



Maugherow

beneath the blowing sands

Autumn 2020

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edited by Seán Golden

Tread Softly Publishing

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Editor: Seán Golden

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*after all one writes poetry for
a few careful readers and a few friends ...
when they can write as well as read, one can sit with
one's companions under the hedgerow contentedly*

W.B. Yeats, Preface to *The Countess Cathleen*

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financial support of Sligo County Council Creative
Ireland Programme.

Front cover: *Blowing Sands*, acrylic on paper,
by Diarmuid Delargy.

I ... came to Ardtermon old *Castle* (court) and leaving it to my left, I crossed the distance, of at least a mile (which is covered over with sand) to the top of Knocklane. Here lies an extensive tract of land belonging to Ballynedan and Ballymuldory T.L.^s. {800 acres?}, which has been deserted by the inhabitants, on account of the sands having encroached, and overwhelmed most of the houses. In these sands, the old church of Ballintemple lies to the R. as one goes from Ardtermon (castle) to Knocklane. On the northwestern extremity of this sandy tract, is Knocklane...

Thomas O'Connor, Sligo 12 September 1836,
Ordnance Survey Letters County Sligo

*Do threascair an saol is shéid an ghaoth mar smál
Alastrann, Caesar, 's an méid sin a bhí 'na bpáirt;
tá an Teamhair 'na féar, is féach an Traoi mar tá,
is na Sasanaigh féin do b'fhéidir go bhfaighidís bás!*

Eóghan Rua Ó Súilleabháin

In the days of my early youth so long ago that I forgot the date, our world was shaken with the dread of the new and terrible plague which was desolating all lands as it passed through them. And so regular was its march that men could tell where next it would appear and almost the day when it might be expected. ... And its utter strangeness and man's want of experience or knowledge of its nature, or how best to resist its attack, added if anything could to its horrors.

It was said to have come from the East ...

Charlotte Stoker, *Experience of the Cholera in Ireland 1832*

*It's hard to be forced from the land that we live in,
Our houses and farms all obliged for to sell.
To wander alone among Indians and strangers,
To find some sweet spot where our children might dwell.*

The Emigrant's Farewell

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Prelude

As part of *Tread Softly*, Bare Hazel is a community arts participation project launched with the kind support of Creative Ireland. Professionals and amateurs from County Sligo collaborate to create a series of written, visual and musical responses to the landscape. As a follow-up to the community-based multimedia event we organised in Ellen’s Pub in Maugherow for *Tread Softly 2019*, I was asked to curate a new community-based event for 2020. Community involvement includes active participation by neighbours of Maugherow and environs in the production of contents as well as organisation and logistics. Neighbours accompany with music and perform as readers for texts composed by other neighbours.

With veterans from last year, we defined this year’s focus and designed a programme for a live event with text, music and artwork. The Covid-19 pandemic lockdown and restrictions on public events and pub openings ruled out this possibility, but having received many texts, artwork, photographs and songs, we decided to edit and publish an innovative book containing the work composed especially for this year’s event, to be distributed in a limited edition free of charge and available in digital format at www.treadssoftly.ie, as we did last year. To give voice to the inhabitants, the anonymous victims of the blowing sands, the Famine and epidemics, we decided to include extracts from traditional emigration songs that fit this year’s theme and oral history compiled by schoolchildren in the 1930s available at www.duchas.ie, as well as Robert Milne’s *Sweet Dernish Island, Adieu* and the *Ballad of the Pomano*.

The theme chosen this year was *Maugherow beneath the blowing sands*, a reference to entire villages that were inundated by sand there in the nineteenth century,

aggravating the effects of the Famine and contributing to emigration, a fact first revealed to us by Brian Leyden's contribution to last year's book, *Maugherow a much wilder place*. We made the following call for contributions:

Blowing sands buried homes and villages in Maugherow in Famine times. Remains survive beneath the sand. Burials and funerals and cemeteries. Passage graves, middens, tombs, souterrains, scalpeens and *cillíní* – the graves of the unbaptised banned from sacred ground. Disjecta from sunken ships cast upon the strand. Emigration, perhaps the *Pomano*. The gentry and the inhabitants. Visitors' chronicles. The victims' silence but for song, recitation and legend. Palmerston's reach from the bent grass in Ballyconnell to the Opium Wars in China. The sands of time in the time of sands. Text, music new and trad, soundscape and image.

We recruited last year's participants and sought newcomers. We provided a selection of historical texts and visitors' chronicles describing the blowing sands and their consequences. The Covid-19 pandemic inclined us to include extracts from Charlotte Stoker's account of the 1832 cholera epidemic in Ireland, from Sligo town to Ballyshannon.

The theme *beneath the blowing sands* was a starting point, but the call was open. The 'Big Wind' of 1839 buried parts of Maugherow beneath the sand, complicating the effects of the Famine that followed. Topics like famine, epidemics and emigration came to mind immediately, together with things buried then revealed, submerged then cast ashore, lost to time then recovered. Remembrance of times past. Restoring memories and recovering lost knowledge. Archaeology revealing prehistory, leading to myth, folklore and legend.

We took inspiration from the striking metaphor that ends

Eibhlín Dubh Ní Chonaill's eighteenth century *Caoineadh Airt Ui Laoghair*, comparing her husband's tomb to the darkened cells of *fili* or poets of the Gaelic order who shut themselves inside in darkness to compose and memorise their poetry, emerging later to recite it. She comments ironically that Airt does not enter the darkness to learn or make music, nor emerge again, because he is buried beneath clay and stones. We could do what Airt cannot, descend beneath the blowing sands but emerge again, alive with knowledge and art, song and music, poetry and prose.

The blowing sands also called to mind the political context of the desert images W.B. Yeats used in 'The Second Coming', first published 100 years ago, or the failed hubris of Ozymandias, the 'king of kings' whose buried self-aggrandising monument Percy Bysshe Shelley parodied: 'Round the decay / Of that colossal wreck, boundless and bare / The lone and level sands stretch far away'. Eoghan Rua Ó Súilleabháin anticipated both of them in the eighteenth century as Pádraig Pearse's version shows:

The world hath conquered, the wind hath scattered
like dust Alexander, Caesar, and all that shared sway.
Tara is grass, and behold how Troy lieth low –
And even the English, perchance their hour will come!

We would like to thank the contributors for their enthusiasm and support, especially Dickon Whitehead for his timely and generous help, and acknowledge the support we received from *Tread Softly* and Sligo County Council's Creative Ireland Programme, as well as Michael Carty's help in getting us into print and the collaboration of Eamon McManus and Sean O'Hanrachain at Tiger Print. We continue going a road signposted for us by Dermot Healy with *The Drumlin* and *Force 10* and by Leland Bardwell with *Cyphers* and *Scriobh*.

Seán Golden

Ordnance Survey Maps

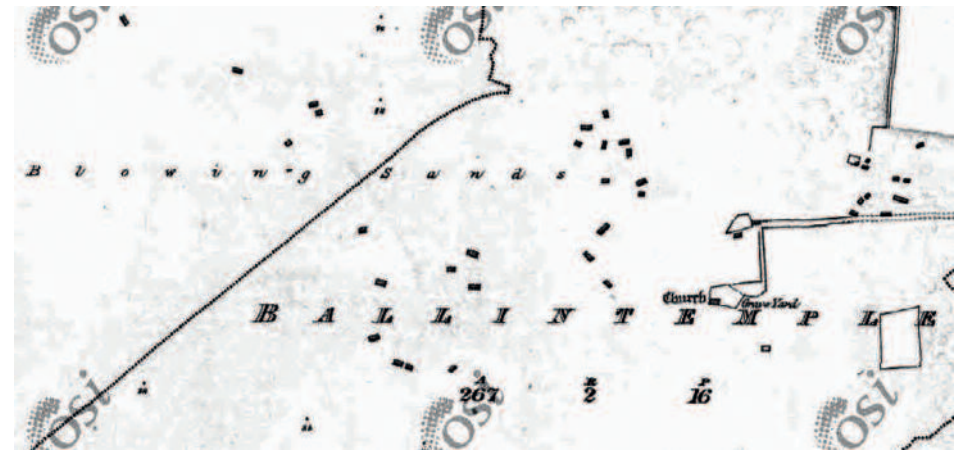


Near the western shore [of Raghly] is the romantic hill of Knocklane, under which are some remains of fortifications; and on the eastern shore, about half a mile from the village, are the ruins of the old castle of Artarmon, now deeply buried in the sand, the ancient residence of the Gore family. The blowing sands of Knocklane extend northward from the village, and are about two miles long and two broad; they have already covered a great tract of good land and about 150 cabins, and are constantly in motion, giving a dreary and desolate appearance to the country around.

Samuel Lewis, *Topographical Dictionary of Ireland* (1840)

Mr. Frank Barber, in his evidence before the Devon Commission [1844], stated, that at that date, 2,000 acres of land in the district of Knocklane, was covered with the drifting sand, and that 700 of those acres were covered in his own time. The suffering caused by this invasion was great, numbers being obliged to abandon house and home, and some, who held on to their habitations, having to go in and out through the roof, as the doors and windows were blocked up. This formidable evil was stopped by the bent which Lord Palmerston set the example of planting, only for which the whole of Magherow would be converted, by this time, into a Sahara.

Terrence O'Rorke, *The History of Sligo: Town and County* (1890)



Pre-Famine 6-inch edition (1837) shows 'Blowing Sands' and Ballintemple village.



Post-Famine 6-inch edition (1885-88) shows 'Sand Hills' but no village.



In the beginning of this century, a village adjacent to [Kilaspugbrone] church was gradually engulfed by the blowing sand, and its inhabitants compelled to remove.

W. G. Wood-Martin, *History of Sligo, County and Town*,
(1882)

I. 'seeking refuge, a pristine place'

Una Mannion – Crouched Burial

They move the earth with small trowels and brushes and
all week the seals sing a desolate chorus as if for you.
First a small child's foot slow sweeps of the brush across
your small bones,
your shape in the ditch, taking definition, a slow birth
in the corner of the field by the water's edge.

You are lying on your side
knees pulled into your chest
the thin bones of your arms
holding yourself without your hands
your heavy head bent low
toward your small body,
a comma in the earth,
like an ultra sound picture of the earth's womb
where you lay crouched for years.

Beside your ribcage, a single blue glass bead
for your ear a bronze ring,
your grave gifts.
If flowers and herbs cradled your head,
they are dust now.
Someone brought you here
and laid you down with care
your death a secret, your story buried.

In the moon bay
at the edge of earth where they found you
the midden's shelves layer time, like growth rings.
Now is our turn on the surface of time
you and your buried bead, prehistory,
before there were written words to remember with.
A sequence of milk teeth along the bone of your jaw and
the buds to permanent ones spell your age.
You are eighteen months old.

Your bones in the midden are a mystery
Iron Age people didn't bury their dead
bodies were left to wind, or wolves or water.
But not you.
Perhaps touching your cold cheek your mother
could not abandon your body to the night
and here, where the land juts out toward the sea and the
tide moves,
a place she might find again,
she brought you.

Malcolm Hamilton

(image stills from Bettina Seitz's *Underwave* installation,
photography Fionn Rogers)

1. Home Coming

On a fashion note you meet us
in famine rags and sail cloth
they wrapped us in the morning
we were tipped over deck rails
of the *Naomi*, the *Syria*, the *Pomano*

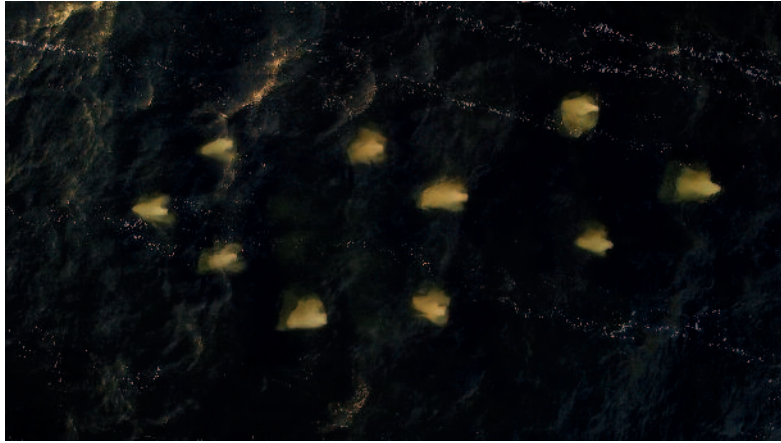
and it's coffin-ship ballast not contraband
we're laden down with. Might
have slowed us a bit, but still
the dead-weight kept us below sharks' radar.
Who'd have fathomed

Atlantic Fine-Tooth and Mako would track rickety boats
of *Ye Olde* Irish traffickers
all the way from Sligo Quay
to Grosse Isle St Lawrence. Slim pickings chum,
we were only skin and bones. But let's not dwell on history,

we're close to shore now, almost home;
cormorants falling fireworks from the sky,
smolt darts like children through our weary parade,
leaves of sea green lettuce
drifting ticker-tape across our faces ...
one more haul away and tomorrow will be some celebration
The Great Hunger meets Decade of Commemoration
when we stagger wonky-legged as Spanish sailors
from the smashing waves of Streedagh
into welcoming arms and blankets.



Underwave Installation Day still



Underwave Day 4 image still

Rough Study 1

Looked at from this different perspective
citizens of nowhere such as we are
never actually move.

Lives tossed in the air, pushed over edge,
uplifted by the trafficker, we are suspended
animations for every age,
the world turning away beneath us,
and merely alight,
fallout

in a field, wilderness, a city, offshore like this...
– perhaps we rocked the boat.

Not knowing what movements to make
we merely remain motionless in the strange new place
– stillness is a disguise –
while the powers that don't know themselves
come and go
wash and abate about us.
In one place that's a hosing down,
somewhere else just a paper storm,

sometimes we land in tear gas, mid-referendum,
fish-like shoal into wire, fish-like boxed in refrigerated trucks.
Sometimes we just roll up our sleeves for a vaccine,
grateful that today our skin is not the actual form
for branding our new numbers on.

Petrified, stone still, souls a dropped anchor
we must re-shell with layers of uncertainty
ship wreck our musical tongue on the rocks of new words.
The home culture moved slightly off heartbeat
is like divorce, death of a spouse,
natural politeness now a weapon of survival.

The older we are the more difficult it is to acclimatise of
course
particularly our men who become as nothing, or seemingly
never were.
Our only hope, the young, dead-wise, steal the drop on
everything,
able within a few short moments to roll compliantly up
and down
in the ebb and flow of the European tides.

2. First Settlers

We followed the retreating ice age
that carved this bay, and melting away
revealed it.

Slipping by the yawl-full
from sands of Asilah and Larache
onto an Atlantic
sweetened by melt-waters rained
a million years ago on Ural slopes
we have simply drifted
north for months

on warm new streams and breezes
seeking refuge, a pristine place,
somewhere history is only fossils in limestone,
the only ways are river-ways and stream-ways
among forests of oak and alder. We will not encroach,
remain on the edge, clear back a small cove, perhaps
circle a few modest stones in the high places
to honour our dead, hallmark the landscape,
maybe that, but nothing more.

And so, caught in sun-shafted tidal amber,
through birth-brine of prehistory
the first sallow-skinned Formorians
cautiously struggle ashore.



