

<sup>7</sup> I.F.C., Ms. 707, pp. 456-457.

<sup>8</sup> Mac Giollarnáth, Seán. *Peadar Chois Fhairrge*. Dublin, 1944, pp. 64-65.

<sup>9</sup> I.F.C., Ms. 177, p. 420.

<sup>10</sup> I.F.C., Ms. 1158, p. 290.

<sup>11</sup> I.F.C., Ms. 314, p. 407.

<sup>12</sup> Browne, Charles. *P.R.I.A.*, 21 (1898-1900), p. 258.

<sup>13</sup> I.F.C., Ms. 537, p. 213.

<sup>14</sup> I.F.C., Ms. 844, p. 5.

<sup>15</sup> I.F.C., Ms. 805, p. 282.

<sup>16</sup> Ashworth, John Hervey. *The Saxon in Ireland*. London, 1851, pp. 191-192.

<sup>17</sup> I.F.C., Ms. 770, pp. 175-176.

*Co. Roscommon*Kilcashel District (furniture).<sup>1</sup>*Co. Sligo*Parish of Kilmacteige (general purposes).<sup>2</sup>

This conspectus is comprehensive enough to show that evidence for the use of bog wood for all kinds of domestic carpentry is found virtually all over the region where the wood was available. Since in these districts we have already found that the timber was extensively used for roofing houses, it was only to be expected that it would be turned to other uses as well. It is, therefore, reasonable to assume that the practice was also known in those places where we know bog wood was raised, but from which we have no specific references to the use to which it was put. An example of this comes from Lough Dan, Co. Wicklow, where we learn :

“ The land at one extremity of the lake, called Inchvore, *i.e.*, the flat boggy land, is subject to constant inundations, and, upon the retreat of the waters, large trunks of oak trees are discernible, partly above the water. The peasantry are extremely desirous of procuring them for fuel, and for sale in the city.”<sup>3</sup>

## MISCELLANEOUS ARTICLES

In addition to furniture and fittings, the wood was also used for the manufacture of a number of other items which it has been thought advisable to list separately as follows:—

Spinning wheels :

Parish of Templecrone, Co. Donegal.<sup>4</sup>Parish of Moyrus, Co. Galway.<sup>5</sup>

Looms :

Co. Tyrone,<sup>6</sup>

Winnowing sieves :

Parish of Kilcummin, Co. Galway.<sup>7</sup>

Carts :

Conamara, Co. Galway.<sup>8</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Griffith, Richard. *Fourth Report of the Commissioners on Bogs in Ireland*. 1816. Appendix No. 6, p. 113.

<sup>2</sup> Neligan, Rev. James. In William Shaw Mason's *Parochial Survey of Ireland*. Dublin, 1816. vol. 2, p. 351.

<sup>3</sup> Wright, G. N. *A Guide to the County of Wicklow*, 2nd edition. London, 1827, p. 146.

<sup>4</sup> I.F.C., Ms. 477, pp. 374-375.

<sup>5</sup> Mac Giollarnáth, Seán. *Annála Beaga ó Iorrus Aithneach*. Dublin, 1941, pp. 267-268.

<sup>6</sup> M'Evoy, John. *Statistical Survey of the County of Tyrone*. Dublin, 1802, p. 119.

<sup>7</sup> I.F.C., Ms. 527, p. 433.

<sup>8</sup> Mac Giollarnáth, Seán. *Peadar Chois Fhairrge*. Dublin, 1944, p. 64.

- Boats :  
 Conamara, Co. Galway.<sup>1</sup>
- Netting needles :  
 Conamara, Co. Galway.<sup>2</sup>
- Swingle trees :  
 Parish of Kilquane, Co. Kerry.<sup>3</sup>
- Gate posts :  
 Ballyfin, Co. Laoighis.<sup>4</sup>
- Fencing posts :  
 Ballyknockan District, Co. Wicklow.<sup>5</sup>

## BOG WOOD FOR VESSELS

A proof of the universal use of bog timber is to be found in the fact that it was widely used for the manufacture of wooden vessels of all kinds for domestic use. In comparison with the bulk of evidence for its use in roofing houses and making furniture that for its use in making vessels is not extensive, but accounts are available from enough places sufficiently widely distributed to show that it must have been common over the whole bog timber region. The following are the principal references to the practice which the writer has been able to discover. Where feasible, quotations have been given since these include the names of vessels of various kinds.

## ULSTER

*Co. Donegal*

## Parish of Templecrone.

Bog wood was used for coopering. Tubs, piggins (stave-built, one-handed milk pails, resembling noggins but wider at the mouth than at the bottom) and noggins (*gogáin*) made of it.<sup>6</sup>

## MUNSTER

*Co. Cork*

## Parish of Ballyvourney.

"*Agus an baraille nù meadar an ime bhíodh seo déanta do ghiúmhaís, agus tobáin i gcomhair biadh bó nù muc.*"

"*Anncaire—árthach beag adhmaid. Bhíodh seo déanta do ghiúmhaís. Fúnsaí iarainn air. Abhad ní ba lugha ná tobán. Choingeóchadh sé bainne nù uisge.*"<sup>7</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Mac Giollarnáth, Seán. *Annála Beaga ó Iorrus Aithneach*. Dublin, 1941, p. 266.

<sup>2</sup> *ibid.* p. 267.

<sup>3</sup> I.F.C., Ms. 771, p. 299.

<sup>4</sup> *The Irish Naturalist* XIV (1905), p. 34.

<sup>5</sup> Information from John Brady, Laurel Lodge, Ballyknockan, Co. Wicklow, 1953.

<sup>6</sup> I.F.C., Ms. 477, p. 374.

<sup>7</sup> I.F.C., Ms. 937, pp. 154, 164.

(The barrel or the butter churn were made of fir and tubs for food for cows or pigs.)

Anker. A small wooden vessel. It was made of fir and had iron hoops. Much smaller than a tub. It held milk or water.)

Co. Kerry

Parish of Cloghane.

Keelers (*ciléirí*) for setting milk were made from fir.<sup>1</sup>

Parish of Dromod.

“*Dhinidís meadracha is aruistí dhíobh.*”<sup>2</sup>

(Churns and other vessels were made from them, *i.e.*, fir logs.)

“*Buintí maidí giúise as phortaithe agus dhineadh cúipéaraithe iad san a ghearradh suas, agus dhinidís meadracha breátha díobh agus tobáin bhainne agus canaí agus ciléaraithe agus aruistí eile a bhéadh a’ teastabháil ar fuaid a’ tighe.*”<sup>3</sup>

(Fir logs were taken out of the bogs and coopers cut them up and made excellent churns, milk tubs, cans, keelers and other domestic vessels out of them.)

CONNACHT

Co. Galway

Parish of Killannin.

Bog timber used for making following vessels: *canna* for fetching water; *baol* for collecting milk for churning; and tubs for salting bacon and fish.<sup>4</sup>

Parish of Moycullen

“*Chuile chuinneóg dá raibh déanta ba giúsach a bhíodh mar ádhmad ionnta. Ní bheiththí sásta le aon chineál eile ádhmaid.*”<sup>5</sup>  
(Every churn was made of fir. People would not be satisfied with any other kind of wood.)

“*Rinneadh píginí as an dair dhuibh go minic sa tseanaimsir. Séard a bhí sa bpígin, soitheach beag galúin nó dhá ghalúin a mbíodh lámh orthab—ceann de na cláracha níos airde ná an chuid eile . . .*

*Bhíodh soithigh le h-aghaidh ime déanta de’n dair dhuibh. Ní raibh sa soitheach ime seo ach aon phíosá amháin.*

“*Bhí na cuinneóga dá ndéanamh sa tír seo de’n phéinne bháin a theagadh i dtír de’n fhairge agus na h-ancaird de’n ádhmad céadna. Bhí bun an loithne déanta de’n dair dhuibh agus an rothán le cur anuas ar chois an loithne.*

<sup>1</sup> I.F.C., Ms. 513, pp. 262–263.

<sup>2</sup> I.F.C., Ms. 147, p. 465.

<sup>3</sup> I.F.C., Ms. 768, pp. 233–234.

<sup>4</sup> I.F.C., Ms. 527, pp. 527, 529.

<sup>5</sup> I.F.C., Ms. 1025, p. 134.

“ *Bhíodh míasa beaga maide de’n dair dhuibh ag na mná leis an uachtar a bhaint de’n bhainne. Aon phíosá amháin a bhí ionntab, píosa tanaidhe. Bhíodh na míasa maide ceadna acab ag baint an ime de’n bhainne nuair a bhíodh an maistre déanta agus ag cruadhadh an ime, tá cuid acab sa tír fos.*”<sup>1</sup>

(Piggins, *i.e.*, milking pails, were often made from the black oak (*i.e.*, bog oak) in former times. The piffin was a small vessel holding a gallon or two gallons and having a handle—one of the staves longer than the rest . . . .

The butter vessels were made of black oak. The butter vessel was cut out of the solid.

Churns in this district were made of white pine drift-wood and the tankards (*i.e.*, water vessels) from the same wood. The head of the churn dash was made of black oak and the “joggler” which fitted down on the handle.

The women had small dishes of black oak, consisting of a single thin piece, for skimming the cream off the milk. They used the same dishes to skim off the butter when the churning was finished and for working the butter also. There are some of them in the district yet.)

#### Conamara

“ *Ní teach geanamhail a bhí ann mara mbéadh . . . coinneóg ghiúsaighe, canna giúsaighe, agus tobán giúsaighe leis an uachtar a chur ar suidheachán ann. Ní fhágann giúsach blas ádhmuid ar an mbainne ná ar an im.*”<sup>2</sup>

(There was no respectable house but had . . . a fir churn, a fir water vessel and a fir tub to set the cream in. The fir does not impart a woody taste to the milk or butter.)

#### Co. Mayo

##### Achill Island.

The hoops of noggins were made of bog deal.<sup>3</sup>

##### Parish of Ballyovey.

Wooden vessels formerly in use: noggins (*naigíní*), milk pails (*pigíní*), butter bowls (*báisíní ádhmaid*).

“ *Go ghiúmhasach is mó a bhíod na soithigh seo déantaí. Bhíodh cúipéaraí san áit an t-am sin leis na soithigh sin a dhéanamh.*”<sup>4</sup>

(These vessels were chiefly made of fir. There were coopers in the place at that time to make them.)

<sup>1</sup> Mac Giollarnáth, Seán. *Annála Beaga ó Iorras Aithneach*. Dublin, 1941, pp. 266–267.

<sup>2</sup> Mac Giollarnáth, Seán. *Peadar Chois Fhairrge*. Dublin, 1944, p. 64.

<sup>3</sup> I.F.C., Ms. 827, p. 146.

<sup>4</sup> I.F.C., Ms. 711, p. 164.

Allowing for the accidents attendant on the collection of oral tradition and the obvious deficiency of our sources concerning all those parts of the country which have not as yet been systematically investigated by the Irish Folklore Commission, these quotations are sufficiently definite and widespread to permit us to infer the fairly general use of bog timber for coopering in those districts where it was in common use for other purposes.

### BOG DEAL ROPES

The wood of the sub-fossil pine trees found in the bogs was, until recent times, extensively used in the country for making strong ropes which were used for a variety of purposes (Pls. I and IV). The process of making them will be described in some detail later; for the moment it is sufficient to say that the wood was reduced to long shreds which were twisted together to form the ropes.

If, as has been already stated, it is probable that the exploitation of the wood from the bogs begins with the decline of the supply of standing timber following the destruction of the native forests it seems reasonable to suppose that the widespread use of these ropes dates from that period also.

In the absence of dated finds the time of origin of these ropes can, however, be placed anywhere in the long period between the initial uncovering of appreciable amounts of bog wood, perhaps in early historic times, and the first explicit reference to them in the opening years of the 18th century. It seems, nevertheless, unlikely that they originated with a discovery of the suitability of bog deal fibres for the purpose. It is much more probable that it was the fibres of a living tree which were originally used and that, as it gradually became less available with the shrinkage of the woodlands, recourse was had to the bog deal as a substitute. This is the more probable in view of the fact that cords made from lime-bast (the inner bark of the lime tree) are known from mesolithic times in Europe<sup>1</sup> and are still made in Scandinavia and elsewhere.<sup>2</sup> Even more significant is the survival in Sweden of the manufacture of ropes and cordage from slivers of pine, the carefully selected length of timber being heated at a fire or in an oven until softened sufficiently to allow of thin strips being peeled from it.<sup>3</sup> Cordage made from both these materials was put to a wide variety of uses, but that made from lime-bast being softer and more flexible lent itself to finer work. Ropes made from bog

<sup>1</sup> Stjernquist, Berta and others: Stone Age Fishing Tackle from Scania *Kungl. Hum. Vetenskap. i Lund. Årsberättelse*, 1952-53. pp. 123-148.

<sup>2</sup> Granlund, John. Lindbast och träbast. *Folk-tiv*, VII-VIII (1943-1944), pp. 166-199.

<sup>3</sup> *ibid.*

timber were also known in Scotland.<sup>1</sup> While it would be possible to argue the transmission of the technique from northern Europe to Ireland during historic times, it seems more probable that in the three areas we are dealing with independent survivals of a very ancient common cultural trait.

Even if the making of bog deal ropes were a comparatively recent and independent Irish invention, which is highly unlikely, they are not the only examples in the country of the use of woody fibres for rope making. Among the charges preferred in 1597 against one Captain Thomas Lee, was the following :

“ Item, the (Provost-) Marshal Bowen coming into the Byrnes, as employed by Captain Lee, would apprehend the poor people, and carry them to the gallows with withes about their necks, ready to be hanged, and then the poor people, giving him a sum of money, or bonds to pay him money by a day, should be forthwith released.”<sup>2</sup>

Dineley, writing of the Barony of Burren, Co. Clare, in 1681, states :

“ . . . their plough Geers, tackle, and traces being (as they are all over the rest of the Kingdome) of Gadds or withs of twiggs twisted . . . ”<sup>3</sup>

and he also mentions the use of such ropes “ according to the then custome of the countrey ” to hang malefactors.<sup>4</sup> Monk, describing Co. Kildare in 1682, also refers to withy ropes for plough tackle :

“ Their Tillage they performe with little horses or Garrans, in Geeres or harnasse made of Withs or Gadds, soe they cann furnish out a plow with lesse than a third the charge they cann possibly doe it for in England, and soe of all other their Carriages which is don with halfe the trouble, . . . ”<sup>5</sup>

Dunton, in 1698, relates an anecdote of some Cromwellian troopers who were hanged by the Irish with “ gads ” made of twisted hazel switches.<sup>6</sup> Madden, in 1738, says that numbers of the poor farmers used “ twisted Gads ” for the tackle of their ploughs and harrows.<sup>7</sup> While ropes for other uses were made from many additional kinds of material—rushes, straw, hay, horse-hair, willow bark, roots of marram grass, although, strangely enough, not of the heather<sup>8</sup> so extensively used in Scotland and

<sup>1</sup> Information from Calum McLean, School of Scottish Studies, Edinburgh, 1955.

