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Clachans: Communal and livestock settlements of the Rundale system.

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We went on then to the next village, a still more primitive and curious one. The houses were built close together, with passages between them, and low square yards marked round with stones. At one corner we came on a group of dark brown asses with panniers, and women standing among them in red dresses with a white or coloured handkerchief over their heads, and the whole scene had a strange foreign, almost Eastern look, though in its own way it was peculiarly characteristic of Ireland. (J.M.Synge and accompanying drawing by Jack Yeats, 2009, 82)

1. Introduction:

The layout of clachan settlements and houses within were characterized by their unorthodox spatial and architectural arrangements. These unconventional features may be attributable to the essential communality of the lifestyle of its residents and to their survival in inhospitable circumstances. Livestock' in particular cattle, played pivotal role in shaping the communal lifestyle and the physical layout of the clachans. In particular they influenced the internal design of the clachan houses. The housing of cattle at one end of these dwellings was reflected in the fire hearth being located at the other extremity of the dwelling. The impact of livestock also prevailed outside the houses. The passages and laneways between the houses had to be at least wide enough to let cattle pass each other.

It is important to point out before we present the physical and social formation of this type of clachan settlement that as an entity it was constantly changing and evolving over time. Keeping this in mind I have concentrated on the stage of its evolution when the long-house-byre was the dominant form of residency within the clachan village. In reconstructing this particular form of the clachan, I have excluded how this type evolved over time. For example, when the cattle were no longer accommodated within the house, the interior of the house was fundamentally changed, with the introduction of a gable chimney, windows added and the division of the house into separate rooms.

2. Topographical morphology and overall physical lay-out:

Visitors and travel writers tended to describe the clustered villages of the clachan as without form, cast, as it were, onto the landscape rather than placed: "An Achill village consisted of a congeries of hovels thrown indiscriminately together, as if they fell in a shower from the sky ... ". (Otway, 1839). Other descriptions used also highlighted similar extreme disorder - 'a formless cluster of small farmhouses ..., (Evans, 1981, 60); possessed " ... no ordered plan ... "(Evans, 1939, 30). A similar perspective was reached by Foster on the lay-out of a clachan:

> **There is no row of houses … but each cottage is stuck independently by itself, and always at an acute, obtuse or right angle to the next cottage as the case may be. The irregularity is curious; there are no two cottages placed in a line, or of the same size, dimensions or build. As this is the largest village I ever saw, so it is the poorest, the worst built and most irregular and most completely without head or centre, or market or church or school of any village I ever was in. It is an overgrown democracy. No man is better or richer than his neighbour. It is in fact, an Irish Rundale village. (Foster, 1846).**

With regard to size, some clachans were considerable settlements. For example, Foster refers to a clachan, four miles from Galway, which had two thousand inhabitants (Foster, 1846).

Access to water was a key requirement in the siting of clachans as emphasised by Corduff:

> **A critical factor influencing the location of settlement nuclei was the presence of good-quality water, preferably of artesian source. A little stream, called '*fiodan*' runs to the west of *Insean*, fed by cartesian wells along its course, and provides copious quantities of good-quality water in all seasons. In neighbouring areas, invariably of later settlement, the only source of water was from rivers and streams which were subject to contamination by animals, turbidity due to floods and stagnant water due to summer draught. It was the general practice never to drink water that did not flow. A particular type of water beetle known as '*deirb*' which was found in pools or slow-moving water caused severe animal sickness and had to be avoided. (Corduff, 2015, 99).**

Two other considerations that came in play into locating a site for a clachan which were – the geomorphic slope in the potential location and the shelter considerations of the local terrain that lessoned the impact of the prevailing winds. The most preferred locations had a combination of both of these features.