Underwave Day 4 image still

Rough Study 2

From the distance behind me an underwave Ode to Joy is
carried on tide,
sung by young *U-Boot-Besatzungen* and British Minesweeper
boys who went down bravely
clinging to their posts, screaming prayer at depth gauges and
pressure dials

the moment they realised their lives,
as mine
made not the slightest ...

Generations since their demise but Peace IV funding means
they can draw young ghosts together from across the ocean floor
a pan-European choir. Battery choked well-oiled throats, it's a
curious timbre.

Of course I arrived here long before diesel and torpedoes.
On a fashion note, you meet me in sailcloth I was wrapped in
the morning I was tipped over a deck rail of the *Pomano*.

A bit of a struggle to make it this far, all the way back to Sligo
I admit
given the weight I went down with, you couldn't fathom it. A
lot of pressure
for a woman alone in the world just trying to get back home

Preferable path perhaps if you could have picked me
from the line-up of terrorists, freeloaders, Daesh woman-haters all
pitched up on the side of a UKIP campaign bus

or playing Let's-Cling-On-Another-While with the kids on a
blown-up tractor tube
mid-Mediterranean, but hey they didn't have a camera lens
for us back in our own little famine-times

Perhaps I'm more with Ötzi
— quick look him up on Google! —
though he was frozen out and I'm in a different kind of pickle
Maybe it's best not dwell in the past though. I got here after all
didn't I?

Raghy, Ballyconnell, Lower Rosses I see them all by moonlight
when I bob about in the low-tide-turning-me.

One last haul anchor and I'm back again, under Barnacle
Geese, skipping
about my childhood Ballygilgan lane down to the big house, a
few days before
they finally cleared us away ... Why do I hesitate?

It's been nearly two centuries I suppose. Will they welcome me
stepping wonky sea-legged out of the ocean, like the Spanish

were welcomed ashore
with garlands and blankets and soup a mile or two up the road
at Streedagh,
the bone or two they picked of Yeats'
or a Traveller family looking for any place,
that kind of ticker tape parade down the newly surfaced
O'Connell Street.

3. New arrivals

We're not quite front-crawling
onto this pan-European shore,
it's more a marathon plod against the tide since
frightened traffickers tipped us overboard.
'Fuel low now for journey home
In you go! Head toward the lights!
In you go!' You learn there's no reasoning
with scared Heckler & Koch-wielding 19-year-olds.
At this point, with two children for every life vest
— all we could afford
from Zuwara's trippy beach-front stores —
the thing became a terrifying fiasco
In hindsight we should have gone for the dry run,
perhaps you'd have even picked us
from the famous line-up of terrorists and freeloaders,
blown up on the side of the UKIP campaign coach.
If all at sea we've managed to cling together though,
but with no clue where on earth we're coming ashore,
I mean has the wind bundled up those clouds over
Olympus? Snowdonia? Truskmore?
Put your ear to a Cloonagh whelk shell
you'll hear our thoughts bubble for directions
as mobile phones don't get signal
at these depths.



Underwave Day 3 image still

Rough Study 3

Passing on the street yesterday
part of the contraflow
you still stopped, a lobster pot dropped
in the pre-post-pre-post Covid street surge,
head aged, weather-beaten, but, by and large my happy
bobbing buoy of old
and we spoke.

Felt like coming up for air, emergence from depth
and if not quite the latest Daniel Craig in Caribbean froth
meets The Birth of Venus
presenting coyly in a 1970s scalloped shower tray,
we still threw about some old shapes,
for the split second forgetting yourself, you were a salmon leap
and glint
shaking off sea lice before dashing up the Garavogue
me as still life, all my glittering sequins relaxing on a
fishmongers' slate.
But hey, it was still me, mask off, hoodie down in the drizzle
razzle-dazzle-smiling, laughing,
human being human in the street.

All thoughts I must be careful of, of course.
Forewarned by professionals about myself
I am keenly aware how a tinchy undercurrent,
disturbance below the surface
oscillates, rebounding up the Beaufort scale,
how the under-wave breaks
in my skull constrained wild Atlantic bay of a mind.
Akin to a snow globe they say,
my being is a basin of brine
I carry around in an earthquake.

It is of course true I have to say. Both the onshore and offshore,
any slight gust can take me
places no one wants to go,
onto rocks,
or fathoms the echo locators get nothing back from.
Once upon a time there was some hope,
a beautiful soft-chinned Jesus water-walking
the Atlantic waves like it's a rolling bog road between Aughris Head
and his Innismurray summer home
would reach down for me when I was going under, a floundering
disciple.

There was that sacred heart lantern port-red glow of sanctuary,
and crucifixion hole in his extended wrist
good for clipping on the safety rope,
but that's not the case anymore,
eschewing full moon lunacy of the Eucharist
it's pills before meals to blunt the wavelengths,
keeping off those seaside rollercoasters.
— You wonder btw, would the Saviour have a needed a TV Licence
for island viewing, and just how you went about planning
applications for more Monk huts and Molaise chapel back in the
sixth century.

Anyway I'm back in off the street now,
leeward safety of my own place
a comfortable murky backwater,
water-patterned linoleum, abalone shells and bathroom sponges
which is where these little visions of my inner world come in,
You catch me FaceTiming the last linkage I have to you from

decades past,
for no reason but to say thank you for that time of day today.
So far it's only my own face looks back at me from the cloudy
grey
intricately web-shattered screen.
I've been so long lost at sea it seems
neither your number or my face are recognised.

4. Expectant Mothers.

Some days we are more hopeful.
After weekend storms and thunderous tides
we ghost quietly inshore, driftnet like jelly fish.
The water we make through is bog-tan with runoff
from Sligo plains, and this is a good sign
— climate changes may have cracked the *cillin*
at Sheeanmore overnight. You see we
have a bone or two to pick from Limbo
before finally being on our way.

Underwave Day 4 image still



Rough Study 4

It's not quite Dante's room for illicit lovers
from which gale-battered Francesca and Paolo
never break. Less hell's soap opera,
more turgid-purgatorial these inshore mud-plains
where we
just what do you call a phalanx of childless mothers ...
are turned and turnabout in moon-hauled tides.
Admittedly there's worse places to part-pay for sins
than up to your neck
in an ice-age sculpted amphitheatre
of Sligo bay.

Congers, crabs and ragworms aside
for those of us gathered here today
eternity is just a waiting game
till this world, the den of our iniquity melts
— what a sunset that's going to be —
and we're all Higgs bosons together guys
and head-first into a black hole with everyone else.
In the interim — for variety sake — each outgoing current
like the bingo bus to Bundoran
takes us away, away to Innismurray and the famous
birthing stone
where — all we do all must together do —
we grab the hand slots
squat, relive the searing out-comes of our original sin.
Legend has it a child was never stillborn to a pilgrim
mother
clinging birth-wrecked to that rock face,
but it's some chorus of fallen angels when it all kicks off
a howling gale of labouring women
scares the geese reeling back to Norway
agus an Bhean Sidhe

firmly stuck in the ha'penny place.
Still, born again and again and again
The unending sorrow is we never see the child.
Midst all hands on our tossing teenage decks
it is swept away
overboard into the moral storm force ten
of wind whipping veils, you might say,
pass the parcel, less infant more hot potato
to who knows where, Limbo, *cillin*, the USA.
We know the times have changed
Oh since 2K Compliance let's say,
much is still in living memory
just too late for the ghost lives we became.
According to the McAleese report,
on laundries where we were cleansed clean
as soapy sea foams on Dunmorán beach,
and which incidentally gives Dante Alighieri a right run
for his money
they didn't even tell us the sex,
lest we call a name after it;
the small mercies
not knowing would help us to forget.
We were just left to our fractured wondering
in grotto puddles, limestone beds slicked with afterbirth,
young women clutching umbilical straws like skipping rope
battening down our breasts for the voyage ahead,
throwing placenta to the gulls.

Underwave - an underwater installation by Bettina Seitz filmed over 4 days by Fionn Rogers in Sligo Bay as part of Tread Softly 2020 - can be viewed on <http://www.treadsoftly.ie>

Leland Bardwell – Innismurray

‘Where there’s a cow there’s a woman and where there’s a woman, there’s mischief’ – St Colmcille who founded the monastery and banned all cows from the island

Two thumb holes in the birthing stone
Beside the women’s graveyard.

There she squats, prayers
Breaking from parched lips

To the great Man-God to deliver her
From the yearly gall of labour,

To beg for a man-child
To erase the guilt of her sex.

For being a woman
Has no pardon,

Skirts raised in the wind
On an island that floats

Like a bayleaf
In the unforgiving sea.

She crouches thus
Till the infant lies in the skutch

And she looks at the unmarked grave
Beneath whose soil her mother lies.

She ponders.

Martina Gillan – Aethnic Shadows



Along the coast from
Ballysadere Bay to Donegal
Bay, great quantity of land
has been destroyed by blowing
sands; great exertions
have been successfully made
by Lord Palmerston to resist
the encroachment of the
sands, by planting bent.

Wm. John Hancock,
Report on the Formation of the
Sligo Union (1839)

*It broke my mother's heart when
from her I went to part
Will I ever see my darling anymore?
Not until my bones are laid in a
cold and silent grave
In my own native isle so far away.*

Erin Grá Mo Chroí

It's hard to be forced from the land
that we live in,
Will I ever see my darling anymore?

Mary Branley – White Beach

We are new arrivals here,
peering deep into seawater pools,
abstracts fashioned when the tide turned,
caught Alaira draped wistfully round
greenhaired rocks, tangled
sleabhach, wrack, duilse.
Our foraging has been fine-tuned
from the early spring, when
our cold pinked hands bagged seaweed
for the garden.

At either end of the broken road,
Beezie and Leland, each sentinel,
a stone's throw from the shore.
Cailleachs of Cloonagh,
Ardtrasna adepts, pillars
of endurance. The woman's chore;
cures, storm forecasters,
gleaners of hardship on the white beach.

Nightly now,
they fill their mouths
with music breath,
a thimbleful of whiskey.
Round the gable,
wind whistling,
haul of water sweeps through
spray rinsed stones.
Irrhythmic like life,
an outsynched ripple
uneven underfoot.
The curved indentation
of where the road was taken
and should not have been.
No one listens.

There were pages torn out
Of my *White Beach*.
The whole copy disappeared
on the night of her wake.
Standing on the broken road,
I'm filling something in.
Leland, a new arrival at the cottage.
She couldn't eat her luck,
those hares' feet went undigested,
eyes blurring on atropine
Or unshed tears.

Several years ago, the sands near Raughly began to move, and in a short time had completely covered two villages. The further advance of the blowing sands has been arrested by planting bent, and thus inducing a growth of grass, which has now converted these sands into valuable pasture-land. The late Lord Palmerston pursued a similar course of reclamation at Mullaghmore, with the addition of a thick belt of pines for shelter, and an encroachment of the sand was also stayed at Killaspugbrone, in the district of Cuil-irra, by planting bent.

W. G. Wood-Martin, *History of Sligo, County and Town* (1882)

II. 'somewhere in sands of the desert'

Brian Leyden – The Blowing Sands (text and photos)

When we first moved to the coast, I was troubled by a recurring dream that a high tide overnight brought the sea in across the fields to reach our back door. A swift, unstoppable inundation. Unaccustomed to the sound of the breaking waves within earshot of the gable window of our upstairs bedroom, my subconscious mind had not yet learned to trust that the sea would stop at the tidal apron, that it would come thus far and no further; the twice-daily tides had definite limits after which they retreated. That it took me some time to adjust to the sea on our doorstep might be explained by the fact that until October 2007 my wife Carmel and I had lived inland in the quietly rural Dromahair village. We would happily have gone on living in our tree-surrounded cottage had we not craved more house room. In the late 1990s we'd bought a field in Ballyconnell West, in the parish of Maugherow on a headland in North Sligo. Approached by a narrow straight bog road like a causeway, Maugherow felt like an island: the stark intensity of the light, the wind-raked bleached out colours, the colossal dome of sky and existentially spare horizon. The Planter's beech of Dromahair replaced by the native *sceach*: the lone hawthorn bush, stunted and leaf-deprived, its tortured branches leaning away from the prevailing wind. The figure of the upright, sober-suited, comfortably situated merchants of Dromahair replaced by the coatless drunk, wandering the roads in hard, unforgiving sea-light; or in theatrical terms, if Dromahair was Chekhovian, Maugherow was pure Beckett. It felt like a place apart,

though it was only twenty kilometres from Sligo town and a short distance beyond the tourist destination Lissadell House.

Lately, with sea levels rising and weather events growing more ferocious and frequent, the threat of engulfment was back on my mind. And with the arrival of the coronavirus pandemic of February 2020, I began to see a connection between the implacable threat of extreme weather events and the larger global quest to deal with the remorseless spread of Covid-19. Both concerns were linked in my imagination with a wind-driven cataclysm called the 'Blowing Sands' geographically connected to this part of the coast.

In our enthusiasm to live by the sea, we hadn't bought a site we'd bought a field on which we intended to build, and it took us the best part of a decade to get planning permission. When the planning department eventually accepted our appeals, I actually put my writing aside to oversee the build. My thinking was that we would be enclosing a space never enclosed before, which was a creative act in itself; a natural extension of the imaginative spectrum on which I'd always worked. So, in early May 2006, I stood looking on as a big yellow digger arrived by low-loader to break ground for the foundations. Seeing it trundle into the virgin field on its caterpillar tracks my chest flooded with nervous anticipation and relief that the long-anticipated build was about to take substance. The graceful, hydraulic arm had just lifted the first scoop of earth out of the ground when a passing neighbour said: 'So, you're building a house where that village disappeared.' 'What village?' I asked, alarmed by a further mention of mysteriously animated cataracts of sand.

In town, the central library furnished me with a copy of John C. McTernan's two-volume history, *In Sligo Long Ago*, where a newspaper correspondent in 1841 reports for the *Sligo Champion* how '800 rich and fertile acres' of the Lissadell estate had become nothing more than a sandbank in consequence of the western winds which drifted the sands to such a height that 'most of the miserable occupiers can only enter their cheerless dwellings by the chimneys'. Lewis's *Topographical Dictionary* from 1837 related how the blowing sands had earlier drifted northwards from the village of Knocklane to cover an area of roughly four square miles, the sands having 'already covered a great tract of good land and about one hundred and fifty cabins..' The site for our new home looked across acres of reeds towards Knocklane. So that passing local was right; the foundations for our house were being dug at the centre of an historic Irish dustbowl.

Diarmuid Delargy – Blowing Sands



Subsequently, in Robert Macfarlane's *The Old Ways*, I came upon a mention of 'vast sandstorms' in eighteenth century Britain that exposed prehistoric footprints in Mesolithic and Neolithic silt-layers off Formby Point north of Liverpool. Here in Sligo, at the time of the British sandstorms, the County Grand Jury had commissioned roads engineer and surveyor William Larkin to produce a map, published in 1819 in six engraved sheets. On the map our nearby beach at *Trá Bui*, or Yellow Strand, was indicated as an area of 'Blowing Sands'. A group of dots on a rise overlooking the 'Blowing Sands' on Larkin's map marked a housing cluster at Ballintemple, and there was another settlement on our doorstep at Ballyconnell. Cautioned to avoid public gatherings and limit social contacts, it seemed a perfect chance to finally go in search of the sites marked on Larkin's map, safely encompassed within the travel restrictions imposed by the prevailing Covid-19 public health guidelines.

