

## Old Schoolhouses of Leitrim Border Region

**Enda O'Flaherty** (introduction by Myra Reynolds)

*Enda O'Flaherty is an Archaeologist and archaeological surveyor who lives in Cork and has been compiling a book about the Disused schoolhouses of Ireland. I spoke to him recently and this is what he told me.*

*'I've been working in Archaeology since 2005. My areas of specialism are geodetic and geophysical survey, landscape archaeology and looking at how people interact with the landscape around them. This project began quite simply by accident when I stumbled across a few of these schools by chance over a couple of days. After taking some photos at each the research began to grow organically until I realised I probably had enough material to publish a book on the subject.*

*I'm covering every county in Ireland though the majority of disused school houses are located in the areas formerly recognised as the congested district: primarily the north-west, west and south-west, and the border region. The book will be available nationwide in all good book shops from September 2018. Among the most interesting school houses were those located across Leitrim, Cavan and Longford; they indirectly tell the story of decades of emigration and depopulation in these forgotten and neglected parts of Ireland. I am also a PhD candidate at NUI Galway where my research involves a study of the significance of human settlement on and near the seasonal floodplains of turloughs. My areas of interest include: Landscape Archaeology, Cultural landscapes of historical Ireland, Interaction between people, place and landscape, and Digital Humanitie'.*



■ Gortahoose NS 1890 interior

### Gortahoose NS 1890

Just a few miles south-east of the town of Ballinamore in Co Leitrim, and set amongst the rolling, boggy drumlins and frequent small lakes, is the small rural village of Corrawaleen. During the first part of the 19th Century a small school house was located in the village and is marked on the First Edition Ordnance Survey map for the area. However, in 1890 a new school house was built in the nearby townland of Gortahoose just outside the village.

This school house still stands today. Though derelict and beginning to collapse, inside, it is in good condition, and the echoes of past schooling can almost be heard amongst the scattered school furniture. In bright daylight, the school rooms seem vibrant still.

The building comprises a detached four-bay single-storey former national school, built in 1890. It has a pitched slate roof with a red brick chimneystack, cast-iron rainwater goods and timber bracketed eaves. The external walls are pebble-dashed with a date plaque to the front elevation. Most of the glazing in the timber sash windows is broken and scattered inside.

This national school building type is found throughout County Leitrim. Some of the schools are still in use in a highly-altered form but this example retains its original plan and features.

In 1937 the Irish Folklore Commission, in collaboration with the Department of Education and the Irish National Teachers' Organisation, initiated a revolutionary scheme in which schoolchildren were encouraged



■ Gortahoose NS interior

to collect and document folklore and local history. Over a period of eighteen months some 100,000 children in 5,000 primary schools in the twenty-six counties of the Irish Free State were encouraged to collect folklore material in their home districts.

## Drumreilly NS

### *Kilnacreevey*

Every now and then I find myself on the road when I chance upon some old empty school house by a roadside somewhere. I wouldn't say that I've become obsessed with these abandoned buildings, but it recently occurred to me that in the past 12 months I've visited just over 100 tumbling down ruins of old schools, and that at the moment I feel compelled to stop and take a quick look around when I do accidentally stumble across one. While travelling from Ballymote to Armagh last month, I happened across a late 19th-century school house in the townland of Kilnacreevey in Co Leitrim.

County Leitrim is Ireland's least populous county, predomi-

nantly rural in character, with Carrick-on-Shannon being the most sizeable town of note. However, the countryside is stunning in an understated way, defined by rolling, boggy drumlins with small lakes interspersed between. The land is agriculturally poor, and the hollows between the drumlins tend to become water-logged and boggy. In 1837, the antiquarian Samuel Lewis described the region as 'generally wet, sour, and moory'.

I feel Samuel Lewis was a little unfair with his description of the region. In the area around Garadice Lough on the Leitrim/Cavan border, meandering country lanes navigate the hillocks and lakes, and lead from one small village to the next. It is on the northern shore of Garadice Lough that you'll find Kilnacreevy townland; a place that hasn't changed much in the past 100 years.

It was just a little over 100 years ago that a small one-roomed school house was built here overlooking the lakeshore. It is located on the northern side of the modern R199 road. The school building comprises a detached, single-storey, three-bay, one-roomed school house of rubble and brick construction, with a pitched slate roof. The date plaque indicates that it was constructed in 1887. It is near identical in form to the example from Sonnagh Old in Co Galway, and in a similar state of decay.

Comparing the First (1835-1845) and Second (1895-1907) Edition Ordnance Survey maps,



■ Drumreilly NS interior

you can see that the 1887 building replaced an earlier school house once located on the opposite side of the road. The 1887 building is clearly an OPW design, part of a significant school building movement in Ireland toward the end of the 19th century. On the First Edition Ordnance Survey sheet, another school was located beside the rectory just over a kilometre to the west in the townland of Killaphort. It's association with the Rectory here might suggest this was a Protestant School.

