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Of hearth and home: the material biography of an Irish cabin

By STEPHEN A. BRIGHTON and ANDREW J. WEBSTER 

SUMMARY: The authors blend archaeological data with ethnographic, archival, and historical accounts to tell the story of a post-Famine stone cabin in County Cork, Ireland that was inhabited between 1860 and 1915. Research reveals the stories of the two families that once lived in the cabin and connects them to broader issues of land ownership, politics, and social dynamics. These issues came to a head in 1915, when one family was evicted from the property and the cabin was set ablaze. Artefacts found in situ speak to the complexities of everyday life and reveal localized expressions of identity and belonging.

INTRODUCTION

One cannot study the materiality of everyday life without understanding the social construct and physical space of home. When we place the home within the broader social, political, and economic contexts of our assemblages, ‘we make meaning out of ruined houses, moving from pattern to change, logic to will, culture to history’ (Glassie 1982, 425). The interpretation in this manuscript seeks to do just that. The following pages blend theoretical perspectives on household archaeology, ethnographic and historical accounts, and archaeological data related to a standing ruin of a post-Famine cabin in inhabited between c. 1860 and 1915, located in County Cork, Ireland. The standing remains of this late 19th-century dwelling were the stage and silent witness to the ebbs and flow of daily life made manifest by the domestic and work-related object found inside. Artefacts recovered *in situ* reveal behavioral patterns and activities over time and are connected to broader cultural and historic contexts. The aim of this paper is to illustrate the power of archaeology to interpret the complexities of everyday life and reveal the localized expressions of identity, belonging, and struggle stemming from the dynamic social, economic, and political climate of late 19th- and early 20th-century Ireland.

THE PROJECT AREA AND METHODS

The archaeological data for this study comes from within the standing ruin of a dry-laid stone cabin dating from the mid-19th to early 20th century. The Collins site (18E0190) is in the townland of Lackaghane in the Barony of West Carbery (East Division), 8 km southwest of Skibbereen town in County Cork, Ireland (Fig. 1). Together with the other rural townlands surrounding Skibbereen, Lackaghane features heavily in the narrative of the Great Hunger and is vital to understanding and interpreting the impacts of colonialism and famine, as well as cultural formation and transformation over time (see Daly 2007; Dickson 2005; Donnelly 1975; Foynes 2004; Geary 2010; Hickey 2002; Kearney and O’Regan 2015; Lewis 1837; Miller 1985). The excavations described here are part of an archaeological field school created and directed by Dr. Stephen A. Brighton, Associate Professor at the University of Maryland, and assisted by Ph.D. candidate Andrew J. Webster. The annual field school is part of a larger research project delving into the material history of rural Ireland during and after the Great Irish Famine (c. 1845–1852).

The narrative history of the Collins Site we produce here is based on a combination of archaeological and archival research. The archaeological

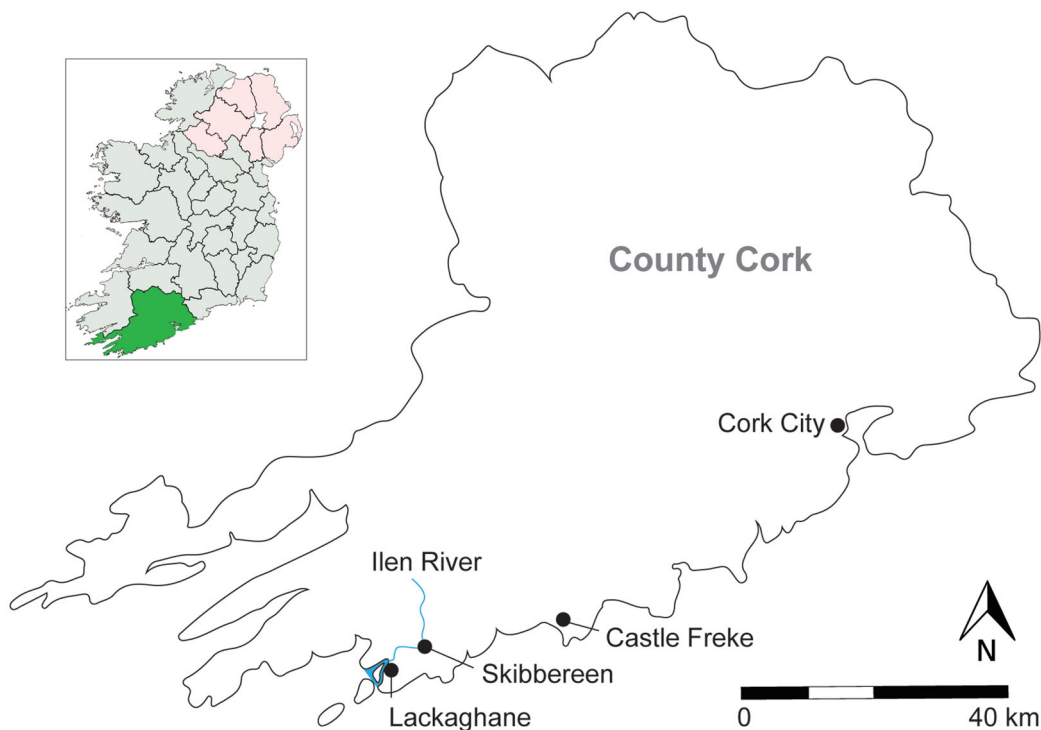


FIG. 1

Map of County Cork showing locations referenced in the text (map created by Andrew J. Webster).

research comes from two five-week field seasons in the summers of 2018 and 2019. In total, 13 excavation units were completed inside the cabin, yielding 1,908 artefacts. These units ranged in size from 50 cm by 50 cm to 2 m by 2 m, depending on physical constraints (cabin walls) and time constraints. The focus of this paper is the interior of the cabin, since it has been almost completely excavated. Additional excavation units were placed exterior to the cabin, but a sound archaeological context has not yet been established these areas. Future excavations will focus on these external areas, but the COVID-19 pandemic has halted excavations for the past few years.