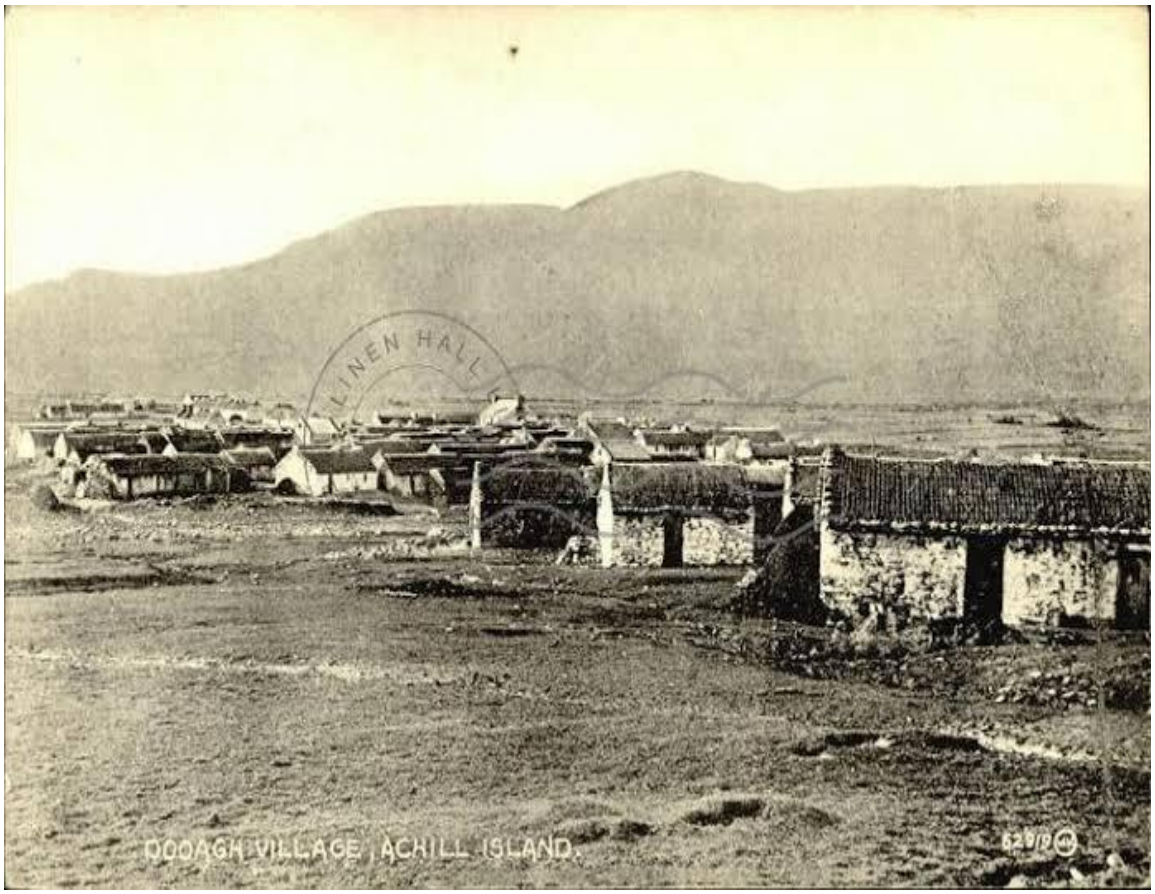

Figure 1. Dooagh clachan with its gables facing into the westerly winds

Estyn Evans claimed that clachans were generally situated at the upper end of the best land in rundale settlements, often placed at the infertile apex of a deltaic fan (Evans, 1956, 299). And according to Aalen the geomorphic location impacted on the actual layout of the houses:

> **The traditional style of house, the long-house, incorporated both byre and dwelling in a single compartment and for hygienic reasons settlements were often deliberately located on sloping sites and the byre ends of the houses were pointed down the slope. In Irish farm clusters with a parallel alignment of houses, the orientation of the buildings is associated with the local slope and not the prevailing winds or any other identifiable factor. Often the orientation of the houses is completely different from one settlement to the next depending on the slope-direction of the site (Aalen, 1978, 222).**

Therefore, the original single roomed-house-byre clachan was very much influenced by the slope orientation and by its 'parallel alignment of the houses', and with the decline of houses:

> **The building of byres and outhouses separate from the house, which occurred widely in the 19th Century as the long-house tradition was dying, has frequently contributed to the confused lay-out of many surviving farm clusters. (Aalen, 1978, 222).**

What subsequently appears to have emerged in the settlement pattern of the clachan was more dispersed arrangement of the houses. But in certain cases the alignment of houses continued to be influenced by local climatic conditions, especially the prevailing winds, as Bell and Watson observed:

> **Within the clachan cluster, he (Evans) claimed that lay-out tended to maximise sunlight capture, and to minimise wind shear. Where clachans were built along a contour on a steep slope (e.g. at Rushtown, county Galway), or along a shoreline (e.g. on Tory Island, county Donegal), there could be a linear development of dwellings.... (Bell and Watson, 2015).**

Corduff explains in his discussion of a clachan at Rossport, Co. Mayo that:

> **Mud houses and their thatched roofs were very sensitive to storms. Because of the primitive construction and material their long axis was in the direction of the prevailing wind as this would that their resistance to storms would be at a maximum (Corduff, 2015 ?).**

Thus, the alignment of these 'mud houses' could be uniform and linear in orientation and direction as the communal members attempted to shelter their dwellings especially from the prevailing winds – by constructing their cabins with their gable-ends facing the direction of the prevailing winds. However, where shelter was naturally provided within the physical confines of the local terrain, such as within hollows etc, the wind direction alignment could be less significant, as Corduff asserts:

> **'…. the direction of the axis is an index to the degree of shelter in a settlement. Where its direction deviates greatest from that of the prevailing wind the area is found to be the most sheltered. (Corduff, 1974, 4).**

Clachans were continually evolving, and their orientation could be changed by climatic conditions. Campbell recounts in the west of Ireland:

> **The most important factors in determining the orientation of the village have been the prevailing south-west wind and the land-slope. More than a half century ago the village lay further to the west and at the other side of the road, but as the**

> **prevailing wind rebounded from the precipitous hill overlooking the village a secondary wind-current was formed which proved so destructive to the thatch-roofs that the village was eventually changed to its present more sheltered site. (Campbell, 1935, 68).**

Another strategy adopted by the residents to shelter their houses and was to partly bury them into a hillock or sloping ground. This usually involved digging into slopping higher ground and burying one gable-end of the house in that excavated crater, thus sinking part of the building into the ground and consequently out of the direct force of the prevailing winds.

