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The symbols of Ireland are today well known and widely recognized. The harp and the shamrock, and to a lesser extent, the wolfhound and the round tower, have symbolized Irish nationality for generations.[1] Among other visual symbols, some of the most renowned include imaginative images of Mother Ireland, Hibernia, and Erin.[2] These metonymical symbols help men and women to envision the wider meanings of the images, and may evoke complex emotions, many of which may be deep-seated and even unrecognized by the individuals experiencing them. In addition to Ireland's most prominent symbols, visual artists and, perhaps, craftspeople created and used symbols that were so subtle that they are today largely unrecognized. Recent research, constructed around archaeological findings, suggests that common course earthenware vessels may have functioned in this manner. Artists in the early nineteenth century may have used coarse earthenware vessels as a way to evoke symbolically the image of traditional Ireland, at the precise time of social crisis and cultural change. The mundane character and functional uses of everyday ceramic containers helps to mask a deep, culturally significant meaning.

Coarse earthenware is a soft-paste ceramic that is fired at a fairly low temperature of one thousand to fifteen hundred degrees Fahrenheit. Ceramic specialists distinguish this type of ceramic from three other basic types: fine earthenware, which is generally harder, whiter in body color, having thin vessel walls; porcelain, which is white in color and usually fired twice; and stoneware, which is extremely hard, thick-bodied, and often gray in color.

1. Jeanne Sheehy, *The Rediscovery of Ireland's Past: The Celtic Revival, 1830–1930* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1980), pp. 9–10. The research reported here was largely funded by a generous grant from the Heritage Council under the Archaeology Grant Scheme, 1999. Other funds were obtained from the Famine Commemorative Commission, the National Committee for Archaeology, and Illinois State University.

2. L. Perry Curtis, Jr., "The Four Erins: Feminine Images of Ireland, 1780–1900," *Éire-Ireland,* 33, 3–4/34, 1 (Fall/Winter 1998/1999), 70–102.

Nonspecialists may better understand these ceramic types in familiar terms: when unglazed, coarse earthenware resembles common, terra cotta flower pots; fine earthenware appears as today's common dishes; porcelain is perhaps best known as fine tea cups and saucers, often referred to as "china" to denote its association with the early Asian tea trade to Europe; and stoneware is generally familiar as heavy, gray crocks often decorated with cobalt blue designs.

Many analysts often refer to coarse earthenwares as "redware" or "buffware" because the clays used in their manufacture typically turn red or pale yellow during firing. Irish specialists often refer to coarse earthenware as "country pottery," undoubtedly in recognition of its humble origins, or simply as "earthenware."[3] Many people used the term "delft" to refer to what ceramists would term "fine" or "refined" earthenware. As used in Ireland, today, "delft" and "earthenware" refer to two different kinds of ceramics.

Potters covered coarse earthenware vessels with colored glazes to make them nonpermeable and often used liquid-clay slips over the glazes for further decoration. The glazes were earth-toned in color and, when carefully applied, gave the vessels a uniform or near-uniform color. They applied the slips over the glazes in a series of decorative dots, undulating lines, or combed patterns.[4]

Whole black-glazed bowl purchased in the early twentieth century, now owned by the Center for the Study of Rural Ireland, Illinois State University and Kilglass, County Roscommon. (Collection of the author.)

3. Mairead Dunlevy, *Ceramics in Ireland* (Dublin: National Museum of Ireland, 1988), pp. 23– 26.
4. Examples can be found in Lura Woodside Watkins, *Early New England Potters and Their Wares* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1950).

Coarse earthenware has a long history and a global presence. It is one of the easiest ceramics to produce; archaeologists have discovered sherds of coarse earthenware ceramics in deposits in Asia dating as early as 5000–4000 B.C., and, in Greece, associated with the period 6000–5000 B.C.[5] All prehistoric pottery technically may be considered to be coarse earthenware because it is merely baked clay; what distinguishes these early coarse earthenwares from the modern examples is the application of glazes on the more recent pieces. The glazed, coarse earthenware industry in Europe has medieval roots, and in Ireland, archaeologists have found samples of coarse earthenware at several medieval sites.[6] Comparisons with other collections have convinced analysts that the medieval coarse earthenwares found in Ireland were both domestic and imported.[7] The production and use of coarse earthenwares increased rapidly throughout Ireland after medieval times, and archaeologists have found numerous examples. Irish archaeologists sometimes refer to these wares as "brownware," in reference to their baked-earth body color, or as "blackware," in reference to their dark glazes.[8] Blackware is more accurately termed "black-glazed coarse earthenware."

The precise locations of coarse earthenware potteries in Ireland—even for the early nineteenth century—remain obscure. Clues to the widespread nature of the industry, however, do exist in the literature. For example, a careful reading of Samuel Lewis's *A Topographical Dictionary of Ireland*, first published in 1837, indicates the operation of twenty-three distinct "coarse" potteries throughout Ireland at the time. Most of these potteries were clustered around Belfast, but other important centers of coarse earthenware production were situated just south of Roscommon town, in Galway, Youghal, and elsewhere.[9]

5. D. B. Webster, *Early Slip Decorated Pottery in Canada* (Toronto: Charles J. Munson, 1969), p. ii.

6. See Bernard Rackham, *Medieval English Pottery,* 2nd ed., (London: Faber and Faber, 1972).

7. T. B. Barry, *The Archaeology of Medieval Ireland* (London: Routledge, 1988), pp. 100–103; Nancy Edwards, *The Archaeology of Early Medieval Ireland* (London: Routledge, 1999), p. 68; J. P. Mallory and T. E. McNeill, *The Archaeology of Ulster: From Colonisation to Plantation* (Belfast: Institute of Irish Studies, Queen's University, 1991), p. 266.

