

Ballymurrin Stories -Restoring the Quaker Farmstead

3: The Farmhouse

Ballymurrin
Quaker
Farmstead

1668

Over 350 years ago
Quakers came to
Ballymurrin

Philip and Delphine Geoghegan,
owners of Ballymurrin from 1994

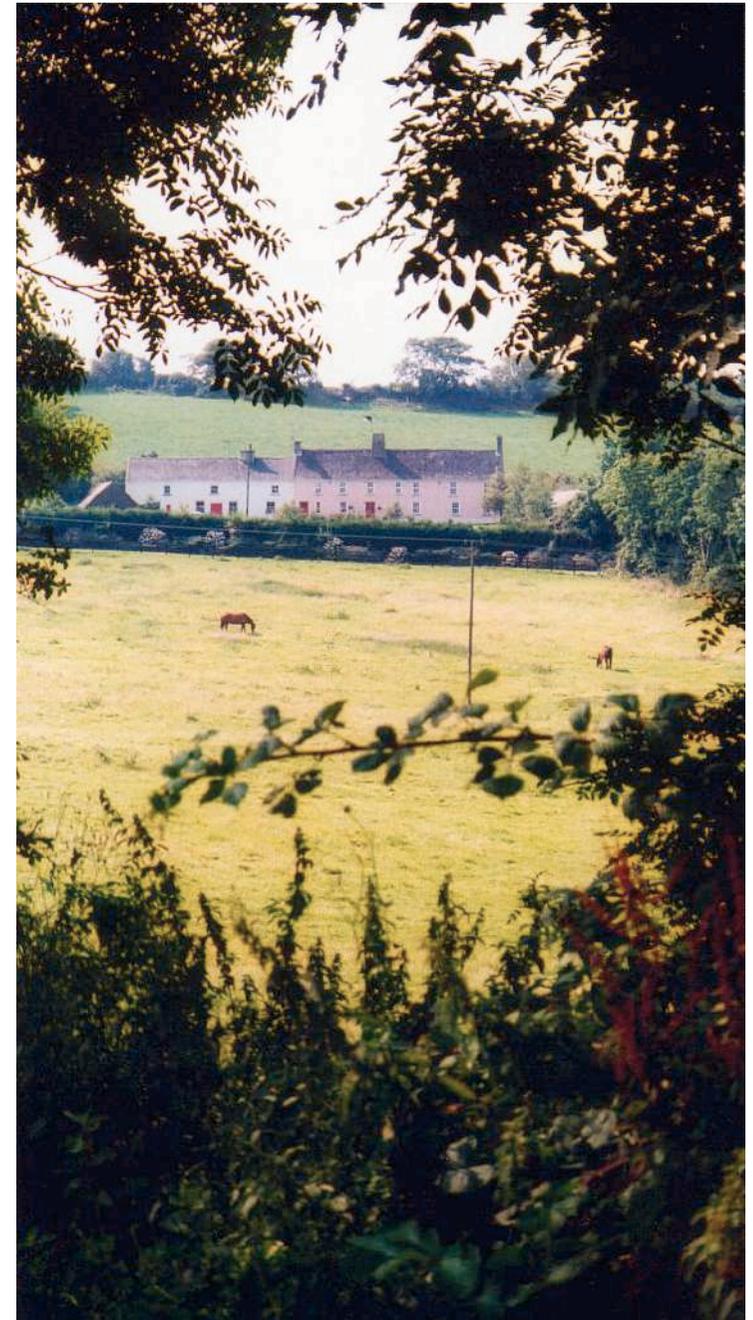
3 General Introduction to the Farmhouse

Whilst it is difficult to date the construction of the New Farmhouse, the successful operation of the farm as a whole must have been facilitated by the availability and use of the second farmstead, and the operational value of the stables and the enlarged cow shed. We have a date for when Ambrose and his wife moved into the first farmstead, which was in 1668. From 1670 onwards, for a decade, the place was changed with the arrival of William Bates and his family of four children. William was a carpenter by trade. It seems likely that he oversaw the programme for further buildings of the farmstead.

The Milking Parlour was increased in size to generate another two milking areas, and the second farmstead was no doubt seen to be urgent, to make room for cart shed, forge, and a dwelling, each one as vital in the development of the farm and its security. William Bates, living on site, was probably organising the buildings to complete the second farmstead and, next, designing and constructing the farmhouse. Whilst this is conjecture, the pace would have to be maintained to fulfil the complexities of building for a working farm and a live-in community.

An indefinite future for his family was affected by the struggle of Quakers in the Wicklow area, who were being punished for not paying tithes. William Bates was imprisoned for a period in the Black Castle prison in Wicklow town for not paying tithes and resisting the forceful taking of farm materials, tools and produce by the protestant 'tithe-monger.' In 1677 he met William Penn in Dublin, receiving a voucher for 250 acres of land in West Jersey. Although he did not leave until 1681, it was clear that he would emigrate to avoid the further distress and consequences of refusing to pay tithes.

