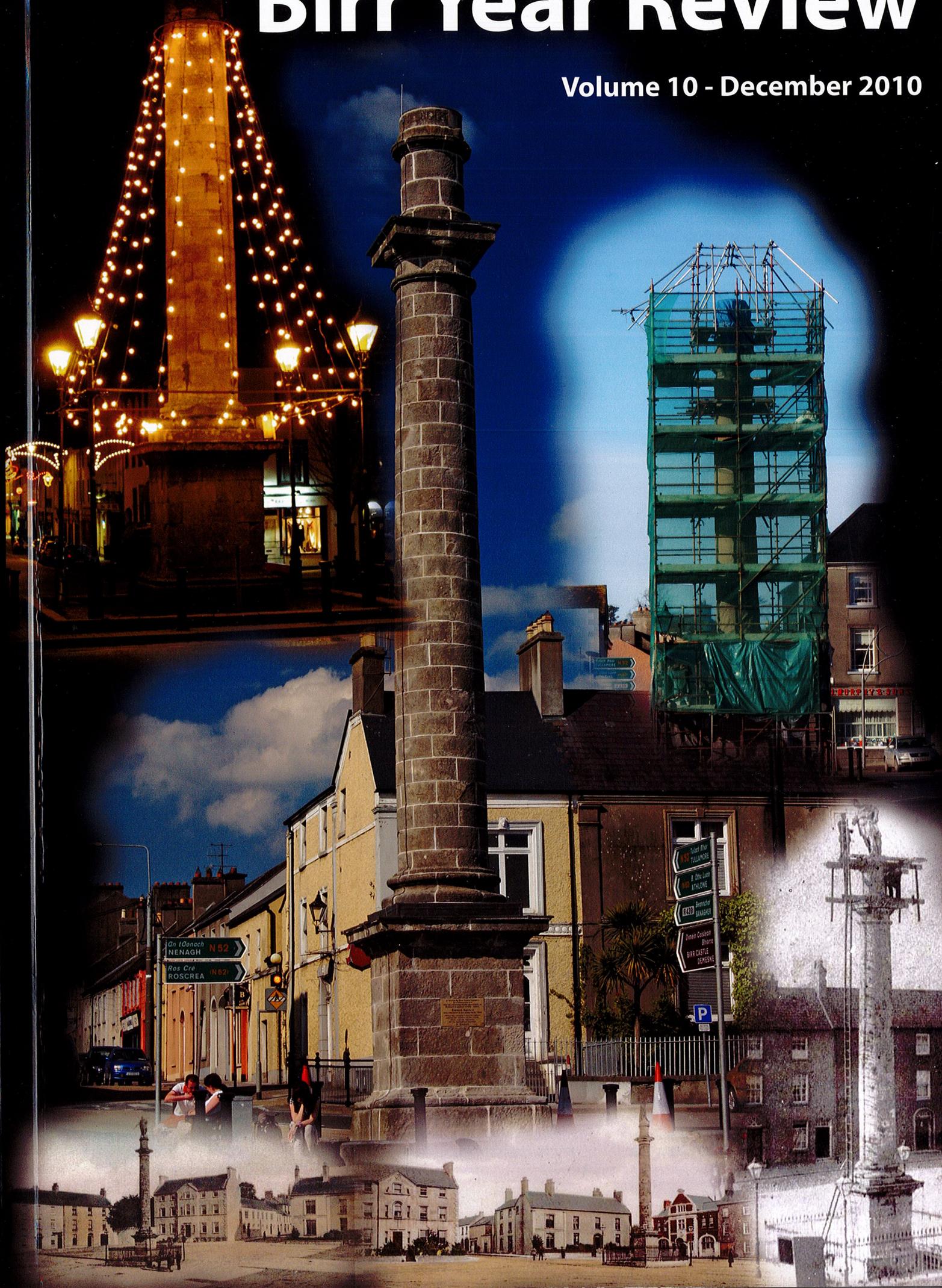


# Birr Year Review

Volume 10 - December 2010



# BIRR YEAR REVIEW 2010

Volume 10

December 2010

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Welcome to the 10<sup>th</sup> edition of Birr Review. It is the biggest and most colourful one we have published to date. We hope that you will enjoy the many articles and stories about Birr people and their varied activities. It includes contributions from people at home and in far flung places across the world. So much happens in a year and the pages of the Review chronicle these events. Due to lack of space we have been unable to fit all the material we received for this year's publication and we will try to fit any such material in next year. If you feel that you would like to contribute material to the Review or be part of the production team please contact any of the people named below. Good quality photos of particular events which occur during the year are always welcome. We hope that this issue of the Birr Review will find its way to Birr people all over the world and we would be delighted to hear from anyone who receives a copy in a distant country.

**Michael Donegan**  
*Editor*



A very warm welcome to the tenth edition of the Birr Review. I hope you enjoy the interesting mix of articles and pictures from the past and present.

Birr Lion's Club is extremely proud to be associated with 'The Review' which has now become an integral part of life in Birr, especially at Christmas time. The proceeds from 'The Review' are distributed locally. The Lion's Club works in partnership with a wide range of organisations focusing, in particular, on the youth, the underprivileged, and the aged.

I would like to thank sincerely the business community of Birr and environs for their most generous support this year and over the last decade.

Thank you for purchasing the 'Birr Review' and I would encourage you to support our advertisers.

Finally, I would like to thank Michael Donegan, who has been at the helm for the last decade, for his fantastic work, Emer Dolphin-Murray who has co-ordinated this publication with military precision and good humour and the Review committee who work tirelessly each year.

**Willie Burns**  
*President*  
*Birr Lions Club*



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**Special thanks to Martin Roberts, Camillus King and Pat Cleary for photographs.  
Thanks to Enda Manzor and Tim Walsh for all their help.**

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# BIRR YEAR IN REVIEW 2009-2010

## NOVEMBER 2009

Birr Stage Guild hosted its third one-act drama festival. Members of the Birr Choral Society organised a special entertainment night, entitled 'Light up the Night', as a fund-raiser.

Brian Cody visited Birr as part of the promotion for his recently-published autobiography.

The Ormond Hunt 'Prints & Promises' auction was held in Dooly's hotel and provided great value for all.

The Birr Met Station closure marked the end of an era in weather forecasting in Birr. People greeted the news with regret, as it brings to an end a connection between the town and weather forecasts that dates back to 1872. Dail Deputy, Olwyn Enright, gave birth to a baby boy. A fund raising Fashion Night for Birr Christmas lights was organised by Birr Chamber of Commerce.

The Birr Community Nursing Unit celebrated Halloween in style with a full week of events.

The worst floods in living memory afflicted parts of the Midlands with rivers breaking their banks in many areas.

Birr Post Office moved part of its operations to the Main Street, marking the end of an era.

Councillors commented during meetings of Birr Town Council that they were concerned about the possible loss of grants for Birr.

Mercy Primary School teachers, Ann Murray and Bridget McAteer, raised funds for a Ugandan mission with a sponsored cycle to Salthill.

James Howley was the architect in charge of conservation works carried out on the column at Emmet Square Birr.

Plans for Birr Skate Park were submitted to the Council.

Three members of the Redemptorist Order conducted a Novena in St. Brendan's Church Birr. This was the first such Novena since 1998.

The Offaly Drama Project presented a new play based around the Leinster Regiment, once stationed in Crinkill Barracks.

'Grease', the world's number 1 musical, stormed the stage of St. Brendan's Community School, bringing with it all the unforgettable hit songs.

A Sale of Work in aid of 'Friends of Birr' was held in Birr Community Nursing Unit.

A Mexican Dance Company performed in Birr Theatre and Arts Centre.

Congratulations to Birr Camogie players Audrey Kennedy and Arlene Watkins who are members of the Offaly Camogie team who won the All-Ireland Junior Title and who were also recipients of 2009 Camogie All Star Awards. Edenderry-based solicitor and Birr golfer, Brian O'Meara, went down in the history book of Edenderry Golf Club by winning the Professional Golfers Association All-Ireland

Amateur Title in Druids Glen Golf and Country Club. Birr 2nds Rugby Team secured their first win of the season with a great victory over Tullamore at Riverside.

## DECEMBER

Co. Offaly VEC announced it would run a part time 'Women Return to Learning' programme in Scurragh Community Centre from January to June 2010.

Christmas was celebrated in the Birr Parent & Toddler Group in the Family Resource Centre in Glebe Street.

The public was updated on the progress of the Birr and South Offaly Community Health Needs Assessment which had been taking place in the area over the last few months. The 4th annual Goal Mile in Birr got under way from Emmet Square on Christmas day.

Ladies hockey moved indoors to the Sports Hall at St. Brendan's Community School, Birr.

The launch of the Birr Community Calendar 2010 in aid of the Skate Park funds was held in Dooly's Hotel. 2009 has been another hugely successful year for Birr Theatre & Arts Centre.

Birr Town Council decided to freeze its rates for 2010 at its annual budget meeting. There were 286 rate-payers in Birr Town and 235 of them are currently paying a rate to the Council of €33.92 per week.

30-year old Birr woman, Sarah Nugent from Green Street, died tragically just two days after Christmas in a car accident.

Councillors expressed their annoyance at the Birr Area meeting that no action had been taken to deal with a troubled housing estate at Crinkill.

A number of Councillors congratulated the Council on the successful completion of road works on Wilmer Road at the monthly meeting of Birr Town Council.

Mundy featured in new book on Irish Bands.

The 40th Annual Ecumenical Carol service was held in St. Brendan's Church of Ireland.

No funds were available to salt roads in Birr.

Craig Short was announced as Birr GAA Minor 'Player of the Year'.

## JANUARY 2010

The country was hit by an extended period of freezing weather and Birr Gardaí warned of treacherous driving conditions across the region. It was announced that the Birr region had enough salt to grit the roads during the freeze and Birr Town Council appealed to people in Birr to turn their taps off during the freezing weather. 'The big freeze' gave 'Golfing in the Glens' an extended holiday.

Birr company, Loughnane Concrete, offered both Offaly County Council and North Tipperary County Council road gritting sand for free during the cold spell. The 42<sup>nd</sup> Annual Birr Vintage Week & Arts Festival got a kick-start. People were asked to get involved with the festival.

It was announced that a series of walking and painting weekends, based in the Tin Jug Studio, would be held during 2010.

Birr Historical Society started an exciting programme for 2010 with a talk by popular Birr man, Caimin O'Brien. Birr singer/songwriter Mundy was nominated once again for the prestigious Meteor Ireland Music Awards.

Birr man and Goal worker, Darren Hanniffy, headed up Goal's relief effort in Haiti.

It was announced during the January meeting of Birr Town Council that this would be the last meeting of the Director of Services, Michael Roche, as he was retiring.

Popular singer, Mary Coughlan performed at Birr Theatre & Arts Centre.

The AGM of Crinkill GAA Club took place in Crinkill National School.

Birr Under-19 rugby team qualified for the semi-final of Division 1 of the Leinster League with a hard-earned victory over Newbridge.

The AGM of CRC Gaels took place and the following officers were elected: Chairman Bobby Corboy, Secretary, Alan Hoare, Treasurers Des O'Brien and Billy Guilfoyle. Well done to Birr players Paul Cleary, Brian Mullins, Rory Hanniffy and Michael Verney, who collected their Division 2 Hurling League medals at the Offaly GAA Awards.

### FEBRUARY

The YouthReach Awards ceremony was held in Birr, and Michelle Morrissey received a framed certificate for achieving her exam results despite a severe traffic accident which left her out of class for a long time.

Good Counsel of New Ross got the better of St. Brendan's Community School, Birr in the first round of a closely fought Leinster Colleges Senior Hurling 'A' Championship played at Dicksboro GAA grounds in Kilkenny.

Oxmantown School created an environmental educational resource - A School Garden!

Birr Lions Club held a Table Quiz in Dooley's Hotel in aid of Stephen Grant's Soul of Haiti Foundation and GOAL.

Crinkill Sports and Recreation Centre (Handball Alley) hosted a "Go for Life" information afternoon.

Congratulations on their Golden Wedding Anniversary to Michael and Mary Caffrey of Glebe Street, Birr.

The Four Seasons Gardening Club held their annual dinner in Birr Golf Club.

International Wrestling made a bone-crushing impact in Birr in Dooley's Hotel. The show featured some of the top stars in wrestling such as 'Mandrake', 'The Supermodel',

'Captain Rooney' and 'Zero Gravity Champ Angus J Rotanda,' to name but a few.

The children of Killeen National School wrote a booklet on the history of Killeen, Riverstown and Birr.

Dooley's Hotel, Birr raised over €21,000 during their auction for the Soul of Haiti charity and over €7,000 in cash donations were also received.

Twenty teams from local primary schools took part in the Credit Union Primary Schools Quiz. St. Brendan's Boys P.S. finished first in the under 11 category while Killeen N.S. won the under 13 category.

The golfer, Christy O'Connor Jnr., officially launched a new innovative golf website at a reception held in the County Arms Hotel. The website entitled [www.golftour.com](http://www.golftour.com) is a local entrepreneurial concept initiated by Birr's Greg Smith and takes the visitor on a hole by hole visual tour of Irish Golf Courses.

Crinkill National School has been included in the Department of Education's School Building Programme. The extension and refurbishment project will be going to tender and construction started in 2010.

The proposal by Bus Eireann to withdraw its 7.05am service from Birr to Limerick is being opposed strongly by Deputy Olwyn Enright, who accused Bus Eireann of completely ignoring the loyal customers consisting of workers, students, OAPs, hospital patients and members of the public who avail of the 7.05am Birr departure to get to work, lectures and hospital appointments.

On Friday 26<sup>th</sup> February, the Birr Choral Society celebrated its 40<sup>th</sup> Birthday with Deirdre Hanniffy as soloist. "An Enchanted Evening" was had by all.

The new Director of Services for Birr Town Council is Mr. Frank Heslin and during his time here he would like to implement as much of the Birr Public Realm Plan as possible.

Students of Riverview Resource Centre, Birr held a 'jersey day' and raised €354 for GOAL.

The reckless lending practices of financial institutions was one of the main factors behind the current level of high indebtedness being experienced in Ireland, according to the Report on High Levels of Indebtedness in Irish Society which was commissioned by the Oireachtas Joint Committee on Social and Family Affairs and co-authored by Olwyn Enright T.D. and Thomas Byrne T.D..

The Public Realm Plan for Birr received a second award in two months. The judging panel found that the quality of the work and involvement of the local people were excellent components of the plan. The plan had also received a commendation at the Irish Landscape Institute Awards. The plan was commissioned by Offaly Local Authorities with support from the Heritage Council and Shannon Development.

The World Day of Prayer service in Birr was held in the Methodist Church, Emmet Street and the guest speaker was Mrs. Elizabeth Reddie from Galway.

Despite all the frosts, fogs and snows, the sun shone brightly for Captains Bernard Kennedy and Kathleen Doorley and Presidents David McDowell and Doreen McKenna for their drive-in at Birr Golf Club.

A Birr man was beaten and robbed after he left a public house on New Road. The individual was struck several times and fell to the ground receiving face and body injuries.

Birr Stage Guild presented the Irish Amateur Premier of Shay Healy's 'The Wiremen'.

At the Comhaltas Session and Awards night there was a presentation of long service awards to three senior members for their contribution to Irish music and dance over the years. The recipients were Tommy Boyle, Mary Darcy and Philip Hayes who was a member of the organising committee of the first County Fleadh Cheoil in Birr in 1959.

Young members of the SUB Project completed an Anti-Graffiti mural on the wall of Keele's archway in Birr.

### **MARCH**

Birr Town Council paid tribute to the late Sadie Campbell, a former member, during the March meeting. Sadie was first elected to Birr Town Council in 1969, representing the Tenants Association. She later joined Fine Gael and remained a Fine Gael Councillor until 1999 when she retired.

Congratulations to the Boys U-13 Handball team, who were crowned Offaly champions recently in the Community Games.

Congratulations to Laura Keigher, Ciara Maloney, Aideen Irwin and Jane Bracken, who won a gold medal in the modern/disco dance competition held in Shinrone.

Birr had an impressive win over Longford Town in Woodfield Park in the U-16 soccer, with a score of Birr 3 to Longford 1.

Birr Rugby's first XV returned to action after a short break for the Six Nations Internationals. They battled it out with Balbriggan but ended in a draw.

The children of kidz art classes at the Tin Jug Studio held an exhibition of their arts and crafts. The children aged between 6 and 9 years old produced an attractive calendar "Kidzart @ Tin Jug Studio". It was commissioned by Stefan & Mandy Haller who creates bespoke and unique calendars for families, clubs and businesses.

The Chairman of Birr Town Council, Tony McLoughlin, launched the Birr GAA Exhibition in Birr Library. This exhibition was compiled by the 6<sup>th</sup> class boys from St. Brendan's P.S., with the help of Birr GAA Club and the Library. The exhibition marked the wonderful achievement of Birr Senior Hurlers over the last 19 years. The starting point was a win in 1986; St Brendan's Community School won the All-Ireland College Senior Hurling Championship. Many of the players on this team created the back-bone of

the All-Ireland winning teams in the following years. A special booklet, 'Birr Road to Croker - 19 years of Birr Club Hurling', was produced to celebrate the achievements by the 6<sup>th</sup> class boys and was sponsored by Birr Town Council. The SUB Project, in conjunction with An Garda Siochana and Birr Fire Brigade, ran a Road Safety Awareness Programme to create awareness of the importance of road safety with young drivers.

The ladies winter/spring league concluded at Birr Golf Club with a win for Lady Captain Kathleen Doorley's team by the narrowest of margins. The winning team comprised Lady Captain, Elizabeth Parady, Christine Bruce, Pauline Daly, Annette Kenny and Mary O'Gorman.

### **APRIL**

Following the election of Liam Dumbleton as Chairperson of Birr Vintage Week and the confirmation of the 42<sup>nd</sup> Annual event from 13<sup>th</sup> - 20<sup>th</sup> August, it was all systems go for the organising committee.

Price Waterhouse Coopers Players returned to Birr Theatre and Arts Centre with their Annual Pantomime, 'Snow White'.

A wealth of talent in both style and technique was manifest at the second annual St. Brendan's Community School's Art Exhibition, which was unveiled at Birr Theatre and Arts Centre.

Birr Arts Group, under the direction of Kathleen Gormley, held a successful exhibition at Birr Library with approximately 15 members exhibiting.

Birr Theatre and Arts Centre celebrated its 10<sup>th</sup> Birthday with a makeover to improve the foyer and reception area. April is Global Astronomy Month and it is a worldwide effort by astronomers to share the wonders of the night sky with the public. A number of events took place around the country and Birr Castle Demesne is delighted to be hosting one of these.

The Birr and District Motor Club held its National Championship Grass Surface Autocross in memory of Billy Cavanagh. Billy was a founder member of the club and National Autocross Champion for six years in a row from 1979 to 1984.

The St. Brendan's Community School Parent Council's 13<sup>th</sup> Annual Golf Classic was held in Birr Golf Club.

Birr Stage Guild presented "Opera Gala 2010 - Ireland's Finest".

"Fable", meaning half truth, half lie, is the title of Rosey's latest album which he officially launched at Birr Theatre and Arts Centre.

Birr U-16 soccer team clinched a semi-final spot in the Midland Cup at the expense of Portlaoise and met St. Francis from Athlone in the semi-final.

The Thatch Restaurant, Crinkill won two categories in the annual Irish Restaurant Awards 2010. The Stables was winner of 'The Best Casual Dining' in Offaly category.

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Birr Library hosted a knitting exhibition by the Birr Knitting Circle. Samples of various works completed by members went on display in the adult section of the library.

The Birr Town Youth Team (Under-18) hoped to win their first major trophy in Tullamore when they play in the Midlands Youth Cup Final led by Captain Daryl Nolan at centre-back. Birr was also in the Ita Farrell Cup Final as well as the Midland Cup Final a great achievement indeed, and hope to bring home the cup.

Eight people were convicted of not having a T.V. licence at Birr District Court. They were fined between €250 and €550.

The Birr U-14 Rugby team which won the Leinster League was presented with their medals by Munster, Ireland and Lion player, David Wallace.

Billy Mullins and Jim Guilfoyle retained their Emerald Masters title in handball. This All-Ireland Handball Championship is for over 55's. Billy also won the 'A' singles in the same category.

The final 18 holes was played on the old course in The Glens – Birr Golf Club – and the new course opened on the 1<sup>st</sup> May with St. Brendan's Community School's Classic.

### MAY

The Birr Parent and Toddler Group celebrated their tenth birthday by hosting a fun open day on Tuesday, May 11<sup>th</sup>.

Birr Library played host to an exhibition of work by Ana Alves Smyth. Cllr. Tony McLoughlin officially launched the event.

A new picnic and play area, suitable for children ten years and younger, opened at Birr Castle Demesne.

Birr Castle played host to BirdWatch Ireland's Dawn Chorus on Sunday, May 16<sup>th</sup>.

'Beyond the Roundabout?', a film by Birr artist Nicky Larkin, after its premiere in Limerick was screened at The European Media Art Festival in Germany and The London East End Film Festival.

Birr Town Council members were complimentary of the restoration work done on the pillar in Emmet Square.

Very Rev. Kieran O'Reilly, Superior General of the Society of African Missions and who has worked abroad since 1978, was appointed by Pope Benedict XVI to replace Most Rev Willie Walsh as Bishop of Killaloe.

Whelahan's Newsagents, Main Street, sold a €4 lotto ticket to an anonymous lady who was the only winner of the €250,000 Lotto Plus 2 prize.

It was announced that Paul Brady would headline a new boutique music festival called Astral Plains at Birr Castle. The festival was scheduled for Saturday, June 26<sup>th</sup>.

The former club mates of a young Birr man, Brendan Donnelly, who was killed in a road accident in October 2009, honoured his memory by holding a Memorial Match in Waterford and afterwards the members of the Kingfisher Soccer Club presented a special plaque to Brendan's mother, Christine.

Thirty-one extra spaces were created at the Wilmer Road car park following the resurfacing and re-alignment of the car park.

In preparation for the visit of the Tidy Towns Adjudicators, the local committee, under the chairmanship of Cllr. Tony McLoughlin, appealed to all householders and business people to remove weeds and litter in the proximity of their premises.

Minister for Arts, Sports & Tourism, Mary Hanafin T.D. launched the Birr International Hot Air Festival at a function in the local Theatre & Arts Centre.

### JUNE

Martin Kearns was unveiled as the new President of Birr Chamber of Commerce.

The students of St. Brendan's CS, following their 'Shave or Dye Campaign', presented a cheque for €5,400 to the Irish Cancer Society.

Members of the Wolftrap Cycling Club returned from an enjoyable Spanish trip.

A tree was planted in the grounds of John's Hall to mark the 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Birr Choral Society. Director of the Society, Michael Hanna, presented a cheque for €3,500 to Declan Hanniffy, father of GOAL aid worker Darren, the proceeds from the Society's highly successful 'An Enchanted Evening' concert.

Offaly hurlers, with Michael Verney, Paul Cleary, Rory Hanniffy and Dylan Hayden featuring, required extra time to get past Antrim on a 3-26 to 2-16 score-line in the Leinster SHC quarter-final at Parnell Park.

The work of Birr designer Sorcha O'Raghallaigh received much acclaim at a London Fashion Show.

The YouthReach Art Exhibition opened at Birr Library.

Oxmantown School celebrated its 150<sup>th</sup> anniversary and to mark the occasion, teachers and children at the school dressed in the attire of 1860.

Birr Town AFC's John Corboy won the Frank O'Connell Hall of Fame award at the CCFL annual awards presentation and dinner dance held in the Bridge House Hotel, Tullamore.

Birr Fine Gael T.D., Olwyn Enright, came out publicly and backed Richard Bruton's bid to displace Enda Kenny as leader the Fine Gael party. Bruton's heave against Kenny was ultimately unsuccessful.

The work undertaken by St. Brendan's Environmental Group was highlighted and praised.

Cllr. Denis Sheils was elected as Birr Town Council Cathaoirleach, taking over the chain of office from Cllr. Tony McLoughlin.

Birr musician Mundy released a new double single 'Head Over Heels' and 'I Miss the Country'.

Birr U-14 hurler Craig Taylor represented Offaly at the National Féile na nGael Skill Star event in Clare.

St. Brendan's Primary School, Birr was awarded its third Green Flag.

### JULY

With over forty bands across four stages, the 'Astral Plains Festival' was hailed a huge success in media reports in the aftermath of the event.

Taoiseach Brian Cowen T.D. officially launched the Riverview Resources Service at Ely House, John's Terrace.

Tributes were paid to Superintendent John Moloney as he moved from the Birr to Tullamore District.

R.J. Barber & Sons celebrated 120 years in business.

Birr Town Council agreed to explore the possibility of twinning with the town of Ledegem in Belgium.

The Offaly minor hurlers, despite a goal from Birr's Brendan Murphy, went down to Kilkenny in the Leinster MHC semi-final by 2-22 to 1-13 at O'Connor Park. Kevin Donovan was also part of the panel, while Noel Russell and Mick Mulrooney were members of the five-man management team.

In the Leinster SHC semi-final, Offaly went down to Galway at O'Moore Park, Portlaoise by a point, 3-17 to 2-18. Paul Cleary, Dylan Hayden, Rory Hanniffy and Michael Verney all featured.

Derrinlough Briquette Factory celebrated fifty years in operation.

Birr U-8 hurlers savoured their opportunity to line out at Croke Park where they played matches against Crumlin and Ballyboden St. Enda's.

Birr athlete, Gordon Kennedy, qualified for the European Championships after he won the National 400m title.

The 32 County Marathon Challenge in aid of Irish Autism Action reached Birr.

Carrig & Riverstown GAA Club officially opened their new facilities on Sunday, July 18<sup>th</sup>.

An action-packed programme of activities was launched for the Birr Vintage Week & Arts Festival during an event at the Birr Technology Centre.

Portarlinton, native, David Mullen, an employee at the County Arms Hotel, Birr, died following a road traffic accident on Wednesday, July 21<sup>st</sup> near Rosenallis.

Staff and guests at Dooly's Hotel, Birr were treated to a lovely surprise when singer/songwriter Sinead O'Connor and her partner Steve Cooney arrived unannounced and during the evening they performed as an impromptu session got underway.

Wilmer Tennis Club hosted a very successful Open Week.

A Memorial Service was held at St. Brendan's Church of Ireland in memory of Venerable Archdeacon Donald Keegan, former Rector of Birr, who died in April.

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**AUGUST**

Birr Theatre and Arts Centre celebrated their 10<sup>th</sup> Anniversary by holding a street party. Stilt-walkers, face-painting and bands provided lots of entertainment.

Minister for Health and Children, Mary Harney T.D. announced the appointment of Dr. Frank Dolphin, a Birr native, as the next chairman of the Health Service Executive.

Birr Skate Park Committee has reached their final target to build their long-awaited skate park. A grant from Offaly Local Development Company was awarded in August.

Teenagers from the SUB Anti-Graffiti project transformed Keele's Archway by creating a mural based on Irish legends on one of the walls. The other wall has already been enhanced by a similar mural.

At the RDS National Crafts Competition, Cathal Barber from Birr took 1<sup>st</sup> prize in the Gold, Silver and Alternative Materials – Precious Metals category.

The 42<sup>nd</sup> Birr Vintage Week and Arts Festival commenced with a spectacular parade held in glorious sunshine. During the week, a Visual Arts Trail took place with over 90 artists exhibiting. Other highlights were the Car Treasure Hunt, the Fireworks display, Olde Time Traditional Fair and the Busking Competition.

The Leinster Regiment Association held a number of events to coincide with Vintage Week. The Leinster Regiment collection was on view in the library, a guided tour of Crinkill Barracks site took place and a lecture on service with the Regiment during the Great War was given.

Bishop Willie Walsh announced the appointment of Fr. David Carroll as parish priest in Birr. Best wishes were extended to Fr. Tony Cahir on his retirement.

The 32 contestants in the Rose of Tralee met local players from the Offaly Camogie team when they visited Birr.

**SEPTEMBER**

Fine Gael T.D., Olwyn Enright, announced she will not contest the next General Election. She was first elected to the Dail in 2002.

Birr Castle Demesne was the setting for the 4<sup>th</sup> Irish Game and Country Fair. Over 35,000 attended the event, which included a falconry display, traditional farming displays, fishing and casting tuition and displays by dog clubs of sporting and Irish breeds.

Birr Community Games were well represented in the National Finals at which Nicholas Turtak won the silver medal in the U-12 Boys Ball Throw.

Actors and actresses from River View Resources presented the Birr X-Factor in the Oxmantown Theatre.

A great welcome awaited the Offaly Intermediate Camogie Team on their arrival in Emmet Square after their historic victory over Wexford in the All-Ireland final earlier that day.

Mossfield Organic Farm, situated just outside Birr and owned by Ralph Haslam, won the Overall National Organic Award 2010 for its organic cheese.

Crinkill N.S. raised their first Green Flag, having successfully introduced environmental management systems and promoting whole school action for the environment. The Army Band of the 4<sup>th</sup> Western Brigade attended the ceremony.

The Birr Whirlpool Star Party took place at Birr Castle Demesne with lectures covering topical astronomical research and general interest subjects.

In response to the Minister of the Environment's announcement that money will be provided to develop cycle tracks in rural Ireland, local man Frank McNamara, proposed a cycle track on the disused Birr/Roscrea railway line.

Birr Tidy Towns Committee was pleased to see an increase of 8 marks on their 2009 score from the Tidy Towns Competition.

**OCTOBER**

Birr Photography Group held their 6<sup>th</sup> public exhibition in Birr Library. Over 30 photographic images were on display.

The Space Odyssey 2010 Exhibition was held in the Science Centre at Birr Castle. It displayed the advances of manned space flight.

St. Brendan's Community School celebrated its 30<sup>th</sup> Anniversary. An Taoiseach, Brian Cowen opened the new extension at the school. New stained-glass windows in the Oratory were also unveiled.

Birr Town Councillors were very unhappy with the government's proposal to abolish 60 town councils nationwide.

In recognition of this year being the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the first presentation of the Seán Robbins Cup for the Offaly Senior Hurling Championship, the County Board made a presentation to all former captains. Birr has won on 13 occasions.

Six candidates have put their names forward to represent Fine Gael in the next General Election for the Laois/Offaly constituency. Olwyn Enright T.D. has announced she will not be contesting this election.

Congratulations to Paddy Quigley who retired from his position in Birr Civic Offices and Birr Library.

Carrig, Riverstown, Killeen Active Retirement Association has produced a book of stories of times past, which was launched by Fr. Tony Cahir.

The principal of St. Brendan's Boys P.S., Michael Donegan, has retired after 11 years at the helm.

**Compiled by Tony McLoughlin, Olwyn Enright,  
Alan Walsh and Cora Kenny**

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## IT'S GREAT TO BE BACK

*By Ben Oakley*

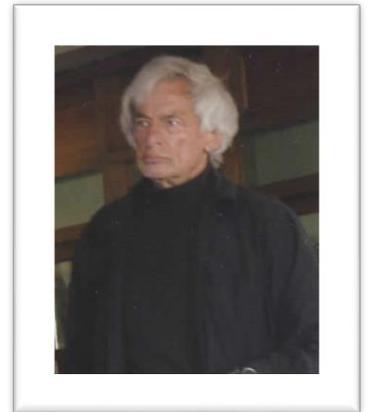
**M**y father, grandfather and great-grandfather were all born in Birr and lived out their lives there. The Oakleys were, for generations, carpenters and builders. I came to the town one week after first seeing the light of day on 24<sup>th</sup> August 1933 in Co. Down. I emigrated in 1956 and returned, in retirement, to Birr after forty-four years in 2000.

My first twenty-three years were spent in Emmet Street in the house now owned by Alan and Eimear Purcell. This included ten years partly spent at school and college in Dublin. This memoir of my youth relates mainly to the war years up to 1946.

Our family had a business at 21-23 Main Street employing fourteen people. It was a bakery, confectionery, shop, restaurant and catering enterprise and even included a small farm at Scurragh and Burke's Hill. The business had come into our family from my paternal grandmother. It catered for wakes, weddings, dances, agricultural shows, threshings and auctions at the big houses. The bread business was a mixture of wholesale to shops in the outlying towns and villages and door-to-door in Birr. We competed with three other bakeries, Haslams, Flynns and Griffins. Loose milk was delivered, twice a day in summer, by Birr Castle Dairy, Odlums, Pilkingtons and Telfords. It was also sold over the counter at Coolahan's on Bridge Street. Several families kept cows, including Mrs. Lunney, Purcell's of Emmet Street, Kearns of Oxmantown Mall and even Dooly's Hotel. Cows were a familiar sight on the streets at milking times. Newspapers, comics and magazines had to be ordered and would be delivered to the house by Shepherds, where Square News is now, or Quinns, who were located where the Credit Union is currently.

Most of the business people lived over their premises together with unmarried staff. The same applied to the Guards in the Barracks and the bank managers and their families of the National, Hibernian and Provincial Banks. I can only identify nine businesses still with the same family, Barbers, now in different premises, Dolans, now a bicycle shop, Fayles, Bowes, owned by Mary McLoughlin, Butlers, Pilkingtons in High Street, Gleesons and Kellys in Green Street and Murphy's Garage in Emmet Square. All of the drapers have gone, including Bagnalls, where my mother served her time before she married, and O'Meara's, Cullens, Pilkingtons, Mannings and Paddy Hanleys. Also gone are chemists Myles, Gleesons and Pilkingtons, grocers D.E. Williams' three shops, Liptons, Haslams, Davis' and Maddens. Gone too are butchers Horans, Tierneys, Clearys as well as shoe shops Keeles and Tylers. There was an excellent home delivery service, with all of the shops having messenger boys.