<sup>2</sup> *Cal. State Papers, Ireland*, 1598–99, pp. 76–77.

<sup>3</sup> Dineley, Thomas. *op. cit.*, pp. 162–163.

<sup>4</sup> *ibid.*, p. 17.

<sup>5</sup> Monk, Thomas. *A Descriptive Account of the County of Kildare in 1682. J. Kildare Arch. Soc.*, vol. VI (1909–1911), p. 340.

<sup>6</sup> MacLysaght, Edward. *Irish Life in the Seventeenth Century*. 2nd edition. Cork, 1950, pp. 322–323.

<sup>7</sup> Madden, Rev. Samuel. *Reflections and Resolutions Proper for the Gentlemen of Ireland*. Dublin, 1738, p. 131.

<sup>8</sup> Wilde, William R. *Catalogue of the Antiquities of the Royal Irish Academy*. Dublin, 1857, p. 205.

the Isle of Man—the foregoing references reveal the existence of an ancient tradition of the use of wood fibres for ropes, and it seems unquestionable that the use of bog deal for that purpose forms part of that tradition.

The first reference to the existence of bog deal ropes known to the writer is that by Molyneux, writing of the Killeglan district, Co. Roscommon, in 1709, which states :

“ They have here a sort of ropes made of ye roots of firr trees, here frequently dug out of the boggs ; these they beat like hemp, and then twist into roaps ; they are pretty flexible, and I am told, more lasting in damp places, than any other cords : they are made in Athlone, . . . ”<sup>1</sup>

A reference a century earlier, in 1609, by Lithgow to the use of “ wooden ropes ” in ploughing may relate either to these or to the “ gad ” ropes mentioned above.<sup>2</sup>

Rutty, in 1772, having referred to the fact that bog fir was dug at a depth of three to four feet on Glencullen mountain, Co. Dublin, and that it was used in Dublin city for lighting fires, and was, in some places, cut into strips for light, goes on to state :

“ This Wood, moreover, is sometimes beaten into strings, and combed and spun, and several strings are twisted together to make ropes, which are sold at some of our fairs, having this peculiar excellence, that being used for cording beds on damp earthen floors, they are not subject to rot, as the hempen cords are, by moisture.”<sup>3</sup>

As our sources of information increase in number in the 19th century we find repeated mention of them : M'Parlan, 1801 (Donegal)<sup>4</sup> ; M'Evoy, 1802 (Tyrone)<sup>5</sup> ; Wakefield, 1812 (Tipperary)<sup>6</sup> ; Hall, 1813<sup>7</sup> ; Dutton, 1824 (Galway)<sup>8</sup> ; Knott, 1835 (Clare)<sup>9</sup> ; Binns, 1835 (Clare)<sup>10</sup> ; Hall, 1840 (Cork)<sup>11</sup> ;

<sup>1</sup> *Irish Archaeological Society : Miscellany*. Dublin, 1846, vol. I, p. 165.

<sup>2</sup> Lithgow, William. *J.C.H.A.S.*, vol. VIII (1902), p. 104.

<sup>3</sup> Rutty, John. *An Essay towards a Natural History of the County of Dublin*. Dublin, 1772, vol. I, p. 99.

<sup>4</sup> M'Parlan, James. *Statistical Survey of the County of Donegal*. Dublin, 1802, pp. 90-91.

<sup>5</sup> M'Evoy, John. *Statistical Survey of the County of Tyrone*. Dublin, 1802, p. 188.

<sup>6</sup> Wakefield, Edward. *An Account of Ireland Statistical and Political*. London, 1812, vol. I, p. 399.

<sup>7</sup> Hall, Rev. James. *Tour through Ireland*. London, 1813, vol. 2, p. 318.

<sup>8</sup> Dutton, Hely. *A Statistical and Agricultural Survey of the County of Galway*. Dublin, 1824, p. 452.

<sup>9</sup> Knott, Mary John. *Two Months at Kilkee*. Dublin, 1835, p. 33.

<sup>10</sup> Binns, Jonathan. *The Miseries and Beauties of Ireland*. London, 1837, vol. 2, p. 382.

<sup>11</sup> Hall, Mr. and Mrs. S. C. *Ireland : Its Scenery, Character, etc.* London, 1840, vol. I, p. 155.

Kohl, 1842 (Longford)<sup>1</sup>; Wilde, 1857 (Connacht).<sup>2</sup> Finally, when we reach the period covered by the traditions recorded in the archives of the Irish Folklore Commission, we have abundant data for the study of their manufacture, use and distribution.

While the actual process of making the rope was a simple one, it called for considerable skill both in the preparation of the material and the twisting of the fibres. Most informants are agreed that a clean, straight-grained piece of wood, four to five feet long, was the first necessity. From this long thin strips were peeled or split but, as the technique of preparing them varied from district to district, there are local differences of opinion about the best condition of the wood for working. In some parts of Kerry (Cahirdaniel,<sup>3</sup> Sneem<sup>4</sup> and Castlegregory<sup>5</sup> districts) the strips were in the nature of very thin shavings, and it was held that they could be best cut from the parent log while the timber was still moist from the bog. In N. Antrim and Derry thin longitudinal slices 1 inch wide and 1/32 of an inch thick were cut with a butcher's knife and the wood had to be dried carefully beforehand.<sup>6</sup> In some cases the strips themselves were moistened prior to twisting. This is recorded from Beagh Parish in the vicinity of Gort, Co. Galway.<sup>7</sup>

In some places it was the custom to pound the strips to reduce them to a more fibrous condition. Denis Finucane, aged 80, of Banemore, near Listowel, Co. Kerry, describing the methods used in his district, states that the strips were pounded with a beetle of ash or elm.<sup>8</sup> An informant, aged 84, of Tonranny, Beagh Parish, Co. Galway, recorded in 1937 that the strips were beaten with a hammer before twisting,<sup>9</sup> and a similar practice obtained in Ballynakill Parish in the same county according to details recorded in 1939 from an informant aged 91.<sup>10</sup> From Kilballyowen Parish, near Kilrush, Co. Clare, it was recorded in 1942 that the method employed there was to cut the bog deal into strips as thin as paper and then to pound these.<sup>11</sup> Owen Niland of Urlaur, Ballyhaunis, Co. Mayo, writing to the National Museum in 1949,

<sup>1</sup> Kohl, J. G. *Travels in Ireland*. Translated from the German. London, 1844, p. 42.

<sup>2</sup> Wilde, William R. *Catalogue of the Antiquities of the Royal Irish Academy*. Dublin, 1857, p. 205.

<sup>3</sup> I.F.C., Ms. 777, pp. 359-361.

<sup>4</sup> I.F.C., Ms. 1143, pp. 83-84.

<sup>5</sup> I.F.C., Ms. 513, p. 278.

<sup>6</sup> Mogeey, J. M., *U.J.A.*, 3rd series, vol. I (1938), p. 152.

<sup>7</sup> I.F.C., Ms. 433, pp. 294-295.

<sup>8</sup> Information from James McDonnell, County Kerry Field Club, Tralee, 27.11.1953.

<sup>9</sup> I.F.C., Ms. 433, pp. 294-295.

<sup>10</sup> I.F.C., Ms. 707, pp. 455-456.

<sup>11</sup> I.F.C., Ms. 861, pp. 950-952.

stated that: "When the bog-deal root was split into strips these were pounded with a wooden mallet or beetle and then torn into string-like pieces.<sup>1</sup> Seán Ó h-Eochaidh, describing the practice in the Gortahork area of Co. Donegal, also mentions the preliminary beating of the strips.<sup>2</sup> That this is part of the traditional technique is shown by the fact that M'Evoy in 1802 mentions that in Tyrone the wood was "beaten out into small filaments to make the ropes"<sup>3</sup> and that even Molyneux, our first authority for the existence of the ropes, records that the bog fir roots were beaten "like hemp."<sup>4</sup>

Molyneux (1709),<sup>5</sup> M'Evoy (1802),<sup>6</sup> Wakefield (1812),<sup>7</sup> Hall (1813),<sup>8</sup> Smith (1846),<sup>9</sup> Niland (1949),<sup>10</sup> and Evans (1951)<sup>11</sup> state that the roots of the bog fir were used for the purpose. On the other hand, a scrutiny of the records of the Irish Folklore Commission reveals that while some informants are silent about the part of the tree used, none mentions the roots, and a length of the trunk is specified in entries from the following counties: Kerry (three),<sup>12</sup> Mayo (two),<sup>13</sup> Galway (one),<sup>14</sup> Donegal (one),<sup>15</sup> and there are, in addition, two independent records, one from Kerry,<sup>16</sup> the other from the N. Antrim-Derry district.<sup>17</sup> Although, naturally, more credence attaches to the latter series of records, since most of them embody the knowledge of people who actually saw the ropes being made, while most of the former are probably based on hearsay information, it is, nevertheless, likely that the roots were sometimes used, in which case the strips prepared from them almost certainly required a thorough pounding to counteract their natural tendency to wiriness and kinks.

When enough strips had been prepared they were twisted into a ply of suitable thickness. In some places, *e.g.*, Rosguill<sup>18</sup> and

<sup>1</sup> Nat. Mus. Ireland. Reg. Nos. F. 1949: 57-62.

<sup>2</sup> *Béaloideas* XIII, pp. 145-146.

<sup>3</sup> M'Evoy, John, *op. cit.*, p. 188.

<sup>4</sup> Molyneux, Thomas. Journey to Connaught, April, 1709. *Irish Archaeological Society, Miscellany*. Dublin, 1846, vol. I, p. 165.

<sup>5</sup> *ibid.*, p. 165.

<sup>6</sup> M'Evoy, John. *op. cit.*, p. 188.

<sup>7</sup> Wakefield, Edward. *op. cit.*, p. 399.

<sup>8</sup> Hall, Rev. James. *op. cit.*, p. 318.

<sup>9</sup> Smith, Aquilla. *Irish Arch. Soc., Miscellany*. Dublin, 1846, vol. I, Footnote, p. 165.

<sup>10</sup> Niland, Owen. Nat. Mus. Ireland. Reg. Nos. F. 1949: 57-62.

<sup>11</sup> Evans, E. Estyn. *Mourne Country*. Dundalk, 1951, p. 185.

<sup>12</sup> I.F.C., Mss. 777, pp. 359-361; 1143, pp. 294-295; 513, p. 278.

<sup>13</sup> I.F.C., Mss. 743, pp. 407-408; 805, p. 282.

<sup>14</sup> I.F.C., Ms. 433, pp. 294-295.

<sup>15</sup> I.F.C., Ms. 458, pp. 503-509.

<sup>16</sup> Information from James McDonnell, County Kerry Field Club, Tralee, 27.11.1953, referring to Banemore Townland, Listowel District.

<sup>17</sup> Mogeey, J. M., *U.J.A.*, 3rd series, vol. I (1938), p. 152.

<sup>18</sup> I.F.C., Ms. 1143, pp. 74-75.

Gortahork,<sup>1</sup> Co. Donegal; Ballycroy, Co. Mayo<sup>2</sup>; Ballynaskill, Co. Galway<sup>3</sup>; and the Dromod,<sup>4</sup> Caherdaniel,<sup>5</sup> and Castlegregory<sup>6</sup> districts of Co. Kerry, this was done by means of the particular pattern of straw-rope twister used in each locality. In some accounts the method of twisting is not mentioned, but there is a number where it is stated or implied that the twisting was done by the hand alone. In N. Antrim and Derry, where hand-twisting seems to have been the rule, the finished rope was coiled around the legs of a stool,<sup>7</sup> and descriptions from Sneem<sup>8</sup> and Cahirdaniel,<sup>9</sup> Co. Kerry, where the rope, according as it was made, was twisted around the back of a chair, imply that the twisting was done by hand here also. A reference from Co. Donegal in 1802 reads: "Mr. Richard Nisbett, of Woodhill, on some property of his in Boylagh, found a tenant of his lately at work twisting and making ropes with his fingers of bog-fir."<sup>10</sup> Owen Niland, whose account of the manufacture of these ropes in the Urlaur district, near Ballyhaunis, Co. Mayo, has been referred to before, also vouches for the existence of hand-twisting: "There were no implements used to twist them, as far as I can learn, being twisted by hand while the material was damp."<sup>11</sup>

The rope, was, apparently, never used in the form of a single ply. To judge by the surviving specimens preserved in the National Museum, the commonest type was a two-ply one, made by doubling a suitable length of single ply on itself and twisting the two portions together. If a stronger rope was desired, a third ply was twisted in. No examples of four-ply ones appear to have survived although they are mentioned as having been used at Kilclogher, Kilballyowen parish, Co. Clare,<sup>12</sup> and reported on hearsay from Erris, Co. Mayo.<sup>13</sup>

All the National Museum specimens, with the exception of six, are of the two-ply type and come from the following districts: Magherahaan, Co. Donegal (Reg. No. F1950:317), Tuam, Co. Galway (Reg. No. F1933:50), Urlaur, Co. Mayo (Reg. Nos. F1949:57-62), Farranmacshane, Co. Offaly (Reg. Nos. F1952:119, 120), Shannonbridge District, Co. Offaly (Reg. No. F1953:92).

<sup>1</sup> *Béaloides* XIII, pp. 145-146.

<sup>2</sup> I.F.C., Ms. 805, p. 282.

<sup>3</sup> I.F.C., Ms. 707, pp. 455-456.

<sup>4</sup> I.F.C., Ms. 768, pp. 80-81.

<sup>5</sup> *Béaloides* XV, p. 47.

<sup>6</sup> I.F.C., Ms. 513, p. 278.

<sup>7</sup> Mogeys, J. M. *U.J.A.*, 3rd series, vol. 1, (1938), p. 152.

<sup>8</sup> I.F.C., Ms. 1143, pp. 83-85.

<sup>9</sup> I.F.C., Ms. 777, pp. 359-361.

<sup>10</sup> M'Parlan, James. *Statistical Survey of the County of Donegal*. Dublin, 1802, pp. 90-91.

<sup>11</sup> Nat. Mus. Ireland. Reg. Nos. F. 1949:57-62.

<sup>12</sup> I.F.C., Ms. 861, pp. 950-952.

<sup>13</sup> I.F.C., Ms. 706, p. 78.

