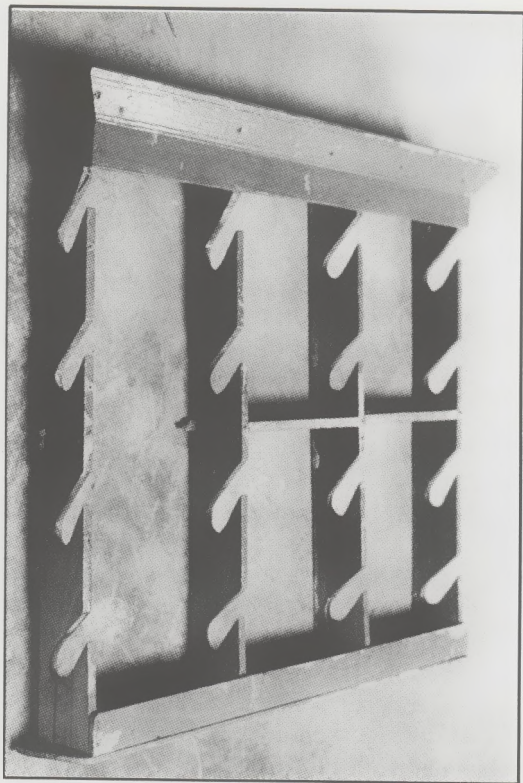


## THE CLEVY

Another extraordinary piece of furniture is the clevy. Also spelt clevvy. This item is a mystery, a throw back of by gone days - awe inspiring. Ask any country man what a clevvy is? "Ah, a clevvy, of course, I remember them in all the old houses long ago", and on he'll go about the good old days and it will be difficult to stop him because its a favourite subject. But time is not on your side, so you must interrupt, "but what is it? How do you spell it? Where did the word come from?" "Ah, sure don't you know they were little shelves on a wall where all the knick knacks were kept, sure I remember my grandfathers pipe " and on he goes. Okay, wall shelves, so whats the big deal? In Joyce's "English as we speak it" C.1910, it is described thus: "Three of four shelves, one over the other in a wall. A sort of open cupboard, like a dresser (all over the south)". But this does not explain the wooden side slots running parallel which most clevvies have. What were these slots for? We are led to believe they were for laying iron spits on. I have met nobody who remembers anybody ever cooking on spits. Yet these clevvies complete with side slots were made right into this century! Marty O'Malley again:" I never heard of meat cooked on spits, but clevvies were in every house. Rosary beads is all I remember hanging from the slots." Back to the dictionary. In Webster's Dictionary (20 Volumes!) under "clevis" (early word clevi akin to Scottish clivvie) cleft, brand, groove for a door, to split etc. Half a page but not one mention of spits or spit racks!

The Scottish National Dictionary Association tells me there is no such item or word in Scotland! The Gaelic dictionary translates clevy to cleibhi and visa versa. No wiser. A local retired school teacher and folklorist, Kieran Lillis, tell me, "People were always coming and going to the bogs. They would bring an iron bar with them to shove into the peat to discover buried bog wood. This implement they called a spit!" He maintains they hung this on the clevvy. Not good enough, too many clevvies and each clevvy could hold three to four spits. There is now no doubt in my mind that the clevvy is a throw back to the 18th century or earlier when spits were used for cooking. What is extraordinary is that they were made for over 120 years afterwards, thousands of them, with their initial use redundant! Mid 19th century "Farm at Lough Gur" - "with mint sauce - it is lamb" I said firmly, "make a good fire and have it on the spit in plenty of time." "I don't know how I will roast it with the key of the spit lost on me? 'Tis gone since last Friday, when ye'd have me roast the hare " Now this was a sophisticated wind-up mechanical spit - years advanced from the iron bar type! Strange in this book no mention of clevvies. Plenty of mention in the Tailor and Ansty. "Over the fireplace is the 'clevy', a shelf filled with tins. One contains sugar and another tea. There is a box of pepper and one containing carraway seeds, which Ansty mixes with the tea " The famous clock that was wound up every day and put away in a box was also on this clevy, but not a mention of cooking ever on spits.



**Fig. 5** The Clevy dimensions 36 inches wide,  $37\frac{1}{2}$  inches high and  $4\frac{1}{2}$  inches deep.