

# Caught on camera the ghosts of a fading past



The bedroom of the first deserted home that David Creedon discovered.

The abandoned interiors and the treasures inside these homes once formed part of the fixtures and fittings of their owners lives, and have now been brought out of the shadows to reveal a part of Irish history that has been left to the ravishes of time.

BY SIOBHÁN BREATNACH

THE POIGNANT vibrancy of a bygone era in Irish history has been captured on camera for the first time by a Cork photographer. David Creedon's exhibition Ghosts Of The Faithful Departed takes an alternative look at the impact of emigration on Ireland and especially the lives of those who stayed behind.

For two years — between 2005 and 2007 — the documentary photographer photographed abandoned and derelict houses he discovered across the country. Describing his project, which exhibits in London from the end of the month, he said: "I'm not sure if I found it or if it found me. I'd been photographing in cities in Europe for a while and in May 2005 I stumbled across this house in Co. Mayo and it was like going into a time warp.

"There were sheep living downstairs but when you went upstairs it was totally intact. "When I opened the door of one of the bedrooms the hairs stood up on the back of my neck because I didn't expect to see what I did.

"I photographed it and took a few more photographs in the house and thought no more of it." But it was only a couple of months later while on a trip to Kerry that the photographer came across another abandoned home.

He said: "I was driving along again and I saw this house that looked the same and again there were cattle living in this house. But there was absolutely nothing upstairs that I saw that was photographic. I just said I'd try one room downstairs and I looked in — I thought the cattle would have destroyed everything — but there was a piano and a chair with a picture of the Sacred Heart sitting on it and I was flabbergasted."

And so it was from there Creedon's collection began to take shape.

The 51-year-old says his aim was to capture the often overlooked experiences of those people who stayed in rural Ireland

when other family members left for cities in Ireland, England and America.

At that time it was normal for one family member to stay behind to help run the farm and look after their elderly parents.

Creedon said: "I felt so strongly about the story because nobody had ever discussed those who stayed behind — they'd help around the farm and look after their parents. They could never afford to get married or they wouldn't have brought another woman into the house with the mother still there."

And it was this that gave rise to what the photographer describes as the era of bachelor Ireland.

He added: "When the parents died those left often found that they were alone without families of their own. When, in turn, they passed on, the title of ownership passed to far-flung relatives.

"These houses then lie deserted awaiting the return of owners whose dreams of coming home may never be realised."

Creedon describes his work to that of a forensic scientist — examining objects and letters to get a background and understanding of the lives of the people who once lived there.

In many of the houses he visited he found clothes packed away and still unworn with their shop labels attached.

He said: "Rural Ireland of the 1950s was a far cry from cosmopolitan London or New York and the opportunities to wear such fashionable attire may not have existed in the harsh reality of West Cork or Mayo."

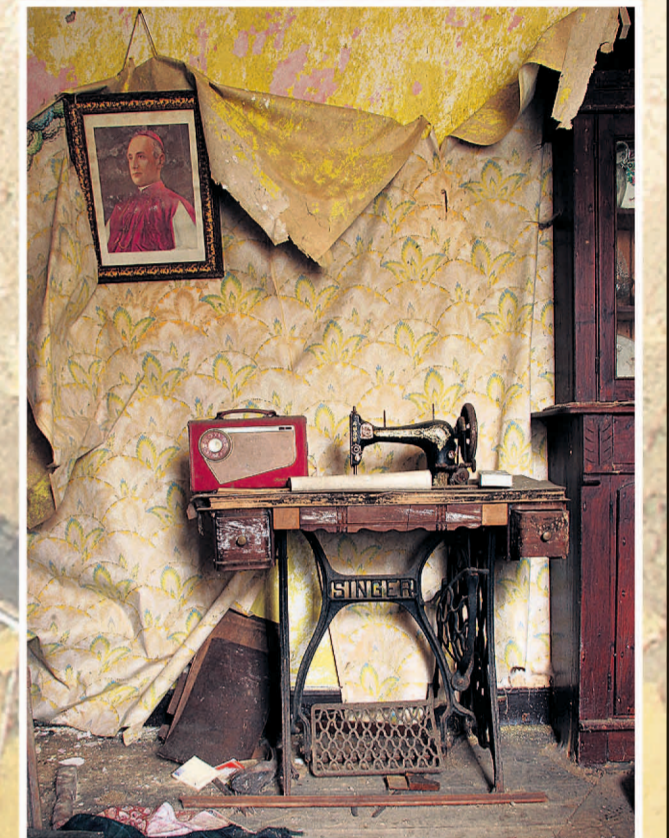
His stunning photographs were taken in available light at different times of the day and he explained: "For some reason the vibrancy and colour came over. Everything just came together. I'm delighted with it and that I took the time to do it. It was a labour of love. I photographed as I found as I felt I had to keep the integrity of the scene."

■ Do you recognise any of the places in the photographs? We would like to hear from you Telephone 020 8741 0649.



## Emigration

IT has been estimated that between 1949 and 1989, well over 800,000 people were forced to leave Ireland. The peak was reached in 1955 when 55,000 young people left the shores and in a Census taken in 1956 the population of the country fell to 2.8million — the lowest ever recorded.




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### Ghosts Of The Faithful Departed by David Creedon

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