Of the three-ply examples, one, from Glencolumbkille Parish, Co. Donegal (Reg. No. F1036 : 107), was made in August, 1936, by Séamus Ó h-Ighne of Meenacross ; the second, from Belmullet, Co. Mayo (Reg. No. S.A. 1021 : 2), was made by Michael Maguire, apparently about 1921 ; the third, from Killywool, Co. Derry (Reg. No. F1032 : 175) was found in the ruins of an old house ; the fourth, from Cumber, Co. Mayo (Reg. No. 1942 : 1839), was found in a bog: the fifth (Reg. No. F1954: 124) was made in 1954 in Tooreens, Kilcrohane Parish, Co. Kerry ; the sixth (Reg. No. F1955 : 12), from Glencullin, Kilcommon Parish, Co. Mayo, was made in 1955 by Patrick MacManmon, aged 65. In addition to these specimens, three-ply ropes are reported from Rinnafarset, Templecrone Parish, Co. Donegal<sup>1</sup> ; Carrownaglogh, Kilcommon Parish, Co. Mayo<sup>2</sup> ; N. Antrim and Derry<sup>3</sup> ; and Caherdaniel district, Co. Kerry<sup>4</sup>.

The available ropes vary from 1.5 cm. to 2 cm. in diameter, the three-ply ones being, naturally, the thicker. The average diameter of the component plies may be put at about 1 cm. The slivers or strips of wood of which they are made are almost invariably less than 1 mm. thick : an occasional one may be as thick as 2 mm. but such are very exceptional. The variation in width is much more considerable, strips of up to 10 mm. being not unusual but the bulk of them average 2-3 mm. It is virtually impossible to estimate the original number of strips in the ply since in twisting the wider slivers split up longitudinally into a number of smaller strips. It is worthy of note that in all the Museum specimens the strips in the plies are S-twisted, while the plies themselves are Z-twisted together.

As with many other rural skills, the making of these ropes was probably within the competence of almost every man in the districts where they were used, but it was natural that some persons who proved more expert than others should tend to specialise in the work, even to the extent of gaining a part-livelihood from it. In 1802 M'Evoy states that in Co. Tyrone "it is a kind of trade with many poor people in the vicinities of bogs"<sup>5</sup> and Mogey, in 1938, describing it as a dying art in N. Antrim and Derry, says : "Its manufacture was a specialised craft."<sup>6</sup> Of the Dunboe and Magilligan area in Co. Derry, it was recorded in 1945 : "At one time there was quite a local trade in the manufacture of fir ropes"<sup>7</sup> ; and in 1938 it was recalled that within living memory

<sup>1</sup> I.F.C., Ms. 458, pp. 503-509.

<sup>2</sup> I.F.C., Ms. 706, p. 78.

<sup>3</sup> *U.J.A.*, 3rd series, vol. I (1938), p. 152.

<sup>4</sup> I.F.C., Mss. 1143, pp. 83-84 ; 777, pp. 359-361 ; *Béaloides* XV, p. 47.

<sup>5</sup> M'Evoy, John. *op. cit.*, p. 188.

<sup>6</sup> *U.J.A.*, 3rd series, vol. I (1938), p. 152.

<sup>7</sup> I.F.C., Ms. 1079, p. 297.

there was an old man specialising in the work in the townland of Rinnafarset, Co. Donegal, who, having made a supply, would set off to sell them in the neighbouring islands of Aranmore, Inishkeeragh and Inishmeane.<sup>1</sup> Tomás na dTéad (Tom of the Ropes) whom Domhnall Ó Súilleabháin, then aged 86, writing in 1945, mentions as having seen selling them at Caherdaniel Fair, Co. Kerry, every November, seems to have been another such specialist.<sup>2</sup>

## USES

## Cording Beds

It is a curious fact that the first and the great majority of the later printed references mention these ropes in connection with one single use, the cording of wooden beds as a support for the straw, chaff or feather tick. A series of holes was bored in the side boards and end boards of the bed and through these the rope was threaded to form an open network of considerable elasticity.

The passage from Molyneux, referring to the ropes in the Killeglan district in 1709, quoted above continues:

“ . . . they are made in Athlone, and are much used for cording beds in damp clay floors, where they last for ever, whereas till they made these roaps they were used to change their hemp cords every day (*sic*). ”<sup>3</sup>

Rutty, writing in 1772, of the bog fir raised on Glencullen mountain, Co. Dublin, refers to this use of the ropes in almost the same words.<sup>4</sup>

M'Evoy, writing of Co. Tyrone in 1802, states:

“ . . . when beaten out into small filaments, is found to answer for ropes which are principally used for cording beds, and, in damp places, will last considerably longer than hempen ropes. Twenty yards is the usual length for a bed-cord, which is commonly bought for 10d.”<sup>5</sup>

Dutton, writing of Co. Galway in 1824, states:

“ Sometimes this species of timber is twisted into ropes, much used for supporting the beds of the cottiers, as they bear damp better than hempen ropes.”<sup>6</sup>

Kohl, in 1842, apparently referring to the Edgeworthstown district of Co. Longford, says:

“ The ropes they call ‘ deal ropes ’ and a network is formed of them, on which they lay the bags of straw that compose their beds.”<sup>7</sup>

<sup>1</sup> I.F.C., Ms. 518, pp. 84–88.

<sup>2</sup> *Béaloideas* XV, p. 47.

<sup>3</sup> Molyneux, Thomas. *Journey to Connaught*, April 1709. *Irish Arch. Soc. Miscellany*. Dublin, 1846, vol. I, p. 165.

<sup>4</sup> Rutty, John. *op. cit.*, p. 99.

<sup>5</sup> M'Evoy, John. *Statistical Survey of the County of Tyrone*. Dublin, 1802, p. 188.

<sup>6</sup> Dutton, Hely. *Statistical and Agricultural Survey of the County of Galway*. Dublin, 1824, p. 452.

<sup>7</sup> Kohl, J. G. *Travels in Ireland*. Translated from the German. London, 1844, p. 42.

Aquilla Smith, in 1846, editing Molyneux's account above, adds :

" Ropes made of the roots of fir trees, are still used by the peasantry in many parts of the country for cording *bedsteads* and for lines for drying linen."<sup>1</sup>

Wilde, in 1857, writing, it may be assumed, from personal knowledge, states :

". . . but one of the strongest and most durable pieces of rude cordage is that formed out of the fibre of the bog-deal, until very recently commonly used in roping beds, and sometimes in thatching in the west of Ireland."<sup>2</sup>

Mogey, in 1938, with reference to the N. Antrim-Derry district, also mentions this use of the rope, but it is not clear whether from personal knowledge or with one or more of the above sources in mind.<sup>3</sup>

Some more recent references give grounds for believing that this practice survived rather later than might be inferred from Wilde's statement and supply information about its existence in districts for which there are no published accounts.

Owen Niland in 1949 states that the ropes were largely used in the old wooden bedsteads in the Urlaur district, near Ballyhaunis, Co. Mayo : " Holes were bored through the side rails and end rails also of the bedstead and the ropes woven through them."<sup>4</sup>

A similar description was recorded in 1943 from an informant aged 89 in Ballycroy, Co. Mayo,<sup>5</sup> while the practice was also known in the Bangor-Erris district in the north of the same county.<sup>6</sup>

From Co. Kerry a very explicit account of the cording process was given in 1953 by Maurice Leen of Rea, near Listowel, who had the information from his mother,<sup>7</sup> and two others were obtained in the Castlegregory area in 1938<sup>8</sup> and 1945.<sup>9</sup>

These citations make it clear that this use of the ropes extended over two hundred years, at least ; from the beginning of the 18th to the end of the 19th century. For its distribution we have evidence from Tyrone, Mayo, Galway, Roscommon, Longford and Kerry, which is enough to make us reasonably certain that it was

<sup>1</sup> *Irish Arch. Soc. Miscellany*. Dublin, 1846, vol. I, p. 165, footnote.

<sup>2</sup> Wilde, William R. *Catalogue of Antiquities of Royal Irish Academy*. Dublin, 1857, p. 205.

<sup>3</sup> *U.J.A.*, 3rd series, vol. I (1938), p. 152.

<sup>4</sup> Nat. Mus. Ireland. Reg. Nos. F 1949 : 57-62.

<sup>5</sup> I.F.C., Ms. 805, p. 283.

<sup>6</sup> Information from Micheál Mac Énrí, Bangor-Erris, Co. Mayo, 1955.

<sup>7</sup> Information from James McDonnell, County Kerry Field Club, Tralee, 27.11.1953.

<sup>8</sup> I.F.C., Ms. 1081, p. 46.

<sup>9</sup> I.F.C., Ms. 513, p. 278.

to be found all over the western half and a large part of the north of the country, *i.e.*, in all those places in which we have evidence of the long-standing and large-scale exploitation of bog timber.

### Roofs and Thatching

One of the most widespread uses of bog deal rope, and one which must have called for the manufacture of large quantities of it, was in the roofs of houses: to tie the purlins to the couples; to sew in place the foundation layer of sods or thatch, whichever was used in the district; and to rope down the exterior layers of thatch in those areas where this practice was followed.

Roped thatch is confined to the Atlantic coastal fringe from N. Derry to Kerry, and is designed to resist the high winds prevalent in those districts. On a sod layer foundation a coat of thatch is laid. This is not fastened directly to the foundation, but is held in place by an elaborate network formed of ropes running horizontally across the roof and up and down from eave to ridge.<sup>1</sup>

Prior to the introduction of commercial thatching rope, or "Hairy Ned," the ropes used were sometimes twisted from the thatching material itself, whether straw, bent, flax or mountain grasses. These had the disadvantage of a very limited life, quickly rotting and disintegrating under the weather. To remedy this bog deal ropes were used in many places, and instances of this have been recorded from Dunboe and Magilligan district, Co. Derry<sup>2</sup>; N. Antrim<sup>3</sup>; Inver<sup>4</sup>, Templecrone<sup>5</sup> and Culdaff<sup>6</sup> districts, Co. Donegal; Owneykeevan, Co. Sligo<sup>7</sup>; Kilcommon, Co. Mayo<sup>8</sup>; Kilmurry-Ibrickan, Co. Clare<sup>9</sup>; and Cahirdaniel district, Co. Kerry.<sup>10</sup>

In some cases, *e.g.*, Inver and Kilmurry-Ibrickan, it is said that the ropes were taken off in summer and immersed in a bog-hole or some similar wet place and taken up and replaced on the approach of winter. This is in accordance with the general belief that these ropes function best when kept moist, and tend to fall asunder under dry conditions.

Evidence for the use of the rope for sewing the foundation layer, whether of sod or other material, to the roof timbers comes from a wider area. In the Mourne district of Co. Down it was used for fastening down the sod layer and the first coat of thatch as

<sup>1</sup> Ó Danachair, Caoimhín. *Béaloides* XV, pp. 209-211.

<sup>2</sup> I.F.C., Ms. 1079, p. 297.

<sup>3</sup> *U.J.A.*, 3rd series vol. I (1938), p. 152.

<sup>4</sup> Information from Hugh MacDiarmuid, Inver, Co. Donegal.

<sup>5</sup> I.F.C., Ms. 518, pp. 84-88.

<sup>6</sup> I.F.C., Ms. 1079, p. 377.

<sup>7</sup> Information from Patrick Cleary, Owneykeevan, Co. Sligo, 3.10.1952.

<sup>8</sup> I.F.C., Ms. 743, pp. 407-408.

<sup>9</sup> I.F.C., Ms. 1081, p. 126.

<sup>10</sup> *Béaloides* XV, p. 47.

well.<sup>1</sup> In the Ballyknockan-Lackan district, Co. Wicklow, the sod layer was usually sewn to the roof timbers with plaited "dog rush" but, occasionally, bog wood split into pliable strips and plaited was used instead.<sup>2</sup> A number of pieces of bog deal rope presented to the National Museum in 1949 (Reg. Nos. F1949: 57-62) was found when the roof of an old house in Urlaur, Ballyhaunis, Co. Mayo, reputed to be 200 years old, was dismantled. They had been used to sew the first layer of thatch to the timbers.<sup>3</sup> The National Museum also possesses a length of similar rope (Reg. No. F1933: 50) which came to light in 1933 when the roof of a 17th or 18th century two-storey thatched house in Vicar Street, Tuam, Co. Galway, was being taken down and where it had been used to secure the thatch foundation to the roof timbers.<sup>4</sup> In the Castle-gregory district, Co. Kerry, it is reported that in former times the sod layer was tied to the purlins with bog deal rope.<sup>5</sup> In addition to these examples there is a number of less particularised references to its use in thatching, as in the quotation from Wilde given above, in which its exact function is in doubt.

Besides its use in thatching there are a few cases on record in which the rope performed a more structural function of fastening the roof timbers themselves to each other. In Gweedore, Co. Donegal, the couples for a house roof were assembled on the ground before erection, and the component parts were lashed together with the rope during the process.<sup>6</sup> Two pieces of two-ply rope presented to the National Museum in 1952 (Reg. Nos. F1952: 119, 120) were discovered during the demolition of an old house in Farranmacshane, Belmont, Co. Offaly, where they had been used to tie the ridge pole in the V formed by the crossing of the upper ends of the couples. The ridge pole was not a continuous piece, but consisted of a number of lengths of timber in the round. The purlins of this roof were lengths of split timber and these were tied to the couples by similar pieces of the same rope. Although there was no means of discovering when the house had been built, it was old enough for all recollection of the time of its erection to have disappeared from local memory.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Evans, E. Estyn. *Mourne Country*. Dundalk, 1951, p. 185.

<sup>2</sup> Information from John Brady, Laurel Lodge, Ballyknockan, Co. Wicklow, 1953.

<sup>3</sup> Information from Owen Niland, Urlaur, Kilkelly, Ballyhaunis, Co. Mayo, 1949.

<sup>4</sup> Information from Dr. T. B. Costello, Bishop Street, Tuam, Co. Galway, 1933.

<sup>5</sup> I.F.C., Ms. 1081, p. 46.

<sup>6</sup> I.F.C., Ms. 539, p. 301.

<sup>7</sup> Information from Mathias Rigney, Shannonbridge, Co. Offaly, 1952.

## Boat Cables

Probably because of the old established and widespread belief that these ropes were strongest and most long-lasting when kept more or less permanently moist, they were in great favour as boat ropes and cables. In the Lower Rosses, Co. Donegal, bog deal ropes were used for all purposes, but the fishermen who used them in their boats were reputed to be specially skilful in making them.<sup>1</sup> From Rinnafarset in the same county it is related that one old man in the townland was expert at the work and that when he had finished a quantity he took them for sale to the islands of Aranmore, Inishkeeragh, Inishmeane, etc., where he sold them for tying boats and currachs.<sup>2</sup> Another account from the same place also mentions their use for this purpose, adding that they were made up in lengths of 8—12 fathoms and sold for a penny a fathom.<sup>3</sup> At Rosport, Co. Mayo, it is said "they were for some peculiar reason fancied for boat sails and navigation."<sup>4</sup>

From Banemore, Listowel, Co. Kerry, comes a tradition that they were sold by the yard in Tralee where they were formerly used for towing "lighters" on the Tralee-Fenit canal.<sup>5</sup> In the Cahirdaniel district, Co. Kerry, an informant aged 70 recorded in 1942 that she often saw a man in the neighbourhood making these ropes which were used for tying up boats<sup>6</sup>; and at Sneem, in the same county, they were used for the same purpose.<sup>7</sup>

## Tying Hay and Corn Stacks

Information on this use of the ropes is mainly confined to Co. Kerry, but the accounts from there are explicit and unambiguous. An informant aged 60 recorded in 1941 that in the Cahirdaniel district he both saw the ropes being made and remembered them being used for roping down stacks, large stones to hold them in place being tied to the ends of the two ropes used. When the stack was exhausted the ropes were stored in a wet ditch until required the following season.<sup>8</sup> In this connection a man aged 86 recorded in 1945 that he remembered bog deal ropes being exposed for sale at Cahirdaniel Fair every November, the ropes being chiefly used for tying down corn stacks.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> I.F.C., Ms. 1143, pp. 71-72.