In addition to the archaeology, a suite of archival sources were consulted to create the following narrative. The majority of these sources were accessed online or remotely, due to travel restrictions caused by COVID-19. The Irish Censuses of 1901 and 1911 were accessed online via the National Archives of Ireland. These include the Household Return (Form A), House and Buildings Return (B1), and Out-Offices and Farm-Steadings Return (Form B2) (Irish Census 1901; 1911). The Valuation Revision Books for Lackaghane townland, which record the history of legal tenants of a

property, are held by the Valuation Office in Dublin and were accessed by mail by submitting an Application for a General Search of the Valuation Office Records (Valuation Office 1859, 1865, 1876, 1882, 1888, 1911, 1928, 1951, 1976). Civil records, including births, marriages, and deaths, are held by the General Register Office and obtained via their website (General Register Office 1845). Ordnance Survey Maps, which for West Cork were recorded in 1842 & 1899, were accessed online via Geohive, Ireland's national geospatial data hub (Ordnance Survey Ireland 1842, 1899). Griffith's Valuation, which was carried out in 1853 in County Cork, recorded property owners and immediate lessees along with property details (Griffith's Valuation 1853). Griffith's Valuation is available online at the Ask about Ireland website. Baptismal records and graveyard records were provided by the Skibbereen Heritage Centre. Petty session court records were accessed on Ancestry.com. Finally, newspaper records were viewed online via the Irish Newspaper Archive. Of particular use to us here were the two Skibbereen periodicals, *The Cork County Eagle* and *Munster Advertiser* (later known as *The Skibbereen Eagle*) and *The Southern Star*.

THE CABIN AT THE COLLINS SITE

Over its lifespan, the cabin housed two families between c. 1860 and 1915: the McCarthys (c. 1860–1911) and the Lordans (1911–1915) (Griffith's Valuation 1853; Census of Ireland 1901, 1911). At the time of excavation at the Collins site, local oral history suggested there may have been an eviction, but who was evicted and how were not clear. The artefacts recovered were assumed to be those of the McCarthy Family—the Lordan story had not been unearthed yet. The objects recovered from the 2018 and 2019 excavations, plus the cabin itself, reveal the types of commodities used, cherished, and discarded by the men, women, and children who once called the dwelling their home.

The site consists of the ruins of a dry-laid stone cabin and the surrounding yard space. The ruin lies near the bottom of a hill just above a tidal flat of the Ilan River. Based on the historic Ordnance Survey maps (Ordnance Survey Ireland 1842, 1899), construction of the cabin occurred sometime after 1842 and before 1899. The 1842 Ordnance map shows a different cabin located on the property, just north of where the ruined cabin appears on the 1899 Ordnance map. There are no visible aboveground signs of the earlier cabin and it is likely that architectural stone from the earlier cabin and outbuildings were used to build the existing cabin. It is then likely that the cabin was constructed in the decades following the Great Irish Famine.

The dwelling is typical of rural Irish vernacular architecture—it is a single-story building with a thatched roof and gable-end hearths (see Ó Danachair 1972; O'Reilly 2011, 193; Aalen 2011; Gailey 1984; Kinmonth 1993). It is three bays across and a single pile deep, measuring 10 m by 6 m (Fig. 2). The south elevation has a central door opening with windows on either side and is an example of a direct entry dwelling. The north elevation has a central door but no windows. The interior is an open floor plan with flag-stone flooring along the eastern section representing the daily living and cooking areas, as evidenced by the large gable-end hearth in the eastern wall (Ó Danachair 1972, 89) (Fig. 3). The western section, the sleeping chambers, has a clay floor. The western section has a smaller hearth and served as the sleeping quarters for the adults, and above this room a small loft was used for the children's sleeping quarters. There would have been a partition, either of wood, cloth, or furniture separating the spaces. This style of direct entry, partially divided house was a common form in the West of Ireland during the mid to late 19th century (Aalen 2011, 215; Ó Danachair 1972, 89; O'Reilly 2011, 196; Gailey 1984, 142; Ó Danachair 1964, 63; Ó Danachair 1972, 89).

Irish vernacular dwellings took a variety of forms depending on region, time of construction, and where the inhabitants stood on the social ladder (Aalen

1989, 2011; Rowley 2017). Beginning with the 1841 decennial census and continuing into the 20th century, houses were designated as belonging to one of four classes based on their number of rooms and windows and the material of their walls and roofs: fourth class, a one-room one-window cabin with walls made of mud or other perishable materials; third class: constructed with more durable materials and consisting of one to four rooms; second class, “a good farm house”; and first class, anything better (Matheson 1903:196–197; McKay 1992:28). During the second half of the 19th century, housing classes generally improved across Ireland and in the west and south in particular, due in part to the devastating depopulating effects of the Famine, improvements made by tenants, and political action towards tenants rights and land ownership (Matheson 197). From 1841, on the eve of the Great Famine, to 1901, when the McCarthys appear in the census, the proportion of fourth-class houses in Ireland dropped from 37% to just 1%; third class houses dropped slightly from 40% to 32%; second class houses rose from 20% to 61%; and first-class houses rose slightly from 3% to 8% (Matheson 1903:197–198). When the McCarthys were recorded in the 1901 census, the Buildings Return (B1) listed their cabin as a third-class house possessing stone walls, thatch or wood roof, one room, and two windows (Census of Ireland 1901). In 1901, all ten dwellings in Lackaghane were of one to two rooms and either second or third class.

In 1901, six outbuildings are listed on the McCarthy property, including a stable, a cow house, a calf house, a dairy, a piggery, and a fowl house (Census of Ireland 1901). This was common in the area at the time; of the ten houses in Lackaghane townland listed in the 1901 census, all but two had 5–7 outbuildings. In the absence of zooarchaeological data (of which little was recovered), this census listing reveals the animals the McCarthys likely had on the farm: cows, pigs, chicken, and a horse or donkey.

LIFE HISTORY OF A CABIN: THE MCCARTHY FAMILY (C. 1860–1911)

The Collins Site and the rest of Lackaghane townland was part of the vast Carbery Estate associated with the Evans-Freke family (Griffith's Valuation 1853). The Carbery Estate was centered at Castle Freke, 20 km east of Skibbereen near Rosscarbery. In the 1870s, Lord Carbery owned around 13,700 acres in County Cork, 2,700 acres in County Limerick, and smaller estates in County Kilkenny and County Laois (National University of Ireland Galway 2011). Lord Carbery, Lady Carbery, or their heirs are listed as the owners of all plots in Lackaghane from the Griffith's Valuation through the rest of the 19th century (Valuation Office 1859, 1865, 1876, 1882, 1888, 1911).

