

GORTERMONE: WHAT DIFFERENCE A CENTURY MAKES IN A TOWNLAND?

STATISTICS FROM 1911 AND 2011 **South Leitrim** *Ciaran Mollahan*

ON SUNDAY April 10th 2011, the residents of Gortermone like the rest of the population of the Republic of Ireland did their civic duty and completed the census return form. A little over one hundred years earlier on April 2nd 1911, the residents in the same townland did likewise. The data from this census survived intact and is housed by the National Archives. Thanks to technological progress, it is available to view freely on the Internet. I used this facility and combined it with some local research to contrast the difference in statistics that a century has made in this rural townland.

Gortermone comprises 619 acres and is located in the southwest of Carrigallen parish. It forms the parish boundary with Aughavas in the North where it meets the townland of Corrigan. In the south is adjoins Firmullagh in the parish of Dromard and this point marks the county boundary between Leitrim and Longford. The bridge over the small river that runs from Gortermone Lake to Tully Lake at this point marks the provincial border between Connacht and Leinster. Interestingly Gortermone is located less than three miles from Moyne where the Longford-Cavan border exists and the provinces of Ulster and Leinster meet. It is unsurprising therefore, that some residents of Gortermone in both 1911 and 2011 were born in Counties Cavan and Longford as well as Leitrim.

Gortermone translates as Gort na Móna and means field of the bog. Contrary to what the name suggests, the townland boasts some of the best farming land in

the county and farming has been the mainstay of the region for the century on which we are reflecting.

From 1911 to 2011, the population of the Republic of Ireland has grown by 46% from 3,139,688 to 4,581,269. The Republic of Ireland did not exist in 1911 but we can tell from the census of Ireland of that year, how many comprised the population of the twenty six counties that it went on to form. The population of the county of Leitrim has fallen from 63,582 in 1911 to 31,778 in 2011. This reflects a 50% decrease in population across the century, a complete contrast to the Republic of Ireland as a whole as there is a delta of almost 100% between the two trends.

So how has the population of Gortermone fared over this period? In 1911 there were 109 people recorded on the Census in Gortermone. One hundred years later this has decreased to 55 people. This decrease of 50% reflects an identical trend to that of County Leitrim. The number of households has only decreased by four or 17%. The average household size has decreased from five to three.

A closer inspection of the demographics reveals some notable changes in Gortermone other than the sheer extent of the population decline from 1911 to 2011. The percentage of the population made up of by children has decreased from 32% to 25%. There are now a mere fourteen children under eighteen years of age in comparison to thirty-five a century earlier. In fact the average age of the populace has increased from thirty—three years of

age to forty—three years. The ratio of females to males has also increased over the past one hundred years. The percentage of females has grown from 46% to 49%. In numerical terms there is only one more male than female living in Gortermone in 2011 relative to a majority of nine in 1911.

The most striking change in one hundred years in Gortermone contained in the census statistics is the make up of the religious denomination of the population. In Ireland in 1911 Roman Catholics made up 74% of the population, Church of Ireland 13% and Presbyterians 10%. The religious make-up of Gortermone at this time did not conform to the national trend as 31% of its people belonged to the Church of Ireland faith with 69% members of the Roman Catholic Church. In 2011 100% of Gortermone's population are affiliated to the Roman Catholic Church. Although, the national breakdown of religions from the 2011 Census is not yet available, the 2006 Census of Ireland revealed that 92% of the population were Catholics and it is thought that this figure is unlikely to have grown significantly in the last five years. Therefore, once again the religious demographics in Gortermone buck the national trend.

In 1911 eighteen of Gortermone's twenty-three households cited farming as the lead profession or occupation. The head of the family of two of the outstanding households claimed agricultural labourer as their profession, a further family-head was a postman and there were two un-declared households for the question

of profession. Suffice to say that farming was the mainstay of the community with almost every household and family dependant on it for a living. In 2011 farming continues to be important for the people of Gortermone but their dependency on it has weaned significantly. Twelve of the eighteen households in 2011 have a primary interest in farming with five of these household-heads complementing their farming income with income from another profession or job.

Whereas a postman was the only non-farming occupation in Gortermone in 1911, in 2011 there are nurses, carers, teachers, Gardaí, bank officials, shop assistants and mechanical engineers amongst the professions of the population. In 1911 no female adults were attributed with a profession other than farmer's wife. Presumably the female folk were fully occupied with running the household and raising their respective family. This provides a marked contrast to the 2011 census where the majority of adult females are earning an income outside of the family home, amongst the professions mentioned above.

The most popular family name in Gortermone in 1911 was Cooke. There were seven households of Cookes, six of whom were of a Protestant faith. Today

there are two Cooke households in the townland. In 2011 the most popular family name is Donohoe with six households of that name. The Donohoes were well represented in 1911 also with four households accounted for. Two other family household names to survive the century are Farrelly and McIntyre — albeit that the latter was spelled McEntire in 1911. There were two McCabe households in 1911 but this family migrated the short journey to Tully, the next townland in the parish. The Mollahan surname featured in both censuses but there was not a household bearing that name in 1911. Family names that were present in 1911 but disappeared in the subsequent century include: Armstrong, Cavanagh, Cosgrove, Higgins, Lennon, Martin, Noble, McLoughlin, and O'Reilly. Names that featured in 2011 that were not present in 1911 include: Beirne, Doyle, Harte, Murray and Reynolds.

Migration and emigration was a constant theme for the people of Gortermone over this one hundred year period as people sought to make a living and avail of opportunities elsewhere. Gortermone was synonymous with both farming and education throughout this period. It boasted a national school that had been opened in 1891 and served the children of the hinterland until the times of its closing

in the 1970's. Today the old school serves as a holiday home for a Dublin family (not recorded in the 2011 census), the only such home in the townland. Gortermone Co-operative Creamery opened in 1927 to meet the needs of the local dairy farmers. This was later acquired by Killeshandra Creamery and was operational until the 1990's when the advance in technology and the decline in the popularity of dairy farming deemed it unnecessary. Consolidation of farming land was also a feature in the townland as an increase in farm sizes was necessary to provide a living for its decreasing population. The arrival of the tractor, the motorcar and the rural electrification scheme transformed the lives and behaviours of the residents of Gortermone during this period. However, the scenic view, the beauty and good nature of its people have remained a constant in Gortermone for the last one hundred years.

What will the 2111 Census of Ireland reveal of the townland of Gortermone? Only time will tell. Paddy Cooke, a veteran resident of Gortermone, noted in Carrigallen Parish A History (1996) "I cannot but detect a strong thread of resilience in the lives of the people of this area". This suggests that whatever it reveals, it will be favourable.

