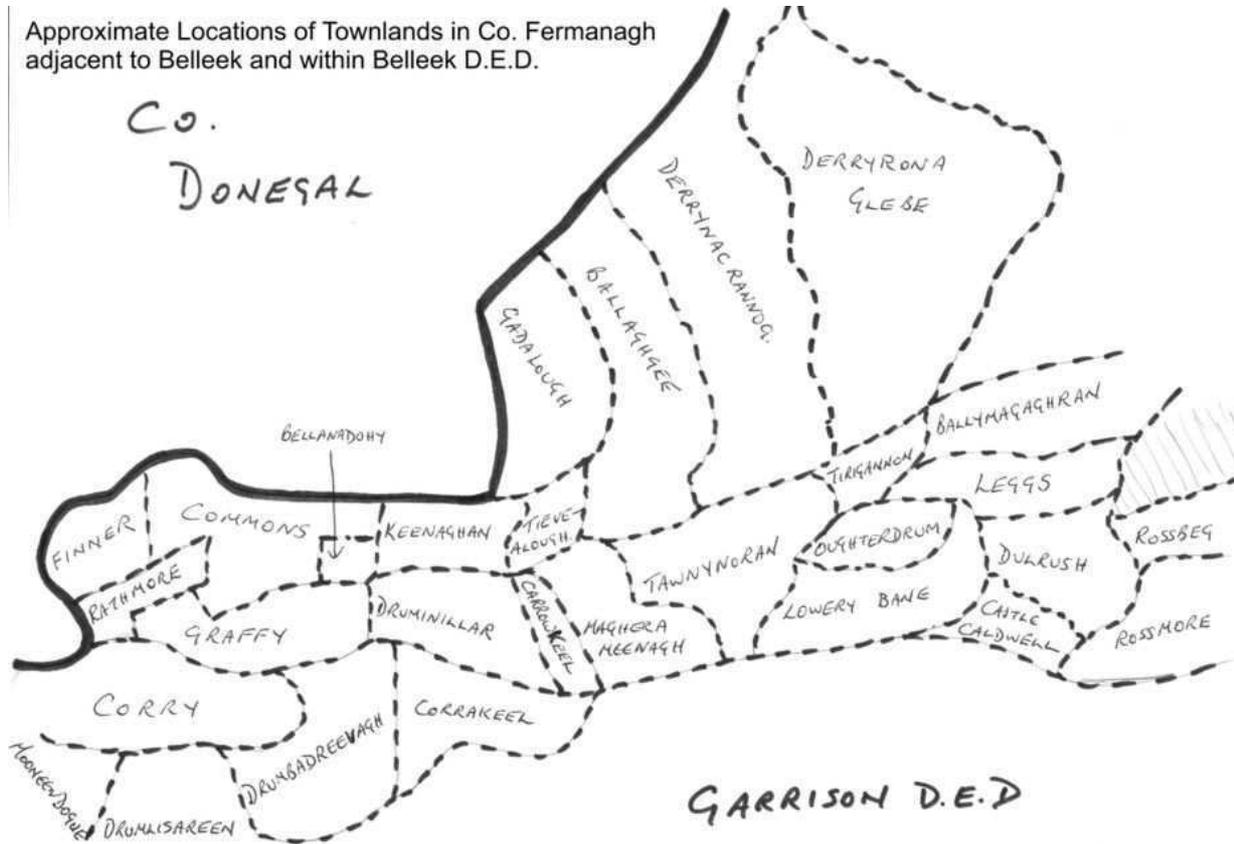


## The Belleek Census Returns of 1901 & 1911

On and off, as time has been available in recent years, I have been analysing the census returns of 1901 and 1911 for Belleek town. The returns are available at the National Archives in Dublin, where I have accessed them, and also at the Public Record Office of Northern Ireland in Belfast. The following article is part of that analysis and concerns the Pottery and some other occupational categories of the townspeople as given in their returns to the census enumerator.

The years between 1901 and 1911 were difficult times for the pottery and it seems that their concentration on the production of parian ware to the exclusion of other forms of pottery may not have been good policy. They may have made quite a name for themselves with the International Centre Piece at the Paris exhibition of 1900 but, by 1907, the pottery was only considered worthy of a small table at the Irish International Exhibition in Dublin. In that same year Cardinal Logue of Dublin was present at the pottery's Annual General Meeting, for what purpose one can only surmise.

Approximate Locations of Townlands in Co. Fermanagh adjacent to Belleek and within Belleek D.E.D.