On a brisk September afternoon I set out on foot from Raghly Harbour where a narrow coast-road on a short neck of land was all that connected the harbour to the mainland, a rough wall of boulders built on the western flank to stop further whittling away, though it would probably only take a major storm or two to reduce the



place to a standalone islet. I scrambled up the rocks and over a little craggy headland with an expansive view of Brown Bay, the Seal Rocks and Horse Island.

When I reached *Trá Bui* a stiff east wind whipped up the dry, fine-grained sand, the spindrift streaming across the beach in serpentine tails. Trapped sand accumulated against the leading edges of rocks and tussocks of marram grass. Delicately sculpted mounds that might possibly bank into sturdy sand dunes over time to rectify the damage done by the winter storms that had collapsed the seaward face of the dunes and left behind skeletal tracts of bare stones where there used to be soft sand.



It took a good twenty-minutes to hike along the byroad that overlooks Ballyconnell and from which I could see our house at the edge of the wetlands that gave sanctuary to several rackety herons, a discreet otter population, and migrant whooper swans in the wintertime. A short distance in from the public road, and ringed by nettles, a barbed-wire fence, and a head-high boundary stone wall, a ruined medieval church stood in an open field. There was neither signage nor easy access and conscious that I may be trespassing on private property I carefully untied the length of frayed blue nylon rope holding up a leaning

gate to enter the field enclosed by hawthorn hedging and more barbed wire. In the field I looked around for ripples in the ground to indicate the whereabouts of the eighteenth-century settlement on Larkins's map. It appeared that everything had been ploughed back into the earth and not a trace remained, save the ruined, overgrown church.

The original cabins would have been built of fieldstones, mud and straw, and not exactly durable even in their own day. Known as clachans or *bailes*, and made up of largely Gaelic-speaking extended family members and close relations, the first Irish census, taken in 1841, had over a million tenant farmers nationwide congregated in such clachans, and three-quarters of a million more landless dependants out of a total population of eight million people. Underpinning the high population of impoverished tenant farmers and agrarian labourers was a unique source of sustenance and commerce, the potato. Cultivated through a system of lazybeds in claggy soils and marginal plots of land, the 'lumper' potato variety was especially suited to the Western Atlantic climate.

Then, in July 1845, a hitherto unknown disease struck and destroyed one third of the potato crop across Ireland. Small black lesions enlarged and coalesced on the leaves leading to defoliation and, washed by rainfall from the leaves, infected the tubers which developed a brown marbled appearance. There had been periodic food shortages in the country before, but in 1846 practically the entire potato crop was destroyed, with a lifetime of terror in the sight of infected stalks and rotten tubers again in 'Black 47'. Mass starvation brought 'epidemic fever': a deadly mixture of typhus and relapsing fever, together with colic, dysentery and cholera. Assailed for decades by 'Blowing Sands' the population of Ballyconnell



and Ballintemple now had to contend with the Great Hunger, *an Gorta Mór*.

At the boundary wall around the lone, abandoned church, I had to resurrect my childhood tree-climbing skills to gain entry to the site through dense layers of aged elder tree and sycamore that blocked the only accessible gap in the perimeter wall. The interior was overgrown but negotiable. The air had a musky animal and damp earth smell, where rank clumps of nettle and strands of briar concealed deep burrows that I took to be foxholes. One by one I came upon unnamed gravestones leaning at odd angles but firmly embedded and very old. On a raised mound a single weathered stone had a crude but discernible carved cross. To my untrained eye it could be a mass grave for children, a *cillin*, or a Famine burial plot.

Research done in advance of my hike had turned up a report in the British Parliamentary records on the Relief of Distress in Ireland during the Famine sent by Cpt. O'Brien to Lieut-Colonel Jones in Dublin, dated March 2, 1847. According to Cpt. O'Brien, the settlement he visited

was called 'the Sands' and contained roughly 60 huts 'with a population of five to each hut'. Blowing sand had drifted to the tops of the walls of the huts, and the sloping passages used to gain entry had to be cleared daily, the doors kept constantly shut to exclude the dust. 'Of windows', said Cpt. O'Brien, 'there can be none'. Some of the huts were occupied by the original tenants, more had squatters, taking shelter in what Cpt. O'Brien calls 'burrow-holes'. The place was described as being north of Lissadell and I assumed the location to be Ballintemple.

Cpt. O'Brien was accompanied on his visit to the Sands by the landowner, Sir Robert Gore-Booth. Unlike many absentee landlords, Sir Robert lived on his Sligo estate where the architect Francis Goodwin had been commissioned to design and build a new residence in the Greek Revival style, Lissadell House. The placename, according to Sir Robert's granddaughter Eva Gore-Booth, came from the Gaelic *Lios an Daill*, meaning the 'fort of the blind man'.



Sir Robert and Cpt. O'Brien crawled 'with difficulty' into the first hut they came to and found a coffin inside with the owner's wife, who'd died three days before, 'of want'. The owner told his unexpected visitors he had to leave 'to

dig a hole to put her in' and try and get a couple of men to help him to carry her there. 'A skeleton of a living child' lay in a cradle, in a corner near a turf fire. A woman, a neighbour, rocking the cradle said that the child would be dead before the morning, and added, 'It would be better if we were all dead'. The child's cradle, and a broken table, 'comprised the entire furniture'. The door of the second hut was shut, but a voice from within answered their calls. The door gradually opened, and out of this hole, appeared the head of a man. His face and lips were colourless. He wore only a dirty coarse shirt, in shreds. 'Send for the priest,' he said. 'I will be gone before morning — I am dying of the starvation.' When questioned, the man said his belly was all swelled, and he had bad pains all through it to his back. Sir Robert asked if he had anyone to send to the meal depot, which was two miles distant. The man called a little girl from the hut, but when Sir Robert was giving her directions where to obtain half a stone of meal, the man cried out, 'Can you give any bread, I will be dead before the meal comes, give me bread now; there is a shop not a mile off; give me a bit of bread now'. In his report Captain O'Brien notes, 'I doubt that he is now alive'.

In a following hut into which they crawled on hands and knees they found a bedstead with a little straw over it in which a man lay covered only by an old quilt; his face and belly swollen, as were his feet and ankles, while his knees and thighs were wasted to the bone. His wife cowered over an iron pot on a hook above a turf fire, with a young child in her arms. Three other children were sitting about. A young man was preparing a fishing-line. The father showed his limbs, and said he believed himself to be dying; the mother held up the infant and bared its body to show its little bones pressing through the skin. She made the other children turn their faces to the light, which came

in at the doorway, and they too were 'swelled with starvation'. She put aside her own petticoat, 'she had that morning borrowed from a neighbour to go out with decency to beg or borrow a little barley' and demonstrated the only garment she possessed, a green petticoat in shreds that did nothing to conceal her fleshless legs. The young man said he was going out to fish and could do more that way to 'stop the starvation', than he could by earning eight pennies a day on the Public Works. Asked what was in the iron pot, the woman said it was the barley she had begged that morning. With a ladle she stirred up 'the liquor' where no barley was to be seen, save a grain or two; the liquor 'not much more nourishing' than warm water. Westward of the Sands was the 'large and populous village of Ballyconnell'. Sir Robert and Cpt. O'Brien did not go there.

Martina Gillan – Interior Window



Even as a download off the internet the report had been harrowing and distressing in the extreme to read, and the fact that Cpt. O'Brien and Sir Robert had seen all they could stomach for one day confirms how sand inundation and starvation must have been widespread across the whole of the Gore-Booth estate. To his credit, it should be said, history records that Sir Robert established two soup boilers on his Lissadell estate to each make 140 gallons of soup; and at the height of the famine he 'gratuitously' gave out 280 gallons of this soup per day, every day including Sundays. He also sold 30 tons of Indian corn per week at a reduced price and gave a portion of Indian corn

to about 30 persons daily. Indian corn, it ought to be pointed out, was an animal maze foodstuff that required prolonged cooking to be even remotely digestible by humans and was known to cut the guts out of starving people causing severe stomach pains, dysentery and in some cases, death.

While Sir Robert had recourse to soup boilers and Indian meal, his absentee landlord neighbour, Henry John Temple, Lord Palmerston, had by the time of the Irish Famine attained the position of Foreign Secretary: one of the most powerful figures in the British Empire, and afterwards, twice elected British Prime Minister. Unfortunately, Palmerston took an even more consistently managerial approach to famine relief than Sir Robert. On the rare occasions he visited his Sligo estate – less than once every ten years – Palmerston kept firmly to the belief that by improving his landholdings the measures he and his agents planned to advance his interests would ultimately benefit his tenants and increase productivity. Palmerston had first visited Sligo as young man in 1808, where he found his 600 acre estate in the north of the county densely overpopulated with impoverished tenants; the poorest living on the most marginal lands under the iconic, table-topped Ben Bulbin mountain. These pauperised smallholders were beholden to a pitiless system of middlemen, and a widespread practice of subdivision that put an underclass of tenant farmers and labourers on the bottom rung of an economic pyramid that took the whole of a tenant farmer's efforts and produce, with nothing left over beyond potatoes to live on, to pay the rent.

The money gathered through rents got passed along a chain of rent collectors, sub-agents, middlemen, and estate managers who each got a cut before it reached the landlord. In as far as it was possible, Palmerston set about removing

these middlemen and enlarging his tenants' smallholdings through what was called 'Squarings' whereby extended families were compelled to surrender the tiny, collective plots of ground on which their cabins and clachan settlements stood on the promise of being moved to more productive, individual properties of up to four acres. It was called consolidation but it felt like confiscation.

Palmerston also had a new fishing harbour built at Mullaghmore, and undertook an extended programme of land improvement works at a rate of sixty acres per year. On the marginal fringes of his estate, peat was piled in heaps and burnt, the ground levelled and then formed into ridges to plant potatoes, turnips and rape, using the ashes as manure, and adding a top-dressing of sea sand and clay. The 'middlemen' however were still actively in place across Ireland when the novelist Anthony Trollope, working in 1841 as Surveyor's Clerk, noticed how Protestant and Catholic landowners were 'exceptionally greedy and irresponsible' through what he called 'the lowness of their education and consequent lack of principle among the middle classes'. Property in Ireland he said, was considered as having no duties attached to it other than turning a profit and 'let the consequences to the people on the land be what they might'.

The most effective way to rid an estate of its unwanted surplus of impoverished tenants and agrarian labourers turned out to be Assisted Emigration. The landlord simply paid a tenant's passage to Canada, food on the journey out, clothing, and a little 'head money' doled out by the ship's Captain on arrival. At a cost of between £5 and £7 per emigrant, Sir Robert Gore-Booth had strongly recommended this measure to Palmerston and his representatives. The historian John McKeon says that on the Palmerston estate nine ships were chartered in 1847

alone, carrying a total of 2190 passengers bound for Quebec and New Brunswick. Most arrived safely, though it was the rate at which these cargo vessels – hastily repurposed to carry people – foundered, and the extent of deaths amongst their malnourished and ailing passengers, that gave the world the term 'coffin ships'. Accusations were also made against Palmerston and his agents of 'dumping destitute and elderly emigrants on the colonies', sending them out late in the season, failing to provide adequate clothing, and forcing many into almshouses with no work available as winter approached. Those who opted for Assisted Emigration – if they could be said to have much choice in the matter – had to trust their luck: a fraught option for people who had mostly only ever known misfortune.

In the course of improving his estate, Palmerston had initiated quite early on an experimental sowing of an exotic grass imported from Russia known as bent grass, or 'bent'. Trial and error proved that when planted in staggered rows the bent trapped the sand and arrested the blowing movement. Pine trees were then planted in palisades of 300 trees per acre to make shelterbelts. By 1881, further planting of 'bent' by neighbouring landlords Samuel Barrett at Cullenamore, Messrs Barber and Yeats at Lower Rosses, and Gore-Booth at Lissadell, meant that the *Times* correspondent Thomas C. Foster, as he drove across the flats towards Knocklane, could report that, 'There are now no sands to be seen but the richest grass, with herds of cattle and sheep grazing...'. Cattle had replaced people: beef farming being more profitable than labour-intensive tillage.

It was difficult to imagine, though hard to suppose, the tenant farmers on the Palmerston and Lissadell estates never enjoyed their own moments or relief and gladness:

the setting of the sun on their labours at the end of a hard day's work, the thought perhaps that today's rain would make tomorrow's illicitly distilled spirits, or a sweet human voice free from the fear of what may be coming next in the way of disaster.

And coincidentally, Lord Palmerston came to wider public notice again when his character appeared in the ITV series *Victoria*. His name has also been attached to the current Brexit negotiations for his view that Britain has no eternal allies and no perpetual enemies, only eternal and perpetual interests. In Sligo he left his tenants with no illusions about the extent to which colonialism embodied a protective power, the sheltering umbrella of Empire. Beleaguered smallholders experienced starvation, dispossession, disenfranchisement and death: a brutal legacy of evictions, assisted emigration, and subsistence living, the barest semblance of a civil society for the poor and nothing in the way of genuine acknowledgment or appreciation of their culture. They were never honoured nor considered in their full humanity, and no value whatsoever was placed on the things the people embraced as their own.

It did not escape me either that just as the devastation of the Blowing Sands and the Irish Famine exposed the callousness of Victorian attitudes and colonial misrule, the coronavirus pandemic has exposed grievous deficits in present day Irish society. There continued to be grim shortcomings in our health and public services after years of brutal austerity cutbacks. The spread of Covid-19 in congregated settings, in direct provision centres, in care for the elderly, exposed how those who look after the young, the old, and the most vulnerable were the least well paid. We got a fresh perspective on the homeless crisis when public health measure shut-downs revealed how full

our cities were of empty investment properties. We had scandals in public life where elite 'in-groups' believed themselves protected by the law and bound by nothing; and out-groups found themselves bound by the law and protected by nothing. It might even be said that we await effective treatments and a breakthrough in the development of a vaccine to rescue us from Covid-19, in the way that a 'Bordeaux Mixture' of crystal bluestone and washing soda used against mildew in French vineyards was found to ward off blight and restored the harvesting of potatoes; while a hardy, imported 'bent' grass planted in staggered rows mitigated the natural calamity of the Blowing Sands.

For me, I had located the old church and graveyard at Ballintemple. I was above ground, and could hope to stay so for another while. In mid-stride I stopped, took several deep breaths and listened. Did the whispering sands of *Trá Bui* still carry restless traces of the famine dead: the granular residues of that poor man's wife in her coffin in Cpt. O'Brien's report, carried out and buried in the Blowing Sands, soon to be joined by her starvation-stricken husband and children. When the people of the 'Sands' had spoken to Cpt. O'Brien and Sir Robert that day they must surely have known they were doomed. Powerless. Possessionless. Despairing. They related the truth of their predicament. They offered their testimony. They told their story, knowing the only thing they had left was to be heard.

Diarmuid Delargy – Blowing Sands



Towards the close of the eighteenth century, the entire district from Court to Knocklane was covered with blowing sand to the very summit of the hill. An extensive tract of land, then estimated at one thousand acres, had been deserted by its inhabitants, in consequence of the continual encroachment of the sands, which had overwhelmed entire villages. In this sandy tract, now a fine bent farm, lies the old Church of Ballintemple, and on its north-western extremity is Knocklane, washed on the south-west and north by the ocean, and traversed by the two lines of fortifications already described.