The Farmhouse was built onto the gable of the Second Farmstead, The roof was a little steeper, emphasising the key building of the farmstead and also increasing the internal volume of the building. The plan was simple: there were two large rooms on the ground floor; the Kitchen, and the Parlour, where constituent Quaker meetings were held every fortnight; initially, there were two upstairs bedrooms, one of which was modified to make a hallway and upstairs passage to the 'dower' house, built later for the ageing parents.



Construction of the Farmhouse

There is no date recorded of when the farmhouse was built, but it would have been part of the overall plan. The construction of the farmhouse was a major project, with technical and engineering requirements. Building completion might have been before 1700.

The decade when William Bates with his family lived in Ballymurrin was between 1670 and 1681. As a carpenter living on site, he may well have organised the building of the New Farmhouse.

The inclusion of a bread oven in the farmhouse offers a further clue to a date for the new farmhouse.

Barry O'Reilly's Royal Irish Academy paper, "Hearth and Home: the vernacular house in Ireland from c:1800", refers back to the short-lived choice of the bread oven in Ireland as an alternative to the usual use of the hearth, (that involved using a 'bastible' pot, buried under coals from the fire). He offers a date-range of their use from 'the quarter century either side of 1700".

In Ballymurrin there are two examples of bread ovens, one from the second farmstead kitchen and the second in the new farmhouse kitchen. The first was domed in brick; the second dome was made in stone. The construction of both buildings and the dower house wing would have been carried out during the date window of fifty years, up to 1725, which Barry O'Reilly has suggested.

The Foundations

Our own works undertaken in the last twenty years have twice involved digging below the 'foundation' to create level floors. in both cases. It was essential for us to maintain the level as underfloor heating was being installed in the Old Milking Parlour, and two of the rooms of the second farmstead. This confirmed that there were no foundations other than what appeared to be compacted clay. It is remarkable that the stonework in the second farmstead and the new farmhouse has not moved perceptibly during 350 years of habitation.



Above: This is not the farmhouse... However it is a vital component in the construction of the farmhouse, as these facilities were built as privies: toilets, or earth closets, alongside the paddock for the stables. This building remains in good condition with a new slated roof recently completed. It has three 'rooms' one at each end, with door and ventilation opening above. The middle space is accessed from the other side, on the edge of the garden attached to the 'dower' house.

The Walls of the farmhouse

The external walls are a random selection of stones; large ones generally granite, what appears to be a local sandstone, and a black stone. The evidence from the first building, the farmstead, where the stone is the final finish, is that the building was coursed at about every two feet, 50 cm. Window surrounds, where they are visible, are edged with brickwork to simplify sharp arrises. The thickness is 700mm. The construction produces a relatively smooth face on either side of the wall, with a centre core filled with rubble, a combination of clay and smaller stones. With the exception of the first farmstead and the stables, where the stonework is exposed, the other buildings have been rendered. The finish on the farmhouse is a strong cement layer with a stone dash finish applied, perhaps in the early years of the twentieth century. Although it would be appealing to remove the cement, it could be difficult to hack off and the likelihood is that the brick window surrounds would be damaged or made unstable. So our decision is to leave well alone.

The **front walls** have a generous amount of fenestration both at ground level and above, with a five- bay symmetrical pattern and the centred front door, which was a solid timber door with fanlight about 300mm high replaced some time ago with a glazed double-door. The door to the kitchen was a later addition which also made it necessary to place a thinner window beside it, where there had been a full sash window before. The concrete sill confirms this. The addition of the 'dower' house at the North end altered the symmetrical frontage with the addition of a further two bays of windows.

All the original windows were seated on granite sills. Where windows were added later (for example, at the rear and beside the kitchen door) they can usually be identified as concrete sills.

The **rear walls** were built into the slope behind, about three feet, a metre, below natural ground level. The slope was dug out by the Strawbridges to create a level garden behind the house and to limit any dampness to the walls. They inserted the door to the kitchen. In turn, we inserted a floor-to-ceiling double glazed door in order to gain more daylight into the parlour. There are few windows in the rear walls, but those made recently make for exceptional evening penetration of sunshine and light.

Internally, the walls surround the chimney in a complex arrangement which incorporates a small entrance hall, a large walk-in fireplace with a stone bread oven at ground floor level, and above it a narrow upper space at mid-level with stone flooring. It is supposed to have been used as a priest's hole during the Penal Laws period; more often, though, as a pantry.

The internal structure of the farmhouse and stair to the first floor

The L-shaped stair twists round at its mid point, allowing access to the pantry over the bread oven. There is an event on the way upstairs which hints at change-of-mind at some period of time. The structure of the farmhouse depends on the central stone chimneys and three massive beams about one foot, 300mm, square and spanning across the 4.9 metre, 16 feet, rooms. The stair required a significant change in one of the beams, reducing head height: it was cut away by about half its thickness over the stair...Not a great idea for the structure... However, no consequences have been noticed to date, although sleeping upstairs sometimes feels insecure. We think that the original access upstairs would have been by a fairly steep ladder stair, replaced with the present easy stair, which may have been put in when the dower house was added, to make upstairs more easy to reach for elderly parents.

