

NIMBLE HANDS

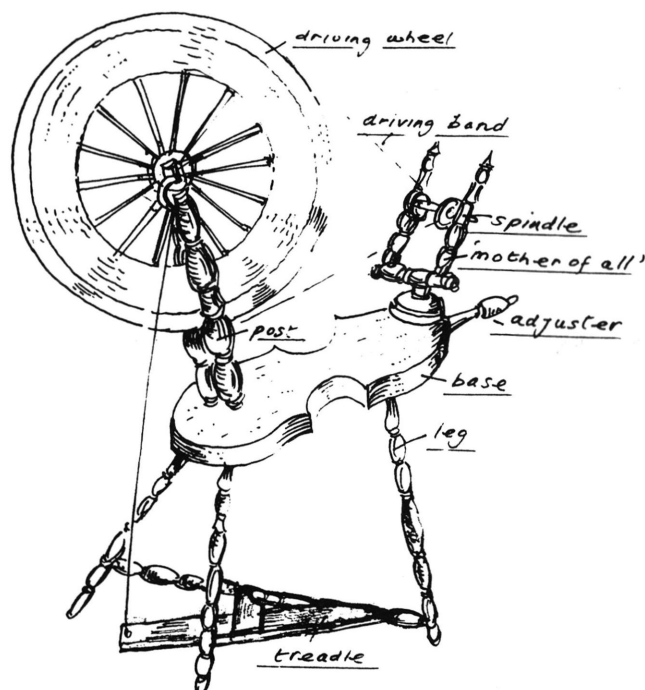
BALLINTURLY near Athleague is noteworthy for its turlach, a lake sparkling with wildlife in winter and sweet grasses in summer. Here many elements of environmental pleasures can be found, and some areas of it have found their way into folklore, and are well told in James Moran's book ('), who lives close by, at Correal. A family from here that had a meritorious member were the Treacys'. This was Kate Treacy who was excellent at knitting, sewing, crochet and needle work. She was also expert at the spinning wheel, and found time to exhibit her work at various shows around the midlands at the turn of the century. This was still a time when natural resources were used to produce common items of clothing. The processes of carding, spinning and weaving were time consuming. This was mainly the work of women in the home, although the weaving of the cloth was done outside the home. Women made most of the clothes for themselves and their children and men's attire was often purchased from the local or travelling tailor. This was even more so the case the further west one travelled in the country.



Kate Treacy and her daughter Maureen with spinning wheel, about 1920.

Kate Treacy was born in 1869 to Patrick and Honoria (nee Gallagher) Treacy and she married Jack Boyle. They had one child Maureen, later to be Maureen Ryan, Castlecoote. Maureen's son, John and his wife Breege hold mementoes of Kate, which include a photograph of her at the spinning wheel, some of her showcards from her prizewinning and a spindle that survives from the wheel.

The purpose of this note is, firstly, to rekindle an awareness of the cottage industry in the last century, the spinning skills of girls in those days and some, like Kate Treacy, who entered competitions with praiseworthy results. Secondly, to draw attention to a physical aspect of the spinning wheel used by her which appears to display a fiddle shaped base. This type of base is very rare and of many wheels in the collection of the Folklore Division of The National Museum, only one displays this feature (see drawing).



SPINNING WHEEL WITH 'FIDDLE' BASE
NATIONAL MUSEUM OF IRELAND

Spinning wheel with 'fiddle' base national Museum of Ireland.

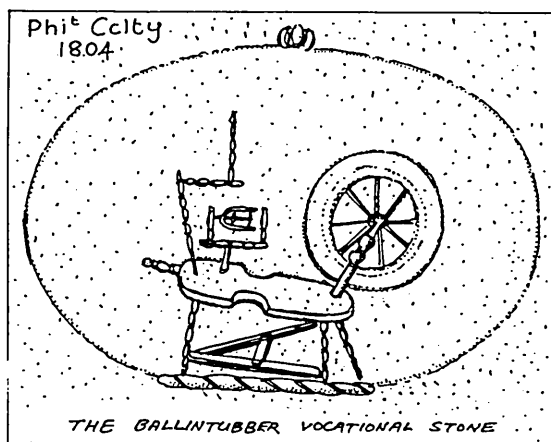
The Ballintubber Wheel

This curious type of fiddle shaped spinning wheel base, or at least a shape quite close to it, is displayed on a memorial stone in Ballintubber churchyard (see drawing). The standard design of base is normally a plain rectangular piece of wood with a perforation made for the screw mechanism, that adjusts the "mother-of-all", and the perforations that take the twin posts supporting the driving wheel.

The carving in Ballintubber is a rare depiction and the writer is not aware of any other in the country. Subject's name is Phil Celtry and the date is 1804. The name may be understood as Philip Keelty. Possibly he was a spinning wheel maker. On the stone all the main components of the wheel are expertly carved, and the base shows a fiddle shaped pattern. Components of this type of wheel have to be made by expert turnery work on a pole-lathe, and these are well depicted by the mason in this case.

Grants

This type of wheel became popular during linen production in Ireland and during the latter end of the 18th century, but the type is well known from medieval times and similar types are widespread in Europe and North America. In Ireland a grant was given by the government in 1796 known as the Flax Growers Bounty. Under certain specified planting conditions, for sowing one acre of flax, four spinning wheels were offered. One could sow up to five acres and receive a



The Ballintubber Vocational Stone

loom, wheels, reels and hatchells to the value of fifty shillings.

Many of the spinning wheels in museums around the country and in private possession date from this time. It is probable also that Kate Treacy's wheel is from this period, in many homes these wheels were treasured as heirlooms of times past and a link with older generations. A list of people in Fuerty parish interested in or, in fact, taking up this grant as did many other parishes in the county, is preserved in the National Library of Ireland (²).

Bleaching Green

The area where Kate Treacy lived is not far from Castlecoote where flax was processed at the mill there. There is still a field alongside the river called the bleaching green and the main road close to it is

marked as the Bleach Road on an early 19th century county map. A tradition of flax growing is still strong in the neighbourhood. General information on a county basis is weak but it is well known that from Strokestown to Boyle were strong areas for production.

Kate exhibited at events such as the Co. Roscommon Industrial and Agricultural Show 1912, the Midland Counties Association, Athlone and the Co. Roscommon Fruit, Flower and Home Industries Exhibition from 1902 to 1909 and this is only a sample from information on prize showcards extract (³). Some of the items she had at these events were : yarn, petticoats, needlework, men's socks, wool and crochet items.

— A. Siggins

Acknowledgment

The writer would like to thank John and Breege Ryan for copy of photo and showcards, James Moran for promoting him to research into Kate Treacy and Mr. Paul Doyle, Keeper Manager, Folklife Division, The National Museum for permission to use a drawing of the fiddle spinning wheel in the collections.

Notes

1. Vignettes on Fuerty and Athleague (1996)
2. Trustees of the Linen and Hempen Manufacturers. Nat. Lib. Irl. (ref. Ir. 633411).
3. Roscommon Agricultural, Horticultural and Industrial Show Catalogue, Oct. 16th, 1912 is in Roscommon Co. Library. Kate's nephew, Bishop John P. Treacy of La Crosse, Wisconsin U.S.A., dedicated the new Church of Our Lady Assumed into Heaven, and donated the High Altar of the same church at Fuerty in 1954.

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