Cultures and Lifestyles Revealed through Vernacular Interiors: Case Studies from Ireland

Barry O'Reilly
National Built Heritage Service, Ireland.
barry.o'reilly@housing.gov.ie

Received	Accepted	Published
03.08.2024	28.01.2025	31.01.2025

https://doi.org/10.61275/ISVSej-2025-12-01-09

Abstract

Henry Glassie's classic book, *Passing the Time* published in 1982 eloquently and highly readably integrates his informants' life stories with ethnography to provide insights into the generations of families who had occupied Irish vernacular houses. Some recent work has also given attention to interiors, but detailed studies, beyond some measured surveys and limited photography, are rare. In this context, this paper examines three houses with unusually well-preserved historic interiors, to unravel the lives of the inhabitants and the richness of the interiors, the death of whose last owners have prompted recent academic attention.

The research employs case study as a research method. It then uses documentation of the interiors and the histories of selected families as well as interviews as research techniques to examine the complex existence of the vernacular Irish house interiors. It approaches each interior largely from a museological and sociohistorical point; histories of the families of two houses have been recorded, with professional oral recording of an interview with one occupant. All the three houses have had complete collections of furniture, fittings and personal items. One house has had a preliminary assessment carried out and items repaired as needed; a second, the most liveable, had received both academic and public attention; and the third has had a full inventory carried out, with some objects deposited in a local museum and others in the National Museum of Ireland.

The findings highlight the need for these vernacular architecture interiors to be documented thoroughly. They divulge not only the organization of spaces and the furniture within them, but reveal the complexities of the lives of the families. The assemblages constitute the biographies of the occupants themselves. Indeed, they also offer deep insights into the intricate relations among the spaces, objects and people whose everyday lives unfold cultures and life styles, and enrich the society.

Keywords: Ethnology, Furniture and fittings, House interiors, Museology, Social life.

Introduction: Recording lived interiors

Studies of Irish vernacular houses have tended to focus almost exclusively on either plan forms or the thatched roofs; the interiors have rarely been examined in any detail. This is perhaps true of architectural studies in general or, as Glassie suggests, 'The lack of interest in

interiors is part of an art-historical orientation to architecture as a sort of sculpture that can be adequately represented by slides of elevations in dark classrooms' (1999:273)

An exception is a house in Wexford, in Southeast Ireland which came to academic attention in 1989. However, An obstacle to adequate study of Irish vernacular interiors has been the lack of guidelines or published material on the matter, although recent books on furniture have partly filled this gap. In fact, an in-depth study has been carried out about ten years later, as part of a pioneering conservation project, with inputs from a range of official bodies and specialists, the latter including museologists, paper and textile conservators, a folklorist and archaeologist, as well as a conservation architect and engineer (Reeners, 2003).

In this context, this paper examines the interiors of vernacular Irish houses; including this house among a few others. Its aim is to draw attention to and highlight the need for these vernacular architecture interiors to be documented thoroughly. Its objectives are as follows.

1. To record the biographies of the occupants and how they relate to the interiors.
2. To reveal the complexities of the lives of the families living in them.
3. To divulge the organization of spaces and the furniture within them.
4. To offer deep insights into the intricate relations among the spaces, objects and people whose everyday lives unfold cultures and life styles.

Theoretical Framework

Investigating the artifacts of everyday life, which are at the same time cultural heritage is, as Glassie (1999) suggests, a necessary corrective to the linear method of historical research. He sees that 'all objects [as] simultaneously sets of parts and parts of sets' (1999:47), all reflecting the thought processes that went into their manufacture and 'perpetually represents its composer, the man [or woman] who pounded steel and shaved wood' (1999:60); the same might apply to their acquisition and accumulation. However, as he goes on to contrast house exteriors and interiors: 'the house is often austere without and ornamented within, at once hard and soft, plain and fancy, restrained and expressive…the exterior unites the viewer and the occupant in rationality. Internally, the house comforts the body and delights the senses' (1999:271-2).