8. T. Fanning and J. G. Hurst, "A Mid-Seventeenth-Century Pottery Group and Other Objects from Ballyhack Castle, Co. Wexford, *Proceedings of the Royal Irish Academy* 75, C (1975), 103–118; P. David Sweetman, "Archaeological Excavations at Ferns Castle, Co. Wexford," *Proceedings of the Royal Irish Academy* 79, C (1979), 217–245, and "Archaeological Excavations at King John's Castle, Limerick," *Proceedings of the Royal Irish Academy* 75, C (1980), 207–229; Fiona White, *An Assemblage of Post-Medieval Local Wares from Merchants Road, Galway* (Master's thesis, National University of Ireland, Galway, 1999).

9. Samuel Lewis, *A Topographical Dictionary of Ireland* (Port Washington, NY: Kennikat Press, 1970). A map, created from Lewis' information appears in my "Investigating the Redware Industry of Early Nineteenth-Century Rural Ireland," prepared for the Heritage Council (grant HG/AY99/17; 1999), 10.

Circumstantial evidence about the presence of coarse earthenware potteries can also be gleaned from some contemporary writings. In 1842, Thackeray mentioned the presence of "crockery" or "cheap crockery" at the markets in Waterford, Killarney, and Naas.[10] All of the potteries so noted were undoubtedly small, community-based craft houses that probably produced ceramics for a local market. Potters may have operated these small potteries for generations, perhaps stretching back to medieval times.

Surprisingly little is known about Irish coarse earthenwares despite the evidence that they constituted a major kind of ceramics used in the countryside in the early nineteenth century. Megan McManus notes the paucity of information about Irish coarse earthenwares in a recent study of Irish traditional crafts:

> It is perhaps ironic, when we consider the techniques of the archaeologists, that we know so little about the locally made domestic earthenware that ordinary people used in Ireland in the comparatively recent past. Attention has focused on fine ware, the everyday has often been neglected. Yet there is evidence that in the nineteenth century small potteries producing earthenware and terracotta for household and garden use existed in at least twenty-five different regions.[11]

The Irish coarse earthenware industry has been overlooked for several reasons. First, each pottery kiln was probably small. It may well be supposed that potters made pots and other vessels for the townlands in their immediate vicinities, if for no other reason than to minimize their transportation time and costs. Short travel distances would mean fewer broken vessels during delivery. Second, it is easy to imagine the craft of producing coarse earthenware to be a family tradition and therefore little publicized. The skill of throwing a pot on a wheel must be acquired through experience and familiarity. But even though pottery making was often overlooked as significant, it was a skill nonetheless, and several steps were required before potters could begin to produce marketable vessels. They had to identify a usable clay source; to dig and transport the clay to the workshop; to build a proper kiln and maintain it in working order; to understand firing temperatures and the effects of different fuels; and had to understand the properties of the glazes they would apply to their products. Moreover, after potters had made the vessels, stacked them in the kiln, fired them, and removed them, they still had to transport them to market. The production of coarse earthenware vessels, though a folk industry,

10. W. M. Thackeray, *The Irish Sketchbook* (Dublin, Gill and Macmillan, 1990), pp. 48, 119, 268.

11. Megan McManus, "Coarse Ware," in *Ireland's Traditional Crafts*, ed. David Shaw-Smith (London: Thames and Hudson, 1984), pp. 186–190.

was thus a complicated process. But as men and women who carried on a traditional folk craft—and unlike the owners of the large, profit-oriented, ceramic factories in England—coarse earthenware potters typically did not keep records of their production techniques or the styles of the wares they produced. Instead, they probably made vessels in familiar ways that duplicated how potters had "always" made pots, bowls, pitchers, and other objects in rural Ireland. The production of coarse earthenware vessels was part of a time-honored tradition that did not require written documentation for its success and longevity.

The local, familiar character of the Irish coarse earthenware industry undoubtedly accounted for the neglect for this craft by gentlemen who debated the pros and cons of developing an Irish-based ceramics industry in the late eighteenth century. In a statement cited by many commentators, Thomas Wallace offered a 1798 perspective that aptly summarized the Irish ceramics industry at the beginning of the nineteenth century: "If there exist any manufacture of this kind [of ceramics] beyond that of a few coarse tiles, and still coarser earthenware, it is so trivial as to deserve no notice."[12] As a member of the upper class, Wallace was conceptually bound to imagine that the refined earthenwares then being produced by such industrial luminaries as Josiah Wedgwood in Staffordshire, England, constituted the only "proper" ceramics for a "civilized" nation to produce. When he used the term "coarser earthenware," he was undoubtedly making a value judgement about the products of the Irish traditional folk industry rather than a pronouncement based on his intimate knowledge of the differences between coarse and refined earthenwares. Wallace knew, however, that the Irish-made wares were heavy and earth-colored, while the English-made wares were thin-bodied, white, and brightly decorated.

A few prominent early nineteenth-century observers, notably Edward Wakefield and Isaac Weld, commented upon the manufacture of coarse earthenwares, but both also viewed the industry as a minor part of rural life. In Weld's case, he believed that the burgeoning English fine earthenware industry would quickly destroy the production of Irish coarse earthenwares, "not only because it can be afforded on as reasonable or more reasonable terms, but

12. Thomas Wallace, *An Essay on the Manufactures of Ireland* (Dublin: Campbell and Shea, 1798), p. 243. Also see, John Sheffield, *Observations on the Manufactures, Trade, and Present State of Ireland* (Dublin: Moncreiffe, White, and Byrne, 1785). Excellent historical accounts of the fine earthenware industry in Ireland appear in M. S. Dudley Westropp, "Notes on the Pottery Manufacture in Ireland," *Proceedings of the Royal Irish Academy,* 32 (1913), 1–27, and *Irish Pottery and Porcelain* (London: Stationery Office, 1935).

because it is likewise much better manufactured."[13] For Weld, Wallace, and other observers, English-made, fine white earthenwares appeared modern and forward-looking, while traditional, earth-colored, Irish-made, coarse earthenwares were old-fashioned and retrospective. Given this perspective, it was easy for those who backed the development of an Irish fine earthenware industry to denigrate, or even to ignore, the undercapitalized, locally based, traditional coarse earthenware industry.