Figure 2. A new house with a chimney buried out of the wind in a Donegal clachan.

Therefore, rather than seeing the arrangement of village buildings as haphazard, they were in fact planned in complex ways, taking in a multiple of factors. This complexity is reflected in the construction of their clachan houses.

3. The single-roomed house-byre.

The simple rectangular shape was the most common design of the single - roomed-house, and were built with mud or stone, or a combination of both:

> **Mud walls were built up with a fork in layers twelve to eighteen inches deep of a mixture of damp clay and cut rushes which had been let to sour. A stone foundation layer sunk into the ground was usually built first, and sometimes the gable ends, [...] They were afterwards trimmed with a sharp spade to a thickness which averages about twenty inches but may be as much as thirty. They had to be of massive construction for stability, and the doors which were cut subsequently were kept narrow. (Evans, 1967, 46).**

Most of the clachan single roomed-house-byres in western Ireland had to be made of stone in order to resist the prevailing wind strength. And in places with extreme exposure, if the cabins could not be sunk into their immediate ground, sometimes

artificial mounds (earth or turf) were erected up against the gable-end on the windward side of the dwelling. This added protection against the prevailing winds.

The building techniques that were used to combat wind were especially critical in constructing the roof. The roof-frame of the long house was generally composed of coupled rafters traditionally of bog-oak chosen for its strength as well as from the scarcity of live oak trees. (Evans, 1967, 49). This roof was exposed - no ceilings was erected. The stoutest coupled rafters were placed at the weather end of the cabin, and according to Evans, they were sometimes given a slight inclination towards the wind, (Evans, 1967, 51). The roofing itself consisted of scraw thatch with an underlayer of earth sods. The thatch straw was sourced from differing cultivated crops – oats, wheat, and rye. Reeds were also commonly employed if the other straws were not available. Thatching involved the following:

> **In most areas a thin layer of sods or 'scraws' is laid upon and tied to the roof timbers to support the thatch and improve heat insulation. [….] The most general method of securing the thatch is by pinning the straw to the scraws with scollops – pegs made with thin rods of briar and hazel. Along the northern and western coasts, presumably in response to the strong winds, the thatched roof is commonly held in place by a rope tied to pegs in the house walls or to a row of stone weights. (Aalen, 1997, 153/4).**

Locally sourced materials were exclusively used as noted by Evans:

> **The use of local building materials meant that they (the clachan's long-houses) fitted into the landscapes of which they were literally a part, their clay or stone walls gathered from the earth on the spot, their timbers dug from the bogs, their thatch harvested from the fields. (Evans, 1967, 40).**

A feature of the clachan house-byre which was how the floor sloped away from the fire hearth and down towards the 'bottom-end', where small number of livestock – in particular cows - were housed. This sharing of the abode with humans, defined the long-house as a form of house-byre.

This co-inhabiting arrangement led to the accumulation of manure at the bottom-end of the house-byre. Some house-byres were reported to have from ten to fifteen tons of weight of dung and are only cleaned out once a year (Hill, 1887, 17). But this accumulation was not a result of neglect, but rather it was activity planned for, in which straw, reeds and turf-mould was spread about (Dutton, 1808, 53) in order to collect the excreted waste of the tethered livestock.

The clachan single roomed-house-byre, typically had a thatched roof, without a chimney. As a consequence, the smoke escaped mostly through the thatch, so that according to one observer they resembled 'reefing dunghills. (Evans, 1967, 59). One of the main reasons why these clachan dwellings were not provided with a chimney was according to Evans:

> **'…. to keep the thatch dry and preserve the roof timbers, so that 'when the smoke dies out of a house, it does so be falling down'. This is one reason for the persistence of single-storey houses open to the roof, where the turf smoke could circulate among the rafters and keep the scraws and under-thatch dry. (Evans, 1967, 59).**

Thus, keeping the cabin standing! One more consequence of the chimneyless fire is that upon the burning of the turf, its released constituents were transformed into soot which then covered the exposed under layers of the thatched roof, especially the earthen sods. When the roof was rethatched generally on an annual basis, the old disused thatch, impregnated with a year's accumulation of soot (and its organic endowed nutrients) was 'thrown down' onto the dunghill (McNally, 1973,74).

