




# Stories from The Schools Collection, 1937-1939

## Cóbh Labhráis (Buachaillí) - Oide: Domhnall Ó Súilleabháin

Extracted\* from this link: <https://www.duchas.ie/en/cbes/4811616?Route=volumes>

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## 1 My Home District - Bank

*Seán Ó Súilleabáin, Rerrin* [\[Back To Top\]](#)

*Informant: Micheál Ó Súilleabain, Parent, Age 55, Rerrin*

I reside in the townland of Bank, in the parish of Beare Island and in the Barony of Beare.

There are at present eight families and approximately twenty three people living in the townland. The name which most of the people bear is O'Sullivan. There were in former times various types of houses mostly one storeyed and thatched but now owing to Government grants these are gradually disappearing to be replaced by slated houses.

The townland's name was derived from French fishermen who in previous years used fish in Bantry Bay and reside in the north side of the east end of Beare Island and then called "Palmer's Bank" after them (the fishermens' name was Palmer) afterwards shortened to Bank. There is a little inlet in townland which was previously called "Palmer's Cove", but now the name has been changed to "Cuaseen" meaning the little inlet or harbour, also called after these men. It seems to have been a very long time since these fishermen were living in the island because there are rocks in the east end called "Palmer's Rocks" and we get the idea that they must have full sway over the East End. At present which is very regrettable there is no old person in "Bank" able to tell stories in Irish or speak but very little Irish. My Home District - Bank The land is very rough and boggy and because of this many of the people emigrated to America and the Argentine and a lesser number joined as sailors in the Shipping Service. Although the houses were smaller they were more numerous. The ruins of two of these are still visible. Near the ruins of one of these there was a well and one day a woman was drowned in it and for a long time afterwards everybody who passed had to throw a stone into the well and in that way the well was filled up as high as the ground again.

## 2 My Home District - Ardagh

*Séumas Ó Ceallacháin, Ardagh* [\[Back To Top\]](#)

*Informant: Pádrúig O Ceallacáin, Parent, Age 50, Ardagh*

The name of the townland in which I live is Ardagh and the name of the

parish is Beare Island and the barony is Beare. There are twenty-one families living in the townland. The family name most common is "O'Sullivan". The most of the houses are slated nowadays but long ago nearly all the houses were thatched.

The meaning of Ardagh is "the high place". The land is very hilly and rough and the farms are small and poor. There is a hill in the middle of the townland and there is a tower situated on the top of the hill. These towers were built in the seventeenth century. There are little streams flowing from the hill to the sea.

There were more houses in the townland long ago than are there now. There are about six ruins of houses to be seen now and they are not occupied. At the time of the famine some of the people emigrated to America. Some also went to Australia. The old people do not know Irish. There are no lakes in the townland.

### **3 My Home District - Greenane**

*Sean Ó hAractáin, Greenane* [[Back To Top](#)]

*Informant: Concubhar Ó hAractáin, Age 70, Greenane*

Greenane is the name of the townland in which I am living in, it is in the Parish of Beare Island and in the Barony of Beare. At the present day there are fourteen families living in it and seventy-seven people. The most common name in the townland is "Harrington". There are twelve slated houses in it. The most of them were thatched long ago. Greenane got its name from the place of its situation. Irish is not there at present but there are people there still that can speak it at present.

Long ago the people did emigrate to America and to Australia also. The houses were more numerous long ago than they are now. The ruins of five of them are still to be seen. There are no lakes in Greenane but a lake is bounding it on one side.

Greenane is situated on the south side of the Island. There are four rivers leading to the sea from it. The highest hill in the Island is sheltering it on one My Home District - Greenane side and it is called Greenane Hill.

## 4 St Michael's Well

*Conchubar Ó h-Aractáin, Greenane* [\[Back To Top\]](#)

*Informant: Conchubar Ó hAractáin, Parent, Age 60, Greenane*

There is a holy well situated on the north side of Baile na Cille hill and it is called St Michael's Well. The people who still visit the well do certain prayers. There are white pebbles to be found in front of the well and those people who visit that well take ten of those pebbles and at every round they drop a pebble.

The prayers they say are one decade of the rosary at every round. The people do not drink the water or use it otherwise. There is a small bush beside the well and the visitors leave some relic beside it.

