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The townland of
CASHEL
in 1838
We include extracts from Ordnance Survey Letters of 1838

Feature article:
Irish furniture and furnishings of old

Book of the Week
Taking the Boat:
The Irish in Leeds 1931 - 1981

Cover images:
A settle bed (above),
(Image from Claudia Kinmonth, courtesy Bunratty Folk Park, Shannon Heritage).
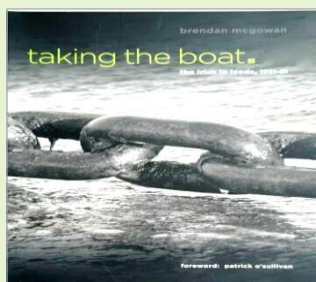
A butter box (right) capable of holding 56 lbs of butter, marked with the creamery's details. A butter box could be converted to many things including a board-ended stool, an upholstered seat and a sewing box (pictured)
(Image from: R. Paschhoff, courtesy Cork Butter Museum)

Irish Furniture and Furnishings of Old

We can learn a lot from our rural Irish ancestors, such as how to furnish our homes economically and sustainably. Farming families usually lived in relatively cramped spaces. All objects were hard won, would last for generations and were adapted to serve multiple functions.

Large families found ingenious ways to accommodate everyone at night. The dual-purpose settle bed was a bench that folded outwards to form a wide floor-level double bed. Placed near the fire, it conveniently contained its own bedding. When opened out, with its four enclosing high sides, it transformed into a playpen for a toddler. Other beds could be folded away or disguised to make the parlour more versatile. The most popular was the "press bed", which looked like a tall cupboard.

Worn out wooden cartwheels were frequently dismantled, and the spokes were used to make new ladders. The central hubs became stools, and the curved outer sections of the wooden rim (called 'felloes') made perfect rockers for wooden cradles.
In the 19th century, people made hanging cradles, which as the name suggests, were suspended from the roof. In coastal areas, driftwood was carefully collected and made into furniture.

A falling table was hinged up flat against the kitchen wall when no longer needed. It saved space, and used little timber, as it only needed one hinged leg to support it. Hen coops were often incorporated into the base of dressers. These enabled women on smaller farms to guarantee a good supply of eggs during the winter months, as hens benefitted from the light, warmth and extra food from indoors.

Butter boxes, once used to pack and transport 56lbs of butter were also saved and recycled. They could be turned upside down, immediately becoming a plain fireside stool, but with a little creativity, a hinged lid was often added, and paint and upholstery helped people create sewing boxes, with padded seats.

Hessian or woven cotton bags used to hold animal feed or flour were saved and soaked. They were then scrubbed to remove any print, and later resewn to make everything from pillowcases, quilts, tablecloths, curtains, clothing, babies' nappies, tea towels, bags and aprons. Recycling, reuse and resourcefulness went without saying. The old proverb "necessity is the mother of invention" was demonstrated daily.

Resources:
www.irishtimes.com
www.claudiakinmonth.ie

A brief history of the surname

CALVEY

Mac an Calbaig, M'Ecallough, M'Ecallowy, M'Icallowe, MacCalvey, Calvey; 'son of An Calbac' (an Irish personal name, meaning 'the bald); a rare surname.[1]
(Mac) Calvey, Calway: MacCalvey is recorded as a synonym of MacKelvey but Woulfe treats it as a different name, viz. Mac an Chalbhaigh (so it could be *calbach*, bigheaded). Modern statistics show that Calvey is mainly found in Cos. Mayo and Sligo.[2]
Of the nine Calvey births in Ireland in 1894 – including variants – all nine were in Co.Sligo.[3]

[1] Extract from '*Irish Names and Surnames'* Rev. Patrick Woulfe [2] Extract from *'The Surnames of Ireland'* by Edward MacLysaght,
[3] Extract from '*Matheson's Special Report on Surnames in Ireland'* by Robert E. Matheson.