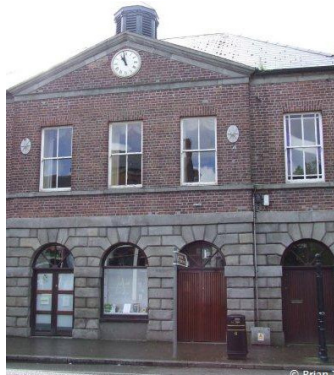




THE HISTORY AND HERITAGE OF NORTH COUNTY WEXFORD PRESENTED BY NORTH WEXFORD HISTORICAL SOCIETY



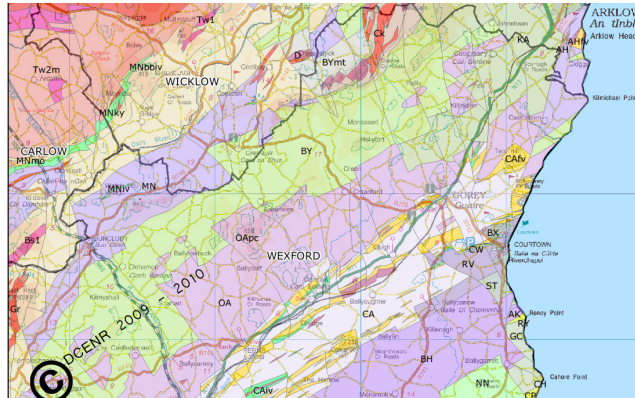
North Wexford Historical Society was founded in August 2011. Over one hundred members have since joined. Monthly talks take place in Gorey Library from September to April and field trips take place during the summer months.

The society is active in collecting and cataloguing burial records, school rolls and other local archive material.

North Wexford has been inhabited for roughly the last 7,000 years and each successive group of settlers and inhabitants have left their mark on the physical landscape and social history of the area. The towns, villages and townlands in which we now live, the countryside around us, the people we meet, the places of worship and the language we speak have all been shaped and formed by this rich and complex heritage.

This history has developed through the Stone and Bronze ages, Celtic and early Christian times, Viking and Norman invasions, the Tudor conquest, Cromwellian Wars and Penal Laws, the 1798 Rebellion, the Famine, the Land Campaign, the War of Independence and Civil War, the Free State, the new Republic and European Union.

SOILS, ROCKS AND LANDSCAPE

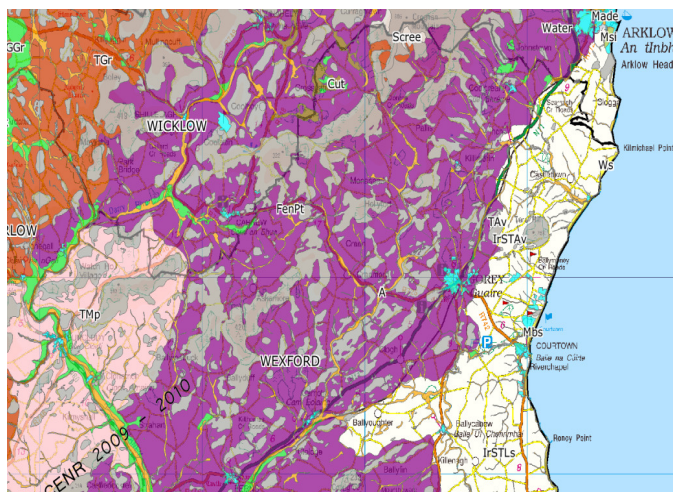


The rocks that underlie most of north Wexford were formed by the deposition of clay and silt sediments approximately 400 million years ago. This period of geological history is called the Ordovician and the rocks consist mostly of slates. Dormant stumps of volcanoes form Tara Hill and the ridges of rock that run parallel to the N11 towards Ferns.

Slates (purple & light green), volcanic rocks (yellow & dark green) and granites (red).



The upland areas of Annagh and Croghan were formed by granite. These slow cooling rocks were sometimes rich in mineral bearing fluids, including gold and the erosion of these gold bearing veins gave rise to the placer deposits found in gravels on the northern slopes of Croghan Mountain (above). This led to a gold rush in 1775-1795 with over 2,500 ounces of gold recovered.