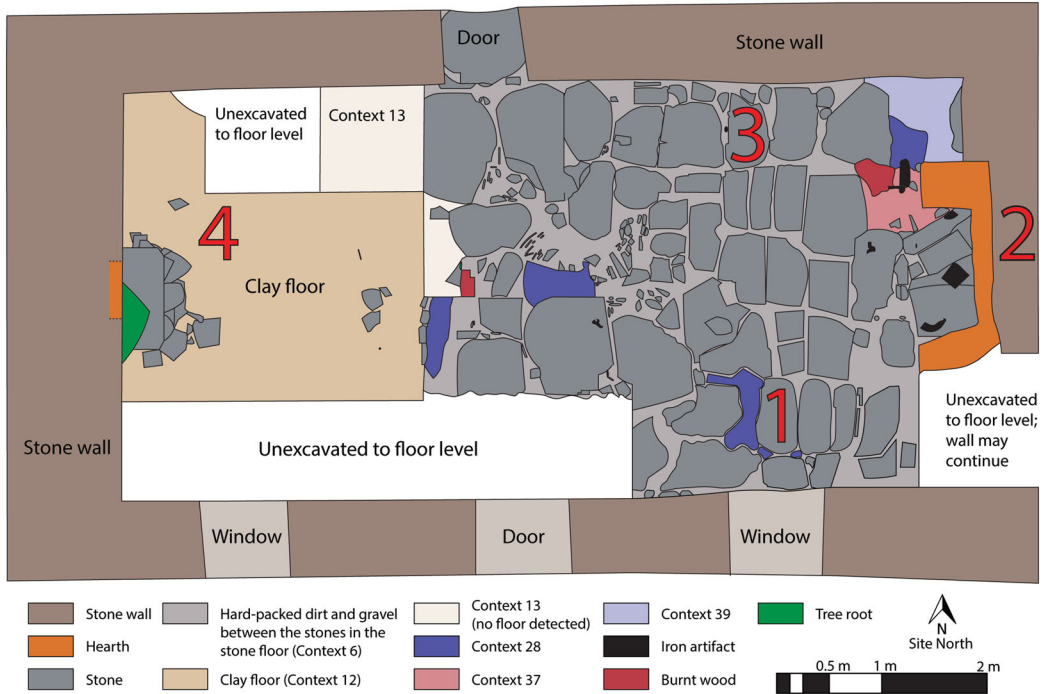


FIG. 2

A detailed plan map of the cabin based on the 2018 and 2019 archaeological field work. The numbers in red represent the different uses of space based on artefact types recovered: 1) area of kitchen and social space where cupboard was positioned along the wall between the door and window; 2) the kitchen hearth and cooking space in front of the hearth; 3) northern half of the daily living and outdoor work space combined, located along the wall near rear door; 4) the sleeping chambers considered the private space (map created by Andrew J. Webster).

The 1842 Ordnance map shows a different cabin located on the property, just north of where the McCarthy cabin appears on the 1899 Ordnance map. There are no visible aboveground signs of the earlier cabin and it is likely that architectural stone from the earlier cabin and outbuildings were used to build the existing cabin. It is then likely that the cabin was constructed in the decades following the Famine. In County Cork, these decades profoundly changed the nature of housing on the landscape. Landlords consolidated their newly depopulated holdings by demolishing mud cabins (Donnelly 1975, 242). Tenant farmers moved into or constructed larger and more durable dwellings, due to both their increased prosperity and their emotional disdain for their previous dwellings, which many saw as monuments to their past adversity (Donnelly 1975, 243).

Based on the Ordnance Map data, the McCarthy Family were the ones who originally built and inhabited the cabin at the Collins Site. Griffith's Valuation (1853) and the Valuation Revision Books (Valuation Office 1859, 1865, 1876, 1882, 1888, 1911) show that the plot of land on which the cabin was located

(Plot 4 on Griffith's Valuation Map) was occupied by the McCarthy Family continuously at least as far back as Griffith's Valuation (1853) (Fig. 4). Branches of the Geaney family lived on three nearby plots (Plots 2, 3, and 6) since that time as well. The McCarthy and Geaney families were intertwined for decades: the Valuation Records show that the Geaney families that occupied Plots 2 and 3 also occupied a "house in 4", and Civil Records show that on more than one occasion there was a marriage between a McCarthy and a Geaney (General Register Office 1845).

In the 1901 census, ten people lived in the cabin, representing three generations of the McCarthy Family. Peter McCarthy, aged 72, was listed as head of household, and was married to Mary, 73. Residing with Peter and Mary were three adult sons: John, 40; James, 25; and Jeremiah, 22. Also living here were John's wife Catherine (Kate, née Geaney), 40, and their four children: Peter, 8; John, 6; Mary, 5; and Patrick, 2. (Census of Ireland 1901). Research is ongoing, but it is apparent that Peter and Mary's children extend beyond those listed in the household in 1901. Baptismal records show that Peter and Mary



FIG. 3

A view of looking east of the cabin's kitchen and social space, including the large kitchen hearth (photograph taken by Stephen A. Brighton).

had 11 children, of which 9 survived to adulthood. Family genealogy and newspaper records show that at least 4 of these 9 emigrated to the United States, settling in California (*Southern Star* 24 Oct. 1908, 1). According to graveyard and civil records, Mary McCarthy died on 19 October 1908 and was buried in nearby Tullagh Graveyard (Skibbereen Heritage Centre 2020; General Register Office 1845). Her husband Peter followed on 4 September 1909, with daughter-in-law Kate McCarthy, John's wife, present in the cabin at the time of his death (General Register Office 1845). The Valuation Revision books show that following Peter's death, son John McCarthy took over as head of household (Valuation Office 1888). Sometime after 1909 and before the 1911 census, John and his family moved to the neighboring townland of Creagh (Census of Ireland 1911).

LIFE HISTORY OF A CABIN: THE LORDAN FAMILY (1911–1915) AND THE POLITICS OF LAND OWNERSHIP

The Lordan family's tenure at the cabin is short. Ironically, it is their short stay and violent removal that has left an indelible scar on the landscape and

within the cabin which forms the crux of this narrative. Their short stay on the property was marked with conflict almost from day one and can be reconstructed from numerous court and bank records left in their wake.

