

NEWSLETTER

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Feature article
**THE SPINNING
WHEEL**
and its importance
in Irish life

Cover image:
Irish women spinning
(Image from postcard collection of Maggie Land Blanck)

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The Spinning Wheel

In the early 19th century many Irish families relied on the spinning wheel to help them produce garments to wear. The spinning wheel used was known as a low Irish wheel or a Dutch wheel, which originated in Holland. The Dutch wheel was originally a flax wheel which was then modified for wool.

Spinning wheels differed from region to region. In Connemara the spinner worked standing up, while in the Blasket Islands in Kerry she sat down. On a fine day the spinning wheel was brought outdoors, and it was customary for women to sing while they spun the wool or flax.

Most homes in rural Ireland had a spinning wheel, which played an important part in the economy of the countryside. It provided a source of extra income for families, enabling them to buy small luxuries such as tobacco, snuff, salt and whiskey.

Spinning was work carried out by the women of the house in addition to all the other household tasks. If the women tired from spinning they would take up their knitting needles. The best wool was kept to knit socks for the head of the household, as remembered by Malachi Horan from County Dublin, "Them stockings would wear at the hardest, for two years or better, and never a hole."

Yarns used for producing clothing were usually made of linen or wool. For wool, sheep were shorn by hand and the fleece washed and dried and any debris removed in preparation for "carding".



Children spinning (Image from Maggie Land Blanck)

Children were involved in the process of "carding" combing the raw wool between two wooden paddles studded with iron bristles ready for the spinning wheel. Fibres from the flax plant were also spun into linen yarn using a spinning wheel. Flax was grown and spun in all parts of Ireland but the production of linen only became an important industry in the northern counties. When the wool or flax was spun into yarn it was then wound into hanks and brought to the local weaver who operated a loom in his house to weave the yarn into woollen or linen cloth.

The following excerpt from The Schools' Collection by dúchas.ie gives a recollection of the spinning wheel in the home of a student from Derrymore, Mayo.

"Long ago the people of this district made all their own clothes out of wool and they make some of their clothes yet. First they tease the wool to take the dirt out of it. Then they flaked it and greased it and carded it and made it into rolls. Then they spun it into thread and sent it to the weaver and got it wove in to blankets and flannen. Nearly every house yet has a spinning wheel. My mother has a spinning wheel and she spins thread and knits it into stockings and jersies."

Interest in spinning still exists today with master craftsmen producing hand built spinning wheels to order for delivery all over the world.

Sources:
RTÉarchives.ie, Museum.ie,
dúchas.ie.

A brief history of the surname **WEBB**

WEBB: Families of this name have been in Ireland since mid-seventeenth century. It is fairly numerous now in Dublin and Belfast.

The extent to which it has been distributed over Leinster in the past is exemplified by the following figures showing the birthplaces of 37 Webb's who were students of Dublin University between 1660 and 1843: Dublin and Cork 7 each, Westmeath 6, Meath 4, Limerick and Offaly 3 each, Kilkenny and England 2 each, Longford, Leix and Tipperary 1 each.¹

WEBB: This common English surname is found in Ireland in about equal numbers in and around the capital and in Ulster in County Antrim having come to Ireland since the 17th century with immigrant settlers.

One settler family of the name in Munster claimed to have come from Gloucestershire to County Limerick whence one branch of the family moved to County Tipperary.²

Of the 33 Webb's births in Ireland, including variants, 12 occurred in Leinster, 5 occurred in Munster, 13 occurred in Ulster and 3 occurred in Connacht. The surname was principally found in Dublin and Antrim.

¹ Extract taken from 'The Surnames of Ireland' by Edward MacLysaght.

² Extract taken from 'Irish Family Names' by Brian De Breffny.

A brief history of the townland of

BOGHADOON

(Both a' Dúin, translated as a tent or hut of the fort).

Located in the north-west extremity of the parish of Addergoole, on a road leading from Erris to the village of Crossmolina. It contains 1,197 acres, 0 roods, 0 perches*, statute measure. Proprietor, Sir William Palmer, Bart. Agent, John Heavyside, Esq.

This townland is all mountain pasture and wood, and is stocked with cattle by Mr. Burke of Ballina. The inhabitants are two herds, who have a small portion of cultivated ground. Bog plenty. Prevailing family name – Clarke. On the south-west boundary is a river, and on the south boundary a stream. There is one fort in this townland.

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

Extract from Ordnance Survey Namebooks of 1838