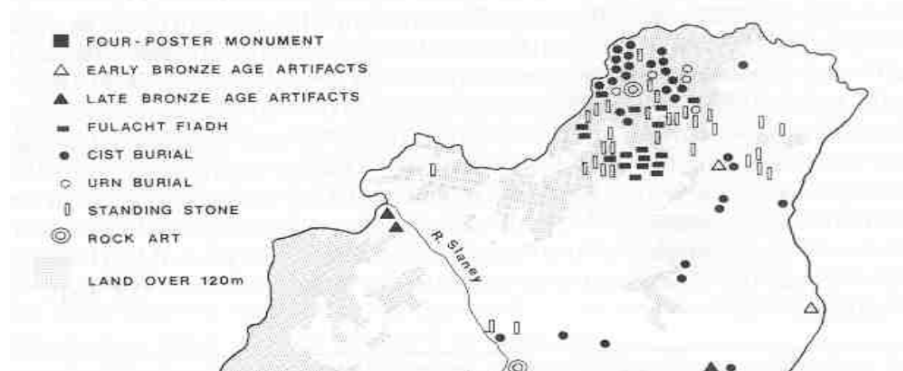
The soil of north Wexford is mostly derived from the slow breakdown of the shale bedrock by the effects of plants, ice and rain. This produces a well drained soil containing a mixture of clay, silt and sand.

Marl occurs in the lower lying area near the coast (white on map). Marl is a heavy, clayey soil with poor drainage that was deposited during the last ice age (c. 20,000 years ago). It forms the 'Macamore' soils that run from Arklow to Cahore.

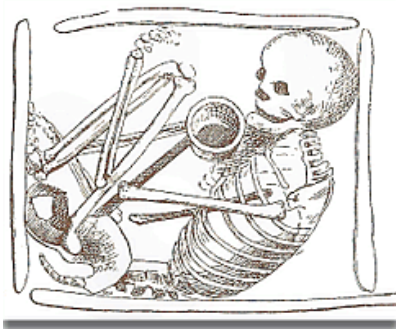
STONE AND BRONZE AGES (4000 B.C. – 400 B.C.)

The first settlers arrived in North Wexford around 4000 B.C. This period is known as the Stone Age and was characterised by the use of stone implements and the construction of large stone monuments (megaliths). A possible megalithic tomb is recorded at Annagh Long, north of Gorey. The early inhabitants would have lived by hunting and fishing and most likely travelled inland from the coast up along river valleys such as the Bann.

The period from 2000 BC to 400 BC was marked by the working of copper and tin to form bronze and for this reason is known as the Bronze Age. North Wexford appears to have experienced its first major influx of settlers during this time, possibly attracted by the gold at Croghan Mountain and copper at nearby Avoca. There are over 90 recorded archaeological sites from this period in the area. The majority of these are concentrated around Annagh-Monaseed-Hollyfort as can be seen below.



Distribution of Bronze Age monuments in North Wexford (from Wexford in Prehistory, G. Stout)



During the Bronze Age the people buried their dead in pits or 'cists'. These Cist Burials are sometimes uncovered during agricultural activity such as ploughing or land clearance. They typically contain the bones of the dead along with some tools and utensils such as a drinking mug, beaker or urn. One such cist uncovered in the Annagh area in 1947 contained a decorated urn which is now housed in the national Museum. Decorated burial urns from this period were found at Mullawn and at nearby Ballinvalley.

Another notable discovery from this period was the Tubberduff Torc found at Aske (near the site of the new N11 roundabout at Tinnock, north of Gorey) around 1863. It was made of solid gold and weighted 14 oz. It can be seen in the National Museum, Dublin.



IRON AGE (400 B.C – 450 A.D.)

The Iron Age in Ireland commenced around 400 BC and coincides with the coming of the Celts from mainland Europe. The Celts had knowledge of iron working, were better armed and gradually displaced the existing local tribes. They introduced their own language (Gaelic), laws (Brehon) and lived in defensive sites such as coastal or promontory forts, in isolated hillforts and in crannogs.

They had their own belief systems administered by druids and worshipped gods such as Lugh from whom the Irish word for August (Lughnasa) comes. Other Celtic festivals were Bealtaine (May) and Samhain (November). Traditions such as burning the Maybush have continued in the area to the present day.