The ever-burning fire was located on a floor stone slab away from the walls. It performed many a function. It of course cooked food, dried clothes, brought warmth and comfort to the family and ailing animals, and in bogland locations, its smoke repelled midgets during warm periods. The most commented upon aspect of the chimneyless fire was how its turf smoke engulfed the entire building, however, these cabin-householders developed strategies to counteract this potential suffocating smoke-filled atmosphere – using half-doors and low standing furnishings:

> **The chimneyless open fire was much more effective as a house- warmer. The turf-smoke, it is true, despite the draught-regulating mechanism of the double doors, must often have been troublesome, but .... the furniture was designed to keep heads low. (Evans, 1967, 59).**

Low stools and benches seem to have been the traditional form of seating, and no doubt the floor served the children. (Evans, 1967, 93). Tables generally did not exist and if they did merely as slightly elevated boards, which were hung on a wall when not in use (O'Crohan, 1934, 40).

One of the most common features of the clachan settlement was the prevalence of the half-doors of the clustered houses. There was not just one door but two which were aligned with each other – 'Two doors, opposite one another, led to the front and back' (Campbell, 1935, 68). This unique two-door system of the house-byre had many benefits. Firstly, they were in fact the main sources of light in the long-house-byre as windows were restricted or did not exist at all due to a window tax imposed on house dwellers in the nineteenth century. Secondly, these opposing doors were used to control the impact of the local winds:

> **The two-door system gives rise to a method of entering the house which does not obtain in single-door house. Either door is used as occasion requires in order to prevent the changeable winds from entering the kitchen. (Campbell, 1935, 70).**

Thirdly, in being able to manipulate the flow of wind into the house, the residents were able to use the two-door system to control the ever-present smoke as a chimney would. Fourthly, they also were used to control the movement of non-tethered animals – pigs and chickens - that were allowed to share the house with their human occupants and finally they were means of sociability and engagement with the neighbours:

> **In Ireland the half-door serves to let in the light while keeping out unwanted animals and makes a convenient arm-rest for purposes of conversation or contemplation (Evans, 1967, 48).**

4.Sraid (street/yard*), garrai* (house garden yard):

Outside some of the clachan cabins, there was a public open space which was known as the *sraid,* which was spatially delineated from the rest of the internal spaces of the clachan. Corduff describes it in the following way:

> **Houses were built on or immediately adjoining the '*sraid'*, an open space, which was a free draining solid expanse of ground. It was a common area of unrestricted movement, usually delimited by contiguous topographical features, and was, as a matter of practice, a public right of way. (Corduff, 2015, 98).**

The *sraid* had two apparent incompatible functions to it. It was a public space with free movement of people, and we presumed also of livestock. Yet it may also have been used to dump the clachan's refuse. The waste however would have been allowed to flow down the slope into the infield – the communal tillage ground. Corduff provided an account of this form of waste disposal:

> **The phrase in Irish 'to throw something out on the *sraid'* means to part with or get rid of something that is of little use. When the dirty water was being thrown out it was customary to forewarn any fairy or other spirit that may be passing by. [....] The *sraid* was a free-for-all dumping ground for which no one had responsibility and for which no one had authority to infringe upon its boundaries (Corduff, 2015, 98).**

The *sraid* had dung and turf heaps that belonged to the individual households that adjoined it, Corduff continues:

> **It was the *sraid* that the dunghill and turf reek were located. There was a small channel along the dunghill on the verge of the *sraid*, to drain water and protect the dunghill from excessive rain wash. (Corduff, 2015, 98).**

Increasing individualization in production relations within the clachan, saw the emergence of individual household *garrai.* These garden yards, mostly adjoined to the house and enclosed by a low wall as described by Bell and Watson:

> **'…. there were also tiny garden patches within or beside the clachan, which were used to grow potatoes and cabbages, and sometimes parsnips, carrots or onions. The lack of variety of vegetables was criticised by improvers, but the main purpose of the gardens was to ensure a subsistence level of food. In many clachans, the gardens were enclosed with a drystone wall, and they were therefore relatively safe from the attacks of both wild and domesticated animals. (Bell and Watson, 2015).**

Therefore, these garden-yards and enclosed haggards that were generally constructed out in the outfield, were a consequence of the rise of individual family working their allotted plots within the infield themselves – storing their tools and the products of their labour, e.g. haystacks, the potato bin etc.

5. The clachan's dung and turf heaps:

Probably, the most frequently referred to aspect of the clachan settlement was the presence of the dung heap outside the doors of the houses. It consisted of more than animal excretion extracted from the byre-house:

> **This contained everything, animal, fowl and human excrement. Mixed with this was turf-mould. Scraws of peat were cut, dried and brought home where they were pulverised using mallets and then used as animal bedding or just added to the dung pit. (O'Mongan, Erris, Co. Mayo, personal correspondence).**

Moreover, the inhabitants of the dwelling and especially the household children were also known to 'gather all sorts of vegetable matter from the ditches, scrapings of the road and the litter of their pigs' (Devon Commission, 1847, 535). Thus the dung heap was not a waste dump but rather a systematic measure adapted to create organic fertilizer for their crops being cultivated.

