

Reimagining the history of Bruckless



INTRODUCTION

This pamphlet illustrates a literary response to historical and folkloric stories about Bruckless in County Donegal. Three participatory sessions were carried out with the Wednesday Group in Killybegs Day Care Centre, alongside healthcare staff and artist Aine Rose Connell, in the Summer of 2024.

Participants met together over three weeks, to collaboratively respond to the history pamphlet 'Walking through local history' (2014) written by Ute Daly, focused on the rich history of Bruckless. Majority of participants in the Wednesday Group in Killybegs Day Care Centre are from Bruckless, allowing rich discursive interactions to unfold when reimagining and rediscovering stories relating to the place. Through the use of collaborative poetry skills, each other's creative potential, interest and expression was explored.

Eleven participants and healthcare staff alongside Aine discussed, retold, read, listened and critiqued historical stories such as the Rahan Castle, once a stronghold for the Clan Suidhne in the 13th Century and the Great Bruckless Drowning in 1813, with particular reference to the local witch who then lived in the Rose Cottage. Likewise, the old Tannery that shipped high quality leather goods from Bruckless Pier in the 19th Century was reimagined, as well as and the life of Communist Thomas Roderick Forde who lived in the Georgian Manor 'Bruckless House' in the early 20th Century.

This pamphlet showcases the visual processes developed by participants during the literary sessions, in which free writing prompts and the creation of visual imagery were explored. Key relevant sites around Bruckless are also visually documented. Illustrated within the writing are poems written collaboratively by the group, poems written individually, and a celebrated poem from the past.



A stroll down a lovely lane

I took a stroll down a lovely lane
I saw so many different things
I hadn't the time to see before.

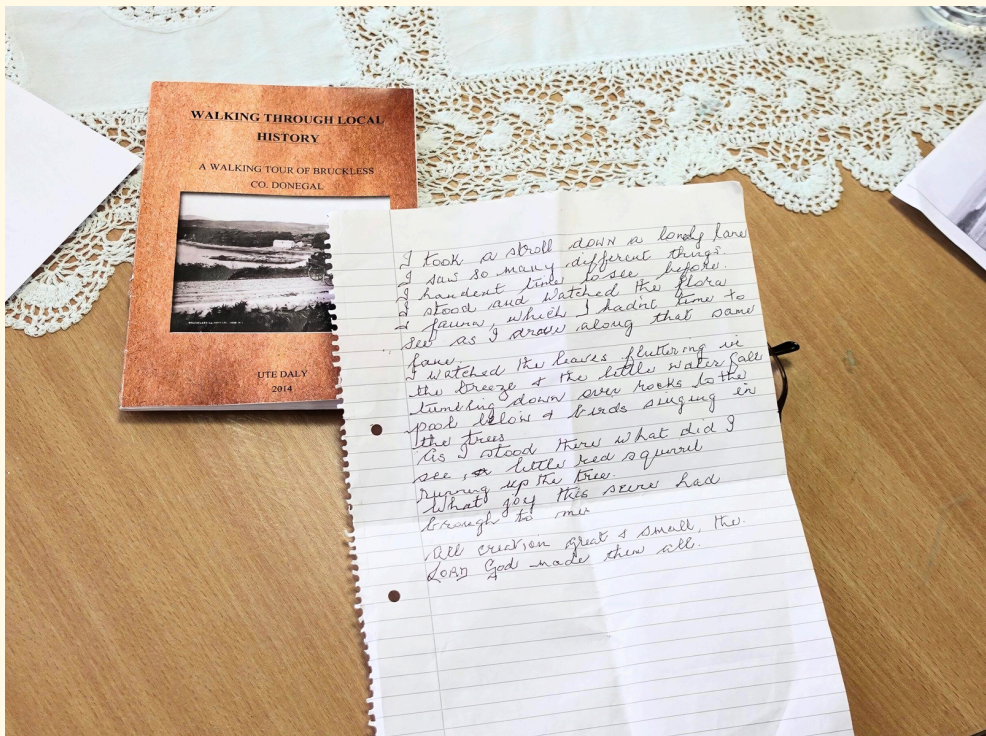
I stood and watched the flora
and fauna which I seem to never see
when I drive along that same lane.