Although now derelict, this former school building retains much of its early character and form. Its simple symmetrical form is typical of the standard school buildings designed and built in great numbers by the Office of Public Works for the Board of Education during the late 19th-century, and in the first decades of independence, particularly from c.1925 to c.1939. This particular school was built in 1887. Its form suggests that it was originally built as a one classroom school

although this impression is undermined by the boundary wall to the rear, which divides the yard into two separate enclosed spaces. The school retains many original features that enhance the facade such as the slate roof, timber sash windows and the carved limestone with incised Gaelic script. This simple school building was of social importance to the local community and represents a modest addition to the built heritage of the local area.

### Carrigeencor NS 1872

Carrigeencor National School is located in the townland of Carrigeencor in Co Leitrim. The surrounding landscape comprises rural blanket bog with a sparse population. Nonetheless, Carrigeencor is one of two school houses located in the area, the other being Kilcoosey National School just 1.5 km away. Leitrim has suffered from rural depopulation more than most counties and today it is difficult to imagine that this area once required two schools.

The school house comprises a detached single-storey one room building with a lower projecting pitched-roof gable porch, and a rear extension with a lean-to roof. It has a pitched roof and the walls are rendered and scored to imitate cut-stone blocks. It was con-



■ Carrigeencor NS 1872

structed in 1872. There is a low coarsely built rubble and mortar wall to the front with a wrought-iron gate. To the rear is the former toilet block. It is a simple stone and mortar construction with brick lintels over the doorways and a sheet-metal roof that has managed to stand the test of time.

The description of the townland of Bohey in 1937, as gathered by Peggy Maxwell is particularly poignant is her sad description of local houses often being in ruins as the people of the townland were continuously forced to emigrate to Scotland and America:

■ Tullaghan NS mid-20th cent



This simple school house is a modest and functional building. The imitation cut-stone gives the building a pseudo-Victorian appearance despite its simple construction. Although it is not particularly striking from an architectural perspective, it stands as a testament to the scale of rural depopulation in the locality.

### Tullaghan

*Mid-20th cent*

I passed this disused National School just outside the seaside town of Bundoran in Co Donegal early one Monday morning. It is situated just off the N15 on the Sligo side of the town. It had no name plate or date that I could see, though it appears to be a recently abandoned mid-20th century school house.

*Our old Schoolhouses are a vital part of our heritage. It is wonderful to see some of them lovingly restored as homes. The lessons learned in these humble but wonderful buildings will never be forgotten.*



■ Dromahair NS



■ Carrigeencor NS 1872



■ Kilcosey 1913



■ Killargue 1956

# North West Leitrim National Schools

*Photos: Tony Fahy (except Creevlea)*



■ Killargue NS



■ Corderry



■ Drumkeerin



■ St Mary's NS Shannonview 1956



■ St Hugh's NS



■ Slievenakilla NS 1895



■ Urbal



■ Tullycacan



■ Glenboy NS 1896

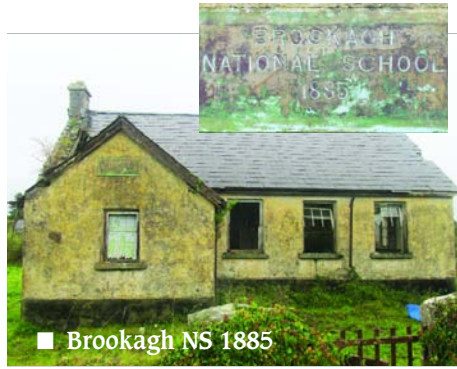


■ Meenymore

HERITAGE



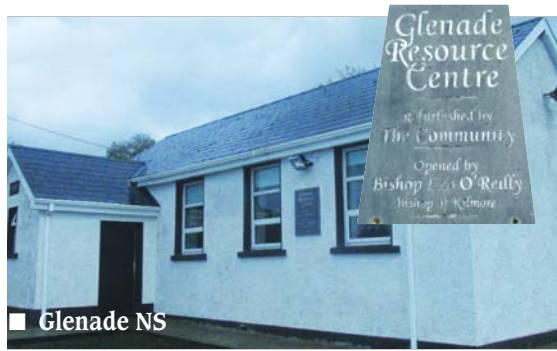
■ Comaloon NS 1891



■ Brookagh NS 1885



■ Difreen NS Glencar



■ Glenade NS



■ Killargue NS 1899



■ Manorhamilton NS 1779



■ Rossinver NS



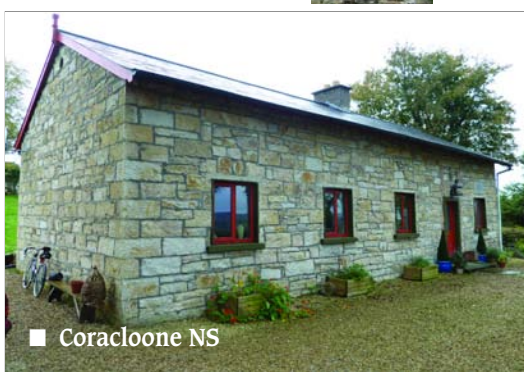
■ Tawnyunshinagh NS



■ Cullentragh NS



■ Carrigeengear NS



■ Coracloone NS



■ Kinlough NS



■ Tullaghan NS



■ Creevlea NS