In July 1901 a former employee and decorator at Belleek, Eugene Sheerin, writing from a Dublin address to the paper "Ireland's Gazette, Loyal & National" about the possible opening of a pottery in Dublin following the discovery of some china clay deposits says "In the making of best white earthenware, or delph, Belleek has elected to fall completely out of the race; so that if a lady or gentleman wanted to buy a dinner or toilet service in Dublin today, it would be utterly impossible to find one of Irish manufacture, hence it will be seen that there is great danger that the art of pottery as a whole will very shortly become extinct in Ireland once more."

The two census returns do not, of course, provide answers to any questions about underlying causes for economic or social activity but they can provide valuable evidence on which to base our historical re-enactments. A brief overview of the census information for the town of Belleek shows that, in 1901, there were 64 buildings in the town of which 53 were inhabited houses, 5 were uninhabited. The others comprise a Manufactory [a name which shows the derivation of our common word 'factory']; a Courthouse; a Railway Station; a Roman Catholic Chapel; a Church of Ireland Mission Hall, and a Methodist Church. In the 53 inhabited buildings there lived a total of 57 families comprising 281 people in total, 142 male and 139 female.

Belleek people were predominantly of Roman Catholic religious persuasion, 127 men and boys with 118 women and girls indicating that this was their affiliation, making up 87.2% of the whole population in the town. 10 male and 17 female members of the Church of Ireland congregation were no doubt supplemented by others from the surrounding area in the mission hall on a Sunday as also would be the 3 male and 2 female Methodists in their Church. One female Presbyterian and one male Lutheran together with a man and woman who recorded their affiliation as 'Church of England' make up the full complement so that, it would appear, no one refused to state their religious persuasion to the enumerator. Within the structure of the Roman Catholic Church, Belleek is in the parish of Pettigoe and was, at the time of the 1901 census, probably served by a curate who is recorded as lodging in a Public House in the town.

The Church of Ireland rector of Belleek was recorded in the townland of Tawnynoran outside of the town. Remarkably both he and the Roman Catholic curate had the same surname.

A total of 130 buildings were recorded on the form headed 'Out Offices and Farm Steadings', roughly an average of two outbuildings per building in the town. These show a variety of uses and, probably, the ways in which people endeavoured to supplement their earnings from their stated rank, profession or occupation. There were, in the town, 10 stables; 6 coach houses, 3 harness rooms, 19 cow houses; 5 calf houses; 3 dairies; 11 piggeries; 25 fowl houses; 2 boiling houses, 8 barns; 7 turf houses; 1 potato house; 15 sheds; 10 stores; 2 forges; 1 laundry; 1 lime house and 1 signal cabin. 12 of the occupied houses did not have any outbuilding associated with them but one uninhabited shop and the railway station had their outbuildings properly recorded. The lime house is recorded with the buildings connected to the Royal Irish Constabulary Barracks in which one sergeant and two constables are recorded as spending the night. However the attached 'lock up' had no occupant that night.

Belleek was the largest settlement, by population, in that part of County Fermanagh which lay within the Ballyshannon Poor Law Union. The next largest was West Glen in the Inishmacsaint District Electoral Division [DED] with 162 persons recorded there on the night of the census. Within the Belleek DED there were 121 in Commons and 118 in Derryrona Glebe. The 281 people in the town constitute 35% of the 802 people recorded in the Belleek DED and 4.50% of the total population of the Fermanagh section of the Ballyshannon Union. In the ten years since the previous census of 1891 the population had fallen by just 16 persons, or 5.4%, whereas that of Fermanagh as a whole had fallen by 11.8% and in the Ballyshannon Union within the county it had fallen by 13.5%.

