

Island Images:
*From the Chambers
Archive, 1929-1938*



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*From the Chambers
Archive, 1929-1938*

Galway County Council Archives

*'...to acquire, preserve and make accessible the
documentary memory of county Galway'*

Galway County Council Archives

George Chambers was a different man...

*He had very early found a way, a philosophy of life, which
was in some ways spartan, without excluding pleasure. He did
not wish to compromise with the second-rate, whether in the
material, the social or the moral sphere. The writings of William
Morris coloured much of his social thinking: rank meant
nothing to him, the man was everything.*

Spoken at the funeral of George Chambers by his son, Ivan, 1960 (GP9/6)

'Himself', George Chambers, Galway, 1931 (GP9/1)

Contents

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Acknowledgements



'A Wayside Well',
Arranmore, Co.
Donegal, 1932
(GP9/3)



'My Host John Lynch',
Valentia Island, Co.
Kerry, 1938
(GP9/5, p6)

Galway County Council Archives wishes to thank the contributors to this publication. When the archivists and heritage professionals, each representing the different areas visited by Chambers, were invited to contribute to the publication they were immediately enthused and supportive. Generous with their time and expert knowledge in providing us with informative and insightful essays, Chambers' photograph albums have been clearly put into context. They have skillfully brought the archival material to light and life. We sincerely thank Dr Niamh Brennan, Rory Bunce, Dr Jim Higgins, Michael Lynch and Catherine Wright.

To the many institutions and archives which have provided us with access to their sources and material. We are especially indebted to Andrea King, Archivist at Ardingly College, Haywards Heath, West Sussex, England, Muireann Ní Cheárna and all the team at Ionad an Bhlascaoid - The Blasket Centre, Co. Kerry, and Claire Doohan and the staff at the National Folklore Collection at University College Dublin.

To our colleagues in Galway Public Libraries, in particular Aoife O'Kelly for expert editing, proofreading and advice, and to Bernie Kelly (A/County Librarian), Sharleen McAndrew, Aisling Mitchell and Josephine Vahey for their ongoing support and assistance. Also, to Galway County Council Arts Office and Creative Ireland Culture teams.

Introduction



'In the Mountains', Arranmore, Co. Donegal, 1932 (GP9/3)



'Island Carriers', Aran Islands, Co. Galway, 1931 (GP9/1)



'Going to the Mountain Bog', Clare Island, Co. Mayo, 1937 (GP9/4)

The George Chambers collection of photograph albums presents a wonderful and important record of island life in Ireland, from 1929 to 1938. The collection is comprised of five albums, each of which focuses on one or more islands along the coast of Ireland. We are fortunate in Ireland that a large corpus of photographs of our islands over the centuries exist and are preserved in our local and national institutions, such as in archives, libraries and museums. Many of these collections were compiled by individuals and organisations whose purpose in visiting the islands was to study the Irish language and culture, for ethnological or archaeological investigations, or compiled for commercial purposes. The Chambers photographs are different, they simply give an English gentleman tourist's sympathetic perspective of the rugged landscape, the people and their lives as witnessed by him during his summer vacations.

Despite the geographical spread of the islands on the Atlantic Ocean, from the furthest south-west coast to the most northerly coast of Ireland, the images in the Chambers' albums illustrate that despite their isolation from the mainland and distance from each other, the islanders lived very similar lives. There are common themes and scenes throughout: thatched dwellings, stone walls, lighthouses, cliffs, donkeys, turf bogs, currachs, laughing barefoot children, dark-cloaked women and flat-cap wearing men. Island life in all its guises is captured by Chambers in a very accessible and honest manner, with sensitivity, grace and humour.

The Chambers Archive collection, held by Galway County Council Archives, also includes a file of material (GP9/6) primarily comprised of a typescript proof, including a foreword by Chambers, for what would ultimately result in the publication *Letters from the Great Blasket*¹. The selection of letters² from Eibhlís Ní Shuilleabháin to Chambers are an important account of island life, but equally are testament to the strong connection and friendship formed between Eibhlís (also known as Lís) and George, during his first visit to the island in 1931. It would seem that Chambers compiled Eibhlís's letters and penned a foreword for an intended publication. However, he never saw it in print, as he died in 1960, and the book was not published until 1978. Perhaps it was his son,

Ivan (who spent his career working for Bryce's bookshop in London) who arranged through his various publishing contacts to have it edited and finally published, or perhaps the Chambers family returned the letters to Eibhlís's family, who then arranged the publication³.

The file (GP9/6) also includes the text of the eulogy '*Spoken at the Funeral of George Chambers by his son, Ivan*'. It helped enormously with research into trying to establish exactly who George Chambers was, as up to 2010 he had remained something of a mystery, simply known as the man from London.

The five albums in the collection, each referenced from GP9/1 to GP9/5, are comprised of captioned black and white photographs, not all of professional standard, but nevertheless of good amateur quality. The captions themselves reflect something of Chambers wry sense of humour, and certainly are respectful of the people and places captured. Occasionally a caption may name the individuals depicted. The albums often include postcards of the various places visited. Reproductions of photographs from other collections, in particular the Mason Photographic Collection⁴ and some from the Valentine Photographic Collection⁵, are also included. In some cases, as the subject matter is so similar, it is difficult to ascertain which are Chambers' original photographs and which may be from other collections.

This publication, *Island Images: From the Chambers Archive*, is comprised of essays presented in chronological order, from archivists and other heritage professionals. We are grateful to the contributors for their time and for sharing their knowledge on the various islands and places discussed, which put the time and places of the images in context. Their insights into the photographs and albums greatly enhance the overall value of the archive collection.

Each essay focuses on the different islands and districts visited by Chambers. *Island Images: From the Chambers Archive* aims to provide some historical background on the places he stayed and provide a sense of what may have attracted him to these places. Over a period of nine years, prior to the onset of World War II, Chambers visited Bantry and its

surrounding district in Co. Cork and Glendalough in Co. Wicklow, the Aran Islands in Co. Galway, the Blasket Islands, Valentia and The Skelligs off the coast of Kerry, Arranmore (Árainn Mhór) and other islands in Co. Donegal, and Clare Island and Achill Island in Co. Mayo. Images from the Chambers' albums are featured throughout the publication to capture the essence of his travel experience and to emphasise the importance of the totality of this wonderfully evocative photograph collection.

The Chambers Archive collection is available to view on Galway County Council Archives' website, at www.galway.ie/archives.

Patria McWalter
Galway County Council
Archivist

Endnotes

- 1 First published in 1978 the book is primarily comprised of a selection of letters, for the most part written by Eibhlís Ní Shúilleabháin of the island, to George Chambers, between 1931 and 1951. The letters provide a remarkable account of island life, and record the emotional wretch felt when Eibhlís and her family finally left the island to live on the mainland in 1942
- 2 A complete copy of the letters was deposited in the archives of the National Folklore Collection at UCD, courtesy of Niamh Ó Laoithe, Eibhlís's daughter. This would seem to indicate the Chambers family remained in contact with Eibhlís and her family after the death of George. See Almqvist, B., 1977, Letters from the Great Blasket [Review of *Letters from the Great Blasket*, by E. Ní Shúilleabháin]. *Béaloideas*, 45/47, pp270–272. <https://doi.org/10.2307/20521403>
- 3 The 1978 edition of the book has a Foreword, not by Chambers but by Seán Ó Coileáin (Emeritus Professor of Modern Irish at University College, Cork). See for instance Almqvist, B., 1977. 'Letters from the Great Blasket' [Review of *Letters from the Great Blasket*, by E. Ní Shúilleabháin]. *Béaloideas*, 45/47, pp270–272, <https://doi.org/10.2307/20521403>
- 4 Images from the Mason Photographic Collection held by the National Library of Ireland included in the Chambers albums include for instance, shipping cattle on Inishmaan (GP9/1, p3) and likely Canoes (GP9/1, p6); 'Shearing Sheep on the Second Strand' (GP9/2, p26), Tomás Ó Criomhthain (GP9/2, p40), and various Mason images of Achill (GP9/4). Also 'Interior of a cottage' (GP9/2, p22) and 'A woman of the Island' (GP9/2, p24) are very likely Mason images, though not exact replicas of those that appear in his book 1938, *The Islands of Ireland, Their Scenery, People, Life and Antiquities*, 2nd ed., revised, London, B.T. Batsford Ltd
- 5 The Valentine Collection is held by the National Library of Ireland. An image for Glendalough in Chambers album (GP9/1), captioned 'St. Kevin's Cross - for luck', is from this collection (VAL 84198), as indeed are all of the Glendalough images

George Chambers, A Mystery Man

Patria McWalter

Chambers waves farewell to Eibhlís and the Great Blasket, 1931 (GP9/2)



He loved the sea, and he was a man who loved islands. His visits...were an enrichment of experience not only for him but also for all of us who were fortunate enough to come within the spell of his enthusiasm’.

(Eulogy, GP9/6)

When Galway County Council Archives acquired the Chambers collection in 2010 very little was known about George, other than what was ascertained from the book *Letters from the Great Blasket*¹, which simply indicated he was from London.

The eulogy given by Ivan Chambers² at his father’s funeral in 1960, the text of which is included in the collection (GP9/6), provides a glimpse of George Chambers, the man, yet it does not reveal much about his career or life. The moving eulogy reveals that George had ‘a natural curiosity about things, interesting things over a wide range of subjects’. He loved poetry, walking, the sea and islands. Ivan includes reference to the Blasket islands, off the coast of Co. Kerry, and the Hebrides, off the north-west coast of Scotland, and indicates that visits to the islands were ‘an enrichment of experience not only for him but also for all of us who were fortunate enough to come within the spell of his enthusiasm’. The eulogy also reveals that George was of Orkney descent, went to school in Ardingly³, lived in London for over 47 years and was married for nearly 60 years.

This rather vague information was the foundation on which extensive research commenced. By delving into various archival sources, we now know far more about George, his family and life than we did when Galway County Council Archives first acquired the albums.

George was born on 29th January 1873⁴, to George and Mary Ann Chambers. He died on 19th September 1960, aged 87 years. Investigation of a register⁵ for Ardingly College in West Sussex, census and other records indicate that his father, also George, was a Mast and Block Maker Master, who died when George was just a child. His mother, Mary Ann (*nee* Jeffery), was a keeper of a lodging-house.

His parents, George and Mary Ann married in the Lewisham district of south-east London, in 1867. Census records show that George and Mary Ann also had a daughter, Alice (born *circa* 1871), and another son, Alexander (born *circa* 1876). George’s father died on 29th November 1880. The address at the time of his death was 168 Keeton’s Road, Bermondsey, Surrey. Just a short time later, the 1881 census list the family as being in Lewisham, in Kent, at that time. Perhaps they were visiting Mary Ann’s family on census night.

4795 Wright (m) Victor Fitzpatrick 13 Jan 28. 1872
 Mrs Anna Wright Surgeon (dead)
 Mrs Ellen Wright (Stepmother)
 Parents Mr Wright, Deptford Kent.

9814 4796. Chambers George 12 Jan 29. 1873
 Mr George Chambers (Builder) dead
 Mrs Chambers living house keeper
 2 Princes Terrace, West Worthing.

NS

Extract from Ardingly College register (Courtesy Ardingly College, Haywards Heath, West Sussex)

CERTIFIED COPY OF AN ENTRY OF BIRTH

GIVEN AT THE GENERAL REGISTER OFFICE

Application Number 8446746-1

REGISTRATION DISTRICT SAINT OLAVE SOUTHWARK

1873 BIRTH in the Sub-district of Saint James in the County of Surrey

No.	When and where born	Name, if any	Sex	Name and surname of father	Name, surname and maiden surname of mother	Occupation of father	Signature, description and residence of informant	When registered	Signature of registrar	Name entered after registration
186	29th Jan 1873	George	Boy	George Chambers	Mary Ann Chambers formerly Jeffrey	Builder	Mr George Chambers, 18 Princes Terrace, West Worthing	29th Jan 1873	[Signature]	[Signature]

CERTIFIED to be a true copy of an entry in the certified copy of a Register of Births in the District above mentioned.

Given at the GENERAL REGISTER OFFICE, under the Seal of the said Office, the 26th day of July 2017

BXCH 261388

CAUTION: THERE ARE OFFENCES RELATING TO FALSIFYING OR ALTERING A CERTIFICATE AND USING OR POSSESSING A FALSE CERTIFICATE. CROWN COPYRIGHT

WARNING: A CERTIFICATE IS NOT EVIDENCE OF IDENTITY.

GENERAL REGISTER OFFICE ENGLAND

George Chambers' birth certificate, 29 January 1873 (8446746-1) Saint Olave, Southwark Registration District

Later records indicate Mary Anne and Alice were in Bermondsey in 1891. A Register of Electors lists Mary Ann Chambers in that area between 1900 and 1908 but she appears to have moved on a number of occasions. She was a resident in Rotherhith St. in 1899 and Rothsay St. in 1908.

George married Ethel Mary (born in 1878, in Winchelsea, Sussex) in March 1901. They had sons Ivan Philip Martin (1902 - 1998), Geoffrey (1905 -?) and Thomas (1908 -?), and daughters Mary and Veronica [1909 - 1991].

An obituary for Ivan reveals that George 'was working on the financial side of a silk spinning factory', in Plovdiv, Bulgaria in 1902 when he was born⁶. The obituary also indicates that Ivan spent many holidays cycling in northern Europe with his father.

Veronica published two collections of poetry in the 1970s⁷. She married Laurence Zabel [1907 - 1974] in Hendon, Middlesex in 1944. Her probate record shows she was resident at Highfield House, Castle Cary, Somerset at the time of her death⁸.

The 1921 UK census lists the family as living at 54 Addison Way, Parish of Hendon, Middlesex, just a short distance from Temple Fortune Lane, George's final home. The form indicates George was a Christmas Cracker Sales Manager, working for Mansell, Hunt, Catty & Co. Ltd. in Cressy Road, Hampstead, London.

The 1929 Register of Electors lists Ethel Mary, George-J, Geoffrey, Ivan Philip Martin, Mary and Veronica Chambers as residents of 64 Temple Fortune Lane, Middlesex. George lived there for the next 30 years, until his death in 1960. His probate record shows he left £4,865.3.1.

England & Wales
 Government Probate
 Death Index 1858 - 2019
 via FindMyPast⁹

CHAMBERS George of 64 Temple Fortune Lane Golders Green London died 19 September 1960 Probate London 2 December to Veronica Theresa Zabel married woman and Ivan Philip Marten Chambers bookseller. Effects' £4865 3s. 1d.

George Chambers travelled extensively and departed for his various summer excursions to Ireland from his residence at Temple Fortune. He would have been what historian Diarmaid Ferriter in his book *On The Edge*¹⁰ refers to as a second wave island visitor, meaning those exploring the islands after the 1920s.

The images in the earliest album (GP9/1) indicate he was travelling with a party of at least 8 people (see the photograph taken at Toormore Bay (outside Schull) when he visited West Cork in 1929. A trip which may have also included Glendalough, Co. Wicklow. It seems likely he may have travelled solo on other trips, as captions for photographs in the albums often indicate 'I' or 'my', rather than 'we' or 'our'.

In 1931 he visited the Aran Islands and Galway city, and The Blasket Islands, off the Kerry coast. Photographs for this period are split between two separate albums. The first (GP9/1) includes the 1929 Co. Cork and the 1931 Co. Galway images. The second album (GP9/2) includes images from both the 1931 and 1938 trips to The Blasket Islands. This album also includes several photographs¹¹ taken during those intervening years. These are likely to have been sent by Eibhlís to George. The series of images of Eibhlís and her family taken in different years, such as 1933, 1934 and 1935, include for instance the images captioned ‘*John and Eilish. 1935*’, ‘*THOMAS O’CROHAN. (The Islandman.) Eilish’s Father-in-law*’¹², and ‘*John, Eilish, “The Islandman”, “Twenty Years A-growing”*’ (Muiris Ó Súilleabháin). These images cannot be attributed to Chambers, but form part of his compilation of images.

The albums indicate that George visited several islands in Co. Donegal including Arranmore (Árainn Mhór) in 1932 (GPL9/3). Some years later he returned to Ireland, when in 1937 he visited Co. Mayo, stopping in Clare Island and Achill Island and also visiting Greystones in Co. Wicklow (GP9/4). The following year, 1938, appears to have been the final trip to Ireland, which involved a return trip to the Great Blasket island. He also visited Valentia Island and the Skellig Islands at that time (GP9/5).

During his first visit to the Great Blasket island (An Blascaod Mór) in 1931, when he stayed in Peat Tom’s house at Slinnéan Bán, he met and befriended a young islander, Eibhlís Ní Shúilleabháin¹³. George was obviously enchanted by the windswept barefooted Eibhlís, describing her in the foreword for his proposed book, as ‘*one of the most beautiful girls that I had ever seen*’¹⁴.

George and Eibhlís subsequently corresponded for approximately 20 years, with Eibhlís’s side of the correspondence later published in *Letters from the Great Blasket*¹⁵.

The letters, which date from 1931 to 1951, include details of island life, of Eibhlís’s wedding day to Seán¹⁷, the birth of their daughter Niamh¹⁸ in 1937, and the family’s eventual departure from the island to live on the mainland in July 1942. The strong and lasting influence of George on Eibhlís is reflected in her letters. The Chambers Blasket album (GP9/2), with its wide and varied images of island life, allows us to bear witness to that special time in their lives when their strong friendship commenced and blossomed.

‘Himself and Eilish’, on day trip to Tearacht, off Great Blasket, 1931 ((GP9/2), accompanied by Nóra Ní Shéaghda and Seán Tom Kearney)¹⁶



An article in the *Irish Times* newspaper in 2009¹⁹ stated:

Perhaps the most powerful hymn to the Great Blasket is a work by another woman – Eibhlís Ní Shúilleabháin. Ní Shúilleabháin is chronicling a world and a culture in death's throes in Letters from the Great Blasket. They're her correspondence with Londoner George Chambers over a 20-year period, written in blundering yet elegiac English, her second language. "My dear there is no place like home," Eibhlís wrote in 1931. "The very day I'll have to leave it won't be a pleasant day for me. I think my dear heart will break that day".... Her prose reveals an island encircled by implacable seas that is very different to the summer visitor's experience. It's an island that is loved. An island that is feared. An island that ultimately must be abandoned.

Such is the book's ongoing appeal that *Letters from the Great Blasket* was published in French in 2011. The French edition is translated by Hervé Jaouen, who has written a number of books about Ireland²⁰.

The National Folklore Collection²¹, held by University College Dublin, and The Blasket Centre²² in Co. Kerry hold images of Eibhlís, similar to those in the Chambers Blasket photograph album (GP9/2).

All five photograph albums in the Chambers Archive collection are a wonderful testament to the gentle character of a curious English tourist. He has left us with a wonderful treasure of images capturing a special time, a harsh and simpler time certainly, that reflect *'the last vestiges of the old civilization or culture'*²³, of life in Ireland and its beautiful islands, prior to the onset of World War II and the emergence of our capitalist and modernist society.

'The Quay Side Kilronan' Aran Islands, Co. Galway, 1931 (GP9/1)



STRICTLY CONFIDENTIAL.

Please read the Instructions and Examples shown on the back, and then fill up the Schedule carefully and in Ink.

