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## Nineteenth-Century Bread Ovens of the Blackwater Valley in County Waterford

Richard Tobin

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### Abstract

The emphasis placed on the baking of traditional soda-bread in a Bastable oven on the open hearth has created a charming image of spartan self-sufficiency throughout rural Ireland in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. But shop-bought bread, produced in small-scale commercial ovens located in villages and towns, was a common item of both rural and urban diet throughout the nineteenth century. This paper explores both the means of production and the possible scale of production in a cluster of villages in the Blackwater valley in the west of county Waterford. An important implication may be that the traditional soda-bread was in fact a source of variety in a diet of commercially available bread.

### Keywords

Bread Ovens; Blackwater Valley; Waterford

### Introduction

In September 2016 the National Archives of Ireland (NAI) published online digital copies of the original component books of the Valuation of Ireland.<sup>1</sup> In addition to the names of the occupiers these books contain a fascinating wealth of detail concerning the size, condition, use and legal tenure of the buildings and land surveyed for the purposes of Valuation. The village of Ballyduff Upper features in one of these books. In 1850, according to the Valuation House and Field books, the village of Ballyduff contained some forty dwellings. Houses numbered 1, 2 and 3 in Griffith's Valuation were occupied by John and James Tobin (nephew and uncle [Fig. 1]).<sup>2</sup> All three houses are unusual in that they contain features described as "Ovens." Out of the forty houses these were the only three with ovens. The form of the ovens as separate structures was also unusual. Two of these houses were owned by the same person (James Tobin) and

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<sup>1</sup> National Archives of Ireland, Griffith's Valuation, Valuation Office books 1824-1856, <http://census.nationalarchives.ie/search/vob/home.jsp>. Field, House, Tenure and Quarto Books may be accessed through this link.

<sup>2</sup> National Archives of Ireland; Griffith's Valuation, Valuation Office books 1824-1856; Tenure Book, [http://census.nationalarchives.ie/reels/vob/IRE\\_CENSUS\\_1821-51\\_007246643\\_00995.pdf](http://census.nationalarchives.ie/reels/vob/IRE_CENSUS_1821-51_007246643_00995.pdf).

possessed one oven each which was also even more unusual. These were separate structures which were individually measurable and whose dimensions were those of a small shed.



Figure 1: Houses Nos 1,2 & 3, Ballyduff. Source: Author.

House number 1 gives the dimensions of the oven as 6 feet 6 inches (6'6") long by 14 feet (14') wide and was 6 feet (6') high at the eaves. In house 2 the feature is described as "return to Kitchen- Oven" and the dimensions are 7'6" by 7'9" and 7'9" tall. In House 3 the oven was 8'6"x5'6" and 6' tall at the eaves. For comparison, a dairy on the plot of house 1 was dimensioned as 16'6" by 14'. Clearly these are substantial structures and contributed measurably to the valuations of the properties. For house 1 the contribution was about 2% of total valuation and for house 2 about 2.5% (Fig. 2).<sup>3</sup>

<sup>3</sup> According to the scanned documents, the measurements date from 1849. National Archives of Ireland; Griffith's Valuation, Valuation Office books 1824-1856; Field Book, Townland of Cappoquin, 22 July 1850, [http://census.nationalarchives.ie/reels/vob/IRE\\_CENSUS\\_1821-51\\_007246908\\_00430.pdf](http://census.nationalarchives.ie/reels/vob/IRE_CENSUS_1821-51_007246908_00430.pdf)

Figure 2: House Book for Ballyduff Village 1849. National Archives of Ireland; Griffith's Valuation, Valuation Office books 1824-1856; House Book, Co. Waterford, Townland of Ballyduff.

## Ovens in Private Houses

There is no indication in the Valuation Book that these objects were in commercial use although the properties in question were at different times used as public houses and grocery shops. There are very few references to “stand-alone” private ovens of these dimensions in the papers referencing material culture in either Britain or Ireland. Tom Janie records examples of private ovens in British houses but citing Eliza Acton, he notes that, beginning in the larger cities from the seventeenth century onward, purchase of bread rendered home baking of bread virtually obsolete. Acton places the blame on ignorance and lack of appliances: “As I have said in another part of this volume, not only are there no ovens in vast numbers of our cottages, but many a small village is entirely without one but I suggest both driven by freely available commercially baked bread.”<sup>4</sup> Such references as do exist for Ireland confine the occurrence of ovens in private houses to east Leinster and south Munster but as will be shown later, this picture may be incomplete.

<sup>4</sup> Tom Janie, *Building a Wood-Fired Oven for Bread and Pizza* (Devon: Prospect Books, 1996), 95; Eliza Acton, *The English Bread Book for Domestic Use* (London: Longman, Brown, Green, Longman, & Roberts, 1857).

If these were indeed private ovens then rather than Irish or British examples, they most resemble those described in papers dealing with North America, the Caribbean and Australia. The foremost of these is by Lise Boily and Jean-Francois Blanchette, in a survey of Quebec. The Quebec ovens were in the main free-standing, roofed to protect from weather and were fired by wood. However, they were mainly used for the supply of bread to single rural households.<sup>5</sup> A further study entitled: “The Stone Ovens of St Eustatius” describes the stone ovens of similar size in use on a small Caribbean island. This study indicates that ovens with a similar range of dimensions were used to supply bread either to single households or to bake sufficient quantities for commercial sale. It was observed in this study that moderate-sized ovens (6’ x 6’ x 5’) were used by small families (4 to 6 members), whereas larger ones were used for both commercial but also domestic purposes. According to the author “Large ovens can bake up to three dozen loaves of bread at one time, or even larger numbers.”<sup>6</sup>

There is virtually no mention of structures of this scale in Irish literature. Having examined the Dúchas schools project and *Béaloideas* it would seem that most private ovens in Irish houses were relatively small in scale and certainly much smaller than those described above. For example A.T. Lucas writing in *Béaloideas* quotes an account of a household oven which he describes as a “Farmer’s Oven” or “Bush Oven” in Carn, Co. Wexford:

Several farmers' houses had bush (furze) ovens. The oven was at the back of the house on the outside but the wall of the oven was part of the wall of the house. It was a kind of lean-to about 5 feet high and about 1.5 feet out from the house. It had a sloping roof of slates and it was always built near the chimney of the house ... Bushes were burned in this oven and when the oven was hot the bushes were taken out and the bread laid on the tiles and it baked in the heat of the oven.<sup>7</sup>

Any such structure would be considerably smaller than the structures reported from Ballyduff. In fact the Ballyduff objects bear a stronger resemblance to institutional ovens described in contemporary newspaper reports in connection with Workhouses. In December 1850 a meeting of the Dundalk Union was informed by letter that the Monaghan Workhouse had erected a bread oven measuring ten feet by eight feet (10’x8’). This oven was operated by a Master Baker and a pauper boy and supplied sufficient bread for 2,000 paupers not just in the principal workhouse but in the

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<sup>5</sup> Lise Boily and Jean-Francois Blanchette, *The Bread Ovens of Quebec* (Ottawa: National Museums of Canada, 1979).

<sup>6</sup> Maria Lavinia Machado Monteiro, “The Stone Ovens of St Eustatius: A Study of Material Culture,” M.A. Thesis, College of William and Mary, 1990, <https://dx.doi.org/doi:10.21220/s2-2b33-0752>. St Eustatius is an island in the Dutch West Indies.

<sup>7</sup> A. T. Lucas, “Furze: A Survey and History of Its Uses in Ireland,” *Béaloideas: the Journal of the Folklore of Ireland Society*, 26 (1958), 58. It should be noted that in Wexford “Furze” is referred to as “Bushes”.

ancillary workhouses as well. Similar-sized ovens, again with similar production capacities, were also reported from Castleblaney and Carrickmacross workhouses.<sup>8</sup>

A report from Thurles workhouse put the consumption of bread in that workhouse (which had about 3,500 inmates at the time) as 106,000 loaves over a six-month period or about one four-pound loaf per person per week.<sup>9</sup> Since the workhouse diet was calculated to be barely sufficient to sustain an individual, we may assume that this level of consumption would be an absolute minimum. It therefore appears that ovens of roughly similar sizes could be used to supply anything from single households to large institutions. It would further seem that the intensity of operation rather than the physical dimensions might determine the scale of production.