1901 census of Belleek Town – Pottery Workers

Name	Occupation	Age	M/Stat	Birthplace	Notes
Mary ROWAN	Delf tester	50	U	Donegal	Boarder in shop
Edward RUDDY	Labourer in pottery	67	M	Donegal	Hd of household
James RUDDY	Potter	32	U	Donegal	Son
Bella RUDDY	Pottery worker	25	U	Donegal	Daughter
Anne Jane DOLAN	Pottery warehouse girl	20	U	Fermanagh	Dtr of cobbler*
Michael John DOLAN	Pottery flowerer	18	U	Fermanagh	Son
James Patrick DOLAN	Pottery painter	16	U	Fermanagh	Son
Roseanne MAGUIRE	Transferer in pottery	25	M	Leitrim	Wife of gen serv
Hamilton STEENSON	Potter	26	U	Fermanagh	Son of widow
Lizzie STEENSON	Potter	21	U	Antrim	Daughter
Michael DOLAN	Delf packer	55	M	Fermanagh	Hd of household
John DOLAN	Potter	23	U	England	Son
Kate DOLAN	Painter in pottery	21	U	Donegal	Daughter
Daniel DOLAN	Potter	19	U	Donegal	Son
Francis DOLAN	Apprentice potter	16	U	Donegal	Son
William HENSHALL	Pottery flowerer	55	M	England	Hd of household
Patrick MONTGOMERY	Pottery kilnman	32	M	Fermanagh	Hd of household
Elizabeth McCANN	Pottery paintress	17	U	Donegal	Neice of P Mon'y
Edward KEENAGHAN	Potter	23	U	Fermanagh	Son of farm serv
John KEENAGHAN	Potter	17	U	Fermanagh	Son
Dan KEENAGHAN	Potter	16	U	Fermanagh	Son
Peter DANAGHER	Kilnman in pottery	56	M	Donegal	Hd of household
James SLEVIN	Mould maker in pottery	44	M	Fermanagh	Hd of household
Francis SLEVIN	Mould maker in pottery	21	U	Fermanagh	Son
Patrick SLEVIN	Gilder in pottery	19	U	Fermanagh	Son
John SLAVIN	Potter	34	M	Fermanagh	Hd of household
Michael DOLAN	Pottery printer	43	M	Fermanagh	Hd of household
John DOLAN	China caster	26	U	Donegal	Son
Michael DOLAN	Pottery flowerer	16	U	Fermanagh	Son
Denis DOLAN	China caster	14	U	Fermanagh	Son
Maggie KEENAN	Potter	21	U	Fermanagh	Dtr of Cooper
Francis James DOLAN	Pottery warehouseman	23	U	Fermanagh	Son of cobbler*
John MONTGOMERY	Potter	27	U	Fermanagh	Son of widow
Ellen MONTGOMERY	Pottery painter	30	U	Fermanagh	Daughter
Maggie McDERMOTT	Pottery worker	21	U	Leitrim	Dtr of housek'per
John GALLAGHER	Parian caster in pottery	42	M	Fermanagh	Hd of household
John GALLAGHER	Earthenware presser	20	U	Donegal	Son
James GALLAGHER	Parian caster in pottery	19	U	Donegal	Son
Sarah M GALLAGHER	Handle presser in pottery	17	U	Donegal	Daughter
James MULRONE	Parian maker in pottery	20	U	Fermanagh	Son of Ag lab
Margaret KNOX	Pottery worker	24	U	Fermanagh	Dtr of gen lab
Bella KNOX	Pottery painter	19	U	Donegal	Dtr of gen lab
Michael MONAGHAN	Potter	21	U	Fermanagh	Son of Carp'ter

\* census record is 'boot & shoe maker'

Above list is in the order in which the enumerator completed his sheets for the town.

In terms of religious persuasion Belleek was not representative of the whole county of Fermanagh in which the Roman Catholics constituted 55.3% and Protestant Episcopalians 35.3%. As in Belleek, Methodists outnumbered Presbyterians [by 7.2% to 2.0%] throughout the county but the small numbers of anything other than Roman Catholics in the town makes such comparisons of no more than passing interest. Even within the larger geographical area of Belleek parish, whose total population was 1462 persons, the proportion of Roman Catholics was 84.3% [1233 persons]. It would appear that, in terms of religious persuasion alone, the County as a whole, but the Belleek area in particular, was more closely akin to Connaught than to eastern Ulster.

By 1911 changes had occurred as is clear from the forms which indicate that there are now 58 buildings, 50 being inhabited and 8 uninhabited. In these 50 inhabited buildings live 50 families, 100 males and 112 females making a total of 212 persons altogether. The Belleek Courthouse and the Belleek Pottery are recorded as uninhabited buildings, which they would have been on a Sunday night. So too is one shop. The net loss therefore is of two buildings and 69 persons in the decade.