To be filled up by the Enumerator.
No. of Schedule: 61

NAME and SURNAME:— <small>of every person who is alive at midnight on the night of Sunday, 24th April, 1921, and who, whether as member of the family or as visitor, boarder or servant in the household or establishment— (1) passes that night in the dwelling of the household or establishment, or (2) arrives and is received into the household or establishment on the morning of Monday, 25th April, not having already been enumerated elsewhere. No one else must be included. (For order of entering names see Examples on back hereof.)</small>	RELATIONSHIP to Head of Household. <small>State whether "Head," or "Wife," "Mother," "Son," "Daughter," "Step-son," or other Relative, "Visitor," "Boarder," or "Servant." (See Instruction No. 1.)</small>	AGE. <small>In years and months. For infants under one month old write "Under one month." (See Examples.)</small>	SEX. <small>If male write "M," if female write "F." (See Examples.)</small>	MARRIAGE or ORPHANHOOD. <small>For persons aged 15 and over, write "Married," "Widowed," or "Single." For children aged under 15 write "Both Alive" (if both parents be alive), "Father Dead" (if father be dead), "Mother Dead" (if mother be dead), or "Both Dead" (if both parents be dead). (See Examples.)</small>	BIRTHPLACE and NATIONALITY.		OCCUPATION and EMPLOYMENT.			Information required only in respect of Married Men, Widowers and Widows. Number and ages of all living children and step children under 16 years of age, whether enumerated on this Schedule or not, i.e., whether residing as members of this household or elsewhere. Total number under sixteen years of age. If none write "None." For each child place a X in the column corresponding to its age. The number of crosses should be the same as the number shown in Column (e).																
					(a)	(b)	(c)	(d)	(e)		(f)	(g)	(h)	(i)	(j)											
1 George Chambers	Head	48 5	M	Married	London	—	Christmas broaders	770/1	Warrnell Hill bathy 16 LD	Bessy Pao	1	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15
2 Ethel May Chambers	Wife	43 10	F	Married	Essex	—	Sales Manager	1/4	Manuf Stationers	439	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
3 Veronica Chambers	Daughter	12 9	F	Single	Essex	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
4 Geoffrey Chambers	Son	16 4	M	Single	London	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
5 Thomas Harold Chambers	Son	13 5	M	Single	Essex	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
6																										
7																										
8																										
9																										
10																										

To be filled up by the Enumerator.				Enumerator's Initials.
Males.	Females.	Persons.	Rooms.	
3	2	5	5	819

Personal Occupation.
State here the precise branch of Profession, Trade, Manufacture, Service, &c. Where the occupation is connected with Trade or Manufacture, the reply should be sufficient to show the particular kind of Work done, stating, where applicable, the Material worked in, and the Article made or dealt in, if any.
(If retired see Instruction 6; see also Instructions 3 to 11 and Examples.)

Christmas broaders 770/1
Sales Manager 1/4
Home Duties

I declare that this Schedule is correctly filled up to the best of my knowledge and belief.
Signature: *George Chambers*
(Head of Household, Manager of Establishment or other person responsible for making the return.)

Endnotes

- 1 Ní Shúilleabháin, Eibhlís, 1978, *Letters from the Great Blasket*, Dublin, Mercier Press
- 2 Ivan Chambers (1902 - 1998), bookseller: born Philippopolis, Bulgaria; OBE 1970; married Kathleen Pilsbury in 1943 (one daughter); died Axminster, Devon. [Obituary: Ivan Chambers | The Independent | The Independent](#) See also » [Ivan Chambers – obituary 1998 \(umbrellabooks.com\)](#). Accessed Mar 2022
- 3 Ardingly College, Haywards Heath, West Sussex, RH17 6SQ UK
- 4 Birth Cert (8446746-1) Saint Olave, Bermondsey, Southwark Registration District
- 5 The assistance of Andrea King, Archivist, Ardingly College, West Sussex, is gratefully acknowledged
- 6 See [Umbrella Books](#), <https://umbrellabooks.com/ivan-chambers-obituary/> Accessed May 2022
- 7 Zabel, Veronica, *30 Poems*, Published by Castle Cary Press, Somerset, UK N/d, and 1978, *Another 30 Poems*, published by Castle Cary Press, Somerset
- 8 Highfield House is a residential care home (see <https://highfieldhousecastlecary.com/>). See also England & Wales Government Probate Death Index 1858 - 2019 <https://www.findmypast.ie/tran-script?id=GBOR%2FGOVPROBATE%2FC%2F1992-1992%2F00236840>. Accessed Feb 2022
- 9 Accessed Feb 2022
- 10 Ferriter, Diarmaid, 2018, *On The Edge, Ireland's Offshore Islands: A Modern History*, London, Profile Books
- 11 Includes for instance Mason images (NLI Ref: M20/29/4), of Tomás Ó Criomhthain, 'The Islandman' (GP9/2, p40)
- 12 Mason image, NLI Ref: M20/29/4
- 13 Ní Shúilleabháin, Eibhlís (1911 - 1978), daughter of Johanna Dunleary, the fourth of six children. Her siblings included brothers, Padraic (Paddy), Michael (Mike) and Séan, and a sister Mary. In circa 1933 Eibhlís married Seán Ó Criomhthain in Ballyferriter, Co. Kerry. They had one daughter, Niamh (1937 - 2019). Eilbhís and Seán are buried at Kilmalkeadar, on the Dingle Peninsula. See also The Great Blasket Centre and Island @ <https://basket.ie/udair-an-oileain/>
- 14 Foreword, Blasket file, GP9/6
- 15 Ní Shúilleabháin, Eibhlís, 1978, *Letters from the Great Blasket*, Dublin, Mercier Press
- 16 Detail extracted from file held by The Blasket Centre - Ionad an Bhlascaoid, Dún Chaoin, Dingle, Co. Kerry
- 17 Ó Criomhthain, Seán (Ó'Crohan), (1898? - 1975), son of Tomás (1856 - 1937), author of *An tOileánach* (The Islandman), completed in 1923 and published in 1929. Seán's own book *Lá Dár Saoil*, was published in 1969 (*A Day in Our Life*, translated by Robin Flower)
- 18 Ó Laoithe, Niamh (*nee* Ó Criomhthain) (1937 - 2019) married Tomás Ó Laoithe in Bile an Lochaigh, Co. Kerry. She spent some time in USA prior to marrying. She had five children: Catherine, Siobhán, Bríd, Lís and Tomás. She is buried at Keelmalkeadar New Cemetery, on the Dingle Peninsula
- 19 'Peig's island of sorrows', *Irish Times*, 1 Aug 2009, <https://www.irishtimes.com/life-and-style/travel/peig-s-island-of-sorrows-1.711798>, Accessed Feb 2022
- 20 *The Kerryman*, 2 Mar 2011, <http://www.independent.ie/regionals/kerryman/news/blasket-book-translated-into-french-27404611.html>. Accessed Jul 2017
- 21 Galway County Council Archives had email correspondence with National Folklore Collection in 2017 to try to establish copyright of the Chambers images, unfortunately no references appear in their sources. The Director, Dr. Críostóir Mac Cárthaigh, looked to their images and was of the opinion that they are all copy negatives (literally photographs of originals), which the NFC obtained from the Blasket Island Centre. Thus, the NFC think the 40 photographs held by it, listed for George Chambers, have their original copyright as belonging to the Blasket Centre
- 22 The photographs held by the Blasket Centre were given to it by Niamh Criomhthain (the daughter of Eibhlís). While they are similar to many in the Chambers' Blasket album (GP9/2), they are not exact replicas. Galway County Council Archives is grateful to Muireann and all the staff at the Blasket Centre (<http://basket.ie/en/scolairi-isteach/>) for their warm welcome and assistance during a research trip to the Centre in early 2018
- 23 Draft Foreword to *Letters from the Great Blasket*, Blasket File, GCCA, GP9/6



The Acquisition
of the Chambers
Archive Collection

The material in the Chambers Archive collection made its way to Galway from the UK via West Vancouver, Canada in 2010, when it was generously donated to Galway County Council Archives by Desmond Anthony Power. He had been gifted the collection in 2008 by the family of his deceased older brother, Brian St Quentin Power (1918 - 2008). Desmond did not know how or why Brian held the Chambers' material, so it may be assumed that Brian and Chambers were acquainted in some way. They both shared an interest in Ireland, and in particular its islands. Brian was considerably younger than George, so perhaps he was a friend or an acquaintance of Ivan, George's son. There are several unknowns in this regard, and unfortunately, at this point, we are unable to confirm the connection between the two men, but we'd like to think they knew each other!

The Powers are a very interesting family and while a short summary of their lives is given here, further reading on them is recommended.

The Power brothers were the sons of Stephen St Quentin Power (? - 1927), an Irishman, and Grace (*nee* d'Arc), who was French-Irish. According to an *Irish Times*¹ report Stephen was the '12th son of an itinerant thatcher, who was born in Querrin, Co. Clare'. He worked for the Imperial Chinese Customers Services. When based in Tianjin, in the

¹'We all go out fishing in the evening', Valentia, Co. Kerry, 1938 (GP9/5)

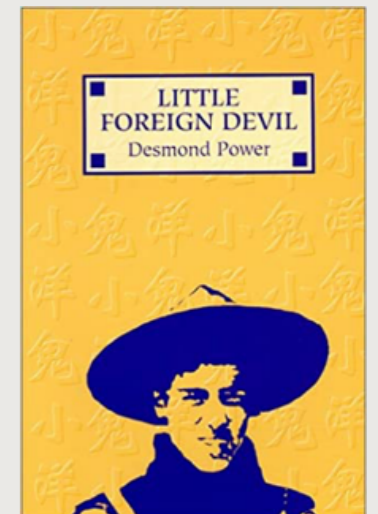
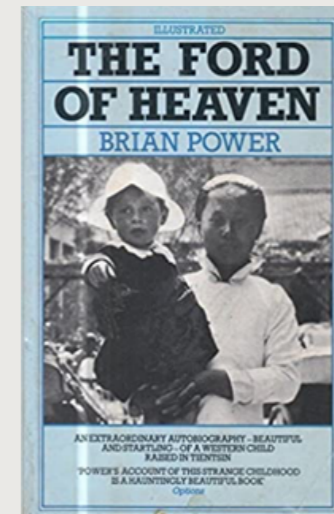


Hopei Province (northern China), he met and married Grace. Stephen died suddenly in Shanghai *circa* 1927. Thereafter Brian and Desmond were primarily brought up by their Chinese servants. Grace, who was very religious and musical, married again and went to work as a secretary in the Hong Kong and Shanghai Bank.

Brian left China when he was 18 and later studied history at King's College, London in the 1930s. He served with the Royal Irish Fusiliers during World War II and was severely injured. He subsequently trained as a barrister and taught the art of advocacy to politicians, diplomats and others. He married Prunella², (*nee* Stack) in Lewes, Sussex in 1964. He did not return to China again until the early 1970s.

Desmond (1923 - 2018) and the rest of his family were caught up in the Japanese invasion of China. In 1942 he along with many foreign nationals was held captive by the Japanese during World War II³. Desmond was interned in various prisoner-of-war camps, including Lunghua. Upon his release in 1946 he moved to Australia and from there to England and New Zealand before finally settling in Canada. While in England he met and married Deborah Vass, from Montreal, in 1955. They moved to Canada in 1960, where they raised their four children: Karen, Andrea, Timothy and Jeremy. Desmond worked for KPMG, designing and installing computer systems. He became a partner in 1972.

Their early years in Asia clearly left deep and fond impressions on both Brian and Desmond, as they both wrote about their time in pre-communist China. Brian⁴ published his acclaimed *The Ford of Heaven* in 1984, and *The Puppet Emperor, The Life of Pu Yi, Last Emperor of China* in 1986. Desmond published *Little Foreign Devil* in 1996.



Endnotes

- 1 'Barrister who taught 'Advocacy for the Layman'', *Irish Times*, 28 June 2008
- 2 Prunella, (1914 - 2010), was born in India. She was the daughter of Captain Edward Hugh Bagot Stack and Mary Bagot Stack (1883 -1935). She married firstly, S/Ldr. Lord David Douglas-Hamilton (+1944), son of Alfred Douglas Douglas-Hamilton, 13th Duke of Hamilton and Nina Mary Benita Poore, on 15 October 1938. They had two sons Diarmaid Hugh Douglas-Hamilton and Iain Douglas-Hamilton. Her husband, an RAF squadron leader, was killed during WWII. She married secondly, Alfred Gustave Albers, son of N. W. Albers, on 22 July 1950. He died 9 months later. She married thirdly, Brian St. Quentin Power, son of Stephen St. Quentin Power, on 15 May 1964. From 15 May 1964, her married name became Power. She lived in 1999 at 14 Gertrude Street, London, England. She converted to Roman Catholicism. The couple bought a croft on the island of Raasay, near Skye, where they wrote, he a memoir of his childhood in China, she poetry and three volumes of autobiography. Prunella was head of the Women's League of Health and Beauty in the 1930s, when she was known as Britain's "Perfect Girl"; she took over the League in 1934, at the age of only 20, after the death of her mother, Mary, who had founded the organisation four years earlier. (<https://www.geni.com/people/Prunella-Stack-Lady-David-Douglas-Hamilton/6000000010997293699>). She was appointed OBE in 1980 (https://www.familysearch.org/search/record/results?count=20&query=%2Bgivenname%3A%22Brian%20St%20Quentin%22~%20%2Bsurname%3APower~%20%2Bbirth_year%3A1918-2010~ Jan 2018)
- 3 'West Vancouver man shares internment story', Laura Anderson, *North Shore News*, 2 Jun, 2013, [West Vancouver man shares internment story - North Shore News \(nsnews.com\)](http://www.nsnews.com) Accessed Jun 2022
- 4 A collection of Brian's papers (MS 381085) including correspondence and working notes relating to publications, including *The Ford of Heaven*, are held at London University: School of Oriental and African Studies (SOAS)



'The Kearney Children', the Great Blasket, Co. Kerry, 1931 (GP9/2)



'Pat Lynch takes the donkey-cart to Knight's Town. (The tree is not growing in the cart)', Valentia, Co. Kerry, 1938 (GP9/5)



Co. Cork Images
1929

Rory Bunce

GLENGARRIFF



NELLIE
BROOKS
THE
LACE-
MAKER



THE
SHORE

TOORMORE BAY



OURSELVES

AGAIN



The first album (GP9/1) in the Chambers Archive is comprised mainly of photographs of the Aran Islands in Co. Galway. However, it also includes approximately 13 pages, with 19 images, relating to Co. Cork. It also includes two postcards of Limerick and a small number of images from Co. Wicklow. This essay focuses on Co. Cork and its related images.

Chambers appears to have visited Co. Cork in 1929, and includes in the album images from Glengarriff; Inacullin – Garinish Island; Toormore Bay (An Tuar Mór, outside Schull); Gougane Barra (close to Ballingeary in the Muskerry Gaeltacht); Mizen Head (the southerly point of mainland Ireland); and Bantry Bay. Much of the material in this part of the album is comprised of postcards or what appear to be reproductions from other, unidentified, photograph collections.

The National Library of Ireland holds a Dorothy Stokes album, *'A souvenir of a visit to Glengarriff, with Maudie Davies, July 1929'*, (ALB224). It includes some lovely images of various places in Co. Kerry, together with many of the same places in Co. Cork that are included in Chambers' album. Perhaps Stokes and Chambers encountered one another on their travels!

Glengarriff

As I passed along from east to west of the county of Cork, everyone expressed the hope that I should not leave the county until I had seen Glengarriff. I would as soon have gone through Italy, and passed by Rome: – and now I was there – had it all under my eye – and was I disappointed? Not in the least. Nothing in Ireland is equal to it, or can be brought into comparison; it is singular, it is unique¹.

The town derives its name from the glen in which it is situated, its *'name in Irish Gleann Garbh, means rough or bitter glen'*². The town produced two writers of note: the father and son, Pádraig and Mortimer Ó Seaghdha³. Pádraig Ó Seaghdha wrote three plays whilst teaching in the local national school; his son Mortimer published short stories as well as other works⁴.

The 1933 edition of *Guy's Cork Almanac and County and City Directory* indicated a town with a busy tourist trade as evidenced in the eight hotels which are listed for business⁵. Dr Cotter was the resident Medical Officer and Registrar assisted by Mrs O'Sullivan, the District Nurse⁶. There was one national school in the town itself as well as three others in the surrounding area⁷; Sgt. Boylan oversaw the local Civic Guard station⁸. A semi-ruined bridge that once facilitated passage across the local river is known as Cromwell's Bridge; the construction of which is reputed locally to have been commanded by Cromwell himself⁹.

Glengarriff is a place of immense natural beauty, which is missing from this photograph. Perhaps the photographer felt the medium of black and white photography could not capture this beauty and instead emphasised the ruggedness of the surrounding area and the idyllic coastal location.

'Glengarriff', Co. Cork, 1929
(GP9/1)



Glengarriff Harbour Co Cork.

Garinish Island

Located in the sheltered harbour of Glengarriff in Bantry Bay, in southwest Ireland, Ilnacullin is a small island of 15 hectares (37 acres) known to horticulturists and lovers of trees and shrubs all around the world as an island garden of rare beauty¹⁰.

Little is known about the island prior to the construction of a Martello tower in the early 1800s¹¹. The island remained relatively uninhabited for the remainder of the 19th century though the returns for Griffith's Valuation in 1852 does list an Edmund Power leasing a house, office and land from the Earl of Bantry¹².

John Annan Bryce¹³ bought the island from the British War Office in 1911¹⁴. *'Keenly interested in horticulture and architecture, he planned to build a mansion on the island and to lay out a "dream garden" – to convert the barren rock into a garden paradise¹⁵*. By the time of Bryce's death in 1924 considerable work had been done on creating this garden paradise, work which was continued initially by his widow, Violet *née* L'Estrange (1863 - 1939), and following her death, by their son Rowland (1899 - 1953)¹⁶. His death in 1953 saw the handover of the island, under the terms of his will, to the Irish State. The island is reached by a short boat journey from Glengarriff, just 1 km away. Its natural beauty attracted writers including George Bernard Shaw (1856 - 1950) who wrote *St. Joan* there¹⁷.

The photograph captioned *'The Old Tower'* could be a still from a film, a western or perhaps one of the many unsuccessful attempts to make a film of the novel *Don Quixote*¹⁸. The absence of colour makes it very difficult to identify the country or location. Not many modern viewers would guess that it is Garinish Island.



'The Old Tower', Innacullin
- Garinish Island, Co. Cork,
1929 (GP9/1)



'Goughane Barra', Co.
Cork, 1929 (GP9/1)

Gougane Barra

The Lake of Gouganebarra is a deep tarn almost a mile long and nearly a quarter of a mile across and it is surrounded on every side, except the east, by great cliffs that rise directly from the water and cast deep shadows upon it to add to the solemnity with which this sacred spot has been invested ever since Saint Finbarr, patron saint of Cork, set up his oratory here in the sixth century¹⁹.

Though no traces of this original oratory survive, a holy well which is 'still used as part of pilgrimage to the site'²⁰ is intact. A hermitage, now in ruins, consisting of cells, a chapel, and other buildings dates from the late 1700s and was built by a Father O'Mahony²¹. His mortal remains are interred on the mainland in a chamber which is contiguous to a 19th century graveyard²².

