

Ballymurrin Stories -Restoring the Quaker Farmstead

1:
The Old
Milking
Parlour



Ballymurrin Quaker Farmstead

1668

Over 350 years ago
Quakers came to
Ballymurrin

*Philip and Delphine Geoghegan,
owners of Ballymurrin from 1994*

Ballymurrin Quaker Farmstead seen from above. The Old Milking Parlour is the long building left of the courtyard. The photograph was taken shortly after completion of the restoration of the building



Above: The Old milking Parlour is left of the courtyard, and shows the three entry doors, previously openings for cows to enter the cow-shed at different levels

Right: These views were taken from the local high point in Ballymurrin Upper, known as Doll's Rock. The long frontage of the main building incorporates the second farmstead, left of the main farmhouse. A fourth quaker building beside the farmstead is just visible in the upper left corner, 'Woodville House' which was built by Joseph Pim, who came from Nurney in Kildare to marry Susanna Ashton, daughter of James Eves and Elizabeth Judd, who was widowed. This continued the Quaker line in Ballymurrin, but the Pims, Joseph and Lydia, had to leave, insolvent, in 1879. It is understood that they opened a draper's shop in Wicklow town. The landscape is typical of the coastal hillsides between the sea and the Wicklow mountains





1 The Old Milking Parlour at Ballymurrin Quaker Farmstead from 1668.

Our adventure with this remarkable place began in 1994, Returning to Ireland after a five-year contract in Jersey (Channel Islands variety) Delphine and Philip fell upon a dilapidated farm complex offering a new challenge. There was a task ahead; perhaps we didn't expect the project to last for over 25 years ...

We were told that, at one time, Quakers were here.

Research in the Quaker Historical Library conjured up a thriving farmstead, built in and lived in by a couple who met in Wicklow, and became Quakers. Their family thrived over four generations, until the mid eighteen hundreds. At the time of the great famine when farming insolvency occurred throughout Ireland, the farmstead changed hands through the Landed Estates Courts to a local Byrne family.

The Quaker legacy is a remarkable collection of farm buildings, dwelling spaces and a substantial farmhouse, all stone-built and slated to exacting standards. However, over the last century the buildings were only sporadically used for farming, and deteriorated almost beyond the point of dereliction. We needed to find ways of helping the buildings pay for themselves with new uses.

The Milking Parlour needed much attention as the roof was in a perilous condition and even our optimism reached beyond simple repair as we tackled a complete reinstatement of the roof and a new floor throughout. We used the sizing of the original timbers and included a range of Velux windows to bring in the daily sunshine and daylight. The opportunity was that the scale of the building inside its walls was ideal for conversion and we were able to achieve that without any damage to the walls, excepting our reinstatement of the shallow arched opening which had been built up. The stepped areas with separate openings for the cows at the rear were ideal as a theme for a very open building already stepped to define the living, eating and sleeping areas with the full length of the 35 metre connected level by level, each level with a cow's width opening, facing South, out to the 'haggard', replaced with a quiet garden.

For ten years we enjoyed a succession of vacation visitors from Europe, the US, Australia and the UK, and of course Ireland. Their enjoyment of a special place was our reward.



Above, Top: the Old Milking Parlour before we started work... The roof was in very poor condition, although the remaining slates were mainly reusable. It was not feasible to retain any of the roof structure as the wall-plates and joists were largely unrepairable.

Above and below, right The window at the lower end concealed the large arch which would have been a key space in the building. Inside evidence shows that the lower third of the building had been a stand-alone space to which the rest of the cowshed was added.





1 The Old Milking Parlour at Ballymurrin Quaker Farmstead from 1668. (Continued)

We love the place ourselves; its high, open roof spaces create the hush of a church; the sun searches out every corner inside, reflecting against the mica finish of the mineral paint; it is a haven of peace, and somehow, it has style.

The world around and outside the Old Milking Parlour is something else. We are blessed to be located in a small valley of almost total privacy. Yet before the N11, thankfully for us, took a long sweep around Ballymurrin our lane gave onto what had been historically the main road between Dublin and Wexford. Its landscape has barely changed; quite hilly, with good lands well maintained by our neighbour farmers. The N11 has given way to the M11 motorway, keeping us quiet here. During the Spring we seem to live in an aviary, with flyovers from red kites now, as well as the gatherings of tits and finches, swallows, blackbirds, doves, magpies and noisy jackdaws. And the rabbits, who consider our garden to be a wonderland of fresh grass and tasty shoots.

All of this is encapsulated in the historical reality of its buildings and the Quakers who lived here continuously from 1668 until 1879. They created a special place of great simplicity. They made the landscape of Ballymurrin, some 300 acres of hillside and valley. Their wider Quaker community was scattered around the coastal areas of Wicklow. Belatedly it has been placed on the Register of Protected Structures, and is considered formally to be a building of national interest.

It is a privilege, to live in such an old farmhouse, to be the custodians of this place, with memories dating back some three hundred and fifty years. Old doesn't always mean beautiful, but in this case the resolute simplicity of its Quaker influenced architecture still shines through. Our commitment is to hand on the farmstead with most of its features intact and with a small yet vibrant community of the courtyard.

(The Quakers' lives will be described in a further 'Ballymurrin Stories')



We were substantially grant-aided by County Wicklow Community Partnership, the local development company, through a European grant as exploration of new energy saving ideas. Their contribution, in 2010, allowed us to put quality first.

We decided to use underfloor heating with a heat pump energy saving system. Attached to that is a solar collector, to heat the water during the summer months. We used only sustainable materials, although our sensational porcelain floor tiles did have to make the journey from Italy. We used organic paints throughout, applying them directly to the cement wash-down protective linings up to the height of a cow and then to the lovely stonework above. We installed underfloor heating with a ground source heat pump and a solar panel; innovative solutions have stood the test of time, although the technology has since then developed

Although the walls are a source of heat loss, their appearance was too important to us to allow them to be insulated and covered up by modern plasterboard. We had to replace the roof completely, unfortunately, but we did use the same size of joists and collars, and we were generous in our use of Velux rooflights to allow the daylight and sun to pour in during the day, heating our porcelain tiles for free. The roof is insulated with Actis multi-foil insulation, only 30mm thick yet as effective as 200mm of more conventional products. We chose this to avoid raising the profile of the roof.

You can find us at Ballymurrin.ie . We also have a historical site with information on visits to our own house at Ballymurrinquakerfarmstead.eu



The Old Milking Parlour at the rear soon after its rehabilitation in 2004. The generous Velux windows allow light and solar heat into the building. The doors at the back are fitted into the cow-shed sized openings for the cows at three different levels. There is a roof solar collector located on the extended roof.