

Focus on Cill Rialaigh, Co. Kerry:
Photographs, Drawings and Plans
Patricia Lysaght

Preserved in the National Folklore Collection, University College Dublin, are photographs and delicately-coloured drawings and plans depicting rural houses of the Irish countryside and a variety of artifacts relating to land, sea and shore, dating to 1934. These bear witness to the fieldwork expertise of the prominent Swedish ethnologist Dr Åke Campbell, who carried out field work in parts of rural Ireland at that time. During his visit to Sweden in 1928, as part of a more extensive study tour in Scandinavia, Finland, Estonia and Germany, Séamus Ó Duilearga, later Honorary Director of the Irish Folklore Commission (1935–1971), visited Åke Campbell, in Fristad in the province of Västergötland, who introduced him to aspects of Swedish local heritage conservation (*hembygdsvård*). This, together with his visit to Skansen in Stockholm and local folk museums, opened his eyes to the word of material and social culture. Campbell's wish to visit Ireland to try out Swedish ethnological methods in Irish field work materialised six years later when he travelled to Ireland at the invitation of the Irish Folklore Institute (1930–1935) in the summer of 1934. Spending most of the month of June and the first two weeks of July in the Irish countryside, he worked in Cill Rialaigh and in the Baile an Sceilg area of Co. Kerry, in parts of Co. Galway, including the Aran Islands, and in the Carlow–Wicklow border area, experiencing aspects of Irish rural material and social culture at first hand. His first port of call was Cill Rialaigh, the home village of the gifted storyteller, Seán Ó Conaill (1853–1931), whose repertoire Séamus Ó Duilearga had collected between 1923 and 1931.¹ By 1934 Seán Ó Conaill had already passed away, but his wife was still alive and his eldest son Pats had inherited the holding.² Åke Campbell was welcomed by Pats Ó Conaill and his mother, and he decided to concentrate on



Ó Conaill's farm (which he termed 'culture land') and dwelling-house, situated in what he described as a pastoral landscape adjusted to the sea, as typifying the way of life, livelihood, husbandry, and habitation form of the village as a whole, which then comprised six families.³ He was accompanied by Seán Ó Súilleabháin, a schoolteacher at Lehid National School, Tuosist, Killarney, who was soon to become the Archivist of the Irish Folklore Commission. Ó Súilleabháin helped Campbell to take measurements of various household and farm objects, and he also consulted with Pats Ó Conaill and his mother about related terminology and details of their way of life. Campbell worked intensively for about ten days, taking advantage of the long, bright June evenings close to the sea, to bring his project and the disruption of the Ó Conaill family to a speedy conclusion. In a subsequent letter to Séamus Ó Duilearga, Séan Ó Súilleabháin remarked on how accommodating the Ó Conaill family had been to Campbell and how appreciative he was of their generosity of spirit. He published the results of his research in Cill Rialaigh in an article entitled 'Irish Fields and Houses. A Study of Rural Culture', in *Béaloides* in 1935.⁴

Cill Rialaigh, Co. Kerry.
Photo: Åke Campbell, 1934



House of Pats Ó Conaill, Cill Rialaigh.
Photo: Åke Campbell, 1934

I have decided to concentrate here on that visit by Åke Campbell to Cill Rialaigh in 1934 and on the documentation arising from it contained in the National Folklore Collection, as it shows Campbell's *modus operandi* in the field, and its success was

the springboard for a further research visit by Campbell, together with a Swedish colleague, Dr Albert Nilsson, Lund, the following year, on the invitation of the Irish Folklore Commission.⁵

The Survey

A photograph taken by Campbell of Cill Rialaigh village in 1934 sets the scene as it shows its situation on high narrow ground at the foot of a steep, rocky slope, the closeness of the houses to each other, and their closeness to the sea, looking out over the Atlantic Ocean to the southwest (see page 76).

