

North Mayo Heritage Centre

NEWSLETTER

Tel: 096 31809

www.northmayogenealogy.com

Email: nmhmanager@gmail.com

Email: northmayo@gmail.com



The
North Mayo
Heritage
Centre

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KILBRIDE
and its association with St. Bridget

Traditions Associated with
MARRIAGE

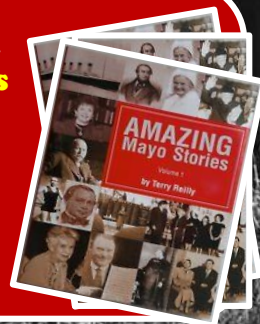
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Cover image: Strawboys call to the home of a bride on her wedding day by W. Green of Wedding Maskers (folklore.ie)

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

Traditions associated with Marriage

As the feast of St. Valentine is celebrated this weekend, we reflect on the tradition of matchmaking and marriages that often occurred around this time.

In 19th and early 20th century Ireland, Shrove Tuesday was the principal day for marriages to take place. There was a ban on marriage during Lent, which only the wealthy could afford to get around.¹ Nearly all marriages were arranged, and the matchmaker was in demand between New Year and Shrovetide. Marriages were local, and the importance of knowing the other party's background was paramount since a dowry had to be paid.

A typical wedding of the early 19th century in rural Mayo would happen in the early evening, usually in the bride's home. Later, when the ceremony did take place in the church, the bride travelled to the church in the company of her father, and in the company of her husband on the return leg. There was usually a celebration in the bride's home. There was a meal for the guests and the priest, at which the bride's father and mother waited upon their guests. This celebration could last for days.²

Among the many customs associated with this celebration were:³

A length of rope was placed across the road blocking the wedding party on their return from the church. The bridegroom paid a small sum of money to allow their passage continue.

The bride's mother broke a small cake over the bride's head when she returned to the house. This was a good luck omen.

Some neighbours who were not formally invited to the party might disguise themselves with straw hats and enter the house. They would perform some music or a song. It was very bad luck to refuse them entry.

¹ Swords, L. 1997. *A Hidden Church*. Columba Press, 248-9.

² Ibid, 253.

³ Danaher, K. 1972. *The Year in Ireland*. Mercier Press. 44-45.

A brief history of the surname KILBRIDE

Variants include Gillbride, MacBride, M'Gillebridy, M'Gillvrid, M'Killbridy, M'Elvride, MacGillbride, MacKilbride, Macklebreed, Kilbride, meaning 'son of Giolla Bhrighde' (servant of St. Brigid).

This surname was formerly found in many parts of Ireland, notably in the North, where it is still common under the anglicized form of MacBride, having been shortened in the spoken language to mac 'a bhrighde, or Mac Giolla bhuidhe.¹ (Mac) Kilbride Mac Giolla Bhrighde (devotee of St. Brigid). Kilbride is the Connacht form of this name, elsewhere anglicized MacBride and MacGilbride.²

Of the 7 Kilbride births registered in Ireland in 1890, 3 occurred in Leinster, 4 occurred in Connacht, while none occurred in Munster or Ulster.

¹ Woulfe, Rev. Patrick 'Irish Names and Surnames'

² MacLysaght, Edward 'The Surnames of Ireland'

Strawboys attending a wedding.

(Image courtesy
of the National
Folklore
Collection)



THE STRAWBOYS

(from the National Folklore Collection, www.duchas.ie)

Strawboys were groups of revelers disguised in various costumes and wearing conical straw hats over their faces, who traditionally visited weddings to dance with the bride and other women. They entertained with music, song and merriment and their presence was believed to bring luck, wealth and health to the newlyweds.

Traditionally they turned their coats inside out and tied straw ropes around them. The night of the wedding they went to a house where they got straw. They did not usually ask for the straw but stole it. They then made the hats and ropes from the straw.

The Strawboys Captain and the Sergeant carried sticks to keep the men quiet. When they arrived at a house, they rapped on the door to summon the bride and groom and enquired if they were welcome. They were then invited in to sing and dance. The strawboys raised three cheers and shouted: "*I wish ye all sorts of good luck*". It was considered back luck to refuse the strawboys entry.

A brief history of the townland KILBRIDE

(Cill Bríghde, St. Bridget's church)

Located in the parish of Burrishoole. There is a Killeen and a well here. There is a story told here about St. Bridget: that she cursed St. Marcan and prayed the sea would come over his house. Her prayer was effective, and Loch Marcan is pointed out as the existing proof of its effectiveness.

Situated in the south-east quarter of the parish, near the southern boundary of same. Bounded on the north by Carrowbaun and Mullaun; east by Carrickaneady; south by Carrowmore; and west by Teevmore.

It is about ¼ mile south of Newport and the road from Westport to Newport lies through it. The property of Sir Richard A. O'Donnell. It contains 225 acres, 2 roods, 15 perches*, including 3 acres, 1 rood, 1 perch* of water. All cultivated. Let at will at 25 shillings per acre yearly. Co. Cess**, 3 shillings 4d. per acre. Soil is a lime and freestone mixture, producing potatoes, corn and flax. There is a graveyard here.

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

** The County Cess was a form of local taxation. It is derived from the word 'assessment'.