Birdwell-Pheasant and Lawrence-Zuñiga point out that there is 'a reciprocal influence of the domestic environment on actors who find their daily activities both enabled and constrained by the physical character of the house and its contents. Houses are encoded with practical meanings denoting proper spaces for preparing food and eating, sleeping, storing possessions' [but also having] 'complex symbolic meanings, expressing identity, status and the good life, which, coupled with their practical dimensions, endow houses with the power to communicate, represent, influence and teach'(1999:9).

Steadman (2015) adds that historiography of the social archaeology of houses, is necessary to understand the intricate relations that exist there. He notes that 'the house was increasingly recognized not just as a node of economic behaviour but as a symbolic container of a culture's ideologies' (2015:14). He points out that a house possesses 'the expression of wealth, status, and power…as shrine or site of ritual action', and 'as seat of all critical human cultural institutions' (2015:16). Finally, it is Cooper (1974) who shows that indeed 'a house is a symbol of self' and that its interiors do so profusely. These theoretical ideas provide the framework for the examination of the vernacular interiors of the houses in Ireland.

Review of Literature

Study of Irish Vernacular Interiors

The literature on vernacular interiors in Ireland is rather slim although some recent work has also given attention to interiors (Kinmonth, 1993 and 2006; McKenna, 2022). The earliest contributions, published between 1887 and 1925 have focused on rushlights, made from rushes dipped in liquid animal fat.[1] However, it was not until the geographer E. Estyn

[1] The earliest is French (1887-91)

Evans (1942) that the vernacular interior received a broader treatment, encompassing the hearth and items associated with food. In his 1957 book, he has devoted multiple chapters to the hearth, furniture and fittings, and lighting. Similarly, Gailey (1966), Aalen (1967) and O'Neill (1977) have focused on larger items of furniture. Harris (1966), has also written about household textiles in the form of patchwork quilts.

Nevertheless, it was Glassie (1982) who has broken the mould with his ethnographical work, *Passing the Time*, which places the household's possessions firmly in the context of family and society, with a strong emphasis on meaning and symbolism. To add, later publications, such as Danaher (1985), Gailey (1984) Loughnan (1984) and Cotton (1989) have taken a more traditional approach. However, Gailey touched on societal aspects, describing the parlour as being 'almost a ritual corner of the dwelling, seldom used, a room to which all the 'best' things were sent to get them out of the way of the bangs and knocks inevitable in daily activities elsewhere'(1984:211). Gailey, as many writers do, highlights the centrality of the kitchen as a multi-purpose space. It is close in concept to a medieval hall but also, interestingly, to recent kitchens of open-plan design.

A sea change has taken place with Kinmonth's *Irish Country Furniture* (1993). The most prolific student of vernacular furniture, her approach pays due attention to the craftspeople responsible for creating these items. Her *Irish Rural Interiors in Art* (2006) has gone further in presenting vernacular interiors as portrayed in paintings and sketches by Irish artists. This work richly illustrates the great variety of everyday furniture, utensils and wall-hung items in their settings. The chapter headings–'Hearth', 'Dresser, display and colour', 'Women and work', 'Beds and ways of sleeping', 'Weddings and wakes', 'Holy days and holidays'–cover key aspects of and approaches to interior furnishings, relating to social custom as well as the utilitarian. Corlett (2014) and McKenna (2022) have also published books on the vernacular houses of counties Wicklow and Offaly, respectively, amply illustrating the interiors.

There are also many fine archival photographs and drawings of interiors in national collections. Of course, museums have displays and collections of objects from vernacular houses too. However, few writers appear to engage with the generational accumulation within lived interiors. Works like 'The Making of Home' by Flanders (2014) is an exception. Nevertheless, a focus on the housing of the wealthy, and relatively little analysis of the of house interiors–that contributes so much to what makes a house a home–suggests that this aspect of vernacular architecture appears to be rather neglected. In this context, this paper make a distinct contribution to address that gap in research and knowledge on vernacular interiors.