It's location in front or at the side of the house, was not just determined by the convenience of moving livestock dung from the 'bottom-end' of the house but also so that it could be watched over to prevent its valued contents from being 'borrowed' by other clachan residents:

> **It can be argued, however, that the commonly reported practice of placing the dung heap in front of the dwelling-house door showed the importance attached to animal manure, rather than its neglect, a claim strengthened by the custom, in some areas, of planting ceremonial May-bushes on top of the heap (Bell and Watson, 74).**

This systematic accumulation of diverse organic waste materials – household dung and excretion, road-scrapings, weeds, scourings of ditches, bog mould, etc., and mixing them was done in order to encourage fermentation (Doyle, 1867, 39) before the manure was applied to the cultivated lands of the commune.

To one side of the dung heap was the accompanying turf heap in front of the dwelling door. It was necessary to have it there for security reasons and of course for convenience as the house fire needed a constant supply of fuel to keep it burning twenty-four seven. However, like all physical aspects of the clachan, as we have discovered, the turf stacks were similarly constructed to protect them from the weather conditions, especially the wind and the rain:

> **Turf-stacking sites on the Blasket Islands seem to have been more enclosed structures, apparently to protect the turf from the weather. Turf stacks made in Ireland could be up to 9ft high or more, and well-built stacks tended to throw off the rainwater. Moreover, it was usual in western Ireland to thatch the stack with rushes, with coping of sods or stones added against the wind. (Downey et al., 2024, 100).**

Finally, Corduff proposes that even these standing mounds did not escape being incorporated into the commune's folklore:

> **It was here (*sraid*) that the dung pit and the stack of dried peat were situated, and a great deal of superstition was attached to this. The stack (6) it was believed protected the householders as it restricted the view of any passer-by who intended to curse them by 'throwing an evil eye'. This custom was religiously**

> **adhered to until recently. A map of clachan settlement gives the impression that household privacy was non-existent; the dung pit and the stack provided privacy, and their superstitions connotations may be practically explained by this. (Corduff, 1974, 5/6).**

As we have uncovered the clachan village was the centre for most of the communal activities, it was also the central hub where most of the commune's transportation routes originated from, along external tracks and internal laneways.

6. Landscape tracks and clachan laneways:

Corduff succinctly captures the essential unique features of the physical routes of movement beyond the confines of the village clachan:

> **It was customary to take shortcuts in a direct line to one's intended destination, therefore a network of pathways evolved which crisscrossed the landscape and radiated from the clachan. (Corduff, 2015, 98).**

This complex maze of pathways spiralled outwards from the clachan settlement onto the adjoining fields (infield and outfields) and over the diverse types of commonage. These tracks were initially created by the incessant movement of people and livestock over the ground surfaces of the commune, to and from the baile/ clachan. Accordingly, these pathways were more of an informal outcome of a constant movement across natural surfaces, which inevitably left both a human and livestock footfall marks on these ground surfaces so that they became recognized as pathways and tracks. In a sense, they were people's routes, made by them and used by them, rather than a centrally planned and constructed roadway system. The pathways were the essential routes of the commune, the pulsating veins and arteries of communality that allowed people and their products to move through the adjoining terrains of the commonages.

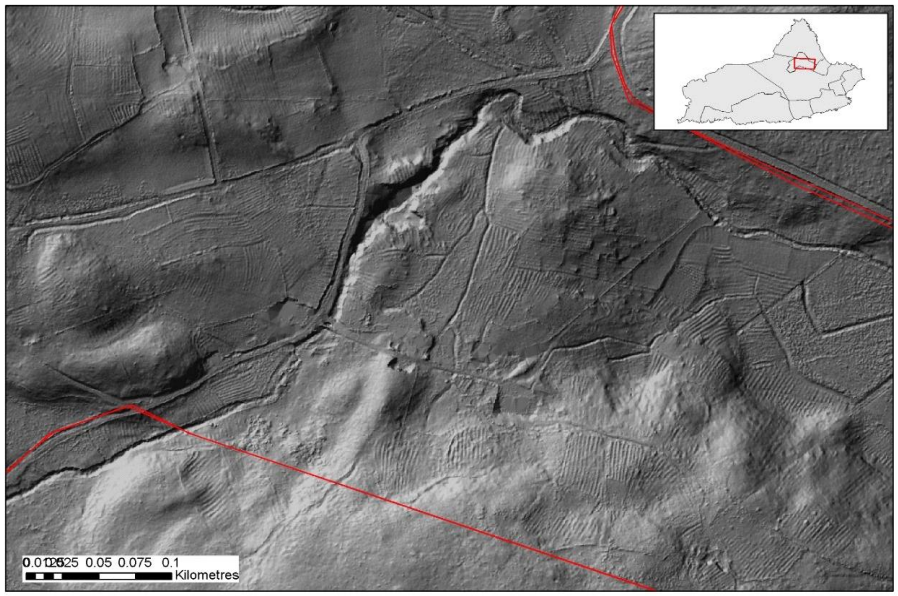

Figure 3. Lidar revealing the tracks and pathways of Clare Island. (courtesy of Stephen McCarron, Maynooth University).

