

The East Clare Heritage Famine Memorial Park

The Casaoireach Tuamgraney.

The Scariff Workhouse Union, an area of 170 square miles with a population of 47,894, was declared in July 1839. Its Workhouse was built in 1841. The Union comprised of Scariff, Ogonnelloe, Killaloe, Bodyke, Tulla, Feakle, Whitegate. Mountshannon and Woodford. Scariff Workhouse was destroyed by fire on the 9th June 1921.

In 1846, the rate of famine burials in Tuamgraney and Moynoe (Scariff), was so great from the infamous Workhouse at Scariff, that the existing graveyards were filled to capacity. In St. Cronan's graveyard, Tuamgraney, hundreds were buried outside the boundary wall, while at Moynoe, sand and gravel was brought from the shore of Scariff Bay to cover the corpses. A contemporary account published in the Limerick Chronicle of January 6th 1847, tells its own story.

"The Workhouse of Scariff, County Clare is so overcrowded with paupers, that a disease almost amounting to a plague has broken out amongst its inmates – the deaths averaging from four to twelve daily. It is horrifying to behold a donkey cart laden with five and six bodies, piled over each other, going to be interred and not a person attending the wretched cortege except the driver. The graves are so dug that the coffins are barely covered with earth, rendering the air infected. No coroner's inquests have been held."

Under these circumstances, the Poor Law Guardians purchased three acres and this site has become known as the Casaoireach. The name is derived from three Irish words, cath siar-iad, which means throw them back. It came about as a result of a scarcity of coffins. The coffins were rigged with a hinged bottom. When it was lowered into the grave, a lever was pulled which opened the bottom and released the body. Even in death, those poor misfortunate people suffered indignity.

This site was subsequently neglected by the powers that be. It was eventually taken over by East Clare Heritage who cleared it by hand. The trenches into which our ancestors were dumped can still be clearly seen. The site has been planted with eighteen varieties of the indigenous trees of County Clare and some shrubs. What better way is there to remember the forgotten and unfortunate victims of the last Dark Age in Irish history than with the living gift of trees?

A three ton unused millstone fashioned by the inmates of the Workhouse has been erected as a fitting memorial. A soup kitchen pot has also been placed on the site as a means of protecting it and as a stark reminder of what some of our ancestors depended on for their daily sustenance.

For further information Email Gerard Madden at **ger[at]eastclareheritage.com**

Books on the famine.

- * A Pride of Paper Tigers by Michael O’Gorman.
- * Souvenir Publication of the Opening of the Memorial Park July 20th 1997 by Gerard Madden.

Payment for any of the above books and video can be made by

1. Personal check.
2. International Bank Draft, or
3. If ordering by telephone, Credit Card (Visa – Mastercard), Simply quote the card number and expiry date.

East Clare Heritage, since its inception in 1989 has been extremely active in facilitating both intellectual and physical access to the heritage and history of East Clare. Given their voluntary capacity the committee have achieved extraordinary success in promoting the importance and creating accessibility to the heritage of East Clare.

As well as holding an impressive series of lectures on subjects like Bidy Early, Robert Emmet and Life in Celtic Ireland, East Clare Heritage has recently organised a variety of cultural workshops at the centre throughout the year to engage schoolchildren with their local heritage. The community has also enthusiastically received one of our most recent initiatives, a series of Irish language classes at the centre. This all forms part of the committee’s outreach policy of providing an educational as well as a recreational resource for both the locals and visitors to East Clare.

The East Clare Heritage Company is a totally voluntary and community based Company dedicated to giving a future to our past. The Company was formed in 1989 and within three years a 10th century church at Tuamgraney, County Clare was re-furbished for use as a Heritage Center. In 2002 East Clare Heritage Company received charitable status. The President of Ireland Mary Robinson officially opened the Center in June 1991.

EAST CLARE HERITAGE

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