<sup>2</sup> I.F.C., Ms. 518, pp. 84-88.

<sup>3</sup> I.F.C., Ms. 458, pp. 503-509.

<sup>4</sup> I.F.C., Ms. 1242, p. 660.

<sup>5</sup> Information from James McDonnell, County Kerry Field Club, Tralee, 7.10.1953.

<sup>6</sup> I.F.C., Ms. 1143, pp. 85-87.

<sup>7</sup> I.F.C., Ms. 1143, pp. 83-85.

<sup>8</sup> I.F.C., Ms. 777, pp. 359-361.

<sup>9</sup> *Béaloides* XV, p. 47.

In Dromod parish, near Waterville, Co. Kerry, an informant aged 66 recorded in 1941 that he had seen the ropes used for tying down hay cocks and that they were stored in a water-hole when not in use.<sup>1</sup>

Traditions of the use of bog deal ropes for securing hay and corn stacks are also current among the older people of the Bangor-Erris district of Co. Mayo.<sup>2</sup>

### Burden Ropes

Burden ropes were formerly a very important item of domestic equipment. It is, apparently, these which are specified in the Brehon Laws as being among those things in cases of distress for which a stay of one day was allowed: "*im lomain tige gniad* (for the rope of the house of the farmer),"<sup>3</sup> which is amplified by the gloss which states: "*i. lomain carr ocus beart sin* (i.e., the rope for tying carts and loads)."<sup>4</sup>

In early times they were in universal use for carrying small loads of such things as firewood, osiers, hay, straw, rushes, reeds, wool, etc., either on the human back or slung across the back of a horse, and they remained so until recent times in those parts of the country where hilly or mountainous terrain, lack of roads and small scale subsistence farming were factors contributing to their survival. Since every possible material was used for making them, it is not surprising that bog deal, on account of its strength and durability, was exploited to provide them. Instances or traditions of the use of bog deal burden ropes have been collected from Rinnafarset<sup>5</sup> and Rosguill,<sup>6</sup> Co. Donegal; Ballycroy, Co. Mayo,<sup>7</sup> and Ballynakill parish, Co. Galway.<sup>8</sup>

### Halters and Tethers

It is probably merely accidental that all the references to the use of bog deal ropes for halters and tethers for domestic animals come from Co. Donegal, where they have been recorded from Rosguill,<sup>9</sup> Rinnafarset<sup>10</sup> and Gortahork.<sup>11</sup> Near the last place booleying was practised in the mountains, and the account relates that at night the cows were tethered by these ropes to a row of bogwood stakes driven into the ground around the booley huts.

<sup>1</sup> I.F.C., Ms. 768, pp. 80-81.

<sup>2</sup> Information from Micheál Mac Énrí, Bangor Erris, Co. Mayo, 1955.

<sup>3</sup> *Laws* I, p. 125.

<sup>4</sup> *ibid.*, p. 141.

<sup>5</sup> I.F.C., Ms. 458, pp. 503-509.

<sup>6</sup> I.F.C., Ms. 1143, pp. 71-72, 74-75.

<sup>7</sup> I.F.C., Ms. 805, p. 283.

<sup>8</sup> I.F.C., Ms. 707, pp. 455-456.

<sup>9</sup> I.F.C., Ms. 1143, pp. 74-75.

<sup>10</sup> I.F.C., Ms. 458, pp. 503-509.

<sup>11</sup> *Béaloides* XIII, pp. 145-146.

## Chair Seats

Although straw rope (*súgán*) was normally used for roping chair seats, there is on record a number of instances where bog deal rope was used instead. The practice was known in the parish of Ballynakill, Co. Galway,<sup>1</sup> and in 1938, an informant aged 83 in Castlegregory, Co. Kerry, stated that this was the only use he actually saw the rope being put to, although he had heard of its use for cording beds.<sup>2</sup> In the same year another informant aged 82 in Dunquin, in the same county, in recording the only two uses which she had seen the ropes put to, mentioned this as one of them.<sup>3</sup>

## Miscellaneous Uses

Among the miscellaneous purposes for which the rope was used and of which only isolated instances are on record may be mentioned the following :

In many of the older houses in Teelin, Co. Donegal, the loft over the end of the kitchen was supported on two large bog wood beams about seven feet apart running from wall to wall. In some cases the platform between the beams was formed by a network of bog deal ropes stiffened here and there by the insertion of short lengths of stick. These lofts were used chiefly for storing wool, baskets, fishing lines and nets.<sup>4</sup>

About the Kilrush area of Co. Clare it is stated in 1835 that these ropes "answer particularly well for drying clothes on, as they do not cause any stain from the application of wet."<sup>5</sup> Aquilla Smith, writing in 1846, also records the use of bog deal ropes "for drying linen."<sup>6</sup>

An equally obvious application of the rope in everyday use is as shoulder ropes for back baskets (*cliabh*) which is recorded from Rinnafarset, Co. Donegal,<sup>7</sup> and Dunquin, Co. Kerry.<sup>8</sup>

In 1812, at Castlelough, Co. Tipperary, an observer noted "some sheep folds, inclosed with fences made of roots of bog-deal, split and twisted into cords, which are then worked through each other so as to form a kind of net-work."<sup>9</sup>

<sup>1</sup> I.F.C., Ms. 707, p. 456.

<sup>2</sup> I.F.C., Ms. 513, p. 278.

<sup>3</sup> I.F.C., Ms. 469, p. 248.

<sup>4</sup> I.F.C.; Ms. 539, pp. 465-466.

<sup>5</sup> Knott, Mary John. *Two Months at Kilkee*. Dublin, 1835, p. 33.

<sup>6</sup> *Irish Arch. Soc. Miscellany*. Vol. I. Dublin, 1846, p. 165, footnote.

<sup>7</sup> I.F.C., Ms. 458, pp. 503-509.

<sup>8</sup> I.F.C., Ms. 469, p. 248.

<sup>9</sup> Wakefield, Edward. *An Account of Ireland Statistical and Political*. London, 1812, vol. I, p. 399.

In Kilballyowen, Co. Clare, a stout rope of bog deal passing over a pulley fixed at the top of a cliff was used with two horses to raise loads of seaweed from the strand below.<sup>1</sup>

Finally, an unusual use is recorded from Carrownagloh, Erris, Co. Mayo, where, it is said, hens' nests, of the type which were hung up in the kitchen in many parts of the country, were made of this material instead of the more usual straw.<sup>2</sup>

### BOG DEAL FOR DOMESTIC LIGHT

Although the use of splinters of resinous wood for domestic lighting is widespread in central and northern Europe, the writer knows no early reference to it in Ireland. On the contrary, the rush candle or rush torch, which survived until the last century, was in use from early times, being mentioned in the Brehon Laws :

“ . . . eight fists in the length of each rush-light, and the root of each rush after being cut equal to the grain by which an inch is measured ; the candle to be dipped in tallow and the grease of the flesh meat.”<sup>3</sup>

In later times the rushlight is mentioned by Moryson, writing in 1605-17 :

“ These wild Irish never set any candles upon tables ; What do I speak of Tables ? since indeede they have no tables, but set their meate upon a bundle of grasse, and use the same Grasse for napkins to wipe their hands. But I meane that they doe not set candles upon any high place to give light to the house, but place a great candle made of reedes and butter upon the floure in the midst of a great roome.”<sup>4</sup>

William Moffet, in 1728, in his burlesque description of Gillo's feast in the *Irish Hudibras*, refers to candles of plaited rushes dipped in grease, known in recent times as *trillseáin* :

“ The sable night came on apace,  
And spread with darkness every place ;  
Therefore long plaited candles came,  
Which lighted made a mighty flame :  
On stately poles of cloven wood  
Dispers'd about, each candle stood,  
That chas'd the darkness clean away,  
And made the night as clear as day.”<sup>5</sup>

While these quotations show the importance of the rushlight, it is unlikely, in view of its importance elsewhere in Europe, that the use of wood for illumination was unknown. As long as living coniferous timber was available in the country it is probable that

<sup>1</sup> I.F.C., Ms. 861, pp. 950-952.

<sup>2</sup> I.F.C., Ms. 706, p. 79.

<sup>3</sup> *Laws* II, pp. 251, 253.

<sup>4</sup> Moryson, Fynes. *An Itinerary*, vol. IV. Glasgow, 1908, pp. 201-202.

<sup>5</sup> Moffet, William. *The Irish Hudibras*. London, 1755, p. 31.

it was used for that purpose. The Papal Nuncio, Chiericati, describing his pilgrimage to Lough Derg in 1517, mentions torches which may have been made of such or of bog deal :

“ Behind, towards the East is the Well of St. Patrick, a cave in which the Saint is said to have slept. It holds twelve people and has an iron door ; but I did not go inside fearing to see terrible things. So I remained outside standing three steps from the door and the Canons went in with two pine torches.”<sup>1</sup>

Indeed it must be presumed that the use of bog fir for light goes back to the as yet undated period when the use of that timber began. A comparatively early, but not conclusive, reference to it comes in 1760 from Co. Cork where “ the vast quantities of wood daily dug out of the bogs and glens ” is mentioned and it is added that : “ This wood burns like a torch,”<sup>2</sup> which seems to imply that it was used for light. To judge by the number of later references to the practice, it must be supposed that their absence in the latter half of the 18th century is accidental to our sources, for about the beginning of the 19th century we find it established in many parts of the country.

In the anonymous folk song *Seachrán Chairn tSiadhail* the following verses occur :

“ *Thógfainn giumhas i dtús an Mhárta,  
Is bhéinn d’a stalughadh ‘sa tsamhradh aríst ;  
Dhéanfainn coinnle ins an lá de,  
Is bhéinn ag báirseóireach ins an oidh’e.*”<sup>3</sup>

“ I would raise fir in the beginning of March,  
And I would season it during the summer ;  
I would make candles from it in the daytime,  
And I would scold during the night.”

The following printed references to the custom are arranged chronologically :

Co. Kilkenny, 1800.

“ Candles and soap are articles little used : a bit of stick often serves for the former and wood ashes for the latter.”<sup>4</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Quoted by Leslie, Shane. *St. Patrick's Purgatory*. London, 1932, p. 64.

<sup>2</sup> Derrick, Samuel. *Letters Written from Liverpoole, Chester, Corke, etc.* London, 1767, vol. I, pp. 79-80.

<sup>3</sup> *Seachrán Chairn tSiadhail*. Scósamh Laoide do chuir i n-eagar. Baile Átha Cliath, 1904, p. 70.

<sup>4</sup> Tighe, William. *Statistical Observations relative to the County of Kilkenny*. Dublin, 1802, p. 491.

## Co. Derry, 1802.

"In the winter time, they sit up proportionally late. A great deal of domestic economy, particularly spinning, goes on till past midnight, at the light of a small piece of bog-fir, called a split. This is managed with great care, and very often brought from ten miles distance for the purpose."<sup>1</sup>

## Ireland, c. 1809.

"The splinters of this timber make a crackling and agreeable fire; and they are often used by the poor people instead of candles, as kennel coal is in some parts of England."<sup>2</sup>

## Co. Kerry, 1812.

"The pine and fir woods [found in bogs], though inapplicable to such valuable purposes, are not devoid of use; amongst others, being highly inflammable, splinters of them are substituted for candles among the poor."<sup>3</sup>

## Co. Derry, 1814.

"Oak and fir trees are found every where under our bogs; . . . . They also afford to the poor an excellent substitute for candles."<sup>4</sup>

## Co. Tipperary, 1814.

"The peasantry know the value of the fir roots so well that they dry them, and separate the fibres longitudinally, which serve all the purposes of candles, burning freely with a strong flame, and continuing until the wood is consumed."<sup>5</sup>

## Co. Clare, 1816.

"The fuel here is excellent turf, with bog-fir, which latter serves for light as well as heat."<sup>6</sup>

"The roots of the fir trees afford a convenience to the inhabitants of this district (as in many other parts of the coast) . . . . by giving them light and heat in the long winter nights."<sup>7</sup>

## Co. Cork, 1819.

"In the union of Middleton are the bogs of Churchtown and Ballybutler, which supply a part of the neighbourhood with turf. Ballybutler, about a mile south-east of the town of Middleton, affords a good deal of fir, being near the surface, in a horizontal position. It is used instead of candles by the poor."<sup>8</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Sampson, Rev. G. Vaughan. *Statistical Survey of the County of Londonderry*. Dublin, 1802, p. 453.

<sup>2</sup> Wakefield, Edward. *An Account of Ireland Statistical and Political*. London, 1812, vol. I, p. 527.

<sup>3</sup> Weld, Isaac. *Illustrations of the Scenery of Killarney and the Surrounding Country*. London, 1812, p. 46.

<sup>4</sup> Ross, Rev. Alexander. In William Shaw Mason's *Parochial Survey of Ireland*. Dublin, 1814, vol. I, p. 289.

<sup>5</sup> Aher, David. *Third Report of the Commissioners on Bogs in Ireland*. 1814. Appendix No. 2, p. 63.

<sup>6</sup> Grahame, Rev. John. In William Shaw Mason's *Parochial Survey of Ireland*. Dublin, 1816, vol. II, p. 452.

<sup>7</sup> *ibid.*, pp. 419-420.

<sup>8</sup> Austen, Rev. Robert. In William Shaw Mason's *Parochial Survey of Ireland*. Dublin, 1819, vol. III, p. 263.

Co. Kerry, 1829.

In a description of a dance in a cabin in Glenflesk :

“ The assemblage did their part, and gave loud vent to their admiration at every new fling from Paddy Haly : indeed to render such movements the more conspicuous and that not a single step might be lost, three or four tall fellows volunteered to act as candle-sticks, with large pieces of blazing bog-dale in their hands, they stood directing the light upon the steps of the dancers.”<sup>1</sup>

Co. Mayo, 1832.

Description of a shooting cabin :

“ Lighted by a peasant with a bog-deal torch, that emitted more light than forty candles together, the old man approached us with his tray.”<sup>2</sup>

Co. Cork, 1835.