Folklife specialists have likewise downplayed or even ignored the widespread distribution and cultural significance of coarse earthenwares in the Irish home. Many have assumed that early nineteenth-century Irish tenant farmers were so desperately poor that they had a meager material culture when it came to ceramics. Estyn Evans, in his widely read *Irish Folk Ways*, makes a point of drawing a historical link between round-bottomed Neolithic cooking pots and twentieth-century cast-iron cauldrons, but he completely ignores the coarse earthenwares.[14] Even the great Irish folklorist Kevin Danaher misread the ceramic evidence. He mentions the work of local potters in one of his popular books, but states that they made "stoneware jugs and jars too"; later, he mentions that "Up to sixty or seventy years ago the usual drinking vessel in the countryside was the china or stoneware bowl."[15] His terms are meaningless to the ceramics specialist, because "china"—technically, porcelain—and "stoneware" are mutually exclusive types of ceramics. It is difficult to know whether he meant that the people continued to use the traditional coarse earthenwares—which he refers to indiscriminately as "china" and "stoneware"—or if he meant that they used the fine earthenware bowls and cups that were extremely common in the late nineteenth century, which he terms "china." The failure to acknowledge the Irish coarse earthenware industry, even by talented folklore scholars, contains significant implications for the understanding of traditional, rural lifeways, particularly since the manufacture and use of ceramics is often viewed as a hallmark of "civilization."

In light of such works as Evans's, many people today may believe that nineteenth-century Irish households relied almost exclusively on metal and straw vessels. Authors usually cite three containers as ubiquitous in the Irish rural

13. Isaac Weld, *Statistical Survey of the County of Roscommon Drawn up under the Directions of the Royal Dublin Society* (Dublin: R. Graisberry, 1832), pp. 32, 403–4; Edward Wakefield, *An Account of Ireland, Statistical and Practical*, 2 vols. (London: Longman, Hurst, Rees, Orme, and Brown, 1812), I:114.

14. E. Estyn Evans, *Irish Folk Ways* (London: Routledge, 1989), p. 76. It is important to note that the urge to link the modern era with prehistory was a convention popular among archaeologists when Evans was writing. See, for example, J. G. D. Clark, *Prehistoric Europe: The Economic Basis* (London: Methuen, 1974), pp. 3–4.

15. Kevin Danaher, *In Ireland Long Ago* (Dublin: Mercier, 1964), pp. 28–29, 31.

home: the three-legged cast-iron cauldron; the round, cast-iron oven pot; and the squat straw basket called a "scip" or "skep."[16] Redcliffe Salaman provides a classic example of this thinking in his influential social history of the potato.[17] He holds that rural dwellers cooked potatoes in iron cauldrons and transferred them to scips when they were ready to be eaten. In this framework, weavers and blacksmiths have roles in traditional Irish life, but the local potters are forgotten.

Many writers and artists understood the significance of the iron cauldron as a centerpiece of the Irish hearth—and thereby the focal point of the home—and often used the absence of an iron cauldron to indicate abject poverty and want. Anthony Trollope provided a famous example in *Castle Richmond*: "There was not an article of furniture in the whole place; neither chairs, nor table, nor bed nor dresser; there was there neither dish, nor cup, nor plate, nor even the iron pot in which all the cookery of the Irish cottiers' ménage is usually carried on."[18] The most shocking part of Trollope's text is intended to be the stark realization that *even* the iron pot is missing from the destitute home. Diarist Elizabeth Grant made a similar observation in 1847: "They [the poor] have not fuel indeed to cook one [a meal], nor pot nor pan nor griddle nor crock to prepare one in, most of them at least."[19]

A. S. G. Stopford offered an equally well-known pictorial example in his lithograph showing the interior of a rural cabin in the throes of starvation and disease.[20] Stopford depicts a devastated family in the depths of despair. Two members of the household lie deathly ill, stretched on thin, straw beds on the floor, while two women administer to small children. A young man sits languishing at a simple table with his head in his arms; his demeanor is that of total resignation. With the exception of three chairs, the table, and an overturned stool, the room is starkly devoid of material objects. The darkly gaping hearth is visible in the left background, but its requisite cauldron is missing. Its wooden crane juts boldly forward, but its accompanying iron chain hangs empty, evoking a feeling every bit as forlorn as the family's despair. It is clear that this

16. Anne O'Dowd, "Baskets," in *Ireland's Traditional Crafts*, ed. David Shaw-Smith (London: Thames and Hudson, 1984), p. 121.

17. Redcliffe N. Salaman, *The History and Social Influence of the Potato* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989).

18. Anthony Trollope, *Castle Richmond* (London: Penguin, 1993), p. 683.

19. Elizabeth Grant, *The Highland Lady in Ireland: Journals, 1840–50*, eds. Patricia Pelly and Andrew Todd (Edinburgh: Canongate, 1991), p. 281.

20. Noel Kissane, *The Irish Famine: A Documentary History* (Dublin: National Library of Ireland, 1995), p. 109; Christine Kinealy, *This Great Calamity: The Irish Famine, 1845–52* (Boulder: Roberts Rinehart, 1995), following p. 266; Peter Gray, *The Irish Famine* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1995), p. 56.

hearth once contained a cauldron, and Stopford's conscious decision to omit it presents the unmistakable message that this household is in serious trouble.

