

LIFESTYLE

Restoring a little piece of Galway's heritage

- 200-year old ledger confirmed as part of Bellew estate



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FOUND in a cottage in the parish of Menlough the guts of 25 years ago, a ledger that is almost 215 years old has had its true significance laid bare.

The ledger is a farm labour account book, dated November 2, 1807, to April 29, 1808. It details the names of the men, their rate of pay and the duties they carried out on the Bellew estate in Mountbellew across 26 weeks.

The origin of this amazing document, which predates the Famine, was confirmed recently by Joe Clarke, who is living in Mountbellew.

Joe is an authority on the Grattan-Bellew family, who founded the town of Mountbellew and built Mountbellew House on their estate in 1786. The Belles intermarried with a couple of families, one of them being the Grattans, and they assumed the surname Grattan-Bellew thereafter.

Joe's extensive research has been recorded in print, with his book *Christopher Bellew and his Galway Estates, 1763-1826*, finding favour in many homes.

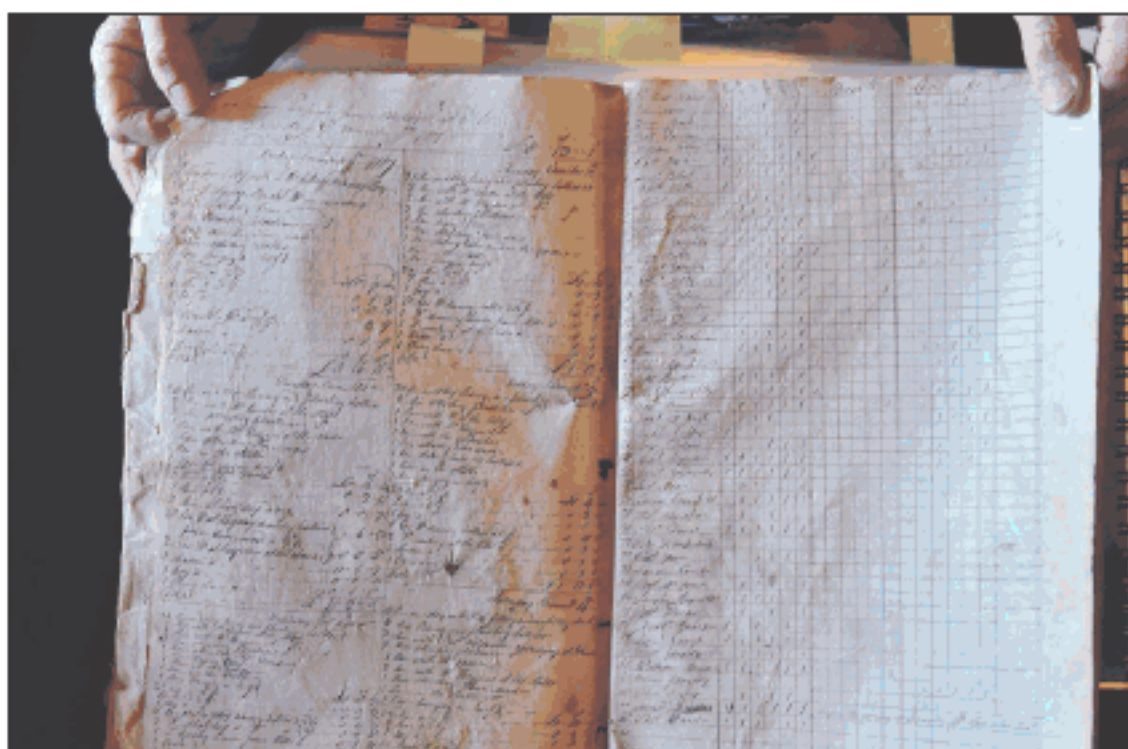
"This is a 'Farm Labour Account Book' from the Mount Bellew estate. I have seen several other examples which have survived, mainly dating from the 1820s and a few from the 1840s. The largest collection is among the Bellew Papers at the National Library of Ireland," said Joe.

"A smaller holding of five ledgers was purchased at an auction in the 1990s and donated to Mountbellew parish by the late Monsignor Michael Tobin.

"This 'Vermont Ledger' is of special interest because it dates from an earlier decade than the others known to have survived."

The finding of the Vermont Ledger, as Joe has christened it, and how it returned to prominence over two decades after being discovered, is another facet of this engaging tale.

Martin Whyte was busy



THE ledger found by Martin Whyte. PHOTO: RAY RYAN



THE attic where Martin made his discovery in 1997.

renovating a cottage he purchased in the townland of Vermont in Menlough in 1997. The property is known as 'Carroll's Cottage', which belonged to Michael Carroll one time. It is a place where Sandra Devlin now lives.

Martin was cleaning out the attic when he came upon the ledger. An *Irish Press* newspaper from Wednesday May 9 of 1945 came with it. The paper carries stories relating to World War II, another noteworthy segway in light of events in Ukraine at present.

"I took the ledger with me for safe keeping. I had forgotten about it until the lockdown. Herself found it in a filing cabinet last year; it had been there for 24 years," said Martin, from the townland of Summerville in Moylough, and now living in Athenry with his wife Breda.

"That's why it has taken so long for it to become public knowledge. I found it near the gable window up in the attic of the cottage.

