

## Bunratty Folk Park

In the shadow of Bunratty Castle just NW of Limerick, stand a group of houses of all types together with a village and a church, all removed from their original location, mostly from the Shannon area. The first was reassembled in 1959 as the castle was being restored, and all are furnished authentically to represent life in about the first decade of the nineteenth century, complete with chickens and Irish wolfhounds. Swiftly visiting nearly thirty buildings, the following particularly caught our attention.

The Cashen Fisherman's House had an ingeniously constructed wall rack, the pegs made of flat pieces of wood dovetailed at about  $45^\circ$  into the back board. It also featured an excellent example of a whitewashed flour-bag ceiling, a cunning alternative to plastering, and good example of using the materials to hand, wasting nothing and recycling, of which we saw much during our week on the island. The three-sided chimney hood made from wooden planking likely sourced from a wreck, bore evidence to the clean burn of turf blocks not causing sparks and the wood thus not being a fire hazard. A fire hood elsewhere of woven wicker and clay also amazed. What we thought was an elongated hanging holder for candles was actually a strop, the pocket holding sand as the sharpening medium.



A wall rack in the Cashen fisherman's house, Bunratty Folk Park. *Photo Roderick Butler*



A painted pine table with double stretchers in the Moher farmhouse of north Co. Clare, Bunratty Folk Park. *Photo Roderick Butler*



A two-tier painted pine hen coop with slatted doors which slide upwards, c.1860. From the Moher farmhouse at Bunratty Folk Park. *Photo Geoff Hancock*

A good example of a spit rack to accommodate two spit bars was seen in the well-to-do Shannon Farmhouse. Also there, the silhouette baluster-fronted dresser c. 1840 with shelves above made a useful comparison to the more worn example previously seen at Damer House, Roscrea. It was possible to determine from this example, although apparently re-painted (Claudia Kinmonth, *Irish Country Furniture 1700–1950*, p. 107), that this model was probably never boarded at the back of the base, was not designed with a pot board, thus making a perfect space for a curtained hen coop, and that the drawers never originally had handles.

The Moher Farmhouse produced a superior in-house two-tier hen coop. Keeping fowl indoors encouraged them to lay through the winter and kept them safe from foxes, whilst producing important income from the sale of eggs for the woman of the house. A painted pine farm table with typical double stretcher underneath, for working at under the window rather than dining at, provided an extra storage place without using extra timber. We saw many signs of a rural life still in existence well into the twentieth century.