On 1 June 1911, a man named Cornelius Lordan, aged 42, obtained the landholding previously held by the McCarthy family (Census of Ireland 1911; *Cork County Eagle and Munster Advertiser*, 12 Sept. 1914, 5). The 1911 Census shows that Cornelius moved into the dwelling with his wife Ellen, 35, and son Patrick John, 10 (Census of Ireland 1911). The Lordan family was originally from the townland of Drishanebeg, approximately 7 km east of Lackaghane (Census of Ireland 1901). This is important to the conflict which arises quickly between the Lordan family and their neighbors, the Geaneys, because the Lordans were outsiders to Lackaghane. The cabin on the site in question, as well as most surrounding plots, had been occupied by McCarthy and Geaney families since before Griffith's Valuation, families which were connected through intermarriage across generations (Ordnance Survey Ireland 1842; Griffith's Valuation 1853; Valuation Office 1859; 1865; 1876; 1882; 1888; 1911; General Register Office). In rural Ireland, family names and identities

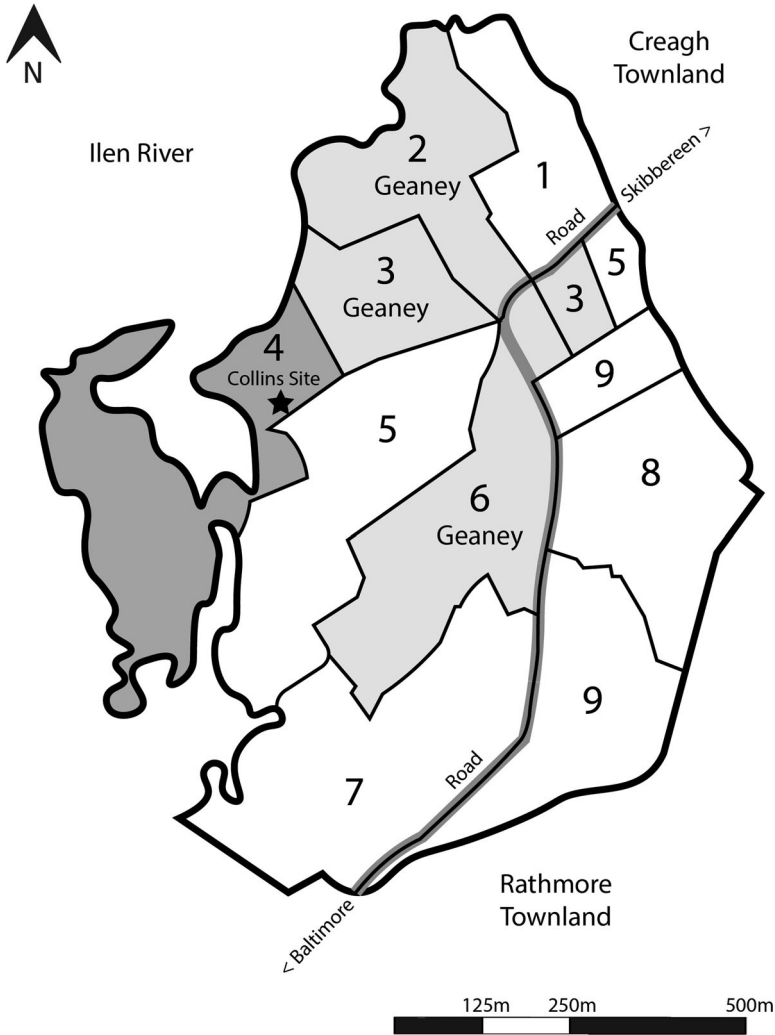


FIG. 4

Simplified map of Lackaghane Townland plots from Griffith's Valuation (map created by Andrew J. Webster, from Griffith's Valuation (1853)).

were and still are tied closely to the lands which they inhabit (Arensberg and Kimball 1948, 31; Salazar 1999, 159; Cassidy and McGrath 2014, 413). When an outside family moves in, or when there are property disputes, conflict can become deeply personal, rooted in familial heritage and deep sense of ownership or belonging to the land. This type of conflict is apparent in Lackaghane—during the few years the Lordan family lived on the property, they were brought to court several times by their neighbors, the Geaney family (Ireland Petty Session Court Registers 1913, 1915a, 1915b, 1915c; *Cork County Eagle and Munster Advertiser*, 18 Sept 1915, 9).

Throughout the later 19th century, emigration and depopulation continued. As many as 4.5 million more emigrants left Ireland between 1850 and 1913, especially from Munster and Leinster (Hatton and Williamson 1993, 575, 588). Of these, almost 425,000 officially emigrated from County Cork, the most of any county (Donnelly 1975, 227). In addition, throughout this time period, there was a general increase of successful socio-political movements to end landlordism, as well as the emergence of acts and policies to redistribute lands to existing tenants so that they could purchase and own the land they improved and on which they raised their families.

Political movements like the Tenant League and Land League were formed to fight for fair housing policies, namely fair rents, fixity of tenure, and free sale (Duffy 2000, 172). Charles Stuart Parnell's Land League, formed in 1879, organized demonstrations against evictions and encouraged the social ostracism of tenants who occupied the lands of those who had been evicted (Duffy 2000, 172; Ross 2002, 239). The League's long-term goal was that farmers should be able to purchase and own the land they worked on; their slogan was 'the land of Ireland for the people of Ireland' (Duffy 2000, 172). This push for land rights coincided with the political fight for Home Rule, or the self-government of Ireland by Ireland instead of the seat of power resting in England.

In response to growing pressure and agitation across the countryside, a series of Land Acts were passed which increased tenants' rights and eventually paved the way for 'peasant proprietorship,' as it was known. These acts first encouraged and later compelled landlords to sell off large portions of their estates (Whelan 2011, 103). The largest and arguably most successful of these was the Land Act of 1903, commonly known as the Wyndham Act. Under the Wyndham Act, landlords could sell off portions of their estate either directly to tenants or to the Land Commission. Landlords received favorable terms of sale, and tenant-purchasers paid an annuity of 3.25%. As a direct result of the Wyndham Act, an estimated 252,000 tenants purchased over 8 million acres of landholdings (Nolan 2012, 578). That is 40% of the land area of the island of Ireland. By the start of World War I, two-thirds of Irish tenants owned their land (Whelan 2011, 103–104).

The redistribution of land away from the gentry to the people was a defining movement in the formation of the social, economic, and political landscape of modern Ireland. Although many benefited from these policies, many tenant farmers found it difficult to purchase land and a number were maintaining themselves and their families on holdings too small to be adequate (Nolan 2012, 579). In *Emigrants and Exiles*, Kerby Miller writes that according to the 1911 Census, at least 40% of tenant landholdings were of insufficient size or land quality to support decent livings (1985, 390). 'In short,' Miller writes, 'the destruction of Irish landlordism merely removed a small group of major capitalists to make way for a mass of petty ones, most of whom were too impoverished to profit from the few economic advantages implicit in Ireland's ... position' (391). The well-intentioned movement for all to own land, while successful to a degree, also created contentious socioeconomic relations between the smaller farmers and the larger and expanding holdings of their neighbors, as well as the demands set in terms of an annuity owed to the Land Commission or a bank where non-payment could result in the forfeiture and seizure of the property.