The well is said to have been founded by a certain sailor who was blind and he had a vision shown to him by St Michael. He was told in the dream about a well which is now called St Michael's Well.

The sailor believed that if he visited this well he would be cured by saying certain prayers. Shortly after St Michael's Well this his ship came into Bantry Bay and the sailor was very glad to get the opportunity, and he was led to the place shown to him in his vision, and when he arrived to the place he said some prayers at the well. It is believed that the sailor's sight was restored to him and since that it is visited by the inhabitants of Bere Island.

## 5 My Home District - Baile na Cille

*Leon Ó Súilleabháin, Ballynakilla* [\[Back To Top\]](#)

*Informant: Florence O Sullivan, Age 63, Ballynakilla*

I live in the parish of Bere Island in the townland of Ballinakilla. Bere Island is in the barony of Beare. There are twenty-four families in the townland and one hundred people. The family name most common is O'Sullivan. Practically all the houses are slated but twenty years ago a lot of them were thatched. There is only one Church on Bere Island and it is in the townland of Ballinakilla. The Church is on the middle of the island and it is because the Church is in the townland of Ballinakilla that the townland is called "Baile na Cille" which in English means the town of the Church.

Any of the people do not know Irish except a few words. Houses were more

numerous in the townland formerly than they are now. There are at least twelve houses now in ruins. Many people left the townland at the time of the famine and went to America and also some people went to Australia.

## 6 The Local Roads

*Seán Ó Súilleabháin, Bank* [\[Back To Top\]](#)

*Informant: Miceál Ó Súilleabháin, Parent, Age 55, Bank*

The road which leads from Rerrin Village to the West End of the Island is known as the Main Road. Other branch roads are known by various names but some of these are no longer used such as:- Ardra road which branches off at the Village and forms the road for the people living in the south of the East End and along the seaboard to Lonehert Battery.

The Main Road was made about ninety-five years ago as a relief work for people who were very badly off and it was through the intercession of the Paris Priest it was gained. The men had to work from dawn until dark and in return got twopence and fourpence a day while a skilled labourer got a shilling.

Previous to this the road led to the cross roads and up an old rocky path called the "High Road" but in 1848 the Board of Works took the situation to heart and made the road from the Cross Roads to the Parish Church. The road which leads from the Church to the Presbytery was also made lately.

About forty years ago the British Government made a moat in the East End and the earth and stones were carted to the village and formed into a road which has undergone various improvements The Local Roads and now it is one of the best roads in the Barony. Long ago the people of the Village owned land in the East End and a road called the "New Line" was made on which to drive their cows. Now however the land has passed into other people's hands and this road is scarcely used. This road was also made about 40 years ago.

## 7 The Wreck of the Joseph Howe

*Conchubhar Ó h-Aractáin, Greenane* [[Back To Top](#)]

In the year 1876 on the 18th day of February a large sailing-ship named the Joseph Howe was wrecked at the south of Bere Island at a place called Fail-na-dTag. When she came to Bantry Bay a storm arose and the Captain made up his mind to come into Cork Harbour for shelter, but when he saw the Inlet near Fail-na-dTag he thought it was the Harbour's mouth, but before he discovered where he was going he was too near the rocks, and he could not return from the Inlet because he was too return against the wind and he could not because it was too strong.

The storm was then at's worst and it threw her up against the rocks. In the morning there was a man walking along the shore looking for wreck when he saw the ship beneath the cliff and she was wedged between two large rocks. The man got help and by means of tying a rope from the ship to the land and in that way they took the crew ashore.

There was one man The Wreck of the Joseph Howe sick on board at the time and they lowered a boat from the deck to the sea and put the sick man into her and he and another man set out for Castletown Hospital, but before she had gone very far the large waves swept into her and sank her, and both men were lost.

"It is said she sailed from Liverpool Town to Cork Harbour for orders bound, but on Fial-na Drag by Bere Island's side her destiny she found." She had a cargo of mahogany on board, but when she got broken up the cargo was scattered. Anyone that would bring a large bit of timber that she had on board to Castletown would get a pound of finding it.