The roof of the farmhouse and its chimney in the centre

The roof is slated and battened to rafters with a large purlin half-way up each slope on either side. The purlin, in turn is supported at one third of its span with a pair of collar trusses. This structure has survived, with a little help in the last century and carries a weighty slate roof at an angle of about 50 degrees. The building was re-roofed in the mid-nineteenth century, replacing a number of rafters but retaining the overall structure and placing roofing felt over the rafters before re-slating. There is a decorated feature at eaves level with bricks set at a diagonal angle: they are not visible as they are hidden behind a bargeboard and gutter, recently renewed. However the detail is the same as that used on the second farmstead attached building.

The Windows of the farmhouse

From the outset, the windows of the farmhouse would have been vertical sliding sash windows. A house built in the last half of the seventeenth century would include sash windows which were becoming the norm in residential houses. The farmhouse windows, originally, were within an opening of 4 feet x 2 feet 8 inches / 800 x1200 mm, with sliding sash windows 6 panes x 2.

The Windows of the farmhouse (continued)

The windows shown, **above right** are the original sliding sash windows, shown here when the house was being upgraded in 1990, just prior to their replacement. Upper windows are the same size as the lower ones. The front door, as seen in the image is a double glazed door replacing a a solid door below a three pane fanlight. The fanlight, app. 40 inches wide, (1m15cm) is still stored in the stables, **below**.



Windows, **Below:** This is a relatively close-up view from pictures taken in 1990, showing the original windows at a larger scale, producing some sense of the original appearance of the frontage. Pictures by David Strawbridge.





On the right: one of the shutters in the parlour; our living room. The motif on these shutters is unlike the others. They have been integrated with a reconstruction of the windows and their shutters. The cupboard beside the fireplace and the doors at either end the room (see next page) are designed with the same motif and with a chair- or 'dado-' rail around the room. It is possible that the walls preceded the present plaster finish with timber panelling, common at that period.



Shutters for windows



Above: After the replacement of the windows and their shutters, they were left behind in the stables block and have remained there for the last 25 years, waiting for us to think up a useful way of recycling them. Most are in better condition than this pair, yet even these could be restored without difficulty.

The dimensions across both shutters are 26 inches (660mm), and from bottom to top are each 50 inches (270mm). It appears that there was some variation in shutter size, perhaps between upper and lower floors. Certainly, those shutters which were retained, and located beside the new windows in the Parlour are 200 mm deep.

Left: Enlarged detail of the fixing for the iron bar, above, which swung across to the other shutter for security.

Right:

These windows are replacements, which take their appearance from the seventeenth century. The original windows chose refinement, innovation of fashionable sash windows at the turn of the 18th century . The shutters are original and have been retained from the original windows.



The windows shown are the lower part of a sliding sash window, this **left:** shows its exterior appearance, with very thin glazing bars with the glass held in with putty.



The image, **left:** shows the inside of the window, with very fine glazing bars shaped to a point, shown on the lower image.

The glass in the panes is exceptionally thin, and many panes are still intact.



These images are from one of several old windows kept in the stables awaiting use or exhibition.



Left: This cupboard in the parlour/living room is fitted between the chimney breast and the external wall. It generates valuable storage space: records of meetings and the family bible may have been kept there. The doors have attractive mouldings, repeated on the shutters and also on the two doors of the room. The cupboard also takes up the theme with the same mouldings. It is unusual to have a singular dentil moulding at the top of the cupboard frame, which is something of a surprise in a Quaker house. The coherence of this room is greatly enhanced with the timber details. They would have given 'presence' to a room which held Quaker meetings on a regular basis. It is possible, and of the period, that the walls were panelled above and below the dado rail, before they were plastered.



Top left: frontal view of the farmstead. The gable of the milking parlour is seen on the far left side, whilst the gable on the opposite side is the stables building.

Top right: Most of the stonework has been covered up over the years. This is an outdoor wall closing off the garden to the 'dower house'. The stonework is achieved with relatively small flat stones of diverse origin, to make it easier to 'turn the corner' without cutting large stones to make the corner.

Middle left: The strange case of a dangerously-sawn key structural beam above the kitchen, presumably to gain head-height on the stairs which pass under... Nothing has shifted in our time here...



Bottom left: Up in the roof, one of the massive purlins is supporting the rafters and is supported, one third of span, by a king post truss. The room below has a ceiling with angled sides, following the line of the rafters.

Right:

A once in a lifetime event for the farmhouse, when a chimney fire damaged the flues, but no other areas were affected. The old flues were replaced with new internal metal flues, limiting further risk of further fires in the chimney. The upper part had to be substantially rebuilt. The image shows the final attachment of the inner flue lining by the contractors, the 'Soot Doctors'.

Behind the frontage

Orientation of the building is East/ West. East-facing frontage is towards the sea, and the rear of the building at the West is tucked into the hillside giving shelter from the westerly winds from the Atlantic.