Women had their work cut out for them with no appliances to speak of, nor central heating, mainly because of the expense and the inadequacy of the local 20 Volt DC electric power supply to which only about half the town was connected. It was the same with running water.



There were three doctors in Birr, namely, Messrs Fleury, Houlihan and Morton. The medicare system was minimal. Doctors were paid directly and often as not in kind. Local medics dealt with Accident & Emergency cases, including broken bones and obstetrics. Dr. Morton lived across the street from us in what is now the Teagasc office. He seemed to be always on the go. He practiced there until he died in his eighties and yet died a poor man. He didn't even have a telephone. Most of his work was done in the patients' homes. Babies were born at home with the assistance of a midwife or neighbour. A doctor would only attend if complications were anticipated. Dr. Morton was a Protestant and would be the doctor of choice for the potentially complicated deliveries. This was usual in the Ireland of the times. Roman Catholic husbands tended not to trust their wives to their possibly more doctrinaire co-religionist medics.

The few motor vehicles that were about in 1939, when the war started, almost completely disappeared in the early forties. Essential services, including doctors, vets and clergy got small petrol rations for restricted travel. Hackney cars could be hired for emergencies only. Even the Guards were carless. To get around one walked, cycled or harnessed the pony into the trap. The streets and pavements were free for bicycles, roller-skating, hopscotch, spinning tops, skipping and ball games.

The Dublin bus left Egans Hotel on Main Street at 9.00 a.m. and returned at 8.30 p.m. The route was via Kinnitty and Portarlington. The bus was always full. The conductor, Jimmy Kelly, was irascible but obliging for doing messages in Dublin. The railway was alright for goods but because of coal shortages, was unreliable for passengers.

Very few had a telephone. The telephone exchange was entirely manual and 'manned' by women and shut down at night. Telegrams were sent by Morse Code up to 1946

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when teleprinters came on line. The post was reliable and just as speedy as today. The one Radio Eireann programme started up at 6.00 p.m. and closed down at 11.00 p.m. The BBC Home Service was much listened to, especially the 9.00 p.m. War News because the news here was heavily censored because of neutrality.

Birr seemed to turn in on itself, particularly for entertainment. The New Cinema in Brendan Street opened on Sunday 1<sup>st</sup> April 1939 with Edward G. Robinson in 'A Slight Case of Murder' thereby partially eclipsing Murphy's Rialto Cinema which reduced showing to three nights a week. Because Ireland was neutral, no war films were screened. The populace lapped up the diet of glitzy, banal Hollywood productions which were an antidote to our prevailing dull, dark and penurious living conditions. The cheapest seat in the New Cinema for an under-14 was two old pence and the most expensive was eight pence. Jimmy Fanning started and directed the Birr Little Theatre in Emmet Street, behind Cumberland House, later the Tribune premises. The twice-yearly productions were excellent and well-attended but perhaps a bit too intellectual for mass appeal.

Inevitably, the war time paucity of communication with the outside world gave rise to parochialness and insularity. Nothing illustrated this more than the death of Gilbert Marshall. On the morning of the 16<sup>th</sup> September 1943, Gilbert Kennedy Marshall was found dead on the pavement in front of Dooly's Hotel where he had lived since selling his ancestral home, Baronne Court, Riverstown. Obviously, Marshall had fallen from his top floor bedroom window but there was much speculation as to how this had come about; was it an accident, a suicide or had he been pushed? No matter that wars raged in Europe, North Africa, Russia and the Pacific, with tens of thousands dying daily, Birr talked about nothing else for days on end. The inquest was inconclusive. There was a reluctance to accept that, with Dooly's Hotel not being big into en-suites back then, Gilbert Marshall, a notorious toper, had during the night raised the window to relieve himself and just toppled out!

A dreadful tragedy occurred in August 1942 when Bowes shop and residence in the Main Street went up in flames taking the lives of Mrs. Bowes, her three young children and their housekeeper. In 1945, another, but much less serious conflagration occurred when D. E. Williams shop, stores and staff residence in Market Square burnt down spectacularly and in full view of the crowds emerging from the cinema. Birr's fire-fighting service was woefully ill-equipped and consisted of a trailer pump towed by an old Ford V8 van in which rode the part-time firemen – no long ladders, no reserve water tank. At one St. Patrick's Day parade of the Defence & Security Services the firemen appeared belatedly, walking and sweating profusely under their heavy oilskins and helmets. It was

announced solemnly over the loudspeakers that the firemen were on foot because the towing Ford V8 van wouldn't start. That provoked a good cynical laugh.

On returning to Ireland I was puzzled by reading of discrimination and ostracism of servicemen returning from the First World War. That certainly did not happen in Birr. The British Legion Club was active and classless. A regular unofficial meeting place was the low wall in front of Cumberland House. In fact ex-servicemen were envied not solely for their secure pensions but for their experiences of travel to exotic places. On Armistice Day the bemedalled servicemen paraded to the square with the salute taken from the steps of the Ormond Club, finally dispersing after the sounding of the Last Post.

My social life and education was mainly with co-religionists and revolved around the Church across the street, St. Brendan's Hall for Sunday School, parties and concerts and the Model School. The Methodists had an activity on Wednesday nights called the Junior Christian Endeavour. Associated with the JCE was a Christmas party, a picnic to Mossfield and a concert where everyone was trained to do an act. I am eternally grateful to those gentle Methodist ladies for giving us so much of their time.

In 1944, I was sent to Killeen National School, cycling there along the muddy and regularly flooded Killeen Lane. For a relatively cosseted lower middle class townie like me, Killeen was a real eye-opener. Some children came to school bare-footed and in ragged clothes. The parents had to supply the turf for the open fire which was lit by the older boys. There was no running water and only dry toilets. The senior girls swept the floors while the boys cleaned the toilets and yard and fetched buckets of water from a pump half a mile away. The parents of most of the children would have been farmers or farm workers. Resulting from DeValera's senseless and self-serving economic war with Britain, rural Ireland was destitute then and, with farming badly run down there was no cashing in on the war-time rise in food prices. An ugly feature of both primary and secondary education at that time was the endemic corporal punishment, administered mainly for not knowing lessons rather than bad behaviour. The children of all creeds and classes came from well-disciplined homes and were respectful of their teachers and elders. Social pressures largely proscribed misbehaving. Everyone knew who you were and one knew that misdemeanours would get back to parents.

Though I was aware of belonging to a minority religion as a youngster, I was not conscious of any discrimination and certainly not in Killeen School where I was the only 'Prod' and only too happy to sit out the Confirmation classes. In spite of the drugs, traffic and unruly youths, Birr is a nicer place than it was in 1956. It's great to be back.

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# THE CUMBERLAND COLUMN

By David O'Brien

Earlier this year Birr's great monument to nothing received a good spruce-up. As the scaffolding went up a steeplejacks set about their brave business, wondered whether the fine column that has stood in the centre of what is now Emmet Square since 1746 would once again celebrate a great achievement and be topped with a statue of our best.

Might Brian Whelahan gaze down on his grateful townsfolk, or St. Brendan himself, or the great cyclist J.J. McCormack? Maybe young Barack Obama from out the road there in Moneygall has done so well for himself over in America; mighty Dom Egan perhaps, or even the hero author of this article for his fascinating account of western China which so delighted in previous editions of the *Birr Review*.

Alas though, all speculation proved futile. When scaffolding was removed it revealed a column better pointed and slightly straighter, but still the occupied column. Apparently, the column could hold the weight of some new hero, which is perhaps sadly symbolic of Ireland in 2010.

So what of the man who had stood there until the Duke of Cumberland, remembered in some of these isles as 'The Butcher of Culloden'? How did he come to be so celebrated in this small Offaly town and why doesn't he still stand above us?

Constructed in 1746-7 to the design of an architect called Samuel Chearnley, it was commissioned by Sir Laurence Parsons whose family had lived in Birr Castle for the previous 150 years or so. This was a period of much instability in Europe and the New World as new ideas spread and the old certainties looked a lot less certain. This time of 'revolutions' was to culminate in the American Revolution in 1776, the French Revolution in 1789 and our own United Irishman Rebellion in 1798. During these fraught times, Sir Laurence may well have worried somewhat about his position. The Ireland of the day was controlled by a Protestant Ascendancy, constituting a small member of the established Church loyal to the British Crown. It governed the majority Irish Catholic population by a form of institutionalised sectarianism codified in the Penal Laws.

While some in Ireland were seeking greater autonomy from Britain, the king, George II, had even bigger problems in Scotland.

The Battle of Culloden was fought on Drumossie Moor, to the north east of

Inverness, on April 16, 1746. It was the last of the great risings - popular attempts to reinstate a Stuart on the throne of Britain - and was led by the Charles Edward Stuart, also known as Bonnie Prince Charlie or the Young Pretender.

Jacobite comes from the name 'Jacobite', which is Latin for James - a popular Christian name among Stuart kings. Charles was the son of the Old Pretender, James Francis Edward Stuart, and grandson of the deposed James II of England.

He fled to the shores of Scotland in July 1745, returned from exile in France in an attempt to overthrow Protestant King George II and his Hanoverian successor on the throne.

Charles was seeking to avenge his grandfather's defeat at the battles of Aughrim and the Boyne fifty-five years earlier in 1690 and raised support for his rising among the Catholic Highland clans who were loyal to the Jacobites.

The Battle of Culloden, the last full-scale battle to take place on British soil, was the last stand of an ancient clan, the Jacobites, which traced its ancestry back to the kingdom of Dal Riada.

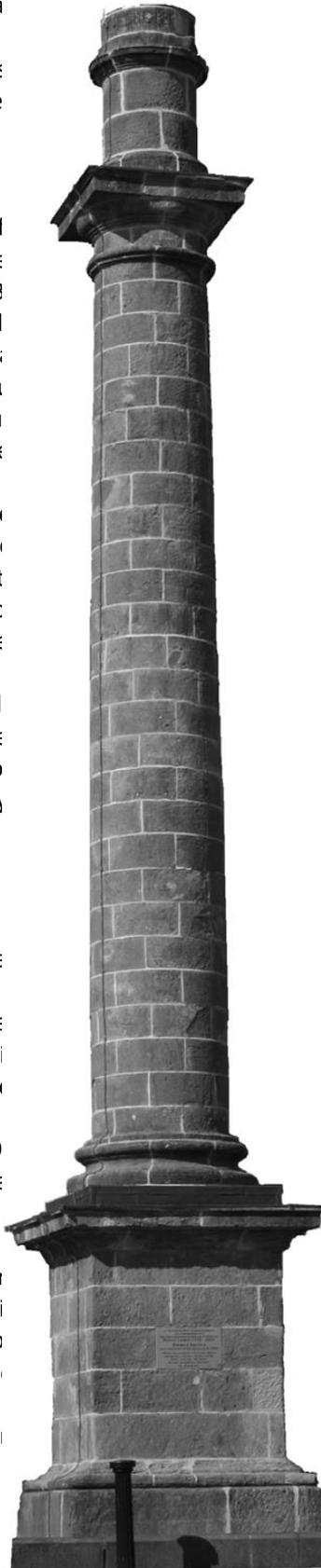
The Jacobite force at Culloden was led by William, Duke of Cumberland, and the king's youngest son.

The Jacobites were outnumbered by around 9,000 to 4,000 and the ground was too marshy to execute the Highlanders' favourite tactic - the 'Highland charge' into the enemy's ranks. Cumberland's artillery decimated the clans as they advanced and the command to charge.

The Jacobite clansmen fell simply because the command to charge came too late, as Charles waited for the Hanoverian troops to advance first, whereas the Jacobite troops just kept firing in the light of their successful bombardment. When the Jacobite charge did come, the charge itself was disorganised. The Hanoverians stood firm and sent the Jacobite army into retreat.

Many of the Highlanders headed for Inverness and were hunted down and killed without mercy by Cumberland's dragoons. Others, who headed into the mountains, stood a better chance of survival, but the government troops were thorough in their retribution.

Many of the legends surrounding Culloden involve the clans' attempts to return to home and the severity of Cumberland's reaction. The Jacobite Rising was over and Bonnie Prince Charlie headed back to the safety of France and a life of obscurity.



The erection of the column and statue of Cumberland not just celebrated the Hanoverian victory, which clearly Sir Laurence Parsons desperately hoped for, as victory for Charles would have made things very difficult for him and his family. It also sent a strong message to the rebellious Irish that, should they get out of line, the British would come down on them like a ton of bricks!

In fact, the Birr column was the first victory column erected in Ireland. Monumental columns, or 'Pillars of Victory', as they were originally called, are more commonly found in cities, rather than small towns like Birr. The tradition of victory columns can be traced back to Rome in the second century AD when several were built to commemorate victories of the emperors Trajan and Marcus Aurelius. Long before London had its Nelson Column in Trafalgar Square, Birr had its Cumberland Column in Cumberland Square.

The fifty-five foot column built in the Doric style of ancient Greece cost £182 and 14s. It appears it was constructed of sandstone, somewhere in the south east of the country before being shipped in pieces to Birr. The leaden statue of Cumberland was designed by John and Henry Cheere of London and depicted the duke in Roman robes crowned with victory laurel. Not all went to plan though. When it arrived in Birr cracks were discovered in the Duke's leg but when John and Henry Cheere were consulted they advised the problem could be fixed by, a 'local plumber'.

It seems, though, the good people of Birr never warmed to their statue. A poem written by Birr poet John Frazer sometime between 1839 and 1852, which refers to a deep pond or moat around the column's base, was far from complimentary about the old duke.

*There stood in a square in our fair old town  
Begirt by a deep moat of water  
A column of Cumberland, damned to renown  
Whose statue on top in 'study' called 'brown'  
Still seemed to gloat on slaughter.*

Still, however unpopular the statue was with the people

of Birr, or Parsonstown as it was then known, the duke would remain gazing down imperiously on them until 1915 when a group of Scottish soldiers based in the barracks in Crinkill decided it had become 'unsafe', and removed it. As William Laffan writes in his 2005 essay, *From Paper to Pillar Miscelanea Structura Curiosa and the Cumberland Pillar:*

*'Cumberland's appreciation of the delights of garden buildings, so appropriate in a Birr context, did not however, save his statue on Chearnley's column. Soldiers (presumably Highland) stationed at the nearby Crinkill (sic) barracks took exception to his presence overlooking the square and in 1915 the statue was removed. A pretext for this action was found on safety grounds. Cracks had appeared, presumably those in the Duke's leg which the Cheeres had dismissed a century and a half previously...Cumberland thus became one of the first imperial statues to be removed in Ireland, many years before Nelson was less ceremoniously toppled. There is no small irony of course in the fact that it was done to placate Scottish rather than Irish sensitivities...'*

The statue, or what's left of it, was taken to Birr castle where the head is still on display, although some of the duke's foot does remain at top of the column.

In 1922 Cumberland Square was renamed Emmet Square in honour of Robert Emmet, leader of the 1803 rebellion against the British who famously said from the dock after he was condemned to death; "When my country takes her place among the nations of the earth, then and not till then, let my epitaph be written."

Even with cracks in its legs, the statue of Cumberland long outlasted the original duke, who died at the age of 44 on Upper Grosvenor Street in London, on 31 October 1765, apparently from a heart-attack brought on by his life-long obesity.

It can only be hoped that a new hero can one day be found, of less weight than the Duke of Cumberland who can perhaps give us all something to look up at and perhaps this time, to be proud of too.

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## IT IS A LONG WAY TO TIPPERARY

*by Anne O'Meara (Hoek) in South Africa - daughter of Eamon and the late Rita O'Meara, Riverstown*

**B**irr is my basement, my burrowing. What is it about the place you grow up in, that anchors the heart - that etches you with sounds and smells and burns you with a searing light? Playing conkers under the chestnuts on Oxmantown Mall; whirling on the bike, hands free, down the mossy path at Riverside in July; pinkeens in a jam jar, the cowslips of Sandymount; inky field mushrooms on a pan. I remember these and other things of Birr - the smell of chalk and rain sodden clothes in a classroom of forty five kids; drizzle on window panes in thick walls; eiderdowns; Mickey Maddens; Buntus Cainte and day trips to graveyards, to satisfy Da's insatiable appetite for local history. The streets of Birr were the streets of my childhood, each one a well-worn path - a first kiss. But it's the faces that stay with me; the freckles that remain - along with the music and the water and the gentle country. Birr was my well spring.

The arc of my life seems to have led me far away. I have lived in the South of the world for fourteen years now, where January is a time of swimming out of doors and there is frost on veldt grasses in July. Rain is waited for. Where I live, the skies are blue in winter and I have grown to understand different things, different words. Like raindance. The link between Birr and Johannesburg must seem tenuous to you. "How did ya end up there, mush?" But to me, the chord has always been.

In the labyrinths of our old place in Birr, tusks of carved elephants stood watch on the mantelpiece over coal fires in the drawing room. For many years they stood benignly, casting their influence over my sisters and I, alongside the three brass monkeys - see no evil, hear no evil, speak no evil. Up the step to the landing, the phone stood on a table, under which there was a buckskin rug; which gave some warmth, as the wind whistled down from the top floor, and we spoke into the heavy black handle "Birr 14." In the yellow breakfast room, we ate bacon and cabbage and floury potatoes, under the assegai of a Matebele warrior. There were African beads and bangles and a black and white photo album of a road trip across the Kalahari desert. From time to time, mum would dish up an avocado, or corn on the cob and my sisters and I would give one another a look. And from her side of the bed, you could see a withered, brown, flower on the dressing table that gathered dust over the years and was a devil to clean. Often tempted to throw it out, but afraid to, I left the protea where it was.

This collection of things belonged to my mother, Rita, who spent three and half years in South Africa, as a nurse in a black hospital, in the Johannesburg of the 1950s. Her stories of Africa seemed heightened, written in indelible ink. Wistful. She spoke of the country with a longing in



her voice; a kind of desire. So for me, Birr Castle and the Kirstenbosch Gardens; Zulus and Manchester Martyrs, were all part of the same patchwork. The Slieve Bloom and Table Mountain were woven from the same cloth.

Time passed and I left Birr. Many years later in 1996, when I was restless and unsure of my life's path, I met a group of South Africans in Madrid with Deloitte, who I then worked for. By this time, in the course of a scarred history, Mandela had walked free from his 26 years as a prisoner under apartheid and the first democratic elections had been held. It was a hopeful time. In the subliminal parts of my mind, the elephants on the mantel trumpeted and I heard their call. Deloitte South Africa offered me a job and so I came in September of that year - in the Spring. And a door opened, for me, onto a new world.

Enchanted, from the first; South Africa has marked me with her scent. She is wild, sometimes cruel, but true to a fierce, natural beauty; her feline graces a gift. This is a country of tribes and tongues. A country of rhythm, and music and dance - a feast of graceful movement. She has given me unique memories of Africa - red earth on tyres after a cycling safari; the feel of sand on my toes, having kayaked down a sand dune; the rustle of leaves as I slept in a tree house on the Indian ocean; the force of rainstorms that washed our footsteps away on a hike up the Drakensberg. I remember too, the brush of tropical fish in the reefs of Sodwana; sitting under a cheetah sprawled in an acacia tree; listening to African voices sing in harmony, on an avocado plantation; and a lazy



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**Ann with her son Kristof outside the Calabash Stadium in Johannesburg during World Cup 2010**

afternoon float with friends, down the Orange River, to welcome in the millennium. I have placed a king protea on a bowl on a table, and understood its beauty for the first time. It is a place of my heart too.

Most people who live here have not been so lucky. It is a country of contrasts, of highs and lows, a vibrant, pulsing, changing country. The minority is wealthy and the majority is poor, which creates tough challenges for the future - and for the ANC Government. Although the economy has been managed very well, there is jobless growth and a young and growing population. The borders are open too to the rest of Africa. There are ghettos and townships and squatter camps. Crime is rampant and the graveyards are full of the young, who have died of AIDs. With Zimbabwe on the door step, there is political paranoia in the minority, some of which is unfounded, but there are plenty of real issues too. Race is one of them - still. There is poverty and squalor and death. It can be a dangerous place - I have seen things I would not wish you to see. Yet, despite everything, there are radiant smiles, on street corners.

Until this year, when South Africa hosted the soccer world cup, most international news about the country, portrayed it in a limited and negative light. There was much skepticism locally and internationally as to whether it could be done. But it was, and in style. I was there at the Calabash in Jo'burg, for the Ghana vs Paraguay match, and I roared for Africa. Hopefully those of you who visited got a taste for the country, which looks and feels very different

in summertime. Still in the West, South Africa remains largely unexplored, at the end of a dark continent. I myself, before I ventured here, saw myself locked up in a dusty city flat, afraid to go anywhere on third world streets. To my surprise, I found world class airports, roads and buildings in certain parts of the cities, friendly, hospitable people, international companies and a country of staggering beauty. If you get the chance to visit, do. You will not be disappointed. There are spaces that go on forever, deserted spaces. This is a big country.

And it has been good to me. My husband Willem and son Kristof are South Africans. Willem, an Afrikaner, is from an isolated farm in the bush, where he grew up by candle light, until electricity came when he was eleven years old. His ancestors are of Dutch and German extraction and I am the only native English speaker in his family. For the skilled, there is plenty of work. I've worked in management consulting and project management at Deloitte, IBM and as a contractor for local companies, like Sasol. Mum, Da and the sisters have visited, most of them on numerous occasions, hungry to get back here.

I was uncertain what Da would think about my new home, being very much a Birr man and comfortable in his own skin, in his own place. He came here ten years ago at age 79 with mum, and we went to a game farm near the Pilanesberg National Park. Da walked up to a python wrapped round a thorn tree, almost prodded it and asked "Is it real?" It was, he discovered, as it slithered down the tree and bit a game ranger on the shin, before winding its way into the grasses! In fact, he loved his visit as much as mum and they had a ball - watching the wildlife of Africa; drinking sundowners on a boat on a dam; swimming at Sun City; getting caught in a thunderstorm after an outdoor braai round an ox wagon wheel; a picnic under the oaks at the Johannesburg Country Club; Christmas by the pool, and ringing in the New Year by dancing their feet off at Harrisons.

Though the wooden elephants of my mother's African collection gather dust in Riverstown, as I write under African skies, my heart has space for both places. I think of Birr often and love to hear news of the town and everyone there. We go home once a year and spend time. Our trip this year, in April, was a sad one, to bury mum under a Celtic cross in the O'Meara plot in Clonoghill. The countryside was filled with daffodils, as we walked behind the coffin on a cloudless Spring Day and I can't but think how beautiful the old Irish rituals of saying goodbye are, and of how well we were treated by family, friends and by the people of Birr.

Watching mum being lowered into the ground, I knew a little piece of South Africa was being laid to rest and will always be there on the hillside, in the fine Irish rain. It may well be a long way to Tipperary, but with a thought I am there, as I am here. Nkosi Sikelel' iAfrika.

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# AN INTERVIEW WITH JOHNNY GILMARTIN

By Richard Kennedy



When an interview with John Gilmartin for a Birr Review article was suggested to me I looked forward in anticipation to what I knew would be an entertaining and interesting conversation. Curiosity was

added when our esteemed deputy Editor Jim Phelan advised "Ask him about the time himself and Dan Boyd went to Tullamore to play golf". The answer when I got it was wonderful. But first some background.

His parents moved to Birr in 1924, having bought the shop and bar premises in Main Street known as the Rising Sun. His father, Tom Gilmartin, had served his time as an apprentice to a shopkeeper in Roscrea who demanded loyalty from his customers, as demonstrated by a story John often heard from his father. The proprietor would invariably stand at the shop door and keep an eye on the comings and goings on the Main Street in Roscrea. One day he spotted a local man going up the street with what was obviously a new coil of rope. The owner turned to young Tom Gilmartin in the shop and asked "did he buy that rope here" and when informed that he hadn't said "charge it to him, he should have had".

There were six in John's family, Eamonn, Marie, Kay, John, Brendan and Michael. Of the six John was the only one who stayed in Birr. Brendan is now retired and living in Birr and Kay lives in Dublin. Eamon, Michael and Marie died in recent years. John remembers a happy home life in which, not unreasonably, it was expected that the children would play their part in the running of the family business.

One after school job was washing out the bottles when they bottled their own stout. They were then presented for inspection by their father. "He'd get the bottle, put it up to the eye and if there was a speck of dirt in it it'd be thrown back into the basin."

A vivid childhood memory is of the Saturday Fairs held in Market Square. From early morning there would a steady stream of horses and carts into the town. His father had stables in the yard and many of the market traders would stable their horses with them for the day. The Fair was the marketplace for all local farmers. "Coolahans would often be the first cart down in the mornings with calves. Then there were the Purcells and the Farrells of Riverstown – all great cattle dealers and they'd fill every inch of that square with cattle. Later in the morning the cabbage man would arrive by horse and cart from Athlone. There could be five or six loads of cabbage and every one of them would be sold by evening."

John can name off all the shops and shopkeepers on the street, some of which had been there for generations and most of which seemed to vanish in a few short years in the seventies, Liptons, Tyler's, McDowell's, Haslams, Cullens, Eamon Hackett, D.E. Williams, Tierneys, the list goes on. All of these shops were well served by the railway station since almost all goods came into town by train, and were then delivered around town by the C.I.E. mailman Jimmy Carroll by horse and dray.

Their neighbour was Jim Dooley. "He was a great character. You could go in intending to buy half the shop but if you knew anything about flowers, or the town, or the water coming down the Kinnitty Mountains, he'd chat with you all day and forget about the business."

There was Mr. Robinson, the saddler. "He was Barney Robinson's father. I can see him now, he'd have a ball of wax and he'd get the cord and run it through the wax making the thread and there'd be a smell of leather that would suffocate you."

Next door to Robinson's was Fanny Cavanagh. "Fanny was a great character but you'd be afraid of your life going into her shop, she could say anything to you, and you'd have to be very sharp to get the better of her".

Further down there was Bowes, the scene of the dreadful fire in the early 1940's.

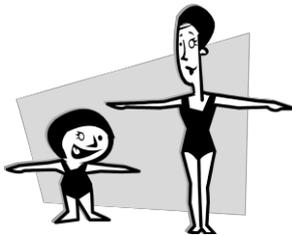
"I remember the night of the fire. We saw it all from our bedroom window. The entire street was lit up from the blaze. The heat was so intense that it cracked all the windows in Mickey Madden's shop on the far side of the road."

Much of their summers were spent on the farm of their uncle Michael and aunt Lil in Glenacurragh. There they lived a very different life, immersed in all things farming, too young to be any real help but enthusiastically biddable. "I remember bringing out the scones and tea to the field when they'd be at the hay. And when they would depend on you to do that you'd be delighted." Sometimes he would be chosen to go in to town to get shopping, and this also was a thrill, both for the novelty and the responsibility of it. "I would go in on the bicycle, with the basket around the bar. And you'd hand in the messages list in the shop and wait for it to be filled and then back out to the country." The evenings in Glenacurragh bought dancing and music with the neighbours rambling in for company and sociability at the end of a long summers day. The children would gather around the big hearth fire, lucky to be left up and keeping quiet for fear they'd noticed and be packed off to bed.

Secondary school was St. Flannan's in Ennis. At the beginning of each term his parents gave him a pound to see him through to the end of term, and a slab of hard toffee, which would last almost as long. While there he

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played a lot of sport, mainly hurling, but he was eclipsed in that regard by his brother Brendan, who is still remembered by his peers as a noted Offaly hurler.

In his early teens the pastime of roller-skating became hugely popular, and he, along with almost every other youngster in town took to it with a passion. "Everyone had them and you could spend all day on them. There was no traffic then so we had the street to ourselves. There could be a dozen of us skating down the Main Street, and when we'd get down to the Manchester Martyrs Monument we'd catch the corner of the railing and catapult ourselves around and back up the street again."

He started playing golf when he was about ten and within a few years was winning competitions. His skill steadily improved until at one point he was playing off a handicap of two.

Since we were on the subject of golf I asked him about the trip to Tullamore. One weekend, aged about 16, himself and Dan Boyd were determined to play in a competition in Tullamore. There was no bus, and despite all efforts they were unable to get transport of any kind to Tullamore. Undaunted, they took this setback in their stride, literally, and set off for Tullamore, each with a set of golf clubs on their back, on their roller-skates. This was on the old bumpy winding Tullamore road. That evening, on their return to Birr, and having played their golf, they had sufficient reserves of energy to go to a dance in the Oxmantown hall.

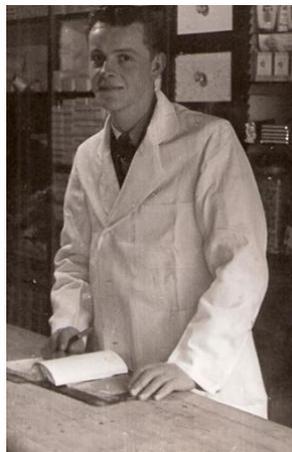
His love of golf led to his enthusiastically advocating the game whenever the opportunity arose and on one occasion led to a comically embarrassing moment. "Hubie Hogan was a great G.A.A man who would come in to our pub just for a chat about Gaelic games. One Saturday night I had closed the grocery and I was sweeping the footpath outside when Hubie arrived to come in and we started chatting about golf and I was demonstrating to him the technique of swinging a golf club, using the sweeping brush as the club. I executed it perfectly, but on my follow through the head flew off the brush and straight across the road and through Lipton's plate glass window. I smashed the whole thing. I nearly died. And Hubie never took up golf".

Good sportsmanship comes instinctively to John. Of all the competitions he took part in over 65 years, the one he remembers with most pride is one which he lost. This was the time he played Joe Carr in a competition in Lahinch in the South of Ireland Championship. "There was a huge crowd there. Mind you, I played fairly alright but I didn't beat him. I remember when we got to the first green we had to be let in under the ropes to get into the green and I was terrified. I was hardly able to hold the club. He was top notch at the time, but it was a great honour to have played him."

Following his Leaving certificate he began the start of a long and very satisfying career in the family firm. Those were the days of the starched white shop coat and the dedicated loyalty of customers. His father was referred to by family and customers alike as "The Boss" although John adds, "he wasn't a cross boss". His mother was equally involved in the business and her contribution was a significant factor in its success.

In the late fifties John first met Roma and, at that moment, realised that there was more to life than golf. They married in 1962. At the time Roma was teaching in Clareen, and she subsequently obtained a position in Birr.

As Johns parents grew older, he gradually assumed more responsibility for the business. The shop provided the livelihood with the bar serving a social function. When country people came to town the shopping list was handed in at the counter, the wife went shopping and the husband



Johnny working behind the counter

provided company in the bar while the provisions were being assembled. "We didn't make money on the bar. The men would come in and maybe have a couple of drinks and they'd stay there all night playing cards and chatting, with a big fire roaring in the grate. My father was worse than any of them – he loved the cards and the company."

John worked part-time as an auctioneer and remembers his first auction, the sale of the Midland Mineral Water Factory in Emmet Street. While auctioneering was always a sideline for him, it did in a coincidental way lead to a very significant change in his business. "I had an auction of a farm and we were having a sale of the effects and furniture. I was storing the furniture in the shop archway until the

auction and while it was sitting there people started enquiring about it and it began to sell before the auction ever came off. I realised there was an opening for this and that's how I started in the furniture business."

From there his business developed, with further diversification into giftware and carpets. He moved to Jim Dooleys shop shortly after Jim died, and continued to trade very successfully until his well deserved retirement in 1997. Along the way he still managed to find time to pursue his hobbies, particularly golf, and served as Captain of the Golf club in 1963 and as President in 1991.

For John, it goes without saying, retirement does not mean that he has stopped doing things. It just means that he now has lots of time for the important things, such as bridge, his workshop, painting, and enjoying the company of his wife Roma, his children, and his grandchildren. And of course golf.

As I left John following an interview which was every bit as entertaining and interesting as anticipated, a very pleasant picture formed in my mind of the mystified and bemused Kilcormac bystanders scratching their heads in wonder as the two young golfers dashed through on their glorious adventure all those years ago.

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# BIRR WILL ALWAYS BE HOME

By Ray Hayden

I thought this would be a walk in the park. Eight hundred words would rattle off my trusty Toshiba. A half-hour tops, and then off to the gym for more penance. Forget it. This has proved the hardest writing job I've ever been asked to undertake. Not that the instructions were difficult or lacked clarity. No, more because the subject was so wide, it was hard to know where to begin. "Write about Birr. What it was like working in the 'Midland Tribune'. Anything you like really", was what I was told by the amiable Paul Barber. To that I now say: 'beware of smiling jewellers'! Tony McLoughlin, a stalwart of civic society in the town, was little better. A chance encounter in Main Street, a gentle nudge, and I was hooked. Two men, same message. Maybe there's a lesson there for the Taoiseach and his colleagues?

So, where to start? Why not the here and now? 2010? Birr is a town that has given me everything and asked for nothing in return. What I needed for a career in print and broadcast journalism, I picked up in my formative years and the time I spent working – I use that term loosely – for the 'Midland Tribune'. Apart from shorthand and typing, and the benefits of brevity and the weight of words, there were the infinitely more important attributes one needed to progress in life. Being a good listener, having good sense and manners can extricate you out of many a potentially dangerous situation! My late and loving mother, Moira, did a first-rate job!

Birr is in my DNA. When I reflect on my youth and early working life, I think of the people who moulded me into the human being I am today. Mentors such as my wonderful English teacher, Jimmy Loftus, who broadened minds and gave depth to character; 'Bud' Burke, Geoff Oakley and Jimmy Fanning of 'Tribune' fame; old colleagues such as Johnny McCormack, John Mulhern, Paddy Cahill and Sean Tait who delivered invaluable advice with a great black printer's humour and Arnold Fanning, because if I didn't mention him here, he'd never forgive me. After Birr came the 'Connacht Tribune' in Galway, and two and a half years of sheer fun. In '79, came the move that would define the rest of my career.