A stone in the graveyard inscribed with the words '*Tadhg Ó Buachalla, an Táilliúr, 1860 - 1945, agus Ainsti a Bhainchéile*',²³ refers to Timothy Buckley and his wife Ansty who lived nearby. They appeared as the main characters in book on the life of the Irish tailor and storyteller, *The Tailor and Ansty* (1942) by Eric Cross²⁴. The island also contains a 'free standing gabled-fronted single-cell Celtic Revival style Roman Catholic church built in 1903'²⁵. The natural beauty of this area was further enhanced by a re-forestation programme in the 1930s. These factors, in addition to the presence of the picturesque church, have led to the site being used extensively as a wedding location.

Many modern photographs of Gougane Barra focus on the chapel or the spectacular natural setting which draws countless wedding parties there each year. This image on light cardboard is likely from a postcard, and highlights instead the elements - the isolation, the inaccessibility, the sense of remoteness - that would have drawn St. Finbarr to establish his oratory there.

Mizen Head

Mizen Head, a cape in the parish of Kilnoe, barony of West Carbery, Co. Cork, Munster. It forms the extremity of the peninsula which extends between Dunmanus bay and Ballydeolin bay; and is situated 5 ¼ miles south of Sheep Head, and 11 miles west north-west of Cape Clear²⁶.

Though situated in an area of great natural beauty Mizen Head has come to be defined by the presence of the signal station located there, which was established in 1909²⁷. The frequent loss of shipping in the waters to the west, including the *Stephen Whitney* in 1847²⁸, *Providence* and *L'Impatiente* in 1813 and 1796 respectively²⁹, necessitated the construction of the station which was preceded by the construction of a bridge to enable access to the headland. The bridge was built by Thorne & Sons of Westminster and cost £1,272³⁰. A navigation light was added on the site in 1959, 'to ensure greater safety for tankers and other ships'³¹. In 1993 the Signal Station was automated³². A Mizen Head visitor centre was subsequently opened incorporating the old signal station and associated outbuildings.

The ship in this image, indistinct and ghostly, suggests a coastline where the loss of shipping is to be expected. Perhaps this is why the photographer included the bridge as a symbol of humanity's efforts to overcome the extremes of nature.



'Mizen Head', Co. Cork, 1929 (GP9/1)

Bantry Bay

The scenery of Bantry bay is unexcelled by any in the kingdom, and bids defiance to the efforts of either pen or pencil³³.

The rivers Moyallah, Ouvane and Curloom all flow into the Bay which is some twenty-six miles in length³⁴. A number of islands are found in the Bay including Whiddy, the largest, Horse, Hare, Hog, Chapel and Coney. A French invasion fleet, with Wolfe Tone³⁵ on board the *Indomptable*, attempted to land in Bantry Bay in 1796 but poor weather prevented it from doing so. A square in the town is named in Tone's honour. There are a number of coastal promontory forts located in the Bay, such as at Dromclogh, Gouladoo and Killoveenoge³⁶. The 1933 edition of *Guy's Cork Almanac and County and City Directory* mentions two steamers plying the waters of the Bay; one to Castletownbere each day in the summer months and every other day in the winter, the other to Glengarriff three times a week.³⁷

This charming image³⁸ offers an interesting snapshot of leisure time in the 1930s. The absence of modern beach paraphernalia and the apparent formality of most of those enjoying time on the shoreline emphasises the contrast between then and now.




'Bantry Bay', Co. Cork, 1929 (GP9/1)



'A Holiday Crowd', Glengariff, Co. Cork, 1929 (GP9/1)
Chambers and his party appeared to stay in The Golf Links Hotel

Endnotes

- 1 *The Parliamentary Gazetteer of Ireland*, 1845, Dublin, London and Edinburgh, A. Fullarton and Co., p271
- 2 Jennet, Seán, 1967, *Munster*, London, Faber and Faber Limited, p104
- 3 Cadogan, Tim, and Falvey, Jeremiah, 2006, *A Biographical Dictionary of Cork*, Dublin, Four Courts Press, p270
- 4 Ibid.
- 5 *Guy's Cork Almanac and County and City Directory*, 1933, Cork, Guy and Co. Ltd, p318
- 6 Ibid.
- 7 Ibid.
- 8 Ibid.
- 9 *The Parliamentary Gazetteer of Ireland*, 1845, Dublin, London and Edinburgh, A. Fullarton and Co., p270
- 10 The Office of Public Works, 1982, *Ilnacullin*, Dublin, Stationery Office, p2
- 11 The Office of Public Works, Oileán Na Cuileann (Gairnish), Dublin, National Parks and Wildlife Service
- 12 Griffith, Richard, 1852, *General Valuation of Rateable Property in Ireland, County of Cork, Barony of Bear*, Griffith's Valuation, Dublin, p9
- 13 Bryce, John Annan (1843 - 1923), British merchant, politician, and garden owner. For more on the Bryce Family see OPW Garinish Island website <https://garinishisland.ie/the-family/> Accessed August 2022
- 14 The Office of Public Works, 1982, *Ilnacullin*, Dublin, Stationery Office, p25
- 15 Ibid.
- 16 Ibid.
- 17 Ibid.
- 18 *Don Quixote* is a Spanish novel by Miguel de Cervantes, published in two volumes, in 1605 and 1615
- 19 Hayward, Richard, 1964, *Munster and the City of Cork*, London, Phoenix House, p67
- 20 Power, Denis; Byrne, Elizabeth; Egan, Ursula; Lane, Sheila; and Sleeman, Mary, *Archaeological Inventory of County Cork, Vol. III – Mid Cork*, Dublin, Stationery Office, p323
- 21 Smith, Charles, 1893, *The Ancient and Present State of the City and County of Cork*, Vol. I, Cork, Guy & Co. Ltd, p167
- 22 Power, Denis; Byrne, Elizabeth; Egan, Ursula; Lane, Sheila; and Sleeman, Mary, *Archaeological Inventory of County Cork, Vol. III – Mid Cork*, Dublin, Stationery Office, p384
- 23 Jennet, Seán, 1967, *Munster*, London, Faber and Faber Limited, p108
- 24 Cross, Eric (1903/1905 - 1980), writer and broadcaster
- 25 National Inventory of Architectural Heritage, Reg. No. 20908001 <https://www.buildingsofireland.ie/buildings-search/building/20908001/st-finbarrs-oratory-derreennacusha-cork> Accessed Aug 2022
- 26 *The Parliamentary Gazetteer of Ireland*, 1845, Dublin, London and Edinburgh, A. Fullarton and Co., p777
- 27 *Cork Weekly Examiner and Holly Bough*, 1970, Thomas Crosbie and Co., Ltd, p5
- 28 Lankford, Éamon, 2007, *Mizen Journal*, Skibbereen, Mizen Archaeological and Historical Society, p17
- 29 Cadogan, Tim, and O'Mahony, Colman, 1999, *Mizen Journal*, Skibbereen, Mizen Archaeological and Historical Society, pp74-87
- 30 National Inventory of Architectural Heritage, Reg. No. 20915203 <https://www.buildingsofireland.ie/buildings-search/building/20915203/mizen-head-signal-station-mizen-head-cloghane-cork> Accessed Aug 2022
- 31 *Cork Weekly Examiner and Holly Bough*, 1970, Thomas Crosbie and Co., Ltd, p5
- 32 National Inventory of Architectural Heritage, Reg. No. 20915203 <https://www.buildingsofireland.ie/buildings-search/building/20915203/mizen-head-signal-station-mizen-head-cloghane-cork> Accessed Aug 2022
- 33 *The Parliamentary Gazetteer of Ireland Vol I. A-C*, 1845, Dublin, London and Edinburgh, A. Fullarton and Co., p220
- 34 Smith, Charles, 1893, *The Ancient and Present State of the City and County of Cork*, Vol. I, Cork, Guy & Co. Ltd, p273
- 35 Tone, Theobald Wolfe (1763 - 1798), United Irishman, political publicist, diarist, and French army officer
- 36 Power, Denis; Byrne, Elizabeth; Egan, Ursula; Lane, Sheila; and Sleeman, Mary, *Archaeological Inventory of County Cork*, Dublin, Stationery Office, p126-128
- 37 *Guy's Cork Almanac and County and City Directory*, 1933, Cork, Guy and Co. Ltd, p234
- 38 This image may be a reproduction, possibly from the Valentine Photographic Collection, held by the National Library of Ireland

A sepia-toned photograph of the Round Church tower in Glendalough, Co. Wicklow. The tower is a tall, cylindrical stone structure with a conical roof and several small, narrow windows. In the foreground, there is a cemetery with numerous gravestones, some of which are Celtic crosses. The background features a dense forest of evergreen trees and a large, rounded mountain peak under a hazy sky.

Glendalough, Co. Wicklow Images, 1929

Catherine Wright

The first photograph album (GP9/1) in the Chambers Archive contains several iconic images of Glendalough, Co. Wicklow produced by the commercial photographic company Valentine & Sons¹. These images were sold in a wallet of twelve photographs, possibly purchased at a local souvenir booth in Glendalough. They depict well-known features in the ancient monastic city's landscape and story including several of the ruins of the seven churches it contains.

This iconic image of the Glendalough valley in Chambers' album depicts the Round Tower and ruins of the monastic city, the Upper Lake and Lower Lake in the background and the Royal Hotel² in the foreground. It could be said that there are many layers of cultural meaning attached to the landscape of Glendalough. The Irish tradition of the sacred site centred on physical elements of the landscape, such as holy wells and ancient sites like the passage tombs at Newgrange, Co. Meath, which were imbued with stories and religious meaning³. The antiquarian and romantic tradition of the 18th and 19th century prized the depiction and study of the sublime splendour of ancient ruins and the picturesque landscape.



'Glendalough', Co. Wicklow (GP9/1) (Original source: Valentine Collection, NLI)

Hotel advertisement, Porter's Post Office Guide & Directory for County Wicklow, 1910 (Wicklow County Archives, Sean Leonard Collection (Pp/3))

Irish Tourist Association Survey list of tourist accommodation in 1942 (Wicklow Library Service Local Studies Collection, ITA Survey 1942)

142 GLENDALOUGH.

Townland, Newrath—
Douglas, Jernish, Ginnany.
Hamer, Mia, Eted.
Somerhill, Ballyghan A.

Townland, Rosanna Lower—
Clarke, Wilton.
Tomb, Thomas A.
Townland, Rosanna Upper—
Tighe, Waller S.

GLENDALOUGH Beautifully situated on the margin of the Upper Lake. Commanding the most delightful scenery in Wicklow.

HOTEL.

LUNCHEONS, DINNERS, TEAS ON THE SHORTEST NOTICE. PICNIC OR PLEASURE PARTIES A SPECIALITY.

Popular Charges only. Free Fishing. Boats supplied.

JAMES GRANT, Proprietor.

AT THE LAKE.
Richardson's Lake Hotel,
GLENDALOUGH. (THE SEVEN CHURCHES)

In the Heart of the Valley of "The Lakes and Churches."
GOOD TROUT FISHING, SHOOTING, BOATING AND BATHING.

Railway and Hotel Excursions Daily.

Combined Rail and Hotel Tickets are issued by the Dublin and South Eastern Railway as follows, from DUBLIN—

Tuesdays, Wednesdays, Thursdays and Saturdays Rail, Coach and Dinner Trips—

First Class	Second Class	Third Class
10s. 6d.	9s.	7s. 6d.

SATURDAY TO MONDAY COMBINED RAILWAY, COACH AND HOTEL TICKETS
Are issued from DUBLIN at inclusive Fares of—

First Class	Second Class	Third Class
21s. 6d.	20s. 3d.	18s. 7d.

JOHN RICHARDSON, Proprietor.

I.T.A. TOPOGRAPHICAL AND GENERAL SURVEY
ACCOMMODATION AND CATERING.

Resort or Ballenacorney

Town or Village Glendalough & Rosanna Upper & Lower, Co. Wicklow

Hotels	No. of Bedrooms	No. of Bathrooms	Licensed?
James Grant Hotel	26	1	Yes
Royal Hotel	2	1	Yes
Roundwood Hotel	12	1	Yes
Newrath Hotel	7	1	Yes
Roundwood			

Guest or Boarding Houses

Name	No. of Bedrooms	No. of Bathrooms	Licensed?
Mr. James Grant	6	1	Yes
Miss Nolan			
Mr. & Mrs. Grant			
Mr. & Mrs. Grant			
Mr. & Mrs. Grant			
Mr. & Mrs. Grant			
Mr. & Mrs. Grant			
Mr. & Mrs. Grant			
Mr. & Mrs. Grant			
Mr. & Mrs. Grant			

Restaurants and Cafes

Name	No. of Bedrooms	No. of Bathrooms	Licensed?
Miss Nolan			
Miss Nolan			
Miss Nolan			

Checked with I.T.A. files.

The image captioned *'The Round Tower'* at Glendalough shows the Tower surrounded by tombstones at the old cemetery. The image evokes a sublime landscape, devoid of human activity, when the opposite is usually the case and would likely have been the case in Chambers' time. The Round Tower stands at 103 feet tall and 16 feet in diameter, tapering in width towards the top⁶. The conical roof was rebuilt in 1876 from the roof stones which had fallen into the tower after a reputed lightning strike in 1804. These towers are mainly found on church and monastic sites in Ireland and there has been much debate about their purpose – most likely they were bell towers and used as defence against raids by the Vikings and others.

'The Round Tower',
Co. Wicklow (GP9/1)
(Original source:
Valentine Collection, NLI)

The images captioned *'Ferry to St Kevin's Bed'* and *'Temple-na-Skellig'* of the southern shore of the Upper Lake depict the ruined 12th century Romanesque church Temple-na-Skellig, only accessible by boat. Also shown are the boatmen who carried visitors to the ruins and to the nearby cave known as St Kevin's Bed. The latter is about 27 feet above the water and is said to be the cell occupied by St Kevin during his hermitage. The boatmen may well have recounted the oral tradition associated with this site to Chambers of how Kevin avoided the advances of an admirer Kathleen, by throwing her in the lake to drown. The 1798 Irish Rebellion leader Michael Dwyer⁷ is also associated with St Kevin's Bed and is reputed to have hidden there and later made a daring escape from the forces pursuing him.



(GP9/1)



FERRY
TO
ST KEVIN'S
BED

GLEN DALOUGH

TEMPLE-
NA- SKELLIG

The Valentine image included in Chambers' Glendalough collection of a local guide assisting a woman as she embraces a high cross in Glendalough cemetery is rather charming. The woman's clothing suggests the 1920s or 1930s era and we can discern the tour guide in a coat, possibly a high collared shirt or scarf and a hat. In the various 18th and 19th century travelogues, the guides are often described as 'characters' who dressed up in costumes to increase the entertainment value of their trade and no doubt maximise their fee. Towards the end of the 19th



'St Kevin's Cross – for Luck', Glendalough, Co. Wicklow, (GP9/1)
(Original source: Valentine Collection, ca. 1930 (VAL 84198) NLI)

century, the Commissioners of Public Works were becoming increasingly displeased with this practice and ordered that guides wear a frock coat with a stand-up collar and a peaked cap⁸. We can also see St Kevin' Church or 'Kevin's Kitchen' in the background. According to local tradition, if your hands meet around St Kevin's Cross, also known as 'the Wishing Cross', then your wish will be granted. No doubt there are countless photographs around the world of visitors partaking in this tradition.

The beauty of the monastic site of Glendalough and the surrounding valley, and its fame as a place of pilgrimage, has drawn thousands of visitors for generations. While this has created a vibrant tourism infrastructure, Glendalough also encompasses a rural community engaged in a range of local industries. During Chambers' time, apart from tourism and related enterprises, the main sources of local income were mainly derived from forestry, sheep farming, agriculture and lead mining. These activities have all left their mark on the landscape and evoke a rich cultural heritage which complements the story of St Kevin and the monastic city of Glendalough.

Further reading

Barrow, Lennox, 1984, *Glendalough and St Kevin, Dundalk*

Corlett, C Christiaan, & Medlycott, John, 2000, *The Ordnance Survey Letters Wicklow, Wicklow*

Kavanagh, Joan, (Ed.), 2003, *Glendalough – A Pictorial History, Glendalough Book Committee*

Glendalough Heritage Forum, <https://glendalough.wicklowheritage.org/>, Accessed 8th September 2022

Endnotes

- 1 The Valentine Photographic Collection is held by the National Library of Ireland
- 2 The Royal Hotel was named following the visit of the Prince of Wales in 1871 - later King Edward VII
- 3 The famous annual 'patron' or 'pattern' day of St Kevin on 3 June was eventually ended by Cardinal Cullen in 1862 due to its secular and raucous nature. It is interesting to compare Peacock's lively painting of the Glendalough patron day, 1813 (National Museum Northern Ireland) to Spilsbury's more devout interpretation, circa 1816 (National Gallery of Ireland)
- 4 *Porter's Post Office Guide & Directory for County Wicklow*, 1910, Sean Leonard Collection (Pp/3), Wicklow County Archives
- 5 ITA Survey 1942, Wicklow Library Service Local Studies Collection
- 6 National Monuments of Ireland Annual Report, 1911 - 1912, (revised 1925, 1937)
- 7 Dwyer, Michael (1772–1825) was an insurgent captain in the Irish Rebellion of 1798, leading the United Irish forces in battles in Wexford and Wicklow
- 8 Kavanagh, Joan (Ed.), 2003, *Glendalough – A Pictorial History*, Glendalough Book Committee, p55

The Aran Islands and Galway City Images, 1931

Dr Jim Higgins

'Bridget Mannin and Friends', Inis Mór, Co. Galway, 1931 (GP9/1)



One of the five delightful Chambers' albums contains photographs of the Aran Islands and Galway City. It is a lovely visual record from someone who obviously took pleasure in the people, places, animals and things around him. Forts, churches, and cliffs feature, as does every-day life in its great variety. The album also includes images of Glendalough, Co. Wicklow, but this essay focuses on the Galway images only.

Not all the photographs in the album are by Chambers. Several images are by Thomas H. Mason (1877 - 1958), or one of his sons, and some of them were used by Mason¹ in his wonderful book, *The Islands of Ireland*, first published in 1933. It was republished on a number of occasions in various forms, both with and without the photographs.

The Galway City part of the Chambers Archive includes postcards and photographs, but only two original photographs, both of which were taken in Dominick Street, in Galway City. The featured postcards are of the Spanish Arch and Fishmarket², Menlo Castle³, Lynch's Castle⁴, The Lynch Memorial window⁵, part of the Claddagh near the Claddagh Basin⁶ and of a street scene in the Claddagh⁷. The originals of the postcards date from the 1890s down to the 1920s, but all were sold in different variations over the years, and in both black and white and colour-tinted versions.

Galway town, as it was known in the 1930s, had few industries and a small population; emigration was widespread. As is clear from the image of Dominick Street it had retained its partly late 18th and partly 19th century character. Two fascinating photographs of the street are taken around Dominick Street Bridge. One of these, which is captioned '*Himself*'⁸, (see image on frontispiece) shows a suited, bearded, photographer with his back to the rails of the bridge and the Eglinton Canal behind him. He holds a camera. The present bridge is a concrete 1950s version of the one shown in the photograph. The building to the right in the image is now occupied by the An Tobar Nua workshop.

