

HIDDEN GEMS AND FORGOTTEN PEOPLE

DOREEN McBRIDE



THE FINLAY CHRISTENING ROBE

In 1970 my mother's brother, Arthur Finlay gave me a christening robe passed to him by his aunt Lizzie Finlay. He made me promise to take good care of it and pass it, and its message, on to the next generation.

Uncle Arthur said the robe was made by his great-great grandmother at a time of famine. She was expecting her first child and believed the family oral history was important and in danger of disappearing so she encapsulated it in a concrete way to preserve it.

The Finlay oral history is as follows:-

'The Finlays came from Argyll in the 1600's because they wanted religious freedom. They had been told Ireland's population had been killed by warfare and the land was empty. On arrival they were horrified to find that the situation regarding religious liberty was worse than in Scotland and the original inhabitants were starving. They had been displaced, not killed and it was impossible to help them because approach was dangerous. The Finlays were unable to return to Scotland so had to make the best of a bad situation so remember if there is any religious strife in Ireland there is good cause for it and don't be bigoted.'

I took the robe to Linda Ballard, then Curator of Textiles in the Ulster Folk and Transport Museum. She said it was an Argyll pattern made about the time of The Great Famine (1845-1847).

Doreen McBride

Banbridge Historical Society