

North Mayo Heritage Centre

NEWSLETTER



The
North Mayo
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Feature article
The Long Road to Land Ownership

Book of the Week
On a Wing and a Prayer



Cover image: Frank Davidson ploughing the new potato plot in the organic garden at the North Mayo Heritage Centre using his 1960 Fordson Major tractor.

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

THE LONG ROAD TO LAND OWNERSHIP

Towards the end of the Great Famine of 1845-50, it was clear as never before that while God may have created the blight, the system of land ownership in Ireland had created the catastrophe.

But the loss of some two million people hardly made a dent in that system. In 1870, half of all the land was in the hands of just 750 families.

Powerful political movements emerged in Ireland and at Westminster seeking radical measures and in 1879 the Irish Land War broke out with tenants resorting to rent strikes, boycotts and worse.

The British government responded with a series of measures to restrain the power of landlords. A Land Commission was set up in 1881 to facilitate transfers of land from landlords to tenants. In 1891, extra measures were set up for parts of the western seaboard, known as the Congested Districts.

As landlords resisted, the Irish Home Rule party in Westminster and the Land League in rural Ireland, kept up a relentless pressure and in 1903 and 1909 the British government introduced laws to force reluctant landlords to sell their estates to tenants. But progress was slow, one Mayo landlord was still carrying out evictions as late as 1916.

The 1916 Rising and subsequent War of Independence finally broke the resistance of reluctant landlords. Between 1903 and 1920, nine million acres had been transferred to tenants.

Following the partition of Ireland and the setting up of the new Irish Free State, the old Land Commission was reconstituted. The new government borrowed £30m from the British Government to lend to tenant farmers so that they could buy land from the Commission.

The Commission settled the Land Question in Ireland as far as the Free State was concerned.

... the reconstituted Land Commission became the most important (and controversial) government body operating in independent rural Ireland. It acted as a facilitator of social engineering, compulsorily acquiring lands from traditional landlords, large farmers, graziers and negligent farmers and passing it on to smallholders, former employees of acquired estates, evicted tenants and their representatives, members of the pre-truce I.R.A. and the landless. It moved over 14,500 farmers on to lands totalling over 382,000 acres.

(Terence Dooley, Land and Politics in Independent Ireland, Irish Historical Studies, xxxiv, no. 134; Nov. 2004)

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On a Wing and a Prayer

by Terry Reilly

The full history of a much ridiculed Airport in the West of Ireland, built in the 1980s by a 'simple country priest in a hurry.'

Buy online now from our ebay bookstore
€15 (+postage)

A brief history of the surname (O) SHEERAN, SHEERIN, Ó SÍRÍN:

A sept of the Donegal-Fermanagh area whence the name has spread as far southwards as Co. Leix. Syron of Co. Mayo is presumably a branch of this. The Co. Cork sept of Ó Sírin appears to be extinct.¹

Sheeran, Shirran, Sheeren, (O)Sherin, (O)Sherin, (O) Shirine, Ó Sírin: Descendants of Sírin a variant of Ó Síoráin.²

Of the 30 Sheeran births in Ireland – including variants – 18 occurred in Leinster, 2 occurred in Munster, 2 occurred in Ulster, and 8 occurred in Connacht

¹ 'The Surnames of Ireland' by MacLysaght

² 'Irish Names and Surnames' Rev. Patrick Woulfe, 1993 edition

A brief history of the townland of GARRYCLOON:

(Garrycloonagh, Garbh-Chluanach, rough lawn or meadow).

Located in the northern extremity of the parish of Backs/Kilbelfad, it contains 173 acres, 1 rood, 30 perches*.

The property of Arthur Pugh Stewart, Esq., Dublin. Let to 10 occupying tenants at will (with promise of lease) from 16 shillings to 23 shillings per acre yearly.

Co. Cess**, 2 shillings 8d. per acre. Tithe withheld. Soil, part sandy light clay, and part shallow, producing oats, barley and potatoes. No bog. The tenants pay for turbary £4 per acre at a distance of 3 miles from their dwellings. There are 5 forts in this townland and a pound for impounding cattle.

* 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'.