The other Galway City image is captioned '*Penelope and Katrina*'⁹ and shows two young ladies walking their bicycles across Dominick Street Bridge. This wide-angled image gives a good view of the street, which includes two parked cars, in the background. As with some of the Aran Island photographs the people in the image were clearly known to the maker of the image. The bridge at Dominick Street was one of three swing bridges along

the Eglinton Canal. These could be opened to let boats pass through from Lough Corrib and the Eglinton Canal to the Claddagh Basin and Galway Bay. The Eglinton Canal was constructed between 1847 and 1852 and opened by William Montgomerie, Earl of Eglinton, the Lord Lieutenant of Ireland, on 28th August 1852. Two locks and several bridges occurred on its length. By the early 1950s the swing bridges were found to be dangerous and permanent unmovable bridges¹⁰ replaced them.

The Aran Islands are a group of three islands, Inis Mór (Inishmore), Inis Meáin (Inishmaan) and Inis Oírr (Inisheer), some 30 miles or 47 km from Galway City.

'Penelope & Katrina',
Dominick Street, Galway,
1931 (GP9/1)



In 1841 the islands had a population of 3,531. This had dropped to 2,845 by 1901, and to 2,668 in 1911. In 1926, when 93.4% of the population was Irish speaking, it was 2,152 and in 1936, shortly after Chambers' visit, the population was down to 2,106. It continued to decrease until 2011, when it saw a slight increase, to 1,251. In 2016 the population, which is still primarily Irish speaking, was recorded as being 1,226.

The islands are famed for their archaeology¹¹ and have attracted the attention of archaeologists, antiquarians, folklorists, ethnographers¹², linguists, philologists¹³, botanists¹⁴ and geologists, for several centuries. Since the late 19th century onwards the islands have been the inspiration for Celtic Revivalists, artists, writers and photographers. The islands continue to inspire today, with tourism playing an important role in their economy.

The islands played an impressive role in the Gaelic Literary Revival, the movement of the late 19th and early 20th centuries that sought to assert a distinctive Irish identity, particularly through its language, folklore, art, literary and heritage. Encouraged by W.B. Yeats (1865 - 1939) in 1896 John Millington Synge (1871 - 1909) began to visit the islands. Six of Synge's plays are inspired by his sojourns on Aran. Lady Gregory (1852 - 1932) spent time learning Irish there, as did many of the predominate members of the Gaelic League and other Irish revolutionaries. Pádraig Mac Piarais (1879 - 1916) and Seán MacDiarmada (1883 - 1916) are among the leaders of the 1916 Rising who spent time on the islands.

From 1908 Harry Clarke (1889 - 1931), the renowned stained-glass artist, spent summers there, as did his future wife, Margaret Clarke. Seán Keating (1889 - 1977) and many other artists, have been inspired by the islands over the years. Robert J. Flaherty's (1884 - 1951) 1934 documentary film *Man of Aran* depicted the islands in their stark beauty and increased their popularity with visitors. The islands produced several writers, most notably Liam O'Flaherty (1896 - 1984), from Gort na gCapall on Inis Mór, and Máirtín Ó Direáin (1910 - 1988), also from Inis Mór.

The islands feature in the photographs of many commercial and private collections held in several Irish libraries and archives. Dating from the mid-19th century onwards they are to be found on lantern slides and photographic collections of national and international repute. Hundreds of photographers have made images of Aran over the years and several collections have been published¹⁵, from Synge's early 20th century images to the work of the professional photographer Bill Doyle, in very recent times.

Most of the photographs in Chambers' 1931 album feature the Aran Islands. The captioned photographs, in various sizes, are typical of a collection amassed by a tourist to the islands. Whereas the collection contains many Galway city postcards, as distinct from photographs, no postcards are included for the Aran portion of the album. This may be because postcards were not easily available or for sale at all the time of Chambers' visit. We have instead nearly three-score of photographs of every-day life and of the built and natural heritage of the islands.

The album, which also includes photographs by others, has several quotes or extracts from various writers, interspersed throughout the volume. Many of these, which are typed on interleaving tissue paper, are from the books of Donn Byrne¹⁶ and are relevant to the places visited. The album also includes a press cutting about the 1934 documentary film *Man of Aran*, based on the life of Pat Mullen. The source of the press cutting is unknown.

The subject matter of the photographs is wide. There are images of the transportation of goods and cattle, of groups of people waiting for the mail boat or the Steamer and at the market on the quayside at Kilronan, together with photographs of men fishing, herding pigs, scything and kelp gathering, and of women milking cattle. There are turf boats, presumably from Connemara, and currachs. The modes of transport for people and goods included carts, side cars and boats. Horses are also common. Images of stone fields, donkeys and natural features including cliffs and the Wormhole are depicted. Some are general informal photographs and others are of individuals and groups posing for the photographer. The photographer clearly knew some of the islanders personally and included their names in the captions in the album.

Of the archaeological and historical sites there are a considerable number of images. Dún Aengus, the pre-historic, dry stone wall fortification, is featured in three photographs, including one of its cliff side; this image may be the work of another photographer. *Dun Chathair*' (or Dubh Cathair) and *'The Runes'* (sic, ruins?) within the Fort are also featured.

Among the photographs to feature churches are the *'The Church of the Four Beauties'* (along with a local boy), *'St Kiron's'*, *'The Graveyard'*, *'One of the Seven Churches'*, *'The Seven Churches'* (2 images) and *'St Beniginus Church'* (Teampall Bheanáin).

THE SEVEN CHURCHES



'The Seven Churches', Inis Mór, Co. Galway, 1931 (GP9/1)



'The Ghost Stones', Inis Mór, Co. Galway, 1931 (GP9/1)

The 'Well of the Saints', 'The Well of the Holy Ghost', and 'The Bed of the Holy Ghost' (at the base of a fragment of a high cross) are shown along with 'St Columkille's Well' (sic, *Columbkille's*), where six children and an adult are kneeling in prayer¹⁷. These images are significant because of the changes that have taken place to the archaeology since the 1930s, but they are of poor quality.

Among the later antiquities, 'The Field of Ghosts' and 'The Ghost Stones' on Inishmore (Inis Mór) are depicted. The latter are the wayside cenotaphs with inscribed plaques, generally in English, to the memory of the deceased, set in stone pillars each topped with a simple cross. There are in the region of 30 of these memorials on Inishmore, dating from 1811 to the early 1890s.

What the photographer classes in his caption as a 'Drinking Trough' is one of the water collection-tanks which are so common in Aran and were the subject of interest to American geographers in the 1930s for instance¹⁸.

One captioned image, *Aran More, Aran Is., Pat Mullen gathering sea-weed*, shows Pat forking kelp into a pile. The photographer, whom we assume was George Chambers, appears to have known Pat Mullen personally. An image on the same page captioned 'Sea-weed for kelp' shows some large piles of seaweed drying, prior to its burning for the iodine industry and its shipping to Galway. The kelp industry was important to the subsistence economy on Aran. The income gleaned from its collection, burning, sale and transport was significant for the islanders¹⁹.

At the time Chambers was taking these photographs Thomas H. Mason, in *The Islands of Ireland*, described the islanders working in family teams at kelp burning, which required several days and nights. John Millington Synge's descriptions, published in 1907, of kelp burning on Inis Maan (Inis Meáin), provide an insight into its harvesting and its importance to the island's economic life:

The people have taken advantage of this dry moment to begin the burning of kelp, and all the islands are lying in a volume of grey smoke... The work needed to form a ton of kelp is considerable. The seaweed is collected from the rocks after the storms of autumn and winter, dried on fine days, and then made up into a rick, where it is left until the beginning of June.

It is then burnt in low kilns on the shore, an affair that takes from twelve to twenty-four hours of continuous hard work.

The kiln holds about two tons of molten kelp, and when full it is loosely covered with stones and left to cool. In a few days the substance is as hard as the limestone and has to be broken with crowbars before it can be placed in currachs for transport to Kilronan, where it is tested to determine the amount of iodine it contains, and paid for accordingly. In former years good kelp would bring seven pounds a ton, now four pounds are not always reached²⁰.

Synge and Mason, among others, record that the price received for kelp was unpredictable and unreliable. In the 1893 *Baseline Report of the District of Aran Islands*²¹ it was estimated that two-thirds of people in the islands burned kelp. However, the sources of family income at the time included two thirds received from livestock, kelp and seaweed amounted to just twenty-five percent, and fishing provided seven percent of income.



'Pigs to Market – Michael Hennon; Aran Island (GP9/1)

The image *'Pigs to Market – Michael Hennon'* is one of several in the album where the people depicted are identified in the caption. Though the quality of the image is poor, it is still a wonderful photograph. It shows three rather large pigs being marched along a rough gravel roadway, presumably off to market. The landscape behind Hennon is a rather flat, even bleak, vista. The image also captures the rugged stone walls along the margin of the roadway.



'Sea-weed for kelp', Inis Mór, Co. Galway, 1931 (GP9/1)



'Bed of the Holy Ghost', Inis Mór, Co. Galway, 1931 (GP9/1)



'Bridget Mannin and Friends', Inis Mór, Co. Galway, 1931 (GP9/1)

The *'Bed of the Holy Ghost'* shows, among other features not now present, a portion of a limestone Celtic Cross of the late 12th century or *circa* 1200, one of a group of such crosses found on the Aran Islands and in Co. Clare including a large group at Kilfenora²².

The photograph captioned *'Bridget Mannin and Friends'* is a very nice composition. It is an image of three young Aran women and a boy. Both Synge, in his *The Aran Islands*²³, and Mason, in his *The Islands of Ireland*,²⁴ described the clothing of the islanders in some detail and document the changing fashions.

The photograph simply captioned *'Kilronan'*, in which a man on a horse drawn side cart dominates, very interestingly shows some of the vernacular buildings in the village, very few of which are still thatched.

The typical tourist attraction, the donkeys of Aran, are much photographed. Mason in his *Islands of Ireland* described how they were the primary means of transport for many types of goods. He also complains of their large numbers, as *'the ass travels best at night'* sometimes kept visitors, like himself, awake²⁵.

Two of the photographs mounted on the same leaf of the 1931 album are captioned *'Inishmaan Shipping Cattle'* and *'Inisbeer Unloading'*. These show the crews of currachs transporting and unloading cattle, while pulled up beside what is probably the bigger Galway boat, a vantage



'Kilronan', Inis Mór, Co. Galway, 1931 (GP9/1)

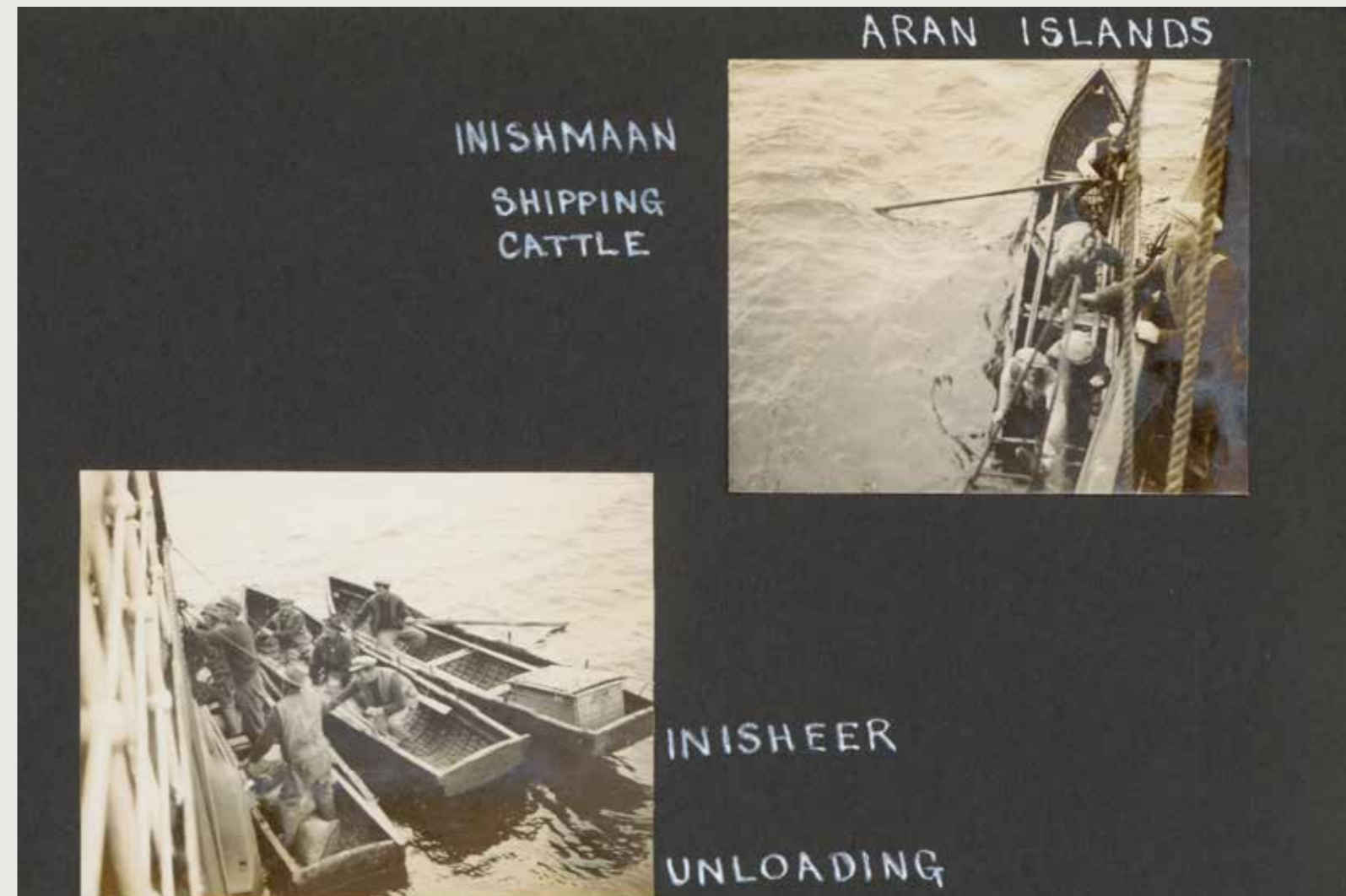


'The Island Steed', Inis Mór, Co. Galway, 1931 (GP9/1)

point from which visitors often took photographs of the people of the islands going about the vital everyday work of keeping the economy of the islands going.

The Chambers' photographs have an importance that goes far beyond the quality or artistic perfection of the image captured. A person's photographs can reflect their interest, perceptions, and world view, as well as their dexterity with the 'machinery' of photography. What shines through in Chambers' photographs is the range of subject matter, the joy in the living landscape, and the obvious interest and comfortable interaction he clearly had with those who peopled that landscape. A warm intimacy with some of those of whom he made images is hinted at, especially those he named in his captions. More than a mere travel souvenir and aide-mémoire to places seen, the people also make the place in Chambers' images of delight.

(GP9/1)



Endnotes

- 1 Mason, Thomas H., 1933, *The Islands of Ireland, Their Scenery, People, Life and Antiquities*, London, New York, Toronto and Sydney, B.T. Batsford Ltd
- 2 The postcard is captioned *The Spanish Arch, Galway*, and shows Greene's pub, the Spanish Arch, Claddagh pier and the Claddagh Hall, probably dates to the 1920s
- 3 The Menlo Castle postcard is captioned *Menlo Castle, Galway*, and shows the building situated on the banks of the River Corrib, and dates before 1910, when the Castle was destroyed by fire
- 4 The postcard captioned *Lynch's Castle, Galway* shows the castle prior to its purchase by the Munster and Leinster Bank in the late 1920s
- 5 The image captioned *Lynch Memorial Stone, Galway*, with St Nicholas' Collegiate Church behind it. The image post-dates changes to the church in the 1880s, and probably dates to the early 20th century
- 6 The postcard *The Claddagh, Galway* shows part of the village of thatched houses and the Claddagh boats to the west of the Claddagh Basin
- 7 This card captioned *The Claddagh, Galway* shows its main street of thatched and white-washed houses
- 8 The photograph captioned '*Himself*' shows Chambers in a light-coloured suit. Several other photographs throughout the Chambers Archive, including in groups images, identify the photographer as '*Himself*'
- 9 It is unfortunate that we have no other details about Penelope and Katrina, shown in the photograph
- 10 Galway County Council Archives hold a 1953 Specification and General Conditions of Contract for the erection of three reinforced concrete bridges across the Eglinton Canal, Galway, by F. S. Rishworth, Consulting Engineer, Galway in association with Ed Ralph Ryan, Consulting Engineer, Galway (GC/CS/004)
- 11 The archaeology of Aran has a vast bibliography. As early as the 17th century some of the monuments were being described and engraved. Roderic O'Flaherty, *A Chorographical Description of West or H-Iar Connaught*, written AD 1684, edited by James Hardiman for the Irish Archaeological Society, Dublin, 1864; *The Ordnance Survey Letters* by John O'Donovan provided a valuable early survey of the antiquities as they were in 1839. Thomas Johnson Westropp's (1860 – 1922) articles on the islands inspire many to visit and see the spectacular archaeology of the island, and his contribution to the *Journal of the Royal Society of Antiquaries of Ireland*, Volume 25, 1895, pp250-278 was subsequently published with work by other antiquarians and archaeologists in the Royal Society of Antiquaries of Ireland's 1905, *Illustrated Guide to the Northern Western and Southern Islands and Coasts of Ireland, Antiquarian Handbook Series*, VI, Dublin, Hodges and Figgis. For a full list of Westropp's work see for a list see Kavanagh, Mary A., *Galway-Gaillimh: Bibliography of the City and County*, 2000, p182; Wilde, William R., 1858, *A Short Description of the Western Islands of Aran, County of Galway, chiefly extracted from the Programme of the Ethnological Excursion of the British Association to these western islands of Aran, in September, 1857*, under the Direction of W. R. Wilde, MRIA, 18th August, 1958; The more recent archaeology is summarised in Waddell, John *et al* (eds), 1994, *The Book of Aran: The Aran Islands, County Galway*, Kinvara, Tir Éolas
- 12 See Haddon, A.C., and Browne, C.R., 1891-93, 'The Ethnography of Aran Islands, County Galway', *Proceedings of the Royal Irish Academy*, 2, pp765-803; O'Connell, M. *et al*, 1992, 'Ecological Studies of Littoral Fauna and Flora on Inishmore, Aran Island, Co. Galway', *Proceedings of the Royal Irish Academy*, 92 B, pp19-131; Messenger John, 1964, 'Literary vs Scientific Interpretations of the Cultural Reality in the Aran Islands of Eire', *Ethnohistory*, 11, pp41-55; Messenger, John C, 1966, 'Man of Aran Revisited, An Anthropological Critique', *University Review*, 3(9), pp15-47
- 13 For the linguistics and philology of Aran see for instance O'Direáin, Seamus, 2015, *A Survey of Spoken Irish in the Aran Islands, Co. Galway*
- 14 For the botany of Aran see Andrews, William, 1848, 'Observation on Botany of Great Arran Islands, Galway Bay', London, *J. of Botany*, 4(48), pp569-70; Web D. A., 1980, 'The Flora of the Aran Islands' *J. Life Sciences*, Royal Dublin Society, 2(i), pp1-83
- 15 Among the published collections featuring the Aran Islands are the following: Watson, Henry Cecil, 1999, *Inis Meáin Images, Ten Days in August 1912*, Dublin, Wolfhound Press, Reprinted 2000 etc; Syngé, John Millington, 1971, *My Wallet of Photographs: The Collected Photographs of J.M. Syngé. Arranged and Introduced by Lilo Stephens*, Lilo, Dublin, Dolmen Press and Humanities Press; Scully, Sean and Tóibín, Colm, 2007, *Walls of Aran, Introduced by Colm Tóibín*, Thames & Hudson; Doyle, Bill, 1999, *The Aran Islands Another World*, Lilliput Press; and Doyle, Bill, 2000, *Island Funeral*, Photography by Bill Doyle, with a text by Muiris Mac Conghail, Veritas Publications
- 16 Donn, Brian Oswald Byrne (1889 - 1928) was a prolific Irish writer, well known for his historic novels, short stories and poetry. His novels, in particular *Ireland: The Rock Whence I Was Hewn*, were immensely popular in Ireland and America
- 17 This photograph may be a Mason image
- 18 See Kilmm, L., 1939, 'The Rain Tanks of Aran. A Recent Solution to an Old Problem', *Bulletin of the Geographical Society of Philadelphia*, pp73-84
- 19 See for instance, Cliff, Brian and Grene, Nicolas (eds.), 2012, *Syngé and Edwardian Ireland*, Oxford University Press; Fitzpatrick, David, 2012, "Syngé and Modernity" in Cliff and Grene (eds.) 2012, pp121-158; Allen, Nicholas, 2012, "Syngé Reading and Archipelago", in Cliff and Grene (eds.), pp59-171; and Markey, Anne, 2012, "The Price of Kelp in Connemara: Syngé, Pearse, and the Idealisation of Folk Culture" in Cliff and Grene (eds.), pp208-224
- 20 Syngé, John Millington, 1907, *The Aran Islands*, World Classics Edition 1962, pp194-5
- 21 Rutledge-Fair, Major Robert, 1893, *Base Line Report for the Congested Districts Report* Reproduced in Facsimile in O'Sullivan, Paul (Rev., Godwin, Nora), 1977, *A World of Stone*, Dublin, O'Brien Educational, pp71-5
- 22 For the Aran Island high crosses see Waddell, John, 1981, 'An Unpublished High Cross in Aran, Co. Galway', *Journal of Royal Social of Antiquarians*, 3, Ireland, pp29-35; Macalister, Robert A. S., 1913, 'Crosses at Kilbreacan Aran', *Journal of Royal Social of Antiquarians*, 6 (3), Ireland, p344
- 23 Syngé, John Millington, 1907, *The Aran Islands*, World Classics Edition 1962
- 24 Mason, Thomas H., 1933, *The Islands of Ireland, Their Scenery, People, Life and Antiquities*, London, B.T. Batsford Ltd
- 25 Mason, Thomas H., 1938, *The Islands of Ireland*, 2nd ed. revised, p61