The job of Deputy Editor of the 'East Antrim Times' was a challenge in every sense of the word. Moving from a vibrant city like Galway to a large town that closed its security gates at six each evening was bad enough; coming to terms at warp speed with deep community divisions was more difficult. But after a year or so, I had done enough to win the 'Provincial Journalist of the Year' award which was quickly followed by a move into broadcasting.

The accolade wasn't the only high point; of greater importance was the birth of my daughter, Gemma. As she was learning to walk, the BBC in Belfast beckoned.

After a brief introduction to an Uher tape recorder, I was sent out to do my first story – one that involved an interview with a car thief or, as we termed them then, a joy-rider. Northern Ireland was spiralling towards a dark place and, like others, I had to cover tragic and all too often needless

stories. In the midst of seeing man's inhumanity to man, I also witnessed great kindness and decency.

And there was danger. Such as the time a colleague and I were standing on the doorstep of a Councillor who, minutes earlier, had been shot and seriously wounded in a midnight gun attack. We were talking to a Police Inspector when an Army Technical Officer (ATO) came up and told us that the small package hidden feet away was a bomb. "Get out of there now, right now", he yelled. We did. As we ran down the street, the bomb went off. We were showered with broken glass and debris. I'd kept my tape recorder going and, so stark and frightening was the actuality of what I recorded, that it gave me my first national broadcast.

Then, came my first live radio broadcast from a Count Centre. Without being told beforehand, I was asked by the presenter to explain Proportional Representation and, because I'd grown up with PR, I was able to muddle through. My boss lavished me with praise but it was short-lived. After the two-day event, I returned to Broadcasting House and into the packed office of my Editor. In the middle of the floor sat two gundogs and I asked a little too loudly who owned "these mangy creatures". To which my Editor guided me to a woman sitting in a chair behind a wall of bodies and introduced me to Lady Faulkner, wife of the late Brian and Chairman of the BBC Board of Governors. Thankfully, she was a gracious lady who pretended she hadn't heard my gaffe.

Brighton was next. The Conservative Party Conference was the last big conference of the season and I was there to cover it for BBC Northern Ireland. We'd attended an eve of conference reception in the Grand Hotel and in the wee small hours – don't ask me why - I'd decided to make my way back to my own hotel a few hundred yards away. As I entered my room, the 'phone rang and the night porter told me he'd just heard a loud noise further down the



promenade. I grabbed my tape recorder and raced back to the Grand. It was eerie. No screaming. Dust everywhere. And a deep gash in the building where only 20 minutes earlier I'd been swapping stories with a delegation from the Ulster Unionist Party. For the next twenty-eight hours, it was non-stop broadcasting. Regular updates. Voice-pieces into regional bulletins. Live two-ways and my first live TV appearance. During this time, I worked as a Parliamentary Reporter at the Northern Ireland Assembly where, to a large degree, there was a pretence at regional government. As an accredited lobby correspondent, I was permitted to use the Members Dining Room. Shrewdly, I sat with Ian Paisley and some of his backbenchers, simply because their only vice was food or so they told me.

In '85 I became Industrial/Business Correspondent at UTV, a position I held for ten years. In that time, I travelled the world and reported on various political and business stories from places as far apart as Pittsburgh and Pusan in South Korea.

The grim eighties saw economic blight visit Northern Ireland. Tens of thousands of manufacturing jobs were lost and once-great industries disappeared. As that was going on, efforts to win overseas investment were stymied by the IRA's bloody campaign.

I was in the news-breaking business so, whenever I appeared at factory gates, workers quickly realised it wasn't to report record results and expansion. In some trade union circles, I became known as "Dr Death", even though they were some of my finest sources.

Also I covered altogether different stories far too frequently for ITN of London. One week in particular, I covered ten murders, countless attacks and eight funerals. In '95, I set up my own business, specialising in Public Affairs, Public Relations, media training and DVD production. A call in '98 brought me back to the political world. The Ulster Unionist Party, under David Trimble, needed a Director of Communications for the Referendum and subsequent Assembly election and I was asked if I would do the job. As a staunch supporter of the Belfast or Good Friday Agreement, I had no hesitation in taking up the challenge. And challenge it was. The party was split with pro and anti Agreement factions fighting it out.

A party that never had to fight for anything in its long history suddenly found itself having to defend a rather shaky redoubt. There was no PR strategy; no understanding of how to counter the opposition; no communications plan of campaign and no staff.

The entire operation had to be built from scratch within a six-week period. There was an over-riding need to secure a majority Unionist vote.

It was nerve-jangling, frustrating but hugely enjoyable and, in the end, we got the result we needed. I predicted the exact result and took the sweep, much to the amusement of Ken Maginnis, who jokingly demanded a recount. A month later, David Trimble secured 28 seats in the new 108-seat Assembly against frightful odds.

This was a period when the average working day was 16 hours, seven days a week. But you lived on adrenalin. Relished the campaigning ... the strategising ... the writing ... the rebutting ... the briefing of former colleagues ... the 'fire-fighting' when things went the wrong way.

Shortly after that, I was asked to serve as a Special Adviser to Sir Reg Empey in the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment (DETI). We carved out good relations with our shadow Assembly committee, led by Pat Doherty of Sinn Féin, and saw through the creation of Invest NI and the south-north gas pipeline as political storm clouds gathered. Two years as a temporary civil servant proved an invaluable experience. Gaining an appreciation of how things work from the inside didn't fill me with awe and admiration. I encountered a lot of good people who wanted to make things work for the wider community, but who were frustrated by processes and time-wasting procedures.

The work I do now still involves political contact and engagement. I conduct public affairs for a myriad of clients drawn from financial, aviation and consumer sectors, all with different points to put to civil servants and politicians, all with different priorities and agendas.

Once or twice a month, Nuala and I get in the car to make the trip to Birr. Three hours get us there, door-to-door. But for me, it's more than just a three-hour drive. I'm transported back to my place, my roots, and my people. I left Birr 32 years ago but in many ways, I never left home!



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# MOSSFIELD ORGANIC CHEESE – AN OFFALY SUCCESS STORY

By Michael Donegan

In these times of economic gloom and uncertainty the story of Mossfield Organic Cheese and the wonderful people who produce it should serve as a headline of bravery, genius and hope to everyone in our country.

Ralph and Lorraine Haslam have been farming at Mossfield Farm, Clareen since 1973. Originally they engaged in a mixed farming type of operation but in the early eighties they moved into dairying as the main farming activity. It soon became apparent that if they were to survive in conventional farming they would have to compromise their dearly-held beliefs about environmental farming and natural farm produce. The reality was they were in a vicious circle. To produce more milk they had to spread more nitrates on the land and increase their herd size. By producing more milk in this fashion they and other dairy farmers were flooding the market which, in turn, decreased the price they were paid for the milk they produced. This was a no-win situation and, in the end, their land and their environment was being continually damaged by the process. As parents of young children they were also conscious of the chemicals that were making their way into the food chain through sprays, insecticides and animal medications. So, in the nineties, they made a decision which would radically alter their life-paths and eventually turn them into multi-award winning cheese makers. They decided to convert their milk operation completely to organic production.

Going organic is not an immediate or a simple process. It takes a minimum of two years and during that time the land must be free of all artificial fertilizer and chemicals. Any extra feedstuffs consumed by the cattle must also be organically produced. There is intensive assessment and soil testing and all this is closely monitored by the Irish Organic Farmers and Growers Association. The stocking rate is lower as, without artificial fertiliser, the growth rate of the grass is slower. Originally their ambition was to produce organic milk. Then in 2004, their son Jonathan opened up an organic shop in the Main Street in Birr. Naturally, he wished to put organic cheese on his shelves. He struggled to source any Irish organic cheese. Suddenly, there was a new challenge. They decided to research the idea of manufacturing their own organic cheese from their very own organic milk. Being absolute novices had its pluses and its minuses. On the plus side, they were learning from scratch and could objectively look at best practice, learn from other people's mistakes and take advice. On the minus, side they had no tradition to build on and would have to sink or swim on the reputation they were about to begin to create. In the beginning they outsourced the cheese-making. From the cheeses that Jonathan imported for his shop they knew that Gouda



Ralph Haslam and his cows

style cheese was very popular. By trial and error and close monitoring of the process each time they produced a batch of cheese, they gradually began to get it right. There were many mistakes in the research and development stage and it was an extremely difficult time financially. As well as the tough business of product development they had to research market potential, source financial investment and create a business plan. While all that was going on, 85 cows had to be milked twice each day and over 300 acres of land had to be managed completely organically. They soon discovered that everything seemed to affect the quality and taste of their cheese, whether it rained or didn't rain at a particular time, the type of grass the cows ate, the type of additional feed they were given, the mood the cows were in, the smallest change in the environment, temperature or handling of the cheese during the maturing process. Initially, they produced two types, a plain Gouda style cheese and a mature version of the same cheese. The plain cheese is matured for three to six months and the mature for a whole year before it reaches the shops.

As they grew more confident as cheese-makers they realised that they would have to build their own production plant so that they could have complete control over their own affairs. In 2006, they sought advice on the design of a cheese making plant which they could set about building from scratch on their own land. After a tough struggle with the planning authorities on a suitable location they began the construction of their new state-of-the-art cheese-making facility in Mossfield. To have three-phase electricity installed would have cost €35,000. In another example of the resourceful way they approach things, they simply sourced suitably high-powered diesel generators and carried on. They got a lot of advice from

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Teagasc on the planning and execution of the project.

Today, a beautifully designed building, packed with the most up-to-date cheese-making equipment stands about a hundred yards from their own dwelling house. They applied the same ruthless standards of excellence and determination to this project also. It reflects an investment of over a million euro and has the capacity to produce and mature 40 tonnes of cheese per year.

The process of cheese manufacturing is meticulous and goes through about 15 closely-monitored stages until the final product is achieved. First, the cows are milked and the milk is brought to the plant and pasteurised. The milk is then transferred to the cheese vat and a starter culture is mixed in. During this process the milk is continually stirred. As this process continues, curds begin to form and these are gathered and placed in moulds. The liquid which is left is called whey and is used as feed on the farm. The moulds are then put on a pressing table where pressure is applied to each mould. Each mould is then turned by hand every few hours. The next part of the operation sees the rounds of cheese immersed in brine for 24 hours.

Then they are brought to a drying room and turned each day. The final stage is when each round of cheese is coated with a special covering of wax. This is done to protect the flavour of the cheese while at the same time allowing it to breathe. The cheeses are then left on open wooden shelves in the



maturing rooms for the required length of time and turned regularly. Each piece of cheese is marked with its own code so that it can be traced back to the day and date of its manufacture right up to the moment of its consumption. Everything is done to the absolute highest standards of hygiene and at any moment government food-hygiene inspectors can come in and examine the entire operation meticulously.

For Ralph and Lorraine the care of their animals is an absolute priority. They believe that the care of their cows is reflected in the taste and quality of the milk. They are only fed very high quality organically produced silage and grain when they are not out grazing the beautiful Clareen pastures of the farm. They have re-seeded all these pastures with a mixture of 12 different types of grasses and clovers. The usual modern grassland consists of only three. Their grassland is typical of the very best wild flower meadows of long ago. The cows simply love the various

plants and herbs and this is reflected in the quality and taste of the cheese. Because these fields are not fertilised by spreading nitrates on the surface, the plant roots go deeper into the earth for nutrients and so bring up the very best in taste and energy to the grazing cows. Their calves are not fed milk powder and only get new milk. Even when they are inside, the cows are bedded on straw rather than concrete slats and they are never left standing long before they are milked in case they would become stressed in any way. The particular breed of cow on Mossfield farm is a Friesian Rotbunt cross. This is a cross between an old Irish breed of cow and the German Freidan and is ideally suited to the Mossfield operation as the milk is high in the butterfat which is essential to good cheese making. Drew Haslam, their eldest son has the main responsibility for making sure the farm operates efficiently. Jonathan is kept very busy with the shop and the polytunnels in which he grows his organic vegetables.

Increasingly, Lorraine and Ralph are trying to keep up with the administration and production side of the business.

Their cheese is to be found in the best cheese and organic shops in the country from Cavistons of Glasthule to The English Market in Cork to Country Choice of Nenagh and in all the Avoca shops. They have had American cheese buyers over and have just recently taken a major organic trade fair by storm in Germany. The range of cheeses has been

extended to Basil and Garlic, Cumin Seed and Mediterranean Herb flavours. They have been featured on numerous T.V. programmes and the list of awards they have achieved is growing weekly. They have just been awarded the premier award for 'Best Overall Organic Product' and 'Best Overall Sustainable Product' at the National Organic Awards 2010. They have also taken the Gold and Silver Award for Irish Cheese at the 2010 National Irish Food Awards among a whole list of other awards too numerous to mention. The success story that is Mossfield Organic Cheese is a story primarily of hard work, high standards, and the unrelenting pursuit of excellence. It is about delicious cheese produced to the highest of organic standards but above all it is about the sheer determination of Ralph and Lorraine Haslam to follow their dream. Try their delicious cheese and you'll taste a little bit of that dream.



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# THE BIRR TRAIN DISASTER OF 1910

By Michael Byrne

The years before the First World War must have been a golden age for Irish railways. The new-found prosperity in the country from the 1890s, the development of organised sport, especially Gaelic games, and the organised excursions of employers and societies all played their part in getting people on the move. One such event was a Temperance Society trip from Birr to Queenstown or Cobh, on the line of the Great Southern, organised for 19<sup>th</sup> July 1910 from Birr and Roscrea. A train crash occurred due to faulty brakes and staff failures. The hero of the hour was the Roscrea station master, Mr. J. Hayes, who responded to the crisis with the gallantry that was to be observed on the part of some on *The Titanic*, some two years later. It was a day when the doctors of Roscrea and Birr made haste to the scene in cars, motor bikes and good old push bikes. The monks of Mount St. Joseph were among the first on the scene.

Mr. John Wright, who had taken over the *Birr Chronicle* some forty years before, knew what he was talking about when he said nothing like it had happened before in the locality. It was a time when only a handful of people in Birr had a telephone, but the response from the then Emergency Services, the public at large, was prompt enough. If the doctors had their day in mid-July 1910, when the autumn came, it would be the turn of the lawyers.

The *Chronicle* reports the crash, 19 July, 1910.

'The Birr and Roscrea districts were thrown into a state of consternation on Tuesday last owing to the report which, sad to tell, was verified to the letter, that the excursion train with a freight of about 250 who left the former station at 8.40 a.m., had got out of control at Roscrea and dashed backward a distance of four miles to the crossing cottage at Moynure lane, and ran into the ordinary passenger train which left Birr at 9.15 a.m. For at least the past half century there has been none such in the



experience of the G. S. & W. R. Company, and in a miniature way it resembled very much the awful calamity which occurred twenty years ago on the great Northern line when a couple of hundred school-children from Armagh lost their lives. With the word first going round, the wildest stories passed to and fro but, after eliminating these rumours the facts are melancholy enough. The train got to Roscrea to time. Here there was another crowd of intending tourists for Queenstown, and as soon as the train slowed in there was the usual rush for places. Just then the engine was detached to take on more carriages, and on the return gave the waiting carriages a knock which instantly set them in motion before the couplings could be joined. It also appears that the guard, from no fault of his own, had not put on the brake. The motion beginning gradually, accelerated until the speed was variously reckoned at from 15 to 25 miles an hour. Be that as it may, the uncontrolled "runaway" travelled to near Brosna. The Birr guard and engine driver, seeing the approach on the single line, both doing their work with presence of mind and promptitude, managed to bring their train to a stand just as the fugitive nine or ten carriages were on top of them. There was not a moment's time for running back but several passengers of the ordinary train, seeing the peril, jumped out and, strange to say, the collision, although so tremendous that the funnel of the engine was shot into the air as from a catapult, the occupants escaped, save one or two who sustained slight bruises and cuts. For otherwise, alas! Is the tale to be related of the excursion train? Five of the coaches were totally wrecked. A number of clergymen suffered most, and how any escaped from instant death is a mystery, three carriages being telescoped and broken. Mr. Hayes, the Roscrea Stationmaster, was on the Roscrea footboard when the carriages began to move, and had a most exciting time of it until he adroitly slid down with an alacrity that cannot be too highly praised. A number of the ordinary passengers did all in their power to afford succour by bringing out the injured, and the helpers in this were Mr. J. J. Kennedy, solr. and Mr. W. Carroll, Arabeg. Numbers of the uninjured excursionists co-operated, prominent amongst them being the Rev. P. J. Gilsenan whose own escape was miraculous; Mr. J. F. Power, solr. Birr, &c., &c. Mr. Willington, J.P., being on the opposite side of the river, plunged in at once, got the seats out and converted them into stretchers, which proved most timely. Messengers were at once despatched to Roscrea for medical aid and, with most admirable tact, Mr. O'Keeffe, stationmaster at Birr, sent out requests to the local doctors who, on their part, were not slow to respond. Dr. Fleury dashed away in his motor car, Dr. D'Alton on a motor bicycle. Dr. F. Woods on a bike, and Col. C. Woods drove, all from Birr; Dr.

Graham, Shinrone; and Dr. Gilligan, Cloughjordan, also assisted, while the Roscrea gentlemen, Drs. Powell, Wallace, Murray, Houlihan, &c., were no less punctual and valuable in their services. Meantime a break-down gang was despatched from Thurles, who tackled the clearing away of the debris and kept at it until well into Tuesday night when the line was clear. It might have been thought that the permanent way would have been ripped up, but beyond some sleepers being torn up the ground damage was trifling. The rail traffic being stopped, buses, brakes and cars were substituted, and these were engaged in conveying some of the wounded to their homes. From the Kingsbridge was despatched special trains, and as soon as possible the more serious cases were removed to Dublin; but it was deemed best to not risk the long journey in the case of the Rev. J. Cunningham P.P., Kinnitty, whose badly lacerated forehead was only part of his injuries which border, we regret to hear, on being described as dangerous. Owing to the confusion and other difficulties only a partial list of the casualties could be got.' As with the attendance at funerals, the *Chronicle* was assiduous in publishing the names of all those injured and those who rendered assistance. The parish priest of Kinnitty topped the list and a photograph was provided of him, the two heroic railway employees and some pictures of the crash. A special supplement followed. Fr. Cunningham was in the company of another ten Catholic priests and some forty of the laity. The messenger boys of Roscrea and Birr were busy too, delivering some 200 messages. Perhaps with an eye to the personal injury claims that would follow, the railway company had twenty two of the injured brought on a special train to Kingsbridge where they were met by the

army and police and many brought to nearby Dr. Steevens Hospital. Another 32 were treated in Roscrea. Augustine Birrell, the then Chief Secretary, made a statement on the incident in response to a query from local M.P., Michael Reddy. The Bishop of Killaloe expressed sympathy with the some twenty priests, families and young children involved.

### Local heroes

It was reckoned that Mr. T. Broughal, Engine Driver, Birr and Mr. J. Hayes, Stationmaster, Roscrea were the heroes of the hour. The tribute was paid by Fr. Devany, the Birr curate and one of the excursion organisers. "The only thing to which I should like to refer is the coolness, judgment, and courage displayed by Mr. Hayes during this trying time. He was on the footboard of the train all through, cautioning the people to keep the carriage doors closed. He undoubtedly prevented many from leaping from the carriages, when they would have been mangled underneath the wheels of the train. Mr. Hayes kept his position on the footboard almost to the last moment. Indeed, he only leaped when the trains were nearly in contact." Within two days, the railway company held an enquiry, with a nice set of old buffers arriving at Roscrea to interrogate the men. Dismissals followed in August. The incident did not much affect the share price of Great Southern stock. Some 512 claims followed. Some were settled for as low as 5s. while the maximum amount appears to have been £2,000 to one Agnes Clarke, a school teacher. For further detail see the *King's County Chronicle* and *Midland Tribune* for 1910. Peter Burke published a useful article on the episode in *Offaly Heritage*, vol. 1 (2003).

### All Scrubbed Up! 1958-1959

Back Row (L to R): Eddie Nevin, Oisín Sullivan,  
Brian Guinan, Pat Horan, Tom Cleary  
Front Row: Willie Lucey, Joe Cahill, Willie Egan,  
Donal Brick, ?



### Resting the Leg – 1991

(L to R): Jack Roberts, Mick Flanagan, Tom Nolan

# SPEEDING UP IN A SLOW DOWN

## FROM CRINKILL TO THE WORLD WIDE WEB

By *Mark Grennan*, son of Cronan and Bernie from Crinkill



Looking back at May 2008, the world was a very different place. Globally, we were still in the longest sustained period of growth in the history of the world. We had never been so prosperous. In Ireland, although things were beginning to cool down, we all thought we were headed for a soft landing. For me, university had just come to an end - four of the best and most memorable years of my life. Throughout my college

years I had envisaged a world of possibilities stretched out in front of me. I studied Economics and Business in university. It wasn't exactly a well-defined career path, so I just decided to send out my CV and see what came up.

I enjoyed my final summer of freedom but, after two months of holidays, it was time to get serious. The world seemed to have the same idea, Lehman Brother's collapsed, Northern Rock was nationalised, the bank guarantee came into force, sub-prime mortgages took a hold of our economy and suddenly those opportunities I had pictured started to dwindle. It wasn't quite the perfect moment to go job hunting.

As luck would have it, I had managed to get my CV out just in time and as our economy collapsed, I had already lined up a few interviews. My options included: a bank - not the best idea, given the climate; a government job - not particularly exciting. But there was one other option, a company named as the number one brand in the world, consistently ranked as the best company to work for, with great growth prospects, great offices, and most of all, free food. The company was Google. My mind was made up; I had to get the job.

Only one thing stood in my way, one of the most rigorous set of interviews in the corporate world. Google is notorious for throwing up questions like "how many golf balls can you fit in a Mini?" or "how many times a day a clock's hands overlap?" Lucky for me, they seemed to have run out of tricky questions on my day. Four long interviews later, followed by weeks of waiting, and I was in! Google Dublin is the HQ of the European, Middle East and African operations. They employ over 1,600 people in Ireland. The company has young staff - with most in their 20s, they're from over 30 countries and speak over 40

languages - it certainly makes for an interesting work environment.

The offices are known for their quirky features. The head office in California has its very own T-Rex skeleton. The Zurich office has a slide and a fireman's pole to get between floors and Google Dublin isn't too shabby either.

Our offices are fitted out with pool and football tables, a gym, on-site masseuses and 'all you can eat' free canteens. Other perks include lunchtime speakers. Brian Cowen, Brian Lenihan and Bono have all visited us. The London office has even had a visit from the Queen. Google tends to make the headlines for its cool and exciting products. Most recently, it launched 'Street View' in Ireland, putting BIRR on the map, for all to see. These products are paid for through the millions of users clicking on the "sponsored links" on Google search, maps, gmail and YouTube.

Most of the Dublin office works in advertising, where I also work. Google's advertising system, AdWords, allows any business, from the smallest local shop to the biggest multi-national, reach their audience - all you need is a website. This service has revolutionised global business. It has brought a global audience to the shop window of anyone who wants in. Ireland, despite being a global and open economy, tends to lag behind much of the rest of the world when it comes to taking advantage of this opportunity. Too few Irish businesses have multi-currency and multi-lingual websites. Our indigenous companies are losing out as the UK and other international companies take market share.

In Google, a company that has continued to grow at a phenomenal rate throughout the recession, it is very easy to forget the difficult times that many people are going through. I know I've been very lucky to work in a company that continues to grow but as Brian Cowen recently commented to an audience in Google, the reasons why companies like Google are in Ireland still exist. We still have a young, educated workforce, a favourable business environment and low taxes. Add to that an improved infrastructure and improving competitiveness, and things aren't looking so bad.

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## SCHOOL AROUND THE CORNER

By Raymond King

**M**y name is Raymond King and I am currently Principal of Scoil na Mainistreach in Celbridge. It is an all-boys school with 660 pupils, and 55 staff. I am married to Patricia and have three children, Orla, Aidan and Barry. Orla is now a P.E. and Science Teacher and the two boys are enjoying College life!!! Patricia is also a Principal teacher in our local school.

I was born and reared on Lios Lane in Killeen. I attended Killeen National School for 8 years and then completed 4 years of my post primary education in the Presentation Brothers College in Birr. At the age of 16 I transferred to Colaiste Therese in Cork for my Leaving Cert year. I then attended Colaiste Mhuire, Marino and Trinity College and acquired an Honours degree in Education. It is 38 years since I left Killeen, however, I am a regular visitor and have kept close contact with family and friends.

I began my teaching career in St. Marks in Tallaght in 1979 and after 4 years transferred to Scoil na Mainistreach as a class teacher. It was while I was in St. Marks that I met my wife Patricia. We decided to move to live in Celbridge, a developing town at that time, hoping that we would both get jobs there. I was fortunate enough to get a job in Scoil na Mainistreach in 1983. After 5 years I became teaching Principal in St. Anne's National School, Ardclogh, where I spent another 5 years. During those 5 years I drew on both my own experience as a student in Killeen and the College in Birr and also on my previous 9 years working under Principals who had great vision and great leadership qualities. In 1993 the position of Administrative Principal became available in Scoil na Mainistreach and I was fortunate enough to be appointed. The school then, had 579 pupils and 19 staff. Today we have 660 pupils and there are 55 people on staff. So things have actually changed for the better.

I have no hesitation in crediting my current position professionally and personally in large measure to the generosity, dedication and pastoral care of all of the teachers, particularly Principals, with whom I came in contact with in my own primary and post primary schools. I am a product of the free education system which transformed access to education for families who could not afford private schools.

My first teacher was Mrs. Murphy who was in her last years as a teacher in Killeen when I arrived there. She was a consummate teacher. Whilst most of our work in Junior and Senior Infants was done on slates and "marla" boards, the basic skills of literacy and numeracy were excellently taught. My abiding memory of her was her bringing all of us up around her table and reading with us from the Irish Independent the tales of "Curly Wee and Gussie Goose". Without her knowing it, she was in fact doing what we are now trying to encourage teachers of today to do, and we

think it's a new idea! The Principal at that time was Paddy Fullam, who later went to Kenya and set up educational centres there. He is now on the staff of the Mary Immaculate Teacher Training College in Limerick where he has inspired young



teachers for many years to be inclusive and proactive in their teaching profession. He continues to enrich the lives of young people as he did when he was Principal in Killeen. He was an extremely compassionate, kind and pastoral Principal.

He was followed by Virginia Magee later to become Mrs. Duffy, who, whilst she has retired as Principal, is still very active in the life of the Parish. Mrs. Duffy continued the excellent work of the school and brought it to a new level. To say that she was light years ahead of her time is not to do her full credit. She implemented thoroughly the "New Curriculum" which became the National Curriculum in 1969. Would you believe that in 1967 we were doing Art, Physical Education/Drama, Health Education and Music along with the old traditional three "R's"? She was extremely caring for her pupils and their families. It was she, in large measure, who influenced and facilitated my progressing to the secondary school. She assured my parents that we would be able to manage the books and any costs involved. She brought me to meet Brother Denis, the Principal of the College and I have never looked back. I enjoyed 4 years of superb teaching and learning in a school which practiced its Catholic Ethos in very real ways. I was deeply impressed with the mission and vocation of the Presentation Brothers and in my Leaving Cert year transferred to Cork to consider a vocation for myself. Fortunately or unfortunately I decided that I did not have such a vocation. Nevertheless my personal and professional life has been enriched by the 4 years I spent with the Brothers. It is a source of great sadness to see the decline of an Order which has made such a wonderful contribution to the lives of so many young men and women in the greater Birr area. It will be some time before we fully appreciate the generosity and commitment of these dedicated Brothers. I owe much of the philosophy I practice in my work as Principal to the positive experiences I had in school myself. I am especially grateful to Paddy Fullam, Mrs. Duffy and Brother Denis for the magnificent example they have set educationally, professionally and pastorally. I pass Killeen school often and admire the beautiful extension and renovation and wonder if the students there are still as happy as we were 50 years ago. I suppose you could say I am wondering if "the school around the corner is just the same".

## BIRR RFC CENTENARY 1987

**B**irr Rugby Football Club celebrated its centenary in 1987. The following piece is from a souvenir programme of match between Landsdowne and Birr Presidents XV on Sunday 13<sup>th</sup> September of that year. The author is unknown.

The Club was originally founded as Parsonstown Football Club in 1883 but, after it lapsed for a few years, it was reformed again in 1887.

From the start the club played at the ground on the Railway Road (behind the Esso Station), which was put at their disposal by a Mr. Wright and was known commonly as Hank's Field. It is interesting to look back at the time when the club was formed. The founding of the new club was reported in the local papers at the time. *'The Midland Tribune'* dated October 18th, 1883 reported the inaugural meeting of the club as follows:

"On Thursday afternoon the inaugural meeting of the Football Club recently established in Birr, took place in a field adjoining the Lawn Tennis grounds at Moorpark. The attendance of members was pretty large and the play — which was regulated by the Rugby Rules — very fair for a beginning. On Monday a meeting of the members was held at Dooly's Hotel. Mr. J. P. Fagan, Clerk of the Peace, was unanimously elected captain and a committee having been appointed, the colours chosen as representative of the club were amber and navy blue."

*The Chronicle* of a fortnight later reports of their first practice match played on October 25th, 1883. Punctuality seemed to be a problem then as well as the reporter states that "it was a good half hour beyond the appointed time before a team could be got together".

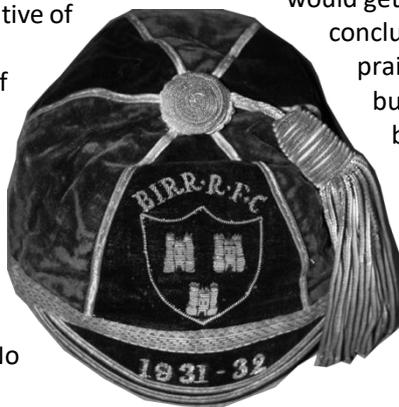
Two teams were picked and a rattling hour's play resulted". The report goes on: "No very high order of merit was displayed but enough was done to show that the rough

material was there in abundance, only needing practice to develop into more than ordinary provincial 'form'. The afternoon was fine and many spectators were attracted, and to most of them it was evident that the Rugby Game was a perfect novelty, as the scrimmages and tackling matches appeared to excite unbounded amusement in the gallery. The opening meet was generally voted a complete success and there is little doubt but the game will be a most popular one in Parsonstown during the coming season."

There was another 'report' of the same game by 'The Man in the Tree'. The game was watched from a tree by this man and he put his report in the novel form of a poem, which certainly caught the atmosphere of the occasion. *'See! now it grows looser: long Crooke will be through, sir: He's off! Oh, well dribbled! He's lost it! He's not. Now, who would have thought it? Young Berry has caught it: But Waring is on him he's down like a shot.'*

The first match played under Rugby Union Rules was in December 1883, when they played Galway Grammar School. The visitors won by one try to nothing but many felt a legitimate Parsonstown try was disallowed in the last minute. As mentioned, the club discontinued for a while before being reformed again and Galway Grammar School once again provided the opposition in one of their early games. *The Midland Tribune* of April 5th. 1888, recalls the match thus: "On Tuesday a most enjoyable football match came off on the Chesterfield Grounds. That the 'Birrs'

would get a sound thrashing seemed to be a foregone conclusion for Mr. Goodbody, who deserves all praise for his pluck in organising the match, had but a small nucleus of the old club to start with, but he found an enthusiastic supporter in Lieutenant Reeves, who brought with him a few 'dashers' from the barracks. The match resulted in a draw, with a slight advantage in favour of Birr, by reason of Galway having to 'touch' in defence.



Vincent Barber's Cap from 1931-32

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# FEAST OF FLOWERS

By Fr. Gerald Grogan

*Fr. Gerald Grogan was born in Millstreet, Cork and was the third of seven children. His father was stationmaster in Millstreet and the family moved to Birr in 1942 when he was transferred to Birr station. Birr became home to the Grogan's and Fr. Gerald became the first priest ever to be ordained in the parish of Birr on 11<sup>th</sup> September 1960. He regularly comes home from America to visit family and friends in the town.*

**M**y home for the past 50 years has been the state of Florida, 'Pascua de Florida', meaning feast of flowers, so named by Spanish explorer Ponce de Leon on Palm Sunday, April 2nd, 1513. As the Catholic population continued to grow in Florida, there are now seven dioceses, where originally there was only one, I served in Miami, Orlando and Venice.

The beginning for me for what seemed the impossible dream began when I left home September 1954 for St. John's College, Waterford. Six long years of study left me with consoling thoughts that I would never make it as I would either "flunk out" or be fired. There were times I had hoped my perception would be realised and bring me back to the good old town of Birr, the sports field, the hurling, the beautiful young maidens I left behind, maybe working at the railway station for my father or seeing the odd movie at the 'New Cinema' or 'Murphy's'. Maybe I will hear again the voice of Mr. Fenton in John's Hall calling "Anois na daoine nac raibh sa rince" as we made a beeline for the door!

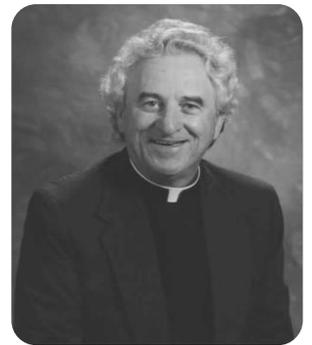
The discipline of the pre-conciliar Seminary rivaled that of a marine boot camp or military academy. The thinking of that era seemed to assume that the common life of the seminary and the demands of a rather rigorous academic formation promoted both physical and emotional maturity where critical and probing questions were seldom encouraged, are best left behind the closed doors of St. John's. Post-conciliar seminary training has significantly changed in its understanding of the dynamics that foster authentic mature human development. I was to experience this change in the pursuit of graduate studies on a non-resident basis at St. Vincent De Paul Regional Seminary, Boynton Beach. After completing studies for my Master of Divinity, I enrolled in Barry University, Miami to pursue studies in the behavioral sciences and graduated with an M.S. in mental health and was nationally certified as an addictions counselor.