The economic and social consequences of the Land Acts can be seen on a local level. Lackaghane Townland had been part of the vast Carbery Estate since before Griffith's Valuation (1853). By the early 20th century, the Carbery Estate, like many others across Ireland, was in the process of being broken up and sold to its tenants through the Land Act tenant purchaser schemes. The Valuation Records for Lackaghane show that all properties in Lackaghane were converted to Land Act Purchases between 1912 and 1914 (Valuation Office 1911).

The point of the Land Acts was to provide opportunity to tenants, however it also brought unforeseen contention, especially on local issues of land ownership. Court records show that on 15 January 1913, Cornelius Lordan was accused of trespassing on his neighbor Patrick Geaney's land on several occasions, causing damage to Geaney's potato crop (Ireland Petty Session Court Records 1913). At the same time, financial troubles were mounting for the Lordan family, and they did not pay the half-yearly annuity due on the land as a condition of the Land Act Purchase. Starting in September of 1914, The Munster & Leinster Bank Ltd. began publishing a series of notices in the *Cork County Eagle and Munster Advertiser* announcing the debt and the upcoming sale of the Lordan property by public auction (*Cork County Eagle and Munster Advertiser* 12 Sept. 1914, 5; 19 Sept. 1914, 6; 19 Dec. 1914, 5; 26 Dec. 1914, 5). The final auction judgement took place on 27 January 1915, and the Valuation Revision books show that a Jeremiah Geaney bought the property (Valuation Office 1911; *Cork County Eagle and Munster Advertiser* 19 Dec. 1914, 5; 26 Dec. 1914, 5). This Jeremiah Geaney is likely the son of Patrick Geaney from the earlier trespassing suit, who lived on the neighboring property (Valuation Office 1888, 1911; Census of Ireland 1911). In the upheaval caused by the Land Acts and the Lordans' misfortune, the Geaney family took an opportunity to increase the size of their landholdings and expand their family's control in the local area.

Despite the legal decision and auction results, the Lordan family refused to leave the property. Skibbereen petty session court records show the legal order for eviction was handed down on 6 August 1915 – seven months after the sale to the Geaney family (Ireland Petty Session Court Registers 1915a, 1915b, 1915c). During that time, Cornelius Lordan vanished from newspaper accounts and court records regarding the dispute between the Lordans and the Geaneys. It is unclear what happened to him, but the weight of the struggle to remain on the property then fell to his wife, Ellen, who remained steadfast and would not quit the dwelling. As a result, Jeremiah Geaney took her to court three times in August and September of 1915 for forcible possession, yet she would still not vacate the property (Ireland Petty Session Court Registers 1915a, 1915b, 1915c). The

dispute came to a head on 8 September 1915, when, according to a newspaper account, ‘Lordan was evicted on an equity suit, and his wife took forcible possession, and was arrested, and while she was before the Court somebody went and burned the house down so that she could not go in again’ (*Cork County Eagle and Munster Advertiser*, 18 Sept. 1915, 9). The culprit was not named, but one can only assume that Jeremiah Geaney was in some way responsible for setting the fire. The fire marked the final straw for the Lordan family, as the house became unlivable and remained so until the archaeological investigations in 2018.

After the cabin was burned, there are only two further mentions of the Lordans in newspaper and court records. In September 1915, the *Cork County Eagle and Munster Advertiser* reported on a court hearing in which Ellen Lordan appealed for relief after her cabin was burned (*Cork County Eagle and Munster Advertiser*, 18 Sept. 1915, 9). Members of the relief commission evidently did not think highly of Cornelius Lordan, remarking that “we should not give Lordan himself any relief; he is not a deserving case; he is a lazy idle fellow,” and “I took him to be an idiot.” Although they took pity on Ellen (“But I think this poor woman should get something”), eviction relief had already been granted to Cornelius, and as such they could not grant further relief to Ellen. Ellen appears once more in the archival records in early 1916, when another dispute between the Geaneys and Lordans goes to court (*Southern Star* 29 Jan. 1916, 6). Ellen Lordan stated that she had cut and sold hay to Jeremiah Geaney in July of 1915 but had not been fully compensated, and that “She never heard her farm was assigned away to a Jerry Geaney....” Geaney claimed that he himself had cut the hay, and that it was legally his property. While Cornelius is listed as the plaintiff, only Ellen is mentioned in the summary of testimony, leaving doubts as to whether or not Cornelius was actually present at the hearing. A resolution to the case was not recorded.

After 1916, there is no further mention of either Ellen or Cornelius in the archival record. But the emotional trauma that the eviction and fire must have had on the family is clear. With Cornelius gone, Ellen was a single mother, without the means to pay rent, without the male status required to receive assistance from the local council, and now with a reputation with area families. While there are several Geaney surnames in the area census records, but no other Lordans appear nearby. Whether she ever reunited with Cornelius, moved away to be with family, or ended up in the workhouse is unknown.

After the cabin burned down, no one ever repaired it or lived in it again, and later Valuation Records show it in ruins (Valuation Office 1911). Ultimately, with the purchase of the former McCarthy/Lordan property, the Geaney family expanded their

landholdings and control over central Lackaghane (see Fig. 4). Valuation Records (Valuation Office 1911, 1928, 1951, 1976) show that branches of the family owned plots 2, 3, 4, and 6 until 1945, when plot 2 was sold to a Miss Noel Ryan. In 1967, plot 6 was sold to a Miss Catherine Bennett. Plots 3 and 4 remained owned by a Patrick Geaney through at least the 1970s. Today, the land of plots 2 and 3 is held not by McCarthys, Lordans, or Geaneys, but by the Collins family, who have generously allowed archaeological research on their farm and who lend their name to the Collins Site.

In this case, history alone does not tell the full story of the Lordan family and their contentious relationship with neighbors. Archaeology, specifically site formation processes, has provided much information about the forced removal of the Lordan family and perhaps more importantly a snapshot of how they lived their daily lives within the walls of the cabin before their tragic departure. The archaeology reveals the humanity within this narrative and details the intimate lives of the individuals who struggled within the larger socio-economic and political structure of post-Famine Ireland. The archaeology to date has recovered the household and personal items belonging to the Lordan family, and the formation of the stratigraphic layers within the house which detail the reasons for site abandonment.

THE ARCHAEOLOGY OF ABANDONMENT

To date, two field seasons at the Collins site have revealed much information about the cabin’s layout and family’s use of space in its almost sixty years of habitation. Due to its rapid abandonment, interpreting the site’s formation processes and the families’ use of space is unusually clear and echoes the turbulent times of Irish history during the post-Famine decades.

