

AGRICULTURE

Raphoe

On a hill to the south-west of Raphoe there lies an ancient monument dating back to around 3000BC. Built by the **FIRST FARMERS** to arrive in the area, Beltany Stone Circle signifies the beginning of a strong relationship between farmers and the fertile land of the Laggan.

Built symmetrically to represent the ritual importance for agriculture the sun and the moon in the daily lives of the farmers (the sun as a source of life, the moon as an indication of time) the stone circle originally contained a passage tomb, and was a site of ritual importance for agriculture. These rituals probably took place at significant times of the year according to the Celtic calendar, including Lughnasa (Harvest Time) and Bealtaine (the

beginning of summer).

Nestled in a valley below the stone circle, the town of Raphoe lies surrounded by fertile land that is still farmed today. The people who work the land around Raphoe have done so for many generations. This exhibition takes a look at two of these farmers and the agricultural work they do. Harry Wallace, John Patterson and Bob Kavanagh contributed the words for this exhibition.

Beltany Stone Circle looking down over Raphoe



Ponies at the Mayfair 2013



Sheep Grazing at Beltany



Joe Knox's Mill with George and John Lucas on ground and above (from l-r) Unknown, W. Dinsmore, Unknown, Billy Lucas and Eddie Mc Aveigh, 1940, Courtesy Ivan Knox



The Mc Daid Brothers from Glenswilly selling horses at the Raphoe Fair Day, c. 1950, Courtesy Hazel Willoughby



Mayfair 2012

TILLAGE



- CROP FARMING

Harry Wallace



John Smullan, Robert Crilly, William Crilly, Unknown, William Crilly Jr, Stanley Barnett, Columba Collins digging potatoes, Carriowen, 1962, Courtesy Harry Wallace



Harry in 2013

"Tillage in this area goes back a long time as the land is very suitable for it. The early farmers brought seeds with them and cleared the land. Then in the Middle Ages it turned to cattle. A lot of it is free draining as well.

My father and his brothers farmed by renting land, and they would have grown 100 acres of mostly oats, or 'corn' as it was called at that time. My father was the ploughman; he ploughed those 100 acres every year for years and years. They started to grow potatoes then, and I just continued on with those. It's mostly cereals I grow now though.

At that time potatoes were gathered and picked by hand, with fifteen or twenty gatherers sometimes. It was hard work but when you have all those people together it was always a bit of fun. You have to dull the pain of all the sore work!

The big difference now is that most farms are run single-handedly. The result is that it has become a very lonely occupation in most cases. There is a high level of depression among farmers at the present time because they are under stress and suffering from loneliness.

I grow mostly barley, some wheat and oats as well. I've been growing British Queens for seed and Kerr's Pinks for ware. Potato growing goes back a long way all over Ireland. It doesn't matter if we go back a hundred years or a thousand years, all we're doing is planting seed in the ground and it grows. It doesn't matter if you do it by hand or by the biggest machine in the world, it's still the same thing. There's a great sense of satisfaction when you do it from start to finish each year."



In the potato field, 1975. L-R: Harry Wallace, John Callan, Robert Wallace (Harry's father) Roy Strain and Willie Mc Clean.



Josie Gregg and George Cowan binding Corn Magheranappin, Convooy, c. 1940



Harry 'Stooking' Corn in 1961

LIVESTOCK AND DAIRY FARMING



John Patterson

John Patterson in 2013



The Friesian: the most common milking cow in Ireland

"My Dad was Dairying for as long as I can remember. Everyone a few years ago kept a few cows. We started off milking by hand, and gradually progressed to a Bucket Plant Machine which continued on to a milking parlour over the years. We started off with six cows and worked our up to about 70 now.

At the beginning it was all Shorthorn cows. The Artificial Insemination Service discovered that the Friesian was giving more milk than the Shorthorn so they eventually took over.

In the summer, a normal day meant getting up at 6:15am. You would bring your cows into the parlour and milk them for about an hour and half. You would then go out and change the paddocks to give them fresh grass. We have 21 paddocks which rotate fully every three weeks. At 4:30pm we milk them again and finish up about 6pm. We also grow silage and need to bring that in.

It's a 'tying' job, because no matter where you go the cows have to be milked twice a day. So if you go away you have to get somebody in to do it. You



Sheep at the Mayfair

have to keep the cows in the same routine as its good for their health.

We have a spring calving herd, which means most cows are calving in January, February and March. It's very busy at that time of year. We keep a camera in the calving pen and check it regularly; years ago you would need to get up once or twice a night.

We milk the cows and the milk goes straight into the bulk tank which is cooled basically as soon as we are finished milking. It's collected then every second day from the yard. Every day the milking machine has to be washed twice a day so when you're finished milking you still have plenty of work to do.

In my father's time, every farmer had a few sheep, a few pigs and a few potatoes. They grew some cereals. My mother had her geese, her ducks and her hens. Every farm was the same. Most farmers now specialize in one or two things now. That's the biggest change from years ago. The hard work stays the same."



Shearing at the Raphoe Mayfair

THE FAIR DAY AND THE MART



The Fair Day – Harry Wallace

"The Fair Day was an important day for the farming community as well as for the town. As Raphoe is located in a prime farming area, there would have been large numbers of animals to be bought and sold.

I remember the Fair Days. I walked the cattle to the fair with my father. It was a big social event; a place where people gathered. There were a variety of animals: cattle, sheep, horses and pigs. We would have bought the pigs and fattened them later. There used to be street theatres and stalls selling things.



Willie Laird (left) and Jimmy Mc Carron viewing Pigs on Fair Day in Raphoe, c. 1950, Courtesy Hazel Willoughby



Raphoe Diamond at the Fair Day, c.1950 Courtesy Hazel Willoughby

There tended to be great characters and very comical times. If they got a bit of craic going that gathered the crowd round, which give them an opportunity to sell more. My father would have taken on them boys and there was great banter going over and back.

Dealing was a long drawn out process with the seller asking a higher price and the dealer offering a lower price. There was a lot of haggling and hand-slapping. The seller would drop his asking price, and then the buyer might raise the offer. Often the dealer would make a bid and then turn and walk away hoping you would call him back and take his offer - this went on 'til they reached a price they could agree on."

The Mart – John Patterson



The Raphoe Livestock Mart Committee in 2012

"The mart is a big social event. Traditionally it or the Fair Day before it was the only day the farmer went out.

The mart in Raphoe is for all sorts of cattle on a Thursday, but mostly beef cattle. It was set up fifty two years ago. There are two rings: the 'big ring' is for beef cattle, the 'small ring' is for dairy cattle. In the springtime farmers bring in their calves. Sheep are bought and sold on Mondays.

The mart has a fat stocks sale around Christmas. We also have a 'rare breed' sale which has everything: goats, sheep, hens and other rare breeds of cattle too.

If you were buying, you would go in, walk around the pens, and decide which ones suit you and which ones don't. You would bid around the ring then for your choice. You also take it home on the day."



Courtesy Raphoe Livestock Mart

THE STONE CIRCLE AND FARMING



Learning Together

The Beltany Stone Circle is a stunning representation of **ANCIENT IRISH SOCIETY**. It shows the strong ritual connection its builders had with the agricultural landscape.



These images show students from St. Eunan's National School, Raphoe, on a recent visit to the circle, as well as some of their artwork in class afterwards. Some of the paintings show the theory of a ritual blessing, whereby weakened animals were walked through the circle with fires on each side in order to be strengthened for the coming spring.