In addition to this lack, there are now 65 Out Offices and Farm Steadings within the town and these are made up of 13 stables; 2 coach houses; 2 harness rooms; 3 COW houses; 2 piggeries; 11 fowl houses; 2 boiling houses; 9 turf houses; 1 potato house; 1 workshop; 16 sheds; 2 stores and 1 laundry. Compared to ten years earlier the significant changes refer to cow houses, dairies, calf houses, piggeries and fowl houses. There are now no barns nor forges recorded and the signal cabin is unrecorded presumably because the station with which it is associated is not included in the census of buildings. If, as we surmised

earlier, the out buildings indicated ways of supplementing income, then now either people no longer needed to maintain them for this purpose or their upkeep had proved more of a drain on meagre resources than a supplement. Perhaps the arrival of old age pensions in 1909 had given the elderly a good reason to cease from manual toil in these outhouses or had there been a concerted effort to remove old and decaying buildings from the town? Further research is needed to answer these questions, but the 50% reduction of such buildings in ten years probably indicates a significant shift in the way people were living their lives in 1911 compared to 1901.

The religious affiliation of the town was still largely Roman Catholic with 87 male and 96 female members of this Church, i.e. 86.3% of the total population. 8 male and 14 female members of the Church of Ireland, 1 male presbyterian and 4 male and 2 female Methodists complete the picture. There is no clergyman of any denomination staying in the town at the time of the census. This year there are 4 persons in the R.I.C. Barracks, a sergeant and three constables and, again, no resident in the attached prison accommodation.

Belleek is still the largest settlement in Fermanagh within the Ballyshannon Union but a drop of 24.6% compared to ten years previously must have been worrying to the town when compared with a decrease of only 7.6% in the Belleek rural district and 5.5% in the county as a whole. The town's population on census night is 30.7% of the whole population of the Belleek District Electoral Division and 3.7% of the total population in the Fermanagh section of the Ballyshannon Union. Figures from the registrar general show that emigration from County Fermanagh had been falling since the decade 1851-1861 and amounted to only 3562 persons in the decade 1901 to 1911 i.e. 5.8% of the county's population in 1901. It seems unlikely, therefore, that wholesale emigration abroad from Belleek is to account for nearly a quarter less people in the town, much more likely that local economic conditions made it necessary for people to seek their livelihoods further afield.

## ***Pottery Workers***

From the way in which people described themselves under the heading of 'occupation' a whole raft of tasks within the pottery can be determined. Considering firstly the pottery workers in 1901 there are Gilders [1], Labourers [1], Potters [13], Flowerers [3], Painters [5], Delf Packers [1], Kilnmen [2], Mould makers [2], Printers [1], China Casters [2], Warehousemen [1], Parian Casters [2], Earthenware Pressers [1], Parian Makers [1], Delf Testers [1], Pottery workers [3], Warehouse girls [1], Transferers [1] and Handle Pressers [1]. Most of these occupations are readily understandable within the pottery industry but it is interesting to note the distinctions between Parian, Delf, China and Earthenware in the descriptions people gave of themselves and also the difference between Gilders,

## ***Flowerers, Painters and Transferers.***

Similar distinctions are apparent from the 1911 census in which, although reduced in number of employees, the trades recorded are Potting [14], Kilnmen [2], Packer [1], Parian Caster [4], Flowerer [2], Transferer [3], Mould maker [1], Decorator [1], Painteress [2] and Pottery worker [1]. One gets a clear feeling that a smaller range of occupations are present but that also there is less awareness of craftsmanship from the generally more prosaic list than in 1901, although 'painteress' is an evocative term. It would appear that the emphasis of the tasks undertaken is now more clearly on Parian and decorative ware rather than the earthenware of ten years earlier and that the generic term 'potting' might cover a variety of tasks formerly undertaken by distinctive trained personnel.

These figures do not give the whole picture in either year because, undoubtedly, there were workers in the factory who were not resident in the town of Belleek itself and a few, indeed, will have come in each day from neighbouring districts in both Fermanagh and Donegal. The summary statistics laid before parliament note 51 male and 16 female workers engaged in pottery manufacture from Fermanagh in 1901 and 31 male with 5 female for the same area in 1911. It is interesting to note that all 5 female pottery workers in 1911 were resident within the town and all but 5 of the male workers also.