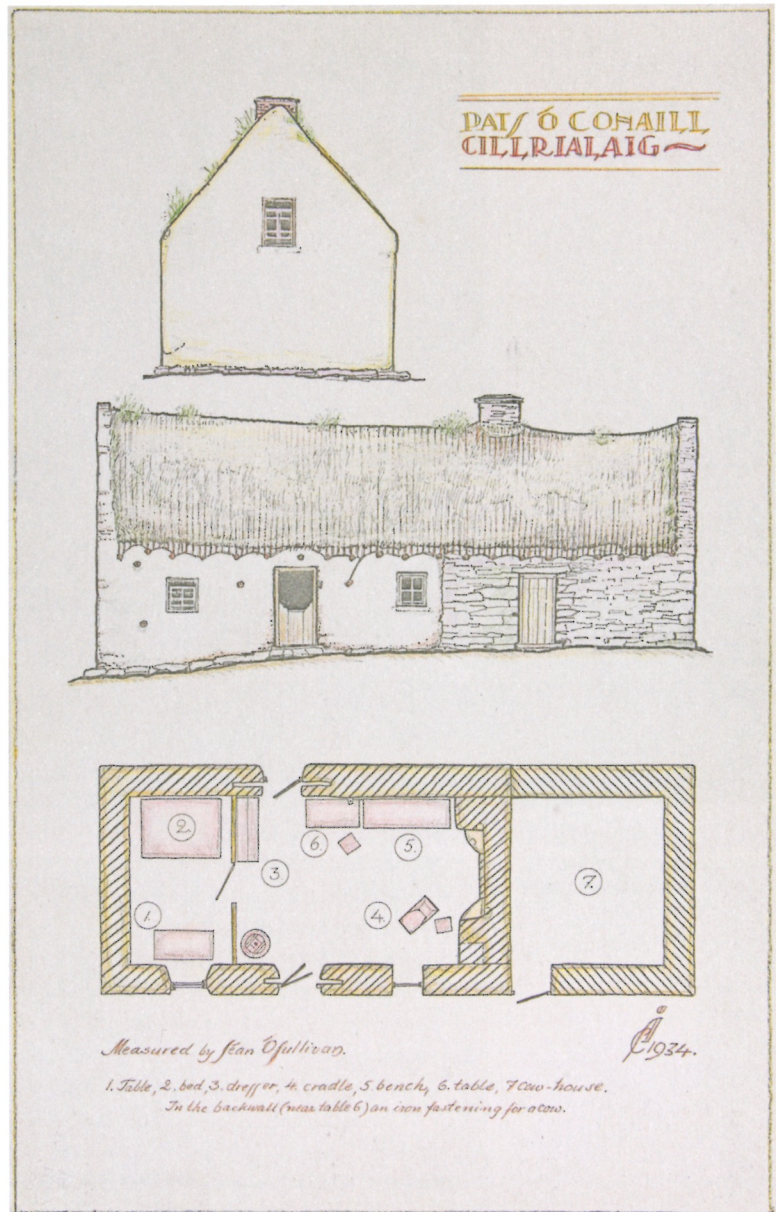
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A second photograph demonstrates the proximity of Pats Ó Conaill's house to the rocky hillside (see page 77).

By way of contextualising Pats Ó Conaill's dwelling-house, outhouses, and (the relatively few) implements relating to farming and fishing, all of which he documented, Campbell categorised Ó Conaill's farm (of about twenty-three acres in total),⁶ as being comprised of rough or hilly pasture-land (*cnoc*) suitable for animal grazing (c. nineteen acres), potato fields (*garraithe*) and corn fields (*goirt*) of about a half an acre each, cultivated by means of a spade (for human food and animal fodder), and hay fields (*páirceanna féir*) consisting of about three acres. The role of the peat bog (*portach*) in terms of household fuel (*móin*/peat), and the importance of the strand (*trá*) and the sea in the provision of livelihood, were also noted.⁷

Campbell's excellent drawings and plan of Pats Ó Conaill's house, and of various household objects, are some of the treasures of the National Folklore Collection (see right).