The cast-iron cauldron was indeed an important piece of material culture within the Irish household, and it became a notable symbol of Irishness, most trivially as the leprechaun's "pot of gold." Writing in 1830, J. E. Bicheno neatly summarized the practical functions of the iron cauldron, though—like Arthur Young and Elizabeth Grant—he confused the issue by referring to the vessel as a "crock," a term commonly used today only for stoneware:

> The crock not only boils the potatoes, which is its legitimate application, but aids in fetching them home, washing them, and all things else that are washable. With the assistance of a table and a kish, it barricades the door, to prevent the irruptions of the pig and the cow during meals. It serves the pig and the children, collects the jetsum and flotsum [*sic*] of the cabin, and is alternatively a vessel of honour and dishonour.[21]

Folkloric evidence, however, also suggests that iron cauldrons had a deeper, more mythic significance in traditional Irish life. Many ancient, pre-Christian myths were constructed around the search for magic cauldrons that could provide material abundance and restore life. Similarly, the Tuatha Dé Danaan are said to have received a cauldron as a gift from the masters of Murias, one of their otherworldly cities.[22] Cauldrons—often a powerful symbol of Irish folklife—thus had a long-lasting, cultural significance.

The iron cauldron continued to occupy a central place within the lives of rural men and women in the early nineteenth century, but recent archaeological research in County Roscommon indicates that coarse earthenwares may have been equally important. Excavations at three village sites in northern County Roscommon yielded 1,321 pieces of coarse earthenware, exhibiting nineteen distinct glaze colors ranging from black to pink. The three townlands—Gorttoose, Mulliviltrin, and Ballykilcline—were all occupied in the early nineteenth century, and the residents of each were either partially or completely evicted in 1847. The percentage of coarse earthenware sherds within the ceramic collections from the three sites ranged from 46 percent to 50 percent of the total number of ceramic sherds found.[23] Their abundance

21. J. E. Bicheno, *Ireland and its Economy: Being the Result of Observations Made in a Tour through the Country in the Autumn of 1829* (London: John Murray, 1830), p. 31; Arthur Young, *A Tour of Ireland with General Observations on the Present State of that Kingdom made in the Years 1776, 1777, and 1778* (London: T. Cadell and J. Dodsley, 1780), p. 26.

22. Peter Berreford Ellis, *A Dictionary of Irish Mythology* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987), p. 57; Caitlín Matthews, *The Elements of the Celtic Tradition* (Shaftesbury: Element, 1996), pp. 9–10.

23. Charles E. Orser, Jr., *A Preliminary Report on the Archaeological Investigations at Gorttoose, A Late Eighteenth- and Nineteenth-Century Village in County Roscommon, Ireland*, report submitted

makes it clear we must not overlook the coarse earthenwares in the archaeological samples, or disparage their importance to the men and women who once lived in the excavated locations. The excavated sherds indicate at least two vessel forms in the collection: large bowls with sharply sloping sides, often referred to as "milk pans," and single-handled pitchers. The pouring spouts were of extremely simple design, produced when the potter pinched the wet clay at the rim of the vessel opposite the handle. The discovery that Irish men and women relied on coarse earthenware vessels in their homes raises questions about the meanings of these objects within prefamine Irish culture. The range of interpretations can vary widely, but two obvious realms of inquiry concern the vessels' functional utility and their symbolic meanings.

The most straightforward interpretation of the vessels involves their functions. It is obvious that the bowls and pitchers were intended to serve as containers. Rural families used large bowls to store milk, potatoes, or other foodstuffs, and they probably used the pitchers to pour milk and water. It is likely that rural men and women used the thick-bodied, utilitarian vessels in other ways as well. An offhand comment by Wakefield suggests that farm families may also have used the vessels for cooking: "Of some of them [clays] the common people manufacture pots, which they use for boiling their potatoes or other articles of food."[24] If Wakefield was correct, then the people sometimes used iron cauldrons and coarse earthenware pots interchangeably. A microscopic study of some excavated sherds from Gorttoose supports Wakefield's contention, as a number of milk pan fragments were found to exhibit parallel scratches on their interior surfaces, indicating that the users had mixed something inside the pots.[25]

The presence of the microscopic scratches inside the bowls proves that the coarse earthenware vessels discovered archaeologically had clear functional uses in the rural Irish home. The thick-bodied, durable wares undoubtedly served many mundane functions. But, in light of the long-held belief in Ireland that vessels could have deeper meanings, it is likely that the functional interpretations only tell part of the story. An investigation into the cultural

to the Office of Public Works, Dublin, 1996; idem, *A Report of Investigations for the First Season of Archaeological Research at Ballykilcline Townland, Kilglass Parish, County Roscommon, Ireland*, report submitted to Dúchas, The Heritage Service, Dublin, 1998; Charles E. Orser, Jr. and Katherine L. Hull, *A Report of Investigations for Archaeological Research at Mulliviltrin, County Roscommon, Ireland: A Tenant Village Destroyed During the Mass Evictions of 1847*, report submitted to Dúchas, The Heritage Service Dublin, 1998.

24. Wakefield, I:114.

25. David L. Brown, *Ceramic Functional Analysis: The Redwares of Late Eighteenth- and Nineteenth-Century Gorttoose Village, County Roscommon, the Republic of Ireland*, senior thesis, Anthropology Program, Illinois State University, 1998.

meaning of the coarse earthenwares would be incomplete without considering their possible symbolic roles within traditional Irish life.

Historical archaeologists working outside Ireland have hypothesized that traditionally designed ceramics can help a people to maintain their sense of cohesiveness in the face of intense assimilative pressure. The unglazed pottery produced by African-American slaves in the American South and in the Caribbean from colonial times to before the American Civil War clearly carried such symbolic meanings.[26] Slaves made pots for functional reasons, mostly for the preparation of food. But slaves also imbued these mundane objects with a deeper meaning, using them both as the physical embodiment of their sense of peoplehood and as a reminder of the need for cultural continuity. The presence of pots reminiscent of an African homeland in a decidedly non-African environment reminded the enslaved men and women that they were united in spirit, that they had originated in a faraway land, and that they were different from the men and women who enslaved them. Slaves thus used pots to create a sense of purpose and cultural continuity within a barbarous system that sought to dehumanize them. Non-African observers never mentioned the slave-made pottery in their abundant writings about slavery and slave life, but their erasure from the written record did not diminish the pottery's value within the slave communities. The paucity of written information only means that, for whatever reason, nonslaves overlooked the industry. The nonfunctional dimension of the slaves' pottery forces present-day analysts to perceive enslaved men and women in the New World as purposefully engaged in self-determined activity, not merely as human beings responding to the biological need to feed themselves.