W. G. Wood-Martin, *History of Sligo, County and Town* (1882)

Beyond this district to the westward is the large and populous village of Ballyconnell; I did not go there, but I was told it was scarcely better than 'the Sands.' To the north, as far as Cliffony, matters are scarcely better; and, I was informed, the same sad tale was to be told of nearly every place in the baronies of Carbury and Rosclogher, except where provision has been made by Sir Robert Booth to feed the people.

Cpt. O'Brien, *Parliamentary papers, Volume 52: Relief of Distress (Ireland)* (1847)

Seán Golden – I saw the pig

We wore heavily padded woollen overcoats in the lecture hall, and layers of clothing. We held jars of weak tea to keep our hands warm, replenished from efficient thermoses of water boiled twenty minutes at least to ward off dysentery, the tea masking the taste of boilers' rusty water pipes. The campus was the latest incarnation of what had been a Catholic college where Teilhard de Chardin taught. There may have been crates of fossils of his in cupboards there still.

I was teasing out the cultural references and connotations of James Joyce's 'Araby' for scores of students finishing their degree course in English in what had been the British Concession of Tianjin, wondering how to explain the changes of what Georgian houses on North Richmond Street had signified in Dublin in the past, and the tenements they had become, what it meant for the children of those houses to run 'the gantlet of the rough tribes of the cottages' behind them.

From the window I could see mansions the British built to house themselves in China, become tenements when the revolution expelled them. Everywhere, on campus and in the streets, there were temporary shelters, often large sections of culvert bricked up at one end, a doorway at the other. Four years before, in 1976, an earthquake not far to the north, at Tangshan, killed a quarter of a million people and knocked almost all but the colonial buildings to the ground. Reconstruction was still under way.

The parallel was patent. I told the students to look out the window. The British Concession doubled for Dublin, the mansions and temporary shelters for Georgian houses

and cottages, the class distinctions and the inequality were similar. The parallels did not stop there. The diminished circumstances of the inhabitants of Dublin and Tianjin shared a common source. The origins of the concessions in China had an Irish connection.

Henry John Temple, 3rd Viscount Palmerston, a landlord of north Sligo who held sway from Maugerow to Mullaghmore and tried to tame the blowing sands there, was the chief architect of British imperial expansion for three decades. As Foreign Secretary he engineered the first Opium War (1839 – 1842), making China cede the island of Hong Kong as a Crown colony 'in perpetuity' and opening some ports to foreign trade, with special privileges for the foreigners residing there.

It was trade that motivated Palmerston's policy, the same mercantilist policy that would shortly devastate Ireland in the Famine. He defended the right of British merchants to trade wherever they pleased, without regard to the merchandise they traded, opium in this case, a product that was illegal in China, as it was in Britain. In his eyes, the Chinese were violating the rights of British subjects, not they who broke Chinese law.

In Parliament, William Ewart Gladstone, no stranger to Irish causes in later times, fiercely opposed what he called 'Palmerston's Opium War' and said he felt 'dread of the judgments of God upon England for our national iniquity towards China', a war 'unjust in its origin' that would 'cover our country with permanent disgrace'. Lin Zexu, the governor of Canton, wrote a letter to Queen Victoria, asking how she could sanction such immoral behaviour on the part of her subjects. Palmerston made sure the letter never reached her (though a translation was published in *The Times of London*). In a letter to the King

of Belgium she wrote, ‘Albert is so much amused at my having got the Island of Hong Kong’.

I came to know Hong Kong well enough after living in the British Concession in Tianjin. Once, when I lodged in the Jesuit residence at the Chinese University of Hong Kong in the New Territories, in the cell of an Irish priest who was away, I returned in the early hours after the pubs had closed to hear someone rehearse a two-stringed *erhu* solo in the stairwell below that merged in my memory with a duet Peter Horan and Fred Finn had played in the early hours in the kitchen in the home place after the pubs had closed.

It was the second Opium War (1856 – 1860), also organised by Palmerston, as Prime Minister this time, that granted Tianjin’s British Concession. My mentor there for classical Chinese was John Minford, who gave me a textbook by Herbert Giles, based on the transcription, translation and explanation of Chinese written characters. Giles had been recruited to be an Interpreter in China, where he became a colonialist administrator from 1867–1892. Then he became the second professor of Chinese at Cambridge. Giles glossed each word carefully. When he came to *family* he betrayed a double colonialist contempt:

Chia [*jia*] is composed of [*mian*] shelter as radical, and [*jia*] a boar, abbreviated, as phonetic. It is the equivalent of our word home, a pig under a roof forming an ideogram that should be especially suggestive to our neighbours in the sister isle.

I was taken aback by the gratuitous nature of the aside and by the attitude toward the Irish it revealed. Not content to insult both peoples in the one book, he repeated the comparison in another:

Considering how squalid many Chinese homes are, it is all the more astonishing to

find such deep attachment to them. There exists in the language a definite word for *home*, in its fullest English sense. As a written character, it is supposed to picture the idea of a family, the component parts being a ‘roof’ with ‘three persons’ underneath. There is, indeed, another and more fanciful explanation of this character, namely, that it is composed of a ‘roof’ with a ‘pig’ underneath, the forms for ‘three men’ and ‘pig’ being sufficiently alike at any rate to justify the suggestion. *This analysis would not be altogether out of place in China any more than in Ireland.*

Such discourse makes it clear that his intended readers were pro-Imperial British who shared his contempt for both the Chinese and the Irish, readers who gloried in the benefits of an imperialism that later decayed, morphing into their descendants’ nostalgia for ‘good old times’. It also envisions a hierarchy with the British on top and Ireland and China sharing the same level below.

Then I found a phrasebook by Giles, dedicated ‘to the ladies and members of the mercantile, sea-faring and sporting communities of China, many of whom I have heard expressing regret at not knowing a few words of Chinese’. That clarified the nature of his non-Chinese audience. I remembered an epitaph from Drumcliffe church – ‘Sacred to the memory of the Rev. Christopher Jones rector of Loughrea who died at that place the 29th day of July 1819, in the esteem of the gentry and inhabitants of his parish’. The distinction between ‘the gentry’ and ‘the inhabitants’ was common to Ireland and to China (though I doubt many of ‘the inhabitants’ of Loughrea considered Jones’ parish to be their own, nor was there parity of esteem).

Giles' phrasebook is divided by ambits, offering 'useful' phrases in English, with the equivalent in Chinese characters and a phonetic transcription. The phrases Giles assumed would be useful to the foreign ladies and members of the mercantile, sea-faring and sporting communities of China include — for 'The Housewife' — 'Light the lamp', 'Call the cook', 'I want to take the accounts now', 'I'll pay you tomorrow', 'This cook is not a good one', 'The coolie is also very lazy'; and in 'General' — 'Make fast!', 'He's a southerner', 'I don't like him', 'He can't be depended upon', 'You mind your own business', 'Where's my ring?', 'It's lost', 'It can't be lost'.

It would be difficult to find more explicit examples of the construction of a British colonialist discourse. As professor at Cambridge, Giles became a famous Sinologist and published many translations of classical texts, some of which inspired Oscar Wilde. He does not seem to have commented on the discrepancy between his admiration for the Chinese classics and his contempt for the people (he had no admiration for the Irish).

The reason that Giles could take it for granted that his readers would assume the Irish shared their homes with pigs becomes apparent in the chronicles of visitors to the sites inundated by blowing sands in Maugherow. William Henry Harvey revealed in 1849 — as if 'somewhere in sands of the desert':

On the coast of Sligo an equally destructive sand-inundation has taken place, and, though partially checked, is still in progress. This has already destroyed from seven to eight hundred acres of fertile land, burying in its course a considerable village. Strange to say, the village is not yet a 'Deserted Village', though buried in the midst of a desert. Its inhabitants still cling to their

wretched huts, only the roofs of which now rise above the sands, and these, with the entrances, are kept clear only by the constant labours of the inmates. It is a singular sight in walking over extensive sandy downs, where scarcely a blade is seen, to come suddenly on a rude chimney from which the peat-smoke rises, and to see a pig, followed by a troop of ragged children, rise up from under our feet. Much care has been taken to induce the occupants of these tenements, who subsist on fishing, to quit the ground, but hitherto unsuccessfully. They pay no rent for the burrows; and are contented to act as geological hourglasses.

W.B. Yeats analysed the phenomenon of visitors' chronicles of the inhabitants of Ireland in the introduction to his *Representative Irish Tales*, — 'The tourist has read of the Irish peasant in the only novels of Irish life he knows, those written by and for an alien gentry'. This recalls an incident at the beginning of Joyce's *Ulysses* where the attitude of the English visitor Haines annoys Stephen Dedalus — 'I can quite understand that, he said calmly. An Irishman must think like that, I daresay. We feel in England that we have treated you rather unfairly. It seems history is to blame'.

The history that was to blame is well-illustrated by the reports Donatus O'Brien made to the Poor Law Commissioners in 1847 in the depths of the Famine, published in the British *Parliamentary Papers*. He visited a hovel buried by sand in Maugherow with the Rev. Mr. Jeffcote, a Protestant clergyman of the parish.

One of the brothers and three others of the families, had died during the previous week. The widow was lying on the ground in fever, and unable to move. The children were

bloated in their faces and bodies, their limbs were withered to bones and sinews, with rags on them that scarcely preserved decency, and assuredly afforded no protection from the weather. *They had been found that day, gnawing the flesh from the bones of a pig which had died in an out-house.*

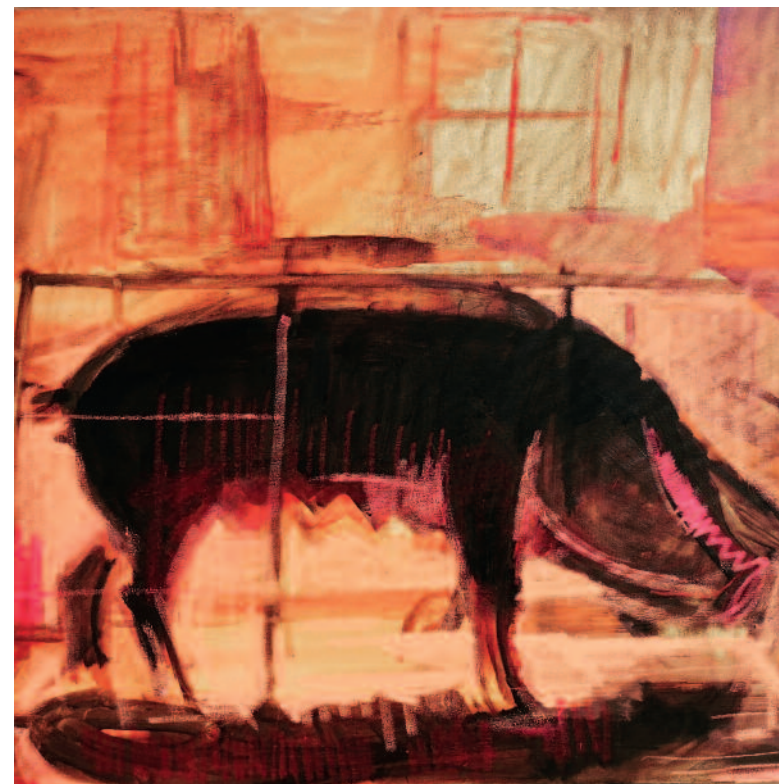
This was stated to me by Mr. Jeffcote. I saw the pig, I believe the fact.

O'Brien's descent into the heart of darkness of the Planters' regime (his own) brings him face to face with the horror of an environmental catastrophe worsened by economic and social depravation the gentry had wrought, the same gentry who were his intended readers. Personal frustration with their anticipated complacency or indifference or incredulity forces him to emphasise the horror with italics – *They had been found that day, gnawing the flesh from the bones of a pig which had died in an out-house.* The truth had changed him. The simple but resigned words, 'I saw the pig. I believe the fact.' sear a hole through the dispassionate reportage of his reconnaissance mission. Perhaps he assumed his readers would neither believe nor care.

Whether those in England feel today they have treated the inhabitants of Ireland rather unfairly might be called into doubt when a British government Minister proposes cutting off food supplies to Ireland over Brexit, or a Secretary for Northern Ireland confesses not knowing that renouncers-of-the-state do not vote for defenders-of-the-state. The indignation I felt in the British Concession in Tianjin at the words 'a pig under a roof ... should be especially suggestive to our neighbours in the sister isle' has only been compounded by discovering sources for them in literature describing the consequences of blowing sands near my home in Maugherow.

It seems history is to blame.

Diarmuid Delargy – Paddy's Pig II – Study in Orange



Tru Lomax — Of Estuaries, Strand Passes, Sand Banks and Oyster Beds

I grew up in Ballysadare, where the river Unshinn flowed into the sea at the Lower Falls, also known as the Rapids, where salmon were netted, to form the Estuary of Ballysadare Bay. All our summers were spent at Culleenduff, on an old abandoned Oyster farm which my father had purchased in the early 1940s. West of Carrigeenfada and across the estuary from Culleenduff, there was an ancient *Fearsat* or Strand Pass. In bygone days the Strand Passes were used by armies as a short cut to their battles. To the north there was a Strand Pass at Cummeen Strand and another in Drumcliff Bay.

Ballysadare Bay was, and still is, fairly shallow and full of sand banks which appeared and disappeared with the rise and fall of the tides. They also mysteriously moved about during the winter months, so that the channels altered and caused considerable aggravation to my father, who took the vagaries of sand very personally. At the beginning of every summer, our first boat trips down the bay and out over the bar at Strandhill into Sligo Bay were punctuated by the skipper leaping overboard in his underpants and heaving the boat off an unexpected sand bank. This was accompanied by a flow of strange epithets to do with the instability of sand!

However, the banks were much loved by us children, as we could easily row our dinghies out to them and find deep pools full of water warmed by the sun. The banks were also much loved by the Common Seals who birthed their pups on the warm sand and taught them to swim on the incoming tides.

Living on the site of the Culleenduff Oyster Fishery, we

took for granted that there must have been plenty of oysters there down through the years as anywhere that you dug into the ground there were layers of oyster shells. As we grew older, we began to appreciate that Oysters had been cultivated thousands of years ago on the Sligo coast and particularly in the Ballysadare estuary. The remains of 'our' oyster beds can still be seen at low Spring tides. Our summer house was built on top of a small hillock with a boathouse dug in underneath so we were living on a mound of oyster shells.

There was a very old L-shaped natural stone dock below the hill, where we fished for shrimps and crabs. On high tides the boats were often moored in the dock, but more usually they were on a mooring in the channel between the slipway in front of the boathouse and the nearest big sand bank.

Behind and above Culleenduff was Knocknarea, the 'Moleskin Mountain' of Louis MacNeice's poem 'Neutrality':

Look into your heart, you will find a County Sligo.
A Knocknarea with for navel a cairn of stones,
You will find the shadow and sheen of a moleskin
mountain
And a litter of chronicles and bones.