The top drawing illustrates the high stone gable at the lower end of the house, with its relatively large window, pointing to the existence of sleeping accommodation (a loft) over the kitchen area.⁸ The front elevation (middle elevation) depicts the dwelling-house (left), and the cow-byre (right) as forming a single complex (see right). The house is of the direct-entry type,⁹ built on sloping ground, indicating that it originally accommodated animals as well as the family. This was confirmed by Pats Ó Conaill who stated that until about fifty years previously, the house had consisted of only one unit – the kitchen and sleeping areas at the upper end near the hearth (note the chimney stack



on the original upper gable), and the cow-byre at the lower, sloping end, beyond the opposite doors.¹⁰ A wooden partition erected below the opposite doors (see third drawing – floor plan) in the 1880s on the removal of the cows to a newly-built external cow-house added to the upper gable of the dwelling, provided additional sleeping accommodation separate from the kitchen area. The half-door, supplementing the front door, evident in the drawing, allowed air and light to enter the kitchen while excluding domestic animals. The dry-stone walls of the dwelling were rendered and whitewashed externally (and internally), while those of the byre were left in their

Drawings and plan of Pats Ó Conaill's house, Cill Rialaigh, by Áike Campbell, 1934



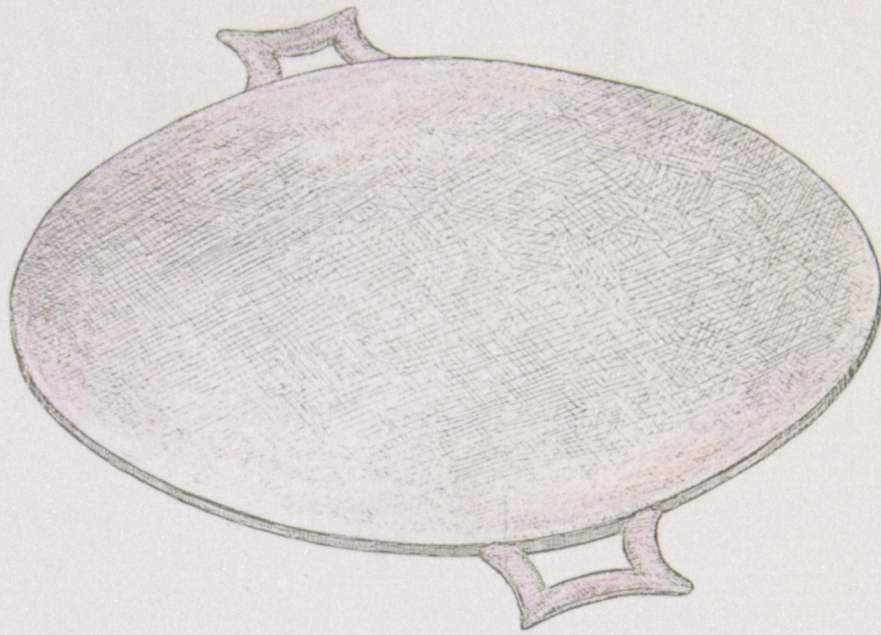
Drawing of the hearth in Pats Ó Conaill's house, Cill Rialaigh by Áke Campbell, 1934

natural state. The high gabled-roof typical especially of Atlantic seaboard counties, was thatched with poor-quality material – long, coarse, mountain grass – as the available oaten straw was probably required for animal bedding. It was protected from prevailing winds by tall stone gables and closely-arranged ropes extending vertically over the front and back of the roof. These were tied to a horizontal yarn secured to wall pegs imbedded in the side-walls of the house (see photograph on page 77).