The two pieces of critical archaeological evidence for the involuntary abandonment of the Lordan Cabin are the signs of burning present on both artefacts and soil, and the large amount of *de facto* refuse present at the site. Michael Schiffer terms ‘*de facto* refuse’ as ‘cultural materials that, although still usable, (or reusable), are left behind when an activity area is abandoned’ (1987, 89). When sites are rapidly abandoned under unplanned or extreme conditions, greater amounts of *de facto* refuse are to be expected (Stevenson 1982, 241–242). In many cases of abandonment, larger more cumbersome artefacts are left behind, and the more portable objects are taken away (Schiffer 1983, 679).

Shannon Lee Dawdy argues that by analyzing the taphonomy of ‘small-scale disasters,’ archaeologists can investigate social conflict: ‘the object is not so much the disaster itself as the tensions and

contradictions it unveils' (Dawdy 2006, 727). The evidence for a violent and sudden abandonment at the Lordan cabin is thus tied to the impacts of large socio-economic and political events and movements both regionally and nationally.

THE ARCHAEOLOGY OF REMOVAL IN RURAL IRELAND

While a small but growing number of archaeological studies have been done on rural tenant households in 19th- and 20th-century Ireland, (see McDonald 1988; Clutterbuck 2006; Conway 2011; Delaney and Tierney 2011; Forsythe 2007, 2013; O'Sullivan 2007; Janes 2009; Whelan and O'Keeffe 2014; Kuijt et al. 2015; MacDomhnaill 2015; Couey 2018) the most direct site comparison with the Lordan cabin is the work of Charles Orser (2006b, 2010) and Stephen Brighton (2009) in Ballykilcline, County Roscommon, because of its focus on households destroyed through eviction and rapid abandonment.

The archaeology of evictions involves not only the objects recovered within and just outside the dwelling, but also the surrounding landscapes and the home itself. In his work on Ballykilcline, Orser developed a clear framework for identifying the archaeological evidence of eviction in 19th-century Ireland (Orser 2005, 45; 2006a). From 1998 to 2002, the remains of two stone cabins that once belonged to the Nary family were excavated. No above-ground evidence for these cabins existed prior to excavation; they were located through geophysical survey (Orser 2010, 86). The Nary family were small or middling farmers who leased a relatively large holding of 44 acres from the Mahon Estate until 1834, when the property reverted back to the Crown (Ryder and Orser 2006, 30). The Narys and over 350 of their neighbors in the townland were violently evicted as part of large-scale clearances of the area between 1847 and 1848, at the height of the Great Hunger, for participating in a rent strike (Orser 2006a, 182, 184). Family members had just minutes to gather their belongings and leave before their homes were demolished and razed to the ground by Crown forces (Brighton 2009, 58–59).

Excavation of the Nary cabins revealed architectural features such as drains, pathways, and floor surfaces, as well as 9,000 artefacts, but also signs of eviction, permanent removal, and abandonment. The archaeological evidence of forced removal included wall collapse evidenced by a tight cluster of architectural stone layered three courses deep, as well as soil layers black to yellowish-brown in color mixed with charcoal and organic material reflecting a roof fire and collapse (Brighton 2009, 59). Over the course of archaeological work at Ballykilcline, Orser proved that sites with unplanned or extreme conditions of abandonment tend to produce high numbers of *de*

facto refuse, objects that were still functional or possessed cultural or emotional significance to the individual or group who left them behind (Orser 2005, 48). By documenting the daily lives of Ballykilcline's rural poor, the archaeology gave voice to the stories of families like the Narys, stories that otherwise would have been lost to a broader discussion of rent strikes and agrarian agitation (Orser 2019, 221). This pattern is similar to that of the Lordan family dwelling at the Collins site.

THE ARCHAEOLOGY OF REMOVAL: THE LORDAN FAMILY, LACKAGHANE, CO. CORK

The archaeology at the Collins site fits the model of sudden abandonment established by Orser. Most of the cabin's floor was covered by a layer of burned organic material. The material was comprised of the remains of the roof's thatching, wood rafters, the large beam comprising the kitchen hearth mantel, and perhaps furniture remains like the kitchen hutch or dresser. In terms of site formation processes, the burn layer represents the collapsed roof during the fire, falling and sealing the objects and personal belongings of the Lordan family atop the flagstone floor and directly underneath the organic burn layer (Fig. 5). Furthermore, the entire material assemblage below the burned layer shows evidence of burning or extreme heat exposure (Fig. 6). In essence, the formation of the site and its timing presents something akin to the archaeologically elusive *Pompeii Effect*. This is an important point to recognize as it then establishes the context that objects would have fallen or shattered near where they were kept or stored over the course of routine life within the home.

The archaeological context at the Lordan cabin thus reflects a sudden and violent eviction by fire. The interpretation of eviction uncovered by the archaeology complements the historical record documenting a fire relating to a legal dispute between the Lordan family and a neighboring family. It explains the vertical and horizontal position and the association of the objects to not only the removal, but to daily life prior to the violent action. It also confirms that this cabin was indeed the dwelling referenced in the archival records. In essence, when the fire destroyed the cabin and deposited the artefacts, the house was set up as it would normally be on any given day, therefore providing archaeologists a rare glimpse into how space was defined and used. But the archaeology does more than just complement the historical records. By bringing together the evidence for how the site formed with the artefacts recovered and their location in the archaeological context, it becomes possible to illustrate the patterned life routines of the Lordan family before eviction.



FIG. 5

Photograph of an early excavation unit in kitchen space illustrating both the flagstone floor surface and the burn layer (red arrows) directly above it (photograph taken by Stephen A. Brighton).



FIG. 6

An example of the completeness of vessels recovered from the cabin and the artefacts exposure' to heat and fire (photograph taken by Stephen A. Brighton).



FIG. 7

An example of an artefact found *in situ*, near where it was located during its use-life. Pictured here is the copper alloy candlestick recovered adjacent to the kitchen hearth (photograph taken by Stephen A. Brighton).