The 1967 encyclical "Sacardotalis Celibatus" of Pope John Paul VI, (The celibacy of the priest) would have a major impact on American clergy as would the encyclical on birth control "Humanae Vitae" (on human life). Thousands of priests left the priesthood to marry. Pope John Paul II, 'the

man of the century' as one biographer called him, because of his extraordinary influence on the world, was insistent on the restoration of hierarchical authority within the church; on an all-male celibate priesthood and the denial of priesthood to women. This led to many priests re-evaluating their once imposed strict ideas on human sexuality and their identity as a minister of the Gospel. This led to a code of silence on many issues, from the pulpit. My refuge from this maze of conflict would be to open a Counseling Center at Our Lady of Grace Parish, Avon Park where I was Pastor. Here I found an invigorating area of ministry in an area of need so frequently overlooked, marriage counseling, individual counseling, bereavement group therapy, and counseling with the anxious, the depressed, and the troubled teenager.

A new adventure began when a little girl of four asked me to be her Daddy, as her classmates were making Father's Day cards, and she had no Daddy. Tears came to my eyes as I said yes and thus began a journey of sheer joy, teaching her how to drive a car, and being her paternal escort when she was selected as homecoming queen in her senior year in high school. She has since graduated with a B.A. and is now employed in her field of interior decorator with C.A.D. She is now happily married, visits me regularly, and never misses Father's Day or my birthday!

I was home this year and enjoyed family and friends. Members of my family were very supportive of my endeavors through the years. I spoke with Tom at the Crinkill stores. His son is in his 2<sup>nd</sup> year in Maynooth and my mind was flooded with ambivalent thoughts as I promised to pray for him. There is sadness now with accusations of paedophilia and ephebophilia in the priesthood throughout the globe. Seminary admission requirements are more stringent now. Letters of recommendation, interviews, psychiatric and psychological evaluations, standardised tests and interviews are strictly adhered to. I have counseled with the abused with genuine empathy for their pain and suffering, and I pray that someday they will be reconciled with a wounded church extending its crucified arms of contrite welcome. The priests of today, despite criticism, continue to serve with integrity and generosity. The day might come in the distant future when the nature of priesthood will change, when seminaries will re-open to teach an updated theology and new awareness from so



## BIRR Year Review 2010

many sciences of today. I am grateful to converse with the people of Birr and its neighbors through the medium of "Birr Year Review", which I have treasured since its inception.

My passion for as long as I can remember was hurling, never missing a Sunday at the sports field to the tune of "Young Dalton died when the Banshee cried in the valley of Knockanure and six pence each the ripe Bananas". The Dooleys, the Spains, the Purcells, Billy Nevin, Tommy Errity and the other greats were our heroes. Minor medals with Birr and Carrig and Riverstown and representing Offaly at the minor level are fond memories. (Birr minors were already eliminated when I came home from the seminary

and P. Cahill, F. Harrington and I were recruited by Paddy O'Brien and Ted Brohan!) The missing medals from Dolan's window of the never-to-be-forgotten street league organised by Fr. Ryan are the subject of conversation, even to this day! The final outcome between Carrig and Riverstown and the number 1's will probably be decided on judgment day when the whereabouts of the medals will be revealed. Maybe you might see me golfing in The Glens, with memories too of many who have passed on, or walking the streets of Birr, looking into the Camcor from the "Chapel Bridge" and you too might respond to my greeting as Jimmy Mac did a few years ago with 'Cé tá ann'!



**Fr. Gerald Grogan with his Primary School Classmates**

Back Row (L to R): J. Daly, B. Flynn, J. Holland, M. Cahill, B. Grogan, B. Murphy, T. Talbot, J. Shanahan, G. Barry  
Middle Row: L. Feeley, J. Frawley, ?, B. Sheils, T. Cullen, M. Hogan, S. Farrell, M. Hoctor, M. Dewane  
Front Row: J. Farrell, M. Boyd, M. Mulrooney, P. Williams, B. Talbot, G. Grogan, P. Delaney, G. Powell

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# BINDON BLOOD STONEY

## CIVIL ENGINEER SUPREME FROM CLAREEN

*By Ben Oakley*

**O**f all the professionals, doctors, dentists, lawyers, clergy, etc. who impact our daily lives none do more so and are more unsung than civil engineers who provide us with our roads, bridges, railways, ports, harbours, airports, water, sewers, drainage, etc.

In Victorian times, Bindon Blood Stoney was up there with the giants of the civil engineering profession, such as, Isambard Kingdom Brunel and Thomas Telford for the contribution he made towards the infrastructure as we know it today.

Bindon Blood Stoney was born in 1828 in the family home Oakley Park, Clareen, the second son of George Stoney and Anne, whose father was Bindon Blood. He entered Trinity College in 1845, graduating in Civil Engineering in 1850.

After college, Bindon succeeded his older brother George as assistant to the 3<sup>rd</sup> Earl of Rosse in astronomical researches at Birr Castle. In 1852, he went to Spain for survey work on railways and on returning to Ireland in 1854, became Resident Engineer on the Boyne Viaduct at Drogheda, which opened for traffic in 1855.

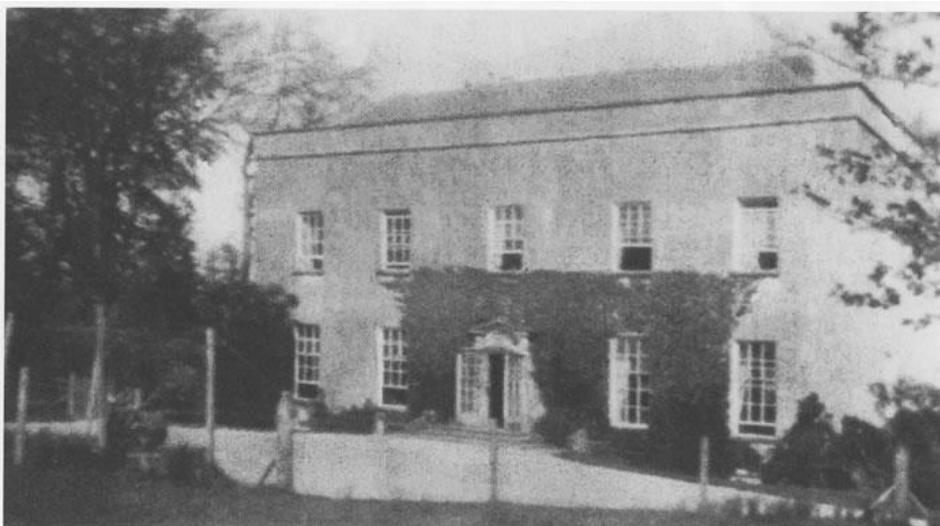
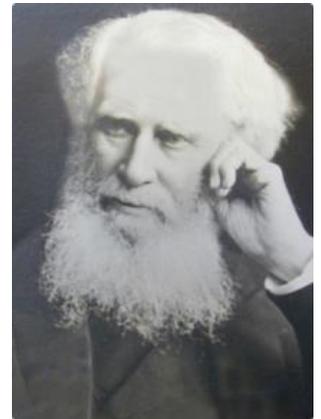
Thereafter, his career was concerned mainly with the development of Dublin Port, where his innovative techniques for harbour and marine works were to be adopted worldwide; they remain in use to this day. The large diving bell used for preparing underwater foundations, designed by Stoney, is on display on Sir John Rogerson's Quay in Dublin.

Dublin Port posed particular problems. It was shallow, with shifting sand banks and, with the prevailing westerly winds against them, difficult to access for sailing ships. As the 19<sup>th</sup> century advanced, so did Ireland's overseas trade, all of which went by sea. There was a need for berths

independent of the tide. In 1810, the British Admiralty initiated a detailed survey, putting their best man on the job, one Vice Admiral William Bligh who, as a young lieutenant twenty-one years earlier, had come to public notice from the 'mutiny on the Bounty' episode. Bligh was a brilliant navigator/surveyor and it was he who recommended the building of Dun Laoighre harbour in deep water. Work started in 1817. This solved the passenger problem but it fell to Stoney to deal with the freighters.

Working from Bligh's survey, for almost forty years he designed and directed the construction of the North, South and East walls and over 7,000 feet of quay walls, thereby converting tidal to deepwater berths. He designed the Alexandra Basin and the O'Connell and Capel Street (Grattan) bridges. He also designed a swing bridge since replaced by Butt Bridge. Between times he published numerous treatises and presided over the Royal Irish Academy and Institution of Civil Engineers. He died in Dublin in 1890. So, the next time you came to the North Wall on the ferry spare a thought for the man from Birr who made your trip possible.

*The above is based on a talk given to the Historical Society in September 2010.*



**Oakley Park, Clareen, Birr, early 1900's. The house was demolished in the early sixties.**

*Photo courtesy of Mary Corcoran Boissel*

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## REBUILDING A CITY

By Darren Hanniffy, son of Declan and Geraldine Hanniffy, Riverstown

**D**arren Hanniffy is GOAL's Country Director in Haiti. He arrived in Port-au-Prince hours after the earthquake struck on January 12<sup>th</sup>, 2010, to coordinate the aid agency's relief response. Here, he writes about the scene that he was confronted with in the immediate aftermath of the quake, the success of the initial response and the challenges that face the international community and the Haitian people as they struggle to get back on their feet and rebuild their country.

"At precisely 5 p.m. on January 12<sup>th</sup>, 2010, I was sitting at my desk in Tegucigalpa, the capital of Honduras, where I was working as the Country Director for GOAL, the international aid agency. We were at the end of another working day and I was preparing a report for our team in head office in Dublin outlining the progress that we had made on several issues that week.

At the same time - and just a few short hours away from my office - Haiti was being rocked by a massive earthquake. In just 35 seconds, the capital city of Port-au-Prince was almost completely flattened. 220,000 people were dead and another 300,000 lay crushed and injured by the falling debris.

About 10 minutes after the event I received a call from a colleague informing me that "something big" had happened in Haiti. In less than one hour a decision was made that GOAL should respond and, just seven hours later, I was making my way by private plane to the Haitian capital.



GOAL had no presence in Haiti at the time but within days, a 15-strong disaster response team had already begun to establish what was to become one of the agency's biggest ever post-disaster operations.

Much has been written and documented about the desperation, the smell of death, the loss and the suffering in those initial weeks following the quake. Despite this, I found no words were able to express the overwhelming sense of shock and disbelief in the faces of the survivors as

I walked through the rubble-filled streets the day after the disaster. I watched loved ones desperately digging for signs of life, others wandering aimlessly around what was once their home or, perhaps most sadly of all, the pain and anguish in the faces of those carrying away the crushed bodies of their family.

How was it for me personally arriving into the airport in Haiti?

There was a mixture of emotions. I was prepared for the worst and expected to see some awful things and, yes, it was awful. I was also excited and buzzing with energy. I desperately wanted to get on the ground to set up operations. The airport building was very badly damaged and remains closed today. I walked through a pool of water, broken glass and debris everywhere in the arrivals hall, no lighting or security or staff or anything, just abandoned.

GOAL had nothing in Haiti so we started from nothing. I slept in the open air for the first two nights beside the rubble of a house. I acquired a pick-up and graduated to sleeping in that for a week or two. The rest of the team arrived and I slotted in to the GOAL emergency machine that just kept rolling day and night for the next few weeks. The GOAL Emergency Team is made up of people, each with a different skill-set from Donor Funding, Plant and Machines, Finance, Community, Engineering etc. They each surge forward in their own area but link up with the team as they move. And the organisation grows fast. GOAL went from nothing to a large multi-million dollar organisation in 2 weeks, leading a very large food distribution.

GOAL has achieved a lot since we arrived in Haiti and there is a lot more that we intend to do. To the untrained eye, it might seem that very little has changed since the disaster. Port-au-Prince is still lying in ruins. The vulnerability of the people remains palpable. So far, however, the emergency response has been a success.

Enough plastic sheeting was distributed to protect the hundreds of thousands of homeless people against the rains. Food was distributed throughout the community. For its part, GOAL managed to feed almost 500,000 people who were left in terrible circumstances following the earthquake. Clean water is accessible for the majority of people through emergency water distributions and cash is being injected into the community through cash-to-work programmes that are being used to take away the rubble. Most importantly - and the ultimate reason why we consider the emergency phase of the response to have been a success - there has been no major outbreak of disease.

The task now is to rebuild the city. This is the major challenge. We must accept that it will take years. The

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Banagher								8.35		8.35				18.35
Birr	5.25			5.55		6.25	6.55	9.00	14.00	9.00	14.00	9.00	14.00	19.00
Kilcormac	5.37			6.07		6.37	7.07	9.13	14.13	9.13	14.13	9.13	14.13	19.13
Tullamore	5.45	6.00	6.15	6.30	6.45	7.00	7.30	9.35	14.35	9.35	14.35	9.35	14.35	19.35
Kilbeggan	5.55	6.10	6.25	6.40	6.55	7.10	7.40	9.45	14.45	9.45	14.45	9.45	14.45	19.45
Tyrellspass	6.00	6.15	6.30	6.45	7.00	7.15	7.45	9.50	14.50	9.50	14.50	9.50	14.50	19.50
Rochfortbridge	6.05	6.20	6.35	6.50	7.05	7.20	7.50	9.55	14.55	9.55	14.55	9.55	14.55	19.55
Milltownpass	6.10	6.25	6.40	6.55	7.10	7.25	7.55	10.00	15.00	10.00	15.00	10.00	15.00	20.00
Kinnegad	6.20	6.35	6.50	7.05	7.20	7.35	8.05	10.10	15.10	10.10	15.10	10.10	15.10	20.10
Clonard	6.25	6.40	6.55	7.10	7.25	7.40	8.10	10.15	15.15	10.15	15.15	10.15	15.15	20.15
Enfield	6.40	6.55	7.05	7.25	7.40	7.55	8.25	10.25	15.25	10.25	15.25	10.25	15.25	20.25

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Departing	Monday to Friday								Saturday		Sunday		
	<i>From Ha'penny Bridge</i>								<i>From Cathal Brugha St</i>				
Enfield	16.15	16.45	17.00	17.15	17.30	17.45	18.15	13.00	18.00	15.00	17.15	22.30	
Clonard	16.15	16.45	17.00	17.15	17.30	17.45	18.15	13.00	18.00	15.00	17.15	22.30	
Kinnegad	16.15	16.45	17.00	17.15	17.30	17.45	18.15	13.00	18.00	15.00	17.15	22.30	
Milltownpass	16.15	16.45	17.00	17.15	17.30	17.45	18.15	13.00	18.00	15.00	17.15	22.30	
Rochfortbridge	16.15	16.45	17.00	17.15	17.30	17.45	18.15	13.00	18.00	15.00	17.15	22.30	
Tyrellspass	16.15	16.45	17.00	17.15	17.30	17.45	18.15	13.00	18.00	15.00	17.15	22.30	
Kilbeggan	16.15	16.45	17.00	17.15	17.30	17.45	18.15	13.00	18.00	15.00	17.15	22.30	
Tullamore	16.15	16.45	17.00	17.15	17.30	17.45	18.15	13.00	18.00	15.00	17.15	22.30	
Kilcormac	16.15	16.45		17.15	17.30	17.45	18.15	13.00	18.00	15.00	17.15	22.30	
Birr	16.15	16.45		17.15	17.30	17.45	18.15	13.00	18.00	15.00	17.15	22.30	
Banagher	18.00 from Cathal Brugha Street									18.00			
Portumna	18.00 from Cathal Brugha Street									18.00	15.00	17.15	

Extra service on Fridays departing Cathal Brugha Street at 13.00 & from Ha'penny Bridge at @ 13.05

Some changes will apply to Bank Holidays Luggage carried at owner's risk.

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## GALWAY

DEPARTS	FRIDAY		SATURDAY		SUNDAY	SUNDAY <i>College Term Only</i>
Tullamore					7.00 p.m.	
Kilcormac					7.20 p.m.	
Birr	9.00 a.m.	3.00 p.m.	9.00 a.m.	3.00 p.m.	7.45 p.m.	3.00 p.m.
Portumna	9.30 a.m.	3.30 p.m.	9.30 a.m.	3.30 p.m.	8.15 p.m.	3.30 p.m.
Kilimor	9.40 a.m.	3.40 p.m.	9.40 a.m.	3.40 p.m.	8.25 p.m.	3.40 p.m.
Loughrea	10.00 a.m.	4.00 p.m.	10.00 a.m.	4.00 p.m.	8.45 p.m.	4.00 p.m.
Arrives Galway	10.50 a.m.	4.50 p.m.	10.50 a.m.	4.50 p.m.	9.30 p.m.	4.50 p.m.
Departs Galway	1.00 p.m.	5.30 p.m.	1.00 p.m.	6.00 p.m.	10.00 p.m.	5.00 p.m.

Bus departs Galway from Merchants Road. Some changes apply to Bank Holiday weekends

During college term, Sunday service will serve Newcastle Rd., Corrib Village and Dunurus

Haitian government's capacity to manage the response has been badly weakened by the earthquake that destroyed most of the government buildings and killed many key staff who would have been involved in managing the reconstruction. Without clear direction, without a rebuilding policy and without leadership, the reconstruction will be haphazard. The international community needs to focus on this issue now and a more holistic urban planning approach needs to be adopted if we are to maximise the opportunity that the funding for reconstruction affords us.

As an organisation responding to the disaster in Haiti, GOAL has evolved over time. Initially, I worked with a team of hardened emergency first responders during what we refer to as "surge operation". These GOALies worked night and day to distribute assistance to the most vulnerable. Food, water and shelter were desperately needed and GOAL worked hard to attend to these basic needs. Over time, the programme has grown significantly. The team has changed and by now I have seen over 70 GOALies come and go - each bringing a particular skill to the programme.

We are now moving into what is called the "early recovery" phase. This is the post-emergency phase when organisations like GOAL begin to move away from the hand-to-mouth assistance and on to a more sustainable approach where the beneficiaries become involved in discussions about how the aid should be targeted and are encouraged to take ownership of the projects.

This change empowers communities and promotes community spirit. It encourages the beneficiaries to begin to take the lead in helping themselves and gives them a strong sense that they can improve their own circumstances with some external support.

GOAL very much remains the owner of the projects and is responsible for keeping up the momentum. It is still an

emergency and the survival environment is still very fragile. It is the first step on the long road to helping Haiti rebuild what has been destroyed and rebuilding, using better techniques while improving morale and promoting community spirit.

Haiti is a difficult country to work in. It is very insecure and GOAL, as with all organisations that work here, face dangers on a daily basis. A lot of work is put into keeping the team safe. Security procedures are very tight and GOAL has put in place significant protocols to protect the team. Working in this environment is a challenge. With the upcoming elections, there is concern that the country will become more insecure again.

However, GOAL enjoys a lot of popularity in the areas where it works. We work closely with the communities and they respect this. This offers a level of protection to the organisation too. Insecurity is a challenge but it is part and parcel of the work that GOAL does.

I came to Haiti the day after the earthquake and was joined by a close family of GOALies that have worked together around the world. The camaraderie is very strong and we all enjoy the excitement of working together as a team and responding to disasters such as with Haiti. We also have a team of GOALies that are based in Ireland who work literally night and day supporting our efforts on the ground. There is immense satisfaction to be gained from this co-operation. There is a strong loyalty and bond that develops within GOAL when working like this. This is the payback that we get and this is why we like to work for GOAL.

As time goes by we see small improvements in the circumstances of the communities in which we work. We see them beginning to smile and we see them beginning to rebuild their lives. It is hard to measure or to photograph or to record, but it represents the first shoots of renewal. We hope that it will be sustainable and that it will continue to improve. There is no doubt that this will take time but it is worth investing in. Haiti represents an opportunity for the international community to demonstrate that a developing nation can be transformed out of the rubble. It will require commitment and determination but let's hope that that will be sustained so that we can hold Haiti as an example to other poorer nations that they too can improve their circumstances.

I will finish my work in Haiti before the end of the year and will return to Ireland. I will be sorry to leave Haiti as it has been a fantastic experience. The people whom I have met have been the highlight, particularly the GOAL team that I have worked with. I look forward to Christmas at home and the ceol agus craic with my family and friends. But I will also be thinking of the GOALies that will celebrate Christmas in Haiti, in Pakistan, where many of my colleagues from Haiti are now based, and in and in all the other developing countries where GOAL is in operation.



Scene of destruction after the earthquake in Haiti

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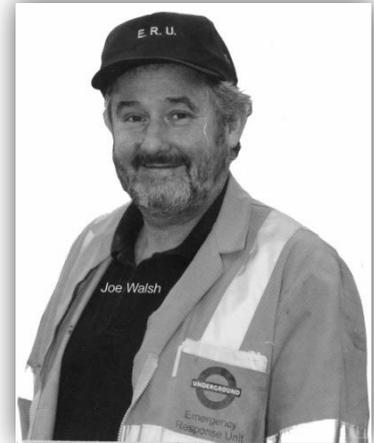
## JOE WALSH – HERO OF LONDON RESCUE

By Michael Donegan

Joe Walsh is a native of Birr. He is one of twelve children of the late Frank and Josie Walsh of New Road. As a young man he worked on Armitage's farm in Lisheen before emigrating to London in 1977. He first worked for London Underground in Golder's Green before transferring to 'Breakdown', the old 'Emergency Response Unit' at Neasdon. His unit deals with an average of two suicides a week, where people throw themselves under the wheels of trains. They also deal with hazards such as broken rails, derailments or dips and kinks in the tracks. He has a lot of experience of dealing with the carnage and mayhem of large scale train disasters. He worked on the disaster which occurred at Ladbrook Grove or Paddington Station in October 1999, when two trains collided head on at a closing speed of 210 kmh. Thirty-one people, including the drivers of both trains involved, were killed, and 227 people were admitted to hospital. A further 296 people were treated at the site of the crash for minor injuries. Another terrible tragedy that Joe worked on became known as 'The London Bombings' or 7/7. In July 2005, a series of co-ordinated suicide attacks on London's public transport system during the morning rush hour took place. At 08:50, three bombs exploded within fifty seconds of each other on three London Underground trains. A fourth exploded an hour later at 09:47 on a double-decker bus in Tavistock Square. The explosions were detonated by the bombers themselves, all four died. 52 other people were killed and around 700 were injured. The bombings sparked a massive Emergency Rescue Operation. This operation was spearheaded by the Emergency Response Unit of London Underground.

They worked round the clock after the terrorist attacks to help the police remove victims and move incident trains around — all while attending to day-to-day tasks on the rest of the operating Underground. On the morning of the 7<sup>th</sup> of July, the team responded immediately and had 10 men at each location within 20 minutes. Joe Walsh was one of them. "We were on a training course that day, but as soon as we heard about the attacks, the course was cancelled," he says. "At the scene of the disaster we evacuated people from trains and helped to clear people from the station. We weren't allowed to touch the bodies, we could only take the standing and walking injured out. At 8 p.m. we went back to the scene in case the tunnel was damaged, to make it safe for forensics to check for secondary devices." Joe and his colleagues didn't go home for several days, staying in a nearby hotel on standby to help the police move parts of trains, so that they could get any remaining victims out. "We are used to dealing with 'one-unders', when people throw themselves under a train,

but we never expected to deal with what we saw here," says Joe. "But somebody had to do it. When you are in a position to help people, you don't think about it, you just do everything you can. If you thought about it, you wouldn't go in.



We got a lot of people out and it was important to treat every single person with care and respect. Every person in there was somebody's relative, child, son or daughter."

Joe and his team mates had done a live exercise with the emergency services the previous week and he says that this preparation, along with two years' training for this type of incident, really paid off. "We worked with the fire brigade and paramedics, teaching them how to crawl under the trains to jack trains up and get to people," he says. Once the site had been cleaned up, it was the ERU's job to remove the trains and make the track safe. "The trains had been blown to bits, it took a lot of equipment to winch them out," Joe recalls. "Working conditions were difficult. It's a very confined space with just nine inches of leeway to work in, there is no space for cranes, and you can only use jacks. It was hot, with no trains running to ventilate the tunnels and it was dark. When the forensic teams were working in the tunnels, it went up to 140 degrees and they had to use breathing apparatus."

Joe stresses that the most important part of the ERU's work is working as a team. "Nobody ever does anything on their own, and so far, nobody on the team has ever been hurt," he says. "One concern is how quickly we can get to the scene on London's busy roads. Since 7/7 we have been granted permission to travel in bus lanes to an incident where lives may be in danger. That should help us to get to incidents even faster in future."

Joe is also the 'Gang Cook' and is responsible for making sure the men do not go hungry on the job. In 2008, Gordon Ramsey, the celebrity chef of 'The F-Word' tv programme, worked with them for a day and cooked a special meal for the men in the evening. The programme was featured on the London Tonight News show on ITV. Joe is very proud of his Birr roots and returns to stay at his old home in New Road whenever he gets a chance.

# BIRR CHAMBER OF COMMERCE



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## FOLLOWING AN EASTERN STAR

By Grace Ryan

*Two Roads diverged in a wood-  
I took the one less travelled by,  
And that has made all the difference.*

~ Robert Frost

This is my favourite quote and one which holds a lot of meaning for me. I have taken quite a different path in my life but I truly believe that it has made all the difference. Never in my wildest dreams did I think this amazing opportunity to study medicine abroad would become a reality.

I have already completed my first year, and looking forward to the challenges ahead in second year medicine. Living abroad, I have been immersed not only in the Eastern European culture of Slovakia but also in the many different cultures of 'mo chairde nua'. This has expanded the boundaries of Europe, from Israel to Germany, from Poland to Greece, from Portugal to Norway and, of course our neighbours in Great Britain.

Eastern Europe is very different to Ireland to say the least. Kosice will gain the honorary title of Cultural City of Europe in 2013. It can be described as the bustling metropolis of eastern Slovakia. As well as being my new home, it is the second largest city in Slovakia after its capital, Bratislava.

Still a relatively young but fast growing nation, Slovakia is a post communist country and gained its independence from the Czech Republic in 1993.

Steeped in an eventful and illustrious past, Kosice is now a hub of industry, especially in steelworks, commerce, science and culture. It boasts several universities, museums, galleries and a majestic theatre located in the centre, co-incidentally where I saw my first opera, 'Madame Butterfly'.

The beautiful centre of Kosice has a very European, sophisticated feel with quaint cobblestoned streets, aristocratic palaces, catholic churches and townfolk houses, amongst which you can find a variety of boutiques, cafes and restaurants where my friends and I frequently enjoy a variety of cuisines, teas, coffees and banter.

Like Birr, Kosice shares the prestige of having many protected heritage buildings. St. Elizabeth's Cathedral which is the largest in Slovakia and is Europe's most eastern Gothic-style church stands as one of Kosice's main landmarks.

The University Church itself is of Jesuit origin and is situated close to the Faculty of Medicine at Pavol Jozef Safarik University. The faculty offers a six-year programme in Medicine, taught through English by Professors from a variety of disciplines. University lectures begin at 7.30 am and we have weekly written, oral and practical exams. The university enjoys a close relationship with universities and

institutions in Prague, Paris, Nantes, Bordeaux, Padova, Essex, Dusseldorf, Amsterdam, Utrecht and Zurich.



Grace at Lake Bled in Slovenia

Living in Kosice has afforded me the opportunity to travel. Already in my first year I have been to Paris, Slovenia, Budapest and Vienna. My journey to Kosice entails flying to Budapest, where my sister studies Veterinary Medicine. From there, I board a big mass of steel that looks like it came out of a James Bond movie. The famous Hogwarts train comes to mind, except the trains we travel in to Kosice are a small bit older and colder. Nor is there any magic wonder or any of Bertie Bott's Every Flavour Beans on offer!

Outside Budapest, the unrelenting rolling plains of the Hungarian countryside fuse together with the distant skyline. In winter, the overnight snow covers the endless masses of land in a blanket of glistening white.

Getting home last Christmas was particularly memorable. The snow decided to fall on the day we were to fly home. Our flight already delayed, we were to witness several trucks driving down the runway in an attempt to get the snow cleared as fast as possible. An image I will never forget.

Living and attending university abroad has taught me so much and I look forward to the challenges ahead. Studying abroad has broadened my mind and opened up a whole new world for me.

It's so cool skyping my friends in three different time zones all at once. I can now proudly say 'goodnight' in several different languages. Dobre Nocs (Slovak), Laila tov (Hebrew), Gute nacht (German), Spochoinoi nochi (Russian), Bon nuit (French) and, of course, I taught them all the cupla focail as Gaeilge in return. Hearing them practicing 'Oiche mhaith' brought many tears of laughter



St. Elizabeth's Cathedral, Kosice

to my eyes!

Learning about new cultures and lifestyles has made me become so aware of my Irish roots and has ignited a very strong, national pride within me.

St. Patrick's Day means a lot more to you when you are away from the Emerald Isle. All the Irish in Kosice and friends from abroad squeezed into our very own Irish pub here. We all raised a pint of Guinness and Irish flags high in the air for Ireland. It inspired a deep patriotism which makes me very proud to say I'm Irish.

Finally, I would like to thank my family for their unconditional love and support, without whom I would be lost! Birr will always be my home, but for now I'm living my dream on the road less travelled by.

## LEAP CASTLE

*By Jack Ryan*

Leap Castle first came to my attention in the early 60's when my sister living in Brighton sent me a beautiful little cookery book. Its name was "A Taste of Ireland" by Theodora Fitzgibbon. The recipes are accompanied by some remarkable historic photographs. One is of Leap Castle and its caption reads 'The most haunted house in Offaly reputed to have twenty-four ghosts.' While I never had the pleasure of meeting such "spirited" people I spent many a moonlight night "scouting" the area looking for them. My young friends who were with me said that they met all twenty-four!

The princes of Ely O'Carroll who built the castle lived in it for about two hundred years. The Darbys who took over the castle from the O'Carrolls lived in it for three hundred years. The Leap estate passed into the hands of the Darby family through marriage with the O'Carrolls. Succeeding generations of the Darbys preserved and restored it over the years. Its occupation by them ended when it was burned down on the 30<sup>th</sup> July 1922, during the Civil War. If the old walls could speak, they could tell tales of many dark deeds. The upper dungeon was a place where prisoners were unceremoniously disposed of. Inside the castle, the oubliette, the bones in the dungeons and the skeletons walled in for centuries were physical evidence of past violence. The gallery, hanging in mid-air and the bloody chapel was the rendezvous of the reputed ghosts. Tradition has it that Teige O'Carroll murdered his brother at the altar of the chapel. Mrs. Jonathan Darby had many ghostly experiences which cannot be explained. The Darbys were of English extraction and the Leap branch was descended from Sir William Darby of Gadspy Hall, Lincolnshire. Jonathan lived in Brighton and wrote under the pen name of Andrew Merry. One of the ghosts was

identified by its nauseating smell and lustreless eyes and those who saw the apparition became violently sick.

Leap castle was rescued from dereliction by Peter Barlett, a young Australian, in 1974. His mother was descended from the O'Bannons, who were the sub chiefs to the O'Carrolls and occupied the castle but were forced to leave in Cromwellian times. Peter died in Australia on the 10<sup>th</sup> June 1989. From what I can remember, Peter was in residence in the gate lodge on one of our midnight hikes and little did I know that he was to die at a young age. Sean Ryan bought the castle and now lives there with Ann and their daughter Ciara. Sean, who is one of Irelands best known tin-whistle players, is now restoring the place to its former glory.



Leap Castle

*Jack has written a poem about Leap Castle and this can be read on the back page of this magazine.*

# CARRIG CAMOGIE STAR – SHEILA SULLIVAN

By Tony Dargan



Sheila with her All-Ireland Medal and Cup

Although camogie has come to be a major part of her life, Sheila Sullivan was a relative new-comer to the game. While in primary school in Carrig N.S., she loved all types of sport. At that time, swimming was probably her main interest, as she was a member of Nenagh Swimming Club and won an All-Ireland silver schools' medal in the sport. Sheila was very involved in athletics, taking part in the cross-country events and joining Birr Golf Club, of which she is still a member. Sheila also tried her hand at Gaelic Football for a year, playing in Birr. When she got into 6<sup>th</sup> class, her teacher, Mr. Dargan, asked herself and Caoimhe Gibbons to play with the school hurling team. They managed to get to grips with the skills and tactics of the game. Carrig N.S. did quite well, reaching the final of the Offaly Cumann na mBunscoil that year and winning the North Tipp Shield. Sheila played at wing back on the team. Sheila joined Birr Camogie Club that year also, and has never looked back.

In 1998, she made her first appearance with Offaly, playing in the backs for the under 14 team, under the management of Majella Bergin. It was a great honour to represent the county and she knew at that stage, that she wanted to achieve a lot more with them. It was then that she began to focus entirely on the game.

During her time in St. Brendan's Community School, Birr, there was a great group of players and a huge interest in the game. In 2000, they won the Leinster competition and Sheila was delighted to be a member of the panel, being only in second year.

The following year she joined the Offaly Junior panel for the first time, at the age of 15, and met some of the players that she has become great friends with since. This turned out to be a successful year for the county, as they reached the All-Ireland final for the first time ever in Croke Park, under the guidance of Pat Hoctor. Although they lost the match to Tipperary, it was a huge occasion for Sheila as she made her debut appearance, coming on as a sub for the last

15 minutes. In 2002, they won the under 16 'B' Leinster final and reached the All-Ireland final.

Sheila attended University of Limerick from 2003 to 2007 to study PE teaching. Again, she was fortunate to be there at a good time for camogie. They won the top colleges competition, the 'Ashbourne Cup', three years in a row during that time and Sheila had the honour of captaining the team during the third year. In 2005, she also represented Ireland in the Camogie-Shinty International in Inverness, which they won.