Áke Campbell also identified Ó Conaill's household furniture (with the exception of the churn [*meadar*], which he drew situated to the left of the front door of the kitchen), and depicted its arrangement in the floor plan (see page 78). He noted that the kind of furniture in Ó Conaill's house was typical of the other houses in the village, as was its arrangement along

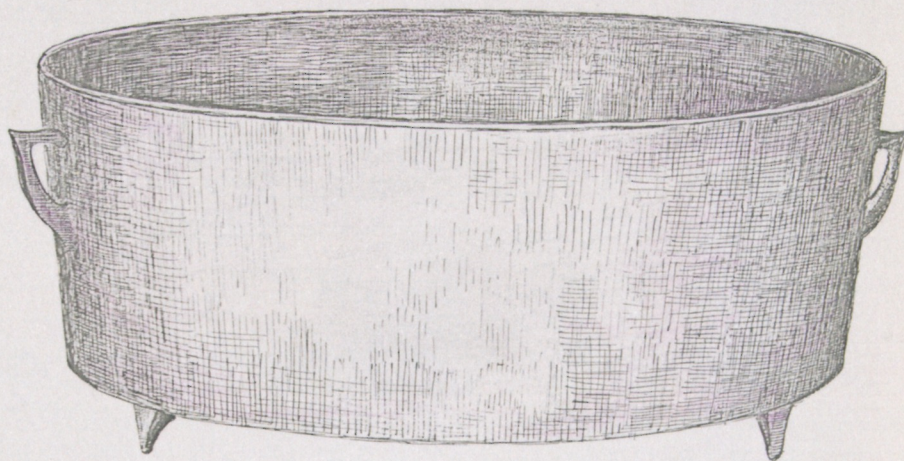
the walls in order to keep the floor space, especially that of the kitchen which was the social and work centre of the house, free, and he depicted a similar arrangement in houses in Connacht which he surveyed in 1935.¹¹ Campbell pointed to the existence of an iron fastening on the kitchen wall behind the table (item 6 in the floor plan, page 78) as bearing silent witness to the former presence of cows in the house.¹²

Campbell photographed and made a drawing of the hearth area (above), showing the open fire at floor level in the traditional manner, the crane (*croch*) and hanger (*drol*) for supporting cooking vessels over the fire, and a tripod on which the griddle was placed when baking bread.¹³ He also made separate drawings of the baking equipment – a griddle (*grideall*), and a pot-oven or 'bastable' (*bácús*) – and of the kind of bread for which each was used (see pages 80–1).