Given the dimensions of the structures the first question that occurs concerns their intended purpose. Were the Ballyduff ovens commercial ovens in the sense that they were intended to bake bread for sale to the public or might they have been intended for “community” use as described in some British literature?<sup>10</sup> A related question might be: was the presence of these ovens in Ballyduff merely an aberration? Could it have been the case as Jaine has said that “that the enthusiasms of the householder informed the activities in the kitchen”?<sup>11</sup> If their presence were not mere whimsy, then the relevant converse is to ask whether the ovens may have been necessary adjuncts to the commercial businesses carried on in at least two of these houses?<sup>12</sup> Considering the apparent disparity between the capacity of the Quebec and St Eustatius ovens on the one hand and the Poor Law Union ovens on the other (as measured by a comparison of the external dimensions), it seems relevant to explore this question of production capacity related to size.<sup>13</sup> If these were indeed commercial-scale ovens and if they did function as such then the presence of two or three such in one small village begs the question; how extensive was bread production in small villages and towns during the

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<sup>8</sup> “Letters read at weekly meeting of Dundalk Union,” *Dundalk Democrat*, 21 December 1850, 2. It should be noted that it is not clear if these are internal or external dimensions but are believed to be external.

<sup>9</sup> “Report from Thurles Union,” *Nenagh Guardian*, 18 November 1850, 2.

<sup>10</sup> George Ewart Evans, *Ask the Fellows Who Cut the Hay* (London: Faber & Faber, 1956); David Barrowclough, *Give Us Our Daily Bread: The Deployment of Food in the Construction and Maintenance of Communal Identity and Solidarity in Nineteenth Century Industrial Britain, the Case of Communal Bread Ovens at Preston in Lancashire* (Cambridge: Red Arrow Press, 2014).

<sup>11</sup> Jaine, *Building a Wood-Fired Oven*, 96.

<sup>12</sup> Since there are no mentions of baking in either Edmond Tobin’s journal or in the newspapers of the time, one has to ask if baking was considered an integral part of grocery business at the time?

<sup>13</sup> Oven Dimensions: In St Eustatius, oven size ranged from 4.0 ft. to 7.0 ft. in height; 4.0 ft. to 10.0 ft. in length; and 3.0 ft. to 9.0 ft. in width. It was observed that moderate-sized ovens (6 ft. x 6 ft. x 5 ft.) were used by small families (4 to 6 members), whereas larger ones were used for commercial and domestic purposes. Large ovens could bake up to three dozen loaves of bread at one time, or even larger numbers.

19th century and to what extent was shop-bought loaf-bread consumed as part of the common diet of the time?

### Types of Bread Oven

In its simplest form, a bread oven is a domed or arched structure of brick or other material which will withstand heat and retain it. A chimney is located to the front above the oven door. A fire is kindled inside the cavity and kept alight until the walls have attained the requisite degree of heat. When the walls are hot enough the fire is raked out quickly, the oven swept clean, the batches of dough put in, the front door closed and sealed with dough or clay or even wet sacking to make an airtight seal and the bread left to bake by the heat which radiated from the oven walls.

Whilst we seem to have very few extant recorded examples of nineteenth century ovens in Ireland it may be helpful to think about them in terms of three fundamental oven types, examples of which can be found on YouTube. The first and oldest might be called the Roman oven which operates as described above. Examples of this may be seen today in the Pompeii excavations or indeed in a modern incarnation in any Pizza restaurant. This type is a simple insulated cavity made of brick or stone with a flue arrangement and an opening that can be closed by a metal or wooden door. In operation this oven is often referred to as a “falling oven” since the temperature falls from its initial maximum. Different items may be baked at different stages in the falling temperature but if a second batch of bread is to be baked, this simple oven cavity must again be filled with fuel and fired to raise the temperature and repeat the cycle. From a historical perspective wood was the favoured fuel most often used, with furze or whin in Irish and English examples respectively.<sup>14</sup> Additionally turf was also used in Irish ovens. Modern versions (often prefabricated) of these ovens may be purchased today for installation in homes or restaurants.

The other two major types of oven represent different adaptations or refinements to resolve the problems of fuel choice and continuity of production. The first is the “Gueulard” oven, commonly used in continental Europe especially in France, Belgium and the Netherlands.<sup>15</sup> This differs from the Roman oven in two respects. First it is fired by means of a separate firebox located beneath the oven cavity in the front third of the oven. The flame and hot gasses from the firebox are directed up into the oven cavity by means of a “Gueule” or moveable angled pipe. This enables heat to be directed to different parts of the oven. The second major difference is that the exit flue is located at the rear of the oven so creating a strong draught through the oven. The flue then travels forward above the oven to recover as much as possible of the heat from the combustion. These ovens do not appear to have been used in Ireland or England. They

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<sup>14</sup> Lucas, “Furze”; Evans, *Ask the Fellows*.

<sup>15</sup> “Bread Oven History,” Museum of Old Techniques (website), accessed November 23, 2021, <https://www.mot.be/en/opzoeken/bakovens/geschiedenis/geschiedenis-van-de-bakoven>.

have the advantage that the oven “sole” remains relatively free from embers and other combustion products. They are heated principally using wood although there seems to be no reason why alternate fuels such as coal, coke or even oil could not be used. They are still in use today in artisan bakeries especially in France.<sup>16</sup>



Figure 3: A Scotch Oven and Bakehouse at Llynon Bakery. Information board for the Gwynedd Archaeological Trust, by John Hodgson.

The third oven type was the Scotch oven which was common in Britain, Ireland and Australia (Fig. 3). This type was definitely present in Ballyduff (as evidenced by Fig. 6 below), and a pair of Scotch Ovens heated by oil still operate in Barron’s Bakery, Cappoquin.<sup>17</sup> Similar to the Gueulard it has a separate firebox but this time the firebox

<sup>16</sup> See Michel Gasiglia, “Le Four à Bois de Busserolles,” YouTube Video, 05:39, 07 December 2018, <https://youtu.be/Ajs933r1MmM>.

<sup>17</sup> Roz Crowley, photographs by Arna Run Runarsdottir, *Our Daily Bread: A History of Barron’s Bakery* (Cork: Onstream, 2011).



is located to one side of the oven sole. Again similar to the Roman oven the flue is located to the front but is on the opposite side of the oven door to the firebox. Like the Gueulard, the arrangement reduces the potential for contamination of the product by ash and cinders; it facilitates the use of multiple fuels such as wood, coal, coke, turf and even oil and it facilitates repeated firings. According to Roger Hayden, the Scotch oven is today experiencing a revival in Australia.<sup>18</sup>

It is unclear where the name “Scotch Oven” comes from. In his article on the rebirth of the Scotch Oven, Hayden speculated that:

Whether the term 'Scotch' actually refers to Scotland or indirectly to the Scots (it has been suggested that the inherent economy of the oven might have been regarded as a reflection of a traditional Scottish frugality) is also not entirely clear. Curiously, there is no entry in the *Oxford English Dictionary* for Scotch oven, nor one in the *Australian Macquarie Dictionary*, yet in both countries many hundreds of these ovens proved to be crucial to the success of the baking industry.<sup>19</sup>

One might add that even today Wikipedia and general Internet searches retrieve no definitive description of the Scotch oven. In *The Book of Bread* (1903), Owen Simmons gives an extended description of what he considered a Scotch Oven:

The Scotch oven is ... Fired by coke, and is certainly economical and durable. The furnace is usually in the right hand corner ... In some recent cases there is a special arrangement, whereby the furnace bars are not fixed permanently as usual, and can be raised so that clinkers can be extracted through the ash pit door instead of oven... There is one flue placed ... on the left side of oven door when the furnace is on the right.<sup>20</sup>

### Origins of Bread-Ovens in Ireland

A.T. Lucas suggests that the built-up oven was probably first introduced into the country by the monastic orders, that it was spread by the Anglo-Normans over those areas of the country where their system was established in a tolerably consolidated fashion and that it continued to be a feature of town and village life in those areas up to the 19th century.<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> Roger Haden, “Australian History in the Baking: The Rebirth of a Scotch Oven.” *Australian Journal of French Studies* 30, no. 87 (2006): 61–73; Owen Simmons, *The Book of Bread* (London & Edinburgh: Maclaren & Sons, 1903).

