

Tel: 096 31809

[www.northmayogenealogy.com](http://www.northmayogenealogy.com)

Email: [nmhmanager@gmail.com](mailto:nmhmanager@gmail.com)

Email: [northmayo@gmail.com](mailto:northmayo@gmail.com)

Follow us on  
Facebook and Twitter



Feature article

## May Day Customs

Enniscoe House

## Ornamental Garden

Restored under the Great Gardens of  
Ireland Restoration Programme and  
open to the public since 1999

Check out our



## TRACE YOUR ROOTS

Are you interested in professional help to  
**Research Your Family History**

Let us do the work for you.  
All work can be done remotely.

For more information,

Tel: 096 31809

Email: [northmayo@gmail.com](mailto:northmayo@gmail.com)



### BOOK OF THE WEEK

## HERITAGE IRISH PLANTS

This publication celebrates our Heritage Plants and the beauty of botanical illustration. It features articles on a variety of plant themes: latest snowdrops, dahlias, sweet peas, primroses, iris and daffodils. Beautifully illustrated throughout with paintings from Irish Botanical artists.

Available to buy now from our online bookstore  
€25 (+postage)

# MAY DAY CUSTOMS

## May Flowers

“Bealtaine” (May 1<sup>st</sup>) celebrated and marked the start of summer in Irish folk tradition. The picking and bringing home of fresh flowers by children was a principal practice to welcome May Day. They were gathered on the evening before, namely May Eve, and were typically yellow in colour, such as primroses, cowslips, buttercups, marigolds, furze (gorse) blossoms. The children assembled them into small bouquets or garlands and placed them on the doorsteps of houses, on windowsills, on farm animals and in local wells. This custom was to bring luck and provide protection from the “evil eye” and supernatural beings, who were strongly believed to be more active at this time.

Additionally, there was a deep association with the devotion of the Blessed Virgin Mary during the month of May. Hence, the tradition of flower picking on May Day was incorporated into the Marion processions countrywide.

Flowers were used for the crowning of Our Lady in town processions, and adorned grottoes, shrines, and church altars too.

## May Bush

A bush, usually of hawthorn, was decorated with flowers, ribbons, streamers, and garlands of coloured eggshells left over from Easter. Occasionally, candles and rushlights were attached and lit at dusk on May Eve.

In rural areas they were left outside the house. In towns, they were placed in a communal area. They were associated with the good fortune of the household or community and were carefully guarded in case a rival group would attempt to steal them.

## May Dew & Nettles

The collection of May Dew at dawn was an essential custom as it was believed to hold the essence and vitality of summer. It was applied to the face as it promised eternal youth. Superstitiously, it was a lucky and optimum time to collect nettles for the making of soups and tinctures.

## Fire

Usually, no fire was lit on May Day to retain the household’s luck. In parts of Connacht, the phrase “*Colladh Bealtaine*” (May Day Sleep), referred to the late rising of people who could sleep late on May Morning rather than get up and avoid lighting the fire.



May Altar (Image from ouririshheritage.org)

Special care was also taken not to throw out the cinders or ashes. Indeed, nothing was removed from the household including food scraps or floor sweepings. Nothing was loaned, gifted, or bought on this day. In general, the rule was “no spending, no lending, no borrowing”.

## Forecasting & Divining

“*A wet and windy May fills the barn with corn and hay*”. May was also a time for the farmer to study the weather as it would forecast the approaching summer climate. Marriage in May was back then considered extremely unlucky. However, May Eve and May Day was a time to divine the future. Women placed snails on flour or ashes to predict the initials of the man they would marry.

### Resources:

*The Year in Ireland – Irish Calendar Customs* by Kevin Danaher  
<https://www.museum.ie>  
[www.ouririshheritage.org](http://www.ouririshheritage.org)

## A brief history of the Townland of PROSPECT

Located in the south-east of the parish of Crossmolina. Bounded on the north by Kildavaroige and Inishcoe; east by Cloonkelly; south by Cabragh and Killeen; and west by Kilsavaroge.

It contains 144 acres, 1 rood, 3 perches\*, including 3 acres, 1 rood, 9 perches\* of water.

The property of M. Pratt, Esq., who resides on the townland in Inishcoe House. This is a beautiful residence, pleasantly situated on the shores of Lough Conn. A considerable part of this townland is planted, and Lough Napastia is on the boundary, in the south of the townland.

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

Extract from Ordnance Survey Namebooks of 1838

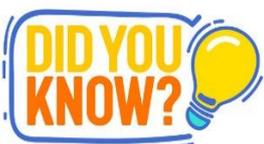


## A BRIEF HISTORY OF THE SURNAME BREHANY

**Brehany, Breheny, Brehon, Mac an Bhreitheamhnaigh:** Now largely translated as Judge.<sup>1</sup>  
**Brehany:** A Connacht family, confined exclusively to that province at the beginning of this century. The Brehenys still reside mostly in the counties of Sligo, Roscommon and Galway.<sup>2</sup>  
 Of the 16 Brehany births in Ireland in 1890 – including variants – 16 occurred in Connacht, while none occurred in Leinster, Munster or Ulster. Roscommon and Sligo were the counties where the surname was principally found.

<sup>1</sup> Extract taken from ‘The Surnames of Ireland’ by MacLysaght.

<sup>2</sup> Extract taken from ‘Irish Family Names’ by Brian de Breffny.



## WHY IS “MAYDAY” A DISTRESS CALL?

Mayday was made official as a distress call in 1948. It was the idea of Frederick Mockford, who was a senior radio officer at Croydon Airport in London. He came up with the idea for “mayday” because it sounded like the French word *m'aider*, which means “help me.”