A short time after a man from the Island composed a song about her, the following is the first verse:-

As I awoke put on my clothes  
To the sea I made my way,  
On coming towards the seashore cliff  
I spied an awful scene  
Far on the rocks beneath

Lay a large Brigatine

I was struck with amazement The Wreck of the Joseph Howe On looking on  
the wreck

The ship was slowly sinking,  
With three men on her deck,  
Another hanging to her boom,  
To reach the shore his object,  
Or death would be his doom,  
Four surviving mariners

I now intend to name.

The captain's name was Timpleton

The boatsman was the same

The steward's name was Peter Seamer,

A kind good natured man

The other was a seaman

Whose name was Harry Grant

She hailed from Minnie Fitleton

From Liverpool town she sailed,

With a cargo of mahogany

For Cork harbour she was bound

But at Fail-na-Diag by Bere Island's side

Her Destiny she found

## 8 The Towers

*Sean Ó Súilleabháin, Rerrin* [\[Back To Top\]](#)

*Informant: Miceál Ó Súilleabháin, Age 55, Rerrin*

One hundred and forty two years ago Wolfe Tone went to France and  
obtained a fleet which was to come to Ireland to assist him in gaining for her

independence. The fleet left Brest in December 1796, under General Hoche, for Ireland. When some time at sea a gale of fierce velocity arose and the fleet was scattered some of the ships being driven into Bantry Bay. The English were taken unawares and so to secure their future safety started building the following year five Towers on Beare Island.

These towers were built on the ... of five hills:- two in the East End, one on Cloughland's hill, one on Ardagh's hill and one in the West End. The towers were built by Englishmen who were sent specially for that purpose. The complete placement of stones etc. were sent from England dressed and ready for building. A pier was also built in Lawrence's Cove probably for the purpose of landing these stones.

The towers were then built and also watch-houses as quarters for the watchmen. In the tower there is a well which was to supply the soldiers in case of their being besieged. The soldiers lived in these towers for a few years but they were never used in warfare as batteries. The towers were numbered 1 and The Towers and 2 as the numbers for the two in the East End and three, four and five for the other three respectively.

As time grew on the towers became out of date and when the English bought some land in Beare Island the first work they undertook was to knock three of these towers beginning at No. 1. This was in the year 1897. The workmen were very badly treated by the gangers who were always hurrying them up. A verse composed by a local "poet" with regards the work runs as follows:-

"Three pence an hour

At number one tower

And you hurry up"

so that gives an idea of the wages at the time. The name number one still sticks to the place to the present day. The other two towers numbers 2 and 5 were knocked shortly afterwards but 3 and four are still sound and look capable of lasting another few hundred years.

## 9 Place Names

*Concubar Ó h-Aractáin, Greenane* [\[Back To Top\]](#)

*Informant: Conchubhar Ó h-Aractáin, Age 60, Greenane*



The district in which I live abounds with place-names of fields and cliffs and rocks, and the most of them are Irish. The names are very hard to convert into English language, because as time went on the words were changed.

This follows with a list of fields

Gort na Ceárdhna,

Leac Amháin,

Páirc na Scoile

Páirc na Loca

Páirc an Tíge

Páirc na Claise

Gort Caol

Árd na Gaoithe

Páirc ó (?)

Páirc Garbh

Páirc Caol

Gort an Tobair

Cnucán (?) Dóighthe

Cnucán Reamhar

Cár na Caoirig

Páirc Núa(?)

Páirc Árd

Túirín Ciaráin

Dún Beag

Páirc an Tigh(?)

The following is a list of coastal names

Carraigléa

Bun Naun (?) Locán

Illaunathough

Carraig an Éisc

Faill na gCaorach

Carraig an Éisc

Faill na dTaidg

Many of those places and names are to be found in many places through-out the Island such as "Tuirín Ciaráin". There is a strand called "Tráigh Ciaráin" and is still known by the same name and we conclude from that, that St. Kieran must have landed on the strand once upon a time. It is also known that St. Kieran was in the Country many Place Names years before St Patrick, and we conclude that Tuirín Ciaráin has some connection with St Cieran. There are many more names of the same kind.

