

Irish – as spoken in Lower Ormond

By Liam Mac Peaircín

The following article, penned by ‘Eamon an Chnuic,’ was published in the *Nenagh Guardian*, 3 April 1937. The author has been identified as Pádraig Ó Meára (1905-1971), Toomyvara, a pioneering publisher, and leading light in the Gaelic League in Nenagh.¹

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(Being an attempt to compile and explain the many Irish words and phrases still retained by the English-speaking people of this barony).

Generations have passed since Irish was the vernacular of Tipperary, but many words and expressions in Irish lived on in the English speech, and may be heard even yet. Those of us who never got the opportunity of learning our native tongue, still use many Irish words in our everyday conversations even though we may not understand their derivation or correct application.

Undoubtedly, several of those words have become fixtures in the English language, and are used wherever English is spoken. I refer to such words as “colleen,” “brogue,” etc. Others are to be found only in Ireland. Below is a fairly full list of Irish words and phrases still in use among the English-speaking people of a certain part of Lower Ormond. Firstly, the more common words and expressions:

Colleen: from the Irish “cailín,” meaning “a girl.”

Boohal: Ir. “buachaill,” a boy.

Gorsoon: Ir. “garsún,” a young boy.

Smidhereens: Ir. “smidiríní,” fragments.

Omadhaun: Ir. “amadán,” a fool.

Ownshagh: Ir. “óinseach,” a fool (applied only to females).

Pliike: Ir. “pleidhce,” a fool.

Bonave: Ir. “banbh,” a bonham.

Kithogue: Ir. “ciotóg,” a left-handed person.

Croob: Ir. “crúb,” a claw or hoof.

Croobeen: Ir. “crúibín,” a little hoof.

Gob: Ir. “gob,” contemptuous name for the mouth.

Puss: Ir. “pus,” do.

Clob: Ir. “clab,” do.

Dhudeen: Ir. “dúidín,” a pipe.

Brogue: Ir. “bróg,” a boot.

Caubeen: Ir. “caibín,” an old hat.

Grug: Ir. “gróga,” a crouch.

Anashore: Ir. “aindeiseoir,” a miserable person.

Potheen: Ir. “poitín,” whiskey made in private stills.

Banshee: Ir. “bean-sidhe,” a fairy woman.

Crooshkeen: Ir. “crúiscín,” a jug.

Pogue: Ir. “póg,” a kiss.

We have also retained the following well-known expressions – mainly terms of endearment, and given in the form used when addressing a person:-

Acushla: Ir. “a chuisle,” darling.

Avourneen: Ir. “a mhúirnín,” do.

Agraw: Ir. “a ghrádh,” love. (Grádh is in use too in such sentences as “He has a great gradh for you,” i.e. he likes you very much).

Machree: Ir. “Mo chroidhe,” (of my heart, e.g. grádh mo chroidhe means “love of my heart.”)

Avic: Ir. “a mhic,” son.

Asthore: Ir. “a stóir,” darling.

Alanna: Ir. “a leanbh,” oh child. (addressing a child)

Faugh a ballagh: Ir. “fág an bealach,” clear the way.

Along with these, some not-so-common words have been preserved:

Breshna: Ir. “brosna,” a bundle of sticks.

Spart: Ir. “spairt,” wet, heavy turf.

Pleb: Ir. “pleib,” a laughing-stock.

Shkillawns: Ir. “sciolláin,” potatoes cut from seed.

Keolawn: Ir. “ceolán,” a babbler or cry-baby.

Cusheen: Ir. “coisín,” a little foot.

- Powlthogue: Ir. "paltóg," a blow.
- Cloosh: Ir. "cluas," an ear.
- Pusheen: Ir. "puisín," a kitten.
- Gowlogue: Ir. "gabhlóg," a forked stick.
- Greasha: Ir. "gríosach," burning embers.
- Thrawneen: Ir. "tráithnín," a withered stalk of meadow grass.
- Bosthoon: Ir. "bastún," a block-head.
- Kerawn: Ir. "caorán," a piece of dry turf.
- Theeven: Ir. "taoibhín," a side-patch, e.g. on a boot.
- Bownlock: Ir. "buinn-leac," inflammation.
- Mohal: Ir. "mothall," a bush of hair.
- Thicka: Ir. "toice," a girl.
- Bockawn: Ir. "bacán," a hinge or hinge-hook.
- Thurmas: Ir. "tormas," grumbling, sulking.
- Dhusahawn: Ir. "dosathán," an impertinent fellow.
- Plawmawse: Ir. "plámás," flattery.
- Kippen: Ir. "cipín," a little stick.
- Boreen: Ir. "bóithrín," a lane.
- Ogawny: Ir. "ógánach," a youth.
- Losset: Ir. "losat," [losaid] a kneading trough.
- Scollop: Ir. "scolb," rod used in thatching.
- Buahalawn: Ir. "buachallán," ragweed.
- Mehel: Ir. "meitheal," a number of men employed at any special work as turf-cutting, etc.
- Shlawn: Ir. "sleaghán," a turf-spade.
- Grawneogue: Ir. "gráinneog," a hedgehog.
- Bugawn: Ir. "bogán," an egg laid without the shell.
- Sugan: Ir. "súgán," a hay or straw rope.
- Pilibeen: Ir. "pilibín," a lapwing or plover.
- Prawshkeen: Ir. "praiscín," an apron.
- Spawg: Ir. "spág," a big foot.
- Spalpeen: Ir. "spailpín," a migratory labourer; a mean fellow.