2008 marked a very significant change in the county set-up. Joachim Kelly came in as manager. His first statement to them was that they would be in the All-Ireland that year, a feat which they achieved, losing narrowly to Clare in Croke Park. The disappointment of this loss drove them on the following year and they managed to make amends against Waterford in the final. For Sheila, it was a dream come true to win the All-Ireland and it was indeed the pinnacle of her sporting career to that date. It was also a source of great pride for her family, who have been behind everything that she has done from day one. From the time her Dad, Tadhg, used to bring her swimming in Nenagh and her Mam, Mary, used to bring her to all the other activities she was involved in, to now, they rarely miss a match and are always full of encouragement and praise. Her brothers, Tadhg and Eoin, are also good supporters of camogie, despite the fact that they are both avid Tipp fans! There was great excitement and celebrations for months following this first All-Ireland win.

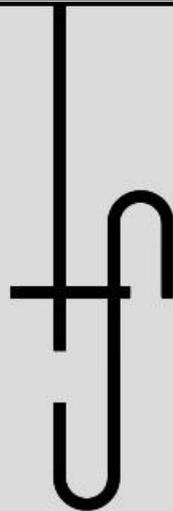
This year, they put in a huge effort to obtain the Intermediate crown. This was perhaps a sweeter victory than the first, as they really had to dig deep in the final few minutes of the match to overcome Wexford's comeback and find the winning scores. The thing that made the wins so special was the fact that they were achieved with a fantastic group of girls that get on so well. Over the last three years, they have really gelled as a group, along with management, and it is always reassuring to know that, on the field, everybody will do their all to help their teammates.

At club level, Birr also had a really successful year, reaching their first senior county final. Having a very young team, they accounted for themselves very well against Drumcullen.

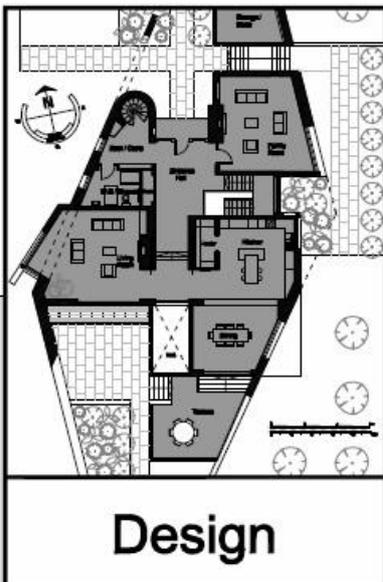
Sheila's hopes for next year would be that they can build on our successes at both club and county level and achieve the improvements necessary to hold their own in the senior competitions. Hopefully by doing so, it will leave Offaly camogie in a healthy state and competing at the grade that everybody strives to be part of.

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In its first four years of operation, Hector Smyth has secured planning permissions for projects in Birr and Tullamore, and in other areas of Offaly such as Rath, Fortal, Banagher, Kilcormac, Cloghan, Ballyegan and the Blue Ball, along with applications lodged in North Tipperary, Laois, Kildare, Galway, Clare, Westmeath, Dublin City, South County Dublin and Dun Laoghaire. Typical projects have included single houses, crèches, offices, renovations and extensions to dwellings, schools and protected structures.

Visit Hector Smyth's website at [www.hsdesign.ie](http://www.hsdesign.ie) for more information.

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## JOE KERINS – THE MET MAN

By Michael Donegan

Maybe it was all that rainfall sweeping down the sides of the Magillicuddy Reeks that set Joe Kerins on a life path of weather prediction and recording. Joe is a Kerryman, or a Traleeman, to be exact and one of a family of seven. Little did they think, all those years ago, when the nuns in Tralee first taught him the first equation of  $1+1=2$  on a chalk board that they would be setting him out on a lifetime love affair with the science of figures. After a secondary education with the Christian Brothers in 'The Green' in Tralee, Joe sat the Civil Service exam and then proceeded to sit the Metrological exam and qualify as a Station Assistant. The competition was fierce as only seven places were allotted out of the 130 potential Met Office candidates. The prize was selection for a five-week training course at the metrological training school at Dublin Airport. During those weeks Joe stayed in digs in Drumcondra and each evening an uncle who worked in the Civil Service took him on walking tours of the city. The training was exciting and demanding and, after passing an exam at the end of it, Joe learned that he was to be sent to Birr for his further practical training.

Joe had no previous knowledge of Birr and had only ever heard it mentioned by an eccentric aunt who insisted on pronouncing it 'Brrrr'.... On his arrival in Birr railway station Joe enquired locally for directions to the Met Station at Syngefield. It had been built as a state of the art weather station in 1954, just three years previously. Prior to this, a Mr. Telford had kept records with the aid of a small weather station in the grounds of Birr castle. There was a staff of five under the command of Des O'Connor at Syngefield. That morning, Joe met another metrological assistant called Paddy Cotter for the first time. Paddy took him under his wing immediately. He got him digs in Back Lane and introduced him to the sights and sounds of his new surroundings. Joe remembers that his digs cost £2-10s per week 'all found'. This left him approximately £2 to spare from his meagre wages. In Birr, Joe was introduced to the daily grind of a working weather station.

There were Hydrographs and Thermographs, Anemographs and Barographs. All types of intricate and ingenious mechanical devices had to be monitored and serviced regularly. The station functioned 24 hours a day and the work was carried out in shifts. The longest was the all-night shift from 11.30pm to 9.30am. Each hour the various instruments had to be checked and the graph data recorded. There was even a searchlight to check the height and type of cloud at night. Within ten minutes of its recording, the information had to be relayed to Dublin or Shannon Airport. In the early days, this was done over the



Joe, centre with Joe Bergin (left) and Finbarr Maher

telephone and later by Telex. It didn't finish there. The charts had to be removed from the various instruments and plotted. Averages had to be calculated from the hourly data of the wind or humidity graphs using specially formulated scales. These were pre-computer or even pre-calculator days so a high level of skill in mathematics was called for but the Kerry nuns had done their work well and Joe rose to the task.

At the end of five weeks he received his first permanent posting to Claremorris. After approximately two and a half years there he got the opportunity to return to Birr and jumped at it. By this time Ted Foley was in charge of the station but Joe was glad to be reunited with his old friend Paddy Cotter once again. He quickly settled back into life in Birr and has remained a loyal citizen of the town ever since. In 1968 he married Mary Delaney from the Mile Tree and set about the business of rearing a family of two boys and two girls. Joe looks back on his work in Birr weather station with great satisfaction and affection. He remembers a particular incident when he was sent out at 3.30 a.m. to plot the journey of the first satellite in 1957. He was armed with a poorly functioning ex-army issue flashlight, a star-map of the night sky and a pencil. As he scoured the sky for his first glimpse of the moving light he was startled by a sharp growl of contempt from someone unseen. It was a neighbour, Mrs. Powell, who had also come out to have a look, telling him sharply that he was looking completely in the wrong direction. On another occasion, he was confronted by a farmer who demanded all the grass temperature data taken hourly over a full week period. The man was obsessed with the idea that this information would help him solve the mystery of his sick cows. There was also the man who was building a slatted shed and wanted to know about the possibility of



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frost before he poured the cement. Joe advised him against it and as a result a lot of money and hardship was saved.

Joe has always found his work very rewarding. He is fascinated by the way that every day's weather

is different and how each day weaves its own distinct pattern and combination of atmospheres and temperatures. So many lives and livelihoods depend on accurate weather monitoring and forecasting, from farming to air travel to shipping. Now the business of collecting and monitoring is all automated and highly technical. The old ingenious mechanical instruments of Birr Met station are now obsolete and unused. They have

been replaced by sophisticated, unmanned, highly accurate, computerised equipment. Indeed the main recording of weather and climate data is now carried out at Gurteen College some miles away in an unmanned weather station. For some years Joe has felt that true data collection was increasingly affected by such factors as passing traffic and residential build-up in the immediate vicinity of the station. At least in its rural setting these influences will not now be a factor.

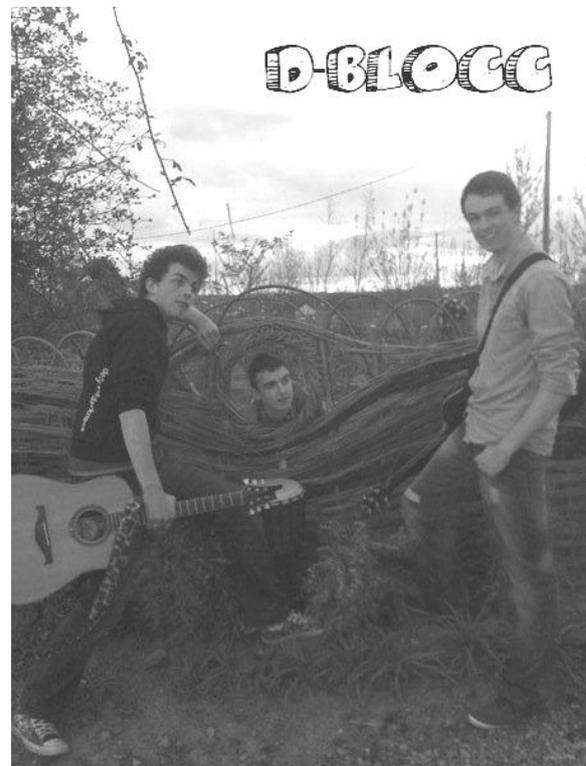
Since his retirement in 2002, Joe has thrown himself wholehearted into the pursuit of his favourite hobby, Bridge playing. He is an expert player and regularly plays all over Ireland and holds special Bridge classes in Birr every winter. He has always taken a very active part in the life of the town and has been very involved with organisations such as the Marian Hall Committee and sports and athletics clubs. Sadly, he feels Birr has changed over the past 50 years and not always for the better. The old custom of keeping the door on the latch for visitors is no longer a safe one though he and Mary are lucky to live among good neighbours in The Crescent. Even though he is retired now, Joe has never lost his fascination with weather and the elements. He takes keen interests in the Met reports on T.V. and radio and is proud of the high standard of weather forecasting by the Irish Metrological service.

## D-BLOCC – A BAND WITH A FUTURE

Local band D-Blocc has recently been described as a “dynamic acoustic trio”. The band consists of Reuben Noyce (guitar), Ciaran Keane (guitar) and Luke Garland (Bongo and Djembe drums). All in their late teens and living in the greater Birr area, they have been playing together for a few years now. D-Blocc first went public with an entry into ‘Roscrea’s Got Talent’. This debut acoustic performance went down very well and the boys picked up the runner’s up prize. The first gig soon followed in Liam and Ann Hogan’s ‘The Swan Inn’. Things got better and better for D-Blocc and by the time summer of 2010 came the boys were playing two or three times each week-end. The highlight of the summer came when they played a support slot for the hit singer and songwriter, Mundy, in Birr Theatre and Arts Centre.

Although they play mostly cover songs, they have written quite a lot of their own material. Their music is heavily influenced by acts such as Roesy, Mumford and Sons, Jack Johnson and Newton Faulkner to name but a few.

Leaving Cert 2011 looms and gigging must take a back seat to their studies. Rest assured, after that, D-Blocc will be straight back into action so make sure you look out for their gigs being advertised in local newspapers.





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# A GREAT JOB

By Paul O'Brien, Overseas Director for Concern

I have a great job working for Concern. I am responsible for all of the Concern programmes in 28 different countries around the world, from Africa to Asia to the Caribbean, Angola to Zimbabwe, and Afghanistan to Haiti. It is a very challenging role but a very rewarding one as well. Annually, Concern works directly with over 12 million extremely poor people – making a major impact in their lives.

I grew up just outside Riverstown, went to school in Birr – played hurling with the Presentation College, Carrig and Riverstown and St. Brendan's. I still treasure a number of underage country medals won playing for St. Brendan's and a Junior county medal won with Carrig and Riverstown back in 1981. Those formative years in school and playing hurling went far too fast, I didn't appreciate them enough at the time – "youth, they say, is wasted on the young". I still miss the belonging that comes with membership of a GAA club and the memberships of a rural parish community.

Growing up in rural Ireland with one TV channel, RTE 1, I clearly remember watching Radharc documentaries showing Missionaries working in development in Africa. I was really attracted to that life. So, having initially focused on agriculture, I became a Missionary and went to work in a semi-arid part of Kenya called Kitui. It was my first experience of rural poverty in Africa. Drought and hunger were frequent. People had very little. Women walked for hours each day to fetch water in the unrelenting sun. People, although extremely poor, also possessed an inherent happiness. They loved music (mainly drumming), dance and various social gatherings – the weekly market on a Saturday was a hive of activity that attracted large crowds. The extended family concept was very strong and older people commanded great respect.

We tried as best we could to assist people in their daily struggle to grow or secure enough food and water. We drove a four-wheel drive pick-up truck as there were no tarred roads, and were frequently called during the night to bring sick people or women in labour to hospital. During my time in Kitui I quickly evolved into a humanitarian worker struggling to understand how to adequately and sustainably address the issues of extreme poverty faced by the majority of Africans I knew.

I left Kenya after four years, returned to Ireland and studied development. At the end of my course Aengus Finnucane (RIP), who was then the CEO of Concern, asked me to join Concern and take up a position in Sudan working in a camp for internally displaced people. That was 20 years ago. Over the next few years I lived and worked in Sudan, Liberia, Bangladesh and Tanzania. I witnessed death in

Liberia in the early 1990s and the memories are still vivid of adults and children starving and dying because of war. I can still see people being brought into feeding centres in wheelbarrows, their

feet, hands arms and faces swollen with oedema simply because people could not find sufficient food to eat. I saw young boys and girls, 12 to 16 years old, carrying Kalashnikovs. These were the child soldiers of Charles Taylor who is now on trial in The Hague facing War Crimes charges. It reminds me of *Rotha Mór an tSaoil*, the big wheel of life, or what goes around comes around!

The low-lying delta country of Bangladesh was truly amazing in extremes; extremely fertile, extremely wet and humid and extremely crowded. When I first arrived in 1991 there were 120 million people living in an area one and a half times the size of Ireland. Everything appeared to be in miniature. For example a fully grown cow in Bangladesh was about the size of a 3 month old calf that you would see in BIRR Mart. Each year the equivalent of the population of Ireland is added to the population of Bangladesh. I returned to Bangladesh in 2009 to find the population is now an incredible 160 million people. It is the only country in the world where the height of the average person is getting smaller. Bangladesh is truly an amazing place with the most resilient people I have ever met. Annually, they face floods and cyclones; annually they survive and develop – however, population growth is a major concern.

For the last eight years I have been based in the Dublin HQ of Concern. Nevertheless, I still get to travel frequently to different countries to monitor the programmes that Concern is implementing either directly ourselves, with local partners or with local governments. My job is to ensure our teams based in the 28 countries where Concern works have the financial, material and human resources required to implement programmes. One of my primary responsibilities is to ensure our programmes are funded and this responsibility takes me to places like Brussels, Geneva, Berlin, London, New York and Limerick – where the Irish Government's department for overseas aid was decentralised to a few years ago.

I am also charged with ensuring all our staff of 200 International workers and 3,500 Nationals are safe and secure. This is not an easy task as Concern works in places like Somalia, Sudan, Afghanistan, Democratic Republic





**Paul with Nani and her sons and Majoj Kumar – Concern's Country Director in Sierra Leone (September 2010)**

Congo and Chad. When I started with Concern, the work of humanitarian workers was in many ways easier. Now we face many challenges, particularly around the safety and security of our staff. Aid workers are frequently targeted by different groups who may believe we have hidden agendas or that we are really spies in disguise.

Kidnappings and assassinations of aid workers have increased dramatically in the last 4-5 years. Sometimes, in places like Afghanistan we are confused with military personnel who frequently travel in the same types of white vehicles.

The development and humanitarian work of Concern is still vital. This year we succeeded in preventing a major famine in Niger in the districts where Concern works. We had been operating in Pakistan since 2001 and this provided us with the platform from which to respond to the major earthquake in 2005 and the displacement of over 2 million people in early 2009. Our work involved setting up a network of 35 local organisations and building their capacity. Now, with our financial assistance, those organisations have assisted over 300,000 people affected by the floods. Concern was also present in Haiti prior to the earthquake on January 12<sup>th</sup>. Again we were positioned with staff and supplies on the ground to respond to the disaster. The TV cameras have mostly left Pakistan and Haiti now (they never got into Somalia or Niger!) but the work of rebuilding lives continues. Concern works and I'm proud and happy to say I work for Concern.

## MEET THE WRAFTER FAMILY

**F**rank Wrafter from Woodfield, Birr and his wife Phyllis (nee Murphy from Coolderry) emigrated to Galt, Ontario in Canada on August 6, 1966. Frank and Phyllis were determined to give their four children, Marie, Vera, Michael and Irene, a better life. Frank had been a weaver in Birr Fabrics and decided to continue in this profession on arriving in Canada. After some time a career change beckoned and he joined Canadian Pacific Express in 1966 as a mechanic and retired in 1996 as a Damage Claims Clerk. While working at Canadian Pacific he also held a full-time position as caretaker of St. Patrick's Church in Galt and retired from that position when he retired from Canadian Pacific. Not content with putting his feet up on retirement, he then took a volunteer position with their new parish, St.

Clements Church in Cambridge as head sacristan and as of today he is still working there. The family ties with Birr have always remained very strong and each of the family has returned on numerous occasions during the past 44 years. 2010 was the first year all six members of the family returned to Birr as a complete unit to attend the wedding of Emmet Wrafter and Sam O'Connor, Frank's grand-nephew. Frank and his brother Tommy Wrafter remained very close. Unfortunately, Tommy passed away in 1990, but the bond that they held was passed down to their children and the cousins frequently visit each other either in Canada or Ireland. The Wrafter family will continue to return to Birr as there is no place like home.

**Pictured from left are Frank, Phyllis, Marie Wrafter Gauvin, Vera Wrafter Murphy, Michael Wrafter, Irene Wrafter Hutchings.**



## AN ACTIVE LIFE – LILY TAIT

By Michael Donegan

Lily Tait was born in Inchicore in Dublin. Her grandfather, John O'Callaghan, had been a sergeant in the Leinster Regiment in Birr. He had married Mary Sylvester. The Sylvester family lived in a cottage in the grounds of the Convent Primary School and the story goes that once, as a young man, her grandfather was scaling the wall of the school to help himself to fruit from the orchard and Mary caught him. She had started by giving him a telling off but finished up by accepting an invitation to a ball in the barracks. Romance blossomed and the rest as they say is history. Lily's father, Tim O'Callaghan, had been born in the barracks in Crinkill. He followed in the tradition and served in the fledgling Irish army. He was an army barber. He was stationed in Dublin and had met her mother Brigid Norton at a dance. Sometimes, when he visited his aunt Theresa, in Birr, he helped out at Smyth's or Winter's barber shop. Eventually he and Brigid got married. There were three girls born to the O'Callaghans. All three are still alive and well. Lily lives in Glebe Street in Birr. Rita lives in Raheny and is recently widowed while Monica lives in Warwickshire in England. Lily was born on the 27<sup>th</sup> November 1929. After 21 years, Tim retired out of the army and decided to open his own business in Market Square, Birr. The family moved from Dublin to Birr to live over the business in the square. Market Square was a very busy place at that time. She remembers her neighbours there with great fondness. There were the Donegans, Harringtons, Hendersons, Tierneys, O'Callaghans, Bowes and Liptons. Across the street stood Gilmartin's grocery shop and the O'Hare and Conway public houses. There was Williams' Hardware and Grocery, Arthur Bridges Garage, Doolin's Drapery and O'Connor's sweets and confectionary shop. The Roberts family were shoemakers around the corner in Castle St. J.J. Kinsella ran a saddlery nearby. Every weekend there were fairs and markets. On particular days there were different markets. The Banbh market was a busy place. The Purcells, Ned and Jack Farrell, and Tony Conroy dealt in cattle. The Coolahans dealt in calves. Customers came from all parts to her father's shop to get their hair cut. Lily helped out with the sweeping up on busy days. A haircut cost 6d and a shave cost 4d. Tommy and Paddy Kinsella worked in the



shop also as apprentices. Sometimes Lily got a tip of a 3d or a 6d. One Christmas she had been watching a lovely doll in the front window of Haslam's shop for many days hoping it would not be sold to anyone before she had enough earned to buy it. Just as the shop was closing on Christmas Eve she

had managed to gather the last few pennies to make up the 2/6- needed. She made it to the shop just as Miss Stapleton was about to close the door. The doll was still in the window. Johnny Hayes, the shop attendant reached in and got the doll for her and, proud as punch, she carried it down the street home. On Christmas morning she was sent down to Mr. and Mrs. Kieran Delaney's to bring home a ½ dozen bottles of stout for her Dad. Mrs. Delaney often gave her a couple of bottles of lemonade and a Christmas cake to bring home with her. There was little traffic and the street was the children's' playground. She skipped and

played hopscotch with her friends around the Manchester Martyrs monument in the square. They had plays and concerts in their shed at the side of the house. Sometimes she swam in the river behind the brewery with the Nevin and Ahern children from Castle Street. She remembers the excitement when Mary Harte got a new bicycle all the way from England. They all took turns speeding down Aggie Sherlock's hill. Mary's father had to come out eventually and rescue the bike.

Her first day at school was with Miss Hill in the 'Cottage'. The class was a mixture of boys and girls. School days were very happy and she remembers her teachers with great fondness. She was particularly fond of Mother Loua. She was a tiny person of great gentleness with amazing blue eyes. Lily remembers small birds coming to eat crumbs from her outstretched hands. Sr. Mary Gerard taught her music. There was great emphasis on religion and she remembers Dean Quinn very well. He was very involved in their First Holy Communion. He dressed like a character out of Dickens, with a top hat and long black coat and walking stick. There was much to-ing and fro-ing to the church. On First Communion Day the nuns put on a spread of tea and bread and jam for the children in the school. A Miss Phelan played the organ. She later married Vinny Byrne. Bishop Fogarty confirmed her class. She was confirmed with her best friend, Anna Corboy. It was another exciting day. The girls and boys sat separately in the church. This time there was a small party at home



**The Good Olde Days,  
Lily, left, with Ann Mulvey, Fiona Hayes and Phil Carroll**

with her mother. At the end of primary school Lily attended St John's secondary school for two years. She was taught there by Sr. Mellisa and Sr. Monica. When she was fourteen she left to get a job in Birr Shoes in the old workhouse. The wages at the time were very small but she liked her work and stayed there for 9 years. Naturally most of her wages were immediately handed up at home.

Lily loved going to the pictures and there was a cinema in the square called 'The Rialto' or Murphy's Cinema. It was 4d for a seat in the stalls and 6d for a seat in the balcony. Then a 'New Cinema' opened in Brendan St. She remembers that the first film she saw there was 'King Kong'. In her late teens Annie Noonan invited herself and Shiela O'Callaghan into the Stage Guild. Fr. Ryan and Jimmy Fanning were putting on a big show called 'Fatima' in the Oxmantown Hall. Annie Noonan was the pianist. It was a huge success and had to run for extra nights. After that, she became really interested in the Stage Guild and its activities and to this day has remained involved. She performed on stage and worked on costumes with Julia Carroll and her life-long friend, Betty Dwyer. She has served thousands of cups of tea to backstage crews, casts

and visitors over the years. Lily also became involved in St. Brendan's R.C. Church Choir with her friends Doreen Rigney and Joan Kennedy for many years and joined The Choral Society with her friend Chrissie O'Meara. Annie Noonan and later Birdy Hayes (nee Tait) were very involved then. Rev. Winston Grahame was musical director of the Choral Society. Gerry Dolan was, of course, in the middle of all these activities.

Once Lily got an invitation to a C.I.E. dance in the Oxmantown Hall and while there she was chatted up by the band leader, Sean Tait. Sean lived in John's Place, where his parents ran a newsagents shop. There followed a romance which took her on a tour of most of the dancehalls of the midlands. The band consisted of Birdy on piano, Sean on drums, Jackie Campbell on base fiddle and vocals, Joe Harte on accordion, Joe Powell on violin and Joe Barry on Banjo. They usually hired Haines' taxi to travel to the venues. In 1953, Lily and Sean Tait got married. Sean worked for 40 years at The Midland Tribune printing works as a linotype operator. He held a seat on Birr U.D.C. and was a very active member of Birr Fishing Club. They had two children, John and Bernadette. Sadly, Sean passed away 28 years ago and Lily still misses him very much. She likes to keep very active and has many good friends and neighbours. She was also very involved with the I.C.A. She was secretary of the local group for many years and loved all the activities. In its heyday, they put on lots of plays and entered competitions. Mrs. Richie and Br. Polycarp were usually the producers. Lily and Anne O'Meara set up a 'Vintage Kitchen' every Vintage week.

With all her friends, Betty O'Dwyer, Ann O'Meara, Anna Corboy, Chrissie O'Meara, Joan Kennedy and Doreen Rigney, she is still involved in St. Brendan's R.C. Choir, Birr Choral Society and the Stage Guild. She is also very involved with Birr Active Retirement Group and loves taking part in all their activities. Lily says the secret to a contented life is to stay active and occupied. That's the way she has been all her life and that's the way she intends to remain.

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## PRECIOUS JUBILEES

**S**r. Roberta Delaney celebrated the Diamond Jubilee (60 years) of her Religious Profession as a Sister of Mercy on Saturday 28<sup>th</sup> August 2010. Fr. Tony Cahir celebrated a thanksgiving Mass at the Convent of Mercy, Riverside, Birr and there was a celebratory luncheon afterwards. Sr. Roberta also celebrated her Jubilee in Limerick in the company of sisters there who had entered the convent with her and were professed in 1950. Twelve girls entered the convent that day and six are still alive and

kicking. Sisters Cyprian, Mary and deMontfort are in Limerick whilst Sisters Magdalen and Xavier are in South Africa. Sr. Roberta wishes to thank members of her Community, family, relatives and all the good people of Birr for their Masses, prayers, good wishes and gifts. Above all she thanks God for all His many blessings during her happy life in His service, especially the lovely people she knew in Limerick and here in her native Offaly. May God bless them all.

**Sr. Roberta (centre) cuts her cake with Sr. Maura, left and Sr. Nora, right**



**S**r. Rose Fennessy and Sr. Anne O'Driscoll celebrated the Golden Jubilee of their religious profession as Sisters of Mercy on July 3<sup>rd</sup> 2010 with family and friends. Both come from the same area, Bodyke and O'Callaghan's Mills and are very proud of their East Clare connections. Sr. Rose served as a primary school teacher in Nenagh, Birr, Borrisokane and Biloxi. Sr. Anne served as a post-primary teacher in Nenagh, Tulla and Birr. Celebrations began in St. Brendan's R.C. church with a memorable Mass concelebrated by Fr. Tony Cahir and

Monsignor John Barry. Later on, a delicious meal, arranged by Willie and Barry Loughnane, was graciously served by a very courteous staff in the County Arms Hotel. A lovely sun-filled day was enjoyed by all present and Srs. Rose and Anne are deeply grateful to God for His loving care and protection before and since 7<sup>th</sup> September 1957 when they entered the novitiate in Nenagh Convent. Moladh go deo le Dia.



**Sr. Anne (left) and Sr. Rose prepare to cut their celebration cake**

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## CELEBRATING SIXTY YEARS OF MINISTRY

By Rev. Irene Morrow

*Rev. Irene Morrow has resided in Birr since her 'retirement' from active ministry in 1993. This year she celebrates 60 years of ministry in the Methodist Church. In this account Rev. Irene recalls some of the milestones of this 60 year journey of faith.*



**Rev. Rosemary Lindsay (right) makes a presentation to Rev. Irene Morrow on behalf of the Local Circuit to mark 60 years of religious vocation.**

Sixty years ago I left Ireland and went to England to join the Wesley Deaconess Order of the Methodist Church. The Order, based in Ilkley, Yorkshire accepted candidates from Ireland and, if requested by the Irish Conference, stationed deaconesses in Ireland.

Ilkley is a small pretty town and a good place in which to find one's feet in England. Students from the Deaconess College shared in the life of local churches both in Yorkshire villages and in the cities of Leeds and Bradford. I had to listen carefully to the Yorkshire accent and learn some new words.

My sense of vocation to ministry within the church grew stronger and I considered the possibility of serving overseas. The Methodist Missionary Society accepted my offer and in 1955 I was sent to the Gold Coast. All the talk there was of the new political parties and people looked forward with optimism and excitement to becoming an independent nation. In 1957, Ghana came into being under the leadership of Kwame Nkrumah.

The Methodist Church in Ghana traces its beginnings to 1835. From the beginning, local people were trained for ministry and leadership. So when, in 1960, the Church became autonomous, Ghanaians were in leading positions; twelve missionaries were retained to fill assigned roles.

My work was mainly among women. Within the Church there was a strong women's fellowship and I was appointed national secretary. My 'day job' was in the Women's Training Centre in Kumasi, where we were teaching village women to read. For these women, a fortnight with us was

a break from the routine hard work of ordinary life. As well as reading, they learned more of the Bible, to sing and pray. They also learned new crafts and recipes. Working in Ghana was a happy and useful way to fulfil one's vocation. But it was interrupted! The British Methodist Conference resolved in 1972 to open up the ordained ministry to women and I felt I must offer.

So, after many tests and trials, I was accepted and ordained in 1974 at the Bristol Conference. The Irish Conference was watching 'the experiment' and several years later followed suit. However I was happily working in Lancashire and Yorkshire. I served in Accrington (a mill town), Blackpool (a holiday resort) and Rotherham (a steel town), all of which had seen better days. In each Circuit, I was made welcome even though they had a no previous experience of a woman minister or an Irish minister.

The Methodist church allows ministers to superannuate when they have travelled forty years: for me, that was in 1992 and I came back to Birr.

Being called a supernumerary minister is more to my liking than being described as retired, which is another way of saying 'gone to bed'! Some people describe the supernumerary as a spare part, but it is a privilege to be able to continue to work as and when necessary. It also leaves time to follow other interests.

I have been interested in the early Christian period in Ireland since 1963 when I shared in the Columban celebrations in Donegal and met one of the 'monks' who sailed in the currach from Derry to Iona. But until I came back to Birr, I had no time to pursue this interest. Imagine how I felt when I discovered, within the Birr Historical Society, people who shared my enthusiasm.

Thanks are due to the Rev. Rosemary Lindsay for arranging an evening in August to celebrate my sixty years in ministry. There can be no greater privilege than to be called by Almighty God to be his servant in his Church.



**Rev. Paul Kingston (left), President of the Methodist Church in Ireland with Rev. Irene Morrow and Rev. Rosemary Lindsay**

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# HE DID HIS COUNTY SOME SERVICE – THE GER OAKLEY STORY

By Tony Dargan

On the 6<sup>th</sup> of May 1992, the then Taoiseach, C.J. Haughey resigned. In his resignation speech, he quoted Othello (Act 5, scene 2), "I have done the state some service, no more of that". Fourteen years ago, October 1996, at the tender age of 18 years, Ger Oakley played his first match for Offaly seniors hurlers at wing-back, coming on as substitute in an Oireachtas match against Antrim. He was marking no less a player than the great Sambo McNaughton. Ger remembers this match vividly and when the final whistle blew, Sambo gave the match sliotar to Ger. It is now October 2010 and, at the young age of 32 years, Ger has announced his retirement from county hurling. It can be said that Ger has indeed "done his county some service....". He will continue hurling with his club, Carrig/Riverstown.

Although his first match was a momentous and exciting occasion for him, his last season with the county hurlers is tinged with sadness and regret. In 2010, he played his last competitive game against Tipperary in a league match and since then he was more than disappointed with his lack of playing time. Groin and shoulder ligament injuries at the end of April curtailed his involvement with the county for a month or so. From becoming a regular player with Offaly, he was now relegated to the substitute's bench and languished there for the remainder of the championship. Ger would have some grievances with the management over his non-participation and was given no reasons as to why this was so.

When asked to comment on Ger's retirement, the County Chairperson gave this response, "Ger Oakley's contribution to Offaly hurling should not be underestimated. He has played a total of 110 competitive games for Offaly, 67 of which were in the league and 43 in the championship. He filled a variety of positions, most notably pivotal positions of full-back, centre-back, mid-field and centre-forward. He could be best described as an inspirational player both on the field and at training where he never failed to give 100%. He won an All-Ireland senior medal in 1998 and two years later lined out at mid-field when Offaly lost to Kilkenny. In 2009 Ger was given the role of captain and, with his leadership qualities coming to the fore, he led Offaly to Division 2 success.

Ger Oakley owes Offaly hurling but the county also owes him a huge debt of gratitude for his wonderful contribution to hurling in the county."

In his 14 years hurling, Ger lined out under seven different managers. They included John McIntyre, Babs Keating, Michael Bond (twice), Pat Fleury, Fr. Tom Fogarty, Mike MacNamara and Joe Dooley. In Ger's opinion, Mike Mac was "a country mile" ahead of the other managers. He built "a team from scratch, was bold enough to make



Ger with his wife Amy and daughter Ruby

moves and decisions and always had the best interests of Offaly at heart. He knew his stuff and he commanded great respect from the players". He also greatly admired Pat Fleury.

When I contacted Mike Mac to tell him of Ger's retirement he wanted to pay his own tribute to him. "This colossus of a man was particularly proud to wear the Offaly jersey and he was rewarded with a long and distinguished career and recognition reserved only for the greats. For me personally, I am glad that we forged a friendship that continues to this day and I feel honoured to have played a small part in this man's great career."

With 130 training sessions under his belt this year and an average of 90-100 each year for the past 14 years, Ger's commitment and resolve cannot be questioned. He has made many friendships that he will cherish in the years ahead with players present and past.

Brendan Murphy outlines the type of person and player Ger is; "Ger as a person is a genuine gentleman. His most admirable characteristic is his loyalty, both on and off the field. His loyalty to the Offaly jersey over the past 14 years has without doubt been unbelievable, through good times and bad. The biggest compliment you could pay Ger is that everyone without exception dreaded the thoughts of marking him in training. He was completely devoted to the cause. It's fair to say his best performance came following his switch to full-back in 2003. In fact under Mike Mac he had two exceptional years in the position. Ger was always dependable and he will be a huge loss to the inter-county scene and within the Offaly camp".