<sup>19</sup> Haden, “Australian History in the Baking,” 63.

<sup>20</sup> Simmons, *The Book of Bread*.

<sup>21</sup> Lucas, “Furze”.

Manorial laws and traditions governing milling and public bread ovens deriving from French (or Anglo-Norman) medieval tradition such as the “Fours Banals” (communal Ovens) did find an echo in parts of Ireland. In an article on Athy in his blog *Athy Eye on the Past*, Frank Taffe states that the grinding of corn was by law carried out at the mill of the Manor Lord. In the manors of Woodstock and Rheban the fees for grinding the corn were paid to the Fitzgerald family. In leases of land in Athy, even up to the eighteenth century there was a stipulation that corn was to be ground at the Manorial mill with payment of the appropriate fee.<sup>22</sup>

In 1809 Edward Wakefield observed that to the south of Cork (i.e. Corkbeg in the vicinity of Whitehaven), wheat rather than potatoes had become a principal crop. He wrote that the local MP for the county ascribed this fact to the failure of the potato crop in 1800. At that period, it was said, the people were “reduced to the necessity” of eating wheaten bread, and they had never since given it up. Wakefield offers no comment on how such bread was made.<sup>23</sup> According to most historians of Irish vernacular architecture, ovens were not a common or significant feature of Irish dwellings.<sup>24</sup> There appears to be a consensus amongst them that almost all baking occurred on the hearth in “pot-ovens” made of cast-iron or ceramic. One therefore has a sense that in the nineteenth century virtually the only bread consumed in rural Irish households was the traditional soda-bread baked in a pot-oven or Bastable in an open hearth.

There are several obvious problems with this perception. Bicarbonate of Soda, the essential leavening agent of soda-bread, was invented in the 1790’s in France and became available in industrial quantities only in the first quarter of the nineteenth century. Ready availability of the chemical led to the circulation of recipes using baking soda and buttermilk in the 1830s.<sup>25</sup> Baking powder which incorporated an acid salt (obviating the need for the acid in buttermilk) and self-raising flour were invented in 1843-46.<sup>26</sup> This would imply that the common bread produced prior to this date (say 1850) was limited to unleavened “griddle-bread.”

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<sup>22</sup> Frank Taaffe, “Bread Making,” *Frank Taaffe’s Athy Eye on the Past* (blog), 13 August 1993, <http://athyeyeonthepast.blogspot.com/1993/08/bread-making.html>.

<sup>23</sup> Edward Wakefield, *An Account of Ireland, Statistical and Political: Volume 2* (London: Longman, Hurst, Rees, Orme, and Brown, 1812). Note also that O’Riordan wrote about an oven discovered in a farm dwelling at Cobh which adjoins across the harbour: Seán P. Ó Ríordáin, “A Built-in Oven near Cove, Co. Cork,” *Cork Historical and Archaeological Society* 48, no. 168 (1943): 154–55.

<sup>24</sup> Åke Campbell, “Notes on the Irish House I,” *Folk-Liv* 1 (1937): 207-234 and Åke Campbell, “Notes on the Irish House II,” *Folk-Liv* 2 (1938): 173-196. See also Åke Campbell, “Irish Fields and Houses: A Study of Rural Culture,” *Béaloidéas: The Journal of the Folklore of Ireland Society* 5, no. 1 (1935): 57-74; O’Riordan, “A Built-in Oven,” 154-155.

<sup>25</sup> See recipe “Soda Bread,” letters to the editor, *Belfast Telegraph*, 13 October 1838, 4.

<sup>26</sup> Wikipedia, s.v. “Alfred Bird,” last modified 07 August 2022, 15:11, [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Alfred\\_Bird](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Alfred_Bird); Wikipedia, s.v. “Henry Jones (baker),” last modified 23 April 2022, 21:03, [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Henry\\_Jones\\_\(baker\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Henry_Jones_(baker)).

Bread-ovens do not appear as significant features in the inventories of historic buildings and sites. There are two databases of Architectural items considered worthy of interest and preservation in Ireland. These are the Sites and Monuments Record (SMR) which is intended to catalogue sites and items from pre-history up to 1700. Then there is the National Inventory of Architectural Heritage (NIAH) intended to catalogue buildings from 1700 to the present day. Neither of the lexicons of the SMR nor the NIAH contain an entry for “Oven.” There are entries for “Kilns,” but the only related entry is “bakery,” and this term occurs in both lexicons.<sup>27</sup> The Sites and Monuments Record contains entries for over 120,000<sup>28</sup> buildings, sites and features but only seven (7) records refer to “Bakeries” and most of these are references derived from literature. Only two entries reference the actual sites of a pre-1700 bakery oven. One is located in South Tipperary and the other in Trim, Co. Meath.<sup>29</sup> Likewise the National Inventory of Architectural Heritage contains records of more than 65,000 post-1700 buildings. Of these only twenty-three entries refer to Bakeries and of this number, only **one** confirms the existence of the remains of an oven.<sup>30</sup> However despite the conventional wisdom and in spite of the absence of record in official inventories, there is evidence to suggest that ovens did commonly exist in private dwellings comprising both great houses and some farm-dwellings from the fifteenth to the eighteenth century.

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<sup>27</sup> Government of Ireland, *Historic Environment Viewer*, accessed 02 December 2022, <https://maps.archaeology.ie/HistoricEnvironment/>. The *Historic Environment Viewer* is an on-line digital service provided by the Department of Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht. It facilitates access to the databases of the National Monuments Service Sites and Monuments Record (SMR) and the National Inventory of Architectural Heritage (NIAH) in a seamless one-stop point of access for both built heritage data resources.

<sup>28</sup> The SMR contains details of all monuments and places (sites) where it is believed there is a monument known to the ASI pre-dating AD 1700 and also includes a selection of monuments from the post-AD 1700 period. There are in excess of 150,800 records in the database and over 138,800 of these relate to archaeological monuments. The SMR database can be viewed on-line through the *Historic Environment Viewer*.

<sup>29</sup> SMR Record Numbers TS078-037003- & ME036-048088-. It should be noted that there may be others since the database is awaiting revision.

<sup>30</sup> NIAH Record No 14808030, Saint Conleth's Reformatory School, TOWNPARKS (LO. PH. BY.), Daingean, OFFALY, date recorded 17 August 2004, <https://www.buildingsofireland.ie/buildings-search/building/14808030/saint-conleths-reformatory-molesworth-street-townparks-lo-ph-by-daingean-co-offaly>: “A notable feature of the bakery is its large oven. An inscription reads: The Dumbrill Oven, Dumbrill Plant and Engineering Company, Beddington Works, Croydon, England.” According to *Grace's Guide to British Industry*, Dumbrill is mainly known for dough mixing machines although in 1930 Dumbrill applied for a patent on a “Viennese” oven of his own design. The address of “Beddington” above would appear to date this oven to post-1931 since the company established itself there in 1931. Thus this oven may be quite a recent artefact. “Dumbrill Plant and Engineering Co.,” *Grace's Guide to British Industrial History*, last edited 28 June 2016, 08:05, [https://www.gracesguide.co.uk/Dumbrill\\_Plant\\_and\\_Engineering\\_Co.](https://www.gracesguide.co.uk/Dumbrill_Plant_and_Engineering_Co.)