The front of the house has many windows, but the rear elevation is limited to a few. The reason for this is to do with the decision to build into the back wall, making a cut into the sloping hillside. Until the 1990s there was no door to the back until the whole area was levelled to floor level, creating a sheltered garden as well as a much improved resistance to damp, and access from the kitchen out to the rear garden. Originally, a ground floor window to the kitchen, a high level window in the Parlour, and three upstairs windows faced the hillside. The excavation made space at ground level, and easier access to the rear.

The Entrances

The entrance to the house is a modest lobby, just big enough to allow access to the left into the kitchen and access to the right into the Parlour. The kitchen door is relatively new, early in the twentieth century, and certainly facilitates use of the kitchen and access. In practice this door is the convenient way in and out.

The Kitchen

This is a comfortable size, generous as a family room and is the core of the house. With double-facing windows East and West, the room benefits from daylight from the East in the morning and lovely sunsets in the evening. At some time the connection between this room and the old kitchen of the second farmstead was made, no doubt once the farmhouse was completed. After some time the opening had been walled up, and the the old kitchen separated from the new. We identified that early opening and removed the stonework to allow movement from the farmhouse to the older part. The kitchen has a unique configuration of the original hearth with a stone bread oven which is intact, although not used because the chimney has been closed to install a Stanley stove in it, with a sealed flue.

The stairs to the bedrooms wrap over the bread oven at the half-landing where the stone floored 'Pantry' accommodated hidden catholic priests in the worst years of persecution.

The Kitchen is a single space 4.9m wide (16ft) and 6.9m long (22.5ft). It includes a fireplace, bread oven and stairs, 1.4 m (4.5ft) deep.

In the last century a door to the kitchen directly from outside was opened. The floor was cemented over with t&g flooring overlaid in 1995, and solid oak parquet floor over that. The kitchen has an open timber joist structure with timber floor above. There is evidence that the floor was replaced, and was dated 1927. Two massive beams which span the width remain from the earlier floor, indicating that there may have been a fire which damaged the joists and floor above. The focus of the room is the fireplace at the end, its opening is supported with a large beam, Oak or Elm (it has a wavy line on its upper surface).



Above: The opening to the bread oven used rounded stones to encourage the easy movement of smoke during heating of the oven with fire. *"Built-in wall ovens for bread, found in some houses in South Leinster ... date from the quarter century either side of 1700"*

Hearth and Home: the vernacular house in Ireland c.1800 Barry "o'Reilly, Proceedings of the Royal Irish Academy Vol. 111C, 2011

The Kitchen, continued

Right: This is the walk-in fireplace at the end of the kitchen. The (black) beams above are strong, spanning across the the room to support the floor above, and the heavyweight beam at the end has an interesting wavy line at its upper edge, suggesting a beam from Elm or Oak. The staircase underside is just visible on the left side, changing direction as it rises in front of the fireplace. It looks like an afterthought, perhaps to remove a ladder stair and make a more comfortable and safe replacement, and making a necessary cut-out in the large beam shown above.

The bread oven, **below, right**, is behind the staircase, accessed from the fireplace. It has a domed shape, built in stone, and is used by bringing burning wood from the hearth, and dry twigs to make a hot fire, then the wood is removed, and bread is placed in the centre of the oven. The door is closed and the bread cooks. The door, surviving to this day is crudely made, with leather used for hinges, but tightly fitted into the opening.

Below: The other end of the kitchen with new glazed door in the added opening on the left and the opening to the second farmstead, centre, used again as found, although with new, folding timber doors.



The Parlour

There are two rooms only, on the ground floor, with a small lobby connecting the two and accessing the main door out. However, both rooms are of substantial size and would have played a central community role in the farmstead.

The parlour was an important room for the activities of the Quakers, who met locally every fortnight. This room would have been the special meeting room as well as the place for other meetings, family and friends, but it is likely that most conviviality would have been in the kitchen. There is a magnificent cupboard in this room which we imagine would have been where records of the Quakers were kept as well as the Bible. Some have suggested that, because it is beside the fireplace the lower cupboard may have been reserved for sheets. The ceiling was lath and plaster, but in very poor condition, replaced with sheeted timber, during the Strawbridge era. The fireplace was also missing; we replaced it with a simple opening and cantilevered slate mantelpiece.



Three hundred and fifty years ago, in 1668, a boy named Robert, registered in the Quaker records, 'The Book of Life', **it was the first birth in Ballymurrin Farmstead.** Ambrose Judd, his father, had emigrated to Ireland from Brandon Ferry, Suffolk, to join Cromwell's Army in 1651.

