

Conserving local farming history

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Tillage farmer Brenda Scanlan from Co Cork noticed that roof slates on a building on her farm had been damaged and was concerned that irreparable damage would be done if she ignored the problem.

“Water was getting in and starting to rot some of the timber infrastructure such as the roof and the old loft. I was worried that if it was left go, then it would be unfeasible to fix it in the near future.”

Brenda knew from knowledge passed down through generations that the building was there since the 1800s and with the help of the excellent staff at Dungarvan library, she was able to find out more.

“Documents in the archive indicate that it was built by my ancestors in 1855 as a cow house, with stabling for horses and a loft for storage of produce or hay etc,” says Brenda.

“The documents also note that Burlington slate was the material used in the roof, a beautiful stone which was quarried in the English Lake District for hundreds of years.”

As Brenda takes part in the Green, Low-Carbon, Agri-Environment Scheme (GLAS), there is financial aid available to help towards repairs. The GLAS Traditional Farm Buildings Grant Scheme is managed by the Heritage Council on behalf of the Department of Agriculture Food and the Marine. The seventh tranche of which opened in 2022.

The principle objective of the scheme is to ensure that traditional farm buildings (and other related structures) that add to the character of the landscape and are of significant heritage value are conserved for agricultural use.

Related traditional farm structures such as historic yard surfaces, landscape features around a farmyard such as walls, farm gates and piers are also supported in this scheme.

Anna Meenan, project manager of the GLAS Traditional Farm Building Scheme outlines: “These buildings were built to be used – they endure and they deserve to be used.”

To repair historical structures in the most sympathetic and responsible way, a local conservation consultant, James Byrne of Southgate Associates, helped Brenda devise a schedule of works and carry out the repairs in



This building in east Cork dates back to the 1800s.

the correct way. Brenda contracted in local builder, Michael Feeney, to carry out the works. Repair is the focus of this scheme and only the minimum work necessary is carried out to fix what is wrong and preserve the integrity of the building.

Maintaining the historic fabric of the building is important for heritage and environmental reasons, as some modern building materials can be toxic to wildlife. Durable materials capable of being re-used are incorporated back into the building where possible.

Retaining and using traditional farm buildings and other built features avoids the mining, quarrying, felling, manufacture and transport of

new building materials. This contributes to climate change mitigation and the sustainable use of resources.

It supports farmers in their endeavours to be more climate resilient. It also provides for the preservation and practice of traditional skills in the conservation building trade, such as lime mortar and parging, for example.

Where applicable, the buildings are repaired in such a way as to maintain and preserve their ecological value.

Birds such as swallows, pigeons and barn owls, as well as bats including the common pipistrelle and the brown long-eared bat, all make use of the old buildings around Brenda's farmyard. “That makes the project all the more worthwhile,” adds Brenda.