## Evidence for Private Domestic Ovens

In a study of Tower Houses of County Cork Rory Sherlock describes the presence of “Mural” bread ovens or ovens built into the walls behind fireplaces. Sherlock surveyed ninety of approximately 181 Tower Houses, Fortified Houses and Castles in Cork County and found fireplaces still existing in sixty-five of them.<sup>31</sup> Of these, a total of eighteen or 27% contained Mural Ovens. The “soles” of these ovens were on average approximately one metre in diameter, circular or sub-circular in shape. He goes on to conclude that, from the dates of such buildings, mural bread ovens would appear to have been introduced to Ireland in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries and are occasionally found as late insertions in tower houses, though are more commonly recorded as original features in fortified houses.<sup>32</sup> When assessed in connection with possible production capacity, these ovens are clearly domestic in scale.<sup>33</sup>

Sherlock confirms the discovery and identification of many other ovens both private and commercial-scale throughout the country from archaeological investigation. In his paper he lists at least twenty-five examples either uncovered by excavation or mentioned in contemporary documents from the thirteenth to the eighteenth century. These reports range from commercial enterprises in Cork and Waterford cities as well as in the towns of Carrick-on-Suir and Cashel. From evidence derived by Archaeological investigations he points to the existence of ovens in private dwellings in Donegal, Kerry and elsewhere.

When we come to the eighteenth century, it is harder to find definite physical evidence of domestic bread ovens for home-baking. According to Madeline Shanahan in a study of Irish manuscript recipe books from 1660 to 1830, recipes for bread appear infrequently in such manuscript sources.<sup>34</sup> She offers two alternative hypotheses by way of explanation for this. Either bread-making was so common that the recipes did not need writing down. Or else bread was not a domestic product but was mainly “bought-in”. When discussing recipes, Shanahan tends to favour the first alternative. There is some support for this hypothesis. In a study of domestic baking in California (late 19C - early 20C), the knowledge of bread-making seems to have been almost intuitive in

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<sup>31</sup> Rory Sherlock, “The Later Medieval Fireplaces of County Cork,” *Journal of the Cork Historical and Archaeological Society* 105 (2000): 207–30.

<sup>32</sup> Rory Sherlock, “Mural Domestic Bread Ovens: Evidence for the Medieval-Post Medieval Architectural Transition in County Cork”, *Journal of the Cork Historical and Archaeological Society*, 111 (2006): 107-124

<sup>33</sup> “How Many Loaves of Bread Do You Want to Bake in Your Oven?,” Museum of Old Techniques (website), accessed 02 December 2022, <https://www.mot.be/en/opzoeken/bakovens/meer-weten/aantal-broden>. Ovens of one meter diameter could bake less than a dozen loaves.

<sup>34</sup> Madeline Shanahan, “Whipt with a Twig Rod’: Irish Manuscript Recipe Books as Sources for the Study of Culinary Material Culture, c. 1660 to 1830,” *Proceedings of the Royal Irish Academy: Archaeology, Culture, History, Literature* 115C (2015): 197–218. <https://doi.org/10.3318/priac.2015.115.04>.

the immigrant Italian peasants who were in any case illiterate.<sup>35</sup> Also according to Shanahan, there is evidence of cake-making in the manuscripts although such one-off speciality items might easily be produced in a pot oven.

However, for the hypothesis of universal knowledge of bread-making to be accepted, there ought to be an equally widespread or universal memory of the presence of domestic bread ovens, but this does not appear to be the case. In the preceding centuries while there is evidence for the existence of domestic ovens, in Cork it encompasses only a quarter of the extant upper-class dwellings. This implies that if bread was extensively consumed by the middle and upper classes then it must have come by way of purchase from commercial ovens based in towns. Curiously Shanahan herself notes that analysis of contemporary Household Account books (as opposed to recipe books) suggests that such may indeed have been the case. Some households recorded significant expenditures on the purchase of bread whilst others expended almost nothing. Purchase of bread surely implies a ready supply thereof and vice-versa.<sup>36</sup>

In the *Dúchas* folklore collections of the 1930s, memoirs of the “pot oven” or “Bastable” vastly outnumber memoirs of the “farmer’s oven” built into the hearth in the manner of the Mural ovens. Nevertheless, recollections of the domestic ovens exist and are geographically far more widespread than might be implied by the work of Campbell, Peate and O’Riordain.<sup>37</sup> Although curiously while almost none of the memoirs recall an active use of the oven, in all cases the method of use seems to have been accurately remembered.<sup>38</sup> If we combine the locations of mentions of private ovens from the *Dúchas* Schools’ Collection with those recorded by Sherlock we obtain the map below (Fig. 4) which shows a widespread distribution of private ovens extending over practically the whole country. Thus, while ovens may not have been *a common feature of the average house* they were certainly common in the tower houses, castles and fortified houses, farm houses and other dwellings of the wealthier classes. They were certainly not confined to “The Pale” and east Leinster / south Munster as implied by the folklorist vernacular tradition.<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>35</sup> Julia G. Costello, “Bread Fresh from the Oven: Memories of Italian Breadbaking in the California Mother Lode”, *Historical Archaeology* 32, no. 1 (1998): 66-73.

<sup>36</sup> Shanahan, “Whipt with a Twig Rod”.

<sup>37</sup> Campbell, “Notes on an Irish House I” and “Notes on an Irish House II”. See also Campbell, “Irish Fields and Houses”; O’ Riordan, “A Built-in Oven”.

<sup>38</sup> E.g. use of furze for heating the oven.

<sup>39</sup> My thanks to Dr Dorothy Cashman for directing my attention to the *Dúchas* Collection as a source of geographically referenced memoir.