In an article entitled “ Rides through the County of Cork ” is a footnote to explain the word “ gewsh ” :

“ Bogwood. The splinters are substitutes for candles with the poor.”<sup>3</sup>

Co. Galway, 1835.

“ In lieu of candles, which are very rarely seen, rushes, dipped in butter melted, are used. Others make use of splinters of bog fir, which contains a large portion of turpentine, and blazes very freely.”<sup>4</sup>

Co. Clare, 1835.

Speaking of tree-stumps in bogs on road to Kilkee :

“ They nearly all belong to the pine species, and the wood is so thoroughly impregnated with turpentine, that the shreds burn most brilliantly and are substituted for candles.”<sup>5</sup>

Co. Kerry, 1845.

Describing a night passed in a house on the Killarney-Cahir-cirveen road :

“ My senior comrade now ordered a pot of potatoes, which were soon in preparation, carried to an adjoining room, and a splinter of dry bog-wood put into a crack over the table as a torch to guide the way to the mouth.” And a little farther on : “ While this was in progress, the father whispered a second daughter to ‘ put on the feather bed for the lady,’ and in a half-hour my bedroom was in readiness, with another splinter of bog-wood to put into a crack to light me on the way thither.”<sup>6</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Croker, T. Crofton. *Legends of the Lakes*. London, 1829, vol. 2, p. 184.

<sup>2</sup> Maxwell, W. H. *Wild Sports of the West*. London, 1832, vol. 2, p. 91.

<sup>3</sup> *Dublin Penny Journal*, vol. III, No. 138, Feb. 21, 1835, p. 266.

<sup>4</sup> Binns, Jonathan. *The Miseries and Beauties of Ireland*. London, 1837, vol. 2, p. 8.

<sup>5</sup> *ibid.* vol. 2, p. 382.

<sup>6</sup> Nicholson, Asenath. *Ireland's Welcome to the Stranger*. London, 1847, pp. 307, 308.

Co. Kerry, 1846.

"The largest tenant on this farm was Pat Brennan, who held the grass of three cows, for which he paid 7*l.* a year. His cabin was filled with smoke, and, as it was too dark to see, a splinter of bog-fir, which is used here for candles, was lighted, and enabled us to discern that it was miserable to a degree, . . ."<sup>1</sup>

Co. Galway, *c.* 1860.

In the course of a description of a dance at a wedding :

"After the dance was over, the pine-wood splits—and these are the holiday candles in the Irish highlands!—were lighted."<sup>2</sup>

Co. Galway, 1862.

"Formerly bogdeal was used for lighting fires, assisting wet turf to burn, or giving light ; and in many parts of Ireland the small farmers and poorer classes depend altogether on bogwood for giving light to the household during the long winter evenings, . . ."<sup>3</sup>

Co. Galway.

In a footnote referring to the islands of Inishbofin and Inishark it is stated :

"*Fassogue, Lassogue, or sup.* . . . a piece of bogdeal used as a torch."<sup>4</sup>

There is no doubt that the use of bog fir for domestic lighting remained in use in many places to a much later date than that of the last extract given above, for there are numerous records of it from living memory in the Irish Folklore Commission manuscripts. Utilising these and the printed sources above, we obtain the following distribution of the practice.

#### ULSTER

*Antrim* . . . Parish of Carnlough.<sup>5</sup>

*Derry* . . . Parish of Dungiven.<sup>6</sup>

*Donegal* . . . Parish of Templecrone.<sup>7</sup>  
 . . . Parish of Glencolmcille.<sup>8</sup>  
 . . . Parish of Inishkeel.<sup>9</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Foster, Thomas Campbell. *Letters on the Condition of the People of Ireland.* London, 1846, p. 544.

<sup>2</sup> Rodenberg, Julius. *A Pilgrimage through Ireland.* Translated from the German by Sir Lascelles Wraxall. London, n.d., p. 291.

<sup>3</sup> Coulter, Henry. *The West of Ireland: Its Existing Condition and Prospects.* Dublin, 1862, p. 118.

<sup>4</sup> Wilde, William R. *Irish Popular Superstitions.* Dublin, n.d., p. 28.

<sup>5</sup> I.F.C., Ms. 1019, p. 93.

<sup>6</sup> Ross, Rev. Alexander. In William Shaw Mason's *Parochial Survey of Ireland.* Dublin, 1814, vol. I, p. 289.

<sup>7</sup> I.F.C., Mss. 741, pp. 172-173 ; 478, pp. 352-353 ; 458, pp. 577-578.

<sup>8</sup> I.F.C., Ms. 143, p. 2013.

<sup>9</sup> I.F.C., Ms. 348, p. 109.

MUNSTER—*continued*

*Cavan* Virginia and Mullagh Districts.<sup>1</sup>  
Parishes of Shercock and Bailieborough.<sup>2</sup>

*Tyrone* Parish of Bodoney Lower.<sup>3</sup>

## MUNSTER

*Tipperary* Not localised.<sup>4</sup>

*Clare* Parish of Feakle.<sup>5</sup>  
Kilkee District.<sup>6</sup>  
Kilrush District.<sup>7</sup>

*Cork* Parish of Ballyvourney.<sup>8</sup>  
Parish of Kilmacabea.<sup>9</sup>  
Parish of Kilmocomoge.<sup>10</sup>  
Middleton District.<sup>11</sup>  
Parish of Kilcaskan.<sup>12</sup>  
Newmarket District.<sup>13</sup>  
Not localised.<sup>14</sup>

*Kerry* Parish of Ballymacelligott.<sup>15</sup>  
Parish of Tuosist.<sup>16</sup>  
Parish of Kilquane.<sup>17</sup>  
Parish of Killiney.<sup>18</sup>  
Parish of Kinnard.<sup>19</sup>

<sup>1</sup> I.F.C., Ms. 1037, pp. 135, 148-150.

<sup>2</sup> I.F.C., Ms. 831, pp. 348, 352, 485-487.

<sup>3</sup> I.F.C., Mss. 1215, p. 172; 1216, p. 31; 1218, p. 97.

<sup>4</sup> Aher, David. *Third Report of the Commissioners on Bogs in Ireland*. 1814. Appendix No. 2, p. 63.

<sup>5</sup> I.F.C., Ms. 642, pp. 314-315.

<sup>6</sup> Binns, Jonathan. *The Miseries and Beauties of Ireland*. London, 1837, vol. 2, p. 382.

<sup>7</sup> Grahame, Rev. John. In William Shaw Mason's *Parochial Survey of Ireland*. Dublin, 1816, vol. II, pp. 419-420, 452.

<sup>8</sup> I.F.C., Mss. 282, pp. 324-326; 476, pp. 201-202, 304-305; 536, pp. 27-28.

<sup>9</sup> I.F.C., Ms. 408, p. 211.

<sup>10</sup> I.F.C., Ms. 393, p. 9.

<sup>11</sup> Austen, Rev. Robert. In William Shaw Mason's *Parochial Survey of Ireland*. Dublin, 1819, vol. III, p. 263.

<sup>12</sup> I.F.C., Ms. 334, pp. 87-88.

<sup>13</sup> Derrick, Samuel. *Letters from Liverpoole, Chester, Corke, etc.* London, 1767, vol. I, pp. 79-80.

<sup>14</sup> *Dublin Penny Journal*, vol. III, No. 138, Feb. 21, 1835, p. 266.

<sup>15</sup> I.F.C., Ms. 483, pp. 500-501, 544.

<sup>16</sup> I.F.C., Ms. 252, p. 373.

<sup>17</sup> I.F.C., Ms. 778, pp. 129-130, 179-180.

<sup>18</sup> I.F.C., Ms. 483, pp. 380-381.

<sup>19</sup> I.F.C., Ms. 217, p. 191.

MUNSTER—*continued*

- Kerry* Parish of Kilfeighny.<sup>1</sup>  
 Parish of Dromod.<sup>2</sup>  
 Parish of Prior.<sup>3</sup>  
 Parish of Kilcrohane.<sup>4</sup>  
 Parish of Kilmalkedar.<sup>5</sup>  
 Derrynane District.<sup>6</sup>  
 Killarney-Cahirciveen.<sup>7</sup>  
 Glenflesk.<sup>8</sup>  
 Killarney District.<sup>9</sup>
- Limerick* Parish of Nantinan.<sup>10</sup>  
 Parish of Kilfergus.<sup>11</sup>  
 Athea District.<sup>12</sup>

## CONNACHT

- Galway* Parish of Ballindoon.<sup>13</sup>  
 Ballymoe District.<sup>14</sup>  
 Parish of Ballynakill.<sup>15</sup>  
 Parish of Beagh.<sup>16</sup>  
 Parish of Cong.<sup>17</sup>  
 Parish of Kilcummin.<sup>18</sup>  
 Parish of Killannin.<sup>19</sup>  
 Parish of Moycullen.<sup>20</sup>  
 Parish of Moyrus.<sup>21</sup>

<sup>1</sup> I.F.C., Ms. 1169, p. 306.

<sup>2</sup> I.F.C., Mss. 147, pp. 459, 465; 175, pp. 141-143; 930, p. 31.

<sup>3</sup> *Béaloideas* I (1928), p. 78; I.F.C., Ms. 1003, pp. 118-119.

<sup>4</sup> I.F.C., Mss. 462, p. 11; 777, p. 535; *Béaloideas* XV, pp. 47-49.

<sup>5</sup> I.F.C., Ms. 911, p. 499.

<sup>6</sup> Foster, Thomas Campbell. *Letters on the Condition of the People of Ireland*. London, 1846, p. 544.

<sup>7</sup> Nicholson, Asenath. *Ireland's Welcome to the Stranger*. London, 1847, pp. 307-308.

<sup>8</sup> Croker, Thomas Crofton. *Legends of the Lakes*. London, 1829, vol. 2, p. 184.

<sup>9</sup> Weld, Isaac. *Illustrations of the Scenery of Killarney and the Surrounding Country*. London, 1812, p. 46.

<sup>10</sup> I.F.C., Ms. 592, p. 235.

<sup>11</sup> I.F.C., Ms. 591, p. 476.

<sup>12</sup> Information from Colm Danaher, Athea, Co. Limerick, 1953.

<sup>13</sup> I.F.C., Ms. 314, pp. 400, 407-408.

<sup>14</sup> I.F.C., Mss. 485, pp. 219-220; 563, p. 14.

<sup>15</sup> I.F.C., Mss. 707, p. 455; 867, p. 451.

<sup>16</sup> I.F.C., Ms. 278, pp. 6-7.

<sup>17</sup> I.F.C., Ms. 1016, p. 255.

<sup>18</sup> I.F.C., Ms. 824, p. 204.

<sup>19</sup> I.F.C., Mss. 461, pp. 302-303; 564, pp. 434-435; 829, p. 58.

<sup>20</sup> I.F.C., Mss. 177, p. 208; 1025, p. 134.

<sup>21</sup> Mac Giollarnáth, Seán. *Annála Beaga ó Iorrus Aithneach*. Dublin, 1941, pp. 265-266.

CONNACHT—*continued*

- Galway* Parish of Ross.<sup>1</sup>  
 Spiddle District.<sup>2</sup>  
 Maam District.<sup>3</sup>  
 Conamara.<sup>4</sup>  
 Barony of Kilconnell.<sup>5</sup>  
 Clifden District.<sup>6</sup>  
 Islands of Inishbofin and Inishark.<sup>7</sup>
- Leitrim* Parish of Mohill.<sup>8</sup>
- Mayo* Achill Island.<sup>9</sup>  
 The Corraun.<sup>10</sup>  
 Parish of Kilcommon.<sup>11</sup>  
 Parish of Kilmore.<sup>12</sup>  
 Not localised.<sup>13</sup>

## Preparation of the Splints.

To prepare the splints a straight-grained log was selected and cloven into suitable pieces. The splints were then cut from these pieces with a knife or even pulled off. The usual length was from a foot to a foot-and-a-half although ones up to three feet are mentioned from Kerry.<sup>14</sup> The same description states that they were from one to one-and-a-half inches wide and about one-eighth inch thick. It is also recorded from Ballyvourney, Co. Cork, that they had to be thin or they would not light well.<sup>15</sup>

When a sufficient quantity has been cut they were tied in bundles and hung up near the fire to dry. In Cork and Kerry a method, evidently unknown elsewhere, was used. The splints were woven into a miniature hurdle, called a *cliath*, with wide

<sup>1</sup> I.F.C., Ms. 526, pp. 63-64.

<sup>2</sup> I.F.C., Ms. 487, p. 190.

<sup>3</sup> *Béaloides* XIII, p. 104.

<sup>4</sup> Coulter, Henry. *The West of Ireland: Its Existing Condition and Prospects*. Dublin, 1862, p. 118.

<sup>5</sup> Binns, Jonathan. *The Miseries and Beauties of Ireland*. London, 1837, vol. 2, p. 8.

<sup>6</sup> Rodenberg, Julius. *A Pilgrimage through Ireland*. Translated from the German by Sir Lascelles Wraxall, London, n.d., p. 291.

<sup>7</sup> Wilde, William R. *Irish Popular Superstitions*. Dublin, n.d., p. 28.

<sup>8</sup> I.F.C., Ms. 521, p. 228.

<sup>9</sup> I.F.C., Ms. 1104, pp. 434-435.

<sup>10</sup> I.F.C., Ms. 1012, p. 173.

<sup>11</sup> I.F.C., Mss. 528, p. 460; 706, pp. 64-66, 78; 735, pp. 197-199.

<sup>12</sup> I.F.C., Ms. 380, pp. 38-39.

<sup>13</sup> Maxwell, W. H. *Wild Sports of the West*. London, 1832, vol. 2, p. 91.

<sup>14</sup> *Béaloides* XV, p. 47.

<sup>15</sup> I.F.C., Ms. 476, pp. 304-305.

spaces left between the sticks. An account from Kilcaskan parish, Co. Cork, relates that three of the longest splints were laid parallel to each other and the shorter ones woven in and out at right angles between them.<sup>1</sup> There was, naturally, room for variation in this plan, but the general procedure remained the same. The *cliath* was propped up in a nearly vertical position in front of the fire to expose the splints to the heat to dry them thoroughly or it was hung on a nail in the chimney. The practice of making the *cliath* is reported from Kilcaskan<sup>2</sup> and Ballyvourney<sup>3</sup> parishes, Co. Cork, and Dromod,<sup>4</sup> Kilcrohane,<sup>5</sup> and Kilgarvan,<sup>6</sup> parishes, Co. Kerry. Domhnall Ó Súilleabháin, who records the last two instances, and whose account was published in 1945 when he was 86 years of age, states that the last *cliath* which he saw was in Kilgarvan parish about 25 years previously.