Having played 110 matches in his career it would be quite difficult for Ger to pick out star players that he hurled

against and matches that hold a special place in his memory. Ger was one of only 16 or 17 captains of Offaly hurling ever to lift a cup of any significance when Offaly won the Division 2 title in 2009. What an honour this was for Ger, his parents Sean and Margaret, his brother John and sisters Aine and Catherine, his local club and the wider Carrig/Riverstown community. Another memorable moment for Ger was playing Cork in an All-Ireland semi-final in 2000. Tony Griffin (Clare) and Joe Cooney (Galway) are two players he had great admiration for.

In primary school, Ger made the school team at a young age. At second level he played at all grades and, though success eluded him the promise of a hurling career was obvious to all. He played under-age hurling with Birr where he won 2 under 14 medals. He captained the Birr minors in 1996. With his own club, he won a Junior medal in 1995 and also at intermediate level in 1996. Ger took on the job of underage coach in Carrig N.S. back in 2004

and, although he is a busy farmer, he still makes time for his training sessions each Friday at the school.

When I asked Ger why he chose now to retire, he had little hesitation in listing a few things that influenced his decision. Among the reasons he gave were the following. He didn't know whether he still was going to have the appetite to train or play at senior level due to the enormous commitment it entails. He has an increasing workload on his farm in Ballagh, which he carries out single-handedly and, most important of all, Ger married his great friend and soul mate Amy on the 17<sup>th</sup> March 2006. Ger has a 16 month baby girl, Ruby and both Amy and Ger are expecting their second child in February. Ger met Amy when he was aged 20 years across a crowded room in the Riverside Inn and he's "besotted" ever since. However it took him seven years to propose, which he did on bended knee in Lacken Castle in 2004. Ger will now have the time he always craved to spend with his expanding family.

### Feile Ceoilanna Na Scoil, Athlone 1977, Fifth Class, Convent of Mercy, Birr



Back Row (L to R): Ann Finnane, Ann Pilkington, Ann Grealy, Lorna Carroll, Paula Cahill, Caroline O'Meara, Siobhan Clifford, Margaret Butler, Jacqueline O'Shea, Noelle Carter  
3<sup>rd</sup> Row: Debbie McGrath, Mairead Kearns, Patricia Ryan, Mary Lempriere, Caroline O'Donovan, Bernadette Carey, Jennifer Egan, Edel Callaghan, Christina Tooher, Elizabeth Tooher, Ursula Sheils  
2<sup>nd</sup> Row: Lorraine Landy, Fiona Scully, Lucinda Corrigan, Collette Fallon, Niamh McNamara, Chrissie Power, Sinead Spain, Suzanne Liffey, Margaret O'Gorman, Jacqueline Parady, Valerie Kinsella, Yvonne Corrigan  
Front Row: Clare Kearns, Margeurite Watson, June Hayes, Deirdre Guilfoyle, Ann-Marie Loughnane, Ann Geoghegan, Janet Horan, Aisling Madden, Celine Delaney, Emer Dolphin, Caroline McCarthy

## WITHOUT FRONTIERS

*by Nessa Feehan, daughter of Jack and Emer, Moorpark Street  
and Missy Cleary, daughter of Pat and Bernadette, Burke's Hill*

**A**fter several months of travelling in South America we decided to give something back. While trawling the internet in search of affordable volunteer opportunities in an amazing continent, we stumbled across the website for Pisco Sin Fronteras (PSF). It is a wonderful organisation, helping to rebuild a poor fishing town, on the Peruvian coast, just south of Lima. A massive earthquake hit Pisco in August 2007, destroying 80% of buildings, tearing families apart and shattering lives.

We joined the team of dedicated volunteers in February 2010 and soon became part of the growing PSF family. Our allocated month's stay came and went in a flash of new friends and new experiences. From rubble removal, trench digging, pouring concrete floors and brick laying to teaching English and helping in a local childcare centre, we could not leave yet, with so much work still to be done.

Missy joined the management team in the role of volunteer co-ordinator. She was responsible for meeting and greeting new recruits and making sure everyone was happy and safe. Nessa undertook the setting up of an English language programme to help enable local people learn new skills.

When not busy in the office we were out on site getting hot and sweaty, helping local families to move out of tents and shacks, made from bamboo and plastic into more permanent and secure homes.

The family that most touched our hearts during our six months in Pisco was Delia's family. Delia is a nurse, who works away from her young family for three weeks out of every month, while her husband Alejandro takes care of their three young children, as well as working long hours in a local restaurant. The family have lived in a tattered tent on a dirt floor without running water, electricity or cooking facilities since the earthquake destroyed their home three years ago. Sharing one single bed between them and living in constant fear that their few remaining belongings would be stolen from their non-secure home. We, along with a team of 30 other PSF volunteers helped them improve their lives and their eleven-month-old baby's chance of survival, by giving them a brand new modular home. It comes complete with concrete floor, cooking facilities, furniture and a bed for everyone and all made by volunteer hands. The joy and happiness on the family's faces when they first saw their new home was the most rewarding, touching and proud moment of our lives.

Despite all the hard work we still found time to mingle with other volunteers from all over the world, England, Australia, Brazil, Canada, Sweden and France, to name just a few. We also had the opportunity to organise social and



**Nessa and Missy with other volunteers  
outside Delia's house**

fund-raising events, both in Pisco and at home in BIRR, through our families and BIRR Lions Club.

The money raised in BIRR was used to build a much-needed centre, for the blind community of Pisco. It is a place where they can safely meet and work. Fund raising events such as the table quiz held in the Swan Bar, BIRR and the events organised amongst the volunteers are fundamental to the continuation and success of PSF. The organisation, a Peruvian NGO, does not receive any funding or financial aid from any government bodies. Therefore, the work we do relies almost entirely on donations and events organised within the volunteer community. One such event, which we decided to run, was a "silent auction". This was a great success and everyone enjoyed themselves bidding on items donated by other volunteers. We decided to use the money raised during this event to build a small children's play area. PSF hope to be able to continue their good work rebuilding the town of Pisco and the lives of the local people for the next ten to fifteen years. By helping people to improve their living conditions, making them more aware of their environment, teaching them new skills and helping them to help themselves, we hope to build a brighter future for all the people of Pisco. Eventually, the time came for us to leave and with heavy hearts and many tears we said goodbye to our new friends.

Anybody interested in volunteering, donating or more information about this life-changing organisation, can check out the website [www.piscosinfronteras.com](http://www.piscosinfronteras.com)

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# CHEEK TO CHEEK

by Frances Browner

*"A rugby pal of mine, Young Munsters' coach, Mickey Cross, always impressed on players to tackle 'cheek to cheek.' It was the safest way, he said, to topple an opponent, safer than a head-on collision. I learnt this to my dismay when playing with Birr RFC back in 1953."*

\* \* \*

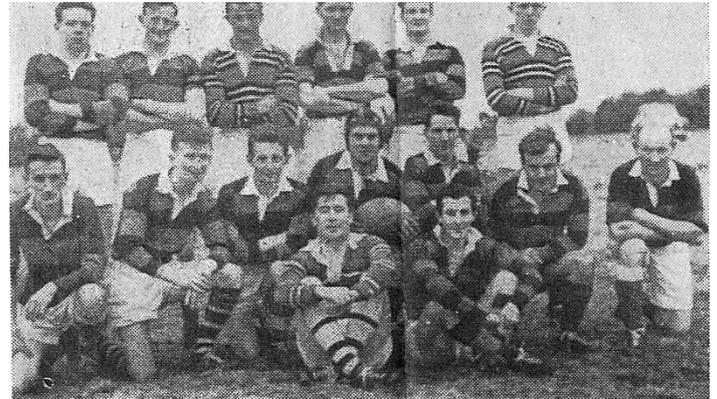
**M**y father arrived in Ferbane in November 1951 to survey sites for the proposed new Power Station. It was a pleasant enough evening, with shards of autumnal sun still evident, when he dis-embarked the bus on the Belmont Road. His instructions were to pick up equipment at the local Garda station. A handsome young man of twenty-five, with a shock of black shiny hair, he cut a dash, as he swaggered through the sleepy town. On rounding *Hiney's* corner, chance stepped forward in the form of Jimmy Madden. Within an hour, he had not only located his kit, but had found digs above Chapman's sweet shop, and an assistant. Soon, 'Mr. Madden' and Connie Browner were renowned in this rural community.

A city boy, he knew little about the country; but as a Munster man, Connie knew all about rugby. Eventually, the two would wed. "In a country place like that, the club finds you," he discovered when destiny despatched fellow Limerick native, Des O'Brien, to fetch him. A teacher at Birr Vocational school and a player with the RFC, Des succeeded in signing on the new recruit. Connie togged out the following Sunday and playing rugby for Birr was one of the highlights of his term in the midlands.

"They were a terrific team and a fierce nice group of lads. There was Jock Rafferty, who took the kicks; Gerry Hoare, hooker; Jim Phelan, wing forward, and a CIE chap, Bill (Porky) Dillon. He was an immense size of a man who wrote annual reports that were worthy of a *Pulitzer Prize*. There was a tall lad, Brendan Heffernan; and the two Banagher boys, Kevin Martin and wing forward, J.J. Hogan.

A car would collect me every week and take me to Birr, or whatever town we were playing that day. We togged out in Egan's Hotel there on Main Street and played in a pitch behind the *Esso* station. After the match, we would return to the hotel for a wash and the lads would drink a few pints while I tried to start a singsong. That night, the club paid for my meal, hillocks of homemade brown bread, cold roast beef and tea you could trot a mouse on, before driving me back to Ferbane. There was no training, as far as I know, I never had to train anyhow. Maybe they considered me something of a star because of my history with Shannon and Garryowen!

We had some great games. J.J. Hogan and I created a colossal try against Mullingar one day. I do not recall who



**Birr Rugby Team 1956/57**

**Connie Browner is in the front row on the left**

actually scored it, but we'll give him the credit anyhow! Another time, against Tullamore, Willie Wall, on our front row, dribbled the ball over the twenty-five yard line thinking it was the goal line. He dropped the ball and fell on it, full sure he had scored, and could not understand why no one was cheering when he stood up from the ruck. We played Lansdowne too and I happened to be in Dublin at the time so I got a lift down with the Lansdowne lads. The country clubs used to organize fixtures against senior clubs, for the practice you see, and to give their supporters a bit of a treat, a chance to see nice football.

They were great days and to top it all, I became engaged to a girl from Glynn, Sadie Bell, so things could not have been better. An incident occurred then that could have caused me to give up rugby forever or take to the drink. Thank God, I did neither.

It was a Sunday afternoon, I remember it well, Birr were advancing towards the 1953 Provincial Towns Cup and we were playing against North Kildare. About ten minutes before the end of the first half, one of our forwards caught the ball at the end of a lineout, broke away and ran diagonally across the field. He eliminated the scrum half and I spotted an opening. Calling for the ball, I took the pass, straightened up and sprinted as hard as I could towards the try line. I was the out-half, the last man on the line, and it was the first time that day I had a chance of scoring. I was making the best of it.

Suddenly the gap closed. This lad, Brendan Coleman, not my opposite number, but a centre, came in to seal it off. He lunged forward, about knee high, and challenged me head on. It wasn't cheek to cheek, you see, and I caught him with my knee on the forehead. I was travelling at a terrific speed and soared out over him, tumbling for about five or six yards, before hitting the ground with force. By the time I stood up and returned to check on Coleman, I knew that he was hurt. His eyes were closed; he was snoring, and seemed stunned although there wasn't a mark on him.

When he bared his teeth a bit, there were droplets of blood visible, so they took him off and brought him to a nearby cottage hospital. He died within forty minutes.

Everyone went back in a daze to Egans. They wanted me to have a brandy, but I couldn't. I was just too shocked. When I didn't drink that night, I never will. I took a cigarette alright, even though I had given up smoking for Lent. The Guards took me to the station for a statement and that was a desperate ordeal altogether. A few of the North Kildare lads were there and they agreed that it was an accident; there was nothing malicious about it at all. Everyone was so kind. Kevin Martin drove us to Summerhill for the removal and back again the next day to the funeral. It was very sad. Brendan's girlfriend had been at the match, and his brother was playing that day. When you think of the poor Colemans, a nice farming family like that, losing a son must have been heartbreaking.

Birr had withdrawn from the cup, but North Kildare organised a replay six weeks later and insisted that I line out, arguing that if I didn't play that day, I never would again. So, I participated anyhow although my heart wasn't in it. They beat us and went on to win the Cup. The season was over then, and I found comfort in the company of friends and my future in-laws whom I visited every night to keep from brooding.

The ESB transferred me to Cork at the start of the summer and after that to Donegal. I was gone for four years before returning to survey a site for the Bord na Móna plant at Derrinlough and went straight back to Birr RFC. I didn't think of playing with anyone else. The draper, Pilkington, was now front row prop; Jonathan Oakley the confectioner was there, and Mick Harbourne, who worked in the Met office. The two Harrington brothers had joined up, and Fitzer, a local lad who was mad on rugby. Every evening after work, the two of us would meet up with Francis Harrington, to practice the 'scissors move.'

Harrington passed me the ball from the left and I would run across the field. Fitzer advanced from the right, and then cut back. I would turn and switch the ball back inside to him. Receiving the ball, he would cross behind me and head for the try line, as I continued running. We were travelling then in opposite directions like the two tangs of a scissors. The idea was to catch the opposition on the wrong foot. By the time they realised I didn't have the ball, Fitzer would have scored. Hopefully! After drawing with them twice, we beat Navan with a move like that. Years later, I met a man, Ring, who was with the Board of Works. 'Did you ever play for Birr?' He asked me. He was on the Navan side that day and cursed our famous 'move.' He said he saw what we were doing, but could not do a thing to stop us!

Five years ago, I was back in Birr at the wedding of my wife's niece. Eating breakfast in Dooly's, I spotted a fellow who looked familiar. By any chance, I asked the waitress, is that Gerry Fitzpatrick. I don't know, she shrugged, they call him

Fitzer. Did he ever play rugby I inquired? I couldn't tell you, she smiled, but he talks about nothing else. Sure enough, it was my old teammate, and we spent the morning reminiscing about rugby. We could have spent the whole day, he was that keen, and he remembered every kick of the ball. He had even taught our 'move' in later coaching sessions, assuring his young squad that "it always worked for us!"

When Birr broke up, I was moving to Dublin and in my thirties so it was time to pack it in. And I had six children by then, three of them prospective young players. In fact, two of my sons, John and Gerry, played with the Birr President's XV team at their Centenary Fixture in 1987, a very enjoyable event. It was an honour for them to be playing for their father's old club, and in their mother's native county.

Birr RFC was the last club I played with and, as a result, I look back on my time there with great fondness. Great camaraderie. Great rugby. Great friends. It always brings to mind Mickey Cross's coaching call – 'cheek to cheek, Connie; always tackle cheek to cheek.' I learnt the hard way that he was right."

\* \* \*

Every November, for the past fifty-seven years, Brendan Coleman's name appears on Da's List for the Dead. This story is one we grew up with and as children, our favourite part was the 'cheek to cheek'. As an adult, I realize now how harrowing the accident must have been for him, for his team, and for his club. I can see them all huddled in O'Brien's bedroom that night, young men in their teens and twenties, shoulders hunched, gazing through a smoky haze, bewildered by Fate's first cruel blow. Their concern for a friend impossible to articulate. Their grief at a player's passing too profound to express. Their love for rugby forever marred by this memory.

"There was no cleaner player than Connie Browner," Jim Phelan told me, "a gentleman to his fingertips. After the collision," he continued, "Connie dropped the ball and ran to Coleman's aid. He didn't even dream of scoring."

In a letter to his father, dated 12/3/1953, Da wrote: *The Birr lads could not have done more for me, staying with me all evening and Des O'Brien even made me stay with him for the night. His landlady, Mrs. Hackett, was very kind, giving me something to make me sleep. The Birr Club had a Mass said for the deceased in my name the next morning and the whole team attended. I had to appear at the inquest after that and I went to pieces again. These last few days have been terrible but please don't worry about me. Prayer is the only thing now. The deceased, Brendan Coleman, was at confession on Saturday and Holy Communion on Sunday. It is consoling to know that God took him in a State of Grace."*

## FROM BOTH SIDES OF THE DESK

By *Bridget Barber N.T.*

**M**y first memory of Mercy Primary School, Birr brings me back to “the cottage” in the schoolyard and Miss Hill. It was my first day at school and she had given me a red candy cane to ease my entry into the world of education.

In my next memory I am kneeling on the floor in the Junior Block for the blessing and official opening by Rev. Monsignor Quinn. Miss Hill was the only lay teacher I encountered. She was a kind lady and, although firm in her discipline, she was much loved by her “Babes”. From then on all my teachers were Sisters of Mercy or Nuns as we called them. They were excellent teachers who provided a good education for all. They always had the best interest of the pupils at heart but some of them were very strict.

There was a great emphasis on the teaching of the 3 R’s....Reading, Writing, and Arithmetic. Irish was taught with great enthusiasm. It was a compulsory subject in all State examinations. The language was very complex and difficult to learn. Its difficulty coupled with the compulsory aspect, only served to turn children against their native tongue. Maths were always thought by formula. Tables, formulae and facts relating to money, weight, capacity and measure were learned by rote. From inches to miles and from ounces to tons, we were all well taught. Mental arithmetic was of paramount importance as this was the pre-calculator era, so children had to process data in their heads. Questions such as 15% of €300 or 4/5 of 80 would elicit a quick correct answer. In English, reading and grammar were taught systematically. Appreciation of literature was neglected. Luckily for me, I had an excellent teacher of English in Sixth class and she inspired me with a great love of poetry.

We were blessed with our music teachers. We called it singing then and it was taught through the Kodaly system. Even today, when I pick up a new piece of music I immediately translate it into Tonic Solfa or doh, ray, me.

There was a huge emphasis on the teaching of Religion. The questions in the Catechism and the stories from the Old Testament were committed to memory. In the Catechism Notes, we encountered terms such as Transubstantiation, Affinity and Consanguinity. I was an adult before I fully understood these terms.

The 1950’s were bad years for the Irish Economy. Families were large and incomes were very small. Most mothers stayed at home to look after their children. Money was a scarce commodity in most houses but people did not seem to mind. This depressed economy meant that many children left school at fourteen years of age. For many, Second Level education was not an option. Third Level education was out of the question. The education received in the Primary School equipped children for life. As well as

teaching the 3R’s, the Sisters taught Needlework, Knitting, Cookery, Laundry, Geography and History.

Children worked very hard in school. They all wanted to pass the Primary Certificate in Sixth Class. This examination would equate to a good Junior Certificate today. For many children it was the only Academic Certificate they ever received.

At that time there were few distractions in the school day. One of the highlights of the year was the “Festival of Liturgical Music”. This Festival alternated between Roscrea and Birr. We learned the Gregorian Chant, donned our navy serge gym-slips and white blouses, and then travelled to Roscrea by train. Mass was said in Latin at that time and we learned the Latin Mass and the Gregorian Chant with great diligence, hoping to gain a place in the Church Choir. Corpus Christi was one of the most important Church Feasts. School children wore their white dresses for the occasion. Religious groups such as the Legion of Mary, the Children of Mary, the Confraternities and the Sodalities raised their banners high and processed around John’s Mall reciting the Rosary and singing Hymns. The First Communicants of the year strewed flower petals on the ground in honour of the Blessed Sacrament. The ceremony concluded with Benediction in the Church.

After Primary School, I went on to St. John’s Secondary School. There I encountered the most wonderful, dedicated teachers both lay and religious. Classes were generally small, having about 20 in each. They encouraged us to make the most of our talents and pursue a career. Following the Leaving Certificate of 1967, five girls were “called” to Teacher Training College.

In 1969 I began my teaching career at Mercy Primary School, Birr. I felt very daunted going in to teach with the Sisters who had been my teachers. I was the only lay teacher on the staff. I need not have worried. They were extremely good to me, offering help and advice when I needed it. The pupil/teacher ratio was very high with about 50+ children per class. The Department of Education had just introduced a new child-centred curriculum which now included Arts, Crafts and P.E. Teachers worked very hard at implementing these new ideas but they were hampered by large classes, inadequate facilities and lack of funds. Nevertheless, they did great work. I taught Senior Infants,



Junior Infants and Special Class. I left teaching in 1979 and returned in 1995.

When I returned I was amazed at the improvements. Children had lovely uniforms so everybody looked the same. They had better footwear and better lunches. They had all the books that they needed and the pupil/ratio was 30:1. There was a greater degree of parental involvement that was helped by the setting up of a Home/School/Community Liaison Teacher.

Yet again there was another "new" curriculum. There was huge emphasis on English language development, creative writing and new methods of teaching reading. In Maths there was a more hands-on approach. Children were encouraged to explore numbers, tease out the problem and arrive at the correct solution. Prediction, Experimentation and Recording were the buzz words in Science. Music now included Listening, Responding, Performing and Composing. Social, Personal, Health Education and care for the environment were now part of the Primary School Curriculum. Swimming, Gymnastics, Athletics and Dancing were now included in the P. E. programme. All subjects were now introduced in Junior Infants and taught right through to Sixth Class. The Department of Education and Science aspired to having a pupil/teacher ratio of 15:1 in the Junior cycle and 20:1 in the Middle and Senior cycles. Funding was put in place and the future looked bright for Primary Education. Sadly, with the collapse of the economy, everything changed.

For this stage of my career I taught several classes until I took early retirement in September 2010. I had seen a complete change, now the Staff comprised of lay teachers only. Throughout my career, I taught with many excellent and dedicated teachers, many of whom are still living in Birr and the surrounding area.

I taught many brilliant children who went on to pursue professional careers in which they excelled. I met many dedicated parents who made huge efforts to ensure the best education for their children.

When I began my career it was all talk and chalk. When I returned in 1995 there was a huge emphasis on the use of computers in the classroom. Teachers attended computer courses to heighten their proficiency in I.T. and ensure the most up-to-date methods for their pupils. Now, the latest teaching aid is the Interactive Whiteboard, bringing Primary Education into the 21<sup>st</sup> Century.

At the end of my teaching career I would like to think that I had some positive influence on my pupils. I hope that I encouraged them to make the most of their lives by using their talents to their best advantage.

In the words of Kathy Davis "In years from now it will not matter what my bank account was, the car I drove or the sort of house I lived in.....but the world may be different because I was important in the life of a child".

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## JOHN J. KINAHAN – THE ‘BIRR FLIER’

As part of the Vintage Week programme for 2010 the Wolftrap Cycling Club hosted a criterium cycle race on the streets of Birr. The race was held to honour the memory of one of cycling’s greats – a local man from Clareen.

Most people would say that Ireland has only come to prominence in the cycling world over the past 15 years with the unearthing of Sean Kelly and Stephen Roche. We still wonder in amazement as to where these tremendous sports people get their courage and determination from. However, it is often forgotten that John J. Kinahan of Clareen, near Birr, smashed many cycling world-records early this century.

John J. was a truly remarkable athlete, who ventured into the cycling world at a time when there was widespread change, with motor cars among many things gradually beginning to come into existence. Born on the 22 November, 1884, John J. showed signs of his desire for sport from an early age. By the time he was 18 years of age, John J. commenced his sporting career in cycling, boxing and weight-lifting. One year later, in 1907 he decided to concentrate on cycling and, to coincide with his decision, he achieved his first major honours, winning the Leinster and Irish championships. His reputation in cycling improved rapidly as he went on to take the mile, three mile, four mile, five mile and 10 mile Irish Championships, in each of which he set records in 1908 and 1909.

This exceptional talent conquered every cycling occasion in Ireland within the short time of three years. By this time, America was crying out for his talents and in 1910 John J. accepted that call.

His American expedition earned him a place in cycling history. He won the Newark one mile race in August of 1910 and, four months later, he earned an American record by winning the one mile at Madison Square Gardens in a remarkable time of one minute, twelve seconds.

It must be remembered that racing bicycles at that time



Vintage Criterium Race 2010

were heavy and gears were not the same as they are nowadays. There was no such thing as disk wheels for aerodynamic purposes.

“The Birr Flier” was now at the pinnacle of his career. In December 1910 he won the five mile race at Newark in seven minutes, eight seconds, establishing yet another American record.

Also in this month, he entered the 2,340 miles race (extended over six days) which took place at the Madison Square Gardens. Here he set his first world record in a gruesome 77 hours. He also smashed another world record in the 3,330 miles (six days and nights) at the same venue in 110 hours. His reward for winning the 2,340 miles race was \$2,000 in prize money and a diamond centred medal. He picked up another handsome \$2,000 for his record-breaking 3,330 miles race. John J.’s third and final world record arrived in January 1911, again at Newark where he pedaled 3,788 miles in 144 hours.

This was soon followed by second-placing in another six-day ride at Salt Lake City. However, his fortune went against him in his next and final race in the USA when he fell and broke his collar-bone.

This unfortunate occurrence signalled the end for the remarkable record-breaker and he returned to Ireland in May 1912, a month after the famous Titanic sank. He still continued as a bright star in a wide field of athletics though. As the years slipped past, he was forced to retire gradually from competitive sport.

He was admired everywhere he went in Ireland and, no doubt if he was around today he would be regarded as a national hero. Kinahan gladly passed on many of his old tricks and much good advice to the youngsters who came along after him.

He took a prominent part in the organising of sports meetings throughout the country and he was a familiar figure at the starting line of every race. John J. died in his native Clareen in 1956 and the passing of the “Birr Flier” marked the end of one of Ireland’s first and most successful sportsmen.

*(With thanks to Randal Scally, who researched and published this article a number of years ago. It is reproduced with his permission.)*



## PHOTOGRAPHIC COLLECTION BY FR. PAT GAYNOR

*by Richard Kennedy*

Between the years 1922 and 1937 one of the Curates attached to the parish of Birr was Fr. Pat Gaynor. In many ways, Fr. Gaynor was an extraordinary man, who possessed the rare ability to combine an idealistic adherence to principles with a strong sense of integrity. Though not from Birr, he was originally from Tyone in Nenagh, his life connects with Birr in a number of ways. Firstly, he served as a curate in Birr for 15 years, at a time when this new nation was struggling to emerge from its troubled birth. He was also one of the confessors and chaplains to the three youngsters who were executed by the Free State troops on the grounds of Birr Castle in 1923 following their Court Martial on a charge of robbery of eighteen shillings. For details of this event taken from the diaries of Fr. Gaynor see the following; [www.birr-comm.ie/2007/01/31/birr-executions](http://www.birr-comm.ie/2007/01/31/birr-executions). His final significant

connection with Birr, and one which has only come to light in recent times, was the fact that, while a Curate in Birr, he took up photography as a hobby, and has left several hundred photographs and negatives of his time in Birr. This collection was recently discovered by his nephew Eamonn Gaynor, another extraordinary man, and he is now in the process of gifting the collection to the Library service in Birr. The photographs are primarily of people and given the fact that they were taken over 80 years ago, there is now limited scope for identification of many of the subjects. Eamonn Gaynor is the author of a fascinating book which traces the lives of three members of the Gaynor family, Fr. Pat, Sean Gaynor (Eamonn's father) and Eamonn Gaynor. The book is titled *Memoirs of a Tipperary Family, The Gaynors of Tyone 1887-2000*.



# 30 YEARS OF ST. BRENDAN'S COMMUNITY SCHOOL

By Brian T. Kennedy

January 2010 marked the 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary of St. Brendan's Community School opening its doors to students in January 1980. As a 1<sup>st</sup> Year at the time and subsequently as a teacher, I have had the privilege of watching the acorn sown in 1980 blossom into the fine oak it is today. In the beginning, there were the usual fears of parents and students, as they wondered how this large new educational campus would function. These were quickly allayed as the school swung into action.

Today most amalgamations take place in a piece-meal fashion, over a period of time. St. Brendan's, however, began functioning with only the Christmas break to finally oil the wheels into motion. The three schools (Presentation College, St. John's Secondary and Birr Vocational) closed for Christmas holidays in 1979 and re-opened on the Cappaneale campus just a few weeks later. Great tribute for the success of the venture must go to the first Principal, Bro. Denis and his staff.

The experience of a 1980 1<sup>st</sup> Year student was totally different to that of the 2010 student. For a start we stayed in the same all-male tutor-group we had started with in the Presentation College the previous September and were taught by the same teachers. This situation persisted until Inter. Cert. and girls only attended a handful of our classes.



**E Block – 1980**

Another vast change has come with the variety and range of subject choices on offer to today's students. At the beginning of 1<sup>st</sup> Year our only choice was to do Commerce or Metal-Work. When in 2<sup>nd</sup> year we were informed the class was doing Art, end of discussion. Needless to say, this was unpopular with a class of 30 boys! Today, in addition to core subjects, 1<sup>st</sup> Year students sample all subjects and have a free choice to do their favourite three subjects.



**1st Year students Ciarán Carroll and Bryan Coady with their English & History teacher Mr. Brian Kennedy. Ciarán's father Michael and Bryan's father Colman were in their teacher's 1st Year class, on the day St. Brendan's C.S. opened in January 1980.**

At the beginning, the sports facilities the school later became renowned for were absent. Management had obtained the adjoining 'Early's field' for games. This was accessed through a gap in the ditch and changing facilities were in two old railway goods carriages. Later the Board of Management developed the 14 acres of playing pitches with the support of parents and sporting bodies. This was a great achievement in the cash-strapped 1980's.

In 1982, the Sports' Hall was built and was the location of the official opening by the then Minister for Education (John Boland). The Minister was well over an hour late and proceeded without any apology to perform the opening. On this occasion, the late Bishop Michael Harty announced the school would be called after the local Patron, St. Brendan (up to then it was just called 'Birr Community School').

To mark the official opening, the school's first musical 'Joseph and the Amazing Technicolor Dream Coat', was staged in the Canteen. This was the location of subsequent musicals, until the venue moved to the enlarged stage in the Sports' Hall in 1990 to mark the school's 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary. The show has become an integral part of school life and is eagerly looked forward to by the school and wider community.

Built in the pre-computer age, the government gave the School its first 'Apple' computer in the early 1980's. Then funding was raised for a set of 'Commodore 64' computers in 1983. They were incredibly difficult to use by modern standards and had the original large floppy drive discs. Since then, two computer laboratories were established in rooms E7 and E8. This year, the Parents Council have

replaced the computers in E7. Of course, computers have also been integrated into many subject areas in line with modern teaching practice.

In the early 1980's the idea of Transition Year or Leaving Cert Applied courses were not even an option. Today over 70 students take the Transition Year route on an annual basis and both courses have become an integral part of life at St. Brendan's.



**School Entrance 1980**

On looking back at pictures from 1980 one thing that really strikes the observer is the bleakness of the site. The early tree and shrub planting programme has turned the site into a landscaped oasis of calm, with something to attract the eye in every season. The other great change is the presence of the Oratory adjacent to the school. Opened in 1998, it is a real oasis of spiritual calm at the heart of a busy school. Observing other pictures from the early years, it is astonishing how little has actually changed. The corridors and social areas have remained the same, right down to the students playing table-tennis.

This year St. Brendan's has received its first extension in its 30 year history. Four new class rooms (including a new

Music Room) and a resource room have been added to the F Block. This is a welcome addition as enrolment is at an all-time high with seven classes in each year up to Junior Cert. It was opened by An Taoiseach Brian Cowen and blessed by Bishop Kieran O' Reilly (on his first visit to Birr), on October 18<sup>th</sup>. This was a memorable day of celebrations, which began with the Academic Mass.

Over the last three decades, almost 4,000 St. Brendan's students have entered every walk of life, academic, cultural, spiritual. They are in every part of the globe and involved in every profession imaginable. The school will always remain part of their lives. The potential to develop a really innovative and well-regarded educational establishment has been realised.

Personally, St. Brendan's Community School has played a large part in my life. (The 1<sup>st</sup> Year of 1980 returned in 1988 to teach English and History). I am proud of my association with the school and glad to be the only 1<sup>st</sup> Year of opening day still in St. Brendan's!



**Canteen Entrance 1980**



**Fr. Tom, Fr. Frank, Sr. Assumpta, Fr. Benedict and Fr. Christy were sons and daughter of Michael and Margaret Kearns, Cappaneale, Birr.**

This is a unique photo as not alone is it one of the few photos taken with all five present but one of the few families with five members of the same family in religious orders. All those present are deceased and Gerry Kearns, Cappaneale is the only member of the family still alive.

## SOME MEMORIES

by Theo Dillon

**B**irr has changed a lot in my memory. Looking back there was so much done in the late 1920's and early 1930's, not very long after independence and at a time when money was very short. The retaining wall was built along the riverside walk from Newbridge Street to Oxmantown Bridge. Local authority housing schemes were ongoing — Pound Street, Newbridge Street, High Street. These replaced a lot of houses, many with thatched roofs and earthen floors. The roadway, firstly in Main Street, then in Connaught Street, were remade and surfaced in concrete. Ongoing, mainly as winter relief work, earthen paths and paved paths were replaced with concrete. Most local roads outside town were unpaved.

In John's Place, the open field between Dooley's and the house where we lived, now the first house without railings was developed by John Hickey, who built the eight houses of John's Terrace. The roadway through the centre of this development extended from John's Place to the boundary of the then Wilmer Tennis Club. Heretofore the entrance to the hospital was through Hospital Lane. The tennis club field was later the site of the home for the elderly, the health centre and the new entrance to the hospital.

John Dooley ran a passenger service to Dublin daily with a 'charabang' (sic) from John's Place. This service preceded the later GSR and then the CIE bus services. He also had a well-established furniture business in the premises which is now 'SPAR'. He had a furniture removal service from his yard in John's Place — now built on with town houses. His furniture storage had underfloor heating which was considered very 'with it' at the time.