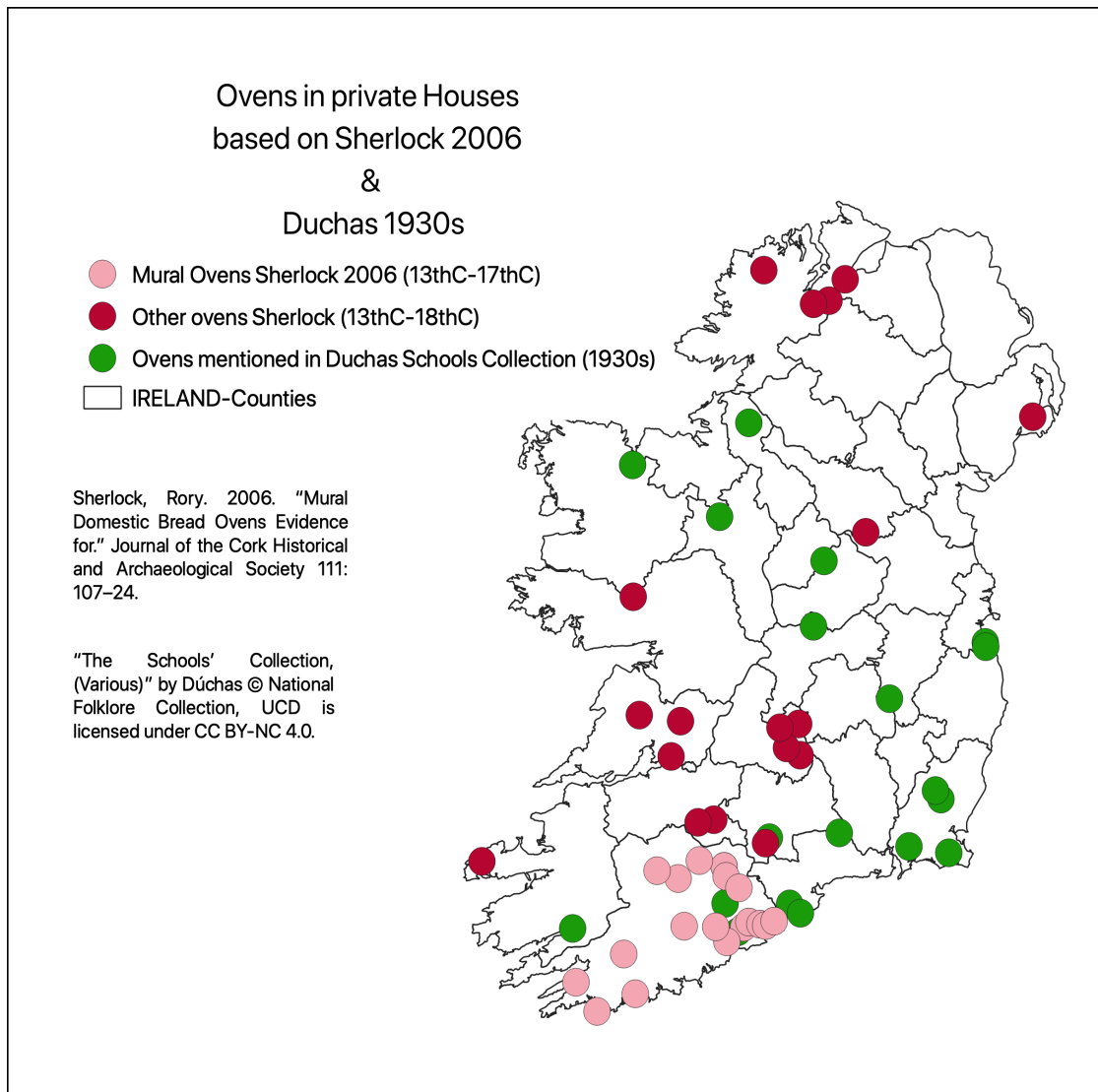


Figure 4: Ovens in private houses based on Sherlock 2006 and Dúchas 1930s.

### How common were the 1850 Ovens in the study area?

In an effort to establish how common these architectural features may have been, the valuation books for the three adjoining villages of Lismore, Cappoquin and Tallow were examined. The following table (Table 1) sets out the number of Ovens/Bakehouses in each of the villages according to the Valuation Books and gives the dimensions and age/ condition of each.<sup>40</sup> The ovens in Houses 1 and 3 of Ballyduff were assessed as quality “A-” which implies that they were more than twenty years old. That of House 2 was simply “B” which was “slightly decayed but in good repair.” It is

<sup>40</sup> The age/condition can be difficult to interpret. The highest quality is “A” with three sub-divisions: A+, A, and A-. “A+” describes a building built or ornamented with cut stone, and of superior solidity and finish. “A” describes a very substantial building and finished without cut stone ornament. “A-” refers to an ordinary building and finish or either of the above when built 20 or 25 years.

not clear if this implies that it also was more than twenty years old, but it is assumed that it does. A further implication is that these ovens were probably built prior to, or about, 1830. The corresponding Tenure Book contains a note that the Ballyduff properties were held under a lease from 1832 which is broadly in agreement.<sup>41</sup>

Table 1: Ovens and bakeries extracted from House Books for Ballyduff, Tallow, Lismore and Cappoquin 1850.

Village	Occupier	Length	Breadth	Height	Roof	Letter	Contion	Bake House?
<b>Ballyduff</b>	John Tobin	6.5	14.0	6.0	Slated	A-	Over 20 Yrs	No
	James Tobin	7.5	7.75	7.75	Slated	B+	Medium	No
	James Tobin (V)	8.25	5.5	6.0	Slated	A-	Over 20 Yrs	No
<b>Cappoquin</b>	Charles Connell	15	14	15	Slated	B+	Medium	Yes
	Anne Collinder	12.25	11.0	7.75	Slated	B	Slightly Decayed	Yes
	Laurence Oakley	8.5	9.25	4.5	Slated	A-	Over 20 Yrs	Both
	Ellen Barron	10.0	8.75	5.0	Slated	B	Medium	No
	James Ryan	8.5	12.75	5.0	Slated	A-	Over 20 Yrs	No
	John Techy (V)	8.0	8.25	4.25	Slated	B+	Medium	No
	Mary Heale	13.5	10.5	6.5	Slated	C+	Old but in repair	Yes
<b>Lismore</b>	James Luke	23.5	10.75	8.75	Slated	B-	Deteriorated by age	Yes
	William Drew	9.3	6.75	6.0	Slated	B-	Deteriorated by age	Yes
	Richard Huddy	7.75	7.0	7.5	Slated	B	Slightly Decayed	No
	James Dwyer	11.25	14.5	8.0	Slated	B-	Deteriorated by age	Yes
	Richard Purcell	23.75	11.0	7.0	Slated	B	Slightly Decayed	Yes
	Hanora Roche	8.25	8.0	5.5	Slated	A-	Over 20 Yrs	No
	Michael Ducey	17.25	13.0	6.75	Slated	B-	Deteriorated by age	Yes
	Margaret Hayes	21.5	15.3	7.5	Slated	B	Slightly Decayed	Yes
<b>Tallow</b>	Margaret Kenefsy	13.0	10.0	9.0	Slated	B	Slightly Decayed	Yes
	Patrick Hickey	19.0	14.0	12.0	Slated	B	Slightly Decayed	Yes
<b>Average Oven Dimensions</b>		8.09	9.00	5.88				
<b>Average Bake House Dimensions</b>		16.30	11.89	8.57				

<sup>41</sup> National Archives of Ireland; Griffith's Valuation, Valuation Office books 1824-1856; Tenure Book, [http://census.nationalarchives.ie/reels/vob/IRE\\_CENSUS\\_1821-51\\_007246643\\_00995.pdf](http://census.nationalarchives.ie/reels/vob/IRE_CENSUS_1821-51_007246643_00995.pdf).

In 1850 Ballyduff had three ovens; Cappoquin had seven, Lismore eight and Tallow only two – a total of twenty – although two properties were noted to be “vacant”. All of the ovens were contained in buildings with slate roofs. Most of the buildings were at least twenty years old according to the “Table of Condition” set out in the Valuation regulations. Quite a few of the buildings, in fact just over half of which were said to contain ovens, were described as “Bakehouses” which incorporated ovens. In Lismore two were additionally described as “Confectioners.”

The average size of the oven structures was roughly eight feet by eight feet or 2.4 x 2.4 meters whereas the bakehouses were on average twice the length of the ovens at 16 feet or 4.8 meters. Bakehouses were also on average slightly wider at nearly 12 feet or 3.6 meters. From examination of the various texts on bread-making, the top of the oven was treated as an upper story for storage of flour presumably to help prevent dampness. In some cases there was a bedroom for the baker. There would be room for tables or trestles for loading and unloading the oven. There would also be a trough for mixing and proving the dough and finally easy access to a fuel store.<sup>42</sup>

From the age and condition information we may surmise that the majority of these ovens had been in operation since around the beginning of the nineteenth century although some were clearly of more recent construction. Thus, the Ballyduff Ovens were not at all unique and were very similar to others found in the surrounding villages and may have been in existence from the eighteenth century.

### **Trend in Bakery Numbers over Time**

Waterford County Council has created a database of names and business descriptions from the various trade directories extant for the County since 1824.<sup>43</sup> Amongst the businesses listed are bakeries. Sometimes these were “stand-alone” enterprises and they were combined with Pub and Grocery. Whilst not all of the villages are featured in all of the directories, nevertheless there are some interesting trends observable over the nineteenth century. From 1820 the combined populations of the parishes initially increased, but after the famine the numbers fell back and at the end of the century the parish populations were less than at the beginning. Notwithstanding, during the same period the number of bakeries increased five-fold (Table 2).

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<sup>42</sup> Simmons, *The Book of Bread*.

<sup>43</sup> “Trade Directories 1824-1910,” Waterford City and County Library Service (website), accessed 14 January 2022. <http://resources.waterfordcouncil.ie/records/web/BasicTradeRecordSearch/>. The following directories have been transcribed to the database: Piggott, 1824; Shearman, 1839; Slater, 1846, 1956 and 1881; Harvey, 1877; Egan, 1894; Thoms, 1909-1910.