Research Methodology

Recording the house interiors

This paper examines vernacular interiors of houses. To do so, a methodology is needed that encompasses moveable as well as fixed items, small as well as large, and those for display as well as those of a utilitarian nature. This research employs case studies as a methodology and inventories, and documenting of objects and family histories as the major data collection techniques. Interviews have been employed, which record personal experiences.

Creating an inventory was not an easy task. Knowing when to stop is a challenge, as the tendency is to record absolutely everything. A strong case, however, was made for doing just this, as such an approach reflects the totality of the occupants' lived experience within the house.

In practice, some limits have been imposed to make the research feasible. Spreadsheets were a convenient way of managing and listing objects, and were searchable. A reference, based on a space or part of a space (e.g. a wall) is useful, with further data as necessary (e.g. a particular shelf of a dresser), the object type, material, other details (e.g. the nature of decoration, carving, any lettering, etc.) and current habitat (the object may be *in situ*, or moved to a museum. When done, they were tagged or marked with a museum accession reference. Some objects are within other objects, such as keepsakes kept in a tin, or a bowl sitting within another bowl.

As said, the focus of this paper is the interiors of three specimen vernacular houses. In each case a museological approach has been taken to record and assess the interiors and their contents, and to establish their collective significance. Three case studies were chosen: Wexford house, a House in the County Offaly, and a House in the County Carlow, in Ireland.

In the case of the Wexford house, each object was photographed and tagged with an accession number related to the building, because many needed to be moved out to temporary storage while conservation repairs were being undertaken to the structure of the building. However, some objects have not been returned to the building and are currently on view at a site 12km distant in an exhibition relating to the house and farm.

A key aspect is the ensemble–none of the items exists on its own, but as part of a family or owner's lifetime's accumulation. Some items are purchases, some are gifts, some are 'found' objects, some were made for the house and some were, or may have been, made in the house itself. Some items, otherwise utilitarian in nature, such as a horseshoe, or tongs for the fire, may also have supernatural aspects and a simple listing or description of outward character might play down the significance of some objects for the occupant who, usually subconsciously, has created the interior.

Recording the 'atmosphere' of an interior was also carried out, although they are very personal to the visitor. In this research, it has been accomplished as being akin to describing one's travel through a vernacular settlement–not knowing what to expect because of the 'vernacularity' of the place, coupled with an awareness of being within a person or family's private domain. If the occupants were present, curiosity was restrained. However, the recorder was, always respectful and professional.

Fig. 1: Kitchen of the Wexford house
Source: Photographic Archive, National Monuments Service,1998

Consideration of the interiors and contents of this house has been quite thorough. Recording and analysis have involved a wide range of practitioners–folklorists and ethnologists, an archaeologist, a professional photographer, vernacular furniture specialist, textile conservator, paper conservator, other museum personnel, historic thatch specialist, a botanist and a biologist. This level of specialist intervention for a vernacular building is unique for Ireland. Physical conservation of the structure involved a conservation architect,

conservation engineer, architecture students (who participated in the physical conservation, including mud-wall repair), woodworm infestation specialists and steel erectors (for a freestanding shed installed over and around the building to protect it during the repair works) (Fig. 1).

For the other houses, the focus of study was more an exploration to assess significance, but for the vast majority of vernacular houses in general, there is a need for fieldwork to determine which ones have interiors of cultural heritage interest. To date, reports have been produced by Kinmonth (2017, 2024) for the Offaly and Carlow houses, respectively. In these cases, the focus has been on the larger wooden items–the dresser, settle bed, food press, corner cabinet, beds, tables and chairs. Tagging for record purposes has not been done, because these buildings are still habitable and tagging would create an unduly 'museumified' environment.

In Irish vernacular studies, relatively little attention is paid to the smaller, more personal items, such as pictures and calendars, and religious objects such as statues and devotional lights (red for the Sacred Heart of Jesus, blue for the Sacred Heart of Mary) hung around the walls. This study however paid attention to everyday utensils, crockery and textiles, as is oral/video recording of family members detailing the history of the houses and their occupants.