Although the light supplied by the splints was comparatively brilliant and clear it remained so only if the charred wood (*smól*) was constantly removed as the flame crept down the stick. If a good steady light was required for any particular purpose it was necessary for someone to hold the lighting splint in his hand while in the other he kept in readiness an unlit splint with which, from time to time, he rubbed the charred wood off the lighting one. This operation, known as "smaarling" in Co. Tyrone,<sup>7</sup> usually devolved upon the children of the household. An informant, aged 61, recorded in 1941 that his grandfather, who was a carpenter in Rinnafarset, Co. Donegal, used to do a good deal of work at night, and that his father, then a boy, had to stand nearby lighting splint after splint.<sup>8</sup> At Teebane East, Co. Tyrone, when their parents went to the byre to milk the cows on winter evenings, the youngsters had to accompany them for a similar purpose, and they were provided with a tin can in which to "smaarl" the splint "for fear you'd burn the byre."<sup>9</sup> In 1938 a tailor aged 85 related that in his journeyman days in the Ballycroy district of Co. Mayo he did his work in the houses of his customers at night by the light of bog deal splints held by a boy.<sup>10</sup> From Derreen, in the parish of Nantinan, Co. Limerick, comes an account which states that at mealtime on winter evenings one of the children held the splints to throw light on the table.<sup>11</sup> In 1946 an informant aged 85 in Muingydowda, parish of Prior, Co. Kerry, described how young

<sup>1</sup> I.F.C., Ms. 334, pp. 87-88.

<sup>2</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>3</sup> I.F.C., Ms. 282, pp. 324-325.

<sup>4</sup> Information from Tadhg Ó Murchadha, Waterville, Co. Kerry, 1953.

<sup>5</sup> *Béaltoideas*, XV, p. 47.

<sup>6</sup> *ibid.*, pp. 48-49.

<sup>7</sup> I.F.C., Ms. 1218, p. 97.

<sup>8</sup> I.F.C., Ms. 741, pp. 172-173.

<sup>9</sup> I.F.C., Ms. 1218, p. 97.

<sup>10</sup> I.F.C., Ms. 528, p. 460.

<sup>11</sup> I.F.C., Ms. 592, p. 235.

boys held "scolbs" of bog deal to give light to people milking cows indoors, and that houses were sometimes set on fire through careless handling of the "scolbs."<sup>1</sup> Women spinning and carding at night also required the services of someone to hold the light for them, as is recorded from Ballyvourney, Co. Cork,<sup>2</sup> where one informant, aged 71 in 1938, recalled having done so when a boy.<sup>3</sup> Other people whose evening activities also required the attendance of a boy to keep them well supplied with light, were card-players, and, in 1939, an informant then aged 89, in the parish of Feakle, Co. Clare, stated: "I remember when I was small that I held a chip of *dale* in my hand a whole night for a crowd that was card-playing"<sup>4</sup> and in Ballyvourney there was a current term to designate such a boy, who was called *buachaill an tsolais* or "the light boy."<sup>5</sup>

In fact, where these splints were used, any domestic activity which required a good light for its performance necessitated the presence of a second party to keep the charred wood rubbed off. As will be seen from the foregoing citations, many of the old people still or until recently living remembered this state of affairs quite well, most of them having performed the task as children as a matter of course. We may end our examples by quoting a man aged 90, from Ballymacelligott parish, Co. Kerry, who, in 1938, recorded that in his father's time, 120 years previously, bog fir splints were the only source of domestic light and that: "'Tis often I lighted a splinter when my mother was darning socks or sewing a patch in clothes. While we were eating our supper, also, some one of the family should hold a splinter until they had finished, and it was the same everywhere."<sup>5</sup>

Except on these special occasions, however, the splints were stuck in some convenient place to throw their light as might be most convenient. Asenath Nicholson, writing of her experiences in a house in Kerry in 1845, says that the splinters were stuck in a "crack," presumably in the wall<sup>7</sup> and there can be no doubt that in many houses it was the practice to utilise convenient chinks for the purpose. Another favourite place to set the splint was in a hole in the fire hob, as is recorded from Nantinan parish, Co. Limerick,<sup>6</sup> and Kilfeighny parish, Co. Kerry.<sup>9</sup> In the parish of Inishkeel, Co. Donegal, the splints were stuck in a basket to

<sup>1</sup> I.F.C., Ms. 1003, pp. 118-119.

<sup>2</sup> I.F.C., Ms. 536, pp. 27-28.

<sup>3</sup> I.F.C., Ms. 476, pp. 201-202.

<sup>4</sup> I.F.C., Ms. 642, pp. 314-315.

<sup>5</sup> I.F.C., Ms. 282, pp. 325-326.

<sup>6</sup> I.F.C., Ms. 483, pp. 500-501, 544.

<sup>7</sup> Nicholson, Asenath. *op. cit.*, pp. 307-308.

<sup>8</sup> I.F.C., Ms. 592, p. 235.

<sup>9</sup> I.F.C., Ms. 1169, p. 306.

hold them in position,<sup>1</sup> while in Kilcaskan parish, Co. Cork, it is stated that they were fixed in the cleft end of a willow rod, the other end of which was stuck in the wall.<sup>2</sup> At mealtimes in Kilquane parish, Co. Kerry, a splint was laid across the bottom of a piggin or wooden mug which was inverted on the table.<sup>3</sup> An alternative method used in the same place was to stick the splint in a sod of turf.<sup>4</sup> In Kinnard parish, in the same county, it is said that at mealtimes the splint was put standing in a vessel which was placed on the table.<sup>5</sup>

In many cases the ordinary iron rushlight-holder made by the local smith, and which follows the general continental and British pattern of these objects, was used. One such was donated to the National Museum in 1949 by Daniel Sweeney, then aged about 70, of Derreenlunnig, Gougane Barra, Co. Cork,<sup>6</sup> who stated that in former years he had seen it used to hold bog fir splints for light. In 1936 an informant aged 60 in the parish of Dromod, Co. Kerry, also recalled a special candlestick (*coinnleóir*) with tongs, made in a forge, to hold splints,<sup>7</sup> while Seán Ó Conaill of Cill Rialaig, Co. Kerry, then aged 74, is recorded in 1926 as also testifying to the use of an iron candlestick (*coinnleóir iarainn*) for the purpose.<sup>8</sup> In Kilcrohane parish, also in Kerry, it is stated that the iron holder held "three splinters together at a time"<sup>9</sup> and in Nantinan parish, Co. Limerick, the holder was driven into the hob.<sup>10</sup> The stem of many of the surviving rushlight-holders ends in a point which could be driven into a portable wooden base-block, or into a wall or beam if it were to be a fixture, and the informant had, doubtless, one of the latter type in mind.

Besides their use for purely indoor illumination, whether in house or outhouse, the splints were used for lighting one's way from one to the other and even for more extended periods in the open air as will be evident from the following passage from Otway which, if somewhat idealised, clearly reflects a reality with which he was well acquainted. Writing of Co. Cork in 1827, he relates how Protestant clergymen, owing to the enormous extent of their

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<sup>1</sup> I.F.C., Ms. 348, p. 109.

<sup>2</sup> I.F.C., Ms. 334, pp. 87-88.

<sup>3</sup> I.F.C., Ms. 778, pp. 129-130.

<sup>4</sup> I.F.C., Ms. 778, pp. 179-180.

<sup>5</sup> I.F.C., Ms. 217, p. 191.

<sup>6</sup> Nat. Mus. Ireland, Reg. No. F 1949 : 144.

<sup>7</sup> I.F.C., Ms. 175, p. 141.

<sup>8</sup> *Béalóideas* I, p. 78.

<sup>9</sup> I.F.C., Ms. 462, p. 11.

<sup>10</sup> I.F.C., Ms. 592, p. 235.

parishes, were obliged to travel round to hold services in isolated houses :

“ . . . and if the cottage cannot be brought to the church, the church is brought to the cottage. And lo ! it is a beautiful thing, when, on the mountain-side, of a fine still winter's night, men are seen walking along in light, each individual carrying in hand a blazing rod of bog fir, as a lamp to their feet, to guide them to some central house, where social worship is begun, and the book of life is opened.”<sup>1</sup>

Otway's account seems to imply the use of single splints of wood carried taperwise but for lengthy periods outdoors a torch made of a bundle of the splints tied together seems to have been more usual and was, naturally, more effective. The use of such torches in fishing will be dealt with presently but, apart from this specialised practice, there are records of the use of torches for more general purposes. From Ballindoon parish, Co. Galway, it is recorded that a bog fir candle (*coinneall ghiúsaighe*) was made by binding together a bundle of splints with a straw rope, lighting it and leaving it in an inclined position on the hearth.<sup>2</sup> While this is mentioned as providing indoor illumination only it could, obviously, have been used in the open equally well. An informant, aged 82, in the parish of Kilcommon, Co. Mayo, stated in 1940 that he saw five or six splints similarly tied together to make a candle (*coinneall*).<sup>3</sup> In Moycullen parish, Co. Galway, an informant, aged 76, related that in the old days it would have been impossible to walk on the rough roads of the district by night without the help of a *coinneall ghiúsaighe* or a *mítheán ghiúsaighe*.<sup>4</sup>

An account from Kilcaskan parish, Co. Cork, describes the torches for outdoor use as being made of five or six splints tied together with an ember placed in the centre. If the flame was quenched by the wind, it was relit again by the ember.<sup>5</sup> This detail is verified by an anecdote called *The Ghost and the two Blacksmiths*, having its setting in Co. Antrim in 1835, in which it is said :

“ Getting, therefore, a white sheet, a keenoge, and a bunch of splinters of bog-fir, such as is used by fishers at night, he proceeded before the two smiths to Drumarory.”

A footnote explains :

“ Keenoge or Cunea, is a turf-coal, rolled tightly in tow or flax, so that you may carry it a long way in your pocket without its kindling ; but when opened out to the air, it instantly becomes, as it were, alive again, and will kindle any combustible.”<sup>6</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Otway, Rev. Caesar. *Sketches in Ireland*. Dublin, 1827, p. 272.

<sup>2</sup> I.F.C., Ms. 314, pp. 407-408.

<sup>3</sup> I.F.C., Ms. 706, pp. 65-66.

<sup>4</sup> I.F.C., Ms. 1025, p. 134.

<sup>5</sup> I.F.C., Ms. 334, p. 88.

<sup>6</sup> *Dublin Penny Journal*. Vol. III, No. 113, Jan. 17, 1835, p. 231.

A description from 1834 of a visit to the Pigeon Hole cave, Cong, Co. Galway, recounts that the woman who acted as guide was accompanied by a little boy who carried "some faggots of bogwood, a wisp of straw, and a lighted sod of turf."<sup>1</sup>

This concludes the account of normal practice in the use of these bog fir splints, but there remain a few records which present some exceptional features. From Tonranny, Beagh parish, Co. Galway, comes an account, recorded in 1936 from a man aged 82, which describes how splints of bog deal, 1 to 1½ feet long, were dipped in melted tallow and allowed to cool on a board, being subsequently used for light. They were called *caisníní*.<sup>2</sup> Although it might, at first sight, be thought that there was some confusion here with the method of making rushlights, this does not appear to be the case since the informant then goes on to describe the latter operation, leaving no doubt that he was well acquainted with it. Moreover, there appears to be no doubt that he saw the *caisníní* actually in use for he states that: "We did more work by the light of these than by candles." We must, therefore, accept it as a fact that the splints were dipped in tallow in this particular place. This does not, however, stand as an isolated instance for there is at least one other record of the same custom—from Kilcaskan parish, Co. Cork, where, in a very circumstantial account of the use of bog fir splints, it is said that they were dipped in tallow before use. These were then called *sciotacháin*.<sup>3</sup>

#### Terminology

The strips of bog fir used for light were known by various names in different parts of the country. In Ulster the general English name seems to have been "splints." This is vouched for in Co. Derry in 1802<sup>4</sup> and in Co. Tyrone in more recent times.<sup>5</sup> For the rest of the country general descriptive terms like "splinter" and "chip" appear to be the only ones used in English. In Irish, however, the terminology is subject to much greater local variation. In Donegal the universal name used by Irish speakers is *spliota*, which is merely a version of the English "split." The only exceptions seem to be the plural form *spileannaí*, which is, presumably, the English word "spills," and which is recorded from Glencolmcille<sup>6</sup> and *coitheán*, which is the name used in the Cruacha district.<sup>7</sup> In Mayo, the name *cipín* seems to have had some

<sup>1</sup> Lover, Samuel. *Legends and Stories of Ireland*. Dublin, 1834, p. 36.

<sup>2</sup> I.F.C., Ms. 278, pp. 6-7.

<sup>3</sup> I.F.C., Ms. 334, pp. 87-88.

<sup>4</sup> Sampson, Rev. G. Vaughan. *Statistical Survey of the County of Londonderry*. Dublin, 1802, p. 453.

<sup>5</sup> I.F.C., Mss. 1215, p. 172; 1216, p. 31; 1218, p. 97.

<sup>6</sup> I.F.C., Ms. 143, p. 2013.

<sup>7</sup> Information from Seán Ó h-Eochaidh, Gortahork, Co. Donegal, 1953.

currency, for it is recorded from Achill<sup>1</sup> and in three separate accounts from Kilcommon parish.<sup>2</sup> The unusual word *caisnín* applied to a splint dipped in tallow, has already been mentioned from Beagh parish, Co. Galway,<sup>3</sup> and in Moycullen parish in the same county the word *mítheán* is applied to the bog fir light used when walking abroad at night.<sup>4</sup> The records from the parish of Ballynakill, also in Galway, give the plural form *gibidí* for the splints,<sup>5</sup> and Wilde's note on *lasóg* in the islands of Inishbofin and Inishark has already been mentioned.<sup>6</sup>

In Cork the standard term seems to have been *geataire giúm-haise*: it is recorded several times from Ballyvourney parish,<sup>7</sup> and the same name is reported from Kilfergus parish, Co. Limerick.<sup>8</sup> The name *sciotachán* is recorded from Kilcaskan parish, Co. Cork,<sup>9</sup> and *siotachán*, which would seem a variant of it, comes from the parish of Kilmocomoge in the same county.<sup>10</sup> Kilmacabea parish, also in Cork, furnishes the term *splanncán*<sup>11</sup> but this, like *sliseóg* which appears in accounts from various counties, is probably a general and not a specific word. In Kerry, the name used is *scólb*, and there appear to be no exceptions to the rule for the county.

It is clear that in the districts where it was available bog fir almost completely supplanted other means of illumination such as rushlights. This was natural since the raw material was plentiful and easy to prepare. The only operations involved were the making of the splints—which was relatively simple work—and drying them. Rushes, on the other hand, had to be cut at a certain season, peeled, dried, dipped, dried again and stored. Peeling and dipping were both tedious operations and storage was troublesome since cats, rats and mice all appreciated the tallow. When these considerations are taken into account and the large quantity needed for a year's supply for even a small household, the preference for the bog fir becomes very understandable. Moreover, among the poorer sections of the people, who in the latter half of the 18th and first half of the 19th centuries rarely ate meat, the procuring of a supply of tallow would have been difficult. In addition to these factors working in favour

<sup>1</sup> I.F.C., Ms. 1104, pp. 434-435.