The Blaskets Album 1931 – 1938

Michael Lynch

'The Cow (underneath) All Together!'; the Great Blasket, 1931 (GP9/2)



The Blasket Islands are a part of the former Dunquin Civil Parish in Co. Kerry, and the most westerly point of Ireland. From Dunmore Head on the mainland, the Great Blasket Island is situated 80 chains (1 mile) to the south-west. The Blaskets are accessible by boat from Dunquin Pier.

In his history of Kerry, Charles Smith notes:

About a mile and a half from this promontory [Dunmore Head] stands the largest of the Blasket or Ferriter's Islands, called also the Blasques, probably from Blaosc or Blaosg, in Irish, a scale or shell, being supposed to have scaled off the continent in Ireland. These islands were twelve in number, but four of them are only rocks.¹

The Blaskets formerly belonged to the Earls of Desmond, who gave them to the Ferriter family. However, when the Ferriters joined the Desmond Rebellion, their lands became forfeit to the Crown in 1580. Under letters patent of 1586, they were granted to George Stone (Kingston, Surrey) and Cornelius Champion, who in turn sold their interest to Henry Billingsley, and ultimately the islands became part of the estate of the Earls of Cork & Orrery.

The Great Blasket (referred to by the locals as Oileán Mór, and as Inishmore by Smith) is approximately 3 miles in length and 1 mile in width. It contains about 1,020 acres and in Smith's time was inhabited by five or six families. Indeed, Smith noted that:

The inhabitants are strong, lusty and healthy, and, what is very surprising, neither man, woman, or child died on it for the space of forty five years before I was there.²

However, he does go on to spoil this picture of rude health by stating that several who fell ill actually died on the mainland. The population of the Great Blasket was 153 in 1841 but dived to 95 just ten years later. It rose again in the latter decades of the 19th century to 136 (in 1881), 132 (in 1891), 145 (in 1901), and 160 (in 1911). This latter figure, when drilled into, reveals that 47% were aged 15 or under, with a further 31% aged between 16 and 40. The population seemed to be a young and vibrant one.

The second largest of the Blaskets is Inishvickillane (MacKillane's Island), which lies about two miles south-west of the Great Blasket. Smith notes that its position - *'too far out in the great western ocean, and the lands being low, and too bleak to afford shelter to inhabitants³* - meant that it had been uninhabited for several years at the time he was writing in the 1750s. This state of affairs had changed by the mid-19th century, with small population numbers being recorded in both 1841 (3) and 1851 (8). However, the later census returns show a gradual falling off of these numbers until 1911 shows Inishvickillane to be uninhabited again. Inishvickillane was purchased by Charles Haughey⁴ in the mid-1970s, and a holiday home was built with a windmill to provide electricity to the house.

The other islands were rarely inhabited other than by seasonal fishermen or (in the case of Tearaght) by lighthouse keepers.

In relation to the Irish language, and taking the 1911 census return as a sample, 72 of the 160 inhabitants recorded that they spoke 'Irish only'; 77 were recorded as speaking Irish and English. Ten are recorded as 'neither' (infant children) and just 1 is recorded as speaking English only. This was Mayo-man John Corcoran, a foreman, working for the Congested Districts Board.

The common occupation of most of the islanders was that of 'fisherman', there being very little by way of cultivable land. The pasture on the main island was of a decent quality, which meant that sheep and dairy farming were viable to a subsistence level.

The Folklore Commission's Schools' Manuscripts Collection returns of the mid-1930s shows what appears to be a still thriving student body in the local national school, with over 450 pages of material collected. However, this is masking the fact that it was the senior children in the school who were asked to collect this material. In 1941, *The Kerryman* noted that the school had been closed by order of the Department of Education⁵. Under a banner headline which asked 'What is the Islanders' Future Fate?' *The Kerryman* reported that school numbers had been 50 in the 1890s but had dwindled to a point where there were just three enrolments during the 1940/41 school year. It goes on to state that the population of the island was 130 in 1925, but the general slowdown in fishing had led to depopulation:

But fishing along our seaboard has sadly deteriorated of late years. No longer does the sea yield its treasure on the former scale. As the Red Man has gone with the buffalo, so has the Blasket Man gone with the fish⁶.

The Kerryman had (in March 1937) noted that ‘a number of Blasket Islanders intend leaving their island homes, where their fathers had lived for generations, to seek a better existence on the mainland next Autumn⁷’.

This article also carried an interview with Seán Ó Chriomhthain, who claimed that the (present) islanders could not endure the hardships of their predecessors. The fishing industry had been ‘a rank failure’, and that between 5 and seven houses would be deserted by the winter of 1937. The next generation was also absent, with little or no school enrolments, and there had been no marriages on the island in the preceding four years.

The sizeable return made to the Folklore Commission’s Schools’ Manuscript Collection masked the fact that, below the latter (5th & 6th) classes in the national school, there were very few pupils being enrolled. Therefore, it was no great surprise to find so few enrolments by the time the school was closed. Following its closure, the archives of the Blasket national school were transferred to the National Archives of Ireland.

The OPW’s Sites & Monuments Record (SMR) records sites on four of the larger Blasket Islands, including evidence of a field system and cultivation ridge on Inishnabro; ecclesiastical remains and a *leacht luimbne* (cairn) on Inishtooskert; and field systems, an oratory, a promontory fort, a *leacht luimbne*, a cross-inscribed stone and an Ogham stone on Inishvickillane. The archaeological complex on the Great Blasket includes a possible castle site, a children’s burial ground, old house systems and a clochán among its remains.⁸ The lighthouse on the western side of the island is the only notable feature on Tearaght.

The seas off the Blaskets can be treacherous, and Edward J Bourke’s 3-volume series, *Shipwrecks of the Irish Coast*, record numerous incidents. On one occasion (8 February 1809, the *Mary* (bound for Poole from Limerick) and the *Sarah* (bound for Portsmouth from Limerick) fouled one another and both were wrecked⁹. However, the most famous wreck off the Blasket coast is that of the *Santa Maria de la Rosa* of the famed Spanish Armada, which was wrecked on 11 September 1588 on Stromboli Reef between Dunmore Head

and the Great Blasket Island. A small brass cannon with a coat of arms bearing the device of an uprooted tree was found on the Blaskets in about 1840 and removed to Clonskeagh Castle. Unfortunately, its present whereabouts are unknown¹⁰.

The Islands were in the Dispensary District of Ventry, which would have required the islanders to get to the mainland for any medical treatments. The parish priest would visit the main island on a regular – if limited – basis, and all baptism, marriage and burial ceremonies were carried out at the Dunquin parish church on the mainland.

The closure of the school foreshadowed the larger problem of an aging population and it became obvious that the settlement could not survive or thrive as it had for centuries past. The end came in December 1953 when the final islanders were evacuated to new settlements on the mainland. By the time of the evacuation, all of the land and homes on the island were owner-occupied. In contrast, the other islands (Inishnabro, Inishtooskert and Inishvickillane) were still owned by the Earl of Cork and Orrery.

While the evacuation spelled the end of an inhabited Blaskets, the rich heritage of island life had been captured in a golden period of literary activity between 1929 and 1935. The Gaelic Revival scholar Robin Flower (lovingly called *Bláithín* by the Blasket Islanders) had been a great champion of the Blasket Island dialect and supported the cause of publication of the writings and experiences of people like Tomás Ó Chriomhthain, Muiris Ó Súilleabháin, and Peig Sayers. *An tOileánach* led the charge in 1929, and was followed by Muiris Ó Súilleabháin’s *Fiche Bliain Ag Fás* (1933) and *Peig* (1935). Ó Chriomhthain’s use of the phrase ‘*Ní bheidh ár leithéidí ann arís*’ (The like of us will not be seen again) would prove to be a very literal epitaph and a knowing recognition of the death of a way of life. Ó Chriomhthain had earlier worked on a series of interviews (*Allagar na hInise*) with An Seabhac (Pádraig Ó Siochfhradha), and his style had so impressed Flower that he went on to help Tomás to create *An tOileánach*. An Seabhac was helped in his earlier work by Swedish ethnologist and folklorist Professor Carl Wilhelm Von Sydow, father of the celebrated actor, Max von Sydow.

Tomás died in March 1937 at the age of 80. Peig died in February 1958, aged 90. Muiris Ó Súilleabháin was drowned at Knocknacarra in June 1950. He had been a member of an Garda Síochána, based in Galway and was just 47 years old.

A page of the George Chambers' Blasket album (GP9/2) depicts some of the literal high points of Oileán Mór. The name 'Cromwell's Tower' is attributed here to the highest point of the island. This is intriguing as there is no known connection of the island with the Cromwell name. Indeed, the Kerry Placename Archive references for the Great Blasket Island do not mention Cromwell's Tower at all. Given the way this picture appears with the others taken on the heights of the island, it appears likely that the name is derived from a misunderstanding of Croaghmore (An Cró Mór), a Trigonometrical Station at the highest point on the island (981 feet).

The album is comprehensive in its attention to the monastic origins of life on the island, but also concentrates on the 'now' of its life and times. This brings in some wonderful images of the landing pier



(GP9/2)

on the island, and a fine series of images¹¹ depicting the difficulties of livestock handling. It is hard to imagine the level of danger involved in bringing cattle to and from the island in an open currach, but to see it being enacted is to marvel at the courage of the islanders.

Turf cutting and harvesting are also represented in the images captured by Chambers. What is presented by postcard manufacturers in a 'touristic' fashion appears more visceral and difficult, even for what Chambers calls '*Modernised Island Girls*'.

Several images bear testament to the challenges faced in delivery of goods to the lighthouse keepers on Tearaght Island. The landing jetty was practically non-existent, but the risk of landing still had to be taken. The images on these pages reinforce what an achievement it was to have this type



'Cromwell's Tower', the Great Blasket, 1931 (GP9/2)



'Modernised Island Girls bringing Turf Home', the Great Blasket, 1931 (GP9/2)

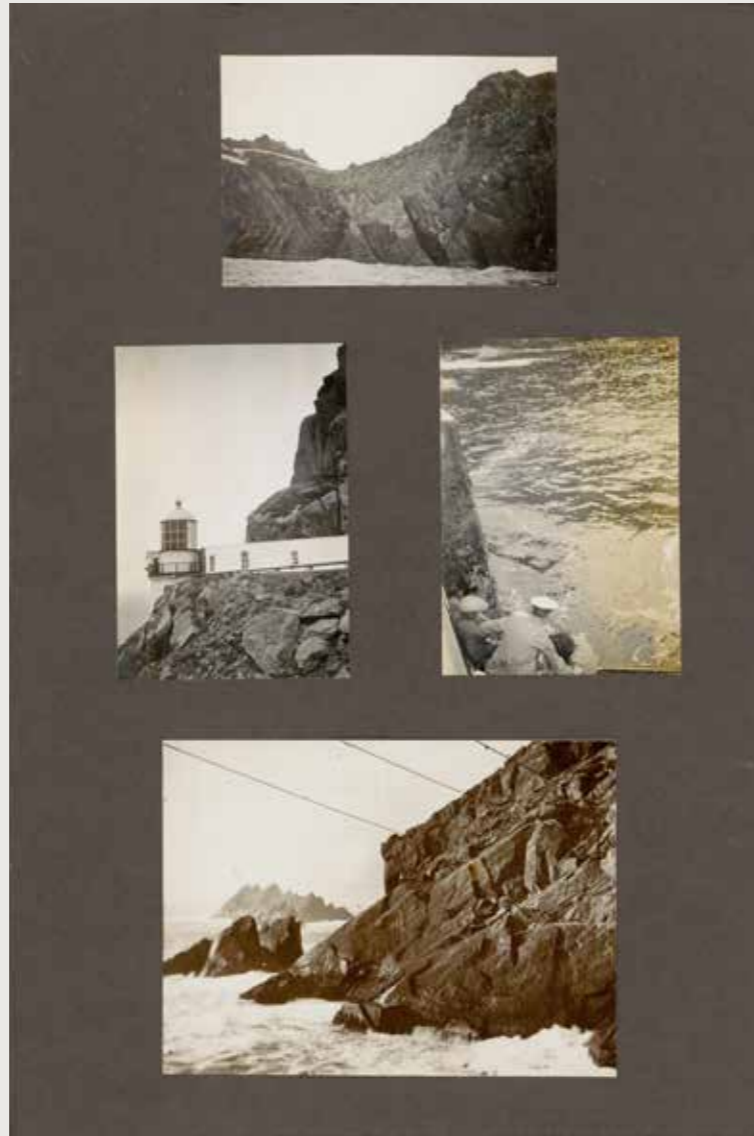
of engine technology in such a remote place ('the most westerly point of the Tearacht and of the OLD WORLD').

We are reminded that the problem of a dwindling population was a grave one for the island. The caption of the 1931 school class notes that there were 35 scholars that year, but by 1939 there was 3 pupils.

The Chambers' album also addresses the literary legacy of the island. It coincides with a period of great productivity in terms of the recording of island life. Eibhlís Ní Shúilleabháin seems to have been Chambers' Blaskets muse, and her connections to both Ó Criomhthain and Muiris Ó Súilleabháin made her literary royalty on the island. It appears clear that Chambers appreciated the snapshot in time that his 1931 and 1938 visits had provided.

Kerry Archives has several collections reflective of Blasket scenery, but the Chambers' album delves deeper into the daily lives – fishing, farming and turf husbandry – that is rarely depicted elsewhere. His captions offer more than just names of people and places. Occasionally, they also provoke more thought and investigation of what he has written. 'Cromwell's Tower' (referred to above) is just one example, while references to 'The Crow' and 'the house of the "Fairy Music"' on Inishvickillane could also provide food for deeper research.

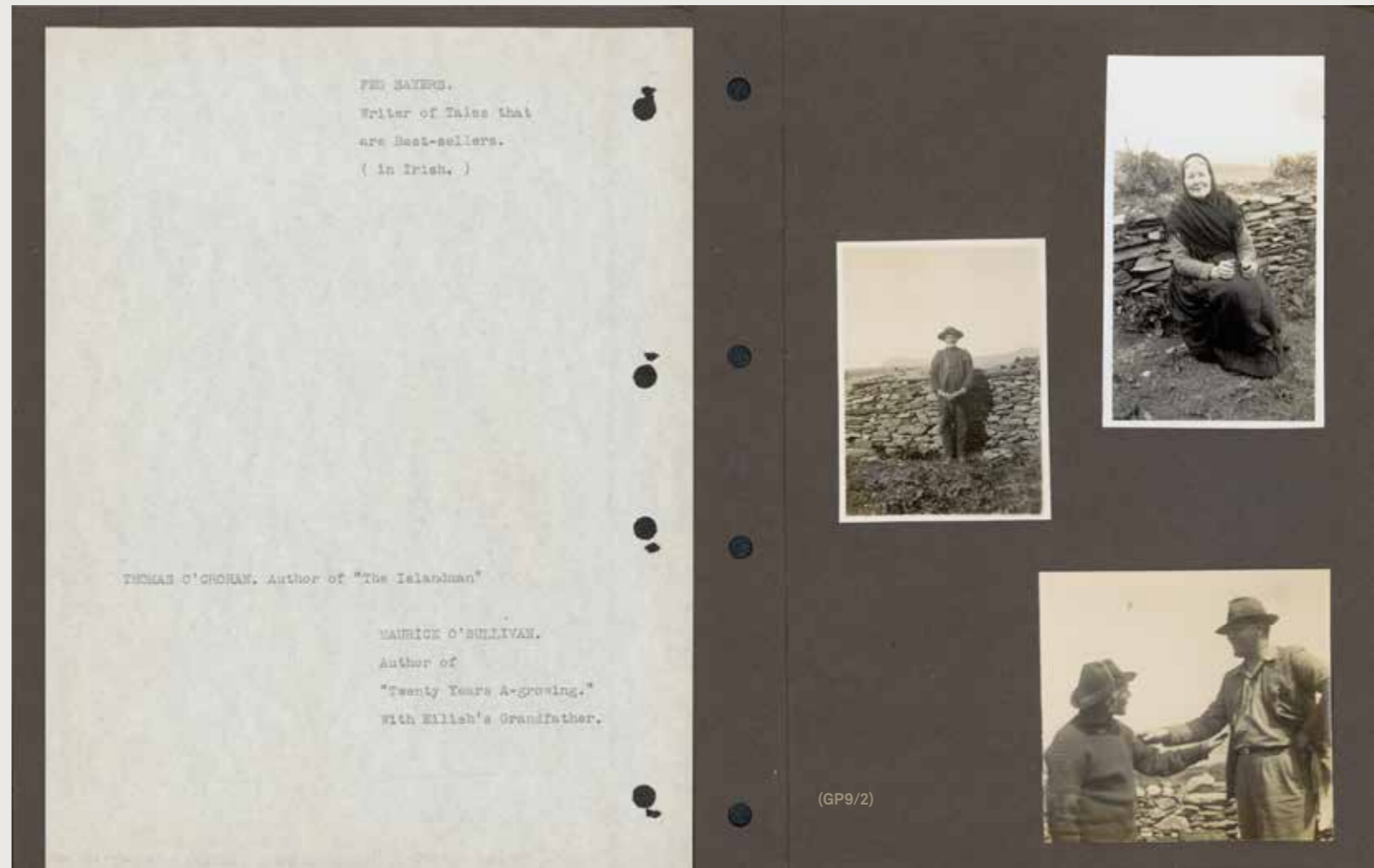
All of these things combine to make Chambers' Blasket album a hugely important document of island life at a time when it was in its last throes, but still had enough life in it to produce some of the greatest Irish language literature of the twentieth century.