Cilrialaig

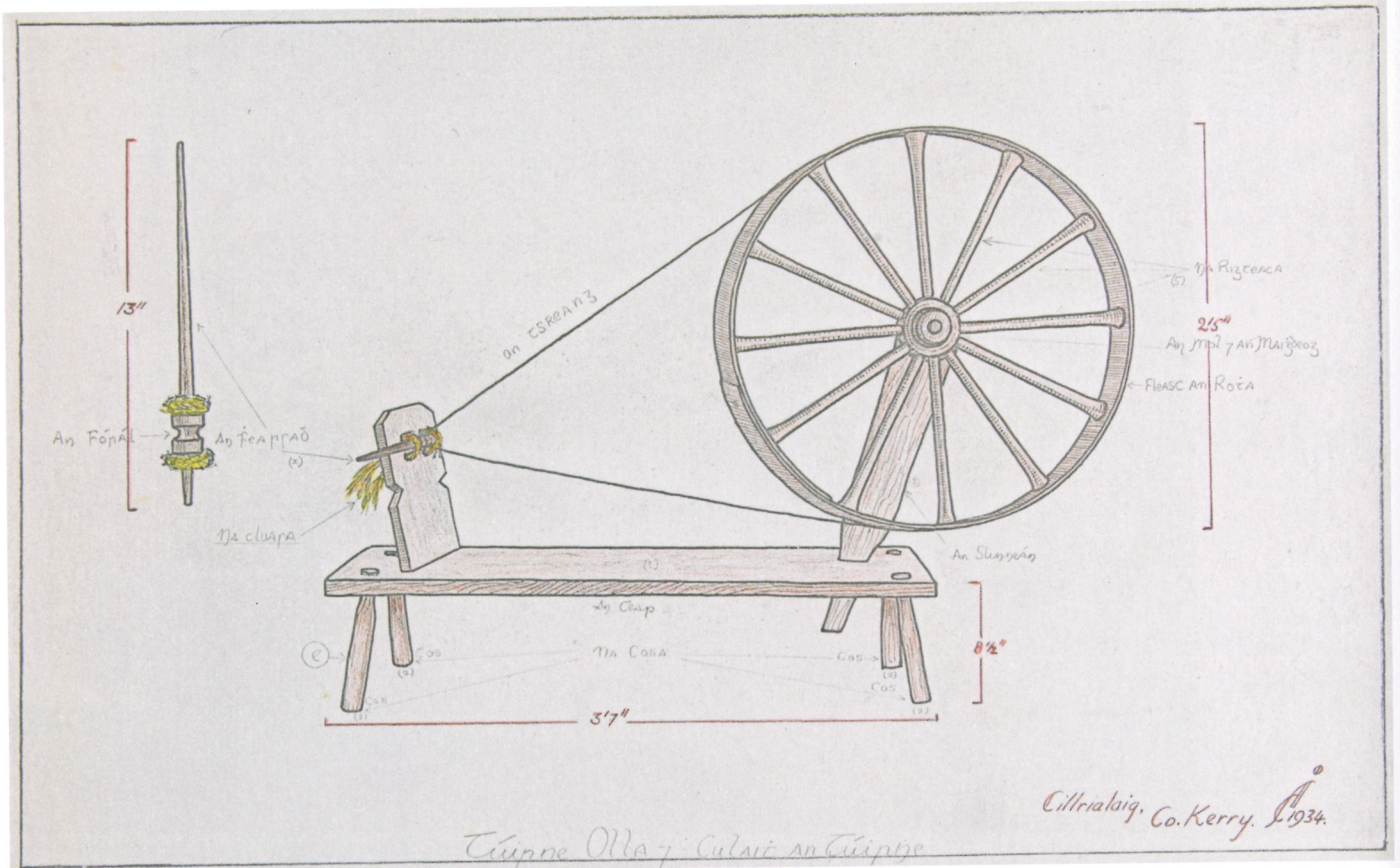
Drawing of a
griddle and
griddle bread by
Åke Campbell,
1934



Drawing of a
pot-oven, or
'bastable', and
soda bread, by
Åke Campbell,
1934

Cillrialaig

*A.
1934.*



The drawing of a spinning-wheel entitled 'Túirne Olla agus Culaith an Túirne', ('Wool Spinning-wheel and Fittings') which Áke Campbell made, depicts the low type of the big spinning-wheel in use in Kerry. The example portrayed has short legs thus enabling the operator to sit while spinning.¹⁵ In addition to measurements, the Irish language terminology for the various elements of the spinning-wheel is also included. Starting at the base, these are: *an ceap* – the base of the spinning-wheel; *na cosa* – the feet (of the baser); *an slinneán* – the beam of the spinning wheel in which the *maighdeog* (axle) of the wheel is fixed; *fleasc an rotha* – the wooden band or tyre of the spinning wheel; *an mol agus an maighdeog* – the wheel hub and the axle; *na rigteacha* – the radials (spokes); *an tsreang* – the wheel band for a wool spinning wheel; *na cluasa* – the 'ears', often made of willow or 'sally', attaching the spindle to the tail stock; *an fhearsad* – the spindle; and *an fóráil* – the groove in the spindle head.