## 10 Place Names

*Seán Ó Súilleabháin, Rerrin* [\[Back To Top\]](#)

*Informant: Micheál Ó Súilleabháin, Age 55, Rerrin*

Beare Island like many other places on the west coast of Ireland abounds with place-names mostly Irish. With the dying out of the Irish language however these names became dissipated and many changes have occurred in the pronunciation since their origination. Therefore the derivation is complicated and very often we err in the simplification of the words. The townland in which I reside is enriched with those names here are some of them:-

The name "Baoi" is very prevalent in the South-West coast of Ireland the Irish for Bantry Bay being Bádhdh Baoi and for the Dursey Island being Inis Baoí. There is a rock on the north side of the Island called Carraig Baoi so we presume that some chieftain name Baoi was resident in Beara in olden times and that those bays and islands must have been called after him - Carraig Baoi meaning the rock of Baoi.

Turk Island:- this is called after the Turks who died of a highly contagious and who are buried there. There are also some mounds there probably to mark their burial places.

Bank Strand: regarded as the finest strand in Bank contains four smaller strands. Hence it's name. At the mouth of the strand there are rocks called

the "Palmer's Rocks" after the men who used fish in that part long ago and after whom the townland is named. There is also a shady strand called also Palmer's Cove but it is now called "Cuasín" the little Coos. Place Names Traighín:- the little strand.

Gealtraigh:- the white strand because of its great stretches of sand and gravel.

Ceann Oileáin = the head of the Island. The east end of the island has always been called Ceann Oileáin.

Carraig a' Mhadra = The Dog Rock or the Perch. This rock has been the finishing place of many ships.

Carraig na Madraí = small dangerous breakers near the Dog Rock

The South Coast has many names for its strands and points like:-

Traigh na Leach:-

the strand of the Flag Stones because the strand is full of these fine flag-stones.

Cuas na dTarbh

many farm animals were lost off this cliff and that is the reason for its name

Cairrgín

the little rock

## 11 Place Names

*Leon Ó Súilleabháin, Ballynakilla* [\[Back To Top\]](#)

*Informant: Conchubhar Ó Súilleabháin, Age 60, Ballynakilla*

Bere Island like many other places in Ireland has many place names. The townland in which I live is called Ballinakilla which comes from the Irish Baile na Cille. Nearly every field has an Irish name. There is Gorta Garbh which means the rough field and Gorta Gearra which means the short field.

There are many common names such as Pairc na Scoile, Páirc Foghanta, Gorta Buidhe and Sleibhín Báidhte. The meaning of Pairc na Scoile is the field of the school and the meaning of Gorta Buidhe is the yellow field and it is so called because it is all rocks and very little grass grows on it. There are

also many names of places in the hill such as:- Fail na dTadhg, Fail Briste, Dún Beag and Láirtheach. There is also a small hill called Cnocáinín Seanín Ó Murcadha.

Ballinakilla is divided into small townlands called Cill Bán, Gorta Móra, and Clocán na gCat. There is a very long deep valley which is called Cumar. There are also various names of strands in Ballinakilla, some of which are Tráigh Ciaráin, Tráigh Galla, Cé na bPoll and Gallín. It is said that St Kieran landed at Tráigh Ciaráin before St. Patrick came to Ireland. Gallín is so called because Place Names there are two long rocks going down into the sea from it and it is like a fork.

## 12 Place Names

*Seamus O Ceallacáin, Ardagh* [\[Back To Top\]](#)

*Informant: Padruig Ó Ceallacáin, Age 50, Ardagh*

Beare Island abounds in place names, and most of these are Irish names. Nearly all the fields have names and the meaning of these words are very obvious in some cases, but others are not easily explained. Most of the headlands have Irish names too. The name of the townland in which I live is Ardagh which means the "High Place".

There are four headlands running out parallel with one another and the names of these are Rinn na h-Eorna(?), Rinn na Curraig, Rinn na nGall, and Donovan's Point.

There is a field near the hill which is called Connacán Árd. It is higher than any other field around. There is another field called Gardín Doimhin which means "the deep garden". There are high rocks around it and it is situated in between these rocks. There is a place near the road called Sean-Tighe. There was an old house built there long ago, but now there are only part of the walls to be seen.

There is another field called Scoil and the people say that there Place Names was a school there long ago. There is another place near the road called Áth na Maidí. It is part of an old quarry.