"I love old stuff, and I don't throw



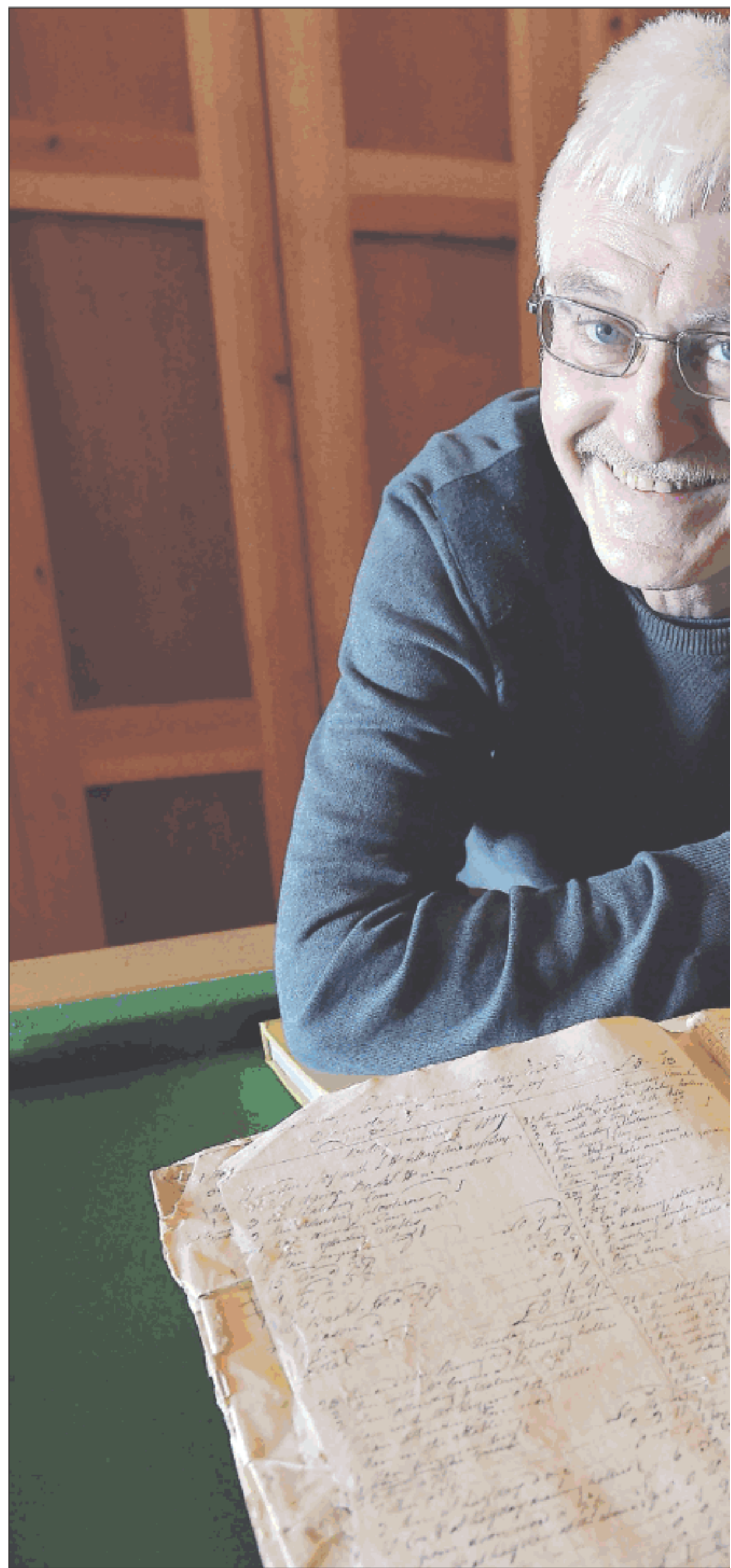
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stuff away, so I knew it was around the place at home somewhere."

East Galway is a haven of history, and the big houses from the 18th, 19th and 20th centuries were a nod to the good land that runs from the townland of Mullaghmore in Moylough over towards Menlough and further afield.

Vermont House was located a few fields away from where the ledger was first located by Martin. Ruane's pub of Glentane in Castleblakeney is also nearby.

The pub is run by Christy and Mary Ruane. There was a pub at the site of Ruane's dating all the way back to 1773. It was once called the Stage Coach Inn, as it was a stopping point for the Charles



Bianconi horse-drawn carriages that made their way from Dublin to Galway.

The big houses of Vermont, Mountbellew, Windfield, Brierfield, Ballinrooan, Ryehill and Monivea Castle were some of the 18 big houses detailed in a booklet called *History of houses and estates of the Landed Society in our Locality*, brought out in 2016 as part of National Heritage Week, by the Skehana District and Heritage Group.

Jimmy Laffey from Skehana is PRO of this group of local volunteers, and the next phase in the story of the ledger involved Martin getting in touch with Jimmy

last September. Jimmy and Martin went through the contents of the ledger together, but they couldn't nail down the exact estate from which it hailed.

"On the left-hand side of the pages are the days of the week, and on the right are the men who worked there and the jobs they did," said Jimmy.

"There are 71 pages in the ledger, and two pages per week. The level of detail in it is unreal; it's brilliantly written.

"It's the same handwriting all the way through it. There's names like Noon, Donalan, Kilroy, Bellew, Whyte, Carrick, Geraghty, Nestor, Kelly, Loughnane, Devane, Lyons