I watched the leaves fluttering
in the breeze and the little waterfalls
tumbling down over rocks to the pool
below and birds singing in the trees.

As I stood there what did I see,
a little red squirrel running up the tree
what joy this sure had brought to me!

All creation great and small,
the Lord God has made them all.

Anna Baskin





The Bruckless Drowning

On 13th February 1813, 200 boats and ninety men were lost to the sea because of a severe storm near Bruckless, County Donegal. The fishermen lived in Killybegs, Malinbeg, Teelin and Mullaghmore.

Local legend attributes the disaster to a woman named Biddy Devenney who lived in a cottage overlooking Bruckless pier. Weather records from the Armagh Observatory on that date also noted a 'very stormy and wet night' (Ua Gallchoíhair, 2006).

However in all retellings of the story, sorcery and superstition remains at its core.

A memorial sign was erected near Castlemurray House remembering all those who were lost.

The Rose Cottage



View from the Old Tannery





What do you believe of vanishing cloaks, fistful of thorns?

Outwards. This sulking sea.
Oulce forms brown trails, dotted
islands on a weathered map.
Squaks from the gulls travel back
to 1813. Young children digging
in dark wet pier sand. Women bent
over, clawing stubborn mussels
off rock. Listen here. A women moves
into a dark cottage. The sea moves flat
like secrets held under lame tongue.



Betty Mc Donald.

Calm Sea

St John's Point

Children on beach

Playing with balls

Coloured blue, Red and

Yellow

Digging in sand with
bucket and spades.

Let them be gone, let them be gone, let them be gone

Near Paradise Pier a small woman
tended to a square thatched cottage
that sat by a fresh rail track. Roses
arching everywhere, bridges
wedging the Godliest heavens. Here
a woman was laughed at for asking
yet again, a catch of fresh herring
from local fishermen. This woman,
ignited like gorse-bush to naked flame,
set a coppan floating in a full water basin
whispered bitter words at the back
of the garden, spat a curse, times thrice
watched the bowl, agitate, irk, upturn.

Ninety men would soon perish to the day
their boats capsized because of a storm
so freak, so supernatural, only a crone
could have been deemed to bring on.

Hear their echoed screams from the sea.
Watch her vanish before dawn to never return.



The Crone

A cottage right beside the shore,
The home of the Crone that asks for more,
fish, fish she cries to the men of the sea,
but she wants it all for free.

Mackerel is coming a plenty, close
to the day, ninety men or more they say,
their tiny currachs and boat,
to see who will land the most.

Mad was the crone at her door,
for all her cry had been ignored,
with a bowl of water a dish inside,
she turned that water round and round,
making the sea turn rough, gigantic waves,
taking the men to a slaty grave.

The waves crashed onto the little day,
so high it washed the pier away
when the storm was spent and waters calm,
so sad was all the harm.

The crone no more could not be found,
gone into the mist without a sound.



A Donegal Memory, The Great Bruckless
Drowning at Bruckless Bay in 1813

“Now bring me a basin of water
And bring me the wee wooden dish”.

This done, she put into basin
A queer-looking three-headed fish.

Said she, “now the basin 's the Ocean
And the little Cupán 's a boat”
So saying, she set the wee Cupán
In the basin of water afloat.

Then walking three times round the basin
Which sat on the old earthen floor,
And muttering something above it,
The Hag disappeared through the door

Outside, amid the thunder and lightning
With many a charm and spell
And manoeuvres, the strangest e'er witnessed
The Hag to her evil work fell.