A train service operated from Birr to Roscrea, where it connected with the Limerick to Dublin service. I only remember two trains daily. When due for departure from the station, the Guard or Porter would look over the wall to see if any potential passengers appeared to be coming up the road towards the station. On occasion, the train, after departing returned to the platform to collect late arriving passengers. There was also freight traffic with general goods, cattle and sugar beet.

Shopping for food as it existed then would be unrecognizable to today's generation of younger customers. Self service was unheard of. There was little in the way of pre-packed food. Most dry items were weighed out individually as the customer waited. Biscuits were displayed in seven pound tins having glass tops so the contents were visible; they were weighed out on demand. Bacon was cut to size to suit the customer; rashers were cut to required thickness. Sweets were displayed in large glass jars and were sold by weight, and for those with less to spend were priced at so many for a penny. Many bars sold groceries, which were usually in the region

of the premises farthest from the street. Butter made by the creameries was largely supplied in wooden boxes. I don't know what weight was in each, possibly 56 or 112 lbs. These boxes were quite robust and when empty were in great demand for various household and garden usage. Country butter, made in small weekly batches on farms was generally packed by the producer in 'pats' of one pound. This butter could vary in both taste and colour as it was affected largely by the feed available to the cows.

Dooly's Hotel in Emmet Square was in a prominent position and very noticeable. Egan's Hotel in the Main Street was a very popular venue. The Central Hotel in O'Connell Street, the house with steps leading to it, was mainly a boarding house. On the corner of John's Place and Wilmer Road was the Shamrock Hotel, again mainly bed and breakfast. The bakers were James Haslam & Son, situated in the Main St. in premises now part of the Super Value complex. Nearly opposite was Flynn's bakery, later Griffin's. Further up the Main Street was Oakley's baker and confectioner and also a restaurant. Mrs. Ward had a confectionery and restaurant in Connaught Street. Also in that street was another premises which served meals.

Public houses or bars were legion! How so many were able to make a living seems a mystery. I have memories of loud behaviour by people going home on Saturday nights especially. On Sundays pubs were only open to 'bonified' travelers — those who had travelled at least three miles. This accounts for pubs being commonly situated three miles or so outside towns.



**Building of the ESB Building on Bridge Street in 1957**

(L to R): Brian Hunt, Mick Cooney, Paddy 'The Sarge' Walsh, Marie Coolahan, Dan Coolahan, Jimmy Cahill, Joe Cahill

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## KILIMANJARO DIRECT

By Tony Dargan

John Gibbons is one of eight boys born to Michael and Barbara Gibbons in the townland of Glengowla, Oughterard, Co. Galway. He left Glengowla after his Leaving Cert to attend Agricultural College in 1970 but the call to become a member of the Garda Síochána was too strong and he entered the Training College in Templemore in 1972. John spent the majority of his 35 years in Birr. He was promoted sergeant in 1986 and retired in June 2006. As he says himself "You come to a point in your life when you know that it's time to leave". He hasn't regretted this decision to leave the force at an early age. While a garda, John gave many hours of his spare time to doing voluntary work in the community. Among the organisations he was involved with were: Birr Community School, Carrig N.S. (Chairman for 17 years, he resigned in May 2009), Community Games (Vice-Chairperson), Birr GAA Club (Chairman), Birr Athletics Club, Birr Traveller Settlement Group, Birr Swimming Pool Committee (Ass. Sec.) and Birr Business Watch. In retirement, John spends all his time schooling his horses on his "ranch" on the outskirts of Birr. He is happily married to Majella and has two sons, Aonghus and Fergus and one daughter, Caoimhe. His granddaughter Abbie is "the apple of his eye".



Fr. Peter Muldowney (left) and John Gibbons ahead of their trip to Kilimanjaro.

John always wanted to involve himself in voluntary work abroad and after an in-depth talk with Fr. Peter Muldowney, Parish Priest of Clareen, he offered his services to 'Kilimanjaro Direct'. 'Kilimanjaro Direct' was established in 2005 to help families in remote areas of Kilimanjaro. John is "a Jack of all trades" and a master of many of them. He is attached to "The Plastering Group", a skill he has honed doing jobs for his family and friends over the years.

Tanzania is a country situated approximately 3 degrees south of the equator. The size of Ireland, it is bordered on the north by Kenya, the Indian Ocean forming its eastern



Volunteers on the bus to Moshi

border. North-east of its commercial capital, Dar-es-Salaam, lies Moshi. With a population of 144,739 people (30 times that of Birr), Moshi lies at the foothills of Kilimanjaro, the highest mountain in Africa. Vast coffee and sugar plantations blanket the area and these crops are the mainstay of the people's lives.

Under the guidance of Fr. Peter, 28 women and men travelled to Moshi in October. This group, over a period of ten days, completed and furnished a block of classrooms and offices and built a new block of 4-5 classrooms.

Families were also given financial aid to start small businesses. Most families live in mud huts, with no electricity or running water, and live off the land. The charity has built new houses for people with disabilities and installed water for families. It also paid school fees for orphans. Fr. Muldowney formed part of a group that went to do similar work in South Africa for the Niall Mallon Trust. This influenced his decision to get involved with Kilimanjaro Direct. Fr. Peter met the project director, Sheila Ryan from Kilkenny, in 2008. He needed little encouragement to join with others in making this project a success. Since then, Fr. Peter has organised many projects to raise money. €28,000 has already been forwarded by Fr. Peter to Moshi.

100% of the money raised goes directly to the Kilimanjaro project to build and furnish the classrooms and offices. Volunteers pay all their own expenses - medicines, flights, food and accommodation. The ethos of the organisation is that all donations go directly to projects. With over 100 children crowded into classes at present, the completion and building of further classrooms will be a welcome relief to teachers and pupils alike. When children are being enrolled preference is given to children with special needs. At 14 years of age many of the children have to take a public examination but approximately 15% pass and go on to further education.

When the project is fully completed in the years ahead, it is planned to keep the children longer in school and provide each one with a skill that will stand to them in their future lives.

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## BIRR CHORAL SOCIETY – 1970 - 2010



The Birr Choral Society celebrated its 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary during 2010. Above is a picture of the group taken in 1972

Back Row (L to R): M. Campbell, D. Corcoran, P. Davis, G. Dolan, L. Crawford, D. O'Brien, J. Armitage,  
T. Lyndon, W. Haslam, P. Barber, E. Connolly

4<sup>th</sup> Row: B. Connolly, L. Kennedy, R. Henderson, H. Reidy, H. Gill, D. Rigney, F. Watkins, B. Graham

3<sup>rd</sup> Row: L. Tait, C. O'Meara, N. Feehan, M. Rigney, M. Bruce, Sr. Gerard, R. Malone, B. Loughnane, B. Cahill, M. Carney

2<sup>nd</sup> Row: C. Malone, R. Garvey, A. Cosgrave, E. Kennedy, P. Garahy, M. O'Meara, M. Haslam, R. Jackson, D. Haslam, B. Pike

Front Row: Rev. W. Graham (Conductor), R. Hoctor, R. Hanniffy, M. Molloy, M. O'Meara, P. Kenny, P. Connolly,  
E. Loane, G. Coulter, N. Connolly, M. Connolly, A. Noonan (Accomp)

## WHAT'S THIS ABOUT THE POINTS RACE?

The editor's attention was recently called to a cutting from the Midland Tribune of August 27<sup>th</sup> 1955. It was headed

### 'Birr Boys Win Seven of the Twenty Scholarships'

'Birr boys, pupils of The Presentation Brothers' National School, scored signal success in the 1955 examinations for scholarships to secondary and vocational schools offered by Offaly Co. Council. From a total panel of 68 candidates for the 20 scholarships competed for on a countywide basis, the Birr Boys won no less than 7, and on the merits list were in the first 10 places.'

First place in the county was taken by a Banagher boy, John A. Madden, Main St., who secured a total of 923 marks out of a possible 1000. Second, third, fourth, fifth and sixth, in

that order of merit, were the following Birr boys (the figures in parentheses being the marks scored by them): Chas. P. Byrne, 27 New Road (917); John F. Duffy, Ballywilliam (917); Brendan J. Power, Moorpark St., (798); Brendan J. Hogan, 15 High St., (788); and Patrick McGarry, 17 High St., (787).

When the results were referred to at the meeting of the Co. Council in Tullamore on Monday, Mr. D. Hogan paid tribute to the winners, their parents and teachers on their successes. He congratulated them all and said the Presentation Brothers' School had reason to be proud of the outstanding success achieved by the seven candidates on the list.....'



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## 2,000 WORDS

*by Johnny Shortt, son of Margaret and the late Tom, Eden Road*

It is 1967, Mrs. Gilmartin is teaching “babies”. We have started on a journey of enlightenment.

Hiker McGarry is the blondest boy in the class – possibly the smallest too. Aidan Gleeson has the curliest hair and is probably the skinniest, later leading to him becoming known as “Rasher” – a name that has stuck to this day. Birr in the 60’s, “the Athens of the Midlands”. Peter Sellers signs my Aunt Nan’s plaster cast on a visit to Birr Castle. There is music in the air, not only in London and San Francisco but also

in Emmet Street, in Kennedy’s house. There is a giant altar to “Gomper” from the Stones Satanic Majesties album, there are milk baths and Bernie Tait and Odette Gleeson chewing daffodils whilst waiting for the best 99s in the country, from Garahy’s down the Main Street.

Seeds of hippidom have been well and truly planted. Cyril Kelly drops out to go to a kibbutz in Israel and my father carries me on the back of his bike to the “boot factory” on a Saturday morning to help cut out soles of shoes, with the promise of a pack of marshmallows from Sheil’s in the square to get me up out of bed.

Cyril Kelly returns in 1980 and swaps priceless vinyl from those days, Iron Butterfly, MC5 and the Grateful Dead for, would you believe it, my Bob Marley tapes!

Living legends from this period still walking amongst us James Hoxtor, Fran Kennedy and Charlie Ritchie, are well worth quizzing up on what Birr was really like in those sun drenched times and how the town managed to make its way into the lyrics of the Rolling Stones song “Salt of the Earth” from Beggars’ Banquet.

Urban Myth or truth - I once asked Keith Richards in Lillies Bordello about this stunning connection to my home town and he said he couldn’t remember the lyric in question. Nothing unusual about that!

Thinking back to those days of the late 60’s, the sun always seemed to be shining even when it was freezing and we stampeded into class to get close to the rads that nearly burnt the hands off you. St. Brendan’s Primary School was really rocking. By 6<sup>th</sup> class, Bernie Loonam was getting standing ovations for his Elvis impersonations and that was before Paul Murphy had ever go to grips with the bridge in “Amarillo”. There was respite, however, from this constant sun and rock and roll. Byrnes in Moorpark Street, where for 2p you could get a pint of diluted orange and a biscuit that, was a cross between a Farley’s rusk and a Liga. There was also the constant temptation and dilemma on the way back from serving 10 o’clock mass with 10 Carrolls for Mr. Mac,

to break your confirmation pledge with a can of Club shandy from Coolahans.

Funny, the same moral issues never arose on taking handfuls of hosts from the sacristy. We never stopped to think were they consecrated or not. If Fr. Vaughan (Fr. Ned) only knew, I imagine the Spanish Inquisition would have been more tolerable.

All of a sudden it is 1977; I had my one and only disagreement with my mates from the ‘Bronx’, Tommy Hamilton, Martin Roberts and Joe Grimes. They’re off to the Tech and I’m going to Presentation Brothers College.

Back then the rivalry between these two schools was really like United versus City or Liverpool and Everton. The colours even bore testimony to this. Pres wore red (well maroon) and the Tech, blue. They also had to contend with girls in the class – scary. Imagine the consequences of annoying one of the girls in carpentry - think of the damage a rusty chisel could do.

Things were a little less hairy in Pres, well not really in fact, as there was a lot of hair in Pres, particularly during the glory days of the uber “gang of 4”, John Glennon, Jimmy Kearns, Ray Haines and Dick Powell. These boys took themselves very seriously, with Luftwaffe overcoats and Dr M’s all sourced from John Kelly’s in Connaught Street. They scared us until Johnny Rotten and the Sex Pistols opened our eyes and liberated us. Punk was born and things would never be quite the same again. I’ll never forget the day we replaced the Sacred Heart picture with a giant portrait of Johnny Rotten. Mr. Murtagh, the Religious Knowledge teacher nearly collapsed. I don’t think the same amount of bravado would have been on show if Brother Denis had been taking that class. He was, however, always prepared to enter into open debate on all the issues of the day and whilst you always got a fair hearing, his point, the best point always prevailed.

I remember one instance when Willie Rigney and myself tried to get out of the hurling league by asking if we could have the time to do extra cross-country training - “there are six other days in the week to run, I only want one hour from you fellas”. I didn’t understand it then but I do now and, when a school has such a small, pick even the absolute duffers had some contribution to make to building the dream that in no small way contributed to the awesome success of Offaly and Birr hurling in later decades.

Anyway enough of the “pretty vacant” period. By 1978 Argentina had illuminated the world with their own particular brand of football, Pink Floyd were working on The Wall, Ms. O’Connell was teaching us Spanish and the Rasher, Charlie Delahunt, Conor Grimes and I were off to



## BIRR Year Review 2010

the Convent for biology!. These were indeed heady days, the sun certainly was shining and a legend of a teacher Mrs. Byrnes inspired us to constantly “beat the girls” in her regular tests, I don’t think Zena Hocter, Gobnait Spain, Mary-Pat Pilkington or Emer Duffy ever forgave us but they certainly got their own back on us by regularly placing broken seats for us to sit on. We had the comfort of a bus ride from Emmet Street to the Convent, which trip was happily always punctuated by a break at Bolger’s so you could pick up a copy of the NME, ten fags or whatever else you might need for sustenance.

If I felt I was having a ball at Pres and I certainly was, and learning something into the bargain, it was nothing to what I was doing in Kelly’s of Green Street. This is where I learned to debate and argue with some of Birr’s greatest. Kelly’s bar on a Sunday morning was no place for the faint hearted. I had the pleasure of working. Politics, sport, religion and even the odd bit of local scandal were always on the agenda for anyone brave enough to take the noble call and offer an opinion or insight. Sadly, most of these heavyweights have headed to the great debating chamber in the sky but they were inspirational and character shaping and so much a part of Birr that they deserve individual mention, Mrs. Kelly, Jim Mac, Kevin Madden, Joe Vaughan, Mick Shorthall, Eric Byrne, P.J. Dunne, Pat O’Dwyer, the Sarge, the Dom and the Squaw and a host of others too numerous to mention. If you accept the notion that our spirit and soul live on and the weaker part of us is interred in Clonoghill, Birr must have a seriously wealthy spiritual bank. Glad to say that, of this great bunch, Jimmy Kelly is still throwing arrows and driving 40 footers!

Fast forward again and we are in 1987, the recession – (sound familiar) and whilst there was carnage on the employment front, things weren’t all bad. Cavanaghs, Grant’s and Ko Rec Type ensured that there was some work available and, on the entertainment front, Melbas had opened its doors replacing “Saturday night at the

County” and Bingo in the Marian Hall as Birr’s premier late-night attraction (unless of course you were a snooker fiend and member of the Social Club). For Birrites, Sunday night in particular was boogie night with Jizzer Mac DJing his own particular brand of indie music – “manumission” at its best had nothing on this!

The 90’s and the noughties have all brought considerable change to Birr also. The influx of new residents has all contributed to Birr’s cosmopolitan feel. Mundy has put us on the musical map and inspired a second flowering of Birr’s musical youth. One could complain that you can’t go courting or swimming up Sandymount to Clay’s Hole anymore but is there a town in the country that can boast of a facility on a par with the Birr Nursing Unit – I don’t think so.

I can’t think of the Birr Motto but if I could give it my own it would have to be “Stella Aequus Durando”. For the future I would love to see the old mill down Sandymount developed into a recording studio so that all the local talent could avail of it and that John and Gene could re-master some of their ground-breaking earlier work. Maybe a new cinema on the site of the new cinema. Who could ever forget the late shows with Vincy Conboy and Tony McLoughlin always prepared to exercise their own brand of sensitive censorship so that we got to watch Bruce Lee movies when we should have been at home in bed. A Summer School on an annual basis to celebrate Birr’s contribution to human rights law – the Cain Adamnain – and if not too much, a re-opening of St. Brendan’s Park so that Birr might finally get a home game in the County Championships.

This piece would not be complete without dedicating it to the late Kevin Tierney, a great friend and co-mass server on the illustrious group K, and two teachers I never got to say goodbye to properly, Sean the ‘Bull Kelly’ and Jim ‘Brutus’ Loftus. Long may you run – all of you.

### Boys Scouts – 1971 style

*(L to R): David Talbot, Fintan Hoare, John Reedy,  
John Gormley, Fintan Ryan, Shane Howley,  
John McNamara*



# CELEBRATING 150 YEARS OF OXMANTOWN SCHOOL

by Karen Alexander

The celebrations began with a service of thanksgiving which was held on Sunday 13<sup>th</sup> June, in St. Brendan's Church, Birr, led by Archdeacon Wayne Carney, Rector and Chairman of the Board of Management. School Principal, Mrs. Audrey Colton, explained that Model Schools were created to facilitate the training of male and female teachers. The training took the form of observing the class teacher and then assisting to teach. It was a multi-denominational school, originally in three separate parts which were amalgamated in 1916 and the first Principal was Mr. John McGill. The name Oxmantown School was adopted in 1968.



**Smiling Past Pupils!**

Lorinda Benn (nee Wolfe), Keith Wolfe and Olga Braithwaite (nee Wolfe)

The present-day pupils came dressed in costumes of 150 years ago and took part in the service with reading, and making a wonderful sound singing, ringing hand bells and playing recorders. Teachers and past pupils also were involved. Mr. Geoff Loane – a past pupil, who for the past 25 years has worked with the International Red Cross, was the keynote speaker at the service. He spoke of the comparisons between life for these children and those in countries where he has worked, such as Rwanda, and how safe school life is here. In his address, he urged the children not to be afraid to take chances or to make mistakes or to trust their imaginations. The best thing they can for anyone is to be kind to them. At the conclusion of the service a perpetual cup was presented to the school in memory of Mr. John McGill by Mrs. Dorothy James and Mrs. Carol Barnes, his grand-daughters who travelled from Belfast. There was a large attendance at the service, which included the Right Revd. Trevor Williams, Bishop of Limerick & Killaloe, past pupils and parents, former and retired

teachers. Local politicians also attended, Olwyn Enright, T.D., Cllr. Tony McLoughlin and Cllr. Michael Campbell.



**Presentation to Guest Speaker**

Pictured L-R: Mr. Geoff Loane (Intl Red Cross & past pupil), Karen Alexander (Chairperson Parents Association), Rowena Keavney (Artist, parent & painter of presentation piece)

After the service, everyone made their way to the school for a reception. The school had been specially dressed up for the occasion, with bunting and balloons waving in the sunshine and a brightly coloured banner which the children had decorated with the help of a parent. Lord Rosse planted an oak tree in the grounds in front of the



**Enjoying the celebrations**

(L to R): Edward Delahunt, Isabel Delahunt (nee Gill) and Whitten Gill

## BIRR Year Review 2010

school. A photo exhibition had been put together of pictures taken over many years right up to the present day and which proved a great source of entertainment and head scratching – (it can't be him, wasn't he the year ahead of us?)! - many thanks to those who sent photos and to those who spent countless hours sorting them out. During the cup of tea, a celebration cake was cut by the youngest pupil, Shannon Briscoe and Mr. Theo Dillon, representing former pupils. Mr. Dillon spoke of his school days in bygone years and the different uses to which the classrooms were put.

The celebrations were a magnificently happy culmination of months of preparation. During the month of May, former pupils had come to meet the children in the school to tell them about their schooldays. This proved very worthwhile, the children being very interested to listen and to ask questions. A history day was also held when the children came to school dressed in their costumes, played games and behaved as in days of old, including a lunch of homemade bread and jam! Souvenir photos of each family were taken and no doubt someone will be looking for them in 150 years time!



**Pupils in costume for their 'Back in Time Day' when all of the pupils and teachers dressed as in the old days, played old games such as hop-scotch and skipping and ate home made brown bread and jam for lunch.**

Back Row: Ms. J. Cobbe, Evan Lewis, Jessica Rusu, Dominik Jozwiak, Lyndsey Armstrong.

Middle Row: Chloe Smith, Ivor Banks, Jacob Staniewski, Adam Fletcher, Jennifer Bailey,  
Jessica Pyle, Vanessa Wakefield, Mrs. A.Carroll.

Front Row L-R: Niamh Nettleship, Raymond Armatige, Christy Keaveney, Rory Tierney, Andrew Coghlan,  
Filip Swigon, Robert Reid, Ivan Svarychevskyy, Sabrina Gheorghe, Dominika Kmiecik.

The architect from the Board of Works who designed the Model school was one Jacob Owen. Jacob Owen was a Welsh man born in 1778. He became the Architect and Principal Engineer to the Board of Public Works. He was a renowned architect of his time and designed some other fine buildings such as the Garda Headquarters in the Phoenix Park, the Carriage Office in Dublin Castle, Arbour Hill Prison, Cork Post Office and various other buildings within the Phoenix Park such as the Islandbridge Gate Lodge and St. Mary's Chapel. He is buried in Mount Jerome Cemetery in Dublin.

## ERIN HORTICULTURE LTD. CELEBRATES 50 YEARS IN BUSINESS



**Cutting the celebration cake**

(L to R): John Molloy, Richard Grimmer, Paddy Duffy

which enabled this milestone anniversary to be achieved. He also spoke of the ambitious and optimistic plans which the Company has for the future, notwithstanding the present economic climate.



**Presentation of cheque for the 'Soul of Haiti' charity**

(L to R): John Molloy, Stephen Grant, Richard Grimmer

**E**rin Horticulture Ltd, whose factory is located at Derrinlough, celebrates its 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary this year. The company, which was originally known as Jack Pot Ltd, was founded in 1960 to manufacture peat pots for export throughout the world.

Whilst the company discontinued making peat pots in 2005, it continues in the Growing Media industry, where it has become a major force in the UK market.

The company hosted a function at the County Arms Hotel on 22<sup>nd</sup> October 2010, which was attended by the entire present workforce and many former employees.

Mr. John Molloy, Managing Director, paid tribute to the foresight and efforts of the people who got the project off the ground dating from 1957/58 and also to the loyal and dedicated workforce throughout the years, at all levels,

To mark the occasion of the 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary, the company presented a donation to Mr. Stephen Grant of Grant Engineering Ltd, a former employee of Erin, in aid of the Soul of Haiti Foundation, of which Mr. Grant is a member and very actively involved.

Replying to the presentation, Mr. Grant recalled his years at Erin which, he said, he valued greatly. He spoke of the appalling conditions which prevail in Haiti and the work which the Soul of Haiti Foundation is doing there and he expressed his appreciation of the Company's gesture.

### THE COOLAHAN FAMILY FROM

**Pictured in the centre are parents, the late Jim and Kathleen**

**The Lads**

(L to R): Brian, Morgan, Paddy, Jimmy, Tommy, John



### POUND STREET

**The Lassies**

Back Row (L to R): Eleanor Coolahan, Catherine Noone, Marie Nevin, Jean Hogan  
Front Row: Louise Noone, Mary Geoghegan, Ann Moloney, Clair Coolahan



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## FLYING HIGH

by Sé Pardy

**B**irr holds many great memories and continues to play an important part in my life, with many great friends from the golf club and airfield and my brother Ger's family still in the locality, as well as my sister Anne in nearby Tullamore. Although living in Malahide and married to Jean with two children, Thomas and Ava, I still visit as often as possible, despite the passing of both my parents, Tom and Nancy. This is primarily during the summer and for the annual Irish Aviation Golf Challenge in aid of the St. Vincent de Paul in Birr.



Sé (right) with his son Thomas and Paul Casey at Adare

This golf event is the largest aviation golf event in Ireland and attracts in excess of 100 entries annually from all over Ireland, UK and from as far afield as Singapore. Those attending have always enjoyed the great golf course we have in Birr but, more importantly the great welcome provided by all in Birr Golf Club and the late sessions in the Chestnut. The event has raised in excess of €90,000 for St. Vincent De Paul in Birr and great credit is due to the many who contribute their time freely. For me personally, Birr was a fantastic place to grow up and it is great to be able to help in contributing back to Birr and have great fun in aid of a worthy cause.

Having completed my secondary education in the Presentation Brothers College, I joined Air traffic control in Shannon in 1984 and completed my basic flying training. I joined Aer Lingus in July 1988, moving to Florida to complete my commercial pilot's licence. Returning to Dublin, I flew the Shorts 360, Saab 340 and Fokker 50 before taking up Captaincy. I have also flown the Boeing 737, British Aerospace 146 and currently operate the European Airbus.

In addition to my flying career, I co-founded Simtech Aviation with my business partner Fergal Keogh, also a

regular visitor to Birr and great supporter of the Irish Aviation Golf Challenge. Our goal has been to provide quality solutions to various aspects of the aviation and events industry. Simtech is unique in Irish aviation as the sole provider of Full Flight Simulator facilities adjacent to Dublin Airport. Our clients include Aer Lingus, Aer Arann, City Jet and a host of clients from Europe, the Middle East and South Africa. Simtech facilitates three full flight simulators based on the airbus A320, British Aerospace Avro RJ and the ATR 72-500. A fixed based simulator will be added in 2011 to complement this 24/7 operation.

Simtech Aviation Training provides a range of courses which are approved in 43 countries. Our former students are employed with 52 airlines worldwide. We provide employment opportunities to 40 people, the majority of whom are highly experienced with a range of aviation skills. Simtech Aviation also provides expertise to the events industry. We provide a fully managed aviation solution to Bray Air Display which attracts 75,000 spectators, Dubai Duty Free Irish Derby at the Curragh, the JP Mc Manus International Pro Am tournament and the 2006 and 2010 Ryder Cups. Simtech provided the Helicopter Logistics at the Ryder Cup at Celtic Manor in Wales during the 2010 Ryder Cup. A team of 22 provided an all-inclusive solution on the Montgomerie Course including: Air Traffic Control Service, Fire Service, Helicopter Marshalling and Passenger Check-in. Simtech were the first non-UK company to win such a contract and, therefore provide clear evidence that Irish companies giving a quality and cost effective service will prosper in these challenging times.



Sé (Left) with Paul McGinley, Don Burn and Billy Foster

# ONE HUNDRED YEARS AGO - 1910

*By Tony Hogan*

Home Rule, housing and the business of the Workhouse were amongst the themes that dominated the headlines of both the *King's County Chronicle* and the *Midland Tribune* in 1910. The deaths of William Bulfin and King Edward VII received much publicity and the Roscrea/Birr train disaster got extensive coverage in both papers.

## **The Birr Roscrea Train Disaster**

The big news of the year was the Birr train crash on the line to Roscrea. No one was killed but several were injured. Please refer to the article dealing with this event elsewhere in the Review.

## **Female Suffrage Meeting in Birr**

A female suffrage meeting was held in Birr in April, organised by Mrs. Cowen, the wife of an army officer. The event was strongly supported by the *King's County Chronicle* which stated that it was probably the first of its kind held outside Dublin.

'..Looking impartially at the intelligent side of the question, it will hardly be denied that the female is as competent as the male. This argument is supported by the number of clever women of both the past and present times in every field of human culture and judgement. To cite a local case, who would be so bold as to say that the female teacher of Carrig School, whose speech before a multitude of her fellows of both sexes was a marvel of close reasoning, would be unfit for the Franchise ... we wish to see every woman in the possession of identical rights within the state, which are now confined to the King's male subjects, believing that it would tend to stimulate and give added strength to the female brain.'  
(*King's County Chronicle*, Oct.)

## **Senor William Bulfin**

The *Midland Tribune* reported in February that there was gloom over Offaly now that its gifted son lay dead.

'William was born of an old and respected Offaly family and from his earliest days he showed unmistakable traits of talent and character, far above the ordinary. At the early age of 17, he emigrated to the Argentine republic. South America opened up to his eager boyish nature a land of adventure and promise. At his death, there was scarcely an Irish home in which his writings were not read. The man and his writings will be sorely missed but the memory of his brave, unselfish work will live. There was no one who loved Róisín Dubh more than he did. There was not a mile of the country he did not travel or explore and its unfading beauties he has described in the vivid picturesque language which made everything he wrote so attractive.

The grave of Bulfin requires no stately column and inscription, for deeply engraved in the hearts of his countrymen is the only epitaph he would have sought. '

## **The death of King Edward VII**

The death of King Edward VII in May was the subject of so much outpouring of grief that the *Midland Tribune* began to wonder were Irish people losing their heads. For the *King's County Chronicle* there were no such concerns. This paper reported,

'It is the merest truism to state, that for the loyal sorrow which overshadows the Empire, the King's County yields to no place, its natural spontaneity being visible no matter where one looks. Particularly is this feeling evidenced in the county capital and in Birr, which may be taken as typical of the whole community, not to speak of the flags at half mast from Birr and Charleville Castles and from the private flagstaffs, nor yet of the almost universal shutting of shop windows, the tolling of the church bell, and the conversation of the people betokening an unfeigned air of depression such as was never before observed so thoroughly – every class, grade and creed being under this cloud of mourning.'

At a meeting of Birr Urban Council the Chairman Mr. John Dooley proposed an adjournment owing to the death of his gracious Majesty,

'The Vice-Chairman Mr. James Brown could say with truth, that Ireland never had a stauncher friend ... he deplored that the King had been taken from them for he was a peacemaker and showed indications of his friendship towards Ireland. '

In an editorial, the *Midland Tribune* noted that,

'... it is not in the nature of things, that we in Ireland should mourn the death of a British monarch. Too few of that royal line, alas, have given the people of this country the slightest reason to feel sorry at their demise. King Edward VII has been the one exception. His attitude towards Ireland we understand to have been friendly and truly sympathetic and on more than one occasion he demonstrated his toleration for our creed.'  
*Midland Tribune*, May 1910.

## **Convent Water Supply**

Birr Urban District Council dealt with the question of fixing the water supply in March. Councillor Byrne thought that the nuns should not be asked to pay as much as other people, as they were doing a lot of good work in the interest of education and besides, did a lot of charitable work. 'We can see them Sunday after Sunday going around looking after the poor.' Councillor Dooley said it was never anyone's idea to give the water for nothing. Councillor Hoctor said the ladies were doing a lot of good for the town and if we were to fix a rent on them it should be as low a one as possible having regard to the good they were doing. Eventually it was arranged that the annual rent of £5 be charged. *Midland Tribune*, March, 1910.

# INDEPENDENT MAN - DENIS SHEILS

## CHAIRPERSON OF BIRR TOWN COUNCIL

by Michael Donegan

**D**enis Sheils is Chairman of Birr Town Council. He is a native of Birr and lives in Ely Place, Crinkill. He is as son of Mary and Bobby Sheils of Whiteford. He is married to Geraldine O'Meara and they have two children, Laura and Dermot.

Denis has been a member of Birr Town Council since he was first elected in 1998. In that time he contested three elections, two of these have been on a Fine Gael ticket, but he has been elected most recently as an independent member of the Council. Denis believes strongly that local politics should be free of party influence and party allegiance and that the main priority of each elected member of the Council should be the welfare of the townspeople and the betterment of the town itself. As a member of Birr Town Council, Denis is involved on a daily basis with the concerns of the people. His work involves interaction with people on matters such as social housing, hospital services, road infrastructure and repair and planning issues. He is also a member of the Joint Policing Committee. Denis believes that, once a citizen raises a query with him, it is his duty to do his best to help and report back to the person concerned the outcome of his efforts on their behalf.

This is the third time Denis has held the office of Chairperson. He was also Chairperson in 2003 and 2004. Council elections take place every five years and the next one is not due until 2013. Denis feels there is a good spirit of co-operation among the members of Birr Town Council.

Over the recent years, much has been accomplished in improving the environment for the people of Birr. We have two modern car parks which are free of charge to the public. Footpaths have been improved, roads and streets have been resurfaced and new roundabouts have been positioned. New street furniture and public lighting has been put in place. The biggest project in Denis' time was the moving of the Council office to the new state-of-the-art building in Wilmer Road, which was formerly the convent residence. This building now facilitates a modern library.

A fantastic playground is also a great feature for the youth of the town. The Cumberland pillar has also been completely overhauled by Birr Town Council and the Heritage Council, which is part of the Birr Public Realm Programme. Denis is very proud of his town, but is disappointed that no new industry has come to the town



Denis Sheils, Chairperson, Birr Town Council

since 1984. It would appear that the I.D.A. has no interest in locating industry to Birr. He says he never believed the proposed FAS Decentralisation Project would work, as it was not thought out fully and failed to take account of the family circumstances of those workers who were supposed to make the move from Dublin to Birr. Denis also believes this proposed decentralisation was responsible for inflating property prices in Birr to unrealistic levels. All that is left is a vacant site which is not worth half of what was paid for it.

Denis is very fearful about the future in the light of the budgetary cuts that are to come and feels it will make it even more difficult to promote the town as a suitable destination for business projects. He is determined to do everything in his power to combat any negative outcomes of the present recession and downturn.

Denis is very proud and honored to be Chairman of Birr Town Council and would like to thank the public for their support and trust in him representing them to the best of his ability.



