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Notes

A POT UNDER A KITCHEN FLOOR

Some years ago attention was drawn to the custom of burying horse-skulls or metal vessels under the floors of kitchens, churches or barns.[1] The practice, according to tradition, was very widespread in Ireland; it is known from other countries also.[2] The reason given for the practice, in folk tradition, is the improvement of the sounding properties of the floors. This is especially the case in kitchen floors, for, says tradition, a clay floor or one of flagstones laid upon clay or mortar emits a very dull sound when walked or danced upon, and a hollow object placed under it improves its resonance; this was a matter of importance to people who were connoisseurs of step-dancing.

In June 1955, in the course of reconstructing a farmhouse at Mahoonagh-beg, Castlemahon, Co. Limerick, the builder's workmen removed a large flagstone, measuring 8 feet by 4 feet, which formed part of the kitchen floor just in front of the hearth. The packed clay upon which the flagstones rested was slightly depressed under the middle of this flagstone and a much-rusted metal plate lay in the depression. On lifting the plate a hole was found, formed in the packed clay; this hole was about 14 inches in diameter and 12 inches deep. Across the top of the hole were laid two lengths of thin iron rod, crossing in the middle, and from these a small pot-oven hung in the hole, suspended by a curved length of thin iron rod bent into hooks at its ends, the hooks engaged in the 'ears' of the pot-oven.

The pot-oven is of cast-iron, flat bottomed, with three legs, its top diameter being nine inches and its depth four inches. When found, its legs were embedded in a muddy deposit at the bottom of the hole, and there was also some muddy clay in the pot itself—water spilled on the floor seems to have trickled into the hole and washed in some of the clay to form this deposit—but measurement left no doubt that the pot originally hung freely in the hole. The iron plate seems to have been part of a wrought-iron griddle, about 20 inches in diameter.

In this house there was no tradition about the pot, and the owner of the house did not know of its existence until it was found. The house appears to have been built in the early 1800's and the pot was, in all likelihood, put in at that time. But the general tradition of a pot under the floor in this part of the house to improve the sound is well known in the area.

Our thanks are due to Mr. Thomas O'Halloran, building contractor, whose workmen found the pot, and who took pains to preserve it exactly as found until it could be examined, and to the house owner, Mr Patrick Liston, who co-operated in every way and presented the objects found to the National Museum (pl. XIII).

CAOIMHÍN Ó DANACHAIR

[1] Ó Súilleabháin, Seán; 'Foundation Sacrifices,' in *J.R.S.A.I.*, lxxv, 45–53.
[2] Sandklef, Albert: *Singing Flails*, (*F.F.C.* No. 136), Helsinki, 1949.

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Bodhrán player, Athea, Co. Limerick (from a photograph)

The pot in position, as found

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