## 13 Weather-Lore

*Pádrúig Ó Ceallacain, Ardagh* [\[Back To Top\]](#)

*Informant: Pádrúig Ó Ceallacain, Age 50, Ardagh*

There are many ways by which the change of the weather is observed. There are many signs and beliefs about the weather. People can tell whether the weather will change from good to bad or otherwise. Many sayings and signs are handed down to us from our forefathers. The sky is the most common way for observing the change.

”A red sky at night is a sheperd’s delight and a red sky in the morning is a sheperd’s warning” is one of the sayings. Another is ”a rainbow in the morning is a sailor’s warning.” When there is a ring around the moon it is a sign of rain. The movements of the birds is another way of telling the change of the weather. The movements of rooks[?] are [?] by some farmers.

If the rooks are settling noisily on the trees and flying hither and thither instead of going straight away a wet day is probable. If the swallow flies high it is a sign of fine weather, but when it is near the ground rain is to be expected. When the cormorant flies out to sea it is a sign of fine weather, but when it comes inland it is a sign of wet weather.

Animals are also very sensitive Weather-Lore to the change of the weather. When a cat sits with her back to the fire or washes over her ears it is a sign of wet weather. Cats also become restless and wander about the house when a thunderstorm is approaching. The braying of a donkey is said to be a sign of coming rain. Sheep in mountainous districts will change their feeding ground to the lee side of the lee side of the hills before the arrival of severe gales and rain.

## 14 Weather-Lore

*Seán Ó Súilleabháin, Rerrin* [\[Back To Top\]](#)

*Informant: Micheál Ó Súilleabháin, Age 55, Rerrin*

There are lots of local customs and beliefs with regards the weather. The forefathers of the people kept them and knew them and passed them on to their children who also passed them on and so on. The old people very proudly tell them when asked about the weather. What are the commonest

of them?

A red sky in the morning and a grey sky in the evening are signs of rain. When the sun sets in an apparent red hole rain will follow. If however the red rises up from the sun and the sun sets in a clear place we have a sure guarantee of fine weather. When "Moses" [?] Horns rise up from the sun we will have wind and rain but if the "Horns" come down from the sun we will have a calm. A fiery red sun is a sign of easterly wind. A halo around the sun is a sign of bad weather.

"When the moon is on its back

Fine weather there is no lack."

is one of their sayings. When the new moon is seen carrying the old moon in its arm rain is sure to follow. When a star is close behind the moon it is of a storm but when the star is in front we will have fine weather. When a star falls in a certain direction it indicates that the wind will come from that direction. It is also said that when a star falls it is a sign of a soul going to Heaven from Purgatory. Rainbows in the morning are sign of wind and on Saturday is sign of rain for the following. A halo around the moon may Weather-Lore pass away soon. A Saturday moon comes seven years too soon. Clouds racing across the sky indicate wind as also black clouds passing over sun and moon. Clouds like mackerel scales and mares' tails indicate wind and rain.

"Mares' tails and mackerel scales

Make lofty ships carry low sails."

Dark blue clouds indicate thunder and green coloured clouds wind. When swallows fly low rain will follow. Sea-gulls inland and crying mournfully are rain indicators. When the jack-snipe or "Gabhairín Reodha" is heard at night we will have fine weather but if heard in the day bad weather.

When the cat washes his face near the fire or when he lays with his back to the fire rain will follow as also dogs crying out in their sleep. When the hills appear to be near rain will follow. When the rocks shine it is a sign of rain. Ants resting on the ground are indicators of fine weather but when flying about rain.

## 15 Crafts

*Seán Ó Súilleabháin, Rerrin* [\[Back To Top\]](#)

*Informant: Micheál Ó Súilleabháin, Age 55, Rerrin*

The old people were very industrious who made their own candles etc. Of course it was necessary for them to make them inasmuch as they were not available in the shops in those days. The principal of those were candle-making, rope making, spinning and weaving and of course basket-making which is still carried on.

The candle-making was a very important because it supplied the people with light. Previous to this they had the rush-lights but that was a very poor means of illumination. It was made of the white part of the rush and whale-oil held in a scallop-shell. Then the people thought of making the candles. The essentials for the making of candles were tallow, a mould and a wick which was made of cotton thread. The mould was a little tin vessel about nine inches in length and about half an inch in diameter and tapered in the top like an ordinary candle. This was turned upside down and the wick held in place by two nails by which the wick was twisted up. When the wick was a certain tightness the hot tallow was poured in and allowed to get hard. The nails were cut off and the candle was made.