The total Fermanagh based workforce of 51 men and 16 women in 1901 had fallen to 31 men and 5 women ten years later. This is a drop of 46.3% in the total workforce, 39.2% of male workers and 68.75% of female workers. These job losses were occurring against a backdrop of increasing Unionisation for male workers in Ireland fuelled by the Local Government Act of 1898, the Labourers Act of 1906 and the rise of 'Larkinism' from 1907. It would appear from the census information that none of these had any significant effect on the Pottery and its workers, in the matter of job retention or improved working conditions. It is interesting to compare this with the activities of the coal miners at Arigna in Roscommon, about 100 in number, who by way of four strikes between 1905 and 1911 enhanced their economic, welfare and social standing through their successfully sustaining a labour society. Perhaps the pottery workers of Belleek had no leadership in their midst, perhaps they were too closely allied to the management of the factory or perhaps they were not aware of the opportunities new legislation might bring in unexpected ways. The agitation for better housing aroused by the Local Government Act of 1898 and pursued through the County Council elections which followed may not have been so pertinent in Belleek with its housing provided earlier at 'English Row' and 'Irish Row' by the pottery management. This, too, would have provided an incentive not to pursue strike or other forms of industrial action when loss of job would mean loss of house and home as well. Whatever the reasons the census clearly points up a serious decline in the Pottery's fortunes during this decade and with it a decline in the prosperity and population of the town itself. It may well be worth pointing out that, despite this temporary decline, the pottery is still in existence and production one hundred years later while the mines of Arigna are long gone.

## ***Craft Workers***

Under this category I am including a number of men and women who give their trade or profession as something that we can readily recognize as needing some training in a skill which can then be of use to the inhabitants of the town. Thus in 1901 there were in the town one carpenter and builder with five other carpenters, four dressmakers, two boot and shoemakers, a blacksmith, a tailor, a cooper, a clerk, an artist, a stone mason, a fishing tackle maker, an egg packer and a person specializing in poultry and eggs. This last was a visitor to the town on the occasion of the census, being a Lutheran born in Denmark and lodging in a Warehouse cum Lodging House. All the others were local, that is born in Fermanagh [14] or Donegal [5], apart from the clerk who hailed from Londonderry.

With the exception of the Danish visitor and the stonemason, who was boarding with one of the general labourers, all others in this category were either householders or their wives, sons, including one stepson, daughters or, in one instance, a brother. For the most part there is just one such craft worker per household the exceptions being a family of a father and three sons all carpenters - they also had a son in the pottery - and the fishing tackle maker whose wife was one of the dressmakers. Apart from this carpenter, both boot and shoemakers, the cooper and another of the dressmakers had children or other family members working in the pottery. It would appear that the pottery had a readily available tradition of handicrafts in the town from which to draw its workforce.

The range of trades represented is not unusual for a town of this size, most of these jobs being necessary for the townsfolk at some stage in their lives. To make a reasonable living most of these craft workers would also rely on trade coming in from the immediate hinterland and the well established Belleek Market would have been a welcome impetus for all of them. The fishing tackle maker reminds us of the particular location of the town and its reputation at the time in angling circles.

At the time of the 1911 census the town held five carpenters, three dressmakers, one bootmaker, one shoemaker, two blacksmiths, a cooper, an artist, a stonemason, a fishing tackle maker and a turner. The town had therefore 'lost' the immediate services of a tailor, a clerk and the expertise of egg packing and the visiting poultry expert. The egg packer now classifies himself as a general labourer.

Fifteen of these 17 people can be found in the 1901 Belleek town census also and one exception, the turner, may well be married to a girl who had been listed, as single, in 1901. The other is an elderly widow dressmaker who, perhaps, has returned to her home town on the death of her husband? This would indicate that the relative downturn in the fortunes of the town did not have as great an effect on these craftsmen and women as some other occupational groups, such as the pottery workers. True, there is no builder and one fewer dressmaker than ten years earlier but no new building appears to have been erected in the town during the decade and the removal of a number of outhouses would not be enough to keep a builder in profitable trade. Interestingly, the builder and carpenter listed in 1901 lived alone in a house without an impervious roof which seems ten years later to have 'disappeared' from the enumerators return as does the person himself.

There is no evidence in either census return of any lace making, although this may have been seen as a 'hobby' rather than an occupation and, therefore, not listed by respondents. The proximity of the town to Inishmacsaint, where a thriving, distinctive and much admired school of lace making had been established around the same time as the pottery, and the recording of seven 'hands' from the Brallagh Sprigging Class from Belleek Fermanagh exhibiting in the home industries section of the Irish International Exhibition at Dublin in 1907 indicate that lace making was being conducted in the area at this time. Also recorded in the international exhibition catalogue, a reproduction of which may be seen in the Irish lace museum at Bellanaleck near Enniskillen, is the comment that there is a ready local market for the lace and that more labour is available.