(GP9/2)



'The School in 1931, when there were 35 scholars. There were 3 in 1939', the Great Blasket (GP9/2) 12



(GP9/2)

*"Eilish, Nora and Island Fishermen outside the house of the
"Fairy Music", Innishvickillane, the Blasket Islands (GP9/2)*

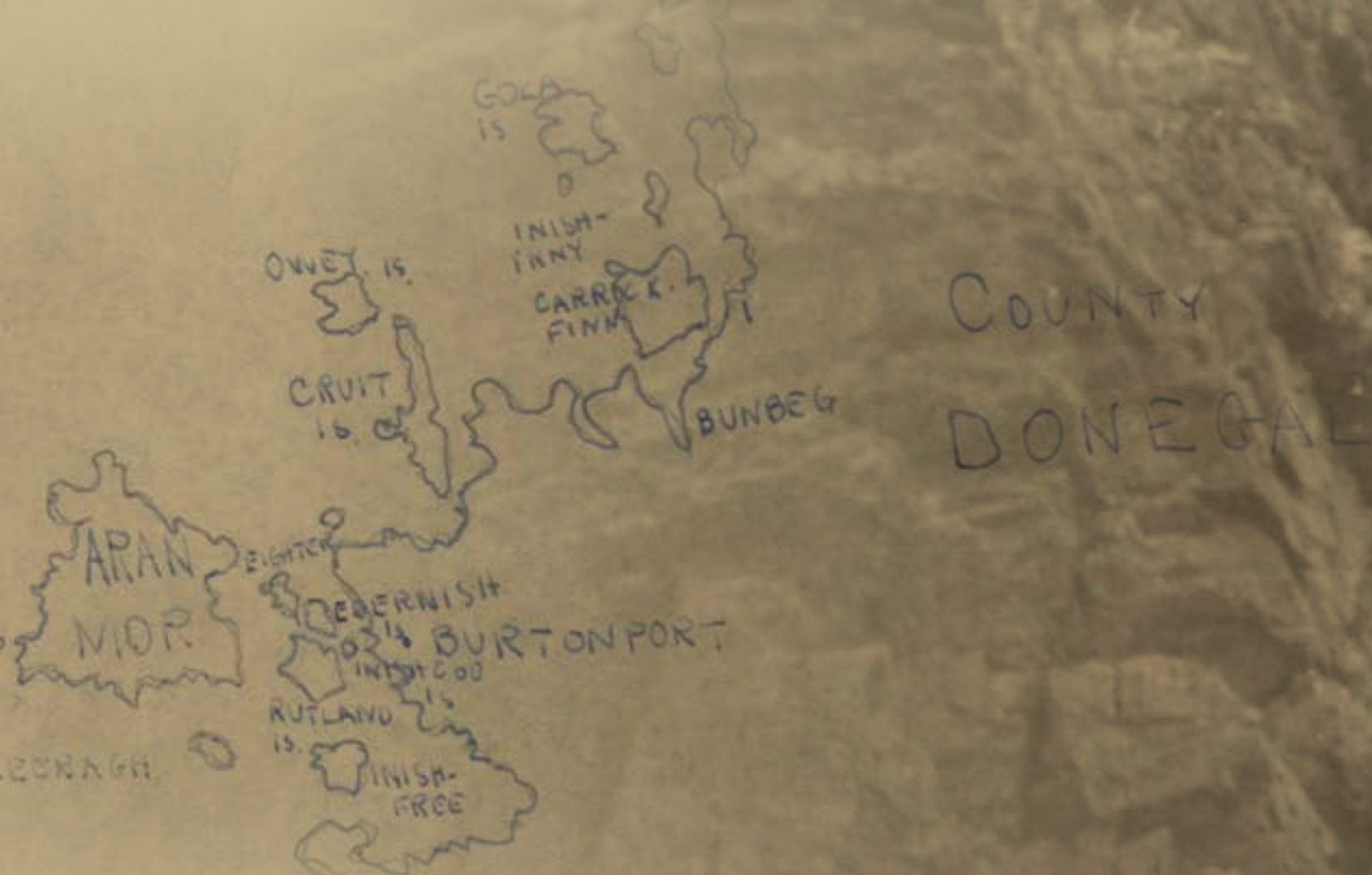


Endnotes

- 1 Smith, Charles, 1756, *The Ancient and Present State of the County of Kerry*, p182
- 2 Ibid., p183
- 3 Ibid., p183
- 4 Haughey Charles (1925 – 2006) Fianna Fáil politician and Taoiseach. He first entered Dáil Éireann in 1957, and served as Taoiseach on three occasions – 1979 to 1981, March to December 1982 and 1987 to 1992
- 5 *The Kerryman*, 1 Mar 1941, p1
- 6 Ibid., 1 Mar 1941, p1
- 7 Ibid., 20 Mar 1937, p1
- 8 Sites & Monuments Record (SMR), Co. Kerry, OS Sheets 51 & 61
- 9 Bourke, Edward J, 1998, *Shipwrecks of the Irish Coast*, Vol. 2, p122
- 10 Ibid., Vol. 1, 1994, p157
- 11 Some of which must be attributed to the Mason Photographic Collection held by the National Library of Ireland
- 12 This image and another image of school children on the same page appear in other publications, such as 1978, *The Blaskets, People and Literature*, A Kerry Island Library, Muiris Mac Conghail, Town House, Dublin, p66. Its caption indicates the schoolteacher was Nóra Ní Shéaghdha (1905 - 1975) from Chill Chuáin, Co. Kerry and that she wrote two novels in Irish. For more see Ainm.ie @ <https://www.ainm.ie/Bio.aspx?ID=221&AspxAutoDetectCookieSupport=1>

The Donegal Album 1932

Dr Niamh Brennan



'Sketch from Chambers' Donegal Album, 1932 (GP9/3)

'The Western Cliffs', Arranmore, Co. Donegal, 1932 (GP9/3)

In a George Chambers' photograph of the Diver family on Gabhla (Gola Island), Co. Donegal, in 1932, they lean against a stone wall, relaxed and smiling, their home and the rugged landscape the backdrop. The image of an intact viable community on the small island contrasts starkly with a photograph from another Archives collection, that of documentary photographer Ann Doherty, whose 1994 photograph of the interior of the O'Donnell family home seems to represent an island that has been abandoned and lost to the community¹.



But in fact, while far fewer people make their permanent home on the Donegal islands today, they are no longer as remote or lonely as they may have once been and are more strongly connected to their county than ever before.



Of the islands off the coast of Donegal, Toraigh (Tory) is perhaps the most renowned, but it does not feature in the Chambers' Donegal album (GP9/3). The majority of the photographs in the album are from Donegal's largest island, Árainn Mhór (Arranmore). There are also photographs of

Inis Fraoigh (Inishfree), Inis Caorach (Inishkeeragh), Uaigh (Owey), Inis Mhic an Doirn (Rutland), Gabhla (Gola), An tÍochtar (Eighter Island), An tOileán Glas (Green Island), Inis Cú (Inishcoo), Eadarinis (Edernish), An Charraig Fhinn (Carrickfinn) and Inis Sionnaigh (Inishinny), and there is a postcard of Oileán na Cruite (Cruit Island).

'The Diver Family', Gola Island, Co. Donegal, 1932 (GP9/3)

Nora O'Donnell's house on Gola Island, 1994. (Ann Doherty, Documentary Photographer Collection (Donegal County Archives))

Árainn Mhór (Arranmore), which lies a few kilometres from Ailt an Chorráin (Burtonport), is the largest and most populated island off west Donegal. The black and white Chambers' prints depict a wild and remote island. We see the vast Atlantic disappearing into the horizon, the lighthouse standing out alone and starkly surrounded by rough terrain as the great white waves crash against jagged rocks and roughly hewn steps below.



'The Lighthouse Steps (from the cliff)', Arranmore, Co. Donegal, 1932 (GP9/3)

'The Western Cliffs', Arranmore, Co. Donegal, 1932 (GP9/3)

The image captioned '*The Lighthouse Steps (from the cliff)*' is an extraordinary photograph of the steps as they wind their way through the dense rocks from the seashore to the lighthouse. Several images in the album including one captioned '*The Western Cliffs*', show the two pinnacles and the huge granite cliffs from a variety of angles. They depict the wildness, desolation and imposing grandeur of the island's edges, when viewed rising out of the Atlantic, along with tantalising glimpses into mysterious dark caves below.

In other photographs, the great cliffs loom over the ocean, sweep down to the wild Atlantic or tower over deserted beaches. These images show a seemingly timeless island, suggesting desertion, isolation, a landscape emptied of human population. Yet as we view some of Chambers' other images of the island, we see Arranmore in the third decade of the 20th century with a thriving community, a harbour and ferry, fisheries, houses and cottages dotted across the hills, colourful flora and fauna and outstanding landmarks such as its striking 18th century lighthouse.

Arranmore is part of the Donegal Gaeltacht in the Rosses in the west of the county, where the majority of people are Irish speaking. Following the Ulster Plantation of the 17th century, Arranmore and other Donegal islands were acquired by wealthy landowner William Burton Conyngham². The census of 1841 tells us that the island's population was 1,431. While the numbers of people on the island declined steadily in the years after the Great Famine, it was really only during and after the 1960s that it began to fall more dramatically, and permanently.

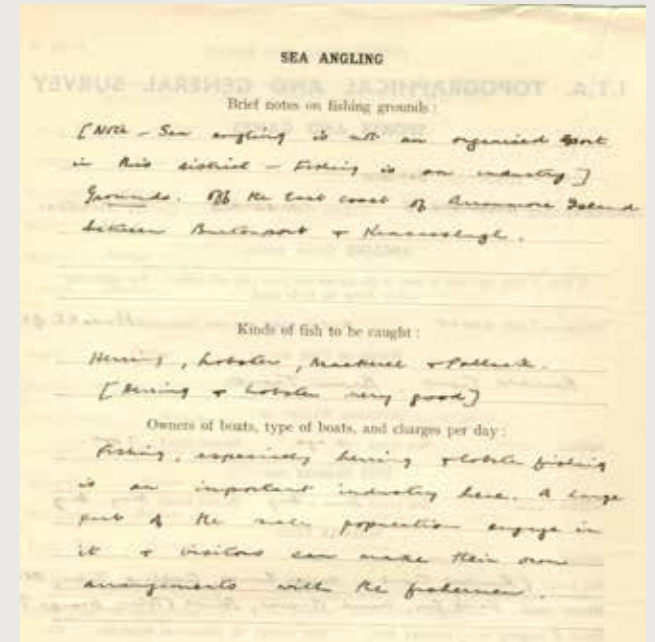
Fishing has always been a vital part of the economy of west Donegal and prior to World War I it is believed that up to 7,000 people were involved in that industry. Many of them were also farmers. Herring was particularly important as it formed part of the basic diet of people in Donegal. In the 18th century William Conyngham constructed a fishing station on Inis Mhic an Doirn (Rutland Island), in order to facilitate large scale fishing of the herring shoals of the Atlantic. Continuing his efforts to industrialise the islands, streets, houses and post offices were built on Arranmore and Rutland between 1785 and 1788. Unfortunately, efforts to establish a permanently thriving herring industry did not ultimately succeed, and many of the fisheries' buildings were no longer in use by the mid-19th century; the fishing industry remained important, nonetheless.



'Getting Ready for the Sea', Arranmore, Co. Donegal, 1932 (GP9/3)

Chambers' photograph of the men on Arranmore, captioned 'Getting Ready for the Sea', reflects the significance of fishing on the islands even into the 1930s, although other means of income were increasing in popularity, including season 'tattie hoking' (migratory potato picking work in Scotland) and local farming.

The Irish Tourist Association (ITA) Survey carried out a decade later (1942 - 1945) reiterates the importance of fishing to Arranmore Island. One surveyor wrote that:



Fishing, especially herring and lobster, is an important industry here. A large part of the male population engage in it and visitors can make their own arrangements [to travel to the island] with the fishermen³.

Extract from Irish Tourist Association Survey, Co. Donegal, 1943 - 1945 (Donegal County Archives)



'Sea-weed (Manure)', Arranmore, Co. Donegal, 1932 (GP9/3)



'Burning Seaweed for Kelp,' Inishkeeragh Island, Co. Donegal, 1932 (GP9/3)



'An English Memory. Glen House', Arranmore, Co. Donegal, 1932 (GP9/3)

'Anna Boyle and John (Philip) [her son] of Glen House, Arranmore, Co. Donegal, 1932 (GP9/3)

Over the course of the 19th century, the harvesting of seaweed grew in importance on the islands for use as a fertiliser and fodder for livestock, among other uses. One of the Arranmore photographs is of a young man gathering kelp while an Inishkeeragh image shows an older man *'Burning Seaweed for Kelp.'*

As the Famine lingered into the early 1850s, the Encumbered Estates Act gave bankrupt landowners an opportunity to sell unprofitable lands and properties. The Conynghams sold the island to John Stoupe Charley⁴ from Co. Antrim. The photograph of Glen House captures the beauty of the house, which Charley built. The print shows a fine house, set among mature trees, with a graceful white horse grazing nearby.

Though Charley, unlike many landowners, lived on the island, he was nonetheless an unpopular landlord. Various evictions took place over the years and many people were forced to leave the island, emigrate or spend time in Glenties workhouse which, though about 36 kilometres away, served as the workhouse for most of the islands⁵.

Glen House was eventually sold to the Boyle family in the early 20th century. The Boyles converted the house into a hotel. Anna, and her husband John, are listed in the electoral register for West Donegal, 1929 – 1930⁶.

The ongoing decline in population from the time of the Famine was due in part to various assisted emigration schemes, both government and landlord sponsored. Through one of these schemes islanders who emigrated to America settled on Beaver

Island on Lake Michigan, and today a strong familial link exists between the people of the two islands.

Arranmore was purchased by the Congested Districts Board in the 1890s. The Board worked hard to improve life for the islanders, dividing up land, building houses, improving farming and increasing livestock. Agricultural training programmes were organised, and the first nurse came to Arranmore to live and work in the early 1900s⁷. Arranmore was also the first island to be electrified under the state Rural Electrification scheme in 1956.

The harshness and conditions of life on a north-west island into the 1930s are reflected in two photographs in the album of a typical washing day. Bridget Boyle is shown in one standing, apparently barefoot, alongside a winding stream, in rough terrain of rocks and bog. She has her 'tools', her washboard and bucket, with sheets and clothes strewn out on warm rocks to dry on a rare sunny day.

'Bridget Boyle Washing' Arranmore, Co. Donegal, 1932 (GP9/3)



Chambers also includes in the album images of a typical day on the more remote islands of the west, which depict journeys to the bog on donkey and with creel baskets.

The reference to children in a few of the captioned photographs as ‘types’ - ‘*Spanish type*’, ‘*Island Child*’ - seems to be a throwback to a time long forgotten today. When we



‘*Work in the Bog*’, Arranmore, Co. Donegal, 1932 (GP9/3)



‘*An Island Child (Spanish Type)*’, Arranmore, Co. Donegal, 1932 (GP9/3)



‘*Confirmation (The Schoolmaster’s Children)*’, Arranmore, Co. Donegal, 1932 (GP9/3)

view these images to-day we don’t see them as types, rather we see them just as happy and busy young children. A greater prosperity is evidenced in the contrasting photographs of two young girls dressed in white on the day of their Confirmation, described as schoolmaster’s children.

Chambers’ image of the lifeboat on Arranmore reminds us of the treacherous nature of the Atlantic waters and the dangers faced every day by those who journeyed by sea, particularly fishermen. Following a petition by local residents the landlord, Charley⁸, agreed to build a lifeboat and slipway in 1883. A new lifeboat house was constructed in 1903⁹. The lifeboat’s importance cannot be underestimated, though sadly it could not save 19 young Arranmore men and women, seven from the one family, when their yawl ran into rocks in November 1935. They were on their way home from seasonal ‘*tattie hoking*’ in Scotland, and some of the recovered bodies were laid out in the boathouse in Rannagh on Arranmore. The subsequent wakes and funerals are documented in harrowing imagery, showing the sole survivor, the coffins, and the grieving families. It seems hard to believe that the shocking photographs¹⁰ were taken only three years after Chambers had visited. The contrast between the depiction of everyday life in 1932 and the utter devastation following the drownings in 1935 could hardly be more stark or poignant¹¹.

‘*The Life-Boat*’, Arranmore, Co. Donegal, 1932 (GP9/3)



Just a few years later in 1943, the ITA Survey wrote of the urgent need for a ferry service from Arranmore, stating that the pier was in the process of being reconstructed and when finalised would 'provide a safe anchorage for boats and allow them to land at all stages of the tide'¹².

Even given its decline in population to 469 people in 2016 Arranmore remains today a thriving community and one of the jewels in the crown of west Donegal. It is easily accessible by ferry from Burtonport and, while traditionally the islanders' main income was from fishing and farming, in recent decades tourism has grown in importance. The population sometimes doubles in number during the tourist season. In recent years the tourism trade has expanded greatly, with the islands gaining holiday homes, hotels, bed and breakfasts, and a hostel. Irish language summer schools also contribute to the seasonal increase in population.