The making of baskets was very common in this part of the country long ago and everybody who owned a donkey was able to make baskets. There were various kinds of baskets:- the large basket with "windows" called a "ciseán", a lobster pot which was fairly Crafts large and which was very hard to make. At first eighteen rods were stood upright and it was around those that the basket was made. A strange thing about the basket is that it is the top of the basket that is first made.

Rope-making was very common in olden days and everybody made their own rope called "soogans". The sheaves of straw were held in an instrument called a "cruaicin" and were twisted up very hard. Those were very good ropes because they used give and take with the weather.

## 16 Crafts

*Conchubar Ó h-Aractáin, Greenane* [\[Back To Top\]](#)

*Informant: Conchubar Ó h-Aractáin, Age 60, Greenane*

Long ago the people used to make a great many things for their own use and that was a great thing. Because they did not have to buy them as we have to do now. Candle-making was one of the commonest of these things they used to make. The candles were made as follows:-

They used a mould for making the candles, the fat of a cow was first melted and the mould which was narrow at one end, and through the mould was the wick and at the narrow end of the mould there was a knot in the wick. The fat was then thrown in through the broad end and the end of the wick was attached to the middle of a nail to keep it straight.

When the fat was again hard the mould was heated a little and then the candle would fall out. It was said that the candles should be made for a year before using, if it was used before then it would burn too quickly.

Spinning another common cork which was carried on in this part of the country and in that way they used to make a sufficient amount of cloth for themselves. The most of the used keep sheep at that time and from those they used get the wool was first carded into rolls Crafts similar to a scythe-stone. It was then spun into thread and it was similar to the thread you would buy in the shops for knitting. The thread was then woven into cloth.

Basket-making was also carried on in this part of the country, but it was not as common as the other ones I mentioned. Baskets are are aslo made on the Island, and they are made with rods at first a number of rods are placed standing on the ground and which formed a circle and these were called "standards" The standards differed in accordance with the size of the basket Then the rods were plaited into the standards.

## 17 Local Customs

*Leon Ó Súilleabháin, Ballynakilla* [\[Back To Top\]](#)

*Informant: Conchubhar Ó Súilleabháin, Age 60, Ballynakilla*

In the peninsula of Beara many of the old customs are still observed. In other places all the old customs are not carried on at all now. Some of the old customs are :-

The spilling of salt is a sign of a quarrel. To put an article of clothing on



inside out is considered a sign of good luck. Three candles lighting together are regarded as a sign of a wedding or a wake. To sing at one's meals is a sign of disappointment. A dog crying in the night is a prophesy of death.

No important work is started on Monday or any journey is not started. Before a new dwelling is inhabited sheep must be housed there first. Anyone never dips a milky vessel into a well or milky water is never trown into a stream but on dry ground. The afterbirth when a cow calves must be placed on a nearby hedge. A cat with his back to the fire or seagulls inland is a sign of broken weather. It is lucky to come across a pin in the morning or a four-holed object like a button.

Bonfires are lit in the Local Customs fields on St. John's Eve and the farm stock are supposed to receive a blessing if the fire is brought amongst them.

Each night before the family retires a wet sod of turf is placed under the glowing embers which will form the nucleus of the fire next morning.

## 18 The Old School

*Séamas Ó Ceallacain, Ardagh* [\[Back To Top\]](#)

*Informant: Pádraig Ó Ceallacain, Age 50, Ardagh*

### The Old School

Before this present school was made there was a small school at the west of Ardagh's Hill in the townland of Greenane. This school was a small thatched house. The entrance was by a door at one end and there were no windows, only a hole at the west end. The stones were used afterward to make fences.

There were about thirty pupils going to the school and they had two or three books. There were two teachers attending, a Principal teacher and an Assistant teacher.

It was eighteen feet long, nine feet broad, and eight feet high. It was closed in the year eighteen fifty six and then this present school was opened. It was the pupils that used to pay the teachers in those days and each pupil used to pay a half a crown for a quarter of a year.