

PLACES TO VISIT AND USEFUL CONTACTS

Muckross Traditional Farms

Muckross House
Killarney
Co Kerry
Manager: Toddy Doyle
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Museum of Country Life National Museum of Ireland

Turlough Park
Castlebar
Co. Mayo
Tel: 094 903751
Email: educationph@museum.ie

Kerry Bog Pony Village

Glenbeigh
Dingle
County Kerry
Web sites Kerrybogpony.ie
and kerrybogvillage.ie

Bunratty Folk Park

Bunratty
County Clare

National Ploughing Association

Fallaghmore
Athy
Co. Kildare
Tel: 059 8625125
Email: info@npa.ie

Irish Seed Savers Association

Capparoe
Scarrif
Co. Clare
Email: info@irishseedsavers.ie

Irish Agricultural Museum

Johnstown
County Wexford

Further reading:

Jonathan Bell and Mervyn Watson
A History of Irish Farming 1750 – 1950
(Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2008).

Reaping oats with a sickle

*An Initiative of The Heritage Council
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Ireland's Farming Heritage



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Ireland's Farming Heritage

During the early nineteenth century, cultivation declined in Ireland, and livestock farming regained its dominant position in Irish farming. Between 1850 and 1900 livestock numbers increased sharply, and this trend has continued almost unbroken.



A Connemara Pony, on the Aran Islands, County Galway. (Museum of Country Life, Castlebar).



A Kerry Bog Pony at the Kerry Bog Pony Village in Glenbeigh, County Kerry (John Mulvihill).



Kerry Cattle at Muckross Traditional Farms, Killarney, County Kerry (Toddy Doyle).

As early as the 1770s, Kerry cattle were recognised as valuable dual-purpose animals, kept for both milk and meat. Herd books for Kerry cattle, and the closely related Dexter breed, were kept from 1887.

Many parts of Ireland had their own local types of horses and ponies. Some of these are sadly extinct, but a few breeds are still doing well. Irish farm horses were developed to carry out a range of tasks; pulling farm implements, driving and riding. Irish Draught horses became a recognised breed in the early twentieth century, and a breed register was started in 1917. Connemara ponies were recognised as distinctive in the early nineteenth century, and a breed register was started in 1924.

LIVESTOCK



Galway sheep.

Sheep can be roughly divided into upland and lowland varieties. The most successful breeds of lowland sheep in Ireland were Roscommons and Galways, both of which still survive in small numbers.



Donkeys at Muckross Traditional Farms, Killarney, County Kerry (Toddy Doyle).

Donkeys became common on small Irish farms from the late eighteenth century. They were used for work in the fields and transporting goods and people.



'Irish Draught horse, 1905.

The RDS began giving grants for the improvement of indigenous farm horses in 1888. Irish Draught stallions were listed by the Department of Agriculture from 1905 onwards. Today Irish Draught Horses are bred with Thoroughbreds to produce the world famous Irish Hunter.

IRISH BREEDS AND TYPES OF LIVESTOCK

SURVIVING

Connemara Ponies
Irish Draught Horses
Kerry Bog Ponies
Kerry cattle
Dexter cattle
Irish Moiled cattle
Roscommon sheep
Galway sheep

EXTINCT

Cushendall Ponies
Greyhound Pigs
Large White Ulster Pigs
Wicklow Sheep
Kerry Hill Sheep
Irish Longhorn cattle

IRELAND'S FARMING HERITAGE

CULTIVATION



Ploughing with horses. The white horse is an Irish Draught.



Disused Cultivation ridges at the Deserted Village on Achill Island, Co. Mayo

During the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, Ireland's population was expanding very rapidly, and farmers moved on to land that had previously been seen as marginal waste. Potatoes were the food crop that allowed this expansion. Traces of disused potato ridges can still be seen in many areas today.



Michael J McKeown of Aghnaclyffe, County Longford, demonstrating the use of a loy spade.