Rutland Island's original name was Inis Mhic an Doirn. Conygham's planned settlement for the islands stretched as far as Rutland and in 1789 a small housing street, a school and fish processing plant were built. The terrace of houses was built on what became known as Tarent or Duck Street. The sole Rutland island photograph in the Chambers' album is of this street with its gate at one end and grass growing in the



'A Poor Man's House',
Arranmore, Co. Donegal,
1932 (GP9/3)

'Rutland Island (Burtonport
in distance), Co. Donegal,
1932 (GP9/3)

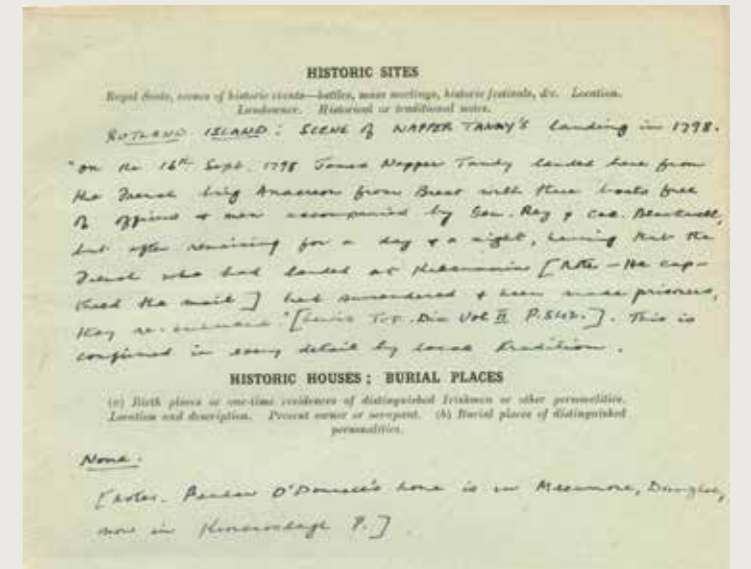
Extract from Irish Tourist
Association Survey, Co.
Donegal, 1943 – 1945
(Donegal County Archives)

middle, the Atlantic waters and Burtonport vaguely visible beyond. The houses, still standing and visible in modern photography online, contrast with the prints of the vernacular thatched cottages of Owey (see image on page 98), and other islands. The most outstanding one of these is in Arranmore, described by Chambers as 'A Poor Man's House'.

Rutland Island is famous for its minor but startling role in the 1798 rebellion. The Dublin based revolutionary Napper Tandy (1739 - 1803) and a few fellow United Irishmen, aided by the French, sailed with a cache of arms to Ireland, arriving in Arranmore on 16 September. During his brief visit Tandy also visited Rutland and apparently hoisted an Irish flag there, but was disheartened when he heard of the failure of the rebellion elsewhere and quickly returned to the continent. He only escaped execution through the intervention of Napoleon Bonaparte (1769 - 1821). A short description of Tandy's escapade on Rutland is included in the ITA Survey¹³.



Gabhla (Gola) is situated about a mile from Gaoth Dobhair. The island covers approximately one square mile. In 1881 it was home to 107 people. The 1911 census recorded 169 residents, a result of a boom in the fishing industry. The electoral registers in Donegal County Archives



from 1902, 1937 and 1964 reflect the changes that occurred in its population over the course of just 60 years.

Although Gola is such a small island, its renown has spread far beyond the county due mainly to the song ‘Báidín Fheilimí’, a song about a fishing boat that most children in Ireland grew up learning at school. Gola is also famous for the voyage taken by two men from the island, Patrick McGinley and Charles Duggan, on the *Asgard*, which brought arms into Howth in north Dublin in 1914, in preparation for the Easter Rising of 1916.

Today the island is attractive to visitors for its renown, its scenery and its wildlife.

Oileán na Cruite (Cruit Island) situated in the area of west Donegal known as The Rosses, is connected to the mainland by a bridge, is renowned for its 9-hole golf course as well as its beaches and wildlife.

Inis Fraoigh (Inishfree), the island of heather, is about one square mile in area. Many believe that the famous chieftain Niall of the Nine Hostages once owned the island. In the early years of the 20th century up to 36 families lived there in ‘*clachans*’. Renowned author and republican Peadar O’Donnell and author Séamus Ó Grianna were both teachers in the local national school on the island (as well as on some of the surrounding islands.)



‘Glacial Boulders
(Inishfree)’, Co. Donegal,
1932 (GP9/3)

Chambers includes two photographs of the island, both of which reflect its ancient geology, the glacial boulders, as well as its more recent habitation, the traditional houses.

Islands Today

The 1940s ITA Survey describes in detail the islands’ breath-taking scenery and the potential for long-term tourism:

Most of the islands, Rutland, Cruit, Inishcoo, ... are low lying and unimposing with low sandy shores. Orwey Island rises sharply from the ocean floor and it is bold and rocky, but Arranmore will easily be the most attractive to the Tourist.

The surveyor notes that from certain vantage points on Arranmore,

The view that unfolds itself is unbelievably lovely, an amazing succession of towering cliffs, sand beaches, bolds promontories, island freckled bays, rocky coastline, inlets and creeks, the cottages-strewn coastal strip, silver lakes and the wonderful background of the highlands, every range and every peak¹⁴.

Seventy years later, in the third decade of the 21st century, tourism is probably the most important industry to west Donegal and its islands. Also, technology now means that many islanders may no longer always need to travel away from their county, even their island, to work. Arranmore, its population still in decline, has upgraded its Internet connectivity, and in recent years advertised its attractiveness as a place to live and work from.

As we have seen, the central role of tourism in the future of the Donegal islands has been established. The need for preservation is of vital importance to the islanders and to all those with responsibility for the islands’ preservation, its rugged landscape, the flora and fauna, and the uniquely fascinating history. The Chambers’ photograph collection and other archive collections play a significant role in recording the islands’ past while contributing to continuing interest and investment in their future.



'The Village', Inisheeragh Island, Co. Donegal, 1932 (GP9/3)



'On Owey', Co. Donegal, 1932 (GP9/3)

Further reading

Ferriter, Diarmaid, 2018, *On the Edge, Ireland's Off-Shore Islands: A Modern History*, London

Harvey, Ross, and Clark, Wallace, 2003, *Donegal Islands*, Donaghadee

Donegal Annual, Journal of the County Donegal Historical Society

Endnotes

- 1 Ann Doherty Collection (Ph/10), Donegal County Archives
- 2 Conyngham, William Burton (1733 - 1796), politician, antiquarian, and landowner. The National Library of Ireland holds the Conyngham Papers, 1614 - 1935 (ref: MS Collection List 53, and MS 35,339-35,434 (which relate to the family and its estates in counties Clare, Donegal and Meath. Also papers of the associated families of Burton of Co. Clare and McCausland of Co. Donegal
- 3 ITA Survey, 1942 - 1945, SY/2/1/1, Donegal County Archives
- 4 Charley, John Stoupe (1825 - 1878) held approx. 6,498 acres in Donegal
- 5 Donegal County Archives holds an extensive collection of Poor Law Unions /Boards of Guardian material (1840 - 1923), including an Admission and Discharge Register for Glenties Workhouse, 1850 - 1866
- 6 Electoral Register, West Donegal, 1929, CC/14/2/4/3, Donegal County Archives
- 7 Hargreaves, Clifford, 1962, 'Economic and Social Conditions on Arranmore in the 19th and 20th Centuries', *Donegal Annual*, Vol. 4, No. 2
- 8 Charley, Major John Francis William (1857 - 1899) (son of John Stoupe Charley) died in battle commanding the 1st Battalion of the Royal Inniskilling Fusiliers at the Battle of Colenso in the South African War
- 9 For more information on Royal National Lifeboat Institution's history see @ www.rnli.org
- 10 See for instance The Independent Newspaper (Ireland) Collection, 1935, (ref: INDH3048, NDH3053 and INDH3060), National Library of Ireland
- 11 Paddy Gallagher, the sole survivor of the Arranmore disaster of 1935, relays the story as part of an RTÉ News report broadcast on 7 Nov 1985. Available at <https://www.rte.ie/archives/2015/1106/740058-arranmore-boat-disaster/>
- 12 ITA Survey 1942 - 1945, SY/2/1/1(6), Donegal County Archives
- 13 ITA Survey 1942 - 1945, SY/2/1/1, Donegal County Archives
- 14 ITA Survey 1942 - 1945, SY/2/1/1, Donegal County Archives

Clare Island Images 1937

Patria Mcwalter

'An Island Porter', Clare Island, Co. Mayo, 1937 (GP9/4)



The islands of Clare and Achill, off the west coast of Co. Mayo, have their own unique scenic attractions, and archaeological and historical heritage. However, they do not appear to have garnered quite as much attention or have been photographed to the same extent as the Blaskets in Co. Kerry and Aran Islands in Co. Galway, both of which have been of major interest to visitors from the mid-1800s onwards.

That said, the National Library of Ireland holds several fine photograph collections dating from the turn of the 20th century up to the 1930s. Many of these do include images of various sites around Mayo, including on Clare Island and Achill Island. The Lawrence Photograph Collection, *ca.* 1865 - 1914 (LCAB), the Edward King Tenison Album of 1858 (TEN18), the Thomas Wynne album, *ca.* 1880s (WYN142), the Westropp Irish Antiquities Album Volume IV, *ca.* 1902 - 1911 (ALB264), the Mason Photographic Collection, *ca.* 1890 - 1910, and the G. H. Orpen album, *ca.* 1893 - 1910 (ALB100), are just some of the wonderful collections held in the NLI. The photographic albums of Charles R. Browne, *ca.* 1890s (IE TCD MS 10961), held by Trinity College Dublin,¹ also include some wonderful images of island life during that period. However, for the most part the images in these collections generally relate to Irish archaeology and topography, often concentrating on antiquities, such as churches, abbeys and castles, and on scenic coastal views, mountains, cliffs and so on. The Lawrence collection images often focus on townscapes and capture the essence of the times and many places depicted.

The fourth album in the Chambers Archive collection (GP9/4) includes images from Clare Island and Achill Island together with two scenic images, of no particular significance, of Greystones in Co. Wicklow. It seems that Chambers spent very little time on Achill and thus had little or no meaningful interaction with the inhabitants there. The thirteen or so Achill images in the album are typical of any tourist photographs of the popular sights, such as Keem Bay, Achill Head, Doogort, together with images of cliffs and bogs. As most of the images appear to be reproductions of Mason images² this essay will focus on Clare Island only.

Chambers has helpfully dated the album as commencing on 26 June 1937. One of the most striking aspects of the images from Clare Island are the wonderful images of people at work and at play. He was obviously enamored by the people and their way of life. The individuals depicted seem to be comfortable in front of his camera, whether fishing, harvesting turf or feeding animals.

Clare Island, which is visible from Achill Island, is a mountainous island located in Clew Bay, just 5 kilometres off the west coast of Co. Mayo, in the Barony of Burrishoole. It has an area of 24.2 km², comprised of approximately 4,500 acres. The island is reachable by ferry from Roonagh Pier, outside Louisburgh. The island is physically dominated by two mountains, Knockmore (An Cnoc Mór), which is 462 metres high and Glen Hill at 220 metres. Much of the island's coastline is dotted with dramatic sea cliffs. The land is wet and boggy, and according to Thomas H. Mason, who visited the island in the early 1930s '*...crops such as oats and barley are sown on broad ridges, between each of which there is a deep cutting for drainage*'.³ The islanders were largely self-sufficient, producing potatoes and vegetables, and raising sheep and cattle, and fishing during the summer.

The pre-famine population (1841) of the island was approximately 1,700 people. Records indicate that in 1911 it had decreased to 592. At that time 36.1% of the population of the Island were Irish speakers. By 1926, with a population of 479, this had declined to 25.3%.⁴ The population 10 years later, just a year before Chambers' visit in 1937, is recorded as being 408; 240 males and 228 females⁵. In 2016, the predominately English-speaking population of Clare Island was recorded as been approximately 150.

(GP9/4)



WHAT WAS A VILLAGE
(BEFORE THE POTATO FAMINE)

The Island has an important archaeological and ecclesiastical heritage. There is evidence of a pre-history field system, with long collapsed stone field walls, and Iron Age huts, together with over 100 *fulachta fiadh* (outdoor cooking sites), which are all suggestive of a farming community, living and working, on the Island from 3,500 B.C.

Evidence for a pre-medieval church site is provided by the large cross-decorated pillar-stone in the graveyard at the Abbey, which may be of Early Christian date. A cell of Carmelite nuns is believed to have been founded there in 1224. It was subsequently annexed by the Cistercian Abbey of Knockmoy, Co. Galway. The Abbey was strongly associated with the Uí Máille (O'Malley) family, who played the role of patrons over several centuries, and used it as a burial place⁶. The Abbey has some important 15th century wall paintings, and an interesting 17th century plaque bearing the O'Malley coat of arms set in the niche of an elaborate canopied and traceried wall-tomb.



'The O'Malley Arms', Clare Island, 1937 (GP9/4) Showing the motto proclaiming 'Terra Marique Potens' (Powerful by Land and Sea)

There is a fascinating island history, much of which centres around the O'Malley family. On approaching the island harbour one of the first things a visitor will see is the Gráinne Ní Mháille (Granuaile) Castle. This is an imposing early to mid-16th century O'Malley tower house, overlooking the harbour, on the south-east corner of the Island. It has been in ruins since the early 19th century. The Castle was the stronghold of Gráinne Ní Mháille⁷ (ca. 1530 - 1603), known as the Pirate Queen, who moored her large fleet at the harbour. She was by all accounts a formidable lady, who levelled tolls on all ships passing along the west coast of Ireland. After a change in fortunes she successfully petitioned Queen Elizabeth I in 1593 for the restoration of her lands, which had been plundered and confiscated by Sir Richard Bingham, provincial president of Connacht.

It is thought that Alexander Nimmo (1783 - 1832), the Scottish engineer, carried out improvement works to the old pier between 1824 - 1829, at the request of Sir Samuel O'Malley⁸. A file held by the National Archives of Ireland (NAI) includes a copy of a letter, dated 9 September 1823, from Henry Goulburn, Chief Secretary, Dublin Castle to O'Malley, informing him that the government has authorised the Commissioners of

Fisheries to commence work on the pier at the old castle on Clare Island⁹.

According to an Office of Public Works file, also in the NAI, further work was carried out to the pier between 1834 - 1847. The file includes a contract with Thomas Flynn to repair the pier for £15, a specification (1834), a request from the Relief Commission Office as to when work is to begin on the road from the quay, and a letter from Sir Samuel O'Malley about a grant¹⁰. Further improvement works were carried out to the harbour in 1937, when Mayo County Council approved an expenditure of £200 towards repair works¹¹.

In 1837 Samuel Lewis indicated the Island was then '*the property of Sir Samuel O'Malley, Bart., a descendant of the ancient sept*¹². O'Malley was in serious financial difficulty by the end of the Famine in the early 1850s, so his Clare estate was sold to the Law Life Assurance Society. In 1895 the Society sold the estate, which was comprised of approximately 4,000 acres, to the Congested Districts Board¹³.

Less than 10 years later, in March 1902, during a debate in the British House of Commons on the work of the Congested Districts Board, Mr Thomas O'Donnell (MP for Kerry West) commented on the '*excellent work had been done by the Board in many parts*



'View from my window (Harbour and Grace O'Malley Castle)', Clare Island, 1397 (GP9/4)



'Grace O'Malley's Castle and the Hotel', Clare Island, 1937 (GP9/4) The McCabe family have run Granuaile House (hotel), the two-storey building in the background, left of the Castle, since 1909

of Ireland... Clare Island, whose people were almost on the verge of starvation and unable to pay their rents, had been changed into a comparative paradise...'. Similarly, Mr Hayden, MP for Roscommon South, stated that when the Board purchased the Clare Island Estate, the "...people on Clare Island had been lifted out of the direst poverty and had been put into a comparatively prosperous condition. They had met every obligation which they had incurred to the Congested Districts Board in a manner which redounded to their credit..."¹⁴.

The Lighthouse, at Ballytoohy More, was built ca. 1818, '...by the Corporation for Improving the Port of Dublin' (Lewis 1837 I, 336), and to a design attributable to George Halpin Senior (1776 - 1854), Inspector of Works and Lighthouses for the Ballast Board (appointed 1810). It was repurposed from a slightly earlier lighthouse built in 1806 - 17, by John Denis Browne (1756 - 1809), first Marquess of Sligo¹⁵. The Lighthouse was decommissioned in 1965 and since 2008 has been a private residence.

Jackie O'Grady wrote that the 'closure of the lighthouse had a huge effect, both psychologically and financially, on Clare Island, as it had been part of Island life for more than a century and a half'¹⁶.

Another important site is the Shivel Head Signal Tower, on the west coast of the Island. This was a two-stage signal tower, built in the early 1800s, but is now in ruins¹⁷. High winds in 1989 caused much of the structure to collapse, so it is wonderful to have the Chambers' image, which shows the Tower at its full height.

The Clare Island Survey (1909 - 11) was the first biological and heritage survey of a specific area in the world. Among other things it examined the geographical distribution, dispersal and ecology of floral and faunal species, and covered antiquities, placenames, family names, geology, climatology, agriculture and meteorology of Clare Island and adjoining districts. It was organised by the Irish naturalist Robert Lloyd Praeger¹⁸, and funded by the Royal Irish Academy (RIA). Its results were published in 67 parts in the RIA's *Proceedings*, between 1911 - 1915. One hundred years on the RIA has funded another Clare Island survey, the New Survey of Clare Island¹⁹, which aims to provide an invaluable body of research informing future conservation of natural and built heritage of Ireland and Europe.

In the 1930s, at the time of Chambers' visit, there were two primary schools on the Island: the 'west' school with two teachers and about 35 pupils, and the 'east' school with



'The Lighthouse', Clare Island, 1937 (GP9/4)



'An Old Watch Tower', Clare Island, 1937 (GP9/4)

one teacher and 19 pupils²⁰. (Today there is one two-teacher school, with about 20 pupils.) There was one shop and one hotel on the island at that time too.

Fish curing was an important industry on the island from the early-1890s to late 1930s. Herring was plentiful and demand was high. In the 1930s the cured herrings²¹ were exported direct from the Island to Germany²². The Irish Tourist Association (ITA) Topographical and General Survey²³ conducted on the Island in 1944, indicated there were several excellent areas around the island for angling. A wide variety of fish could be found from pollock, skate, plaice, sole, haddock, bream to John Dory, mackerel, mullet, trout and salmon. Brown trout could be found in Mill Lake. It appears that by the 1940s the shoals of herring had disappeared from the waters around Clare Island²⁴.

The *'Election Officials Return'* image is an interesting one in Chambers' album, illustrating as it does part of the election process on the island. The officials were returning to collect the islanders' ballot boxes for the general election which had been held on the mainland on 1 July 1937. A historic plebiscite on the draft Constitution of Ireland was also held on the same day. A majority of the electorate voted in favour of the draft Constitution, and it came into operation on 1 January 1938²⁵.

An *Irish Press* report, dated 6 July 1937, details the gale-swept crossing the crew and officials, which included Garda Seavers from Westport, had encountered several days earlier to bring the ballot boxes from Louisburg to the island;

Midway between the Black Rock and Caber Island a fierce storm broke.

The mast had to be held in position by McCabe [Clare Island seaman]. After passing the Black Rock a board in the bottom of the boat was crushed in.

In this condition the party eventually succeeded in making the island in the teeth of the gale²⁶.

In the same area of the sea in February 1926 the *Cardigan Castle*, a Swansea steam trawler, struck a rock in poor visibility and lost all but one of its twelve-man crew. The sole survivor, Henry Batchelor²⁷, was rescued by three Clare Island fishermen in a currach and taken to the Island.

Chambers' album also includes three fascinating photographs that document the 'coal train'²⁸, each of which appear to consist of several men and three horses, bringing the coal from the harbour across the Island to the Lighthouse, three miles away.

Chambers includes some interesting statistical information under the caption of the first image, indicating that the consignment weighed 16 tons, that 2 bags of coal held 1/8



'The Election Officials Return', Clare Island, 1937 (GP9/4)

of a ton, covered 6 miles during each return journey, and that the 'train' covered 768 miles in total. Thus, each horse would have had to travel 256 miles to make the delivery.

