



# Girley Bog Oral History Project



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## Introduction

This project was carried out in 2015 and consisted of interviews with a small sample of the community living in and around Girley Bog, a raised bog Natural Heritage Area near Kells, Co. Meath. These oral history interviews elicited valuable information on the cultural heritage and social history of Girley Bog. If you would like to contribute photos, memories, or stories of Girley Bog, please contact 0879712072/kateflood@yahoo.com.



Cottage of William McGuinness, Bog Warden  
(Image courtesy C. McGuinness)

*“There needs to be something there so there’s a sense of stewardship, a sense that this is ours to look after in some way. It won’t work if you tell people, you can’t do this or that”*

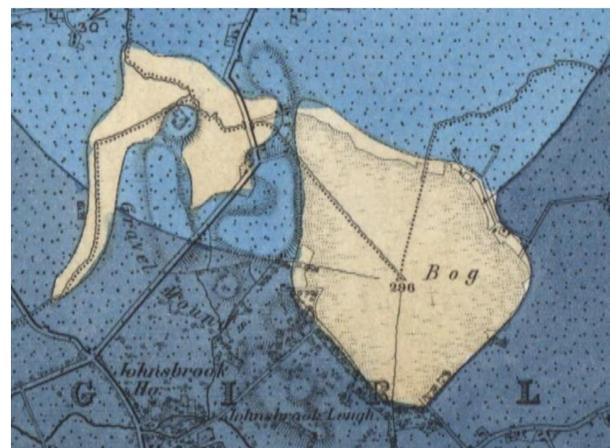


## Girley Bog during World War 2 / The War of Independence

*“In World War 2, turf was brought to Dublin, to the Phoenix Park and used for the hospitals. There was a lot of turf taken out of Girley Bog then, and that road up from Girley was added back then”*

*“The other thing is there was a safe house for the IRA on the bog, in the War of Independence and the house stood up until not that long ago and you can still find tracks of it in the forest”*

*“I remember hearing ... a strong republican, talking about the little bridges over the keshes, you know, keshes over the drains, and they’d have a bell on them and if someone stood on them a bell would go in the house”*



Girley Bog - Geological Survey of Ireland 1898

*“It’s a place of great solitude, like the early Christians, you find a solitude in it. You can go walking and observe all the changes that take place during the year, from the gorse and willow catkins in spring, which provide early pollen for the bees, to the wild orchids, and the raspberries and blackberries and all the bog plants in summer”*

## Social history at Girley Bog

*“I remember there was a well, to get the water for the midday meal, they’d bring bread, butter, milk, and make the tea there. You’d light a fire, sure you’d plenty of turf, and to keep the smoke out of the water, you would float a bit of a stick in it, I don’t know whether it worked, but that’s what you had to do. It was a very social type of a thing, at lunchtime they’d all have a game of cards, there’d be people next door to you cutting turf and they’d all come together at lunchtime and have a big chat”*

Meath Chronicle 1897-current, 19.09.1931, page 1

## Shocking Tragedy in Meath Bog

**OCTOGENARIAN’S TERRIBLE DEATH.**  
**OVERWHELMED IN BURNING HEATHER**

A shocking tragedy occurred on Thursday evening in the bog of Chamberlains-town, situate about mid-way between Kells and Athboy, ending in the death of an old and much respected small holder in the district, Mr. Brian McCor-mack. The deceased man lived with his wife and daughter about a mile and a half from the public road, his house, a thatched one, being located on the edge of the bog. At this time of the year

ter came out and went up into the fire. I told her to “come back—he’s not in the fire—and if your clothes take fire you will be burned to death, so come out.” She came back and went to the off-side, the right-hand side of the fire, as the fire was going north. We went very near where he was found and we could not find him. We came back and searched the wood and back from the wood to the bog. I said he must be lost as I did not see him appearing. Then Pat Bell and Julia McGuinness came. We went along the mearing drain. I was going round the bog hole while Pat Bell went across to where he was and said: “He’s here—burned to death.” I rushed on to him as fast as

This fire on Girley Bog that claimed a man’s life was revealed in interviews with local residents (Source: Meath Chronicle)

## Turf cutting at Girley Bog

*“My father cut turf on his banks, they used to say they were catching turf, that’s cutting it with a breast slane, which was much like a spade”*

*“The turf on Girley wouldn’t be the best quality ... the brown and black turf was down at the very bottom”*

*“We always had fantastic appetites down there, whatever is in it, you’d be starving. The bog air is so pure, it’s very healthy. It’s quiet and calming”*



John Woods, Fordstown cutting turf on Girley Bog  
(Image courtesy James Farrelly)

## Acknowledgments

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