<sup>2</sup> I.F.C., Mss. 528, p. 460; 706, pp. 64-66; 735, pp. 197-199.

<sup>3</sup> I.F.C., Ms. 278, pp. 6-7.

<sup>4</sup> I.F.C., Ms. 1025, p. 134.

<sup>5</sup> I.F.C., Ms. 707, p. 455.

<sup>6</sup> Wilde, William R. *Irish Popular Superstitions*. Dublin, n.d., p. 28.

<sup>7</sup> I.F.C., Mss. 282, pp. 324-325; 476, pp. 201-202, 304-305; 536, pp. 27-28.

<sup>8</sup> I.F.C., Ms. 591, p. 476.

<sup>9</sup> I.F.C., Ms. 334, pp. 87-88.

<sup>10</sup> I.F.C., Ms. 393, p. 9.

<sup>11</sup> I.F.C., Ms. 408, p. 211.

of the bog fir, there is also the fact that the light it gave was superior to that of the rushlight.

“It is called the ‘poor man’s candle’; and no palace could boast of a brighter illumination than it creates.”<sup>1</sup>

Its shorter life was compensated for by the ease with which it could be prepared in quantity and, if it required more attention when alight, large families were the rule, and there were always children who regarded it as small hardship to perform the task.

The simplicity of this mode of lighting must not be construed as an index of its inferiority. As we have seen, it afforded a better light than the rushlights in common use elsewhere at the period, and it must have been immeasurably superior both in illuminating power and cleanliness to the fish-oil lamps in contemporary use in coastal regions and to the first paraffin lamps used in rural districts. The former must have been much dimmer and infinitely more unpleasant in the smell and oily smoke which they emitted. The latter were small conical tin receptacles, having at the top a small tube enclosing a rag wick, and their small naked flame must have been only slightly less smoky and less noisome than that of the fish-oil lamps. Another early type of paraffin lamp, perhaps even less effective, consisted of a small, lidded, cylindrical tin can with a spout rising at an angle from near the base on one side, in the manner of a garden watering can. A twisted rag was introduced into the spout as a wick and lighted where it emerged from the orifice. These were reported as still in use in The Mullet, Inishkea Islands and the Ballycroy district of Co. Mayo as late as 1893–1898.<sup>2</sup> The writer saw one in use in a small corn mill in Glenhull, Co. Tyrone, in 1952, and one was procured for the National Museum which was made about the same date by a tinker in Omagh who had still an occasional customer for them.<sup>3</sup> The bog fir splints were also far superior to the spluttering and sooty resin candles or “sluts” which were used in many of the eastern and central counties.<sup>4</sup>

Neither was the bog fir light an index of the social inferiority of its users although, being the readiest and the cheapest it was, naturally, the kind used exclusively by the poor wherever it was available. Domhnall Ó Súilleabháin, writing his recollections of Co. Kerry, cites the case of a woman belonging to one of the most substantial farming families in the barony who told him that she had read a whole series of Dickens’s novels by the light of bog deal splints.<sup>5</sup>

<sup>1</sup> M.F.D. *Dublin University Magazine*, vol. 18 (1841), p. 679.

<sup>2</sup> *P.R.I.A.*, 19 (1893–1896) p. 628; 20 (1896–1898), p. 102.

<sup>3</sup> *Nat. Mus. Ireland. Reg. No. F. 1951* : 129.

<sup>4</sup> Murphy, Michael J. *At Slieve Gullion's Foot*. Dundalk, 1945, p. 38.

<sup>5</sup> *Béaloides* XV, p. 47.

While it may be taken for granted that every household in the rural communities of the bog fir districts supplied itself with a store of splints for winter use, there is some evidence for the purveying of the commodity as a minor means of livelihood by certain persons, probably for sale to the poorer people in country towns and villages who had no opportunity for providing their own needs in the matter. It is said that the splints, made up in small bundles priced 2*d.* each, were sold by the load in Cahirciveen in former days<sup>1</sup> and they were marketed in the same fashion in Williamstown, Co. Galway.<sup>2</sup>

### Bog Wood Fire for Light

In place of the splints the firelight from bog fir blazing on the hearth provided on occasion sufficient illumination for the needs of the household. A Co. Cavan account from the townland of Killann states :

“ If the old people wanted to spare the rush or resin candles, or if they ran short of either, they did with the light of the fire. Turf and bog deal gave the best light.”<sup>3</sup>

Similar statements are recorded from the Virginia-Mullagh district in that county<sup>4</sup> and from Teevurcher on the border of Meath.<sup>5</sup> In Connacht similar evidence is forthcoming from the parishes of Ross,<sup>6</sup> Ballynakill,<sup>7</sup> Cong,<sup>8</sup> Killannin,<sup>9</sup> and Moyrus,<sup>10</sup> Co. Galway, and from Achill<sup>11</sup> and the parishes of Killasser<sup>12</sup> and Kilcommon<sup>13</sup> in Co. Mayo. In the last place an informant aged 94 stated in 1941 that up to the time she was 30 years of age the principal source of light was a bog fir block (*crompán*) in the fire and that every house had a chimney full of pieces of *crompán* drying for the purpose.<sup>14</sup> For Donegal there are references from the districts of Rinnafarset<sup>15</sup> and Gortahork<sup>16</sup> and from Kerry there is one from the parish of

<sup>1</sup> I.F.C., Ms. 930, p. 31.

<sup>2</sup> I.F.C., Ms. 485, pp. 219-220.

<sup>3</sup> I.F.C., Ms. 831, p. 348.

<sup>4</sup> I.F.C., Ms. 1037, pp. 129, 149.

<sup>5</sup> I.F.C., Ms. 831, pp. 308-309.

<sup>6</sup> I.F.C., Ms. 784, p. 29.

<sup>7</sup> I.F.C., Ms. 867, p. 451.

<sup>8</sup> I.F.C., Ms. 1016, p. 255.

<sup>9</sup> I.F.C., Mss. 461, pp. 302-303; 487, p. 190.

<sup>10</sup> Mac Giollarnáth, Seán. *Annála Beaga ó Iorrus Aithneach*. Dublin, 1941, pp. 265-266.

<sup>11</sup> I.F.C., Ms. 1104, pp. 434-435.

<sup>12</sup> I.F.C., Ms. 117, p. 177.

<sup>13</sup> I.F.C., Ms. 706, p. 64.

<sup>14</sup> I.F.C., Ms. 735, pp. 197-199.

<sup>15</sup> I.F.C., Mss. 322, pp. 311-312; 478, pp. 352-353.

<sup>16</sup> *Béaloidéas XIII*, p. 136.

Killiney.<sup>1</sup> Finally, from the Kilkee district of Co. Clare, we have the following tribute to the illuminating powers of a bog fir fire :

“ This bog-wood is used for fuel, and truly delightful is the fire it produces, especially the fir and pine trees, with their most brilliant blaze and fragrant smell. Almost every cabin here has its stock of bog-wood piled up beside the turf-rick in the little yard, holding out a cheering prospect for the long dark evenings of winter. It is called the poor man’s candle ; and no palace could boast of a brighter illumination than it creates.”<sup>2</sup>

### Bog Deal Torches for Fishing

The bog fir torches previously mentioned are most frequently described in one specific connection : that of luring fish at night to spear them. The following account of 1836 refers to the spearing of salmon in Erris, Co. Mayo :

“ Another method, by holding lights over the pools of the river [Owenmore] at night, the fish are attracted, and a handy spearsman soon deposits in his bag the bleeding spoil. These lights are torches made of dried bog-wood, split into small slices which produce a most brilliant blaze : and the act itself is called ‘ burning the river.’ The hundreds of them scattered through the mountain region at night in the fishing season, to the uninformed traveller, might appear as so many fay lights, or ‘ Will o’ the wisps,’ with all their accompanying horrors.”<sup>3</sup>

A similar description referring to the same river and that of the Owenduff in the same neighbourhood appeared in 1851.<sup>4</sup> Earlier, in 1816, the practice was described in the parish of Kilmacteige, Co. Sligo. The salmon running up the rivers to spawn were attacked by “ old and young, men, women, and children ” by day and by night. At night “ torches, made of slips of bog fir tied together ” were used to attract the fish.<sup>5</sup>

A large number of the Irish Folklore Commission references to the custom comes from Co. Galway where the use of these torches has been recorded from the parishes of Ballindoon,<sup>6</sup> Ballynakill,<sup>7</sup> Kilcummin,<sup>8</sup> and Ross.<sup>9</sup> In most cases it is stated that the bundle of splints forming the torch was tied together with a straw rope. In Killorglin parish, Co. Kerry, the torches were tied with

<sup>1</sup> I.F.C., Ms. 483, pp. 380-381.

<sup>2</sup> M.F.D. *Dublin University Magazine*, vol. 18 (1841), p. 679.

<sup>3</sup> Knight, P. *Erris in the “ Irish Highlands.”* Dublin, 1836, pp. 39-40.

<sup>4</sup> Ashworth, John Hervey. *The Saxon in Ireland.* London, 1851, pp. 171-172.

<sup>5</sup> Neligan, Rev. James. In William Shaw Mason’s *Parochial Survey of Ireland.* Dublin, 1816, vol. II, p. 354.

<sup>6</sup> I.F.C., Mss. 271, p. 145 ; 314, pp. 407-408.

<sup>7</sup> I.F.C., Ms. 867, p. 451.

<sup>8</sup> I.F.C., Ms. 527, p. 338.

<sup>9</sup> I.F.C., Ms. 526, p. 64.

a couple of gads or withies.<sup>1</sup> The modern technique of making them for salmon poaching in the Waterville district of Kerry is to tie a bundle of long splints at intervals with wire hoops. When the torch has burned down to the first wire binding, the hoop either falls off or is knocked off so that the splints spring out again in a wide crown to give increased light. This occurs as each hoop falls off in turn, ensuring controlled and even burning of the torch down its full length instead of, as might otherwise happen, the outer splints, with a freer access of air, burning away more quickly than the central ones and causing the whole bundle to fall apart before it was fully consumed.<sup>2</sup> It is probable that the same procedure was adopted elsewhere when tying the torches with straw rope but that it escaped mention since it passed unobserved by the writers who described the practice. Bog fir torches were also used in poaching in the Athea district of Co. Limerick.<sup>3</sup>

There is no reason to suppose that this use of bog fir torches was confined to the areas from which it has been fortuitously recorded. Salmon spearing was common everywhere there were rivers presenting an opportunity for it and, if bog fir happened to be available in the particular locality, we may be certain it was not overlooked for night spearing. The use of the salmon spear in modern times is well attested over an extensive area of the country<sup>4</sup> and, in view of its widespread use in Europe, there is every ground for believing that it is an ancient native cultural element. It has been suggested that the use of the fish spear in Europe may go back to the Magdalenian phase of the Upper Palaeolithic,<sup>5</sup> while there is no doubt that composite spears of barbed bone points were in use in Mesolithic times.<sup>6</sup> By the La Tène period fishing spears were in use which are identical with types in use in Ireland and elsewhere in modern times.<sup>7</sup> Lagore crannog, dating in occupation from Early Christian times, produced the tine of an eel spear,<sup>8</sup> while the Strokestown crannog yielded eel spears of the type known as "sun spears" which may go back to the same period. Although no early examples of salmon spears appear to have been discovered in this country, it would be remarkable if such a highly-esteemed fish as the salmon were not speared if eels were caught by that method. If so, it is more than probable that torches were employed and that the modern examples are

<sup>1</sup> I.F.C., Ms. 716, pp. 246-247.

<sup>2</sup> Information from Tadhg Ó Murchadha, Waterville, Co. Kerry, 1954.

<sup>3</sup> Information from Colm Danaher, Athea, Co. Limerick, 1953.

<sup>4</sup> Went, A. E. J., *J.R.S.A.I.*, 82 (1952), pp. 124-132.

<sup>5</sup> Clark, J. G. D. *Prehistoric Europe*. London, 1952, p. 31.

<sup>6</sup> *ibid.*, p. 47.

<sup>7</sup> *ibid.*, p. 58, Fig. 28, 2.

<sup>8</sup> Hencken, Hugh. *P.R.I.A.*, 53 C, I (1950), Fig. 42, C. (saw?).

directly descended from them. Since we do not know when the exploitation of bog timber began, it may be that its use for this purpose goes back to ancient times.

#### Bog Wood for Ceremonial Fires.

The custom of the Yule Log does not appear to have been widespread in Ireland—within living memory, at all events—but there is a number of references to it from the south-west of the country. Among these is an account from Kilquane parish, Co. Kerry, which states that the wood used was bog fir :

“ They had a log of fir stuck in the fire on Christmas Eve night, a log that would blaze. It was put on the fire after the meal. It was put on the fire in honour of Christmas Eve. It gave a fine light about the fire. I never heard any name for it.” (translation).<sup>1</sup>

The informant was aged 73 when she recorded this in 1941.

Another account relating to the parish of Kilmacabea, Co. Cork, is available which was recorded in 1937 from an informant aged 77 and states :

“ *Do choimeádaidís cathaoir mhór giúmhaise chun teine na Nodlag a dhéanamh.*”<sup>2</sup>

“ They reserved a large stump of fir to make the Christmas fire.”

The remaining reference comes from Ballyvourney parish, Co. Cork, and states that a large knotty block of fir which was not fit for anything else was put on the fire early in the afternoon of Christmas Eve and was called *bloc muar na Nodlag*, “ the great Christmas block.”<sup>3</sup>

Another ceremonial use for bog fir which must have been very common in those districts where it was the only timber readily available was for the Midsummer fires. The use of bog fir for the purpose is, naturally, not often explicitly recorded, but there is at least one definite account from Shercock district, Co. Cavan, where it was obtained in 1942 from an informant aged 70.<sup>4</sup>

#### BOG DEAL FOR THATCHING

In addition to the use of bog timber for the structural members of the roof and of bog deal ropes for tying these and roping down the thatch, bog deal was, in some parts of the country, extensively used in thatching to provide the longitudinal strips of wood by which the individual bundles of straw were held in place and also the staples by which these strips, in turn, were pinned to the roof. It was preferred for this purpose to osiers or other rods on account

<sup>1</sup> I.F.C., Ms. 778, p. 130.

<sup>2</sup> I.F.C., Ms. 408, p. 358.

<sup>3</sup> I.F.C., Ms. 476, p. 305.

<sup>4</sup> I.F.C., Ms. 831, pp. 422-423.

of the length of time for which it resisted decay. One description of the preparation of the material from the Killorglin district, Co. Kerry, states that the bog deal was sawn into pieces of about two feet in length and cut into strips of suitable size by means of a hatchet and an old slasher. The strips intended for the staples were soaked in water for some days to make them more pliable. Each was then twisted a few inches from the centre after which it was bent to hairpin shape with one leg slightly longer than the other. The twisting prior to bending prevented the strip cracking across at the bend.<sup>1</sup> This use of bog deal has been recorded chiefly from the south-west: Kerry,<sup>2</sup> Clare,<sup>3</sup> and Limerick,<sup>4</sup> but was probably well known in other pinned-thatch areas where the wood was available.