O'Grady in his article 'Clare Island Memories and the Lighthouse Service' tells how his father was the mail-boat contractor for the Island, and that he also had the contract for the transport of personnel and materials to the lighthouse²⁹; could the man, with his hands in his pockets, on the left in the photograph be O'Grady? He certainly does not look like a member of the 'train's' crew!

Another series of related photographs in the album are comprised of four interesting images capturing an inter-island sports day, Achill Island versus Clare Island.

The first image shows several currachs, at least six, moored beside the harbour wall. There are some men still on two boats, who appear to be about to disembark. A larger group of about twenty men, all of whom appear to be wearing caps and suits, seem to be conversing in a relaxed manner on the pier. The boats cast an attractive shadow in the calm water.

The second image, which is captioned '*An Achill Picnic*', shows a group of people - men, women, and some children - gathered on a grassy area above the bay, encircling others sitting on the ground. Several of the children, in particular the boys, are barefoot. The ladies appear to be dressed in their finery of smart coats and hats. A small number of boats are anchored in the water.

The third photograph in the sequence, which appears to have been taken from a small height, is a sea view of four currachs, with hoisted sails, all in a rough line close together, heading out to open seas. The caption indicates the boats are racing each other. Another small boat is anchored to the left of the racing boats.

The final image in the series, captioned '*Watching the Race*', is taken from the back of a group of people, perhaps in the region of one hundred. They are gathered on a gently sloping hilly area, overlooking the bay, which is hardly visible in the image most are facing in the direction of the sea. Many of the spectators are standing, some in small groups deep in conversation, others are seated on the grass. Some of the women appear to be wearing shawls wrapped around their bodies and heads.

This lovely sequence of photographs shows two island communities coming together for a special day of rivalry, no doubt, and togetherness. It was likely a big occasion on the annual calendar of social events, and one Chambers must have been delighted to witness.



LOADING THE COAL TRAIN
16 TONS. 3 MILES TO LIGHTHOUSE. 2 BAGS HOLD
250 lbs ($\frac{1}{8}$ TON) 3 MILES THERE. 3 BACK.
 $16 \times 8 \times 3 \times 2 = 768$ MILES.



THE COAL-TRAIN
ON WAY TO
LIGHTHOUSE



'Geese', Clare Island, 1937 (GP9/4)



Had Chambers remained on the Island until 15 August, he would likely have also witnessed the annual pattern day pilgrimage to the Holy Well of Toberfelabride (Tobar Bríde)³⁰.

The image captioned 'Geese' hints at what must be a spectacular view of the island and the ocean beyond on a clear day. Mason indicates in his book *Islands of Ireland* that geese grazed on the mountain slopes alongside sheep, and that an islander told him '*...the geese were all "tokened" by holes punched into the web between the claws of the feet, so that the owners could easily identify their own birds*³¹. Most families on the island cooked a goose on feast days and for various family celebrations³².

There are many other wonderful images in the album which capture Chambers' impressions of and visit to Clare Island. There are general scenic shots, such as of the shore, bogs and cliffs. There are images of people at work, mending fishing nets and lobster pots, mowing hay, repairing stone walls, harvesting turf, and feeding calves for instance. Unlike similar images in his Aran Islands (GP9/1), The Blaskets (GP9/2) and Arranmore (GP9/3) albums Chambers does not name the people depicted in the photographs. This may imply he did not have the same personal experience on Clare Island as on the other islands, where he appeared to form very cordial acquaintances, and in some cases lasting friendships with those he encountered. Or it could be he didn't have a pen and paper with him when he was photographing his subjects and just couldn't remember their names ... we will never know; yet another mystery surrounding Chambers and his albums! Nonetheless, this album (GP9/4) is a charming and significant archival record of his visit to Clare Island, and of island life during the summer of 1937.

'Achill Islanders Arrive for Sports', Clare Island, 1937 (GP9/4)

'An Achill Picnic', Clare Island, 1937 (GP9/4)

'The Sailing Match', Clare Island, 1937 (GP9/4)

'Watching the Race', Clare Island, 1937 (GP9/4)

Endnotes

- 1 The photographs were filed in a series of albums, six of which survive and are held in the Library of Trinity College Dublin (TCD). The Browne archive is singular in terms of its depiction of life in the west of Ireland in the 1890s
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- 9 National Archives of Ireland, Chief Secretary's Office, File of papers relating to application of Sir Samuel O'Malley, magistrate, for new pier on Clare Island, Co. Mayo, 1823, CSO/RP/1823/1246
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- 17 National Inventory of Architectural Heritage, Reg No: 31308401
- 18 Praeger, Robert Lloyd (1865 - 1953), naturalist, author, and librarian, from Holywood, Co. Down. Educated at Queen's University Belfast, awarded BA (1885) and B.Eng. (1886). His contributions to natural history led to his election as Member of the Royal Irish Academy (1891). He had a varied career, including being appointed assistant librarian to the National Library of Ireland in 1893, where he worked until 1923. See also for instance, Collins, Timothy, 1993, 'Praeger in the West: Naturalists and Antiquarians in Connemara and the Islands 1894 - 1914', *Journal of the Galway Archaeological and Historical Society*, 45, pp124-154 <http://www.jstor.org/stable/25535616>
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- 20 O'Grady, Jackie, 2007, 'Clare Island Memories and the Lighthouse Service', *Béalóideas*, 75, pp170-249, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/20520926>
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- 22 O'Grady, Jackie, 2007, 'Clare Island Memories and the Lighthouse Service', *Béalóideas*, 75, pp170-249, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/20520926>
- 23 Available on Mayo County Library website at <https://www.mayo.ie/irish-tourist-association-survey>
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- 26 'In the Teeth of the Gale', *Irish Press*, 6 Jul, 1937, p9, Irish News Archive. Accessed Jun 2022
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- 28 Commissioners of Irish Lights Photographic Collection, ca. 1900-1909, includes an image of a coal supply being transported by horses on Clare Island (NPA CIL198), National Library of Ireland
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- 30 Irish Tourist Association Survey, 1944, 'Customs, Patterns, etc', <https://www.mayo.ie/getattachment/8ee3efc1-d7b3-4d03-b90b-dfcaf35b42a8/attachment.aspx>. Accessed Jun 2022. See also, 'The Schools' Collection, Volume 0098, p69' by Dúchas © National Folklore Collection, UCD is licensed under [CC BY-NC 4.0](https://www.duchas.ie/en/cbes/4427851/4350556/4451180), <https://www.duchas.ie/en/cbes/4427851/4350556/4451180>
- 31 Mason, Thomas H, 1938, *The Islands of Ireland*, 2nd Ed. Revised, London, B.T. Batsford Ltd, p44
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Valentia and The Skelligs Album 1938

Michael Lynch

The Skelligs are comprised of three islands off the coast of the Iveragh Peninsula, in Co. Kerry. The largest of these is called the Great Skellig or Sceilg Mhichíl after the patron saint of the island's monastic settlement (St Michael). Great Skellig is situated 8 miles west-north-west of Bolus Head, or just under 8 miles west-south-west of Bray Head on Valentia Island. The nearest of the Skelligs to the mainland is called The Lemon, a small (less than 1 acre) and almost circular rock, situated about 3 miles south-west of Puffin Island. Three miles further on lies the Middle or Little Skellig, home to a large colony of gannets among other sea-bird species. The Great Skellig lies a further 2 miles to the south-west of Little Skellig. Samuel Lewis describes it as *'a stupendous mass of slate rock rising majestically from the sea, and at the height of 50 or 60 yards dividing into two pyramidal summits, the taller of which has an elevation of 1500 feet above high-water mark'*¹.

The island has a central plain of about 3 acres, which was cultivated for a monks' garden when the settlement was used as a monastery. In the early Christian era, the island site was particularly chosen as a place of religious seclusion, and there are still remains of the sizeable ecclesiastical complex. The Annals of the Four Masters tell us that Sceilg Mhichíl was ravaged by 'Gentiles' (Vikings) in 823², that the Abbot of Sceilg (Eitgal) was taken and starved to death by his captors, and that the monks died of starvation due to the lack of means to get provisions to the island.

After the early settlement of the island, the only human visitors were pilgrims and those in pursuit of penitent solitude. Its remote nature led some to believe that Easter occurred a week later on Sceilg Mhichíl, thereby giving the unmarried an additional week to find a life partner before Lent began. This gave rise to what became known as 'Skellig Lists', a form of public targeting of single people, and regular jibes of *'don't miss the boat [to the Skelligs]'*. These lists of the unmarried men and women of a parish/area were often printed and distributed around the locality, often with unflattering or downright scurrilous descriptions of individuals included. Naturally, the publishers of these lists rarely put their names to them for fear of parish retribution.

The *Cork Examiner* noted that one young distributor of a 'Skellig List' in Cork City was found to be trading copies for soup tickets. *'It was a regular bank transaction'*³.

Griffith's Valuation notes that Great Skellig was held in the name of the Ballast Board, otherwise known as the Corporation for Preserving and Improving the Port of Dublin. This body had been in charge of maintenance of lighthouses around the island since its establishment in 1810, but ceded that function to the Commissioners of Irish Lights in 1867. Two separate lights had been constructed on Great Skellig in the late 1830s by Trinity House. Mr & Mrs Hall noted that *'the effect has been almost to put an end to wrecks on the coast'*⁴. However, there continued to be occasional wrecks off the Skelligs, though many fewer than in Ballinskelligs Bay, closer to the mainland.

The Ordnance Survey Name Books and Letters series are very sparing in their treatment of the Skelligs – it seems certain that the surveyor for Killemlagh Parish did not manage to visit, given the lack of reference to the (by then) one-thousand year old monastic remains on Sceilg Mhichíl. Fortunately, the Sites & Monuments Record (SMR) rectifies this omission, with three pages worth of references to the various archaeological remains to be found on the island.⁵ Being largely untouched due to its remote nature, the archaeological complex on Sceilg Mhichíl is hugely significant and reveals a great deal about the arrangement of the monastic settlement. Ann O'Sullivan and John Sheahan's archaeological survey of South Kerry captures the complexity and complete nature of the settlement and its importance in understanding the nature of early monastic settlement⁶.

Valentia is an island parish, lying approximately 4 miles south-west of Cahirciveen. Its Gaelic name is Oileán Dairbhre – Island of the Oak Wood – and it is said to have been home to Mogh Ruith, a magician similar to Merlin in the Arthurian tradition. Valentia is about five miles long, and runs parallel to the mainland, forming a fine deep-water harbour channel (Portmagee Channel), with the Atlantic forming the opposite boundary to the island. Oliver Cromwell had forts placed at either end of the island to prevent the area being used by Spanish privateers; Spaniards had occupied the island before Cromwell's time and had given the island its name. However, Cromwell's tactic backfired as Charles Smith noted that the island *'was, in Queen Anne's wars, much frequented by French Privateers who, by keeping a watch on the island, lay very secure; for if any ship of war came to this place, the sentinel gave notice to what end of the harbour she directed her course and then the privateer sailed directly out at the other, and thereby escaped'*⁷.

The island was formerly connected to the mainland by two ferry crossing points, one at Reenard Point, which connected to what became Knightstown, and a second shorter route at Portmagee. The latter has been replaced since 1971 by a bridge crossing.

The island population in 1841 was 2,920, very evenly split between male and female inhabitants. In 1851, this had dropped by 508, although the new settlement at Knightstown had also sprung up in that ten-year period, with 31 houses and 165 people living there. In 1849, Samuel Lewis noted that *'within these few years a town has been commenced, called in the Ordnance Survey "Knightstown", contiguous to the eastern landing-place'*⁸. This landing point is well protected by Beginish Island, which lies directly north of the ferry channel between Reenard and the island.

The site of Cromwell's Fort in the north of the island at Fort Point (Glanleam townland) became the later site of the island lighthouse, built in the late 1830s and first lit on 1 February 1841.

Valentia remains a part of the estate of the Knights of Kerry, and the present Knight retains a residence on the island at Glanleam. The island has always been a fertile place, and in Smith's time *'was esteemed the granary of Ireland'*⁹. However, it also had the distinction of having a thriving slate quarry industry throughout most of the 19th century. The slate slabs from Valentia were of great strength and size, and often used in the great buildings of London, including the National Gallery, the British Museum and the newly-built Houses of Parliament. Lewis noted that, in 1849, 400 men were employed in the slate works, and that the labouring wage on Valentia was double that on the mainland.¹⁰

Lewis also noted that Valentia, being the nearest point to America, had seen a great deal of interest as a potential packet station for transatlantic passage. However, he could not have foreseen that Valentia would instead find its niche as the terminal point of the transatlantic telegraph. Pioneers of the nascent submarine telegraph technology saw Valentia's place as being the relay point for American news onward to mainland Ireland and Britain and from Europe to the New World.

Submarine cable telegraphy was still a very new and difficult technology when the Atlantic Telegraph Company chose Valentia and Newfoundland as the twin terminals for their huge venture, and the poetically named Foilhummerum Bay and Heart's Content (Newfoundland) entered history when the first messages were transmitted between the

Foilhummerum Bay, Valentia looking seaward from the point at which the cable reaches the sea. Illustration by Robert Dudley, in Russell, Sir William Howard, 1866, *The Atlantic Telegraph* <https://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/356571>



two countries. While the first two cables (1858 and 1865) failed, a third cable began transmitting in July 1866. It was temporarily put out of commission in 1867, during the Fenian Rising, but was restored shortly thereafter.

As transatlantic telegraphy grew, so too did South Kerry's connection to it, with a telegraphy school operating on Valentia, in conjunction with the offices of several further telegraph companies on the island. Waterville would also subsequently benefit from the industry surrounding this expanding telecommunications provision.

With this increasing need for qualified workers in communications came a desire for Valentia to be more significantly accessible than before. While the notion of the island serving as a packet station for transatlantic travel had gone by the wayside, the associated plans for connecting the island to the railway infrastructure of Ireland was revived. This involved an interconnector line from Farranfore (which would connect the island directly to Cork and Dublin). This was, in effect, an extension to the Great Southern & Western Railway Company's Castleisland to Killorglin line which had operated since 1885, and the first through train from Dublin to Valentia Harbour station (at Reenard) ran in May 1893. The line ran its final passenger service in January 1960, and was completely lifted in August 1962. However, new life will be breathed into the line when it re-opens as the path of the proposed South Kerry Greenway.

Apart from their geographical proximity, Valentia and the Skelligs share a place at the forefront of Ireland's place in the world. The Great Skellig monastic settlement ranks among the world's great archaeological sites, and has been recognised by UNESCO's World Heritage Convention as an inscribed place since 1996. The citation for Great Skellig reads:

Scailg Mhichíl is an outstanding, and in many respects unique, example of an early religious settlement deliberately sited on a pyramidal rock in the ocean, preserved because of a remarkable environment. It illustrates, as no other property can, the extremes of a Christian monasticism characterizing much of North Africa, the Near East and Europe.¹¹

Similarly, plans are in motion for recognition of the part played by Valentia Island and Newfoundland in the development of telecommunications, and for their inclusion on the UNESCO World Heritage Convention's Inscribed List.

George Chambers' Skellig & Valentia 1938 album (GP9/5) gives a flavour of a different type of island life to that experienced in the Blaskets. The images of the quarry depict an industry (slate quarrying and associated works) that had thrived enough to generate a labourers' village and a reputation for quality. Samples include two fine benches which had been a part



'The Disused Slate Quarry', Valentia Island, Co. Kerry, 1938 (GP9/5)



Benches, formerly part of the Collis Sandes estate in Tralee, now in the courtyard of Tralee Library (© Michael Lynch)



'The Village of the Slate Quarry', Valentia Island, Co. Kerry, 1938 (GP9/5)

of the Collis Sandes estate in Tralee and are now in the courtyard of Tralee Library. Each is emblazoned with the Sandes coat of arms, and the family motto '*Virtus Fortunae Vincitrix*' (Fortune favours the virtuous).

The image of the cross-roads dance platform is an example of the innocent pursuits that would have been favoured by people at the time, and which chimed well with former president Éamon de Valera's aspirations for the young men and women of Ireland. Chambers makes only a passing reference to the telecommunications element of Valentia's past – perhaps a visit to Foilhummerum Bay would have convinced him of how splendid a task it was, and how it transformed not just the lives of the islanders, but also the whole of Europe.



'One of the Dancing-platforms found at the Cross-roads on Valentia', Co. Kerry, 1938 (GP9/5)

Chambers' journey to Sceilg Mhichíl is very well documented, and it appears from the images in the album that it had been a very pleasant day for his excursion. The sea at the landing-stage is as calm as glass; a very rare occurrence.

Photographs of the pathway illustrates the precarious nature of the ascent on the island, while the image showing the 'Weeping Woman' brings to mind the salt deposit rocks often seen on the hills above the Dead Sea, which locals there refer to as 'Lot's Wife'.

The Skelligs portion dominates the album and represents what a difficult and solitary life it must have been for those penitent monks on the island some 1,200 years ago.



'The Cat Hole and Landing-place on Skellig Michael', Co. Kerry, 1938 (GP9/5)



'Our Launch at the Landing-stage', Skellig Michael, Co. Kerry, 1938 (GP9/5)



'The Pathway around Skellig Michael', Co. Kerry, 1938 (GP9/5)

'The Pathway, showing the "Weeping Woman" and the Lesser Skellig', Co. Kerry, 1938 (GP9/5)

'The "Weeping Woman", Skellig Michael, Co. Kerry, 1938 (GP9/5)



'The Lynch Children Do Their Homework', Valentia Island, Co. Kerry, 1938 (GP9/5)



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Biographies



Dr Niamh Brennan is the Archivist for Donegal County Archives, Culture Division, Donegal County Council. She has managed the archives service since its inception in 1999. She previously worked as an archivist in University College Dublin Archives Department. Articles published include for *Irish Historical Studies*, *Donegal Annual* and *History Ireland*. Donegal County Archives' publications include articles, booklets and education packs on themes related to Donegal's history and archives. She holds a postgraduate Higher Diploma in Archival Studies, and a Ph.D. in Modern Irish History, from NUI (University College Dublin).



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Dr Jim Higgins worked as a freelance archaeologist in Ireland and abroad, prior to being appointed Heritage Officer to Galway City Council in 1999, the first such officer in the State. He is a graduate of NUI Galway, receiving his PhD in 2011, on the topic of Galway's medieval sculpture. He is widely published in aspects of archaeology, history, art history, folklore and folklife, sculpture and symbolism. He is the author of twelve books, and editor and co-author of six more.



Michael Lynch is a retired archivist. He has worked as an assistant archivist at Shropshire Record Office, the Institution of Electrical Engineers (London), and Reuters plc. He has also been City & County Archivist in Limerick and, latterly, was Kerry County Archivist.



Patria McWalter, archivist, worked for a number of years with Mayo Council, prior to moving to Galway County Council in 2000. She has researched and curated a number of exhibitions, most notably 'From Colonial State to Free State, What they said...' (2016), is author of the guide *For the Record, The Archives of Galway's Rural District Councils* (2014), compiled the text for *Collecting and Preserving Folklore and Oral History: Basic Techniques* (2006), and has contributed articles to various publications over the years.



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*'...to acquire, preserve and make accessible
the documentary memory of county Galway'*

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