As these crisscrossing tracks were not signposted, naming them was critical in establishing for the communal members a workable topographical knowledge of their own terrains and how to transgress them. Corduff outlines how this type of internal naming process could have worked:

> **One of the paths, adjoining the Insean, is known, to this day, as 'bothar a'mhuirin (the road of the turf mould) believed to have been so called as it was the main route from the turf …. To the east (Corduff, 2915, 101).**

While these 'bothars' and tracks provided a communal free mobility and even self-determination of the commune to shape their immediate landscape, they were also critically functioning as means of transportation, where on these routes the locomotive power was provided by organic muscles, either horsepower when available but mostly by human bodies, including women:

> **The arable land is all cultivated with the spade, horses seldom or never going near the land, not even to cart manure or remove the produce, this being almost entirely the work of the female members of the occupants. Manure of the land and produce from the land being conveyed in baskets on the women's backs (Robertson, 2007, 244).**

However, within the clachan village itself the opposite occurred with regard to freedom to move. The constructed layout of the internal lanes and passages within the clustered settlement were assessed as an inhibiting maze of interconnecting passage-ways and laneways, creating more of a feeling of claustrophobia than a freedom of movement as the following indicates:

> **The way through the village is the most crooked, as well as the most narrow and dirty lane that can be conceived. There is no row of houses, or anything approaching to a row, but each cottage is stuck independently by itself, and always at an acute, obtuse, or right angle to the next cottage, as the case may be. The irregularity is curious; there are no two cottages placed in a line, or of the same size, dimensions, and build. (Foster,1846).**

The labyrinth of narrow passageways and winding lanes that ran between the houses, gave rise to derogatory comments by a visiting observer to such apparent disorder:

> **The cottages look as if pitchforked to side; some are placed sideways, some endways, some corner ways, there is never a street; and the crooked passages in and out of the dunghills and irregularly placed cottages form the only pathways. Their utter forlornness is pitiable." (Foster, 1846).**

Figure 4. '...without street or lane in and out between the cottages being the only means of communication with each other' (Foster 1846).

7. The inherent sociability of clachan life:

The dense physical layout of clachans would have stimulated or at least re-enforced the essential communality of the Rundale commune and how it was mediated in the crowded arrangement of the clachan's houses. This encouraged unavoidable neighbourliness, and we have to presume intense sociability between the residents. The closeness of the houses would have promoted intense social interaction between the residents, with both positive and negative aspects to it. An insight into the positive features of this social communality was given by the famous resident of an island clachan, - Peig Sayers – who stated the following:

> **We passed our lives together peacefully and lovingly and, on the hill or in the garden we gave one another a helping hand…We spent our lives helping each other (Sayer, 1974:210).**

This close and intense interactions between households that they had with each other, a condition which was probably very much prevalent in communes like the rundale. This strong sense of communal sociability would have spilled over into collective forms of entertainment:

> **There were ceilidhes (dances) and spinning parties, and many a clachan had its shanachie (storyteller) - and its fiddler or piper – usually a maimed or simple person – who accompanied with folk-tunes. Folksongs, occupational airs and legendary tales were kept alive in this way (Evans, 1967).**

The clachan milieu would have stimulated a strong collective identity among the communal members. This would have come to the fore when a particular clachan as a whole had to engage in external relations, either with state institutions, their landlord, or other rundale communes. The existence of diverse social forms of communality,

helped the development of a strong communal identity which allowed them to collectively resist the impositions coming from external agents:

> **'…the recollection of nights of social concourse, of aid in sickness, of sympathy in joy and sorrow, of combined operations of defence against bailiff or gauger'. (Evans quoting Wilde (1853) 1967, 32).**

The inherent relationship between the physical layout of the clachan and its social form of communality became explicit when it was lost or about to be lost:

> **'… the pleasure the people feel in assembling and chatting together, made them consider the removal of the houses, from the clusters and hamlets in which they were generally built to the separate farms, a great grievance' (Lord George Hill, 1887,42).**

The break-up of the clustered clachan settlement with the subsequent creation of individualised and 'solitary' farmsteads impacted greatly on the clachan residents. It was probably a natural reaction to the intensity of their attachment to clachan life. This was made clear in a testimony given to the Devon commission in the 1840s, describing people's reaction to moving from a clachan to a solitary farm. It was stated … that even if they were moving only half a mile away, 'they were crying as if they were going to America' (Bell and Watson,).

