

Mayo Heritage

Newsletter

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The Station Mass
an old custom we all remember



Excited to announce
NEW SERVICES

at the North Mayo Heritage Centre

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Tel: 096 31809 Email: northmayo@gmail.com
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The
North Mayo
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Centre

Cover image: A Station Mass in times past (Image from *The Athenry Journal* 1995 - 2004)

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The Station Mass – an old Custom

This tradition dates back to the Penal Laws, when it was forbidden for Catholic priests to say Mass in public. The poem “*Anseo i lár an Ghleanna*” tells the story of the arrival of redcoats (the British army) following an outdoor Mass. An elderly layman, Brian Ó Laoi, quickly swapped clothes with a young priest so that he could be killed and the priest’s life saved.

*Do ghaibh na Sasanaigh Brian Ó Laoí, is d’imigh soar an sagart;
Do chroch said Brian ar chrann caol ard, anseo i lár an ghleanna*

Similar incidents occurred in other parts of the country. When the Penal Laws were repealed, the custom of the station Mass continued, especially in Ireland’s more rural areas. The Station Mass predominantly took place in Spring and Autumn. It was also a means of ensuring every parishioner had their confession heard during Advent or Lent. It was considered a status symbol to host a station. Not everybody was in a position to afford it, as the house required a certain minimum of amenities. No expense would be spared to meet the expectation of the priest or the critical gaze of the neighbours. It was widely believed that many blessings and good fortune would follow any family who hosted the station Mass.

Prior to the day of the station Mass, the woman of the house would have completed all the cleaning and decorating and commenced baking meat to serve cold the next day.

On the morning of the Mass additional baking would be done. Freshly picked flowers would be displayed throughout the home and family members dressed in their Sunday best.

On the day itself, a large white sheet often hung below the roof to prevent soot falling onto the altar.

Items kept specifically for the occasion such as lace cloths, candlesticks, a butter dish etc. were removed from storage, washed and used.

Tea sets and tea pots would be borrowed from a wealthy neighbour. Things never ordinarily seen, for instance sugar cubes and rolls of butter made an appearance on this special day. On arrival the priest would empty his Mass kit – items included a chalice, a paten, a wooden cross, Latin missal, linen cloths, bread and wine, altar stone and vestments.

Family members or close neighbours sang hymns during the Mass which prior to the mid 1960s was in Latin. In pre-famine times, the priest’s horse boy served Mass as an altar boy and would also answer the Mass in Latin. The Mass would often be a hurried affair as the priest could be very hungry and anxious to get the hearty breakfast.

In pre Vatican II times, there was a Eucharistic Fast in place where no one could eat or drink for perhaps 12 hours prior to receiving communion.

Later in the day another substantial meal consisting of butcher’s meat, fowl, oaten bread and butter would be provided.

The man of the house and a select few neighbours ate with the priest in the “parlour”. Another room (sometimes a bedroom) was allocated for confessions. Holy water from the station Mass was brought home by neighbours for good luck.

Nowadays, the station Mass takes place the odd time. It’s a fading tradition, similar to many others.

While Diocesan Secretary of Tuam, Fr. Fintan Monahan recalled in *The Irish Catholic* “that while the tradition remained strong in some parishes, others have abandoned the practice altogether. Station Masses were very nice, well organised and there was always a great sense of community at them, from my experience”.

References:
Irishcultureandcustoms.com
A Hidden Church by Liam Swords (1997)

Duchas.ie
Irishcatholic.com

The North Mayo Heritage Centre re-opens
1st April 2023.

Opening times:
Tue. to Sat .
10am to 4pm

Sun.
12pm to 4pm

Genealogy,
Telephone, email or
call to reception

Vegetable stall
Tue. – Thur.
12pm to 3.30pm



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Lots of benefits ... details coming soon!

NEW SERVICES

The North Mayo Heritage Centre is delighted to offer new services to enhance your special occasions:

- Hire of Garden & Enniscoe House for photos
- Hire of Conference Hall
- Special Occasion Booklets

Check us out here
www.northmayogenealogy.com/our-services



Booking now open
www.northmayogenealogy.com/events

€10 per child (+booking fee)

EASTER EGGSTRAVANGZA

Easter Sunday
Slots between 11am & 4pm

Walk through the woods
Find the golden bunny

Decorate your own egg
Win a hamper