The name *Knocknarea* is generally taken to mean 'Hill of the Kings' or 'Hill of the Moon'. So says the noted Sligo historian, John C. McTernan, to whom I am indebted for much fascinating information about the Coolera Peninsula and the Sligo Oyster Fisheries. Archaeologists have come up with a wealth of information in recent years about the 'litter of chronicles and bones' at the foot of The Hill of the Moon. The recent excavations at Carrowmore are very well documented and I am drifting away from the underlying subject of sand! However, I will say that a stream of clear spring water runs down from somewhere

under Knocknarea, where I am told there is a subterranean lake. The entrance to it has been lost, maybe by a rock fall covering it, but it is said that that stream has never in living memory been known to dry up. It flows through a meadow which was full of wild orchids in old God's time and runs into and down through the dock in the Oyster Fishery, probably keeping it from silting up with sand. We drank a great deal of it, the fresh water of the stream, I mean, not the sand, during our magic summers at the end of the Oyster Lane. Those summers were all the more delightful because we had no electricity and no running water.

In the late nineteenth century, there were twenty-one licensed Oyster Fisheries in operation. Ten of these were in Ballysadare Bay, five in the Sligo estuary, two in Drumcliffe and some smaller beds at Moneygold. Unfortunately indiscriminate dredging and illegal trawling began to seriously deplete the stocks. In 1864 the *Sligo Journal* refers to 'lawless plunderers' descending on the beds at Oyster Island. At that time Sir Robert Gore-Booth owned the Lissadell Oyster Beds. These extensive beds had an excellent reputation both in Ireland and abroad, and the *Sligo Chronicle* states that Sir Robert owned the 55 acres which contained the Beds 'not only by prescriptive right, but also by Charter – one of the few instances on record of a special grant from the Crown'. John C. McTernan, in his excellent book, *Olde Sligo, Aspects of Town and County over 750 Years*, quotes a lengthy article in the *Sligo Chronicle* of 19 November 1864, which begins

During two or three days of the past week the neighbourhood of Lissadell has been the scene of intense and most extraordinary excitement. Its quiet shores, its lovely woodlands, its retired

road-ways have been disturbed from their usual tranquillity, by an invasion as curious in its way – as amusing in its audacious effrontery, and as comic in its sea-fights as that beautiful line of coast has for a long time witnessed.

The *Chronicle* goes on to relate how, at ten o'clock that morning a fleet of boats arrived on the horizon. It appeared that word had spread throughout the districts of Coney Island, Rosses Point, Ballysadare and adjoining coast lines, that oysters were to be had for the taking at Lissadell and that '*private rights were out of all consideration*'. From a window in Lissadell house Sir Robert Gore-Booth watched as about twenty-one boats appeared, carrying all the gear required for dredging oysters. He remained unruffled as his tenantry rallied around him, eagerly prepared to protect his interests! They were

armed with scythes neatly tied upon long poles, innumerable bill hooks of the most handy description, five dozen of most beautiful blackthorns, that would have done credit to Donnybrook in its palmiest days, and some guns charged with buck-shot! In the presence of this formidable force the pirates saw the game was up, and turning to their oars made off with the utmost despatch.

The Lissadell Oyster Fishery is still producing renowned oysters, and in spite of more modern methods involving tractors and trailers hauling out the trays of shellfish on land rather than dredging them from boats, most of the work is manual and back-breaking. I have been told this by my grandson, who worked there for several summers, and says he never wants to see another oyster, let alone eat it!

Backtracking to Culleenamore and Culleenduff, while the shoreline at Culleenduff is rocky and mostly bladder

wrack, where we used to find mussels as well as the odd full oyster, a mile or so on from our fishery, in the direction of Strandhill, the road takes a sharp right angle turn around the end of Knocknarea. On that turn there is an old Iron Gate leading into an area of sand dunes and marram grass, known as the Sandy Field. To the left is a small, sheltered curve of sandy beach, and when small, we used to play and have picnics there. As we grew older we would follow the shore round to the sweep of Cummeen strand. Cockles abounded there, easily dug up out of the sand; we would open them by twisting the hinges of two cockle shells together and eat them raw, there on the beach. They tasted of sea and wind, were a little gritty with grains of sand, and were totally delicious.

In the early 1960's I brought my childhood friend, Rodney Lomax, to Culleenduff one autumn evening and from the house on the little hill of oyster shells, we watched a blood-red hunters' moon rise slowly over the Ox Mountains as a rising tide covered the Sand Banks. In 1966 we were married and I began the rest of my life as a boat builder's wife, in Mullaghmore. Here also there was plenty of sand; the prevailing wind was Southerly to South Westerly, and sand from Bunduff strand regularly coated our windows and often spilled onto the road into the village. Now, in this year of Covid-19, I am watching sand blow into the bay and gradually fill up Palmerston's unique Harbour. I remember the days of innocence and carefree enjoyment of the coastline of my beloved County Sligo, and wish to God I had started writing about it much earlier in my life! It is sad to see that large portions of the trees that Lord Palmerston planted to hold the sandy soil and break the wind have been totally felled.

I made the following translation of the poem *Sables Mouvants* by Jacques Prévert for my late husband.

Tru Lomax – Quick Sand

Demons and wonders
Winds and tides
Already in the distance the sea is ebbing
And you
Like seaweed softly caressed by the wind
You stir dreaming in the shifting sands of the bed
Demons and wonders
Winds and tides
Already in the distance the sea is ebbing
But in your half-open eyes
Two little waves are poised
Demons and delights
Winds and tides
Two little waves to drown me.

Scalp, scolp, scalpeen; a rude cabin, usually roofed with *scalps* or grassy sods (whence the name). In the famine times – 1847 and after – a scalp was often erected for any poor wanderer who got stricken down with typhus fever: and in that the people tended him cautiously till he recovered or died. (Munster.) Irish *scalp* [scolp].

P.W. Joyce, *English As We Speak It In Ireland* (1910)

Póilín McGowan – Winds of Change



*The house we were reared in is but a stone on a stone
And all round the garden wild thistles have grown
And all the fine neighbours that ever I knew
Like the red rose they withered in the May morning dew.*
– May Morning Dew

It's hard to be forced from the land that we live in,
Will I ever see my darling any more?
The house I was reared in is but a stone on a stone

*I'm an honest Irish Labourer and I came from the County
Clare
Once I had a farm there with nothing much to spare
But I had to sell my donkey and me little billy goat
And with the money I received, to Glasgów took the boat*
Mickey Dam

Once I had a farm there with nothing much to spare



**Scalpeen, *The Illustrated London News*,
15 December 1849
(From our own Correspondent.)**

**Our ... Sketch represents what is called a
Scalpeen.**

III. 'a sigh for the blackened stalks'

Charlotte Stoker — *from Experience of the Cholera in Ireland 1832*

In those days, I dwelt with my parents and brothers in a provincial town in the west of Ireland, called Sligo. It was long before the time of railroads, and (I think) of steam boars. At least one had never been there at the time, so news travelled slowly. But still the rumour of the Great Plague broke on us from time to time, as men talk of far off things which can never come near themselves.

But gradually the terror grew on us, as time by time we heard of it nearer and nearer. It was in France, it was in Germany, it was in *England*, and (with wild affright) we began to hear a whisper pass '*It was in Ireland*'. ...

But to come to our household. Gradually we ceased to go out or hear what went on outside. The last evening we were out, we went to see the family of the Collector of Excise, Mr. Holmes. There was a large family, father, mother, grandmother, three or four sons, three daughters and a little grand-child. We left them all well at half past nine, and the next morning at nine o'clock we heard that Mr. Holmes, his mother, two sons, one daughter and the little child were dead *and buried*.

After that (which occurred on the sixth day of the cholera) we stayed pretty much in the house. There was a constant fumigation kept up, plates of salt, on which acid was poured from time to time, were placed outside all the windows and doors. Every morning as soon as we awoke a dose of whiskey *thickened* with ginger was given us all, in quantities according to our age. Gradually the street in

which we lived thinned out; by twos and threes our dead neighbours were carried away. One morning (the ninth day) four were carried at once dead out of the opposite house. Our neighbours on both sides died. On one side, a little girl called Sheridan was left alone sick, and we could hear her crying. I begged my Mother's leave to help her. She let me go with many tears. Poor Mary died in my arms an hour after and I returned home, and being well fumigated, was taken in and escaped.

Some descriptions of provisions became almost impossible to get. Milk most of all, as none of the country people could be induced to come near the doomed town. We had a cow and many persons (ladies whom we did not know except by sight) used to come and beg a little milk for their young children. The jugs used to be left on the doorstep, filled and taken away.

At night many tar barrels and other combustible matters used to be burned along the streets to cry and purify the air, and had a weird unearthly look, gleaming out in the darkness. The cholera carts and cots had bells which helped to add to the horror ...

Diarmuid Delargy – Experience of the Cholera in Ireland extracts



Early on the morning on the fourteenth day, my Mother heard a great commotion among the poultry in the back yard, and going out found several of them dead or dying. We came in and said it is time for us to go pack up. So we put up a few things, sent the cow to the meadow in the neighbourhood where there was water, begged the people near to milk her and make use of the milk, and at ten a.m. we (that is my father, mother, two brothers, myself and a servant) started on the mail coach for Ballyshannon, where some of my father's friends resided, who we were sure would receive us for a few days till we could get some place to live in. It was a damp drizzling morning and we felt very miserable as if we had a forewarning of what we had before us. All went well until we got within a mile of the village of Bundoran, about four miles from Ballyshannon, when the coach was met and stopped by a mob of men armed with sticks, scythes and pitchforks and

headed by a Doctor John Shields who was half mad. He was one of the first physicians and most respectable man in the country, but he did not take after his father. The coach was stopped, we were ordered out, our luggage taken off and no entreaties could prevail on those men to allow us to pass. Fear had maddened them. After long parlay and many threats of the vengeance of the Law, our coach was allowed to proceed, and we were left on the roadside sitting on our trunks cold, wet, hungry and well-nigh hopeless. My father feared to leave us to go look for assistance, but at the end of about an hour and a half, we saw my uncle's carriage. They had heard of our situation and had come out to try and get us in, and an old servant of the family who had a livery stable brought his chaise for the sake of old times.

We got into carriages, but when we came near Ballyshannon we found we would not be allowed to remain, and all we could get leave to do was to drive through the town. My uncle had an old friend in Donegal about twenty miles further on, a Miss Walker, and they advised our going there, and wrote to beg his friend would receive us for a little. Well on we went, my mother and children in the chaise, and my father, the servant and luggage in the open carriage. It was now raining as if Heaven and Earth had come together, and after driving about ten miles, my father took very ill. Our store of cholera medicines (without which no one moved a yard) were produced but no vessel to mix them in, so one of the drivers ran to a cabin near in the fields and begged the loan of a mug and a little water. The woman gave it but on being returned she broke it in pieces and when offered money said that if we left it on the roadside, she would take it up after a while, but feared to touch anything from our hands.

Diarmuid Delargy – we were fed and our feet were bathed



My father's illness was not cholera, but the result of cold, anxiety and exhaustion, and he was soon well enough to get on. We entered Donegal, but our arrival had been announced in some way and we found the square where we entered full of men, *howling* like devils. In a trice, ourselves and our luggage were taken (or rather tom) from the carriages, the luggage was piled up in the centre of the square, we placed on it and a cry went out *fire to burn the cholera people*; we thought our last hour was surely come and sat as quiet as we could and tried to be resigned to our fate. Fortunately the Officer in command of the regiment quartered in the town was a man of promptitude and humanity. The barrack gate opened into the square, and in an incredibly short time, he ordered out the men who surrounded us in the hollow square, and

faced the mob on all sides with fixed bayonets. We were now comparatively safe, but in what condition; we were cold, hungry, houseless and surrounded by a howling multitude who would not even allow us to go on. Presently a meeting of the Magistrates was held, – to decide on what was to be done with us (and I regret to have to tell it of a minister of Christ) the bitterest and least merciful among them against us was the rector of the parish. In the meantime some kind person sent us out a large jug of hot tea, and a loaf which we thankfully received and which was all the food five persons had that day till ten o'clock that night.

Diarmuid Delargy – and our cousins refused to open the doors



The Magistrates decided that we should not be allowed to pass, but be sent back by the way we came, escorted by the military to protect us from the fury of the mob. So our carriages were again packed and back we went with our escort, who left us about seven miles on the road. We now held a Council of War as to what was to be done, and the drivers advised that we should wait till dark and they would drive us by a back way to our cousin's house in Ballyshannon, where we were sure of shelter if we could get there. They walked the horses and about ten at night we arrived without detection and were warmly received by our cousins. We were fed and our feet bathed and beginning to feel quite comfortable when, behold! a great uproar in the street, and the voice of our old enemy Doctor John Shields, calling for us to be brought out. But we now had the best of it, and our cousins refused to open the doors. The noise continued, and presently the chief magistrates of the town and two doctors arrived, who civilly requested admittance. They were let in on promising to abstain from violence, and we had to submit to a medical examination. We were declared free from cholera so far, but the house was put into quarantine, and no one let out for some days. At the end of that time we abode in peace, till the plague was abated, and we could return to Sligo, where we found the streets grass-grown and 5/8ths of the population dead, and had great reason to thank God, who had spared us through such dangerous and trying times and scenes. Sligo was said to have suffered more than any town in Great Britain from Cholera.

5 June 1873, Caen, France

*Our artists, our farmers, our tradesmen are leaving,
To seek for employment far over the sea.
Where they'll get their riches with care and with industry,
There's nothing but hardship at home if you stay.*

The Emigrant's Farewell, Farewell to Old Ireland

Once I had a farm there with nothing much to spare.
There's nothing but hardship at home if you stay.
It's hard to be forced from the land that we live in.



Scalp of Brian Connor, *The Illustrated London News*, 22 December 1849 (From our own Correspondent.)

There is also something called a *scalp*, or hole dug in the earth, some two or three feet deep. In such a place was the abode of Brian Connor. He has three in family, and had lived in this hole several months before it was discovered. It was roofed over with sticks and pieces of turf, laid in the shape of an inverted saucer. It resembles, though not quite so large, one of the ant-hills of the African forests. Many of the people whose houses have been levelled take up their abodes in such places; and even in them there is a distinction of wretchedness.

Yet the instinctive love of life is so great, so strong is the sentiment by which Nature ensures the continuance of the race, that Brian Connor dreads nothing so much as that he shall not be allowed, now that his hut has been discovered, to burrow longer in security; and like a fox, or some other vermin, he expects to be unearthed, and left even without the shelter of what may be called a preparatory grave. The mud cabins and turf huts that the peasantry lived in before 1846 were denounced by every traveller as the scandal of civilised Europe; and it was supposed that worse habitations were not on the earth; but the Irish have proved that in their lowest deep there is still a lower deep – that a Scalpeen is worse than a mud-hut, and a Scalp worse than a Scalpeen.

Joe McGowan — *from Sligo Heritage*

The worst eviction [from Lissadell] that ever took place was that of the 'Seven Cartrons' [in Ballygilgan]. Those townlands were in the parish of Drumcliffe between Carney and Lissadell. In that area about one hundred families were evicted in the one operation by Sir Robert. Many of these poor people had their rents paid but the landlord wished to take over the land for a grazing ranch for his cattle. In order to get rid of them completely he got a ship to take them to America. Whole families went on this ship as they saw no hope for themselves had they remained.