THE MATERIAL CULTURE OF DAILY LIFE IN THE LORDAN CABIN

A total of 1,908 artefacts comprise the collection from within the cabin and range in date from the 1860s to 1911. The *terminus post quem* (TPQ) of 1911 is from the date of a British half-penny. In terms of *de facto refuse*, there are numerous and mendable sherds of glass ($n=1,103$) and ceramics ($n=562$), iron cooking pots and farming implements, as well as small personal finds such as a candlestick, sewing items, and religious items found *in situ* (Fig. 7). All artefacts from inside the cabin were found below a layer of burned organic materials (thatch and wood). Ceramic sherds relating to table ($n=127$) and teaware ($n=123$) were found in the same proximity and were mendable to form vessels. This demonstrates not only the sudden abandonment, but that where the sherds were recovered is near where the vessels were placed, stored, and used throughout the course of daily life in the home.

Households are spaces for the formation and performance of personal and cultural identities through use of space and the materials within it. As sites of cultural production and negotiation, households own,

display, and discard objects that create, contest, and showcase individual and social identities such as class, gender, and ethnicity as part of the broader cultural landscape. This makes households ideal subjects for the archaeological study of daily life, especially when combined with ethnography and archival research (see Allison 1999; Beaudry 2004, 2016; King 2006; Mrozowski et al. 1996; Mullins 2001; Rotman 2003, 2009; Wilkie and Hayes 2006; Wood 2004; Wurst 2000). According to Beaudry, determining the life history of a household site is vital for interpreting its use and change over time (1999, 122). Therefore, while artefacts are important for household analyses, features and their position in space may be even more important (120). Archaeologists can link the life histories of sites—such as stratigraphy and site formation processes—to episodes of household change (Beaudry 2004, 4).

When a visitor entered the front door of the Lordan cabin, they would see the rear door in front of them on the back wall, a partition leading to private sleeping chambers to their left, and the kitchen and living area to their right (see Fig. 2). The visitor would likely have been invited into the kitchen and living area by Ellen Lordan, the woman of the house. This area was the primary interior living space for Ellen and Cornelius Lordan and their son Patrick, as well as the space where visitors would be received. The large kitchen hearth in the eastern wall was the social and familial center of the house (O'Reilly 2011, 206; Kinmonth 2020, 397). At the hearth, Ellen prepared meals for the family, and the Lordans gathered with friends or relatives to talk, tell stories, and or read the newspaper (NFCS 362, 257). Oral histories for the National Folklore Schools Collection (NFCS), collected in the 1930s often feature descriptions of the hearth. For example:

The kitchen fireplace took up almost the width of the house... two strong piers supported the “mantle-tree” – usually strong oak tree trunk – the “breast” of the chimney was built on this and narrowed by “lobbies” at intervals up to the roof... Farmers fireplace also provided a strong iron crane – to support the large pots... (NFCS 362, 258).

In the Lordan cabin, the hearth feature takes nearly all the eastern gable end wall (see Fig. 2). Archaeologically, the excavations recovered cooking related items within the hearth feature itself (Fig. 8). Recovered from the kitchen hearth were large iron pots or cauldrons ($n=3$) with matching lids ($n=2$), as well as ferric or iron fragments and pieces of a griddle pan, and architectural structure of the hearth crane including the swinging arm, the vertical post, and base of the crane system. Such items are commonly mentioned in oral histories:



FIG. 8

An example of a cooking-related artefact found in and around the kitchen hearth. This is a large iron pot lid left in the hearth when the cabin was abandoned (photograph taken by Stephen A. Brighton).

The hearth fire was the one and is still used with a large swinging crane over it fitted with crooks of different sizes and pot hangers. The crook was very handy and some were long enough to accommodate two fair sized pots over the fire at once. The fire of turf was always big and blazing then the space around the fire was commodious enough to hold ovens, skillets or anything else placed near. The tongs a good strong iron one was left in the corner ... (NFCS 237, 67).

In the Lordan Cabin, the site formation processes of vigilante eviction and rapid abandonment sealed artefacts near where they were at the time of the fire. Thus, the pots and crane remained where they were after Ellen Lordan prepared breakfast for herself and her son on the fateful morning of 8 September 1915, before she went to court and the cabin was set ablaze.

Directly above the hearth was a large wooden mantel or clevy, the remains of which were partially recovered archaeologically as burnt wood in front of the hearth. Here, Ellen Lordan displayed various objects of significance, including a candlestick, a porcelain figurine, rosary beads and religious medals. The religious items would have been part of a holy shelf or shine, and could have been placed directly on the clevy or on a separate shelf nearby (see Kinmonth 2020, 409). The more practical object, if

unusually ornate, was the copper alloy (brass) candlestick. Throughout the first half of the 20th century, electricity was not common in rural Ireland and aside from the hearth fire candles provided some of the only source of light in the night (Kinmonth 2020, 415). As stated in the School's Collection concerning candles and candlesticks:

Candles were commonly made in the area – once people kill a cow they would keep the fat and melt it – placed in a mould and use a cotton thread for the wick ... use the candles on table to light their table during their meals ... (NFCS 345, 95).

Commonly, candlesticks were either made by the family from drift or bog wood. Alternatively, blacksmiths made relatively basic iron candlesticks, as well as iron cooking pots, griddles, and cauldrons.

About seventy years ago there were no candles sold in shops. The people would gather rushes and peel them. They would melt grease and soak peeled rushes in it. Some people made their candles out of bog fir. They cut the fir in handy pieces and soaked it in the grease also. They would stick it by the wall or in the tall iron candle sticks (NFCS 167, 553).

The copper alloy (brass) candlestick in the assemblage seems to be more ornate and not locally made



FIG. 9

An example of a work-related artefact found in the northeast part of the living space that combined domestic interior space with work/farming outdoor space. Pictured here is a *graíán*, or turf shovel (photograph taken by Stephen A. Brighton).

(see Fig. 7). In terms of the context of impoverishment and removal, the object seems relatively out of place. It is not known how the Lordan family came to own this seemingly ornate candlestick, but it is certain that they prized the object. At the time of eviction, it was positioned in a place of importance above the hearth. It may have even been part of the holy shrine (Kinmonth 2020, 162; 167–168). In Sean Keating's *Republican Court, 1921*, a 1946 oil painting depicting the interior of a County Cork house in 1921, two brass candlesticks are displayed as part of a holy shrine (Kinmonth 2006, 69–70).

The fire from the hearth and the flame of the candles would have provided enough light for the Lordan family to sit at the kitchen table or near the fire to read and write letters. A complete glass inkwell rested in the same stratigraphic context as the candlestick and was most likely sitting atop the mantel at the time of the fire. The inkwell itself indicates that someone in the house was literate and the 1911

census data confirms that the entire Lordan family could read and write. This makes sense, given that in 1911 only 7.3% of the population was illiterate (Central Statistics Office 2016). It is not hard to imagine Cornelius or Ellen using the inkwell for extensive letter writing during the numerous land disputes around the property.