Table 2: Estimated parishes population and number of Bakeries at various dates 1824-1881 (based on “Trade Directories 1824-1910”).

Year	Estimated Population	Number of Bakeries
1824	15,399	5
1846	23,070	18
1856	17,880	16
1881	13,974	27

Commentators on changes in Irish diet and food habits have interpreted this shift away from the potato as a staple and toward a more mixed diet favouring grains as a reaction to the failure of the potato crop resulting in Famine. It echoes what Wakefield observed in Cork in the early 1800s.<sup>44</sup>

However despite being described in the trades directories as “baker” not every such person considered themselves to be such. In Ballyduff, both Harris and Higgins gave their occupations as “Grocer” in the 1901 and 1911 Census. Yet both employed bakers and as far as can be determined both businesses baked and sold bread. The following table (Table 3) shows that only a fifth to a third of businesses described as Bakeries were exclusively involved in that trade. The other 66%-80% seemingly baked as an adjunct to either grocery or pub or both.

Table 3: Percentage of grocery, pub and bakery businesses specializing in bakery only at various dates (based on “Trade Directories 1824-1910”).

Village	1846		1856		1881	
	Total	Baker Only	Total	Baker Only	Total	Baker Only
Cappoquin	4	1	5	1	11	1
Lismore	5	1	6	2	7	1
Tallow	9	5	4	2	9	4
Ballyduff	3	0	?	?	3	0
<b>Totals</b>	21	7	15	5	30	6
<b>Percent</b>	100.00	33.33	100.00	33.33	100.00	20.00

<sup>44</sup> Ian Miller, “Nutritional Decline in Post-Famine Ireland, C. 1851–1922,” *Proceedings of the Royal Irish Academy: Archaeology, Culture, History, Literature* 115C (2015): 307–23.

Throughout the nineteenth century the trade directories in general show that business descriptions were less specialised than at present with many operations sharing the combined designations of Bakery, Public House and Grocery business. This raises the interesting speculation that grocery and public house businesses almost automatically incorporated the production of bread, making it so common as to be almost unnecessary to mention. Supporting this hypothesis are the number of contemporary advertisements for the sale of public houses which state that the premises concerned include “Bread Ovens”, as in this example from Queenstown (Cobh):

Cork Examiner - Wednesday 10 August 1859

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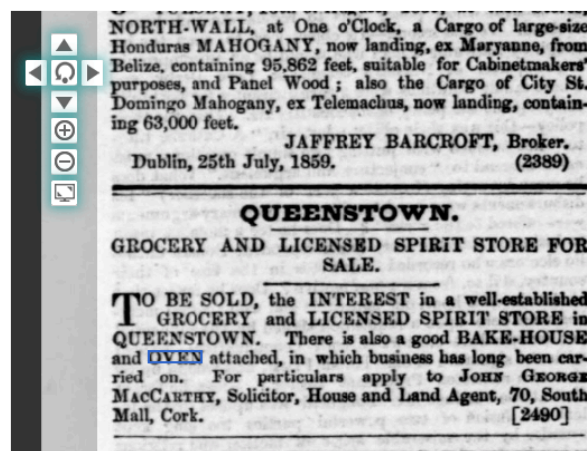


Figure 5: Advertisement for sale of a grocery and pub including bake-house and ovens in Cobh 1859. *Cork Examiner*, 10 August 1859.

The association of public houses and bread-baking is not confined to Ireland as the following notes from the description of a Listed Building in Scotland attest:

Originally formed part of a complex owned by a wealthy publican ... (who) According to the “Statistical Account”, ...erected ... large buildings for a brewery and malting, joined with a bakery. This resulted in him selling ...great quantities of ale and wheat bread through the country.<sup>45</sup>

Bakeries were regulated from the late 1830s insofar as the weights of loaves were determined by law and even bread deliverymen were required to carry a weigh-scale in case a customer wished to challenge the weight of a loaf. Responsibility for

<sup>45</sup> “The Old Bakery, Kirkgate, Chirnside”; Historic Scotland; Source ID: 393631; Historic Scotland Designation Reference: LB46345; Listing Date: 6 September 1999; Category: B; Building Class: Cultural; <https://britishlistedbuildings.co.uk/200393631-the-old-bakery-kirkgate-chirnside-chirnside#.Y5MhQOzP2It>

enforcement of this and other regulations devolved on local authorities and on Sanitary Authorities after 1874.<sup>46</sup>

### Hypothetical Production Capacity

According to writers on modern bread ovens, those identified by Sherlock, being about a square meter in area, would appear to have a capacity of about eight to twelve loaves, each 20cm in diameter and weighing about 800g.<sup>47</sup> Clearly this capacity would not be sufficient for commercial production although such an oven could perhaps sustain a large extended household as might have occupied a “big house.” Using the external oven dimensions from the House Books one can relate oven sizes to other ovens in Ireland and elsewhere.<sup>48</sup> Based on the Monaghan workhouse example which states that one oven of the typical average size (8’x9’) could provide sufficient Poor Law Union rations of bread for 2,000 paupers, it is possible to make a “back of the envelope” estimate of the maximum total production capability of the bakery ovens at each date, assuming that each bakery used at least one “Scotch oven.”<sup>49</sup> Twenty-seven bakeries each with a similar oven should therefore, in theory, be able to produce sufficient bread for a population equivalent of 54,000 persons. This would be more than ample for the 1881 contemporary population of 14,000. Even the peak population of 25,000 could have been easily accommodated by the eighteen ovens then present at a production of 36,000 population equivalent. In 1824, the five listed bakeries could, by the same calculation, have catered for a population of 10,000.

It should be noted that Ballyduff was not separately listed in the Trades directories before 1881, but if we assume that the three ovens identified in Ballyduff or the equivalent thereof were also operational, then a total of eight ovens in 1824 could have fed 16,000 persons which was approximately the population present on that date. I believe that actual production at the relevant dates would have been lower and geared to the varying demand for bread throughout the year. Nevertheless the above calculation gives an indication of the potential. Thus, throughout the nineteenth century and perhaps before, bread-production capacity in this part of the Blackwater

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<sup>46</sup> In the study area the relevant enforcement authorities were Lismore Town Commissioners and the Lismore Poor Law Guardians. However examination of the reports of the latter published in the *Waterford News* did not reveal any actions during the nineteenth century.

<sup>47</sup> “How Many Loaves of Bread Do You Want to Bake in Your Oven?,” Museum of Old Techniques, accessed 02 December 2022, <https://www.mot.be/en/opzoeken/bakovens/meer-weten/aantal-broden>.

<sup>48</sup> Barrowclough, *Give Us Our Daily Bread*.

<sup>49</sup> “Limerick Union Workhouse,” *Irish Examiner*, 30 October 1850, 4; “Thurles Union,” *Nenagh Guardian*, 13 November 1850, 2. According to the *Irish Examiner*, each inmate of the Limerick Workhouse was given approximately 12oz of bread per day or the equivalent of 1.3x4-lb loaves per week. According to the report of the Thurles Workhouse Master, production of bread there was 1.15x4-lb loaves per person per week. There is reasonable agreement between these estimates.

valley i.e. in the combined parishes of Ballyduff, Lismore, Tallow and Cappoquin, was more than adequate to support the contemporary population.