Visual images of early nineteenth-century, rural Ireland reinforce the idea that coarse earthenware vessels—like slave-made pottery with which it is roughly contemporary—had both functional and symbolic meanings to the men, women, and children who used them. Scholars of Irish history and culture have undoubtedly seen them many times. Unless they were archaeologists or ceramic specialists, however, most viewers would have overlooked the significance of the earthenware vessels or have failed even to notice them.

Three well-known images portray the functional uses of earthenware pitchers. In the first image, from a small book of watercolors from County Waterford probably dating to the 1820s, a group of four women and one child use wooden buckets and red earthenware pitchers—represented in the form identical to that found archaeologically—to hold water drawn from a town

26. Leland Ferguson, "Struggling with Pots in Colonial South Carolina," in *The Archaeology of Inequality*, ed. Randall H. McGuire and Robert Paynter (Oxford: Blackwell, 1991). Also see, Charles E. Orser, Jr., *A Historical Archaeology of the Modern World* (New York: Plenum, 1996), pp. 117–123.

pump.[27] The second and third images, reproduced in black and white, show groups of destitute men and women carrying earthenware vessels as they wait for rations in 1847. One of the images is titled "A Sketch of the Poor Assembled for Soup at Poulacurra House on the 22nd of February 1847" and the other is named "A Group of Peasants and Beggars Assembled in the Kitchen Garden of Poulacurra House, May 1847."[28] The images are part of a collection of five pencil sketches signed "LLDB," but neither the artist nor the location of Poulacurra House has been determined.[29] In the first image, two waiting women carry what appear to be earthenware pitchers, and in the second image, four pitchers are visible, as well as one shallow bowl and two straight-sided mugs.

The artists have attempted to provide a realistic picture of living men and women waiting to receive the food that will help them to survive. The presence of the vessels is important—after all, the hungry poor need them to take away their rations—but the dominant images of the pictures are the people themselves; the vessels are incidental. At the very least, however, the presence of the vessels among the starving men and women provides further support for folkloric evidence indicating that to receive rations one had to bring his or her own vessel to the storehouse.[30] The knowledge that utterly destitute individuals would starve if they sold every personal possession—even down to the last remaining coarse earthenware pitcher—provides a chilling insight into the horrors depicted in Stopford's picture of total devastation.

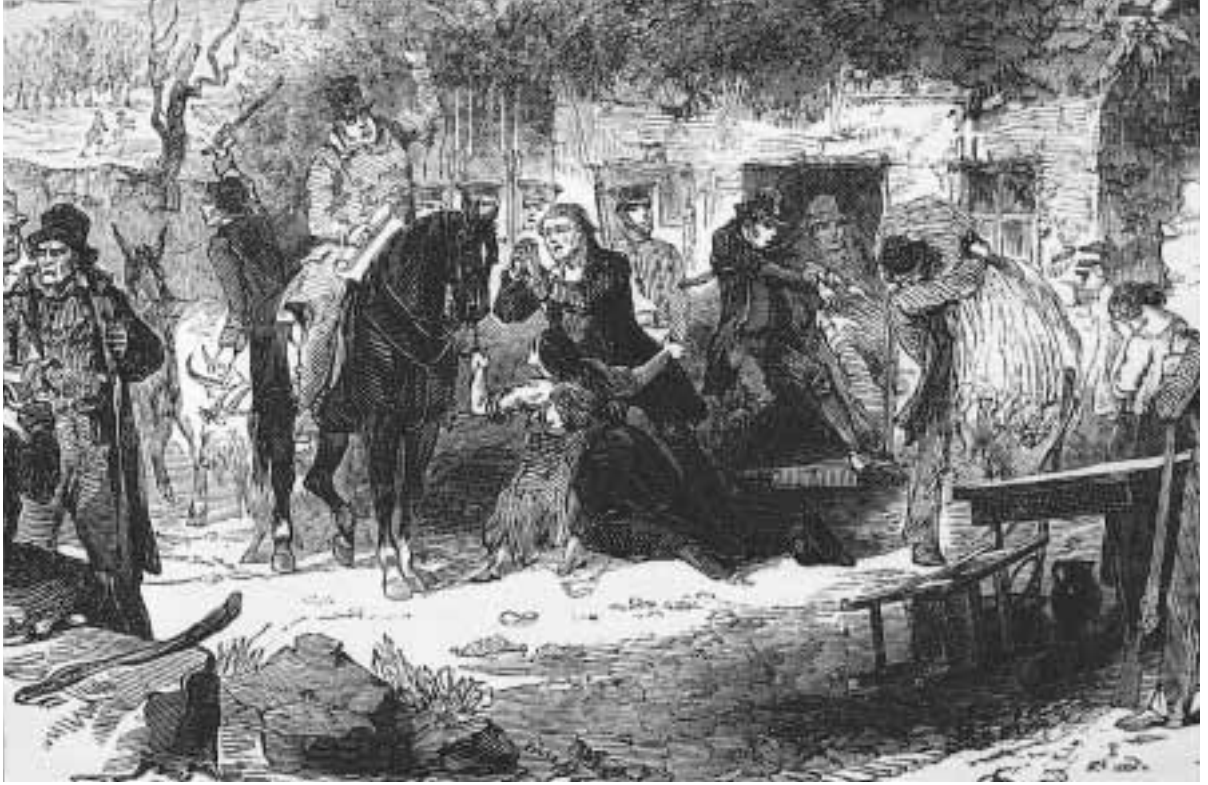
Images showing the functional, everyday uses of coarse earthenware vessels are similarly worthy of note. At a minimum, they provide information about the cultural contexts of such vessels in early nineteenth-century rural Ireland. They also help to portray the tangible reality of the horrors of starvation. In some drawings, the pitchers, even though they have an easily recognizable function, are often not recognizable. Artists sometimes represented their shapes in highly stylized ways that do not reflect any actual vessel shapes used during the period. More intriguing than the images showing the functional uses of coarse earthenwares are those that suggest something of the symbolic qualities of the vessels. These pictures provide new insights into the significance of ceramic vessels within traditional, rural culture. Four well-known, early nineteenth-century images are particularly useful for suggesting the