(photo from www.what-when-how.com)

Possible Iron Age sites in the area include a crannog site at Clonsilla, near Gorey and a funerary mound at Loggan, near the Wicklow border.

Remains of numerous residences or ringforts from the latter part of this period are recorded throughout the area including Ballyconran (photo) Pallas, Mount Nebo, Carrig, Croghan, Monamolin, and Raheenagurren.

There is also evidence of many fulachta fiadh (mounds of burnt stones used for cooking) throughout the area such as at Ballynamona, Ballyedmond and Kilmichael Hill.

During the first millennium A.D. the Uí Chennselaig (Kinsella) tribe controlled most of Wexford and other parts of Leinster. Croghan mountain (photo), on the Wicklow border, is also known as Croghan-Kinsella. The inauguration seat of the Kinsella chieftains is thought to have been at the mound at Loggan, near the Wicklow border.



In a lineage that spans over 1400 years, The Ó Morchoe (left), a direct descendant of Brandubh, one of the early Uí Chennselaig kings, currently lives near Gorey.

Early records state that the legendary hero Fionn MacCumhail was granted land in north Wexford in the second century AD and that the area around Limbrick, north of Gorey, was known as Formaol na bhFiann. Formaol or Fermoy is referred to in old manuscripts and Fionn and his descendants are reputed to have ruled here until 283 AD.

CHRISTIANITY AND VIKING INFLUENCE (450 - 1169)

COMING OF CHRISTIANITY

St Patrick is said to have landed at Arklow (then called Inbhear Dee) during his time as a missionary in Ireland and then travelled via Tara Hill to near Cahore. He converted Crimthann, the king of Ui Chinnsealaig, at Rathvilly, Carlow around 458 AD, after which Christianity became established in Co. Wexford.

Numerous church sites (denoted by the prefix Kill-) in North Wexford date from this time such as Kilnenor, Kilnahue, Killaveany, Kilpipe, Kilcashel, Kilcavan, Kilrush. There are also holy well sites such as Toberpatrick, near Ballythomas, St Mogue's Well at Ferns and also at Kilnenor, Clonough and Kilpatrick.

St Aidan founded his monastery at Ferns in 598 A.D. and the boundaries of the present diocese of Ferns date from this period. His cathedral (now Church of Ireland) is still in use today. It is the smallest cathedral in Europe and incorporates the remains of previous churches on this site. Other ecclesiastical buildings at Ferns include St. Mary's, a 12th century Augustinian Abbey, the remains of another 13th century cathedral, a smaller church called St. Peter's and some High Crosses in the cathedral grounds.



Ferns Cathedral



St Aidan

THE VIKINGS

The Vikings began to arrive in Ireland from the 9th Century and soon established new or took control of existing coastal settlements. The Viking or Norse names they gave these settlements, such as Wicklow, Arklow and Wexford are still used today.

The Norse kingdom of Dublin extended as far south as the Inch river, 5 miles north of Gorey. Trade would have been carried on with the Viking inhabitants of Arklow but there is no record of any other settlements in the North Wexford area. We do know they raided Ferns in 835 and again in 839. Evidence of the Viking heritage of the area lives on in names such as Doyle (Dubh Ghall) and O'Loughlin. Also common words such as haggard (part of a farmyard) and penny (coin) come directly from the Norse language.



NORMAN SETTLEMENT (1169 - 1558)

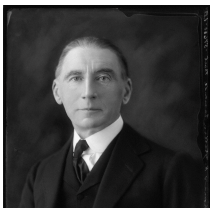


Dermot Mac Murrough was King of Leinster until 1167 when he was defeated by Tiernan O'Rourke and High King Ruairi O Connor at Clonegal. The cause of the dispute was the abduction of O'Rourke's wife, Dervorgilla, by Dermot. Dermot's castle was at Ferns, probably on the site of the present castle. The defeated Dermot fled to France, where he sought aid from King Henry II. Henry allowed Dermot to recruit a group of Norman knights from south Wales. Dermot returned to Glas carrig with a small group of Flemish mercenaries in 1167.