Photography, whether of individual objects, rooms or parts of rooms has produced the most accessible presentation of the interiors and their contents. In the image, the eye is drawn from one item to another, whether it be an object or wall covering, an everyday, utilitarian object or something prized and highly decorative.

Findings

Case Study 1: House in County Wexford[2]

In January 1989, this house was brought to the attention of the writer and the Department of Irish Folklore, University College Dublin by the curator of the Irish Agricultural Museum, sited nearby. We immediately recognized the interior as being of the highest significance. When the bachelor owner died in mid-1996, it became evident that the building was at risk of falling into decay, although it was several years before a major conservation project was begun. As the last occupant had willed the property to his kind neighbour who lived in his own house down the road, maintenance of the building has been a serious challenge. In fact, at this stage, the house again needed an extensive programme of repair, but this time against the background of likely transfer to public ownership.

The building had a hipped thatched roof with a substructure of rough boughs and wattle-work borne on mainly mud walls with much evidence of unfired mud brickwork. Accommodation comprised of a large kitchen occupying the northern half of the building, with a parlour and a further section divided into a dairy and a bedroom occupying the southern half. There are two loft bedrooms over the southern half and the kitchen, not untypically, is open to the apex of the roof.

The last occupant was a thatcher and this is perhaps the reason why the house remained in good condition as long as it had. He was a man who appears to have kept everything and cast away nothing. The house has never had electricity or running water. He has cooked on the open hearth, which essentially provided the only heat in the house. In former times, bread has been baked in a rare Irish example of a wall oven built into one side of the hearth and this feature dates the building to a quarter-century either side of the year 1700. The hearth crane is timber, the canopy overhead being of unfired mud brick, an exceptionally rare feature.[3]

The range of furniture and fittings in this house is exceptional and features strongly in Kinmonth's 1993 work (Fig. 2). There is the traditional wooden dresser with its display of mass-produced crockery and utensils, but the dresser is set on an earthen plinth and fixed into the mud rear wall of the house. Bench seats are homemade or recycled; upstairs, there is a bed with a cloth canopy. The hearth is wide and voluminous, with a canopy of unfired mud brick.

[2] For an account of this house and the conservation work carried out on it, see Reeners, 2003

[3] Until recent years it was believed to be unique to the house; since then, two more have come to light.

The floor of the kitchen is mud. A 'stillion' (stone shelf) inside the door was where crocks of water and milk were kept cool. Framed religious prints, family photographs, religious and farming-themed calendars covered the walls[4]; some items had an added border made from the silver foil of beef stock cubes. A horseshoe nailed to the wooden bressamer spanning the hearth speaks of the protective power of iron. Halfway between more orthodox religion and folk custom, a broken crucifix and a headless holy statue have been pushed into the underside of the thatch.

Fig. 2: Kitchen of the Wexford house
Source: Photographic Archive, National Monuments Service,1998

The most intriguing group of objects found in this interior comprises twelve examples of *greim gamhna* or *dúilín* [Irish, 'calf bit'], i.e. a calf's afterbirth. This spongy tongue of tissue was traditionally supposed to be sucked on by a calf while in the womb and was considered to offer protection to the household, particularly to prevent the magical theft of the farm family's output ('profit') of butter. It was carefully picked out from the afterbirth and, in this case, placed in mainly cotton pouches tied with cord to the main roof timbers of the kitchen (Fig. 3).

[4] Most of these items have now been removed for safekeeping.