Puck: Ir. "poc," a male-goat.

Breekeen: Ir. "bricín," a troutlet, small fish.

Thrawlick: Ir. "tráileach," wrist pain. [Dinneen 1927, 1240].

Yalp: Ir. "alp," to eat ravenously.

Keeler: Ir. "cíléar," a shallow wooden vessel for milk.

Ark-luker: Ir. "airc luachra," a lizard. (If a person swallows an "airc luachra," a hunger which cannot be appeased, follows. The traditional cure is to hold the head over a pan of fried meat, the odour of which will attract the unwanted inmate and bring him out).

Seem: Ir. "suim," interest, heed. (Heard in sayings like "he didn't put any 'seem' in me." Note the direct translation from the Irish).

Cleeve: Ir. "cliabh," a basket, a wickerwork cart or creel.

Kish: Ir. "cis," a basket, wickerwork sides for a cart.

Kisha: Ir. "ciseach," an improvised pathway or road laid over damp ground. A crude bridge over a bog-drain.

Bawse: Ir. "bás," death. Applied to dying-looking or sickly person.

Bawn: Ir. "bán," dry pastureland; a milking yard.

Toher: Ir. "tóchar," a causeway, a car-track in a bog.

Crith: Ir. "cruit," a hump on the back.

Bothoon: Ir. "botún," a mistake.

Guggy: Ir. "gogaidhe," a child's name for an egg.

Glugger: Ir. "glugar," a rotten egg.

Boorawn: Ir. "bodhrán," a deaf person (usually heard in "As deaf as a boorawn").

Reesk: Ir. "riasc," marsh, moor.

Bawneen: Ir. "báinín," a home-spun coat.

Corrig: Ir. "carraig," a rock.

Raymaysh: Ir. "ráiméis," nonsense.

Boss: Ir. "bas," blade e.g. of a hurley.

Raythore: Ir. "réidhteoir," a cleanser for a pipe stem.

Playsham: Ir. "pleisean," [pléiseam] foolery.

Smeig: Ir. "smeig," the chin. (Applied in this district to a goat's "beard").

Streel: Ir. "straoille," an untidy woman.

Grishken: Ir. "gríscín," a broiled piece of meat.

Glawn: Ir. "glám," a clutch, a snatch.

Galas: Ir. "gealas," a suspender.

Libe: Ir. "leidhb," a strip.

Gib: Ir. "giob," a shred, a scrap. ("Gibs" of hair – bits of hair sticking out from the head).

Cawbogue: Ir. "cábóg," a rustic.

Boondoan: Ir. "bundún," the fundament.

Gad: Ir. "gad," a withe. (Used in "as tough as a gad").

Shoeleather: This is the name given in country districts to a hurling-ball. I imagine it to be a corrupted form of the Irish word "sliotar."

Prasha weed: When a farmer used those words he really means "praiseach bhuidhe," or charlock.

Shkeow: Ir. "sceabha," askew, aslant. ("Shkeow-ways," – crooked).

Coor: Ir. "comhar," co-operation. ("Cooring" is an old and useful system of co-operation among farmers).

Playing pookha: This was what our parents said instead of "Blind-man's bluff." Ir. "púcóg."

Reek days: Ir. "riabhach," roan. The "reek days" are the opening days of April. The story is that a roan cow complained of the harshness of March, whereupon March borrowed a few days from April. Those days were so wet and wild that the cow died.

Kybosh: Ir. "caidhp b[h]áis." Cap of death, i.e. the black cap a judge wears when pronouncing sentence of death. Thus "to put the "kybosh" on a thing, means to finish or destroy it.

Mention need hardly be made of such common words as "galore" (go leor, plenty), "leiprachawn" (leipreachán, fairy cobb[l]er), and "shillelagh" (blackthorn walking stick), "mah galore" Ir. "maith go leor," good enough, tipsy (only heard in these parts in the latter sense).

This collection shows how near we are after all to the past, even though no part of our county can be termed even Breac-Gaeltacht nowadays. Some old people know the salutations "Dia dhuit," and "Dia is Muire dhuit." I have heard the story of O'Connell and the servant-maid who warned him of the poisoned cup told, and

"A Dhomhnaill Uí Chonnaill an dtuigeann tú Gaedhiig?
Tuigim, a chailín."

etc., given out in fluent Irish.

As recently as thirty years ago the custom of striking the door with a newly-baked cake on New Year's Eve (to keep hunger away for the coming twelve months) was observed and the appropriate Irish words used during the process:

“Fograím an gorta go tír na dTurcach,
I order famine (hunger) to Turkey [literally far away]
Go bliain ó anocht agus anocht féin go fírinneach.”
For a year from tonight and from tonight truthfully (completely)

In the pronunciation of placenames, Irish phonetics are to the fore. Many of our idioms and forms of expression in English are direct translations from Irish. The tradition of our native language is still with us, but we must look to the coming generations to restore the language itself to its rightful place in the lives of our people.

Eamon an Chnuic.

Further Reading

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References

- 1 Breathnach, Ní Mhurchú (1997, 205-6); <https://www.ainm.ie/Bio.aspx?ID=764> (22.02.2019). For further information see Uí Mhorónaigh (1993); Ó Meára, Ó Drisceoil (2017). A similar list, but far more extensive, which won first prize at Feis Thiobraid Árann 1904, from the Glen of Aherlow region can be found by Sliabh g-Crot [Seán Ó Gruagáin] (1917).