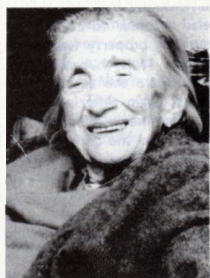
The Normans landed in Bannow Bay, south Wexford in 1169, with another larger group, led by Strongbow, arriving in Baginbun in 1170. Due to their superior military technology, ruthlessness and fighting ability they quickly took control of Wexford, Waterford and large parts of the country. They established castles and fortified sites such as mottes and moated sites. Strongbow married Dermot's daughter Aoife.

A number of moated sites occur in north Wexford area at Pallas, Clone and Moneygarrow. Possible moated sites have also been identified at Coolnagloose and Craan.

Ferns Castle was built around 1220 by William Marshall. Marshall was married to Isobella, the daughter of Aoife and Strongbow. The castle was taken and occupied by the Kavanaghs from 1360-1540. It was eventually destroyed during the rebellion and Civil War in the 1640s. Only half of the castle now exists but what remains has been restored by the OPW.



The Esmonde family of Ballynestragh are directly descended from Geoffrey de Esmont, who landed in Bannow in 1169. The family has a long and interesting involvement in Irish history and are linked by marriage to the Parliamentarian, Henry Grattan.



Sir John Esmonde, 16th Baronet, of Ballynestragh, represented Wexford as a Fine Gael T.D. in Dáil Éireann until 1977. Sir Thomas Esmonde (above left), 11th Baronet, (1862 –1935) was an Irish Home Rule nationalist politician. Other family members include Eugene Esmonde V.C. and Thomas Esmonde V.C.. Maire Comerford (left), the republican activist and Ellice Pilkington, one of the founders of the Irish Countrywomen's Association, were also members of the Esmonde family.

TUDOR CONQUEST (1558 - 1641)



Although the Normans gained a firm grip on south Wexford they gradually lost control of north Wexford and it remained part of Kavanagh-Kinsella territory until the mid-1500s. The area was still governed according to the old Gaelic customs and laws and was Irish speaking. However from around 1550 onwards Elizabeth I (left) made a concerted effort to establish control of this and other remaining Gaelic parts of Ireland. The main impetus for this was the value of the extensive oak forests still covering the area, that could be used for building and ship construction.

After numerous campaigns, treaties, betrayals and rebellions the power of the Kavanagh chieftains was finally broken by the end of the Nine Years War in 1603 (right). During this war the Kavanaghs were supported by the O'Byrnes and O'Tooles of Wicklow and the O'Morchoes (Murphys). Their defeat paved the way for the plantation of north Wexford between 1610 and 1618. During this time the lands of the native Irish were confiscated and granted to settlers (New English) and to those Old English (Normans) who had remained loyal to the Crown.



Huntington Castle, Clonegal

Plantation castles or forts were built at Forchester (Fort Chichester) and at Newtown, near Coolgreany, Prospect and Middleton, near Courtown, Marwood at Monaseed, Moonasootagh near Ferns, Norrismount at Camolin, Limbrick at Kilanerin and at Wingfield. The best surviving example of such a plantation castle is Huntington in Clonegal, on the Carlow-Wexford border. Newborough (now Gorey) was incorporated by Royal Charter in 1619, and was developed by the Ram family.

North Wexford and south Wicklow became a centre for iron smelting in the 1600's and raw iron ore was imported from Wales through Wicklow port, refined using charcoal made from the oak, and re-exported to England. Over 300 mobile iron workings or bloomery sites (left) once existed throughout the area. Oak timbers from Shillelagh, exported though Enniscorthy, were used in the roof of Westminster Abbey.



