

Donaghmore Workhouse Museum

One of the few remaining workhouse buildings left in the country, Donaghmore was built in 1847 to address the enormous need caused by the Great Famine. The site today tells the story of the workhouse and how the buildings were used later as a base for the Donaghmore Co-operative Society, founded in 1927. One of the buildings houses an impressive collection of agricultural equipment associated with the Society's main concern, butter production. Claudia pointed out some fine examples of the large earthenware bowls used to separate the milk. These were traditionally glazed in either cream or black.



An early twentieth-century butter box recycled into an upholstered storage box or stool. Donaghmore Workhouse Museum. *Photo Alison Dewing*



A press bed, a 'parlour' version in the form of a chiffonier with shelves above, Donaghmore Workhouse Museum.
Photo Alison Dewing

Other items common to the area were the butter boxes used to transport the product, printed with the dairies' names. We saw some that had been upholstered with padded seats to create a useful piece of storage furniture. This was an example of how people made use of everything around them to furnish their homes.

Around the museum we saw a press bed, a 'parlour' version in the form of a chiffonier with setback shelves above. Also a settle bed with an unusually low seat, unlike other types we had seen elsewhere. In another room was a typical dresser painted in the common colour scheme of cream and gingery brown.

Guiding us round was Trevor Stanley, the volunteer curator, a local farmer; he held a real passion for the site and was very knowledgeable about its history. He showed us the cold and forbidding dormitories where people slept on raised wooden platforms running the length of each dormitory. Little comfort for families, where men, women and children were separated from each other. This was an unimaginably hard life but they had little other choice.

Trevor pointed out a rare survival in the collection, a tub truck. These light-weight pony or horse traps were made of plywood which is why few have survived. Up until the 1970s they were widely used. In the main reception area was a wonderful black and white photo of a market day with dozens of the traps lining the street in neat rows, shafts pointing to the sky.