Niall MacGhiolla Brighde



Resting Place

Down by the wet Bruckless shore you'll find the path.

Follow the route where little children were told
not to step. Head West behind an old railtrack pillar
you'll soon be sat at the old Forde's grave.

Here you'd hear nothin' but the tiptoe of the tide
turning over and back, the drush of a robin bouncing
through the rosebush, the Ash tree dance with dawnlit
whispered breeze. Here Summer could only bloom.

Forde brought with him lore of the Soviet's, Communism,
stretching far back to 1922. Here their home was made
in the ivy-laden walls of Bruckless House, through Georgian sash
window pane: gardens vast with honey bees, damboo, live poultry.

After heckling deValera in a meeting of the Irish men
it was a grey October evening in 1949. Forde mounted
his bicycle and pedalled five mile. From the saddle he wobbled, fell
into a pale grass ditch. His heart gave way, a filament bulb burned out.

Forde's Grave, Bruckless



Forde's former home, Bruckless House







Tales from the Day Care Centre
on 10th July 2024

'Willie Cunningham owned the Tannery
where high-quality leather goods were shipped
from Bruckless Bay.' 'And Roy was the milkman!
'Yes I was the milkman, I didn't want to be nosy
around the Tannery. Out there, you'd see the sea,
or one thing, or another'. 'Anne when were you born?'
'In 1941, and Willie Cunningham was a nice quiet man'.
'The Creamery was the old cattle shed, down the road
to the right'. 'Rahan Castle is the old McSwyne's castle,
built with very good stone'. 'What did you say earlier
Celine?' 'That the stone fell into the sea after a big storm.'
'The stone was so good you'd see parts of it in the block work
in St Mary's church in Killybegs'. 'Anna what are you smiling
about?' 'Armstrong cut a hole in the bottom of his van,
and used his feet as drakes', how like Flinstones, we laughed!
The Rahan stone was used to build Castlemurray too.'

And our dear Lily, at only twenty-one,
it was there where she lived in a wee caravan,
just married, forever
happy with her Jimmy!







Special Thanks

To the participants in Killybegs Day Care Centre
for their enthusiasm and participation:

Roy Adair

Anna & Albert Baskin

Celine Cunningham

Eilis Gallagher

Nancy Whincup

Jan Carr

Betty McDonald

Bernadette Kennedy

Eileen Keeney

Lily Byrne

Mary Rafferty

Heartfelt thanks to Ute Daly, writer of 'Walking
through local history' (2014), the Killybegs Book
Club, as well as those in Killybegs Day Care
Centre for their humour, knowledge and support:
Day Care Coordinator Ann-Marie Traill, Stella
Watkins and Dina Gill.

Funding

With kind support from Clár Éire Ildánach /
Creative Ireland Programme, Comhairle
Contae Dhún na nGall / Donegal County
Council, An Roinn Turasóireachta, Cultúir,
Ealaíon, Gaeltachta, Spóirt agus Meán /
Department of Tourism, Culture, Arts,
Gaeltacht, Sports and Media (2024).



Clár Éire Ildánach
Creative Ireland
Programme



An Roinn Turasóireachta, Cultúir,
Ealaíon, Gaeltachta, Spóirt agus Meán
Department of Tourism, Culture,
Arts, Gaeltacht, Sport and Media



Aine Rose Connell

PROJECT LEAD

Aine is an ARTIST and speech therapist from Killybegs, County Donegal. Her practice combines COLLABORATION, POETRY and VISUAL ARTS, created TOGETHER with people, OR in response to WORKING with people in the community.

This practice has seen her work with people experiencing dementia, those who are ageing and those with Parkinson's disease.

Aine began developing her practice after completing a diploma in fine art in 2021. Her writing has appeared in *Trasna*, *Drawn to the Light Press*, amongst others. She was selected for the Poetry Ireland Introduction Series 2024.

aineroseartist@gmail.com

aine-rose.com

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