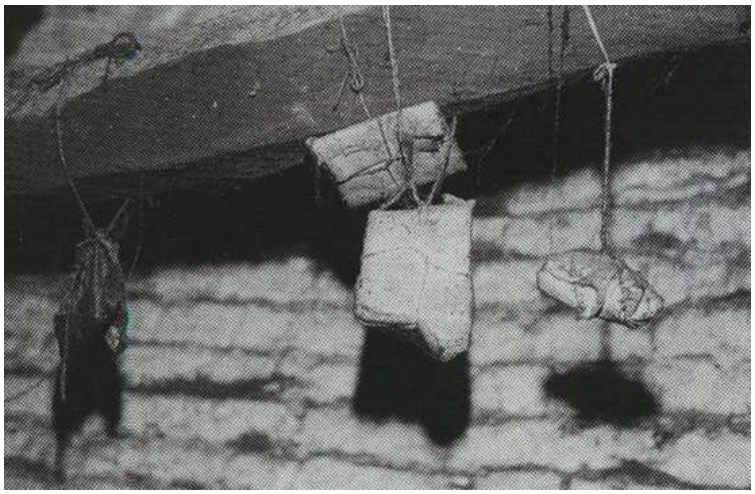

Fig. 3: Greimeanna gamhna hanging from the roof timbers
Source: Ní Fhloinn, 1998

The parlour room, behind the hearth, provides a formal contrast to the kitchen, having furniture more typical of the 'Big House' (dwelling of a colonial-era landlord), a fireplace with moulded wooden surround, a corner cabinet for chinaware and glass, as well as family photographs, religious prints and a photograph of the nineteenth-century Irish nationalist leader, Charles Stewart Parnell. Furnishings in the bedrooms include brass and canopy beds, chests and trunks for clothes, and wash stands.

O'Dowd (2003) conveys the experiential: 'There was poignancy both to opening the various containers and discovering their contents. With this came an awareness that the people who had placed them there were no longer with us–we were now looking into some of the personal detail and privacy of their lives' (2003:100) and 'Unlike the atmosphere and ambience of the kitchen which still retains much of its lived-in feel, first impressions indicated that the parlour had not been used for its set purpose for quite a long time' (2003:103).

Case Study 2: A House in the County Offaly

In 2017, Offaly County Council was approached by the owner's children for advice on maintaining and conserving their old family home. This led to a visit by Kinmonth, who studied the larger items in the house.[5] Subsequently, an account of the history of the family, along with many photographs of house contents was published by the county's conservation architect.[6]

The house, built some time before 1840, has been modernized to some degree, with electricity and running water provided, and a new kitchen and bathroom extension added, in the mid-to late 20th century. The current owner has lived in his own house nearby, since he married in 1966, but cared for his two uncles, his mother and his aunt, until the latter, the last occupant, died in 1997. According to the family, 'the door was never closed and the fire was not allowed to go out.[7] The extended…family continue to keep the house and [their antecedents] alive, sharing stories and histories, providing a link to relations both far and near'.[8] The family has carefully maintained the building in a way that has retained its vernacular character to a degree that is highly unusual in Ireland: a country still gripped by a tendency to build a new house rather than renovate or, even more rarely, gently rehabilitate an older building.

[5] Kinmonth, 2017
[6] McKenna, 2022
[7] This echoes the old, widespread tradition of not letting the fire go out, except at very particular times, such as a death in the family and on May Day.
[8] McKenna, 2022, p.28

Fig. 4: Kitchen of the Offaly house
Source: O'Reilly, 2017

On visiting, it was immediately apparent that the hearth is literally and figuratively the heart of the house (Fig. 4).[9] Its scale and the variety of interesting objects associated with it were unmissable. It was observed that the family light the fire every day, an act that is truly symbolic, reifying continuity with their forebears. At the opposite end of the kitchen is a partition between it and a dairy and a bedroom. Two large items of furniture–a dresser and a food cupboard–are set against the partition, flanking the doorway, and above was another doorway; the latter giving access to a loft room. The dresser is a fine example with a good display of 'delph' (crockery) and the press is a rare surviving specimen. Next to the dresser is a grid-iron and two flesh forks, exceptionally rare, if not unique outside a museum.

A settle bed (bench during the day and potential bed at night) occupied the rear wall of the kitchen; a window with a table beneath and a mug rack occupied the front wall. This represents a highly typical collection and arrangement of vernacular furniture, but the preservation and quality are rare. It was noted that the family opens the house to 'open-day' visits for the general public and continue to carefully tend the building in honour of their predecessors, earning a recent 'Heritage Heroes' award for their dedication to cultural heritage (Fig. 5).

