

Mayo Heritage

Newsletter

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The
North Mayo
Heritage
Centre

Beidh Aonach Amárach
We examine
Markets and Fairs
in times past

Are you interested in tracing your Mayo roots?

If you are interested in professional help to research your family history or are curious about your ancestry, why not contact us? All research can be done remotely. *Perhaps we can help you!*

Tel: 096 31809 Email: northmayo@gmail.com or visit northmayogenealogy.com

Cover image: Fair Day in Cong in olden times. Image from dúchas.ie C041.03.00001 (Caoimhín Ó Danachair)

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Markets and Fairs in times past

Who remembers learning “*Beidh Aonach Amárach*”, (meaning there will be a fair tomorrow), the old Irish folk song during their school days? It was a popular song, no doubt inspired by the fairs that had been held in Ireland for centuries.

These fair days together with market days centred around the farmers’ seasonal production of livestock and crops. They brought people together from both town and country whilst providing a vital role in the Irish economy. As each fair and market was held on a set day, the life of the farm revolved around having the stock and crops ready for selling. The shopkeepers prepared too as they welcomed a large injection of money into their locality. Some of the fairs and markets were solely for cattle, or sheep or pigs, others were more general, and items sold included hay, turf and potatoes, as well as turkeys, geese and calves.

Markets and fairs coincided with days on when rents were due, *i.e.* 1st of May and 1st of November. These days were known as “gale days”. In the north Mayo region, in one of the oldest parts of the town of Ballina, namely, Ardnaree, a fair dating back to 1612 was established when Sir Thomas Burke obtained the patent. In the surrounding districts, during the 19th century, Foxford held a market each Thursday, with cattle fairs taking place on May 15th, June 25th, October 3rd and December 10th.



Market Day Clonbur, Co. Galway, 1960

(Image from dúchas.ie C041.01.00014)

Bonniconlon once had a pig market running from 1910 to 1939, and they held fairs in the months of May, June, August and November.

At the end of these trading days, before heading homeward bound, the farmers frequently paid a visit to the pub. It was generally a pub-grocery where they bought some shop goods, biscuits and sausages, or a side of bacon. They stood at the bar, their young sons waited in the ‘lounge’, while their wives went about the shops and stalls, buying some necessities for the house or themselves, a dress, a coat, some wool for knitting, and perhaps a luxury or two.

It was also a time to visit the matchmaker, where often a farmer went to sell a few cattle and returned home with a future wife!

Today, two of the biggest and busiest fair days in north Mayo still fall on August 15th. One in the village of Lahardane and the other in the coastal town of Belmullet. The latter was traditionally known as *Lá an Logha*, which translates as “Day of Indulgence”. It’s a time when market stalls, bustle and bargaining once again fill the streets in a bygone way.

References:

www.ballina.ie
www.visitbelmullet.ie

Extract from the Ordnance Survey Letters of 1838

A brief history of
BELDERRIGMORE
(Béal Dearg Mhór, meaning big red fort).

Located in the north-west of the parish of Ballycastle / Doonfeeney, extending north and south. Bounded on the north by the Atlantic Ocean; east by Glenglassera; south by Rathavisteen; and west by Cregganmore, Cregganbeg and Belderrigbeg.

It contains 2,750 acres, 1 rood, 32 perches. The property of John Knox, Esq., Castlereagh. Leased to Major Gardiner, Farmhill. Sublet to tenants at will at the yearly rent of £145 for the whole townland. It is principally mountain; the part cultivated lies west along the Belderrig River, producing oats, flax, rye and potatoes. Houses are of stone and inhabitants are very poor.



**Sheep market day, 1960
 Belderrig Mór, Co. Mayo**

(Image from dúchas.ie C050.03.00002)



Fair Day, the Square, Belmullet 1980

(Image from the O'Brien's Ireland Collection)



Fair Day, Balla 1900

(Image from historicalpicturearchive.com)