### MISCELLANEOUS

#### Export of Bog Oak (?)

The late Dr. Adolf Mahr quotes Louis Demaison in the *Bulletin de la Société Nationale des Antiquaires de France*, 1933, as stating that in documents of the Middle Ages and Renaissance period mention is frequently made of "wood from Ireland" (*bois d'Irlande*).<sup>5</sup> Mahr continues that the texts prove that:

"... 'the wood from Ireland' was very much sought for and that it was employed principally for articles of luxury, such as were produced by shrine-makers for ecclesiastical purposes and by cabinet makers of high reputation. This kind of timber served for the construction of furniture, cradles, statues, altar frames, panelled work, doors and windows of mansions and castles."

He considers that fir, having no intrinsic superiority for such purposes, cannot have been in question, and that the documents give grounds for drawing a distinction between ordinary oak and "wood from Ireland," and concludes that the last must have been bog oak. This conclusion, he thinks, is strengthened by the reputation of Irish timber for immunity from attacks by insect pests which he attributes to the structural changes which the bog oak has undergone in its immersion in the peat, rendering it virtually insect-proof. All this is, however, very debatable, for this supposed immunity of Irish timber to insect attack was surely only one aspect of the general anti-toxic virtues which widespread medieval legend ascribed to the soil and natural products of Ireland.<sup>6</sup> In any event the oak from Irish forests enjoyed a high reputation for quality at the time and the *bois d'Irlande* may have been merely

<sup>1</sup> I.F.C., Ms. 1169, pp. 164-165.

<sup>2</sup> I.F.C., Mss. 1081, pp. 20, 22, 40, 41, 71, 175; 1169, pp. 164-165.

<sup>3</sup> I.F.C., Ms. 1081, pp. 107-108, 115, 118, 122, 123, 130.

<sup>4</sup> I.F.C., Ms. 1081, pp. 234, 237.

<sup>5</sup> Mahr, Adolf. *J.R.S.A.I.*, 65 (1935), pp. 150-152.

<sup>6</sup> Giraldus Cambrensis. See O'Meara, John J. *Topographia Hibernie*. Text of the First Recension. *P.R.I.A.*, 52 C. 4 (1949), pp. 130-131.

ordinary oak of superior quality of Irish origin. If, on the other hand, Mahr's deduction is correct, we have here evidence for the large-scale exploitation of bog timber at a date far earlier than we have hitherto been able to trace.

### The Downhill Harp

This harp, which was presented to the famous northern harpist Hempson or O Hampsey (1695-1807) on his eighteenth birthday and played by him during his long life, has the following rhyme inscribed on it :

“ In the time of Noah I was green,  
Since his flood I had not been seen,  
Until Seventeen hundred and two I was found  
By Cormac O Kelly underground :  
He raised me up to that degree  
That Queen of Musick you may call me.”<sup>1</sup>

The harp was made in the Ballynascreen district of Co. Derry and the inscription, which there seems no reason to question, not only gives an early date for the exploitation of bog timber in the place, but shows us that it was already being used for objects of fine craftsmanship. It has been stated that the harp is made of “ sally ” but, as willow wood which had been immersed in a bog for any length of time would have lost all its strength, this identification, in the absence of scientific examination of the timber, is open to doubt.

### Bog Oak Souvenirs

Although, generally speaking, rather deplorable things in themselves, it is desirable, for the sake of completeness, not to pass over in silence the bog oak souvenir objects which were made for sale over many decades, chiefly in Dublin. That the majority of them were made from bog oak need not be doubted since, as we have seen, the wood was raised in enormous quantities all over the country and, in sizes suitable for the relatively small articles manufactured from it, could be readily transported and sold cheaply. The following quotation from the year 1846 supplies some data on the early history of the trade and purports to trace its genesis :

“ We were attracted to three depôts for the sale of Irish bog oak, which is wrought into all manner of pretty nick-knacks and ornaments. One was Freymuth's, in Sackville-street; a second opposite the College Gardens, where specimens of Killarney wood are to be purchased; and the third in Great Britain-street. This I recommend to all my curiosity-seeking friends, as being kept by two very pretty young women to begin with; and secondly, because their father was the original manufacturer of the article in question. Patrick McGuirk was his name, an old soldier, who learnt the art of carving the cocoonut at Gibraltar, and made some little trifles to propitiate the Duchess

<sup>1</sup> Hayward, Richard. *The Story of the Irish Harp*. Dublin, 1954, p. 21.

of Richmond. She told him she should rather fancy something cut out of the wood of the country ; upon which he tried his hand on the bog oak, which he found of exceeding hardness. Since his death, his business has been carried on by his married daughter, Mrs. Griffiths, for herself and her sister ; their brother inheriting the father's talent, supports the family by his earnings. They live at 168 Great Britain-street, just below the Rotunda ; are very civil, and will execute any order and send it on carriage-free to England.

" They showed me a remarkably handsome walking-stick, quite a *chef d'oeuvre*, and the last of the old man's handy works. It is carved from top to bottom in elegant wreaths of shamrocks, mounted in gold, and valued at twelve guineas. They have models of the Clarsach, or old Irish Harp, pretty little toys, which cost thirty shillings. Brooches of Brian Borimhe's harp, some mounted with Irish gems, of which the emerald and diamond possess most water, and pearls from Lough Corrib ; bracelets in the Herculeum snake pattern, with diamond eyes and crests ; studs, paper knives, crosses, rosaries, and pins, of every imaginable description."<sup>1</sup>

## VOCABULARY

The following list of terms associated with bog wood is not the result of a special investigation, but merely records those noted in passing, and has no pretensions to be exhaustive either linguistically or topographically. Each term is followed by Dinneen's definition, if relevant or available, the local application and the districts where noted.

### IRISH

- Bior*—the iron probe used in locating buried bog wood (general).  
*Bior giúise*— do. (Munster).  
*Bior giúmhasaighe*—do. (Connacht).  
*Bior maide*— do. (Donegal).  
*Cailleach*—" a fir stump found in bogs " (Dinneen) ; a stump (Teelin, Co. Donegal).<sup>2</sup>  
*Caisín*—" a slice " (Dinneen) ; a bog fir splint dipped in tallow and used for light (Beagh Parish, Co. Galway).<sup>3</sup>  
*Carcar*—a stump (Parishes of Ballynakill<sup>4</sup> and Killannin,<sup>5</sup> Co. Galway).  
*Cathaoir*—a stump 3-4 ft. high (Parish of Ballyvourney, Co. Cork)<sup>6</sup> ; a stump (Parish of Kilmacabea, Co. Cork).<sup>7</sup>

<sup>1</sup> West, Mrs. Frederic ; *A Summer Visit to Ireland in 1846*. London, 1847, pp. 184-185.

<sup>2</sup> Information from Seán Ó h-Eochaidh, Gortahork, Co. Donegal, 1954.

<sup>3</sup> I.F.C., Ms. 278, pp. 6-7.

<sup>4</sup> I.F.C., Ms. 867, p. 451.

<sup>5</sup> I.F.C., Ms. 829, p. 58.

<sup>6</sup> I.F.C., Ms. 937, p. 137.

<sup>7</sup> I.F.C., Ms. 408, p. 358.

- Círin*—"the trunk of an oak tree embedded in a bog" (Dinneen); the stump and roots (Athea District, Co. Limerick)<sup>1</sup>; the butt of the root (Parish of Clonfert, Co. Cork).<sup>2</sup>
- Cliath*—bog fir splints woven into a miniature hurdle for drying preparatory to use for light (Cos. Cork<sup>3</sup> and Kerry).<sup>4</sup>
- Coinneall giúise*—bog fir splint used for light (general).
- Creachail*—"a log of bogdeal or pinewood as found in bogs, the root part of the embedded tree as distinct from *maide*, the trunk part" (Dinneen); a large piece cut off a *cathaoir* (Parish of Ballyvourney, Co. Cork);<sup>5</sup> a large piece (Parishes of Prior<sup>6</sup> and Dromod,<sup>7</sup> Co. Kerry).
- Crompán*—"a twisted, knotty beam of wood; a tree trunk" (Dinneen); logs only fit for fuel (Parish of Kilcommon, Co. Mayo).<sup>8</sup>
- Dair dhubh*—bog oak (general).
- Drail*—"a thick short block of wood" (Dinneen); a shapeless gnarled stump difficult to cut with an axe (Parish of Ballyvourney, Co. Cork).<sup>9</sup>
- Fadharcán*—"the remains of a branch on a tree" (Dinneen); a branch protruding from a trunk (Athea District, Co. Limerick,<sup>10</sup> Parish of Ballyvourney, Co. Cork).<sup>11</sup>
- Geataire giúise*—bog fir splint used for light (Cos. Cork<sup>12</sup> and Limerick).<sup>13</sup>
- Gibide*—bog fir splint used for light (Parish of Ballynakill, Co. Galway).<sup>14</sup>
- Giús*—bog fir (Munster).
- Giúmhasach*—bog fir (Connacht).
- Giúmhas abair*—bog fir (Parish of Kiltveevege, Co. Donegal).<sup>15</sup>
- Giúmhas poill*—bog fir (Gortahork District, Co. Donegal).<sup>16</sup>
- Ladhar gráige*—"a piece of a tree stump" (Dinneen); do. (Rosses District, Co. Donegal).<sup>17</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Information from Colm Danaher, Athea, Co. Limerick, 1955.

<sup>2</sup> I.F.C., Ms. 469, p. 370.

<sup>3</sup> I.F.C., Ms. 334, pp. 87-88.

<sup>4</sup> *Béaloideas*, XV, p. 47.

<sup>5</sup> I.F.C., Ms. 937, p. 138.

<sup>6</sup> I.F.C., Ms. 1006, pp. 362-364.

<sup>7</sup> I.F.C., Mss. 126, pp. 252-254; 175, pp. 139-141.

<sup>8</sup> I.F.C., Mss. 706, p. 78; 735, pp. 197-199.

<sup>9</sup> I.F.C., Ms. 937, p. 138.

<sup>10</sup> Information from Colm Danaher, Athea, Co. Limerick, 1955.

<sup>11</sup> I.F.C., Ms. 476, p. 305.

<sup>12</sup> I.F.C., Mss. 282, p. 324; 476, pp. 201-202, 304-305; 536, p. 27

<sup>13</sup> I.F.C. Ms. 591, p. 476.

<sup>14</sup> I.F.C., Ms. 707, p. 455.

<sup>15</sup> I.F.C., Ms. 169, p. 624.

<sup>16</sup> *Béaloideas* XIII, p. 134.

<sup>17</sup> I.F.C., Mss. 478, pp. 352-353; 741, pp. 173-174.

- Lasóg*—bog fir splint used for light (Inishbofin and Inishark, Co. Galway).<sup>1</sup>
- Maide*—"a length of bog timber, as distinct from *creachail*, bole and roots" (Dinneen); general in all districts.
- Maide dubh*—bog oak (Parishes of Ross<sup>2</sup> and Killeenadeema,<sup>3</sup> Co. Galway).
- Maide giúise*—bog fir (general).
- Maide portaigh*—bog wood (general).
- Mítheán*—"meathán: a splinter (as of bog-deal for lighting)" (Dinneen); bog fir splint used for light (Moycullen Parish, Co. Galway).<sup>4</sup>
- Pitséar*—bog wood axe (Parish of Kilcummin, Co. Galway).<sup>5</sup>
- Sciotachán*—"a bog-deal splinter used for light as a candle" (Dinneen); do. (Parish of Kilmocomoge, Co. Cork)<sup>6</sup>; bog fir splint dipped in tallow and used for light (Parish of Kilcaskan, Co. Cork).<sup>7</sup>
- Scolb*—bog fir splint used for light (Co. Kerry).
- Spíle*—do. (Parish of Glencolmcille, Co. Donegal).<sup>8</sup>
- Spliota*—do. (Co. Donegal).
- Spreóta*—"a log, a gnarled log, a tree or deal scorched or burnt at one end" (Dinneen); a log for the fire (Parish of Kilquane, Co. Kerry).<sup>9</sup>
- Spríúta*—see *spreóta*; a piece with roots (Parish of Ballyvourney, Co. Cork).<sup>10</sup>
- Treagh*—"a trident or eelspear, a 'try,' a piercer" (Dinneen); the iron probe used for locating buried bog wood (West Cork).<sup>11</sup>
- Tuagh giúise*—bog wood axe (general).

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<sup>1</sup> Wilde, William R. *Irish Popular Superstitions*. Dublin, n.d., p. 28.

<sup>2</sup> I.F.C., Ms. 819, p. 296.

<sup>3</sup> I.F.C., Ms. 538, p. 355.

<sup>4</sup> I.F.C., Ms. 1025, p. 134.

<sup>5</sup> I.F.C., Ms. 527, p. 298.

<sup>6</sup> I.F.C., Ms. 393, p. 9.

<sup>7</sup> I.F.C., Ms. 334, pp. 87-88.

<sup>8</sup> I.F.C., Ms. 143, p. 2013.

<sup>9</sup> I.F.C., Ms. 778, p. 130.

<sup>10</sup> I.F.C., Ms. 937, p. 138.

<sup>11</sup> Information from Daniel Sweeney, Derreenlunnig, Gougane Barra, Co. Cork, 1949.

## ENGLISH

- Black stick—bog oak ; translation of *maide dubh* (Athea District, Co. Limerick).<sup>1</sup>
- Corker—stump ; transliteration of *carcar*. Adopted by Kinahan.<sup>2</sup>
- Fir block—bog fir (Cos. Armagh<sup>3</sup> and Tyrone).<sup>4</sup>
- Fir hatchet—bog wood axe (general).
- Fir searcher—the iron probe used for locating buried bog wood (Cos. Armagh<sup>5</sup> and Tyrone).<sup>6</sup>
- Spit— do. (general).
- Split—bog fir splint used for light (Ulster).
- Stick—trunk of bog wood (general).
- Try—see *treagh* ; the iron probe used for locating buried bog wood (West Cork).
- Wassock—block of bog fir (Parish of Ardclinis, Co. Antrim).<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> I.F.C., Ms. 1081, p. 234.

<sup>2</sup> Kinahan, G. Henry. *Manual of the Geology of Ireland*. London, 1878, pp. 268–269.

<sup>3</sup> I.F.C., Ms. 1112, pp. 85, 311.

<sup>4</sup> I.F.C., Ms. 1216, p. 351.

<sup>5</sup> I.F.C., Ms. 1112, pp. 85, 311.

<sup>6</sup> I.F.C., Ms. 1216, p. 351.

<sup>7</sup> I.F.C., Ms. 1019, p. 93.

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