[9] In the English language, as spoken in Ireland very many people don't sound 'th' in words, thus 'hearth' and 'heart', fortuitously, frequently sound the same.

Fig. 5: Daughters of the last occupant of the Offaly house, in conversation with vernacular furniture historian, Claudia Kinmonth
Source: O'Reilly,2017

Case Study 3: A House in the County Carlow

This site came to notice when this small tillage farm came into the ownership of a young farming family in 2024 as an out-farm to their own property that stands some kilometres away. Recognizing its potential heritage value, they contacted the local authority heritage officer, who in turn informed the writer.

The site comprises a dwelling house that faces a courtyard of granite outbuildings with roofs of corrugated iron. To one side is a second farmyard having small granite structures facing a large corrugated-iron haybarn with later wings added. The dwelling house and outbuildings closest to it predate 1839; the rest have been built by 1905.

Fig. 6: The Carlow house
Source: Author,2024

The dwelling house has a relatively unprepossessing, quite modernized exterior, although the small size of windows is unusual and intriguing (Fig. 6). The interior contains six rooms–the kitchen and, behind this, the parlour unusually accommodating the stairs to a loft bedroom above, and a dairy and further bedroom at the opposite end of the ground floor. The furniture, furnishings and fittings are largely preserved and represent a very complete collection of vernacular contents. The dresser, with its fine display of serving dishes and plates, is not untypical; there is also a settle bed and various items of built-in furniture. There is a fine range of pictures on the walls, some of family members, others being mass-produced prints of landscapes and other subjects.

Fig. 7: The last occupant of the Carlow house
Source: Author, 2024

The last owner has been a bachelor farmer (Fig. 7). The house has had no electricity until 2001, when a cousin has had the building wired and has also installed an Aga cooker. Indeed, this has marked the end of, if it can be said, a vernacular way of occupying the house, although the wheel bellows that allowed air from outside to increase the draught to the hearth fire was still retained. This modernization has been, however, carried out against the occupant's wishes: the latter has missed the open hearth so much that he has taken to use the parlour room behind the hearth wall.

Interestingly, as the last occupant has been a member of the Protestant community, the house lacks the usual paraphernalia associated with most houses in the predominantly

Catholic Irish Republic, such as holy pictures and the Sacred Heart lamp. Instead, there were documents that reflected his different ethno-religious background, as well as a more than usual proliferation of secular pictures (Fig. 8).

Fig. 8: Pictures hanging on the walls of the parlour in the Carlow house
Source: O'Reilly,2024

In addition to the writer's own photographs, notes and sketch plan of the building, Kinmonth has also carried out a report on the furnishings and their significance in the Irish context[10].

Analysis and the Discussion

There are many categorizations under which the objects, furnishings and fittings in the vernacular interiors can be analysed, amongst which are those items that:

1. Reflect basic household functions, utility and convenience, such as cooking and eating, washing and cleaning, resting and sleeping.
2. Display craftsmanship and some decoration (in reality most, if not all objects).
3. Are personal to the family, such as photographs and documents.
4. Form a linkage with faraway places.
5. Recall political events.
6. Manifest family pride and status.
7. Signify consumption and accumulation/accretion.
8. Are recycled from other items.
9. Symbolize the religious practice.
10. Relate to folk beliefs.
11. Relate to entertaining family or visitors.
12. Recall the traditional economy and farming.

As can be seen, the vernacular furniture of the three houses is modest, relatively recent and subtly decorative in nature when compared to that of the country's nearest neighbours. Certainly, economic hardship, insecurity of tenure and the absence of self-determination (until 1922) would have negatively affected what might have been a different trajectory. The most eye-catching piece, the dresser, often has had a hen coop in the base; and the settle was a bench by day and could be opened out as a bed at night. Such multifunctional character to furniture

[10] Unpublished report for Carlow County Council, 2024.

reflects the generally small spaces within Irish vernacular houses. Larger, especially two-storey houses, and those of early date (say 1650-1750), such as the Wexford house, may have a richer assemblage of more decoratively treated items. Nevertheless, all houses display the craft of the carpenter/joiner, blacksmith and tinsmith, potter (some local, much imported), the basket-weaver and straw-worker.