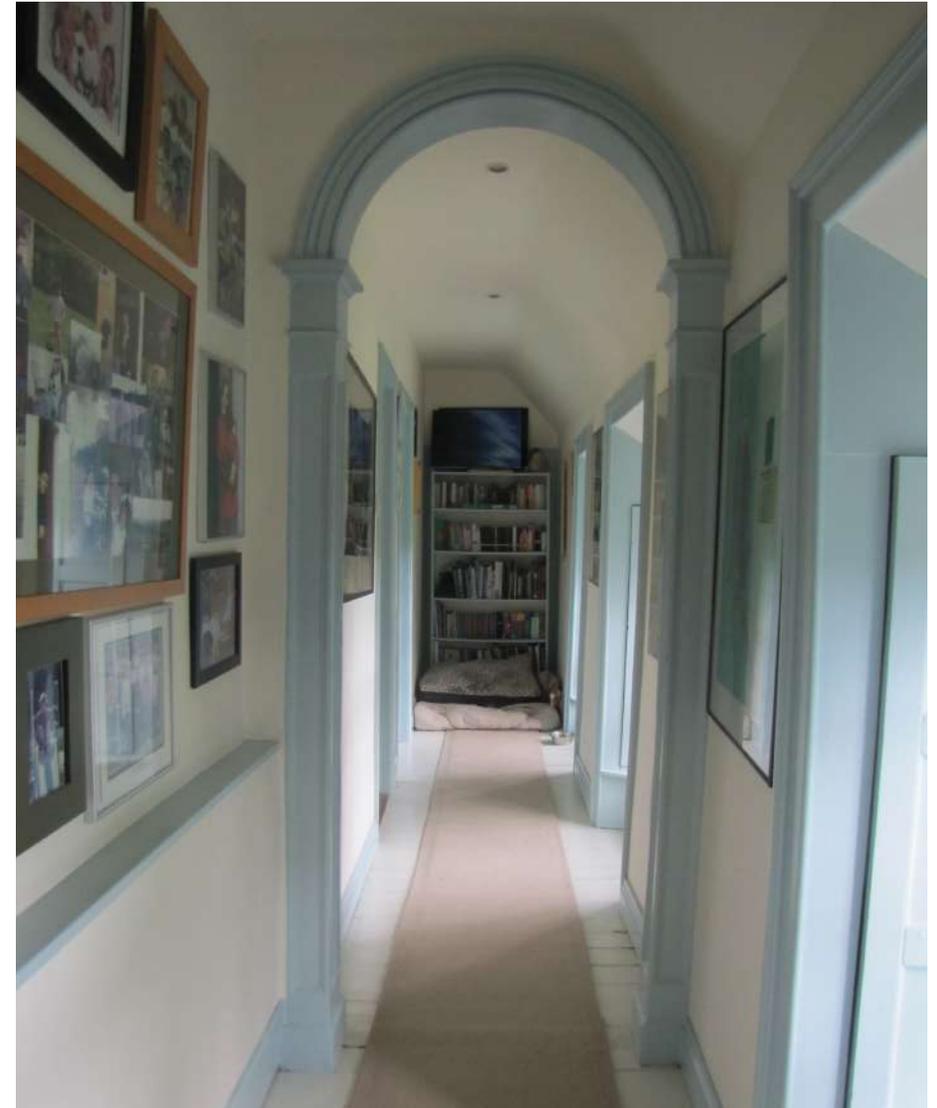
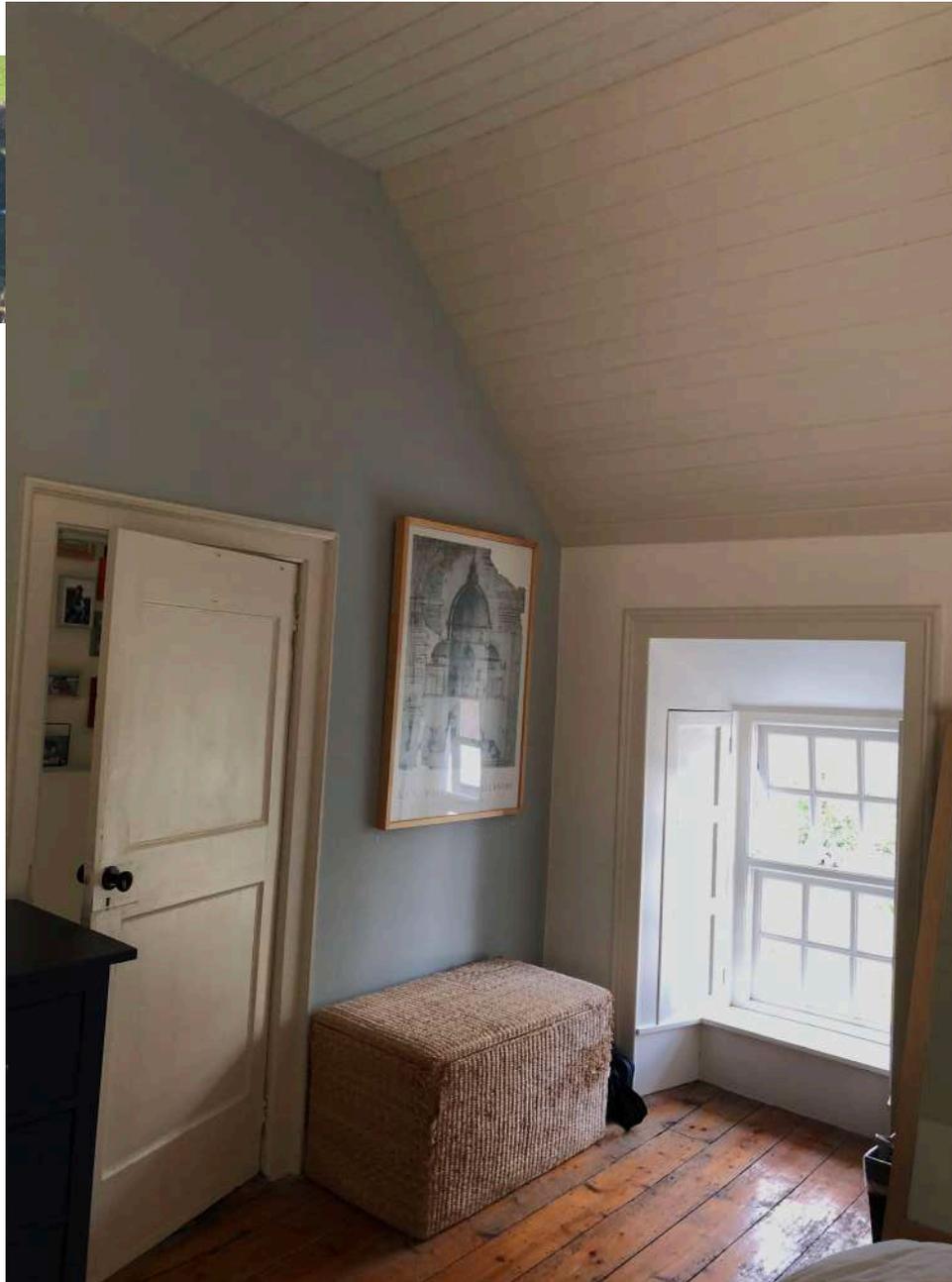
In 1667 he married Anne Eves, who came to Ireland with her parents, as Quakers, in 1660.