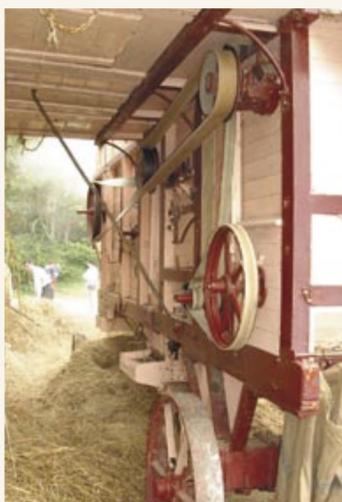
Spades were used in both small and large-scale farming. From the late eighteenth century onwards, hundreds of different types of spade were made in Ireland, designed to suit local conditions and tillage techniques. Some of these spade types are still used in small garden plots, and they can sometimes be seen in use at agricultural events.



Spadesmen in Waterford, 1824

A portable threshing machine in use at Muckross Traditional Farms, Killarney, County Kerry (Toddy Doyle)

Machines for threshing grain were installed from the early nineteenth century onwards. Many farms had threshing machines fixed inside a barn, and operated by horses. However, from the 1850s until well within living memory, many farmers preferred to hire a portable threshing machine for one or two days each year.



Champion ploughmen Jeremiah, John and Dennis O'Sullivan with the cups they won in County Cork in 1925.

The first farmers arrived in Ireland more than 6000 years ago and evidence for agricultural settlements and enclosure has been found from that period onwards. However, most of the landscape of fields enclosed with hedges and walls that we see today is relatively modern, dating from the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. This era has been called The Age of Improvement, when science and technology were used to create new implements, farming systems and livestock breeds.

The estate farms of some big landlords provide our best evidence of risky experimentation, either with large scale machinery such as steam ploughing equipment or the adoption of new ways of utilising older techniques such as working with oxen. At the level of medium sized tenant farms, we find the earliest evidence for the introduction of new, standardised farm machinery, such as all-metal ploughs, reaping machines or horse drawn potato diggers. These medium sized commercial farms were also in the forefront of the development and introduction of standardised breeds of farm livestock during the later nineteenth century.

In much of the west of Ireland, and especially on marginal land, many tenant farms were very small, and provision of a subsistence living for the farming family was a major goal. It is on farms such as these that we find the biggest reliance on manual labour, and also evidence for implements such as spades, sickles or flails, used in techniques which often showed great refinement in their adjustment to local conditions.

FARM CROPS

For most of the historic period, Irish farmers relied more on livestock than crop production. However, there was big swing towards arable farming from the middle of the eighteenth century. Between 1800 and 1815, the British were at war with Napoleon. This led to a huge demand for grain in England, and Irish farmers increased grain production to the extent that Ireland was called 'the Granary' of Britain.



Haymaking at Muckross Traditional Farms, Killarney, County Kerry (Toddy Doyle)

Haymaking was not common in Ireland before the mid-nineteenth century. By 1900, however, the swing to livestock farming meant that it had become the biggest crop.



An Old Long Beamed Irish plough pulled by four garrans in 1783.

These wooden ploughs were criticised because they required four or even six horses to pull them, along with two, or three men. However, they were very effective in turning heavy undrained ground, especially for wheat cultivation. The horse are Irish garrans, and they are wearing straw (súgán) harness.



Harvesting grain with a Ferguson tractor.

Fordson tractors were manufactured in Cork between 1918 and 1932. In the 1930s, County Down man Harry Ferguson's tractor revolutionised tractor design worldwide. Ferguson's tractor design allowed farmers to control machinery at the back of the tractor, at the same time as driving.



Threshing grain with a flail on Tory Island, County Donegal.

After grain has been cut, the seed has to be removed. Flails were used to beat the grain out of the heads.



Benny Moen reaping grain with horses in County Monaghan.

Cover photo: Making potato drills at Muckross Traditional Farms, Killarney, County Kerry (Toddy Doyle).

Drills are long, straight, equidistant rows. Planting crops in these rows meant that care and management of growing crops, and harvesting, could be mechanised. By the 1830s, many Irish farmers were growing potatoes in drills.



Spraying potatoes

The arrival of Potato Blight in Ireland in 1845 triggered the Great Famine in which around on million people died of disease and hunger. In the 1880s, it was discovered that Blight could be prevented by spraying the crop with a mixture of copper sulphate and lime.

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