Áke Campbell also made an excellent drawing of the Ó Conaill household's butter churn.¹⁶ This was a low, broad dash churn of a type commonly used in the southwest of Ireland. He also showed details of the lid and the dash, including the 'jogler', a small cup-shaped object, which fitted around the handle of the dash and over the lid, to prevent the milk splashing through the hole at the top during churning.¹⁷

Áke Campbell was pleased with his work in Cill Rialaigh. He remarked that the more he learned about Ireland the more interested he became in its material culture. His proposal that he might come back the following year assisted by a trained colleague bore fruit as he and Dr Nilsson carried out extensive folklife surveys in different parts of Ireland in 1935.¹⁸ These surveys of 1934 and 1935, the methods involved, and the training provided, greatly influenced the Irish Folklore Commission's work and the future direction and development of ethnological field studies, research, and publication in Ireland over the following decades.

Drawing of a wool spinning-wheel and fittings by Áke Campbell, 1934

Notes

- 1 Ó Duilearga, S., (eag.), *Leabhar Sheáin Í Chonaill*, Baile Átha Cliath, 1977 (1948). (ed.), Seán Ó Conaill's Book. Translated by Máire MacNeill, Dublin, 1981.
- 2 Ó Duilearga, 1977, xxv; 1981, xv.
- 3 Campbell's approach to ethnological surveys was essentially holistic, seeking to include narrative and belief traditions, as well as landscape research, farming methods and material and social culture, in his work, but as Séamus Ó Duilearga had already dealt with the former when collecting from Seán Ó Conaill, he could concentrate on the latter aspects during the short period of his survey in 1934.
- 4 Campbell, Å., 'Irish Fields and Houses. A Study of Rural Culture', in *Béaloides* (1935), 57-74.
- 5 Lysaght, P., 'Swedish Ethnological Surveys in Ireland 1934-5 and their Aftermath', in H., Cheape (ed.), *Tools and Traditions. Studies in European Ethnology Presented to Alexander Fenton*, Edinburgh, 1993, 22-31.
- 6 Campbell 1935, 64.
- 7 Campbell 1935, 61-5.
- 8 See also Campbell 1935, 67, and Campbell, Å., 'Notes on the Irish House', in *Folkiv* 2-3 (1937), 225.
- 9 Gailey, A., *Rural Houses of the North of Ireland*, Edinburgh, 1984, 140-2
- 10 See 'Byre-Dwellings' in Gailey 1984, 142-8.
- 11 See, for example, Campbell 1937, 218 (referring to Garmna, Co. Galway) and 223 (referring to An Spidéal, Co. Galway).
- 12 The placing of the fastening in the living part of the unit is unusual as the cows were normally tethered to the lower gable wall and thus the byre-end of the unit was usually below the line of the opposite doors.
- 13 See Campbell 1935, 69.
- 14 For griddle bread, and soda bread (made in the pot-oven), see Ó Danachair, C., 'Bread in Ireland', in A. Fenton and T. M. Owen (eds.), *Food in Perspective*, Edinburgh, 1981, 58-63, 65-5.
- 15 Mahon, B., 'Wool and Flax', in David Shaw-Smith, *Ireland's Traditional Crafts*, London, 1984, 18-19.
- 16 The drawing of the churn would appear to have been mistakenly dated by Campbell to 1935 as it seems that, after his 1934 visit, Campbell did not visit Cill Rialaigh again until 1954 (Lysaght 1993, 29). According to Séamus Ó Duilearga, writing in 1948, Pats Ó Conaill, who had inherited the holding was living in Baile an Sceilig Thiar on the townland boundary with Cill Rialaigh. Seán Ó Conaill's house was by then 'ar lár' ('laid low') reduced to just a 'carn cloch', 'a heap of stones' (Ó Duilearga 1977, xxi; 1981, xiv).
- 17 O'Neill, T. P., 'Coopering', in David Shaw-Smith, *Ireland's Traditional Crafts*, London, 1984, 65-70.
- 18 See note 5 above.

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