27. *Ireland: Art into History,* ed. Brian P. Kennedy and Raymond Gillespie (Dublin: Town House, 1994), p. 46.

28. Kissane, pp. 77, 79. Also see Gray, p. 162.

29. Kissane, p. 39.

30. See, for example, Cathal Póirtéir, *Famine Echoes* (Dublin: Gill and Macmillan, 1995), pp. 140, 142, 143, 147, 148.



"Ejectment of Irish Tenantry," *Illustrated London News,* 16 December 1848. (Collection of the author.)

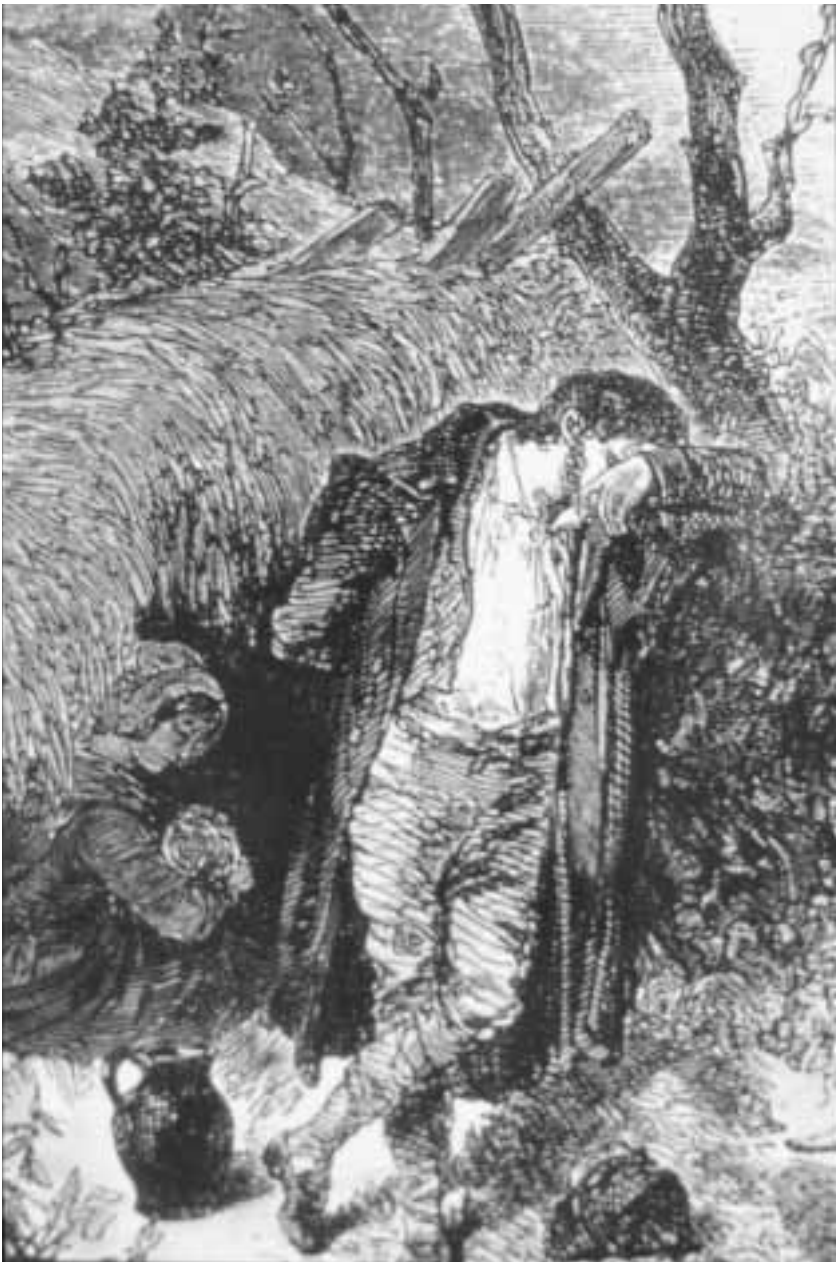
importance of the coarse earthenware vessel as a powerfully charged, symbolic object.

The first image is a lithograph produced by A. MacLure for *Narrative of a Journey from Oxford to Skibbereen . . . 1847* by Lord Dufferin and G. F. Boyle.[31] In this image, two men are emerging from an isolated stone house carrying a dead body partially covered with a white sheet. The men are about to lift the body into a simple, open coffin that sits on a two-wheeled cart drawn by a single horse. The mood is dark, somber, and lonely. Sitting some distance from the house, and in the immediate left front corner of the picture—where it cannot be overlooked—is a two-toned, coarse earthenware pitcher. MacLure has drawn the horse in such a way that it looks directly at the pitcher. The horse thus appears as a visual trick intended to force viewers to direct their eyes to the pitcher. Though the deceased person is positioned in the center of the image, and is clearly the picture's subject, the earthenware pitcher seems focal as well.