The interiors present both inward-looking and outward-looking aspects. Family photographs, certificates and awards are proudly displayed in the kitchen or the parlour (the 'good room') and there are also some official documents, such as rent records (Fig. 9). The Offaly house has a domestic science copybook from 1909 with recipes for bread and meals, and careful instructions for carrying out various household tasks; the same house has a wall clock imported from the USA. Much of the crockery and the metal pots in the three interiors have been imported from Britain. The Catholic households display photographs of political figures associated with the struggle for independence–Charles Stewart Parnell in the parlour of the Wexford house and Éamon de Valera over the hearth of the Offaly one.

Fig. 9: Parlour of the Offaly house
Source: O'Reilly, 2017

The three houses all feature a dresser, the most identifiable item of Irish vernacular furniture. Its size, degree of decorative carving and moulding, and the quality of the plates, serving dishes, spit-irons, mugs, spoons and so on signify the family's relative comfort and disposable income. The accumulation of items dates from about 1800 onwards in the Offaly and Carlow case studies and from, perhaps about 1750 in the Wexford one. The latter has two benches under the hearth canopy that have been made up from the other items, perhaps including a bed end. It is evident in the Wexford house that thrift and conservatism have been strong determinants in the survival of so much that has been lost elsewhere.

Fig. 10: A bedroom in the Offaly house
Source: Author,2017

Interestingly, religion features very strongly in the three houses and, notably, the various rooms and spaces are treated differently–the parlour lacks religious items, but the small furnishings of bedrooms are dominated by religious items (Fig. 10). The kitchens of two have a mix of items that reflect secular society, Catholicism and folk belief. The most typical items in the Catholic houses are framed religious prints–e.g. a print of the Sacred Heart of Mary is to be seen on the partition in the Offaly kitchen and one of the Sacred Heart of Jesus in the front window, the latter with a perpetual light below. The Offaly house has two draught horseshoes fixed to the mantlepiece and the Wexford house has a horseshoe fixed to the hearth beam, but this house also has the remarkable collection of 'calf bits': an especially interesting example of apotropaic magic.

Conclusions

This paper concludes that the interiors of vernacular houses in Ireland are complex settings. Wexford house is one that could probably never be occupied again without fundamentally compromising its historic authenticity and quality. Both of the others could be lived in, if the new occupants were happy to live in interiors that in many respects are museums. In all three cases, however, the approach has been to retain the buildings essentially as museums to an older way of living–this paper argues that this is the correct approach.

The principal significance of the three houses is the high degree of preservation of their interiors. The contents represent the accumulation of furnishings and documents accumulated by the families over two or three centuries, frozen at a point within the last few decades. Many of these items have been mass-produced outside the district or, more commonly, outside the country, allowing the family to participate in a wider world, as well as displaying their tastes and aspirations. Some items have been made by the local blacksmiths and furniture makers and other objects may have been made inside the house.

The recognition of intact interiors such as these urges us to explore beyond the architecture of houses, *per se*, to document the families and the myriad items accumulated over generations that see such places as invaluable repositories of cultural heritage. This paper concludes that it is all the more urgent at a time of great housing pressure, with a need to institute policies to ensure good recording and, where warranted, statutory protection.[11]

Indeed, what remains to be done for all the three houses is a detailed architectural study–a traditional measured survey or perhaps the 'point cloud' technique and a study of surfaces, but most interesting might be a more experiential approach.

[11] The author has set up a Vernacular Interiors Study Group with these intentions in mind.