A notable aspect of this social form of communality was the absence of a clear demarcation between work and social life, both displayed a commitment to a strong sense of communality, whether it was work or leisure as both could be and were combined. For example, Hill refers to the collective building of a cabin house and the sociability involved in such a task:

> **The custom on such occasions is for the person who has the work to be done to hire a fiddler, upon which all the neighbours joyously assemble and carry, in an incredibly short time, the stones and timber upon their backs to the site, men, women and children alternately dancing and singing while daylight lasts, when they adjourn to some dwelling where they finish the night, often prolonging the dance to dawn of the day. (Hill, 1887,40).**

As with other work carried out in common, thatching was regarded as a sort of festive occasion, (Evans, 1967, 57), where the work provided was rewarded not by cash but by entertainment. For example, with regard to the Aran Islands John Millington Synge observed:

> **From the moment the roof is taken in hand there is a whirl of laughter and talk till it is ended, and the man whose house is being covered is the host instead of an employer, he lays himself out to please the men who work with him. (Synge, Aran Islands, 157).**

Other work activities organized in such a way was the collective gathering of seaweed at Keel, Co. Mayo, which was also carried out with an air of ceremony:

> **When an abundance of weed was carried ashore after a storm the entire population of the adjacent village worked in unison to transport it to the tillage fields. As late as 1915, Paul Henry observed the atmosphere of ceremony**

surrounding the communal rite when a ram's horn was blown to summon the inhabitants of Keel to the foreshore, after which "there was time given to everyone to assemble and the mass of weed was attacked with pitchforks and graipes and carried off to the village" (McNally, 1973, 73).

8. The communal form of puca (faerie)-lore within the rundale commune:

The communality of puca (faerie)-lore is best seen not only in their apparent presence in the physical objects and landscape nodes of the rundale commune but also the puca incarnation at these locations was a manifestation of 'living' spirits with subjective opinions and engaging in rational activities. To such an extent that the supernatural and subterranean world of the puca was nearly a mirror replicate of the above surface world of the commune members. Thus, in sharing their landscape with the puca determined that the surface inhabiting population had to respond to the puca presence. In short, the relationship of the commune with the invisible world of the puca was in fact a discourse between these two worlds, mediated through the material culture of the commune. Consequently, the complex and intimate interconnections between puca lore and communal members within a particular commune were critical conditions in the constant reproduction of the commune's collective identity through the medium of storytelling. Though these stories could only be told about places that people knew or recognize.

Therefore, the necessary material precondition for the emergence of and the continual reproduction of the communal form of puca-lore was the ability of the commune's population to roam freely across all of its terrain. This freedom to roam is very much highlighted in the presence of the complex matrix of communal pathways and laneways that transgressed all of the commune's lands. Thus, one of the critical consequences of these free-ranging pathways, was to give the resident storytellers an extensive 'canvas' to 'paint' their puca stories onto. The accumulated spatial knowledge of the communal members that used these trails allowed the tellers of tales the ability to locate their stories over a vast range of locations where the interactions with the puca occurred. Such intimate knowledge of communal locations could not arise under the spatial regime of private property and its essential legal convention of non-entry to a general population. In the context of enclosed private property and the public being unable to visit, limited the geographical nodes on which the puca stories could be spun around.

As we have uncovered the diverse bits of puca-lore that mediated the material culture of the commune instilled a complex series of idealistic identities into the objects referred to. Creating through the communal storytelling, this form of oral narration 'brought to the surface' the supernatural inhabitants of the underworld. Although, these socially constructed essences were idealistic, and consequently had no direct or immediate impact on the materiality of the mundane objects of the commune, except how communal society engaged with them. Critically, the collective nature of this 'puca-lore' aesthetic in its initial creation and continual reproduction is really a communal effort, through the medium of storytelling and listening. Thereafter, the maintenance of this oral aesthetic (words painting images) is minimally a collective commitment to believe in the presence of puca or at least not openly challenging their existence. More

significantly, it was a communal faithfulness to respond to their invisible presence of the puca in appropriate and customary recognized ways.

The veneration of and adherence to puca lore in the mundane activities of everyday life in the environs of the clachan, had an inherent tendency to promote a conservative attitude in maintaining the customary ways of doing things within the immediate ecological environment. This of course preserved traditional customs and maintained communal practices, but it simultaneously stifled innovation and the adoption of new practices. As a consequence, it acted as a barrier to the emergence of individualism among the communal population.

The key ecological dimension to this dreamworld of puca-lore, is that it projected dynamic and 'living' qualities onto mundane objects and organic features in the landscape, thus 'bringing them to life'. In this idealistic lifefulness, the embedded puca-lore replicated the essential fluid structure of organic nature, and its essential interconnecting organic processes. Accordingly, the commune in relating to and engaging with its immediate environment, had to also deal with an intricate tapestry of puca activities and oftentimes even the apparent subjectivities of these puca, e.g. good and bad puca. Consequently, in inhabiting both of these worlds, the communal members tended to respect and not damage the organic objects of the natural environment, conceiving and seeing them as diverse aspects of the puca world who they shared their environmental reality with. Thus, the puca protected the real world of Nature with their ever-present threat of retribution for misbehaviour especially in their ability to impose a *piseog* (a curse) on mischievous individuals and their families!