### The Ballyduff Ovens

Edmond Tobin, son of James Tobin, left a journal written in about 1913 in which *inter alia* he describes houses 2 & 3 as having been rebuilt by his father (James). According to Edmond, at the end of the eighteenth century these houses were “thatched mud huts” but had been rebuilt in stone with slated roofs. Edmond’s father James had completed the re-building of Houses 2 and 3 sometime just before 1846, the year which Edmond says he witnessed the Famine in Ballyduff.<sup>50</sup> House 1 is described as a “Spirit Shop” and House 2 is simply described as “Shop.” However we also know from Edmond’s journal that both houses functioned as public houses at the time (1850). House 3 is described as vacant although Edmond says in his journal that his father evicted tenants from that house and moved the family into it from House 2 in a process of downsizing just after the peak of the famine. House 2 was let to a publican named Mrs. Meade.<sup>51</sup>

However, although Edmond wrote about houses 1 and 2 being used as public houses, he made no mention in his journal of either of the families having been involved in the bakery trade. When Ballyduff comes to be mentioned in the *Guy’s Trade Directory* in 1886, three bakers are identified in Ballyduff. These are James Daly, Anthony Harris and Cornelius Higgins. Daly was a butter-buyer, a flour miller and also ran a public house and grocery in the building where Lindsay’s Pub is today.<sup>52</sup> Anthony Harris was father to John Harris whose name appears on the house by the Glen. He was a grocer and spirit merchant and according to the Census of 1901 and 1911 he employed a baker. Cornelius Higgins occupied the shop that subsequently became “River Action Bistro.” In the census of 1901 and 1911 he also is listed as employing a baker and the ovens located in the premises are recorded in living memory. No member of the Tobin family is listed as having been a baker nor as employing a baker. None of the three houses, listed in 1850 as having an oven, was occupied by those who are mentioned as bakers.<sup>53</sup>

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<sup>50</sup> “Memorandum of Events, Vicissitudes and Recollections of Edmond Tobin, Ballyduff”, <http://memorandum.site44.com>. Handwritten journal in the possession of the author, made available through the above website. Edmond gives his birth year as 1838.

<sup>51</sup> In partial confirmation of the date of construction, the House Book makes a reduction in valuation of 10% by reason of the ceilings being incomplete in Houses 2 & 3.

<sup>52</sup> “Trade Directories 1824-1910,” Waterford City and County Library Service (website), accessed 14 January 2022. <http://resources.waterfordcouncil.ie/records/web/BasicTradeRecordSearch/>.

<sup>53</sup> There is a strong local living memory in the village of bread having been baked at this last-mentioned premises (Higgins), and the author recalls that he was sent on at least one occasion during the 1950s to buy bread there although whether at that time the bread was baked there or bought-in is unknown.

One oven still exists today in what was an outdoor “bake-house.” This oven measures roughly ten feet by ten feet and is built of brick. It has a fire-box door to the left, an oven door in the middle and chimney to the right. The oven is best described as a variation of what was called a “Scotch Oven.”



Figure 6: Remains of a Scotch Oven, Ballyduff. Source: Mike Flynn, Ballyduff.

### Cappoquin: Barron’s Bakery

Cappoquin lies about ten miles further east from Ballyduff on the Blackwater. The Valuation “House Books” for Cappoquin reveal seven properties which contain features described as “Ovens.” Four of these possess an additional structure described as “Bake House.” The village also boasted a mill operated by a water-wheel.<sup>54</sup> *Slater’s Directory* for 1856 lists five separate Bakery businesses compared with the Valuation list of seven properties possessing either Ovens or stand-alone Bakehouses.

<sup>54</sup> Note that flour-mills were also present in Tallow and Lismore and in Ballyduff.

Property number 76 on Main Street which contained an Oven was occupied by “the widow Ellen Barron” and was described as “Bakery” (Fig. 7).<sup>55</sup> Today Barron’s are a well-known bakery although the business is now located on Cook street.

76	Widow Ellen Barron Bakery	104	20.5	25.9	18.6	51	0.11	2.6.9
	House	184	11.0	1.9	5.0	8	35	10.2.4
	Oven							2.9.1

Figure 7: Extract from Cappoquin House Book 1850 showing Ellen Barron Bakery.

The story of Barron’s Bakery has been recorded in a copiously-illustrated book by Roz Crowley.<sup>56</sup> The story is interesting from a number of viewpoints. In this book the Barron family trace their family history in Cappoquin back to a John & Ellen Barron who owned a public house in Cappoquin. *Pigott’s Directory* of 1824 confirms that John Barron was indeed a publican.<sup>57</sup> *Slater’s Directory* of 1846 states that John Barron was in the Bakery business but confusingly it gives his address as Main Street Lismore.<sup>58</sup> John Barron died in 1847. As above, this is indirectly confirmed by the House Books which clearly state that his widow Ellen Barron occupied a “Bakery” on Main Street Cappoquin in 1850. In *Slater’s Directory* for 1870, James and John Barron were involved in the Bakery business and John Barron was additionally given as owner of a public house. The family history however suggests that the Bakery business did not begin until 1887.<sup>59</sup> What may be intended here is that the family did not become exclusively involved in the Bakery trade until 1887.

Barron’s ovens in Cappoquin are known to be Scotch Ovens and the doors show the names of two companies. The first is Moses McCulloch, Glasgow, and the second is James Cruickshank, Edinburgh. Moses McCulloch were manufacturers of cast iron from about 1810 to 1962.<sup>60</sup> The second company, James Cruickshank of Edinburgh,

<sup>55</sup> National Archives of Ireland; Griffith’s Valuation, Valuation Office books 1824-1856; House Book, 22 July 1850, [http://census.nationalarchives.ie/reels/vob/IRE\\_CENSUS\\_1821-51\\_007246908\\_00446.pdf](http://census.nationalarchives.ie/reels/vob/IRE_CENSUS_1821-51_007246908_00446.pdf).

<sup>56</sup> Crowley, *Our Daily Bread*.

<sup>57</sup> *Pigott’s Directory of Munster* 1824.

<sup>58</sup> In this edition of the Directory, Lismore and Cappoquin were combined in a single entry and since both towns have a “Main Street”, errors are possible.

<sup>59</sup> Crowley, *Our Daily Bread*, 17, 22.

<sup>60</sup> “Moses McCulloch & Co.,” *Mackintosh Architecture* (website), University of Glasgow, accessed 02 December 2022, <https://www.mackintosh-architecture.gla.ac.uk/catalogue/name/?nid=McCulMosCo>.

were oven designers for all kinds of ovens including the Scotch Oven.<sup>61</sup> Thus the “intellectual property” constituting the design and construction of direct-fired bread ovens more than likely originated in Scotland as did some of the hardware involved in the building of the ovens and perhaps hence the name: Scotch Oven.

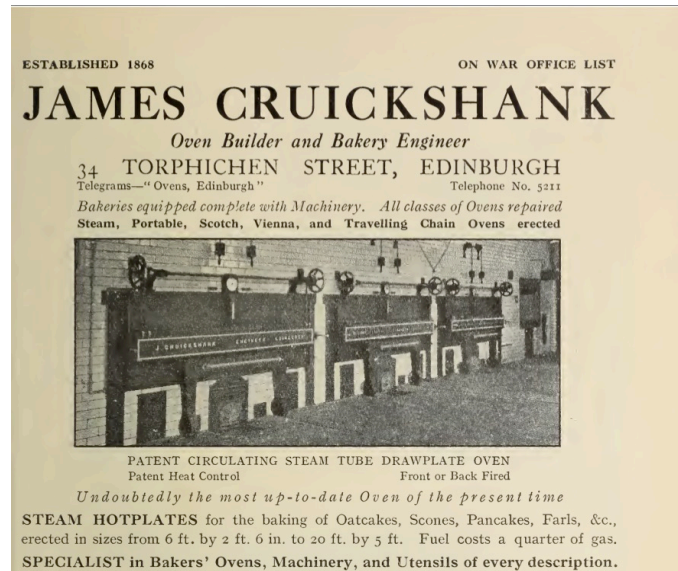


Figure 8: Company literature from James Cruickshank & Co. Source: Stephenson, *Industrial Edinburgh*, p. 139.