He 'was convinced of the blessed truth' in 1672, and became a Quaker.

We celebrated this extraordinary anniversary by holding a 'Meeting for Worship' at Ballymurrin in the Parlour, with 40 Quakers squeezing into the Meeting Room... It was the first Quaker event in the house since 1874, when the Pim family retired to Wicklow Town, with a Draper's shop.



Above: The Parlour, more like a living room now, had the central feature of the fireplace, and, in the corner, a carefully-crafted built-in cupboard. **Right:** There was no original fireplace to keep and this one definitely had to go, replaced with a new fireplace and slate mantelpiece. The window shows its original form with sash window, shutters and boarded recess below. The slope of the ground determined the height of the window above ground. The ceiling has no plaster, and is awaiting timber sheeting. (Photo from 1995)



Left: Upstairs bedroom over kitchen. Sloping ceiling adds considerable height and volume to a large, presumably family, room. The ceiling is tongued and grooved, the door has original hinges, light and with interesting 1930's bakelite handles. The floor is pitch pine, decorated with woodworm (not live). Corridor leads to the Dower House extension, past bedroom and (modern bathroom). The door is behind the bookcase.

The Farmhouse in its landscape



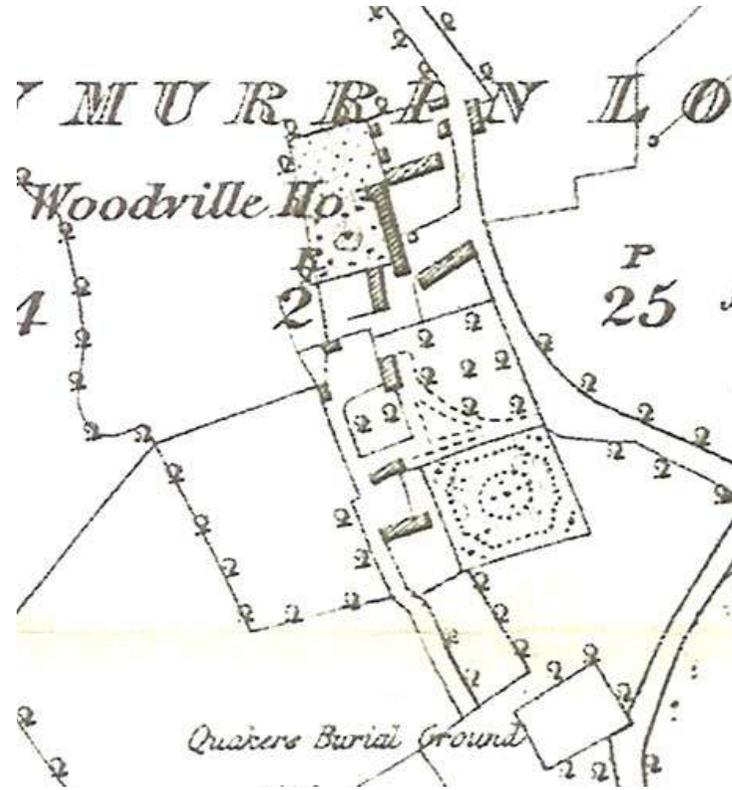
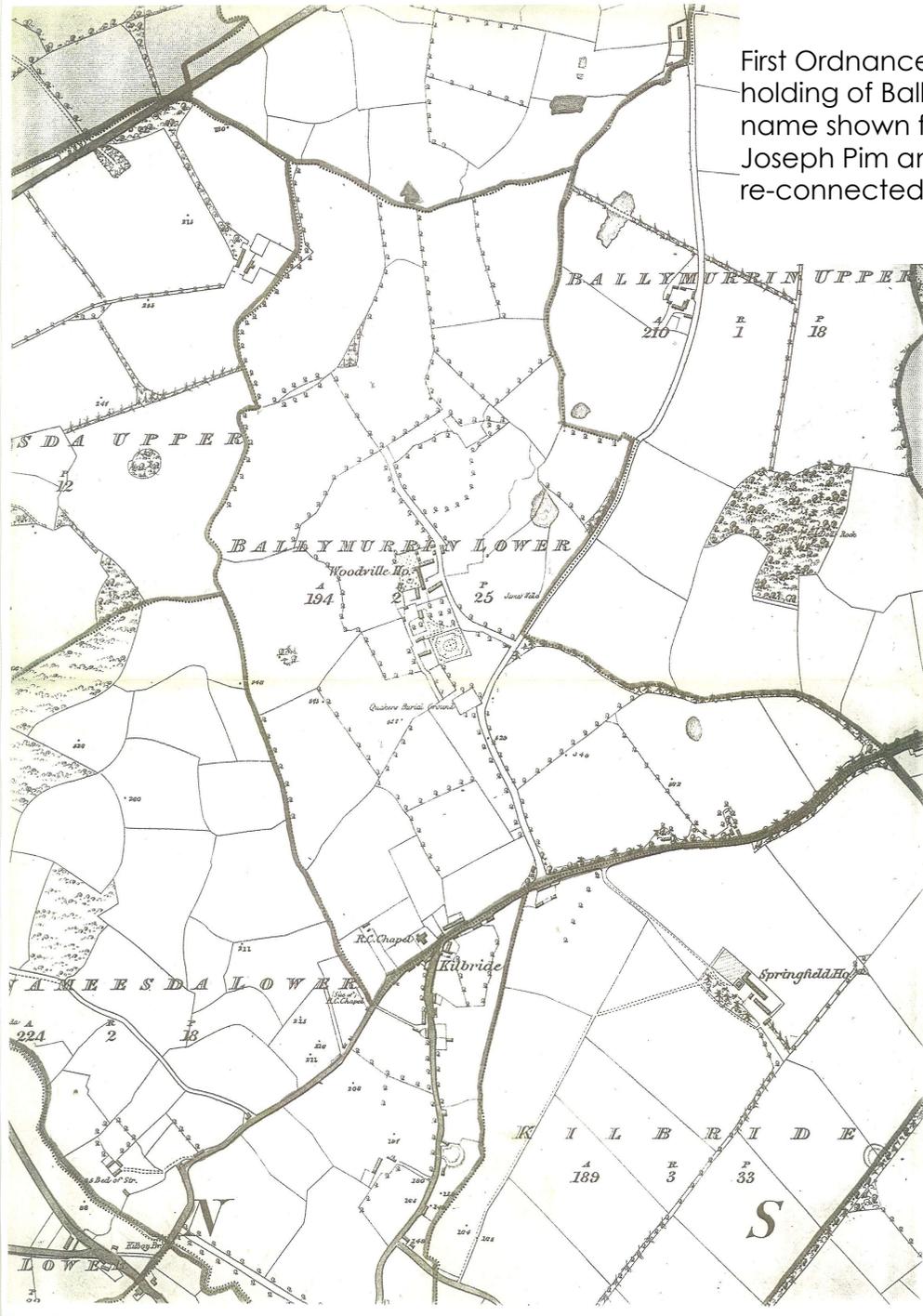
Above: Foothills' landscape is the environment for the town lands of Ballymurrin Lower and Upper, with a background stretching to the Wicklow Mountains. The two town lands made up the farmland of the Ballymurrin Quakers, 357 acres. Ballymurrin Upper was sold in 1855, 163 acres, through the Court of the Commissioners for Sale of Incumbered Estates in Ireland: Ballymurrin Lower was sold in 1874, 194 acres through the Landed Estates Court. Further detail of these transactions will be made available.

Left, upper: the farmstead sits carefully into the landscape, protected from the southwesterly winds. The excavation of the site at the back made the stonework safe from any flooding and created a sun-trap for garden and eating out

Left, lower: The back of the main buildings of the farmstead; a diverse array of what seem like arbitrarily located windows serving bedrooms, parlour and kitchen of the main house, put in over time with giveaway concrete sills. The roofing at this side of the main building result from re-roofing some time in the twentieth century. The lichen attached to the older, real, slates distinguish from the much later asbestos which, in time, will be replaced. The second farmstead was re-roofed in 1995, our first real task of repair and restoration. The roof lights were added; the door at the back, replaced the broken glass window: we intend to make a bridge across to the garden...soon.