9. Conclusion: The clachan as a shared village of livestock and communal members.

The layout of the clachan village, and the houses within, were certainly characterized by their unorthodox spatial and architectural arrangements. Part of these unconventional features can be, as we have discovered, be explained by the essential communality of the lifestyle of its residents and by how they designed their households and their street infrastructure to deal with the ever-powerful forces of Nature, especially the prevailing winds. However, there is other aspect of this village system that also came into play in shaping the life and the physical layout of the rundale clachan that was part of its living residential population – its bovine livestock!

Within the clachan single roomed-house-byre, it was the livestock residents that 'ruled the roost' with regard to the internal design of their humanized byres. Their seasonal residency at one gable end of these dwellings determined that the fire-hearth would be located at the furthest extremity of the building and on the upward slope from their 'bottom-end'.

This livestock architectural dominance continued to reign even outside the walls of the long-house-byre as the village passages and laneways between the houses had to be at least wide enough to let cattle pass each other, similar in dimensions to the roidins of Aran (Robinson, 1995, 20). Coupled with the front door dung reap, which we have seen was mostly made-up cattle excretion, the livestock residents of the clachan had a powerful impact on the design and the living conditions of the clachan as the rundale communal members that built them.

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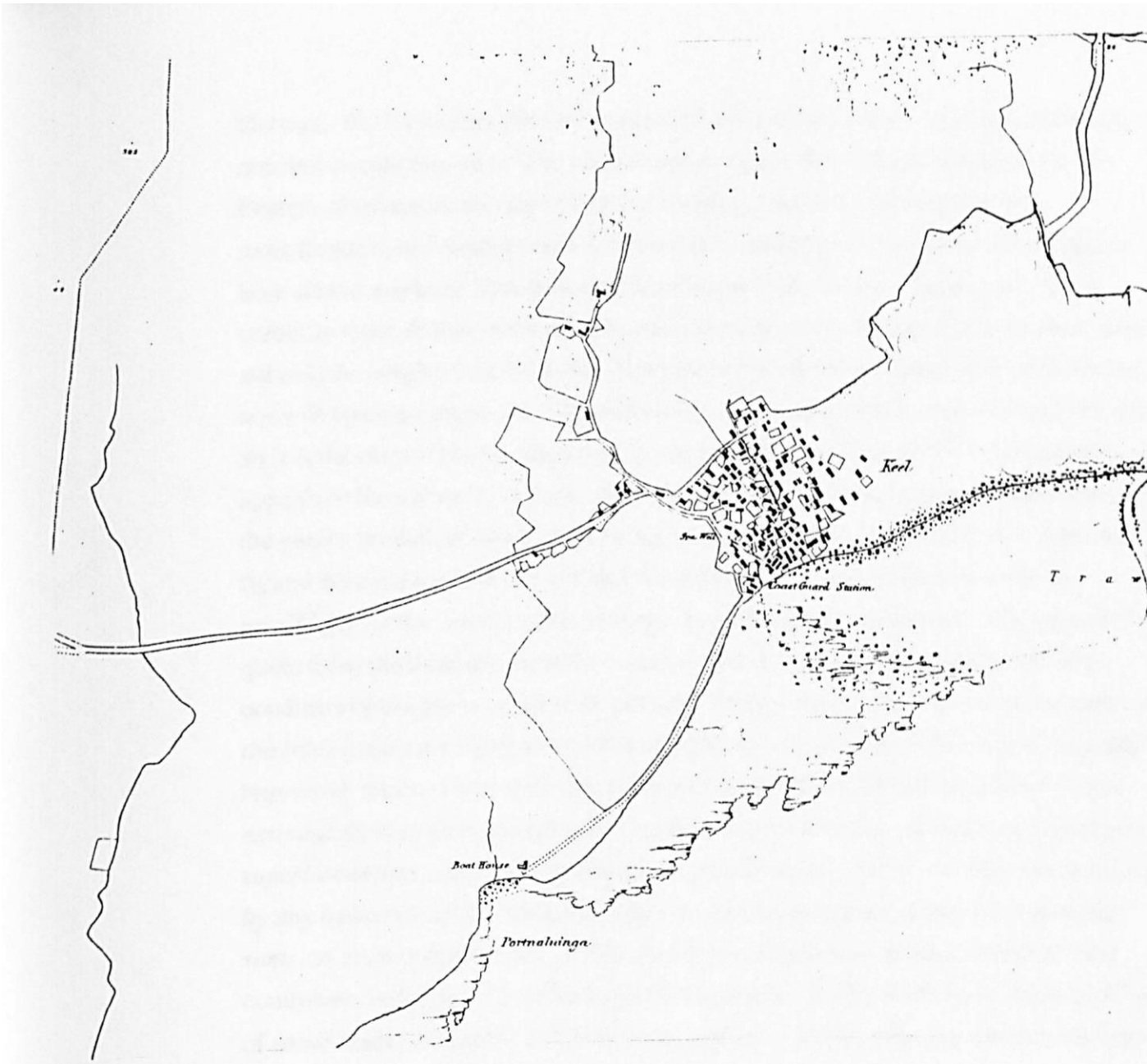

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