Both of the Bakeries operating in Ballyduff in 1901 and 1911 used Scotch Ovens as did Barron's Bakery in Cappoquin. Even though dough-kneading machines were advertised for sale from 1861, according to the Barron's family history the business was modernised / mechanised and upgraded only in the 1940s. I have no information on trends in Lismore and Tallow although I presume trends there to be similar. It is surprising that the traditional methods continued into the twentieth century rather than falling victim to mechanisation and draw-plate ovens before the end of the nineteenth.<sup>62</sup>

## Bread Delivery

By the middle of the nineteenth century there was a wide geographic distribution of a large number of ovens capable of the production of considerable amounts of bread,

<sup>61</sup> Thomas Stephenson, ed., *Industrial Edinburgh: A Book Issued by the Edinburgh Society for the Promotion of Trade in Furtherance of the Movement in Favour of Developing New Industries and Extending Existing Industries in Edinburgh, Leith, and the Lothians* (Edinburgh: Published by the Edinburgh Society of the Promotion of Trade in conjunction with the Edinburgh Chamber of Commerce and Manufactures, 1921), 139,  
<https://archive.org/details/industrialedinbuedin/page/n3/mode/2up>.

<sup>62</sup> Crowley, *Our Daily Bread*, 27.

more indeed than could be consumed by the then urban populations of the four towns. It is thus necessary to consider to what degree the rural population of the time may have had access to the bread that could in theory be produced. The villages included in the present study are all within a five-mile radius of one another and the combined Civil Parishes would be similarly virtually entirely encompassed by a five-mile radius.

Clarkson and Crawford quote an observation by one Henry Inglis writing from Waterford as early as 1834. According to Inglis “the wife of almost every small farmer, carries a wheaten loaf back with her from the market.” The same paragraph avers that “For urban dwellers the bakers' shop was an essential part of life and in the countryside there were many farmers who welcomed *the visiting bread cart* (author's emphasis) several times a week or who patronized bread shops when they came to town.”<sup>63</sup> While the language of the paragraph creates some doubt as to the timing, there appears to have been a regular commercial intercourse between urban and rural in the purchase and consumption of bread. Clarkson and Crawford go so far as to say that although a third of the population lived chiefly on potatoes and rarely ate bread, there remained four to five million people who ate bread at least some of the time.

By the 1890s there is little doubt that in Waterford an extensive bread-delivery system existed. There are many newspaper accounts and even a song about a remarkable racehorse known as “The Vanboy.” Before his qualities as a racehorse were recognised, he was employed to pull a bread delivery van in the Tallow–Conna area.<sup>64</sup> In the Dúchas Schools' Collection there is also an account of the death of a bread deliveryman in a snowstorm in the winter of 1892. It appears that he had been delivering bread from Tramore to Kilmeaden (a distance of about 6 miles) when the storm struck. First his bread van became stuck in a snowdrift: the deliveryman unhitched the horse and attempted to make his way on horseback but died of exposure before he could reach safety.<sup>65</sup>

## Conclusions

Bread-ovens were reasonably common in wealthy private houses extending over practically the whole of Ireland from the fifteenth to the nineteenth century. However, by the nineteenth century commercial production of bread in small rural and town

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<sup>63</sup> Leslie Clarkson and Margaret Crawford, *Feast and Famine: Food and Nutrition in Ireland 1500-1920* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 262.

<sup>64</sup> “The Vanboy,” The Schools' Collection, Volume 0387, 173, National Folklore Collection, UCD. Newspaper searches give his racing years as 1896 to 1902.

<sup>65</sup> “Severe Weather,” The Schools' Collection, Volume 0650, 174-175, National Folklore Collection, UCD, <https://www.duchas.ie/en/cbes/4428147/4381802>. School: Baile Uí Dhuibh (B.) (roll number 13635); Location: Ballyduff West, Co. Waterford; Teacher: Ambrose Madders; COLLECTOR: Matt Murphy; Address: Kilmeadan, Co. Waterford; INFORMANT: Mrs O' Keeffe (Confirmed by report in *Waterford Standard* 24 Feb 1892).



bakeries began to make obsolete the home baking of bread in both Britain and Ireland.<sup>66</sup>

There were three bread ovens in the village of Ballyduff in 1850, all of which were probably in excess of twenty years old at that time.<sup>67</sup> Given that these ovens contributed measurably to the valuation of the houses (2% to 2.5%) it is unlikely that they would have been retained if they did not have a corresponding economic contribution to exploitation of the respective commercial premises.<sup>68</sup> At least two of the houses to which the ovens were attached had no frontage space onto the street nor any public access to the rear where the ovens were presumably located. Therefore it is unlikely that these were in any sense communal ovens. The rear of House No 1 could have been accessed directly from the street but unlike Athy, or Blexhall in England, there is no local memory of a communal oven.

In 1886 also there were three bread ovens in the village, albeit in different premises, and the century ended with at least two of these ovens still in production. This indicates a steady demand for commercially produced bread throughout the whole of the nineteenth century.<sup>69</sup> The population of the Roman Catholic Parish of Ballyduff in 1851 was approximately 4,000 persons<sup>70</sup> and if we assume that religious observance encouraged commercial intercourse in the village, then on the basis of the estimates presented earlier, the bread needs of the parish could have been supplied by just two Scotch ovens.

In the nineteenth century commercial production of bread for sale was extensive in the study area and indeed seems to have been an integral part of grocery retailing in Ireland. Although the rate at which the ovens might have been worked creates a wide disparity in potential productivity, nevertheless in the study area the theoretical production capacity was certainly capable of meeting the basic demand from the whole of the combined parish populations (25,000 persons) of Ballyduff, Lismore, Cappoquin and Tallow. Regular consumption of commercially produced bread appears to have been widespread in both rural and urban areas. This was assisted by a bread van

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<sup>66</sup> Eliza Acton makes the intriguing comment that by 1856, home baking of bread was disappearing in favour of the purchase of bread from bakeries. Acton, *The English Bread Book*.

<sup>67</sup> The lease on the houses is documented as having been initiated in 1834 and there is further evidence of an even earlier lease dating from the eighteenth century.

<sup>68</sup> Reviewer 1 points to the (presumably later) exclusion of ovens in the computation of areas for valuation purposes.

<sup>69</sup> See Footnote 66.

<sup>70</sup> 1851 census of population, based on the townlands in the RC Parish which was established in the 1860s. *The Census of Ireland for the Year 1851; Part I: Showing the Area, Population and Number of Houses by Townlands and Electoral Divisions, Vol. II. Province of Munster*, BPP 1852–3 XCI; Waterford BPP XCI.723-1546; Online Historical Population Reports, University of Essex, <http://www.histpop.org/ohpr/servlet/AssociatedPageBrowser?path=Browse&active=yes&mmo=390&toctate=expandnew&display=sections&display=tables&display=pagetitles&pageseq=1&assoctitle=Census%20of%20Ireland,%201851&assocpagelabel=>

delivery system which, whilst it may have operated throughout the century, was certainly operational by the 1890s and indeed continued up to the 1950s. Soda-bread was a mid-nineteenth-century innovation which, rather than being born of long tradition, offered a new diversity in a historical food culture of commercially produced bread.

On the basis of the remains of one disused oven extant in Ballyduff village, and on the basis of the ovens currently in use by Barron's Bakery of Cappoquin, the ovens used to produce the bread appear to have been some variant of the Scotch oven. However in many cases and certainly earlier in the century some may even have been the simpler Roman-style oven. Unlike France, Belgium, and Australia (where artisanal baking in traditional ovens using wood as fuel is undergoing a revival) the same tradition of local bread-making using traditional ovens and fuels appears to have died out in Ireland in the early 20th century. In the Blackwater valley only one such bakery (Barron's Bakery) is operating today out of nearly thirty at the end of the nineteenth century.<sup>71</sup> Despite the fact that bread is considered "the staff of life," the means of production—the humble oven—is absent from the lexicons of the national (and international?) archaeological and architectural registers.<sup>72</sup>

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<sup>71</sup> Thanks to Dr Cashman for pointing out the 21st century revival in Artisan Bread baking.

<sup>72</sup> It should be noted that in the SMR there are several entries for kilns but none for "fireplace" or "oven". It seems odd that there should be entries for kilns for Malting, Lime, Kelp-drying and Corn-drying yet none for baking.