First Ordnance Survey map of Wicklow, surveyed in 1838, published 1840, shows the land holding of Ballymurrin Lower, and its farm houses in the centre. Woodville House is the name shown for the whole property. That name is now used for the 'new house', when Joseph Pim and his family owned the whole holding of 194 acres. Most of the land is now re-connected with Ballymurrin Upper. The Quaker Burial Ground is identified on the map.



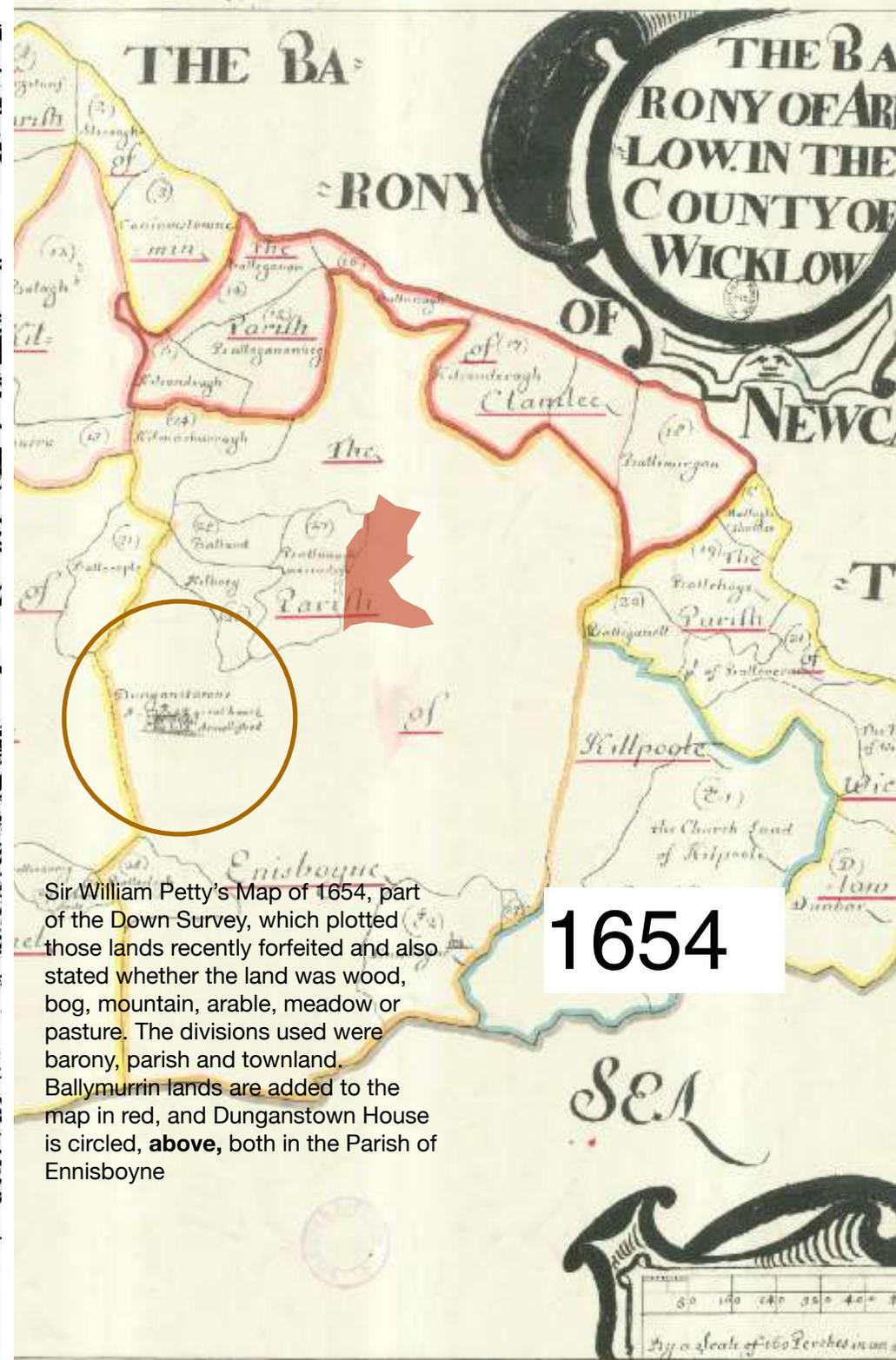
Ordnance Survey 1838



Ballykean, Kilmacow and "Qs Meetg. House", in the circle, near to Red Cross

Brittas, Quaker Richard Penrose

Jacob Neville 1760



1654

Sir William Petty's Map of 1654, part of the Down Survey, which plotted those lands recently forfeited and also stated whether the land was wood, bog, mountain, arable, meadow or pasture. The divisions used were barony, parish and townland. Ballymurrin lands are added to the map in red, and Dunganstown House is circled, **above**, both in the Parish of Ennisboyne