1641, CROMWELL, PENAL LAWS (1641-1798)

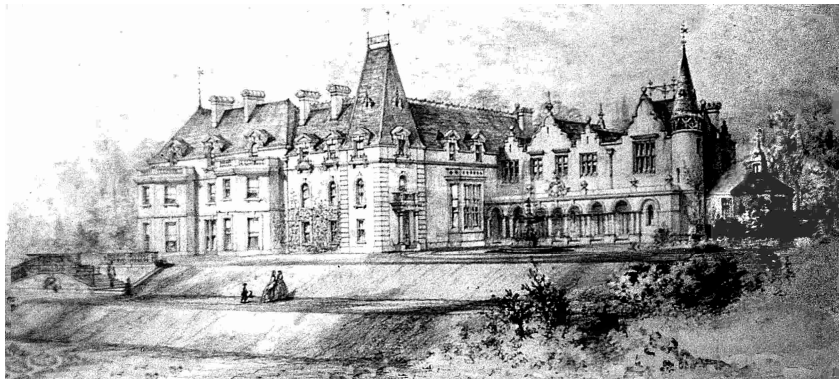


1641 REBELLION

There was much dissent among the native Irish and the dispossessed Old English (Normans) over losing their lands as well as being forced to adopt new laws and customs. This dissent erupted in the rebellion of 1641 in which many of the New English settlers were attacked and killed, and their houses and forts destroyed. From 1641-1648 the Kavanagh chiefs controlled Gorey and occupied Ramsfort House (below).

The rebellion was finally crushed by Oliver Cromwell (left) in 1652. His tactics included burning of crops, forced movement and killing of civilians at Drogheda and Wexford. The Act of Settlement in 1652 completed the redistribution of land to the new settlers and soldier-adventurers.

On his way to Wexford town in 1649 Cromwell passed by Limbrick Castle, whose then owner, Sir Thomas Esmonde, opposed Cromwell and the Roundheads in the English Civil War, but the castle was burnt and abandoned in advance of his arrival.



Ramsfort House

PENAL LAWS



The final defeat of the Irish under King James by King William at the battle of the Boyne in 1690 cleared the way for the establishment of the Protestant religion as the official state religion in Ireland. Catholics and their priests were subject to severe restrictions under the Penal Laws. Mass rocks from this time occur in isolated areas. Only small chapels were allowed and it is thought that the original Ballyfad church(left) dates from this period. There was no church in Gorey town and Gorey was administered from Kilanerin parish.

1798 REBELLION (1798-1845)



The unjust treatment of the majority population throughout the 1700s allied with the new political ideas resulting from the American and French Revolutions resulted in the formation of the United Irish Movement in the 1790s. A branch of the United Irishmen was founded in the Rams Arms Hotel (left) in Gorey in 1792. An active branch of the United Irishmen was located in the Inch-Monaseed area under the leadership of Anthony Perry, Robert Graham, Corcannon, Miles Byrne, Ballylusk and others.

The declaration of martial law in March 1798 and the widespread use of picketing, half-hanging, pitchcapping and summary execution by the English forces and loyalist militias culminated in the outbreak of rebellion in May 1798. Initial successes at Oulart and Tubberneering by the rebels resulted in the seizure of most of Wexford but the attempts to break out of the county at New Ross and Arklow were unsuccessful. Other battle sites in the area include Ballyellis and Ballygullen.



The present Market House at Gorey was used as a headquarters at different times by both the loyalist and rebel forces. Anthony Perry was held prisoner and pitch-capped in it in order to extract information on the local United Irish organisation. He was freed by the advancing rebel forces and fought with them until his capture and execution in Edenderry, Co Offaly.



After the battle of Vinegar Hill on June 21st the rebels forces broke into smaller groups and retreated to the hilly areas around Croghan mountain and south Wicklow while others tried to reach their fellow United Irishmen in Antrim by travelling through the Sculloge Gap near Bunclody to Kilkenny, Kildare and Meath before being finally dispersed in north Dublin.

While the principles of the United Irish movement were based on uniting 'Catholic, Protestant and Dissenter' and the leaders were of mixed religious backgrounds, the conflict sometimes had inevitable sectarian overtones with Protestant lives and property targeted. Almost all the Catholic chapels in north Wexford were burned by loyalist militia in the aftermath of the rebellion and random killings of Catholics were carried out.

FAMINE AND LAND WAR (1845-1914)

FAMINE

The potato blight and resulting famine struck Wexford along with other parts of Ireland in the period 1845-47. A workhouse (right) was built in Gorey in 1840 to assist the struggling population. The building was on a seven acre site and able to accommodate 500 inmates. The effect of the famine on Wexford can be seen from the fact that the population declined from over 200,000 in 1841 to under 180,000 in 1851.