Some did not go and they were lucky for the rotten old ship on which the unfortunate people were placed never reached America. All aboard were drowned when the ship sank on the way. The name of the ship was the Pomano and at the time there was a song composed by someone in this district about it. It was a living account and there were many verses. ...

*Bad luck to Captain Dodwell and likewise Jimmy Joe
My curse be on Sir Robert and that he may lie low
Our rent was paid we were not afraid
But still we were forced to go
When they banished the Roman Catholic
Aboard the Pomano. ...*

Reminiscent of the Highland Clearances in Scotland, when people were cleared to make way for sheep, the events of 1839 in Ballygilgan are well remembered. Having decided to make clearances on his newly acquired property Sir Robert secured the services of Captain Dodwell, who was even then notorious in the area for his ruthless evictions. Folk memory has it that the reason for the forced removals was that, 'Lissadell House was just built. Ballygilgan was too close to it' ...

Refusing the emigrant ship, it was quite common for people to seek refuge in what was called a 'scalp'. A hole, two to three feet deep, was dug in the earth, roofed over with pieces of sticks and turf, and in this burrow a family existed. Slightly larger was a scalpeen, a rather larger hole, often made within the ruins of a tumbled house. From both scalps and scalpeens, the evicted, when discovered, were remorselessly hunted out.

A local woman born in 1898, Maggie Mc Gowan, recalled seeing a family still living in one of these scalpeens in the early years of the 20th century. It was dug into a bank of earth and had no windows. A 'shakedown' of straw and rushes was used as there was no bed. ...

The clearances left a deep and painful scar that only in recent times has begun to heal. There is to this day a place near Ballygilgan known as 'Cats Corner'. It earned its name at the time of the evictions when, it is said, the cats of the area gathered there, also homeless. Desperate with hunger, their piteous cries could be heard for miles as they too sought vainly for something to eat or someone to feed them.

The existence of the coffin ship, the Pomano, which it is said carried the dispossessed families to a watery grave, is still the subject of controversy to this day. Apologists for the landlord regime claim it never happened, that a registered ship called the Pomana took some of the tenants overseas, made the return voyage, and plied the seas for many years afterwards. The ship we refer to, the Pomano, was unregistered. Variations of Pomono/Pomania/Pomano etc. were popular as ships names at the time, causing some confusion. ...

There is indeed no doubt in the minds of the people of the Lissadell/Maugherow district as to the chain of events that led to the tragedy. Etched into folk memory and

popularised in a forbidden ballad of the time, the story of this infamous coffin ship still survives. The song, banned by the Gore-Booths and their agents, was sung only in private houses, never publicly, for to be heard singing it, or gathered in a home or rambling place where it was sung, meant instant reprisal, eviction or worse:

*Many's the pleasant summer day I spent in
Maugherow,
And many a cold hard winter day at the handling of a
plough.
Our rent was paid, we were not afraid,
But still we were forced to go
When they banished the Seven Cartrons aboard of the
Pomano.*

*Many's the lad and pretty lass, that evening on the
shore,
Lamenting for their own sweethearts, they'd never see
them more.
They're sailing on the ocean to a place they do not
know
And they'll mourn tonight for their heart's delight
On board the Pomano.*

*The ship she was a rotten one, the truth to you I'll tell
And they struck her on the Corraun Rock, right under
Lisadell..*

Stories are still told by the older inhabitants of the cries of drowning men and women heard on the shore. In 1984 I spoke to Maugherow's oldest inhabitant, 103 years old Peter Harte. He told me of two women washed ashore who were nursed back to health, at nearby Knocklane, by local families, Feeney and Mc Loughlin. ...

Tanis Smith — Agony



*A home I have made
In the land of the stranger
And it's many's the long years
Since I've left Derry gay
The Tern and the Swallow*

A home I have made in the land of the stranger

Seamus Colreavy – The Famine

Taking to the fields of Roskeeragh
I see the hare
On the Alt
Statuesque
Surveying the centuries
He has seen the undine
The bare ridges
Knows the weakness
Of the human heart
And for the briefest of moments
I see the ribs on the Alt
Rise and fall
A sigh for the blackened stalks

*All I ask is a cairn
In the land of my father
Where Bann and Blackwater
Sweep down to Loch Neagh
The Tern and the Swallow*

A home I have made in the land of the stranger.
All I ask is a cairn in the land of my father.
The house we were reared in is but a stone on a stone.



Scalp at Cahuermore, *The Illustrated London News*, 29 December 1849
(From our own Correspondent.)

On arriving at the bog of Cahuermore, I alighted at the scalp shown in the Sketch ... Than this scalp, nothing could be more wretched. It was placed in a hole, surrounded by pools, and three sides of the scalp (shown in the Sketch) were dripping with water, which ran in small streams over the floor and out by the entrance. Yet, wretched as this hole is, the poor inhabitants said they would be thankful and content if the landlord would leave them there, and the Almighty would spare their lives. Its principal tenant is Margaret Vaughan, whose history has found its way before the public, and a more wretched history, even in this country of wretchedness, is scarcely to be found.

Des McFadden & Margaret Kilcoyne — *from*
Cards from Cat's Corner

Too much to be said
Much lost
Memories and truths seep
Into our DNA
Echoes of ghosts come in with the wrack
Wisdom we read in the sky as the geese pass over
While the hare and cormorant
On the shoreline
Pass messages between worlds

...

*They say she died in childbirth when Mary was born.
They say they were the spritely couple.
They say they always danced like young lovers.
Two older boys, Tom and John with all but a year
between them.
All three lost aboard the Pomano.*

...

They had little choice but to leave as Sir Robert and his henchmen prepared to clear the Seven Cartrons, the land he had acquired from Lord Lorton, in a deal done over the dinner table. It was 1833.

And as part of the plan to extend his demesne Sir Robert next wanted to create a new avenue to the big house. So that no visitors would have to look at 'the dirty houses and dirty children with hungry faces' who lined the road, and also, to please his wife who found the turf smoke offensive, the Seven Cartrons and those who lived there, dogs and cats and all had to be cleared.

The choice he gave them, a move to mountainy land in Ballintrillick or passage to America. But mountain land

far away from the sea was no good to people who did not know how to work it. And dreams of new beginnings pulled strong with the ebb of the tide.

...

A Dream

The bay, the bay
Away, we shall go
To bright pastures and even slant
A noble land
No scurry of the plant
All bright dreams bubbling across the foam
The harnessing of an eager chant
The weight of pocket for my children
Far from the rollicking big house rant
A new dusk to dream in
Vast space
To anoint the day with I token myself to new beginnings

...

*But he had stayed,
Stayed to work at the big house.
Stayed to work for Sir Robert.
Because they wanted him to stay.
Because he was the one who could work the stubborn
mare.
Stayed because he was the only one who could best
work the big plough.
Stayed because they needed him to stay.
Stayed because of Molly.*

...

They say that the screams of the drowning could be heard at Knocklane.

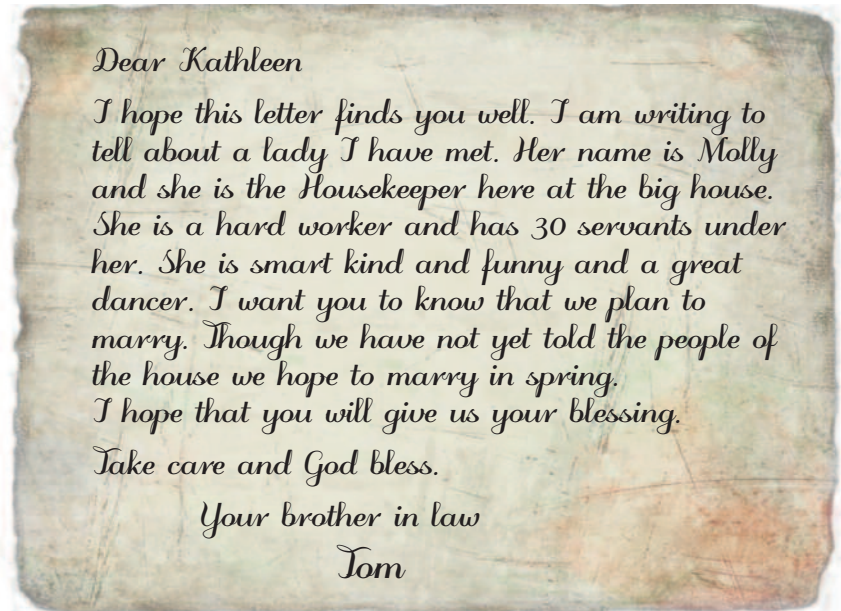
Screams from the **Pomano**. Not the *Pomania* or the *Pomono*, the **Pomano**.

He would walk to the old fort at Knocklane to look out toward Corraun Rock just past the light house where the souls of the Pomano were lost.

...

Molly was the housekeeper at the big house. They danced for the first time at one of the infrequent servants' balls. Here he would start to feel again.

...



...

They say he went a bit strange, that Sir Robert put a stop to the courting, a blood stained stone on the kitchen table. They say he would talk about taking revenge on Sir Robert, that he walked into the channel on the night of a blue moon.

...

Dead Night

The sea calls like an eager friend
I can smell the rot on my skin
The nets that will tie
to tally up the soft of me
Heart chamber now weary
I live in an omniscient box
No scales to set my fortune
Love has riddled me with a dishonourable hole
My yearning now sold to water
Her face a calming memory
The lapping waves warble and begin to stand tall
A brush of the lapwing
I
Am
Gone
...

Martina Gillan – Boggy Pool



*I am bidding you a long farewell, my Mary, kind and true,
But I'll not forget you, darling, in the land I am going to.
They say there's bread and work for all and the sun
shines ever there,
But I'll not forget old Ireland, were it twenty times as fair.*
The Lament of the Irish Emigrant

They say there's bread and work for all and the sun shines
ever there,

Robert Milne – Sweet Dernish Island, Adieu

Adieu, Adieu, Sweet Dernish Isle my heart shall ne'er forget.
The pleasant hours that by the shore in dreams I linger yet.
To all the friends who met me there with hearts so warm and
true,
To each and all a fond farewell
Sweet Dernish Isle, Adieu.

Adieu to thee, sweet sunny isle. In fancy, I'm once more.
A-sailing over thy sun-kissed waves to thy sweet verdant shore.
I see the boat upon the strand the silvery wavelet too,
O'er which we sailed that summer day
Sweet Dernish Isle, Adieu.

Farewell, the pathway through the grove.
In brightest green array, where wildflowers bloom on every
side
Whose fragrance filled the shade.
Those happy hours where the roses bloom,
sweet flowers of every hue, where true and loving hearts abide
Sweet Dernish Isle, Adieu.

Those merry hearts of Dernish Isle will be to memory dear,
Who drained their glasses, brimming o'er with nectar and good
cheer,
Those lads and lassies, bright and gay, who tripped the dances
through.
To each and all a fond farewell,
Sweet Dernish isle, Adieu.

Although I write this fond farewell in sweet poetic strain,
Mayhap I'll visit Dernish Isle in future years again.
If so, God grant that every heart may greet me with a smile,
When I go down to see my friends,
On lovely Dernish Isle.

IV. 'accept the dank reality of returning to the earth'

Eibhlín Dubh Ní Chonaill
— from *Caoineadh Airt Uí Laoghaire*

*A mhná so amach ag gól
stadaidh ar bhur gcois
go nglaofaidh Art Mhac Conchúir deoch,
agus tuilleadh thar cheann na mbocht,
sula dtéann isteach don scoil —
ní ag foghlaim léinn ná port,
ach ag iompar cré agus cloch.*

*I watched last night the rising moon,
Upon a foreign strand,
The memories came like flowers in June,
Of home and father land.*

The Moon behind the Hill

They say there's bread and work for all and the sun shines
ever there.
I watched last night the rising moon upon a foreign strand.
It's hard to be forced from the land that we live in.

Martina Gillan — Knocknarea



*I learned to be very handy, to use both the shovel and
spade,
I learnt the whole art of canalling-I think it an excellent
trade.
I learned to be very handy, although I was not very tall,
I could handle the sprig of shillelah, with the best man
on the canal.*

Paddy on the Canal

I learned to be very handy, to use both the hammer and
spade.

Dermot Healy — A Funeral
in memory of Jimmy Foley

Twelve shovels
dug the grave;
the same twelve
fill it in.
It takes the length
of a rosary.
All together
tap the dab,
kick muck
off a heel,
toss old bones
into a bag.
The shovels
work like oars
rowing the dead man
from this world
to the next.
Then the lights
go back
to the West.

Mary Branley — *Sé Do Bheatha a Mhuire*

There was something
in the way they said the rosary,
rhythmic reach and pull
as if we were sitting in a currach
skimming the waves
Sé do bheatha a Mhuire
lift and drop
Atá lán de ghrásta
rattle and whist
of the *máidí raimhe*
Tá an Tiarna leat
arms outstretched
in a perfect arc
is beannaithe thú idir mná
the pull to the heart
and overlap *na peacaigh anois*
and at the sacred hour
tabhair dom do lámha
row me across to Inis Meáin
ar dhuirling bán
row with all your love
to bring me *slán abhaile*.

Caragh Maxwell – Lazarine

First, you have to die.

Let the nothingness rush the light from your eyes and
bury you from the neck up.
Listen to the thudding of footsteps above like knuckles
on the front door.
Do not resist the inability to answer.
Let gravity stick your limbs to the pine and sink your
tongue back into your head.

Stay dead for a little while.

Inhabit the lairs of earthworms and mushrooms.
Forget what life smells like.
Notice the mourners lessen.
Accept the dank reality of returning to the earth.
Grow comfortable with the encroachment of decay.

Get bored.

Start to dig.

Kick your way out of the box and revel in the
splintering of wood.
Follow the crumbling fresh-footed soil, heaving limbs up
toward the horizon.
Break ground to feel fat globs of rain on your fingertips.
Hear the voices of your Marys and Marthas.
Grip their hands, let them upright you.

As you take your second-first lungful of air,
notice how much you missed it.
Rub the loam from your eyelashes.
Blow the silt from your nostrils.
Stretch.

Scream.

Puke up sod and slugs and spiders.
Exorcise the blackened remains of who you were before.
Stare at the sky and don't look away, even when your
corneas burn.
Shake Death from the crooks of your elbows and the
backs of your knees.

Step forward.

Start again.

Tommy Weir — Cillín Sessuegarry, Sligo



Marion Dowd — Baby Hare

His pupils had collected a basket of words given to them by neighbours, which his black pen tipped neatly onto a page in 1935. Pocharrion, puth dearg, push-a-haw, push-a-han, putch-ar-on. Repeated because the source word must have been unfamiliar to him, the original Irish chewed up and spat out in varying forms. Now, over eighty years later, the root word was unfamiliar to me too. With fair but fading book-Irish, I twisted and turned the sounds trying to seek out the mother form. Unsuccessful, I turned to one better versed in the tongue. He proffered *patachán*, meaning leveret or young rabbit. But that didn't quite make sense. Old dictionaries were in agreement, but also offered 'plump little creature' and 'weak young boy'. At first these seemed more likely, but as the weeks passed, leveret took hold. Leveret: a way of creating distance between a never-child and the community. A word that diluted a father's shame for allowing his newborn to die unbaptised; a word that absorbed some of the mother's grief. Less awful to pass a fairy fort encircling the bodies of lithe leverets, than a waste field choked with dead babies. *Patachán*, a word used in parts of 1930s Louth for babies who died before baptismal waters had cleansed their souls. These little lost leverets, soaked in original sin, were buried in unconsecrated ground, stranded forever in the grey nothingness and nowhere of limbo.