The other focal point in the kitchen area was the dresser, one of the most enduring and important pieces of furniture in an Irish house (Kinmonth 2020, 179). It provided a place to store and display ceramics and glassware, as well as other decorative pieces (Kinmonth 2020, 186). Descriptions of dressers were a common topic in accounts from the Schools Collection:

In every kitchen there is usually a dresser. There are many different kinds of dressers. There are three shelves on some dressers and on other dressers there are four. In the bottom of

the dresser there in generally a cupboard. On the shelves there usually does be plate dishes, cups and saucers, mugs and jugs, and lots of other things. In some cupboards of Dressers there are shelves for keeping bread and Butter and all other things. A dresser cannot be done without in a kitchen (NFCS 185, 141; 827, 34–35.)

In the Lordan Cabin, the archaeology suggests that the dresser was placed along the interior of the south-eastern wall. Here, excavations recovered ceramic teacups, saucers, and plates that mend to form near complete vessels (MNV = 10). Archaeologically, remnants of the dresser were not identifiable—there were burnt wood fragments throughout the southeastern portion of the cabin; however, it is difficult to identify what specifically the wood belonged to—whether rafters, kitchen table, and/or the dresser—but they would have been stored on a piece of furniture.

The Lordan's ceramic assemblage is a mixture of plain and decorative types which range from transfer printed blue and green, fluted and ribbed molded patterns, flow blue, and a few sherds of gilt porcelain and hand-painted whiteware. The flow blue is present on several pieces of teaware and is marked 'WATTEAU NWPCo ENGLAND'. The pattern was originally made by the Royal Doulton Company; however, this specific piece was produced by the New Wharf Pottery Company, Burslem (c. 1878–1894). The flow blue vessels represent the only matching pieces of decorated teaware in the assemblage, though there would have been matching undecorated wares present as well. Outside of the plain or undecorated vessels, the remaining teaware is a collection of mismatched handled cups and saucers. Tableware consists of undecorated dinner and soup plates or plates with a deep well made for eating liquid-based meals like soups or stews. All sherds comprising the vessel count were located with the southeastern quadrant of the cabin and exposed to a high heat. It is not hard to imagine Ellen Lordan carefully arranging her modest collection of ceramics—some with matching patterns, but most mismatched or plain vessels—before accepting visitors for tea or providing dinner for Cornelius as he returned from the fields.

Northwest of the hearth, along the north wall near the rear door, Cornelius Lordan kept tools and other agricultural implements, represented archaeologically by 110 iron pieces. (see Fig. 2). The items include donkey bridal bits and harnesses, pieces to a small plow, as well as hooks, bolts, and a *grafan*, or turf shovel (Fig. 9). Cornelius would have used the turf shovel to cut sod for the preparation of creating potato beds. The placement of these items creates a clear picture of the patterned use of space within the house and rhythm of daily life for the Lordan family moving through that space. Along the north or rear

wall no domestic items in any significant numbers were found, and the same can be said about farming implements along the living and eating space along the eastern and southern space where the kitchen table, cooking hearth, and dresser were located. The archaeology suggests that the front door provided access to the domestic space of the kitchen and living areas—Ellen's domain—whereas the rear door was used by Cornelius to access work-related outdoor spaces.

Moving away from the rear door and back around to the opening in the partition is the private space of the sleeping chamber with a small fireplace in the western gable-end wall (see Fig. 2). The fireplace would have provided warmth not only to the adults sleeping in this room, but also the children sleeping up in the loft above. For the three-member Lordan family, the loft may not have been important, but it would have been crucial extra space for the six adults and four children of the McCarthy Family. Found in the western sleeping chambers were primarily small finds related to personal items ($n = 24$) such a pair of scissors, several bone and porcelain buttons, cufflinks, sewing related items, and a key. The size of the key reflects a door lock and because the partition would have been made of impermanent materials it is likely the key belongs to the lock on either the front or back door lock—an important tool, given the Lordans' strained relations with their neighbors. The personal items in this room speak to the everyday activities in the lives of the Lordans. For instance, the sewing items and small number of buttons found in the same context does not suggest that Ellen was participating in a cottage industry, but was more likely mending or darning family clothing. Many folklore histories collected as part of the Schools' Collection that the women of household would commonly knit their own stockings and repair clothing for their family (NFCS 867,91). Together, these objects give us an intimate look into the lives and activities of Cornelius, Ellen, and Patrick Lordan—one family navigating the social and political climate of their townland over a century ago.

CONCLUSION

In the first decades of the 20th century, the residents of Lackaghane townland were entangled in the broader processes of land redistribution and tenant purchaser schemes. The archaeology of the cabin at the Collins site and the artifacts recovered within provide a material signature of one possible outcome of these political developments. The story of the Lordan Family is an example of those who were left behind by the Land Acts, whose situation did not and could not improve through things like the end of landlordism, Home Rule, or national independence. While these movements undoubtedly helped many tenants,

the most vulnerable families, like the Lordans, were unable to benefit. In the end, the Geaneys benefitted by expanding and consolidating their property by purchasing the holding from auction when the Lordans couldn't pay. Besides moving a short distance away, the McCarthys seemed to emerge from this saga unscathed. But Ellen Lordan was evicted, abandoned, and had nowhere else to go, her house and property up in flames.

Ironically, the very tragedy that befell Ellen Lordan in 1915 has allowed her story to be uncovered and shared over a century later. This project has shown that a multidisciplinary combination of archaeological and archival evidence, informed by history and ethnography, can create a compelling picture of past life. Creating a microhistory like this can highlight and exemplify large events and trends, in our case post-famine recovery, land practices, family politics, and the use of interior space. Artefacts and documents can create a window into the past to recreate the daily lives of ordinary people like the Lordans whose stories may otherwise go untold. Establishing the relationship of both the McCarthy and Lordan families during their tenure in the cabin to local families and the impact of larger economic and political structures creates localized knowledge that can be broadened out to illustrate the complexities and contradictions of the meaning of family, community, and ownership in the late 19th- and early 20th-century Ireland. The materiality of everyday life is firmly grounded in the physical space of the home. The archaeology at the Collins Site has illustrated this fact. The architectural remains and the domestic and work-related objects found within the cabin provide the materials to construct the narrative of the ebbs and flow of daily life for the Lordan family and their ultimate violent removal from the landscape. By telling the story of this cabin and the families that once resided within, we hope to illuminate a more personal case study in the complexities of daily life and landownership in rural Ireland.

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