IRISH LANGUAGE

Irish was still spoken in parts of North Wexford up until the 1850's. In 1819 John Bernard Trotter reported 'we heard it everywhere in the fair of Newtownbarry (Bunclody)'. By 1850 its use as an everyday language had died out but Irish words and phrases continue to be used in everyday conversation to the present day.



LAND REFORM

From the 1880s to the turn of the century a sustained campaign for land reform was carried out by the Land League under Michael Davitt and the Irish Parliamentary party under Parnell. The Croghan evictions took place in 1887 during which a large number of tenants were evicted from the Brooke Estates in Ballyfad and Coolgreany.

Michael Davitt (left) at eviction scene and evicted tenants (below)

(from www.michaelfortune.ie)



The Land Wars finally came to an end in the early 1900s with passing of the Land Acts which gave tenants the right to buy out their leases over a period of years. Most tenant farmers availed of this right and the landowning farmer class, many of whom were descended from the original native Irish, was created. The large estates owned by the landlords were

broken up and a major change in the social structure of the countryside had occurred.

LABOURER'S COTTAGES

Under a series of Acts from 1883 to 1938, cottages for landless labourers were built in North Wexford and elsewhere throughout the country. These provided a home and an acre of land for those who had previously been living in substandard rented accommodation.



WORLD WAR I AND 1916 WAR OF INDEPENDENCE AND CIVIL WAR (1914-1922 A.D)

FIRST WORLD WAR AND 1916

Over 200,000 Irishmen fought in the first World War and over 49,000 were killed. The Great War took its toll on the north Wexford area as everywhere else in the country and 114 men from Gorey and district were killed fighting for the freedom of small nations in France between 1914-18.

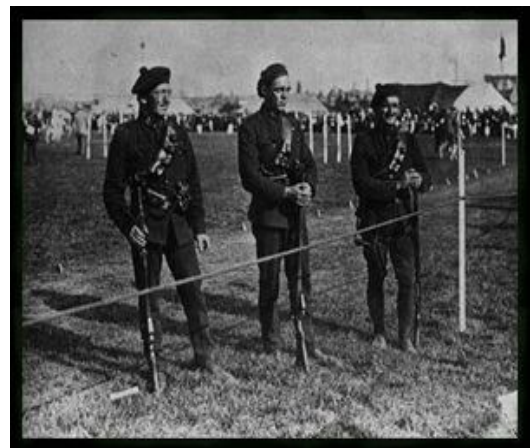
In 1916, a group of Gorey men travelled to Enniscorthy to take part in the Easter rising there. They included Sean Etchingham from Courtown, later a Minister in the Free State government.



WAR OF INDEPENDENCE

Between 1918 and 1921 Ireland's own fight for freedom took place across the country. Captain Lea-Wilson of the RIC, based in Gorey, was assassinated on the orders of Michael Collins in 1920. The Inch ambush took place at Manus' Rocks on the old N11 in May 1921. An RIC patrol travelling from Coolgreany to Gorey was ambushed at Inch and an Auxiliary soldier was killed and police sergeant wounded.

There were also attacks on RIC barracks in Ballycanew, Ferns and Gorey. There are strong local memories of raids and harassment by the Black and Tans and Auxiliary troops (right).



Auxiliaries

CIVIL WAR

There was more activity in North Wexford during the Civil War and during this period the barracks at Gorey was burned and the railway bridge blown up. Ballynestragh House (right), the Esmonde residence, was burnt to the ground but was subsequently rebuilt.



(1922 - PRESENT)

THE FREE STATE, REPUBLIC AND EU.

Employment in the closed economy of the newly formed Free State was mainly in farming and agriculture related industries. Farming was labour intensive and used traditional manual methods. Life was difficult with high infant mortality rates and low life expectancy due to poor medical care and diseases such as TB and polio. Educational opportunities were limited and emigration widespread. World War II gave rise to shortages and rationing but otherwise did not impact directly on the area.

Rural electrification in the 1950's meant that labour saving appliances could be used and radio, telephone and eventually TV became more common. Major changes occurred in the late 1960's/early 70's as a result of EU membership. These changes involved increasing mechanisation with the tractor taking the place of the horse. Cars became more commonplace and the pony and trap and bicycle were gradually replaced by the car as the primary mode of transport. Standards of living rose and healthcare and sanitation were better. Opportunities for people improved with free post-primary education, school transport and more local industries.