## ***Farm Workers***

It is perhaps not surprising to find that in the still largely rural economy of western Fermanagh a good proportion [about 5%] of the town's population still earned their livelihood from farming, nor that this was an entirely male occupation. In 1901 ten men gave their occupation solely as 'farmer', 'farm or agricultural labourer' or 'farm servant' and one other styled himself 'gardener'. In addition there were three others who listed 'farmer' among a number of activities, one a 'publican and farmer', another 'blacksmith and farmer' and the third as 'farmer, hotel proprietor and fishing lessee'. Added to these, all three inhabitants of the R.I.C. barracks that night, in addition to their rank of sergeant or constable, noted themselves as 'farmer's sons'.

Four gave themselves the sole title of 'farmer', one of them being a visitor, born in England, staying at the hotel run by the farmer and fishing lessee. Two other 'farmers' were sons of the licensee of a public house. Six described themselves as farm servants or farm labourers. Their ages ranged from 16 [the 'gardener'] to 70 with a preponderance of over 50's. Five were married and one a widower - all these were 50 or over - but the oldest of all, a 70 year old 'blacksmith and farmer' was unmarried and living with his younger brother and two sisters.

By 1911 the presence of farm related work amongst the inhabitants of the town was still strong, with eight 'farmers', three 'farm servants or labourers', one 'publican and farmer' and one 'retired farmer'. All four occupants of the R.I.C. barracks that night not only called themselves sergeant or constable but also 'farmer'. Of the four married farm workers three were over 60 and styled themselves 'farmer' or 'farmer and other occupation' but one 'farm labourer' was only 28. This is scant evidence but might suggest that the waged farm labourer was not so badly off financially that it was beyond their means to support a wife and 5 month old child in their own house.

Apart from the four policemen who recorded themselves as farmers also, five of the remaining nine were still in the same occupation and, as far as can be judged, the same abode as they had been ten years earlier. This might be evidence that farm work was one of the more secure occupations. However it might also relate to the relatively high average age of those occupied in farm related work, or the recent legislation, which had radically altered the situation between landlords and tenant farmers in favour of the latter.

The 'retired farmer' is an interesting entry since the pension legislation was so recently enacted however the qualifying age was 75 and he only admitted to the enumerator for 71 years of age so the supposition must be that he had retired on grounds, perhaps of ill health, that precluded his following his occupation of farmer. There is, of course, no clue within the census return as to how he and his wife supported themselves - his wife simply recorded herself as 'wife of retired farmer' - and although married for 40 years, there had been no children to the marriage. Perhaps even 100 years ago it was easier to save for old age without the necessary expenses of children. Neither he nor his wife had been resident in the town ten years earlier so had, perhaps, chosen the town for their retirement. The wife had been born in Fermanagh, the farmer in Leitrim.

Farming was clearly a major source of livelihood amongst the townspeople, as well as in the surrounding countryside, and nearly every house in the town backed onto open country. In the neighbouring townlands of Keenaghan, Magherameena, Rathmore, Tawynoran and Tirigannon, at the time of the 1901 census, 27 out of 31 male occupations given related to farming and also 17 out of 31 female occupations. This is 71% of all occupations given and 87% of all male occupations. The town's farming community reached nothing like these proportions, of course, but farm related activity was near the top of the league there also, albeit only for men. Is there an inkling here that women, once they moved into the relative variety and opportunity of town life, readily abandoned any link with the long hours and often arduous tasks of helping to run a farm? None of the farm workers wives, sisters or daughters in the town style themselves 'farmer's wife or daughter or servant' although most of those in the country areas in 1901 do so. Nor are there any women farmers in their own right as there are in the neighbouring townlands.

The range of outbuildings enumerated in each census year almost entirely related to agricultural usage and many other townsfolk whose main occupation was in trade or the pottery would have indulged in 'farming' to a greater or lesser degree. There is nothing in the census occupation distinctions which identifies the type of agriculture being undertaken by the farmers recorded, but from the use of outbuildings given it would appear that livestock farming, in all its forms apart from sheep rearing [no shepherd or goatherd is recorded in either census year], was fairly widespread. Grazing cattle on the lush land near the lake and river or raising pigs or hens in the back yard would seem to be the most frequent use of these outbuildings in both census years. Horses too were commonly kept and would have been the major form of transport within the locality for both people and goods.



*"Fair Day, Belleek" a picture from early this century, courtesy Jan Golaszewski. The Fair is clearly largely agricultural and must have attracted visitors from far and wide.*

- **Paul Tubb**

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