

Carrigeen Farmhouse, Fiveally, Birr, Co. Offaly

We were welcomed by our hosts Patrick (Pat) and Anne Egan and their daughter Bríd, whose introduction to a past way of life was a privilege. The farmhouse survived intact because Mrs Elizabeth Egan and her sister were able to live there into old age with family support. Elizabeth Egan died aged 97 in the 1990s. Since then Pat Egan, her son, has lit the turf fire nearly every day, making a crucial contribution to the house's survival.

The south-facing farmhouse takes a classic Irish form, described for us by Claudia Kinmonth who has recorded the interiors and their contents. Thatch survives under a corrugated roof. The door with a porch is off-centre, with two sash windows to the left and one to the right. The kitchen, the main room, is in the centre; the parlour or the 'good room' is accessed on the left by a door beside the fireplace with two smaller rooms off on the right. The spacious central kitchen has a substantial stone chimney and a wide hearth, a feature of Irish country dwellings. Wall papers, furnishings, cooking facilities and implements survive. A water pump, made in Uttoxeter, stands beside a stone trough at the front door.

The hearth houses a long crane under which two fires can be lit for heating water or cooking different things at the same time. Unusually, its ash-pit survives. There is a



Brid baking soda bread in a pot in front of the hearth; she is getting more hot turf from the fire to place on the lid of the pot. Courtesy of Carrigeen Farmhouse. *Photo David Dewing*



The kitchen with Pat Egan beside the hearth and Crissie White, Anne Egan and Claudia Kinmonth seated on the painted settle bed. Courtesy of Carrigeen Farmhouse. *Photo David Dewing*



View of the settle bed open with bedding enclosed. Courtesy of Carrigeen Farmhouse. *Photo Crissie White*

fine example of a painted settle bed, a painted dresser with its display of stacked plates, bowls and candlesticks, mug rack, cupboards, and chairs, where once stools prevailed. On the wall hang flesh forks for



Painted dresser with its display of plates, mugs and jugs. Courtesy of Carrigeen Farmhouse. *Photo Crissie White*

lifting meat or fish safely from a cooking pot and a square hand-wrought grid-iron for cooking fish. The table sits under the south window, traditionally to work at, not to eat from. Pat told us the basket of turf put beside the open settle bed allowed the occupant to top up the fire from the bed, without rising.

‘The room’, on the left of the kitchen has a nineteenth-century fireplace, a built-in display cabinet with pieced glazing and a nineteenth-century chiffonier, each with its display of ornaments. An early twentieth-century trumpet-style gramophone has pride of place, and on the dining table is the family bible and memorabilia. The cupboard in the corner is a ‘press’ bed and was opened with ceremony by Pat and Claudia to reveal a substantially made comfortable double bed with mattress. On the right of the kitchen are two small rooms, one with iron bed and quilt, a dressing table and a hip bath. The half loft bedroom above with iron bed and dressing table is reached by a ladder.

The house came alive as Pat treated us to tunes on his melodeon, like old times, and Bríd demonstrated the process of baking bread in an iron pot which is placed on a trivet in front of the hearth with turf embers below and above, on the lid. Cooking exclusively over a fire was a revelation. To end the day, the Egan family treated us to refreshments and bread tasting which were much appreciated.

With thanks to Claudia Kinmonth for editorial advice.