

To celebrate Heritage Week this month, we have launched a

**PHOTOGRAPHIC
COMPETITION**

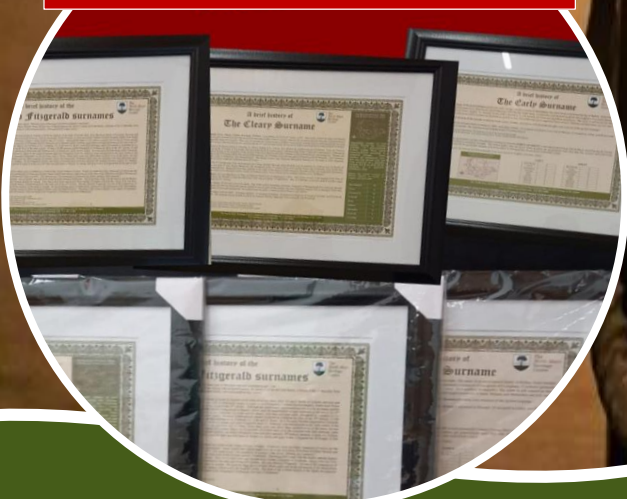
Full details inside



The
North Mayo
Heritage
Centre

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History of your Surname



Feature article

Rush Lights

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?

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

Cover image: Rush light. Image courtesy of Farmer's Journal (Shane Lehane)

RUSH LIGHTS

Before the installation of electricity in homes across Ireland the use of candles and oil lamps was the only means of lighting homes.

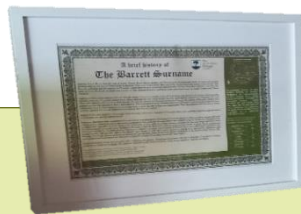
In previous generations households looked to paraffin oil, double burning wick lamps or the Tilley lamp with their glowing globes but in 19th century Ireland the chief source of light was the simple candle, the homemade rush light.

Along river banks and on wet marshy land growing in distinctive clumps or tufts is the common rush. It was this rush that was used for the rush light. The rushes were cut when they were green and ripe, in late summer and early autumn, before winter frosts turned them brown and unusable. Once cut, the rushes were kept in a bucket of water to stop them from drying out, ready for the slow process of peeling off the hard green outside layer to expose the soft pith. This foam like centre of the rush was used as the wick.

The peeled rushes were left to dry for a few days and were then ready to be loaded with grease which was usually tallow, the rendered fat of any slaughtered animal or fowl. The soft, dry sponge of the rush pith soaked up the melted fat instantly.

The rushes were laid on a piece of timber to dry. It was important to keep the tallow rush lights out of reach of cats, mice or rats as they were an irresistible snack for them!

To provide light the rush tapers were fixed in a special rush light holder, made by the local blacksmith. The holder took the form of two pieces of iron riveted together to form a set of pincers which stood upright in a solid block of wood.



Ever wondered about the origin of your surname?

**We can now offer a brief
HISTORY OF YOUR SURNAME
(framed or unframed)**

**Researched by staff
at the North Mayo Heritage Centre**

**A3 size print mounted on a
black or white frame**

**€40 framed
€25 unframed
€25 by email**

**Tel: 096 31809 or call to Reception to order.
Shipping can be arranged**

**What a thoughtful gift for someone or
a family keepsake!**

The rush light was set at an angle of 45 degrees and was adjusted as it burned down. The flame provided a surprisingly effective light and would provide enough light for around one hour.

If more light was needed it was possible to set the rush light horizontally, the only candle that allows this, as the proverb tells us "light the candle at both ends".

The following extract from the Schools' Folklore Collection (dúchas.ie), which was compiled during the 1930s, recounts the history of the rush light in Co. Mayo.

About eighty years ago the people never used wax candles for light. The only light they had were rush lights. The rushes were gathered and the skin peeled off. The rushes were then (peeled off) doubled and tied at both ends. Tallow was then melted and a double rush dipped into it and then hung up to set. One by one they were dipped and hung up so that when the last one was hung up the first one was ready to be taken down and dipped again. This was repeated until the candle was the required thickness. Then it was ready for use.

The rush light may have been considered unsophisticated but its function of lighting up the dark proved it to be a great accomplishment of its generation.

Sources: dúchas.ie
farmersjournal.ie

To celebrate Heritage Week 2023, we are excited to launch our

PHOTOGRAPHIC COMPETITION

Get Snapping!

WE INVITE YOU TO SUBMIT PHOTOS WHICH CAPTURE THE ESSENCE OF

"HERITAGE IN MAYO"

- Winner will receive a book hamper consisting of books of local interest, valued at over €70.
- The winning image will be posted on our social media channels, on our website, in the Mayo Heritage Newsletter and on display at Reception.
- Two runners up will also have their image displayed publicly.

PRIZE

RULES:

- 1 entry per person.
- Please specify if under 18 years.
- Your name and phone number to accompany your entry.
- Please include a brief description including location.
- Jpeg and portrait orientation with no filters or photoshop.
- If persons/children are pictured, please ensure permissions have been obtained.
- Winning photo will be used on social media and may be used for other promotional purposes.

HOW TO ENTER:
Send photos by email only to nmhmarketing2017@gmail.com
Closing date for receipt of entries is 8th Aug 2023.
Winner will be announced during Heritage Week (12th to 20th August 2023)

 National Heritage Week
A Heritage Council programme