The second image is a well-known print titled "Ejectment of Irish Tenantry." It first appeared in the *Illustrated London News* on December 16, 1848.[32] In this famous image, a bailiff is sitting on a large horse before a one-room cabin, while his men forcibly evict its residents. Soldiers, holding rifles with ominous, fixed bayonets, stand idly by watching the event unfold, while in the center of the image a man and a woman plead with the bailiff for mercy. The woman, on her knees, clings to the horse's reins, while the man, with clasped hands, implores the mounted man for relief. The family's livestock are being driven off in the background and two men are on the cabin's roof removing the thatch. In the right foreground of the picture—immediately in front of a group of two idle soldiers and maybe a peasant—are the residents' belongings, objects that have been forcibly removed from the cabin and carelessly deposited in the roadway. An overturned ladder-back chair with a *súgán,* or straw rope, seat lies adjacent to a simple table. Under the table, nicely framed by it and unmistakably visible, is a dark-glazed, classically shaped, coarse earthenware pitcher. To the immediate left of the pitcher, and partly in shadow, is an iron cauldron. The cauldron is visible, but the viewer's eye is irresistibly drawn to the pitcher. It appears to have pride of place among the objects represented.

31. Kissane, p. 116; Helen Litton, *The Irish Famine: An Illustrated History* (Dublin: Wolfhound, 1994), p. 51.

32. Kissane, p. 141; Litton, p. 96; Gray, p. 142; Kinealy, *This Great Calamity*, back cover; John Percival, *The Great Famine: Ireland's Potato Famine, 1845–51* (New York: Viewer, 1995), p. 94; Margaret Crawford, "The Great Irish Famine, 1845–9: Image versus Reality," in *Ireland: Art into History*, p. 84



"The Day After the Ejectment," *Illustrated London News,* 15 December 1848. (Collection of the author.)

The third image is equally well known. Titled "The Day After the Ejectment," it appeared in the *Illustrated London News* on December 15, 1848, and was drawn by the same artist who drew "Ejectment of Irish Tenantry."[33] This image portrays an evicted family with no place to go. They rest on the side of the road in a makeshift shelter, perhaps, the tumbled remains of their cabin. In a commanding place in the center of the image a man stands in despair with his head buried in the crook of his left arm. His wife sits in the shadows inside the shelter holding and comforting a tiny baby, while an older child perches on a hedge or mound of dirt on the right side of the picture. The child points to what might be a tiny carriage drawn by two horses in the distance. At the man's feet is a finely shaped earthenware pitcher, one that precisely duplicates archaeological examples. Like the man, the pitcher demands the viewer's attention, and to intensify the effect, the artist has surrounded it with a white blank space. Viewers are drawn to the pitcher.

Additional images depicting coarse earthenware bowls and pitchers often show the objects surrounded by people. For example, two color images in Peter Gray's *The Irish Famine* include coarse earthenware pitchers.[34] One of the pitchers is overly stylized, but the other is drawn with complete accuracy. Another prominent image that includes coarse earthenware appears in a painting on the cover of E. Margaret Crawford's edited volume, *The Hungry Stream*.[35] Titled *The Irish Emigrants*, and painted by Joseph Barker, it depicts a family—a husband, wife, and five children—awaiting emigration. In the center of the image, a small girl pours milk from a tin pitcher into a what appears to be a wooden bowl. A coarse earthenware pitcher, however, rests in the foreground immediately next to the seated mother. As it is presented on the book's cover, the pitcher—which is identical in form and decoration to that drawn by MacLure—appears in the right corner. In another example—a painting by George Grattan, made in 1807 and titled *Blind Beggar Woman and Child*—a barefoot child holds a two-toned, glazed coarse earthenware pitcher.[36] In yet another image, used to promote a Dublin insurance company, a mythical representation of Hibernia is seated at the base of a column with one of her arms resting on a harp.[37] On the left side of the image, about midway toward the back, but in front of a building engulfed in flames, is an overturned pot of

33. Kissane, p. 142. This image also serves as the cover, in color, of Kinealy, *This Great Calamity*.

34. Gray, pp. 12, 37.

35. E. Margaret Crawford, ed., *The Hungry Stream: Essays on Emigration and Famine* (Belfast: Institute of Irish Studies and the Centre for Emigration Studies at the Ulster-American Folk Park, 1997).

36. Marie Davis, "Child Rearing in Ireland, 1700–1830: An Exploration," in *Ireland: Art into History*, p. 179.

37. Curtis, p. 82.

some sort. It is impossible to discern whether the artist has intended the vessel to represent a coarse earthenware bowl or an iron cauldron, but the lack of a visible handle suggests it is the former. Either way, the position of the vessel of its side indicates that something is terribly wrong. That "something"—most immediately the building on fire—must be righted.

Not every early nineteenth-century image of rural Ireland depicts coarse earthenware; many pictures that would seem to offer a perfect opportunity for an artist to have inserted a piece of coarse earthenware remain devoid of them. In some cases, the depiction of coarse earthenwares in drawings, paintings, and lithographs has no deep significance. Individual artists may simply have sought to include an object in the image to create balance, to present a touch of realism, or to record objects that they may have actually seen in their travels in the countryside. It is also possible that one artist may have represented a pitcher or bowl in one image, and that others saw the image, liked it, and decided to use coarse earthenware vessels in their own pictures. At the same time, an artist's inclusion of a piece of glazed ceramics may be idiosyncratic. The artist who created "Ejectment of Irish Tenantry" and "The Day After the Ejectment" may simply have liked to include the dark-glazed pitcher as a personal convention.

Nonetheless, the similarity among the representations of the vessels suggests that they may have had a deeper, symbolic meaning. The appearance of the coarse earthenwares in the images could indeed evoke feelings, or suggest something to the men and women who would see the images for the first time. In other words, it is likely that the artists intended the vessels to be recognized and understood by their viewers.