The latest phase in the history of north Wexford is the change that accompanied the booming economy of the late 90's and early 00's. Improved road access and rising house prices in the Dublin area gave rise to an influx of new residents. Farming is now highly mechanised and agricultural contractors can now do in hours what used to take farmers and groups of neighbours days of heavy working. Satellite dishes, mobile phones and the internet are common and travel abroad is frequent.



LANGUAGE AND CULTURE

Between 1550 and 1630 there was a school of Gaelic Poetry based in Pallas. The main families involved were the Keoghs and Dalys who were bards to the O' Byrnes of Wicklow. Cearbhaill O' Dalaigh (Daly) composed the love song 'Eileen Aroon', dedicated to the daughter of Sir Morgan Kavanagh of Clonmullen Castle.

North Wexford was largely Gaelic speaking until the mid 1700's and the last Irish speakers did not die out until the mid 1800's. This recent use of the Irish language is reflected in the number of Irish words such as *screed*, *skelp*, *sceach*, *plamaas*, *fooster*, *flathoolack*, *gearogue* and *gig* that are still used in everyday speech. A list of over 70 such words that are still in use has been compiled. These are used less commonly among the younger generation as language becomes more internationalised.

Another feature of everyday language in north Wexford and other parts of rural Ireland is that forms of English pronunciation as introduced by the settlers in the 1600's, and similar to that used by poets such as Shakespeare and Spenser, have remained largely unchanged. Pronunciations such as 'mate' for meat and 'tay' for tea are traditional pronunciations and as valid as their more recent and genteel forms of 'meet' and 'tee'.

GOREY TIMELINE

- 1297 – First mention of Gorey in Norman tax return**
- 1620 – Bishop Ram builds his palace in the town**
- 1641 – Sir Thomas Ram moves to Ramsfort Park**
- 1641 – Ramsfort occupied by the Kavanaghs for 8 years**
- 1649 – Oliver Cromwell passes through Gorey**
- 1655 – Castle, Town Wall and Ramparts at Gorey (Down Survey)**
- 1690 – James II passes through Gorey after the Boyne defeat**
- 1700 – Rams Arms Hotel built**
- 1709 – Market House rebuilt and still in use today**
- 1728 – Dean Swift stays in Hills Hotel on way to Toberneering spa.**
- 1756 – New Jail opened**
- 1762 - Stopfords are created Earls of Courtown**
- 1770 – Gorey consists of 40 stone house and 100 cabins**
- 1798 – Rebellion in Gorey**
- 1819 - Christchurch first built**
- 1824 – Earl of Courtown commences work on Courtown Harbour**
- 1834 – Methodist Church built**
- 1839 – Work begins on St Michael’s Church sponsored by Esmonde family**
- 1840 – Gorey Workhouse opened**
- 1845 – Daniel O’ Connell visits Gorey**
- 1859 – Christchurch rebuilt.**
- 1863 – Railway arrives in Gorey**
- 1886 – Orange Parade in Gorey**
- 1909 – First old age pension paid out**
- 1916 – Gorey men cycle to Enniscorthy to take part in Easter Rising**
- 1920 - Inspector Lea Wilson assassinated**
- 1922 - Barracks and railway bridge destroyed in Civil War**
- 1937 – Gorey Leather factory opened by Sean Lemass**
- 1939 – Ormonde Cinema opens**
- 1947 – Gorey Steel factory opens**
- 1962 - Senator Ted Kennedy visits Gorey**
- 1962 - Fleadh Cheoil na hEireann in Gorey**
- 1962 - First soccer club formed as Gorey Rangers**
- 1968 - Gorey Rugby Club formed**
- 1969 –Naomh Eanna GAA Club formed**
- 1977 - Stopford family sell Marlfield House and leave Gorey**
- 1977 - Rams Arms Hotel demolished**
- 1996 - Last All-Ireland winning Wexford Hurling team greeted**
- 2011 - Last All-Ireland winning Wexford Camogie team greeted**
- 2012 - Darragh MacDonald wins Gold at London Paralympic Games.**