Tommy Weir — Cillín Carrownamadoo, Sligo



Seán Golden — Vestiges

At times, still, a memory of taste and aroma flashes through my palate — the porridge I ate with my grandfather — a sweet and nutty apotheosis of early childhood in the home place, a ghost memory, like a ghost limb. I was adult when I returned to the empty house to live. Straight off I made my way in to town to purchase porridge at Monica Duff's. The taste did not match the memory. In vain I tasted every brand on the shelves. Not one matched the ghost taste. I remarked my disappointment to a neighbour had known him. She paused, puzzled, then realised, 'Of course. It was Indian Meal your grandfather'd be eating. It was cheaper. They don't stock that anymore. It was feed for the animals'. A hundred years on, even I had consumed the legacy of the Famine. Nostalgia soured by the despotism of fact, like the infant buried in the haggard, my unnamed stillborn uncle.

V. 'on the waves of the silvery tide'

Dermot Healy — *from* Mayday

The beach, this May Day morning, is littered with clumps of seaweed like foliage fallen from trees, tiny handfuls of dark pods, strips of blue cabbage, yellow husks, shredded inky-blue lettuce, a gnawed cob, clusters of hard berries. A mermaid's purse. Branches of white berries spray out from her thin white curved spine. This is what has been prepared overnight. And topping each clump, a single mauve flower. The smell is centuries old. In the crevices of the rocks are clusters of tiny mussels. The sand between the stones is filled with bright damp fringes of green. And there are pools into which the seaweed sinks, fans out and returns to its true cinnamon self, the pods glisten, the warm moss shifts a little, pods fill with water and air, and everywhere are the roots of seaweed like thigh bones stripped of meat by marauding dogs. A stench of corpses rises. From the cliffs the acid smell of gannet excrement. There's knotted marble, fissures of warped white granite, shoulder blades arch out of the sand, and the tongues of seaweed become mourning tresses on the rocks.

A seafall.

*A Stór Mo Chroí, in the stranger's land
There's plenty of wealth and wailing
Though gems adorn the rich and grand
There are faces with hunger paling*

A Stór Mo Chroí

Soon I learned to be very handy, to use both the hammer and spade.

In the stranger's land there is plenty of wealth and wailing.

The house we were reared in is but a stone on a stone.

Martina Gillan — Ben Bulben



*I've travelled far from this great land from the east
and to the west
but of all the islands I have seen I love my own the
best
and if ever I return again there's one place I will go
it will be my lovely Leitrim where the Shannon
water's flow*

Lovely Leitrim

*I've travelled far from this great land from the east and
to the west.*

Leland Bardwell – Seasons

Autumn

Weeds through the curragh's ribs
Grass on the jinnet's hames
Rust on the tall ship's anchor
God's acre splits
Cow moans, tumbles
Kestrel defines the wind
Arranged in this landscape
I await the wound of winter
The coming of the geese

Spring

The moon aligns the sun
The ocean gathers
The weeds search for light
The ring of the eye expands
The scar of the torrent knits
The boulders flatten
The hares rut
The rhisomes shiver
The loam breathes
The earthworms sing

Gregory Daly – On the Waves of the Silvery Tide (photos by Dickon Whitehead)

The Orcadian writer George Mackay Brown often included in his novels and stories those who made a meagre living from beachcombing. Scavengers along shoreline and beach, they collected what might be of use to the crofters and fisherfolk of their coastal communities. The finds are exchanged for the price of a drink or a loaf of bread. Favoured only by storms, the beachcombers live outside the concept of equality, they exist in a liminal space, an unsettled zone.

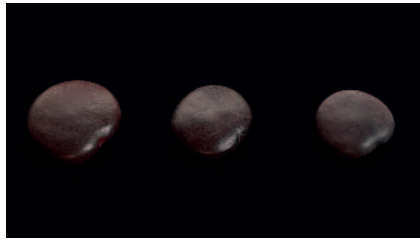
And yet, as they set off on bright mornings, their day is not without hope of salvage, for who can tell what will be cast up by the unpredictable throw of the waves. There is something deeply appealing in this vagabond class, these marginal, solitary figures. For beachcombing is essentially a solitary pursuit, requiring a concentration made impossible by the concerns and preoccupations of happier lives. It can only be abandoned when darkness falls.

The following is a selection of once living objects collected over many years from the coast of Maugherow. *Tra Bui*, Rosskeeragh, Ardtermon, Ballyconnell are all locations that repay close attention. The finds are all related to natural history and none have the more practical use that the characters from Orkney would especially look for. They do however have a rare beauty which Dickon Whitehead's wonderful photographs so skilfully convey.

The currents which bear them shorewards are the only fixed elements of their afterlives, exposing them briefly before windblown sand, tideflow or the path of the beachcomber claims them. It is within this restless space they occur, the demarcation between land and sea, the last

common ground we still have.

A drift seed from the West Indies and tropical America which is carried via the Gulf Stream and the North Atlantic Drift to these shores. It comes from



Sea Heart, Sea Bean (*Entada gigas*)

the seed pod of a climbing plant which can reach high into the tree canopy. It was greatly prized in the past as a good luck charm, especially in relation to childbirth. Folklore associated with it was particularly rich on the Outer Hebrides and it was known on Barra and South Uist as *Cnó Mhuire* or Virgin Mary bean. The people who revered it in the past may have had little scientific knowledge of its origins, but sensed the enormous wonder of it, the exceptional presence of it among the familiar cornucopia of the shore. The good luck now is in finding it at all, for one could search for a lifetime without success.



Horse Eye Bean (*Macuna Sloanei*)

From Tropical America by the Gulf Stream and North Atlantic Drift. Also from a climbing plant. Its name comes from the black band at the centre which gives it the look of a horse's eye. On the Isle of Barra it was also called *sùil an asail*.

It takes a great deal of luck and the eye of a falcon to spot this small grey nut on a pebble or shell strewn beach. From Florida and the West Indies. Like all drift seeds it is light and bouyant, well able for long ocean voyages. It was



Nicker Nut (*Caesalpinia Bonduc*)

also esteemed as an intimation of well-being. How remarkable is that convergence of chance and circumstance, of time and place and the falling of the eye. Remarkable that journey out of the Tropics, perhaps of many years,

from the edge of the horizon to Maugerow.

Shearwaters range over astonishing distances of ocean; from Europe to South America to Newfoundland and back again to Europe. Coming to land only to breed, they nest in burrows on remote uninhabited islands. Most intriguing is their voice, which R.L. Praeger described as a cross between a cock crowing and a donkey braying. Coming ashore only at night, the deeper darkness preferred, the air vibrates with their wild raucous cries. They terrified even the most hardened of the Vikings.



Manx Shearwater

Their loud cries consisted of four articulations like 'kuk, kuk, ah, oo' — 'kuk, ah, oo,' repeated by numbers of birds in the most tragic tones; but while some uttered them in a deep voice, others adopted a higher and more plaintive key, as if in mimicry of their neighbours. (from Ussher and Warren, *The Birds of Ireland*, 1900).

A whole world of space and sound once dwelt in this small skull.

The word petrel is derived from St Peter who once walked on the water. Storm petrels flit, skip, weave and glide in the troughs of the waves, never more than a few inches from the surface of the water. Despite their tiny size they are dauntless



Storm Petrel

ocean travellers of great distance. They nest in dry stone walling on Innismurray and their voice is a deep, wheezy churr or purr of great comfort to those who hear it. In his poem 'Stormpetrel' Richard Murphy describes it as:

*Pulse of the rock
you throb till daybreak on your cryptic nest
a song older than fossils
ephemeral as thrift
it ends with a gasp*

There was a complete skeleton once, but so fragile it melted away leaving only this delicate skull.



Shag

We have them all year round, close to shore, standing on rocks and skerries with wings open, drying in the breeze. There is something almost domestic in this wing drying, something more to do with land than sea. Or we see

them off Ballyconnell with tilted head and bill, making graceful, looped dives for underwater prey. They are faithful to the sea, never coming inland like the cormorants. They breed on Innismurray and around the

coast of Maugherow. Their hoarse sounding cries like some badly made brass instrument are anything but musical.



Gannet

High in the air with measured wingbeats we see them. They fall like hail into the waves for mackerel located from far above. The birds off the coast of Maugherow are most likely from the great colonies of north-west Scotland. They were known in Scotland as *Solan geese*, a name that might echo the Gaelic word for eye: *súil*. This bleached, powerful, dagger like-bill is all that remains of a creature once so wonder-fully alive.

Purple, white and violet these shells are so fine they crumble at the touch. With a bubble raft of air attached, their weightlessness is assured. On the surface of the sea they offer no resistance. They prey on fellow travellers like By-The-Wind-Sailors.

The worst that can befall *Janthina* is to find itself on solid ground, an alien rigidity, deprived of its airlight ocean existence, a gift for the beachcomber.



Violet Sea Snail (*Janthina janthina*)



Seal Skull

Seals are music lovers. It is said that a good singer or musician can lure them ashore. Call from a cliff above them and they will answer back. Their cries and chants from sea caves and promontories are often heard on the wind. People arouse

their curiosity and suspicion. Folklore concerning them is extensive wherever people live by the sea. They take human form only if separated from their sealskins and constantly dream of returning. to the sea. They can be seen on the rocks near Innismurray enjoying the sunny days. At a time when a new wave of persecution is proposed for these creatures as a response to dwindling fishstocks, encountering them has a deeper significance.



Mermaids' Purses

Sharks, dogfish, skate and ray all begin life in these lovely cases. Entwined in the seaweeds that sway and twist offshore, they break free after the fish depart. They can be found all around the Maugherow coast, for no matter how tangled, how firmly fixed to their seaweed anchors they seem to belong as much to the shore as the sea.

The acorn barnacles on this crab are not bound to the rock. Shell on shell, and transient like the human

habitation on the mainland, some are already deserted. In time, both the barnacles and their host will be the sand that covers the walls and fields of Maugherow.

Like the rings on an old tree, these fish rings spell out their own time.



Shore Crab



Fish Vertebra

Mick Geelan – Bitter Winds of Streedagh (text and photos)

*The bitter wind is high tonight
It lifts the white locks of the sea
In such wild winter storm no fright
Of savage Viking troubles me*

The above lines were written in Irish by an Innismurray monk in the margin of a ninth century manuscript, but that same wind that gave him a little assurance, has for centuries terrorised both sailors and cottiers all along the west coast of Ireland.

The quiet beauty of Streedagh strand is such that, in recent years, it has attracted the attentions of several film companies as a location for their film scenes. At low tide, the vast expanse of sandy beach extends for almost three miles. But the loveliness of those golden sands belies the tragedies that are hidden beneath their surface.

The story of the Spanish Armada and the trials and tribulations of Francisco de Cuéllar are well documented over the last 40 years although prior to Bernard McDonagh's book on the subject in 1978, there was very little talk on the matter around these parts. McDonagh's book tells de Cuéllar's narrative of the wrecking of the three ships – *La Juliana*: 65 sailors, 290 soldiers; *La Lavía*: 71 sailors, 271 soldiers; and the *Santa Maria de Visión*: 38 sailors and 183 soldiers – at Streedagh strand in the autumn of 1588. Along with the official complement of 918 men the three ships would also have had many survivors picked up from other stricken ships making the total at well over 1000 men. Most were drowned with their ships. Others who attempted to swim ashore were pulled under by the weight of their own clothes. The fact that

they had sewed coins and jewels into the lining didn't help. De Cuéllar claims around 300 made it ashore alive only to be stripped naked by the natives and the English soldiers and robbed of their clothes and whatever gold they had hidden in them.

He also tells an interesting little aside about a man called Don Diego Enriques 'the hunchback' who was camp master in charge of the Levant Squadron of which the three Streedagh ships were a part. Don Diego, along with three other rich gentlemen on board the *Juliana* with de Cuéllar decided to save their own skins and had themselves closed into the sealed hold of the ship's boat along with 16,000 ducats and launched into the sea, in the hope that the smaller boat would be washed ashore. Unfortunately for them over seventy other poor wretches, who they had left behind on the stricken ship, jumped on to the deck of the leaving boat which immediately capsized with the extra weight. All were drowned except the four within and the following day when the upturned boat was broken into, Don Diego who was the only one left alive, was pulled from the wreck but died shortly after. The Levant Squadron were seven merchant ships which had serviced the Adriatic coast and were totally unsuited to the wild Atlantic weather. The Streedagh ships were not wrecked on the rocks but having lost their anchors, were simply blown into shallow water where they breached and foundered. Only one of the Levant ships made it back to Spain.

Of the three hundred or so who made it ashore, the English Captain Bingham, who was in charge of the Sligo garrison, boasted that he and his men had 'killed six score Spaniards'. Bodies littered the Streedagh beach for weeks afterwards. Some were killed by the natives, some by the English soldiers, most of them were drowned but all were naked.

When we think of the conditions of the Irish in the sixteenth century which de Cuéllar vividly describes, it can be assumed that the clothes were indeed more valuable to the natives than Spanish gold which was deemed to be the property of the crown and would have been very hard to spend. Clothes, on the other hand, could mean life itself to a people who lived in straw huts and often had to hide in the woods for half the winter.

After many trials and setbacks, de Cuéllar and a good contingent of the other survivors made it as far the Mac Clancy castle in Leitrim where he found the men to be 'very rough and badly dressed' and the women to be 'gentle and very beautiful in the extreme'. He went on to describe their dress and said, 'the women wore only a chemise and when going outside covered their heads with a folded cloth'. After spending several months at sea this apparel may have contributed to their beauty in the eyes of the Spanish sailors. De Cuéllar was too much of a gentleman to say so, but, judging by the number of dark haired, dark-complexioned people living around our North West coast to this very day, the women obviously had similar feelings about the Spaniards.

I suppose I had this great story in my head when sometime in the early eighties, while bringing the dog for a walk on the beach, I first saw the rotting black timbers sticking up from the sand. I made the same mistake as many a 'blow in' before and after me and believed I had found an Armada ship. After doing much research late into the night, in at least three different local pubs, I eventually found out that this was 'the Butter-Boat'. I was told, with some conviction, that this was a ship which bought Irish butter and traded between Ireland and Scotland. Little was known about how it got this far down the west coast except that perhaps it was heading for Sligo or Killybegs.

As time went on much more interest began to develop in the Armada. There was still no GPS in the boats around here or any of the technology we have today, but local fishermen knew the sea and one in particular, deemed to be quite mad by some, knew where the Spanish armada lay. When Stephen Birch came with his British salvage team in 1985, the first man he talked to was Paddy 'Prince' Brady. Soon we were hearing stories of British 'crab fishermen' who had taken a great interest in the waters off Streedagh. It didn't take long, in a tight-knit coastal community, before the word was out that they were in fact a salvage team looking for the Spanish ships and had Paddy Brady as their guide.