Enough consistency occurs in the images to create a catalog of similarity. The artists have typically placed the coarse earthenwares in the foreground of the images where they can be easily seen; they have usually surrounded them by light or empty spaces, thereby forcing viewers to look directly at them; in their cultural context, they have usually associated the vessels with devastation, disease, or eviction; and when they show the objects in proximity to people, they have usually positioned a woman near the vessel. In "Ejectment of Irish Tenantry," a woman weeps with her head in her hands directly above the vessel; in "The Day After the Ejectment," a woman sits directly behind the vessel; and in *The Irish Emigrants*, the vessel is immediately at the woman's feet. The only image mentioned here that does not include an association with a woman is MacLure's image of the dead resident being removed from the stone cabin. It is intriguing to speculate whether the deceased person is indeed a woman.

38. Gray, pp. 12, 37.

The pictorial representations of the coarse earthenware vessels in several early nineteenth-century images combined with the archaeological information collected from County Roscommon make it possible to suggest that visual artists used coarse earthenware ceramic vessels as a metaphor for traditional Ireland. Life-changing transitions are part of every image in which the vessels appear—rural families are being evicted, someone has died, families are emigrating, or people are waiting in queues for rations. Only in rare images are the men and women enjoying any kind of peaceful life.[38] Even in these serene images, however, the human associations with the vessels are of rural people at or near the bottom of the social ladder. The human context of the vessels is universally restricted to men and women intimately familiar with traditional culture.[39]

Archaeological research throughout Ireland supports the contention that the earthenware vessels could be construed as imbued with powerful symbolic associations. Prehistoric residents of Ireland often buried their dead in beautifully decorated vases and urns. These clay pots, typically inverted in the bottom of an excavated burial pit, contained the cremated bones and ashes of the deceased.[40] In many cases, the makers of the pots had inscribed a decoration on the outside bottom of the vessel, the surface that would face upward after burial. In at least two cases—one from County Dublin, the other from County Kildare—the ancient potters used a four-quadrant decoration, suggestive of the cardinal directions.[41] It may be no accident that the cauldron the Tuatha Dé Danaan received from Murias was symbolic of the west, the direction most often associated with death and the afterlife. Archaeological excavation of mortuary contexts indicates that prehistoric men and women frequently placed ceramic bowls alongside the dead during burial rituals.

It is intriguing to consider the symbolic correlation between ceramic and metal vessels. In Ireland, as elsewhere in the world, ancient craftspeople made ceramic vessels many generations before they made metal pots. Irish pottery is known from the Neolithic period, roughly 4000–2400 B.C., whereas the earliest metal cauldrons date to the Later Bronze Age, roughly 1000–600 B.C.[42] It

39. Glazed coarse earthenware vessels continue to appear in postfamine photographs. See, for example, Sean Sexton, *Ireland: Photographs, 1840–1930* (London: Laurence King, 1994), pp. 66, 82–83.

40. Peter Harbison, *Pre-Christian Ireland: From the First Settlers to the Early Celts* (New York: Thames and Hudson, 1994), pp. 104–110; Michael Herity and George Eogan, *Ireland in Prehistory* (London: Routledge, 1989), pp. 150–152; John Waddell, *The Prehistoric Archaeology of Ireland* (Galway: Galway University Press, 1998), pp. 140–156.

41. Herity and Eogan, p.151; Waddell, p. 141.

42. Michael Ryan, ed., *The Illustrated Archaeology of Ireland* (Dublin: Country House, 1991), pp. 93–94.

may well be imagined, then, that at least some of the symbolism associated with vessels began with ceramics and was only later transferred to metal. The ancient overlap in the production of ornate, funerary clay pots with certain metalworking traditions complicates the unraveling of the symbolic relationship between clay and metal containers.[43]

Coarse earthenware ceramics, often commonplace, overlooked objects, deserve a great deal more study. Archaeological research indicates that, as products of a traditional folk craft with long historical roots, coarse earthenware vessels played a significant, tangible role in reminding rural farmers that they were part of a venerable cultural tradition. The peoples' need to use traditionally made ceramics to promote or perhaps to signal cultural cohesion may have been particularly acute during the 1820s, 1830s, and 1840s. During this period the English ceramics market was expanding almost exponentially across the globe,[44] and certainly into every corner of Ireland; Irish farmers were under increasing social pressures and were reacting with many forms of both active and passive resistance.[45] In many cases, as with the three archaeological sites in County Roscommon, the upheavals culminated in starvation, eviction, and emigration.

Many scholars tend to think of archaeology as a discipline that can only supplement historical research. Some may believe that excavation is unnecessary for a period as recent as the early nineteenth century. The wealth of extant documents for the period may encourage some to believe that archaeology is a redundant exercise, one that merely provides knowledge that can be learned in other, less complicated ways. The research into the hidden or forgotten meanings of Irish-made coarse earthenwares clearly demonstrates, however, that archaeological research has the potential to open new doors into the cultural history of rural Ireland. Though the archaeology of the nineteenth century is only now beginning to be practiced with regularity in Ireland,[46] the unlimited future of the discipline promises to alter forever our understanding of rural lifeways.

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43. Waddell, p. 140.

44. L. M. Solon, *The Art of the Old English Potter* (East Ardsley: EP Publishing, 1973), pp. 87– 107; Simeon Shaw, *History of the Staffordshire Potteries* (New York: Praeger, 1970).

45. See, for example, Anne Coleman, *Riotous Roscommon: Social Unrest in the 1840s* (Dublin: Irish Academic Press, 1999).

46. Charles E. Orser, Jr., "Of Dishes and Drains: An Archaeological Perspective on Irish Rural Life in the Great Famine Era," *New Hibernia Review,* 1 (1997), 120–135, and "Archaeology and Modern Irish History," *Irish Studies Review,* 18 (1997), 2–7; idem, "Archaeology and Nineteenth-Century Rural Life in County Roscommon," *Archaeology Ireland,* 11, 1 (1997), 14–17; and "Letter from Ireland: Probing County Roscommon," *Archaeology,* 50, 5 (1997), 72–75.