

North Mayo Heritage Centre

# NEWSLETTER



The  
North Mayo  
Heritage  
Centre

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## Rural Electrification

Read about when it began in Mayo



Cover image:

Locals witnessing the electricity being  
connected to a property in Dromiskin c.1949  
([www.esbarchives.ie](http://www.esbarchives.ie))

### Powering the West

A history of Bord na Móna and ESB in North Mayo

Book of  
the Week



## POWERING THE WEST

This is not just a history of the involvement of Bord na Móna and the ESB in Ballacorick, it is a social record of North Mayo and Erris during the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. It contains numerous interviews, archival material and stunning images including many never previously published. Available to buy now from our online bookstore €25 (+postage)

The North Mayo Heritage Centre is dedicated to preserving and promoting the rich heritage of the region





## Rural Electrification

***“Our eyes will never adjust to the brightness.  
We will be blind before the year is out”.***

This was one of many reservations voiced prior to the arrival of electricity to rural Ireland. Other fears, that the E.S.B. poles would disturb the fairies and that thatched cottages would ignite into balls of fire, were expressed. However, it transpired that getting connected to the electricity supply opened the gateway to unimagined luxuries and aided the lives of so many.

It was the biggest project in the history of the state – connecting Ireland’s rural towns and villages to the national grid. In Mayo, the work of the rural electrification scheme began in 1947 in Murrisk, finally finishing in Ballycroy in 1964. (Some private suppliers had permits to commercially supply electricity to urban locations prior to this time e.g. Murphy’s, Ballina and McIntyre’s Stores, Belmullet). A total of 55,669 poles and 4,826 kilometres of cable connected 14,624 of the county’s premises. The original scheme ended in 1964 but was extended, to allow people who missed out the first time around a chance to reapply for a subsidised connection, through various subsequent phases until 1978.

Every county was divided into rural areas of approximately 25 sq. miles, typically based on parish boundaries or creamery areas. A rural electrification office was set up to canvass householders to sign up for the electricity supply and to highlight the many benefits. Initially, one area in each county was chosen for connection, with priority given to those areas which yielded the highest revenue in relation to the capital cost of the supply network.

A grant of half the total capital cost (i.e., poles, wires, transformers, etc.) enabled the E.S.B. to offer supply at reasonable rates of charge. The customer provided all the wiring for their premises from the point where the supply line was brought in and the meter erected.

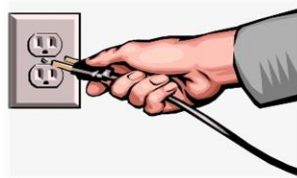
The E.S.B. then proposed to charge an agreed annual sum calculated on the floor area of each dwelling plus half the floor area of out buildings.

The support of well-respected members of the community such as members of the I.C.A., the clergy, Muintir na Tíre and school teachers was crucial in securing sufficient numbers to make each area viable for the E.S.B. connections. Such was the case in Lecanvey, where local national teacher Paddy Gibbons was instrumental in securing the connections to the village in 1948.

The demand for electricity grew throughout the county and the pace of connections increased to a peak in the 1950s. The numbers of rural areas being connected was steady e.g. Lecanvey 1948: Ballycastle 1949: Bohola 1950: Achill rural and Mulranny 1951: Attymass 1955: Lahardane 1956: Belmullet and Geesala 1957: Toomore, Faulmore, Moyrahan, Glencastle, Glenamoy and Pontoon 1958: Inishbiggle 1977.

Demonstrations of electrical appliances were held locally (e.g. Emerald Ballroom Lecanvey in 1948) and mobile demonstrations were also well attended. In the years that followed the roll-out of electricity, life changed immeasurably.

Housewives were liberated with the introduction of washing machines, irons, ovens, kettles, water heaters, refrigerators, vacuum cleaners and more. Farming and industrial activities were enhanced beyond belief and the installation of electric water pumps allowed for modern sanitation in every household and business.



The introduction of electricity transformed rural Ireland but it also heralded the end of story telling, fear of the fairies, pookey men, the banshee and rambling houses. The Seanchaí and his ghost stories just didn’t sound or feel the same when related in the full glare of electric light.

### Sources:

Then There Was Light by PJ Cunningham and Dr Joe Kearney  
The Connaught Telegraph, the 19-June-1948

Powering the West by James Laffey and Christy Loftus  
[www.ouririshheritage.org](http://www.ouririshheritage.org)  
[www.esbarchives.ie](http://www.esbarchives.ie)

### A brief history of the Townland of **BOHOLA**

(Both Óla  
meaning drinking-booth or tent).

Located in the north of the parish. It contains 565 acres, 2 roods, 9 perches\*. The property of Christopher MacManus, Esq., and is rated in the Tithe Composition Book at £14 7 shilling 5¾d. It is let to 35 occupying tenants at will at 30 shillings per acre yearly. Quit rent, 2½d. per acre. Co. Cess\*\*, 3 shillings 5d. per acre. Size of farms, from 3½ to 8 acres. Soil, sandy. Usual crops oats, barley, potatoes and flax. Bog, plenty. Tenants, all Catholics.

Prevailing Family Names are Mullowney and Mulroy. In this townland are 4 ancient forts and an old church yard, called Bohola burying ground.

\* There are 40 perches in a rood, and 4 roods in an acre.

Extract from Ordnance Survey  
Namebooks of 1838



Life, before and after rural electrification, for the Irish housewife ([www.esbarchives.ie](http://www.esbarchives.ie)).



The biggest project in the history of the State involved erecting the ESB poles one at a time. ([www.esbarchives.ie](http://www.esbarchives.ie))