Although the government was in the process of amending the legislation, *The Protection of Monuments Act* as it was in 1985, did not include our maritime heritage. The Streedagh wrecks came under the Irish salvage law which stated that some items had to be recovered and declared to the Receiver of Wrecks in order for the wreck to be claimed. This was done by the salvage team when they took three bronze cannon ashore at Streedagh and a lengthy court battle with the Irish Government ensued. The new amendment was put in place in 1987 and the salvage team duly received compensation. The National Museum had inadequate facilities at the time to conserve such items and the wrecks remained on the seabed. The cannon are now on display at the Collins Barracks Museum in Dublin.

Monitoring of the site for the next thirty years revealed that the Armada artefacts had again been buried in the sand. However the winter storms of 2014-15 washed up a number of items which led to a renewed surge of interest in the Streedagh wrecks, including the Butter-Boat. A survey was carried out by the Underwater Archaeology

Unit and it was found that the wreck of the *Juliana* was again exposed. Action was needed to protect the exposed items and there was great excitement when nine cannon were brought ashore in Mullaghmore by a dive team headed by underwater archaeologist Fintan Moore.

Those same storms that had exposed the Armada wrecks also cleared much of the sand that had for years covered the Butter-Boat. I was again walking the dog at Streedagh (different dog this time) when I got talking to Limerick marine historian John Treacy.



John was closely inspecting the hull of the butter-boat with some locals from The Grange Armada Society. He then explained to me that the Armada ships carried stone ballast and he was looking for traces of pig-iron ballast which would prove that this boat was a much later vessel than the Armada ships. He then showed me where stones from the *Juliana* ballast had come ashore which he could identify by the shape of the stones and the fact that they were made from a type of rock which was not found around here. Following this some samples were taken from the oak timbers of the Butter-Boat and its history was eventually traced.

It was revealed to be 'The Greyhound' or 'Greyhound of Whitby' which was primarily a trading vessel which also



carried some passengers. It left the port of Whitby in the autumn of 1770 with a crew of around ten bound for Limerick. Not much more is known except that she sailed up the west coast probably heading for Galway. We don't know her cargo but it may have been alum, whalebone or coal, all of which were being carried from Whitby to the rest of the British Isles at that time. In December of that same year she ran into a storm on the coast of Mayo and was forced to take refuge in Broad Haven Bay for repairs. We know that she picked up some passengers there and was on her way to Killybegs when she ran into another storm in Donegal bay and was driven on to the rocks at Streedagh Point. As the ship started to break up the passengers and crew were all lost in an attempt to get ashore. The captain however, a Mister Williams, stayed with his stricken vessel and when it was eventually



washed up on to the beach at Streedagh he was able to get off safely.

The following is an account collected in Master Burke's class at Grange school 25 November 1937 by the folklore commission and is taken here from their schools collection. The account was obtained from Michael McGowan Streedagh aged about 75 and collected by pupil Kathleen McGowan.

About two hundred years ago a ship was wrecked off Streedagh point which is about two and a half miles from Grange Co Sligo. The boat is supposed to have been a tourist boat from England.

It was a stormy night and the boat was driven against the point by the storm.

When the boat struck the rocks off the point, the passengers and crew, with the exception of one man who remained on the ship, clambered up on the rocks and tried to reach land. But they fell into a hole between two rocks and were drowned.

During the night the waves washed the boat up on the shore where it sank in the sand. Then when the tide went out the man who remained on the ship got off safely.

He saw light in a house which was nearby in Streedagh and when he came to the house he found that a wake was going on in that house.

When he told the people what happened they left the wake and went down to the shore where the ship was and they carried away as much as possible of the valuables that were on the wrecked vessel. They knew that if this was not done the waves would bring them out to sea again.

Afterwards the one survivor went back to England again.

The remains of the ship are still to be seen stuck in the sands at Streedagh.

I thought it strangely ironic that the Butter-Boat Captain, a genuine seaman and certainly a brave one, who stayed

with his ship, was saved, while the Duke and his cohorts who went to great lengths to save their own skins were not. And the reason it was called 'The Butter-boat'? According to one old lady who said she got the story from the old granny in a local house she had worked in as a girl, 'it was because it was shaped like a pat of country butter'.

Mick Geelan – Streedagh Sky

There is a mist on the horizon
Over Streedagh strand today
There is an eerie effervescence
In the clouds above the bay.
I feel the darkness falling
As I walk along the shore
And I meet the ghosts of other men
Who walked these sands before.

I see three tall ships approaching
Away out in the bay
And a squall that left them floundering
And blew them off their way
I see swarthy dark haired sailors
Engulfed by monstrous waves
And an English soldier laughing
As they find a watery grave.

I see peasants gathering flotsam
Up and down along the shore
Stripping poor drowned sailors
To steal the cloths they wore
But there are some who tend the wounded
And help them on their way
In spite of cruel Bingham
Whose men patrol the bay.

There's a ghostly moon now rising
As I wander home again
And I wonder was I dreaming
Of those long-lost ancient men.
Those men whose bones are buried
In a thousand unmarked graves
And whose spirits long will wander
Over Streedagh's thundering waves.

Imogen O'Connor – Streedagh's Ghosts

I rock our baby and I hold her tight
Singing Daddy be safe through this stormy night.
Rocks and salt air, sea and sand,
Darling may your ship find land.

I'm a fisherman's daughter and a fisherman's wife,
The sea was our love and seafaring our life
'Till our noble King Phillip declared a Holy War
And my love was commandeered to fight for his Lord.

*Sailor, riding the wild sea,
In my dreams I hear you calling, calling me
But each dawn I wake, another piece of me dies
With not even your ghost to lie cold at my side.*

I begged my love flee for his life to save,
I said, 'no good will come of this parting day'
He said, 'but stay or go, the outcome's the same:
A deserter's death or a hero's grave'.

It's a year since he sailed for those British Isles
And he'll never know now that I've borne us a child
For his Santa Maria did sink in sight of land,
And its wreckage lies scattered over Streedagh Strand.

*Sailor, riding the wild sea,
In my dreams I hear you calling me
But each dawn I wake, another piece of me dies
With not even your ghost to lie cold at my side.*

So, I'll turn my back on the sea and the strand,
And I'll go to Seville to work the land.
But when our daughter is wed, I'll return to the sea
And off Sligo's shores, I'll lie once more with thee
Once more with thee

Chorus

Leland Bardwell — Nothing Else
for Nicholas McLachlan

Cloonagh, below the sweep
of Ardtrasna, a pocket unfilled
where the hill rises. Tra Bhan
the beach where the barge buckled
in '95 and bothered us
with possibilities. Tra Bhan
no longer white but sheeted over
with shloch and erannach and rock
limestone steps to the blow-hole
under the alt, is the end of the road
and nothing else.

Above this crescent
I share my house with time
and nothing else
gaze at the pictures of my children
who have treated me well
for my imagination
but pass me by as the wind passes the house
and takes its sigh with it.

Imogen O'Connor — Sonnet for Mide, My
Mother

The passing seasons rise and fall in rhyme,
A birth, a death, a knife, a babe at breast,
This choir that chants Eternity in Time
Sings on above ancestors laid to rest.
She played her role in this great Cosmic Game,
A child of those who fought for Ireland's sake.
She wed an English with an Irish name
And built a bridge for love, her roots did break.
A life, she lived with hindered mind and limb,
But trembling feet begat a steadfast heart
Which sings in me its own especial hymn
And she the dust which feeds the dancing grass.
Nor have I need for boot or shield or sword
To walk barefoot by cairns on Carrowmore.

Jackie Marren – Love and Light



Brendan Marren – Remembering

You remember everything but I tend to forget
The places and the faces where we've been and who we met
From the heartland that we cherished to the headland of regret
You can still remember while I seem to forget
Rocks and sandy beaches pathways to our hearts
Slid into an ocean an erosion from our charts
Memories a slipway and a grip I cannot get
The more that you remember the more I seem to forget

Chorus

*Gabions of memories we took long to collect
Unravelling on the shoreline we thought they would protect
Life without its memories a film without a set
All once well remembered now I just forget*

Moored in bays of shelter safe from wind and rain
Pearls and pools of passion to anchor and sustain
From storm and tide we'd cling and hide our compass firmly set
For a destiny called you and me never to forget
Harvesting treasures of love in time and space
But sands they drift move and shift as footprints they erase
Trawling and recalling yields up an empty net
As all so well remembered now I just forget

Chorus

I danced to all life's rhythms in steps that were my own
Now I stand and take your hand to lead me where I'm going
And leaving home without you I break into a sweat
For you to find I leave behind the things that I forget
In your face I still can trace a place where I belong
The words to all my poetry the music to my song
As colours of my pictures merge in paint forever wet
In shades of blue I leave to you the memories I forget

Chorus

Jonathan Cassidy — Praise God —
Blackthorn Blossoms



*Tá bunadh a' tí 'na lúí
'S tá mise liom féin
Tá na coiligh ag glaoch
'S tá 'n saol ina gcodladh ach mé
Tá Mé Mo Shuí*

I've travelled far from this great land from
the east and to the west.

Tá bunadh a' tí 'na lúí is tá mise liom féin.

Coda

Seán Golden — Emigration Songs

It's hard to be forced from the land that we live in.
Will I ever see my darling any more?
The house we were reared in is but a stone on a stone.

Once I had a farm there with nothing much to spare.
There's nothing but hardship at home if you stay;
It's hard to be forced from the land that we live in

A home I have made in the land of the stranger.
All I ask is a cairn in the land of my father;
The house we were reared in is but a stone on a stone.

They say there's bread and work for all and the sun shines ever
there.

I watched last night the rising moon upon a foreign strand;
It's hard to be forced from the land that we live in.

I learned to be very handy, to use both the hammer and spade.
In the stranger's land there is plenty of wealth and wailing;
The house we were reared in is but a stone on a stone.

I've travelled far from this great land from the east and to the west.
Tá bunadh a' tí 'na lúí is tá mise liom féin.

It's hard to be forced from the land that we live in;
The house we were reared in is but a stone on a stone.

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Jonathan Cassidy's 'Praise God - Blackberry Blossoms', oil on canvas, 50 cm x 50 cm, by kind permission of the artist; his artwork is on view at <<https://www.jonathancassidy.ie/>>.

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updated version of *The Journey of Francisco de Cuellar* is available in The Spanish Armada Museum in Grange; see <<https://www.duchas.ie/en/cbes/4701661/4690384>> for Michael McGowan's story.

Martina Gillan's 'Interior Window', oil on canvass, 41 cm square; 'Knocknarea', oil on canvass, 30.5 cm square; 'Ben Bulbin', oil on canvass, 30.5 cm square; 'Aethnic Shadows', oil on canvass, 30.5 cm square; 'The Boggy Pool', oil on canvas, 20 cm square; by kind permission of the artist; her artwork is on view at Hamilton Gallery <<https://hamiltongallery.ie/search?q=Gillan>>

Seán Golden's 'I saw the pig', 'Vestiges' and 'Emigration Songs' by kind permission of the author; quotations from Herbert A. Giles, *Chinese without a Teacher*. Shanghai: Kelly & Walsh, Limited, [First Edition 1872] Ninth Edition 1931; *The Civilization of China*. New York: Henry Holt and Company; London: Williams and Norgate, 1911; *San Tzu Ching. Elementary Chinese. Translated and Annotated by Herbert A. Giles*. [Taipei:] Confucius Publishing Company, 1910 (original first edition 1900; Shanghai, Kelly & Walsh, 1900)]; 'Emigration Songs' is a constrained text: each verse is taken from a traditional emigration song and fitted to the form of a villanelle.

Malcolm Hamilton's '1 Home Coming', '2. First Settlers', '3. New arrivals', '4 Expectant Mothers', 'Rough Study 1, 2, 3, 4' by kind permission of the author.

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Una Mannion's 'Crouched Burial' by kind permission of the author; this poem won the 2017 Hennessy Literary Award for Emerging Poetry; more of her work is on view at <<https://www.unamannion.com/writing>>

Brendan Marren's song 'Remembering' by kind permission of the author.

Jackie Marren's 'Love and Light', acrylic on canvas, 30 cm by 40 cm, by kind permission of the artist, for Peter Milne and Bernie Marron.

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Póilín McGowan's 'Winds of Change', oil and mixed media on board, 28 x 28 inches, by kind permission of the artist; her artwork is on view at The Open Door Gallery & Studio, Rathcormack Craft Village, Co. Sligo, <<https://www.facebook.com/opendoorgalleryandstudio/>>.

Joe McGowan's extracts from 'Sligo Heritage' by kind permission of the author; see <<https://www.sligoheritage.com/archpomano.htm>>.

Robert Milne's 'Sweet Dernish Island, Adieu' was sent to Martina Gillan by a relative whose twin brother stayed on the island and was one of the last to leave, who had married in the US and never returned but sang the song to her children. Gillan met the son Richard Cole about 13 years ago when he was about 70. The poem was written by Robert Milne (local poet) who was a friend of the bride and groom for their marriage.

There is a complete text and translation of Eibhlín Dubh Ní Chonaill's *Caoineadh Airt Uí Laoghaire* available at <http://www.millstreet.ie/blog/2011/01/15/nora-ni-shindile>.

Imogen O'Connor's 'Sonnet for Mide, My Mother' and 'Streedagh's Ghost' by kind permission of the author; a video clip of 'Sonnet for Mide, My Mother' is available on YouTube at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NpLnu-GDYqA>; videos of her songs may be viewed at <<https://www.youtube.com/user/imogenoconnor1/>>.

Information about the Pomano by Joe McGowan is available at

<https://www.sligoheritage.com/archpomano.htm>; by Leo Leyden at <http://demo.sligoecoco.ie/text/media/SligoCDB/Downloads/HiddenHistories.pdf>; see also <https://www.duchas.ie/en/cbes/4701667/4691366/4713838>; and <https://www.irishtimes.com/opinion/letters/drowning-of-sligo-tenants-legend-or-history-1.410972>.

Fionn Rogers' photos of Bettina Seitz' *Underwave* installation for Tread Softly 2020 by kind permission of the artists; his work is on view at <http://fionnrogers.ie/>; videos of *Underwave* are on view at <www.treadsoftly.ie>; her artwork is on view at <http://www.bettinaseitz.eu/>.

Tanis Smith's 'Agony', oil on canvas, 40 x 30 inches, by kind permission of the artist; his artwork is on view at The Open Door Gallery & Studio, Rathcormack Craft Village, Co. Sligo, <<https://www.facebook.com/opendoorgalleryandstudio/>>.

The complete text of Charlotte Stoker's *Experience of the Cholera in Ireland 1832* is available at *The Green Book: Writings on Irish Gothic, Supernatural and Fantastic Literature*, no. 9, 2017, pp. 11-18. JSTOR, www.jstor.org/stable/48536136.

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Dickon Whitehead's photos of Gregory Daly's beachcombing collection by kind permission of the artist; his work is on view at <https://www.dickonwhitehead.com/>.

Historical Ordnance Survey Maps may be consulted at <http://geohive.maps.arcgis.com/apps/webappviewer/index.html?id=9def898f708b47f19a8d8b7088a100c4>; see <<https://www.ucd.ie/t4cms/Support4.pdf>> for more detailed information about the historical Ordnance Survey Maps.

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Here ends 'Maugherow beneath the blowing sands', published in Sligo by Tiger Print for Tread Softly Publishing in a limited edition, using the Caslon font that Elizabeth Corbet 'Lolly' Yeats chose for the Cuala Press. Finished on the eleventh day of November, in the year of the Covid-19 pandemic, Twenty-Twenty.

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