It is envisaged that all the three houses will be maintained as museums, to facilitate an appreciation and understanding of the lifestyles of our predecessors, but other, as yet undiscovered, interiors of similar significance may be vulnerable to unsympathetic new owners. While museums of folklife and history are valuable places of education, nothing compares to the value of experiencing a complete assemblage of cultural heritage objects in an authentic lived interior, such as in the case studies presented here.

Funding

This research has not received any funding.

Note:

An earlier version of this paper has been presented at the ISVS-13 Seminar held in Colombo in November 2024. The author wishes to thank the peer reviewers before, during the seminar as well as afterwards, which have immensely elevated the quality of the paper.

References

Aalen, F.H.A. (1967) 'Furnishings of the traditional houses in the Wicklow hills', *Ulster Folklife*, 13, 61-8.

Birdwell-Pheasant, D. and Lawrence-Zuñiga, D. (1999) (eds.) *House Life: space, place and family in Europe* (London and New York: Berg,.

Corlett, C. (2014) *Wicklow's Traditional Farmhouses* (Wicklow: Wicklow County Council).

Cotton, B.D. (1989) 'Irish vernacular furniture', *Regional Furniture*, 3, 1-13.

Cooper, C. (1974) House as a Symbol of Self, In: Land, J. (Edited) Designing for Human Behavior, Stroudsburg: Dowden, Hutchinson and Ross, 130-146.

Danaher, K. (1985) *The Hearth and Stool and All: Irish rural households* (Dublin and Cork: Mercier Press).

Evans, E.E. (1942) *Irish Heritage: the landscape, the people and their work* (Dundalk: W. Tempest)

French, Rev. J.F.M. (1887-91) 'On a manner of lighting houses in old times', *PRIA*, series 3:1, 626-30.

Flanders, J. (2014) *The Making of Home*, London: Atlantic Books.

Gailey, A. (1966) 'Kitchen furniture', *Ulster Folklife*, 12, 18-34

Gailey, A. (1984) *Rural Houses of the North of Ireland*, Edinburgh: John Donald.

Glassie, H. (1982) *Passing the Time: folklore and history of an Ulster community* Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press.

Glassie, H. (1999) *Material Culture,* Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press.

Harris, K. (1966-7) 'Patchwork quilts', *UFTMYB*, 16-21.

Kinmonth, C. (1993) Irish Country Furniture 1700-1950 (New Haven and London: Yale University Press).

Kinmonth, C. (2006) Irish Rural Interiors in Art, New Haven and London: Yale University Press.

Kinmonth, C. (2017) Carrigeen Farmhouse, Fivealley, Birr, County Offaly Unpublished report for Offaly County Council.

Kinmonth, C. (2024) Boghouse, County Carlow, An Unpublished report for the Carlow County Council.

Loughnan, N. (1984) *Irish Country Furniture* (No.46 in Irish Heritage Series) Dublin: Eason and Son.

McKenna, R. (2022) *Traditional Architecture in Offaly: history, materials and furniture 1800 to present day*, Tullamore: Offaly County Council.

Ní Fhloinn, B. (2003) 'Mayglass: some evidence from the oral record' in Reeners, R. (comp. and ed.) (2003) *A Wexford Farmstead: the conservation of an 18th century farmstead in County Wexford*, Kilkenny: The Heritage Council, 56-76.

O'Dowd, A. (2003) 'Séamus Kirwan's home: its furniture and furnishings and a contribution to the tradition of the *greim gamhna*' in Reeners, R. (comp. and ed.) (2003) *A Wexford*

Farmstead: the conservation of an 18th century farmstead in County Wexford, Kilkenny: The Heritage Council, 93-120.

O'Neill, T.P. (1977) *Life and Tradition in Rural Ireland*, London: J.M. Dent and Sons Ltd.

Reeners, R. (2003) *A Wexford Farmstead: the conservation of an 18th century farmstead in County Wexford*, Kilkenny: The Heritage Council.

Steadman, S.R. (2015) *Archaeology of Domestic Architecture and the Human Use of Space*, Walnut Creek: Left Coast Press Inc.