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## 'KIA ORA' FROM NEW ZEALAND

by Seamus McNamara, son of Jim & Mary, Moorpark Street



Seamus with his three children Caimin, Ellen and Liam

One thing that's certain is that New Zealand is a long way from home. There are few places in the world that are further away in distance, but, at the same time, there are also lots of ways that Ireland and NZ are close. At a local level, there is no shortage of Mac's and O's in my area phone book and, within a few hundred metres of our house, we've got roads called Athlone and Kildare and avenues called Lisburn and Kinsale. Historically, migration has been outward from Ireland, often via Australia, but in more recent decades, things seem to have evened out a bit with quite a bit of movement in both directions. There's no shortage of stunning scenery here, from the Milford Sound in the south to Ninety-mile beach in the north and everything in between. It's an evolving landscape, with volcanic and seismic activity continuing to make their marks. Luckily for myself, Anne and the kids, my parents have made the long journey twice in recent years. We left for our first trip to Aotearoa, the land of the long white cloud, on St Stephen's day in 2002. My sister-in-law was getting married to a Kiwi bloke and we decided that a month down under would do us all the power of good. It's a lovely time to visit New Zealand as the summer weather is usually starting to settle and, with most of the locals taking their annual break the main cities are even quieter than usual. If someone had told us back then that we were not going to spend another Christmas in Ireland until at least 2010, I, for one, would certainly not have believed it. When we got home, I dipped my toe in the Auckland job market and we moved lock, stock and barrel in November 2003. The intervening years have been something of an adventure for us all. Three small kids, Liam, Ellen and Caimin, then aged 8, 5 and 3, are growing up fast as Kiwis on the outside but with still a lot of Irish on the inside.

It's funny the things you remember about growing up in Moorpark St. The summers always seemed to have been sunny and when we weren't in the Brothers field, we were down the Riverside. Days were long and full of action. Looking back, it's the freedom that's the most striking. You got out of bed in the morning, put on the same clothes you had on the day before, came back during the day to eat whatever was put up in front of you and again, reluctantly when the sun went down, went to sleep. Occasionally, we got up to things that we shouldn't have but generally it was all pretty harmless; stone fights across the river, stealing apples from some orchard or other, smoking fags and then trying to cover up the smell. I don't think it did us too much harm. Sports took over a bit more as we got older, for me it was rugby and Gaelic football, the hurling was always a bit of a challenge in the skills department.

While corresponding with Brian and Emer over the last few weeks it reminded me of how long it has actually been since the group of first years from the Brothers' College moved up to the brand new Community School, January 1980. It's only when you look back that you realise how lucky we really were to be involved in such a transition. After the Leaving Cert, I headed off to the NIHE in Limerick for a few years. As it turned out, our group was the last to graduate before the formal establishment of the University of Limerick. Heady times indeed for education in Ireland. Relatively short spells working in Waterford and Dublin preceded a move back to Limerick to settle down. Not being too far from home, with a good share of old friends from college and in the capital of Irish rugby, who could complain.

We now live in Auckland, a city of about 1.4 million people that spreads itself across quite a large but narrow coastal area. It's generally warm throughout the year, with frost a rarity. It never ever snows but there's lots of rain to keep the place green for most of the year. Auckland calls itself the city of sails and a short seaside walk on a weekend morning will leave you in no doubt as to the reason for this. Kids of all ages can be seen sailing a myriad of little boats on the sparkling waters of the Waitemata Harbour. The harbour itself is dominated by Rangitoto, a volcanic island that rose from the sea less than 700 years ago. At that stage there were no Europeans in New Zealand but the Maori people had arrived a few hundred years earlier from the islands of the South Pacific. I'm sure it must have caused some consternation amongst them at the time.

Living in a rugby-obsessed country was one of the easier parts of the transition. The Moorpark McNamara's are well known in Birr as a rugby family and Anne, having served her time on the sideline at Ballyegan watching the mighty green and blacks, has more than a passing interest in the

## BIRR Year Review 2010

game. I'm happy to report that both of my own boys have played on the hallowed turf of Eden Park in recent times. The local secondary school fields about 17 teams in all grades every Saturday morning during the winter. With the world cup coming up, expectation is mounting and will surely reach fever pitch by this time next year. Rugby matters in New Zealand in a way that's hard to understand. The mood of the country seems to be influenced as much by the performances of the All Blacks as it is by the state of the economy or political events.

In recent months, I've been spending a bit of time in Christchurch, which recently suffered a huge and unexpected earthquake. While it is miraculous that nobody was killed, the cost of the damage is quickly clocking up in billions of dollars. It is now two months since the main quake but the aftershocks are still continuing on a daily basis. It's easy to forget about these major events when the news crews move away but a short visit to the city makes you realise how the event has dominated people's lives. Liquefaction is on the tip of everyone's tongue as is the magnitude and depth of the most recent aftershocks.

So, people will always ask what you miss about home. Besides friends and family, I think it's the humour of the people and the depth of culture. It's that subtle natural humour you get from people that you meet in normal day-

to-day situations. It's not that the Kiwis don't have a sense of humour; it's just different. Having Christmas in the middle of the summer is probably one of those things that you need to be brought up with to appreciate and Guy Fawkes Night doesn't really do much for me either. Since the boys started to play cricket, I must confess to having gained an interest in this strange game but, as they say, travel broadens the mind.

Did I mention that they like their rugby down here? They make a decent pint of Guinness too!



**The McNamaras of Moorpark St.**  
(L to R): John, Seamus, Mary, Maureen, Jim

## BIRR RUGBY CLUB - PAST V PRESENT 1968/69 AND YOUNG FRIENDS



**Back Row (L to R): S. Davis, R. Kerin, E. Hipwell, T.F. Burns, T. Nealon, G. Hoare, J.McNamara, D. Perry, D. McDowell, B. Heffernan, S. Glendenning, J. Houlihan, R. Fitzpatrick**  
**Middle Row: J. Heffernan, R. McDowell, B. Hayes, G. Burns, N. Coughlan, W. Burns, G. Perry, P. Davis, T. Ritchie, M. Loughnane, B. Hanniffy, B. Vaughan, P. Kerin, L. Vaughan, J. Powell, M. Lewis**  
**Front Row: P. McManus, ?, S. Hayes, G. Fitzpatrick, K. Dolphin, G. Boyd, V. Johnson, G. Lewis, S. Loughnane, L. Mills**

## DEVELOPMENT & OFFICIAL OPENING OF PAIRC NA CARRAIGE & BAILE UI LACHTNAIN

*By Tony Dargan*

Carrig/Riverstown has played its matches on eleven different pitches throughout the parish. As the club was on a sound footing financially in the 90's it was agreed to set about purchasing a field. Mr. Liam Smyth agreed to sell a site in Ballaghgar which had road frontage, was level, it was large enough, centrally located and had room for development. The club had purchased their first pitch. To ensure steady income for the club, the lotto was set up and co-ordinated since by Dermot Sullivan.

The building of a club house, which contained dressing rooms, showers, store room toilets and referees room commenced in 1998 with lot of the work done by direct labour and a high level of voluntary input.

The pitch was realigned and reseeded in August '98 and ready for the start of the '99 season.

In 2000, the barriers surrounding the pitch were erected as were the dug-outs. Ball stoppers behind each goal were next to appear, by divine intervention! Or so it seems. The younger players were not forgotten when the juvenile pitch was developed. Lights for training were installed and the idea of having a ball wall was discussed. Lotto funding was sought and secured. The wall was erected and the kerbing, fencing and lighting were completed in 2006.

From 2007, championship matches were becoming a feature of club life. The first inter-county fixture was a Walsh Cup game involving Down and Offaly. Several Offaly club championship matches have been played in Carrig while the club staged a Minor A hurling final in 2009.

The final stage of development included the completion of the wall area, scoreboard and stand. The scoreboard was salvaged from O'Connor Park, Tullamore. Kieran O'Brien undertook the repair, restructuring and re-erection. The building of the stand was carried out by King's, while the steelwork was supplied by Slevin Brothers.

The completion of the development has happened without a penny being borrowed. This is a great tribute to the members of the club and their abilities to raise funds when needed. Race nights, golf classics and auctions were a godsend at stages of the development.

The club is blessed with dedicated officers, including chairmen, secretaries and treasurers, during all stages of the development and, together with their committees have ensured that the job was finished without having recourse to borrowed funds. The club gratefully acknowledges the support of The National Lottery, Tipperary County Council and the Leinster Council. Time after time, sponsors and supporters were never found wanting and we greatly appreciate their support. When you look around and see what has been achieved over thirteen years, it has all been worthwhile.

The official opening of the club grounds and facilities took place on Sunday 18<sup>th</sup> July 2010. The official plaque was unveiled by Mr. Pat Teehan, Chairperson of Offaly Co. Board. A tree to mark the occasion was planted by the three Life Presidents of the club - Jack Kennedy, Tom Delahunty and Dermot Sullivan. Paudie Butler, National Hurling Co-ordinator also attended.



**(L to R): Tom Delahunty, Jack Kennedy, Dermot Sullivan**

Michael Collins, Chairperson of the club, thanked all who had any part in the development of the grounds. He stated that the club was in a very healthy state with nine hurling teams and a very active and successful camogie team. Mr. Collins added, "On this the most significant occasion in our club's 77 year history, I would like to pay tribute to the committee who made this possible, to the people of this area for their financial support. Thank you to all our sponsors and everyone who contribute regularly to our Lotto, to the people who worked tirelessly on the ground development and all who helped to make this day a reality. We hope that these facilities will be used and enjoyed by the young people of our community for many years to come."

Mr. Pat Teehan said that it was the strength of small clubs such as Carrig/Riverstown that have proven the backbone of the GAA. He added that they had given support to the Co. Board and embodied the original vision of community in the GAA. He stated, "I fully appreciate the contribution Carrig/Riverstown has made to Offaly GAA over the years. It is difficult for small clubs to survive and stay vibrant, particularly where numbers are low and success does not come round on a regular basis. However, the GAA people of Carrig/Riverstown have stood the test of time in providing an outlet for the youth of your community in



### Unveiling the plaque

(L to R): Dermot Sullivan, Jack Kennedy, Michael Collins (Chairperson), Pat Teehan (Chairperson Offaly Co. Board), Paudie Butler, (National Hurling Co-ordinator), Tom Delahunty.

## WHERE ARE THEY NOW?

### MARTIN CASHEN - A PROFILE

By Tony Dargan



Martin Cashen was a member of the Offaly hurling side in the 80's which established the county as a force to be reckoned with on the national stage. He is the proud owner of two All-Ireland and numerous county titles with Carrig/Riverstown and his adopted town of Portlaoise. He has many

memories from a career which began at primary level in 1970 and ended in 1998. His father Jack had a great influence on his career and gave him the opportunity and encouragement to play the game. John Cleary (Clonfinane) gave Martin his hurley in 1974 when he emigrated to Australia. He still has the hurley as a treasured memory. He hurled with Carrig N.S. in Bord Na Scoil competitions (1970-72) and in Leinster Colleges (1975-1976) with the Presentation Brothers College. Martin played U14/U16 Minor for Offaly, represented BIRR at Féile na Gael (1972), Minor final (1975) and Senior final (1975).

In 1984, Martin (a garda sergeant at the time) transferred to Portlaoise and played for the local club, where he tasted success on four occasions, winning the Laois senior championship each time. He returned to play with Carrig/Riverstown in 1994, then in the twilight of his career, and won junior and intermediate championships back to

the form of hurling. Carrig/Riverstown has provided many great teams and players over the years and I have no doubt, that with the facilities you have here today, the youth of the area will have the opportunity to carry on that great tradition. Let today be the day where the foundations are laid for a new era of Carrig/Riverstown hurling."

The booklet, 'Carrig/Riverstown GAA Club - A Brief History and Review' was launched at the official opening. The booklet commemorates the history of the club from the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century to the present day, its achievements, its star players of the past and present and a pictorial account of all its present teams and mentors. The booklet was written by an editorial team consisting of Dermot Sullivan, Tony Dargan, Joe Keane, Barry Deane and Robert O'Brien. Contact any of the above if you wish to buy a copy.

back. He began his coaching career with Carrig/Riverstown in 1998 and also became involved with the U-14's in Portlaoise at Feile.

Having represented Offaly at minor level, he received the call-up to the senior panel from Diarmuid Healy for the National Hurling League campaign of 1979/80. This bunch of players inspired Offaly to their first ever senior provincial title. Twelve months later, in 1980 he was celebrating Liam M'Carthy glory. He repeated this in 1985, winning his second All Ireland medal when Offaly defeated Galway. Winning an All-Ireland was a huge achievement and he was honoured to be fortunate enough to get a place on the panel. It was the start of the county's rise to fame. It was a panel of players who were very much united. They all came from south Offaly and would have known each other from school.

He has fond memories of 1978 and the Junior championship victory over Clara - his brothers Frank, Eamon and Jim were also on that team. Having joined the Gardai that same year, success followed as he garnered two All-Ireland Garda Championship medals.

Hurling has been good to Martin Cashen. He has nine championship medals between Laois and Offaly and still gets as much enjoyment out of watching and coaching as he did playing. The game of hurling has no equal for a player and indeed for a spectator. While he was in many winning dressing rooms, the greatest privilege he had was on a sorrowful occasion in 1985 when his superiors asked him if he would like to escort the funeral of Offaly hurler Pat Carroll R.I.P. from Dublin where he died. This he did and felt honoured and privileged to lead such a great hurler on such a sad journey home.

Martin was promoted to superintendent this year, 2010 and will be based in Galway, taking responsibility for traffic in the western region, which includes the counties of Mayo, Galway, Clare, Roscommon and Longford.

# ST. BRENDAN'S COMMUNITY SCHOOL

30<sup>TH</sup> ANNIVERSARY CELEBRATION & OFFICIAL OPENING OF SCHOOL EXTENSION OCTOBER 2010



Back Row: (L to R): Prefects Clodagh Lalor, Paul Kinsella, Reuben Noyce and Elaine Corrigan.

Front Row: Sr. Marie Mc Namara (Chairperson Board of Management), An Taoiseach Brian Cowen T.D., Bro. Denis (Trustee).



(L to R): Yvonne Claffey, John McCarthy (Oratory stain glass artist), Margaret Maher



An Taoiseach Brian Cowen T.D. unveils the plaque to mark the opening of the new Class room block at St. Brendan's. Pictured are An Taoiseach Brian Cowen T.D., Sr. Marie Mc Namara (Chairperson B.O.M.) Tom Foley (Principal), Ming Loughnane (Deputy Principal), Peter Lyons (Architect), Bro. Denis (Trustee), Donie Corrigan (Frank Murray & Co.), Edward Mc Evoy C.E.O. Offaly V.E.C. (Trustee) and Frank Murray (Builder).



Padraig Flaherty, Tom Foley (Principal) and Bro. Ultan at the unveiling of the new Hurling Wall.



Some of the School Choir and Musicians pictured at the Academic Service to mark St. Brendan's 30th Anniversary and opening of new extension.

# RECOGNISE ANYONE?

(ANSWERS ON PAGE 146)



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2



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4



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## LET'S HEAR FROM YOU

Do you have an interesting story to tell or do you know of someone who does? If so, contact anyone of the committee or e-mail us at [birrreview@gmail.com](mailto:birrreview@gmail.com) and tell us about it. We would love to hear from you. If you have any comments or suggestions for the book we would also like to hear from you.

## ST. BRENDAN'S CHURCH OF IRELAND

Somehow each year there is a theme which seems to run through all 12 months in the life of St. Brendan's Church of Ireland. In 2009, it was fundraising for much-needed repairs to the roof of the church. In 2010, much more positively, it was ecumenical events with our sister churches: Our 40<sup>th</sup> annual ecumenical Carol Service in December (which was also the kick-off for the 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Birr Choral Society), a Christian Unity Week series of Prayer Centres, along with an ecumenical service in January, an ecumenical pilgrimage to honour St. Brendan of Birr in August, and a series of talks and discussions over five weeks in September and October entitled "Jesus was human too, you know... don't you? - Getting to know the human Jesus in Scripture".

Speaking of things ecumenical, we offer best wishes to Fr. Tony on his retirement as Parish Priest in Birr, and congratulations to Fr. David as he takes on the job. We are delighted that Fr. Tony will remain as Assistant Priest.

There have been other celebrations as well – in May, Archdeacon Carney celebrated the 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary of his ordination to the priesthood with a special service, and in June, the 150<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Oxmantown School was marked with a joyful service in the church. Former pupil Mr. Geoff Loane, now with the International Committee of the Red Cross, was the guest speaker at the service. This was followed by a reception at the school, which included activities for the children and a special photographic display of past pupils.

Besides helping with some of our ecumenical services, the Birr Choral Society was involved in two special concerts in their 40<sup>th</sup> year; their anniversary concert in February in St. Brendan's Roman Catholic Church, with choirs from Roscrea and Cloughjordan, the Virtuoso Chamber Choir and others; and a concert in May in the Church of Ireland which also featured the Dublin Orchestral Players and the Cork University Choir.

Sadly, we have had a number of deaths in the parish in the past year. Edgar Roe died in the Midlands Regional Hospital, Tullamore, on the 18<sup>th</sup> November. Edgar had been Parish Secretary for many years, and was deeply involved in the life of the parish and the community. On the 15<sup>th</sup> of April, all of Birr was saddened to hear of the death of former Archdeacon Donald Keegan after a short illness. Donald, who was rector of Birr for 30 years, retired in 2002, and moved to Greystones in Co. Wicklow with his wife Janet. A memorial service was held in Birr in July when the special preacher was a former Bishop, Edward Darling. On the 13<sup>th</sup> of July, Tom Hayes, of The Glens passed away peacefully in Eliza Lodge in Banagher. Tom had a long connection with Birr Golf Club, and he will be sorely missed by his many friends there. Jimmy Fryday of Harvest Lodge, Kilcormac passed away on the 21<sup>st</sup> of

August, after many years of declining health. The huge numbers who came to his funeral in Birr were a tribute to the many friendships he enjoyed with so many people in the area. Anna Walsh, of Clonoghill, died on the 8<sup>th</sup> of October, and her funeral brought together family and friends from all over the country. Susan Hayes, a former resident of Birr, and sister of Tom Hayes of Lisduff, died in England in September, and a memorial service for her was held in October. Sincere condolences to the families of all of these faithful parishioners and friends.

On a happier note, we have also had three weddings in Birr over the past year. Karen Abbott and Kevin McDonnell were married in St. Brendan's, Birr, on the 17<sup>th</sup> of April. And on the 30<sup>th</sup> of April, Shirley Delahunt of Banagher was married to John Flanagan of Athlone. On the 26<sup>th</sup> June, Laura Crawford married Caleb Clarke. Congratulations to these couples as they begin their married life together.

On the 6<sup>th</sup> of June, Bishop Trevor came to Birr for Confirmation. Eight candidates were confirmed: Rachel Alexander, Gary Baker, Jack Delahunt, Sacha Hodgins, and Stephen Serviss from our Group of Parishes, William Phair from Banagher, and Fiacre Johnston and Lucy Ryan from Shinrone.

Our annual Parish Fete moved back to Saturday in 2010, and was held on the 19<sup>th</sup> of June. The date seemed to bring out the crowds, and fun as well as fund-raising ensued. Many thanks to all who supported the Fete in so many ways.

Though our most recent major church repairs were completed last year, we still have had difficulties with some of our buildings. The Rectory has had ongoing chimney problems and, while this was being investigated, dry rot was discovered. Repairs have been largely completed, and other ongoing work is planned.

In September, another successful Parish Dance was held in Dooly's Hotel, with proceeds going to the Church Building Fund.

Our Sunday School has been growing in recent months. We had a successful Picnic Barbecue at the Rectory in September, and involved the children in a fundraising project for mission in October. "Change to Make a Change" collected spare change to make a line of coins stretching from the Sanctuary to the back of the church. Proceeds were given to Bishops' Appeal for overseas relief. Other parish activities continue, particularly through the Girls' Friendly Society and the Mothers' Union.

Many thanks to all who contributed to the life of the Parish in 2010 in so many ways, both among our parishioners and the wider community. May we wish everyone in Birr a holy Christmas, and may the New Year of 2011 bring less anxiety and more hope in all our lives.

## **METHODIST CHURCH, BIRR**

In last year's *Review* we reported our intention to hold occasional evening services, whenever the month had five Sundays in it. These 'Fifth Sunday' services have hosted some interesting speakers, connecting us with the wider world and Methodism in other places. There was the Rev. Conrad Hicks who, having served as a mission partner in Jamaica, is now working in Dublin but is also 'accompanying' the Methodist Church in Guatemala. He spends occasional short periods in Guatemala encouraging the work there, and in June was instrumental in bringing to Ireland the President of the Methodist Church in Guatemala, the Revd. Mario Chachavac, who spoke in Dublin and Belfast of the devastation following the tropical storms in Guatemala. The Church's World Development and Relief Fund was able to send money to help the country. Irish Methodists are asked to give 1% of their income to this Fund annually. Mr. Chachavac was interested to visit Gurteen Agricultural College during his stay. At the same time, the Rev. Joyce Torres from Brazil visited Birr and spoke of her work across the Methodist Churches in the whole of Latin America.

Another Fifth Sunday speaker was the Rev. Bill Olmsted, newly returned from the Holy Land. He spoke enthusiastically about his visit and had plenty of small gifts with which to reward those on whose help he called during the service!

At the evening service on the fifth Sunday in August the Rev. Clodagh Yambasu preached. This service was a celebration of the fact that the Rev. Irene Morrow had completed sixty years in ministry. She began in England in the Deaconess Order, and went from there to spend several years in Ghana. She served briefly as a deaconess in Ireland before returning to England to train for the ordained ministry. She came back to Birr when she retired; her father served here as a minister in the 1950s and he also spent his retirement here. Friends from around Birr and family members from considerably further afield joined us that evening, and the President of

the Methodist Church in Ireland, the Rev. Paul Kingston, newly returned from a visit to Ghana, brought greetings from people who remembered Irene's ministry there. The service was followed (as usual in Methodist circles!) by tea, with a cake specially baked by a Ghanaian lady from our Athlone church.



**L-R: Alaercio Lopes de Souza, Andrea Eades, June Eades**

Also in August a wedding was held in the church, the first for nineteen years, when Andrea Eades married Alaercio Lopez de Souza. Another important occasion was the Confirmation in October of three of our young people: Amanda Haslam from Rockview, and Aisling and Alan Bailey from Banagher.



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## ST. BRENDAN'S PARISH, BIRR

The Parish of Birr has certainly witnessed a year of great change in 2010. In July, Fr. Tony Cahir announced his decision to retire from the position of Parish Priest. This was greeted with some sadness, as Fr. Tony had served the people of Birr Parish with great dedication since 1999. However, there was also a general feeling of gladness that Fr. Tony has decided to remain in Birr.

In August, there was further relief when Bishop Willie Walsh announced the Clerical Appointments for 2010. At this stage we learned that Fr. David Carroll, our curate since 2007, was to be promoted to Parish Priest. Fr. Tony Cahir was to become Assistant Priest. Fr. David is a native of O' Callaghan's Mills in Co. Clare and has served in several parishes in Clare and North Tipperary since his ordination. He is also a former Diocesan Schools' Inspector for Killaloe. He is the youngest P.P. appointed to Birr since Fr. John Egan in 1848. All in the Parish of Birr wish both priests well in their new roles.

This January also saw the resignation of Bishop Willie Walsh on grounds of age. The Holy Father announced in May that Fr. Kieran O' Reilly S.M.A. was to become Bishop



**Bishop Kieran O' Reilly (centre) pictured with retired Bishop Willie Walsh (left) at his ordination**



**The Book of Birr is held over Bishop Kieran O' Reilly's head during the ordination ceremony in Ennis.**

Walsh's successor. Bishop Kieran was ordained as Bishop of Killaloe on August 29<sup>th</sup> and several people from Birr attended the ceremony in Ennis.

In July, Bishop Walsh launched the revised 'Child Safety Guidelines' for the Diocese and they were adopted by the Pastoral Council.

Thankfully, the Ceremonies for Christmas 2009 and Easter were attended by packed Churches. There was also a very good response to the Triduum in Lent and the Corpus Christi Procession in June.

August 28<sup>th</sup> witnessed a very prayerful ecumenical procession in honour of our patron St. Brendan. All of the churches in the town were visited and the pilgrimage ended in the old St. Brendan's Churchyard in Church St.

For all details of Mass schedules and Parish contact details, please consult the parish website [www.stbrendansbirr.ie](http://www.stbrendansbirr.ie) Wishing all readers of the 'Birr Review' every blessing for Christmas and 2011.



**Enjoying the Lions Club Christmas Party in the Birr Community Nursing Unit are Joe Dowling (left) and Ray Leonard**

**Dancing the night away at the Birr Lions Club Christmas party in the Birr Community Nursing Unit are Gillian Ryan and George Hackett**



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## MERCY PRIMARY SCHOOL



### Junior Infants

*Back Row (L to R): Goda Butkerviciute, Danielle Cosgrove, Carina Donoghue, Fia Nuaghton, Simona Latuskeviciute, Mary McDonagh, Maja Ubowska, Alysha Williams, Ms. Gemma Enright (Class Teacher).*

*Middle Row: Emily O'Loughlin, Róisín Mooney, Chantelle Hutchinson, Mary Touhey, Bronagh Walsh, Ava Lynskey, Abi Wild, Aisling Kinsella.*

*Front Row: Róisín McAteer, Simone Finnerty, Emma Irwin, Chloe Hutchinson, Sadhbh Talbot, Dariya Plaksiy, Róisín Riley, Sarah Reynolds Murray.*



### 6<sup>th</sup> Class

*Back Row (L to R): Emma Parsons, Stephanie Donoghue, Chloe Walsh, Katie Kirwan, Emma Behan, Mariesa Cleary, Linda Tyrrell, Niamh Horan, Ciara Murray, Benedetta Tramontozzi, Migle Kociute, Leanne McDonagh, Ms. Richelle Treacy (Class Teacher).*

*Middle Row: Ciara Nolan, Katie O'Brien, Darlene Bennett, Frances Hoare, Megan Doyle, Bronagh Byrne, Amanda Pardy, Aoife Hoare, Leanne Hogan, Georgia Carroll, Dervela O'Donovan, Celine Delaney, Cathriona Byrne, Megan Kinsella.*

*Front Row: Alana Roddy Pardy, Rochelle Patel, Niamh Middleton, Clodagh O'Carroll, Laura Maloney, Rachel Boyd, Aimee Carroll, Lorraine Murdock*

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### Junior Infants

*Back Row (L to R): Niamh Carroll, Rebecca Bracken, Andzelika Strujeva, Halle Finnerty, Keelin Murphy, Annabel Haslam, Ciara Bradley, Viktorija Voitenko, Caoimhe Loughrey, Mrs. Mary Dolan, Principal, Ms. Lisa Kennedy, Teacher*  
*Front Row: Kealan Franks, Ferdia Dickson, Jamie Corboy, Cathal D'Arcy, Stephen Kane, Jimmy Kiely, Danny Dwyer, Max Delaney (Missing Jakub Nojek)*



### 6<sup>th</sup> Class

*Back Row (L to R): Mr Conor D'Arcy Teacher, Conor Hickson, Dillon Ward, Aaron Blake, Dillon Heffernan, Conor Smith, Jordan Beswick, Christopher Cleary, Sean Kavanagh, Paul Mahon, Oisin Murphy, Ceilim King, Mrs. Mary Dolan, Principal, Kevin O Keeffe, Gary Baker*  
*Front: Clodagh Mc Cormack, Emma Kinsella, Sarah Dooley, Caitriona Reddin, Roisin Brennan, Santa Baskovaite, Rachel Kealey, Melissa Gleeson, Margaret Hutchinson*

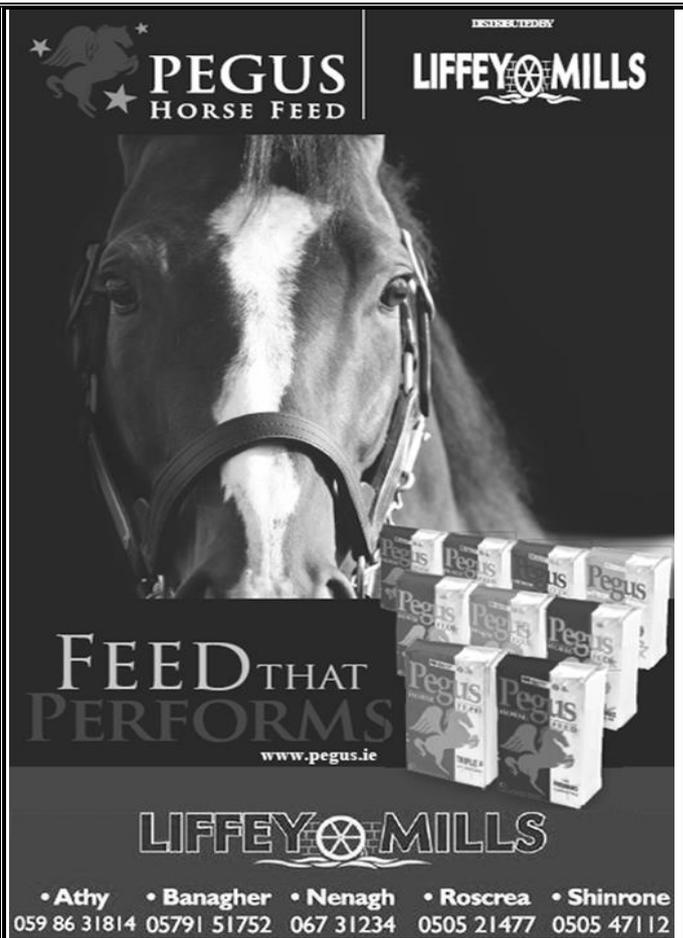
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### Infants

*Back Row (L to R): Sarah Freeman, Aoibhinn Rice, Victoriija Peciukonyte, Sinead Fallon, Liam Daly, Charlie Raper, Peter King, Patrick Bergin, Evan Carroll Tully, Colin Kelly, Mrs Lorraine Carroll*  
*Front Row: Seán Connaughton, Conor McDowall, Áine Kennedy, Alana O'Sullivan, David Guilfoyle, Molly Hogan, Kate Hogan, Emmet Watkins*



### 6<sup>th</sup> Class

*Back Row (L to R): Adam O'Riordan, William Dwyer, Aidan King, Ashton Conn, Callum Dempsey, Mrs Bríd Connolly (Principal)*  
*Front Row: Orlaith Plunkett, Shauna Ryan, Sarah Harding, Shiofra Ryan, Elizabeth Harding*

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## ST. BRENDAN'S BOYS PRIMARY SCHOOL



### Junior Infants

*Back Row (L to R):* Conor Kelly, William Parsons, Curtis Kelly, Mykolas Kocius, Alexander Hansbury Atomori, Dylan Coughlan, Ricky Hanlon, Kiefer Shalloe, Adam Duffy, Alex Molloy, Charlie Smyth, Matthew Donohue, Tymon Kaczmarcz, Sam McAuley, Luke Morrissey and Patryk Kicka.  
*Front Row:* Stephen Nolan, David McDonagh, Isaac Doyle, Kevin Lally Scully, Stephen Dillon, Sean Flanagan, Luke Lally, and Conor Lally Greijmans.



### 6<sup>th</sup> Class

*Back Row (L to R):* R Bernie Ward, Nicholas Cordial, Mr. Niall Crofton (teacher), Vladan Pekovic, Lee Roddy, John McDonagh, Ben Russell, Darcie Howley, Niall Hehir, Shaun Coray, Luke Fogarty, Conor Guilfoyle, Donnacha Purcell, Jamie Grimes,  
*Front Row (L to R):* Curtis Reynolds, Dean Birney, Andrew Cosgrove Milne, Brad Hansbury, Conor Brummell, Michael Seguin, Simon Moylan, Edvinas Latuskevicius, (missing from picture, Dean Cahill, Brian Hynes, Luke Molloy, Dylan Watkins)

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## CARRIG NATIONAL SCHOOL



### Infants

*Back Row (L to R): Alan Fogarty, Aleesha Brewer, Miss Geraldine Fox  
3rd Row: Aoife O'Donovan, Anna Hoctor, Abí Dean, Liam Hoare  
2nd Row: Joseph O'Sullivan, Caoimhe Ginty, Isabel Ryan,  
Bella Mannion-O'Brien, Caoimhe O'Donovan  
Front Row: Niall Redmond, Charlie Whelehan, Ryan Martin.*

### 6<sup>th</sup> Class

*Back Row (L to R): Eoin Bergin, Eoghan Maher,  
Niamh Killeen, Ellen Cashen,  
Tony Sampson (Principal)  
2<sup>nd</sup> Row: Thomas Hogan, Eoghan Smyth,  
Shane Collins, Rhys Culbert,  
Isobel Cavanagh,  
Aisling Larkin, Shannon Abbott,  
Front Row: Christopher Hayden,  
Aron Dickson, Michael Gleeson,  
Megan King.*





**Birr man takes Gold with Silver**

Cathal Barber with the medal for which he won 1st prize in the category of Gold, Silver and Alternative materials at the RDS National Crafts Competition 2010. He designed and hand-crafted a sterling silver Salt and Pepper set entitled "Stand Together".



**Pat Gallagher, County Manager (right) congratulates Paddy Quigley on his retirement from the staff of Birr Town Council**



**Congratulations to Michael Donegan who retired from teaching after 35 years**

He was principal of St. Brendan's Boys P.S. for the past 11 years and is pictured here handing over the school bell and keys to the new principal, Niall Crofton.



**Rosemary and Brendan Mooney from Woodlands Park, pictured with Kristin Davis (left) who plays 'Charlotte' in Sex and the City at the film premiere of Sex and the City 2 in London earlier this year.**

## 32 COUNTY MARATHON CHALLENGE COMES TO BIRR



**Above (L to R):**  
Susan Carroll,  
Sinead Watkins,  
Deirdre Reid,  
Mairead Freeman,  
Siobhan Smith,  
Aoife Dwyer,  
Margaret O'Meara

On Friday 16<sup>th</sup> July 2010 the 32 County Marathon challenge arrived in Birr. This challenge was the brainchild of two Westmeath men, Gerry Duffy and Ken Whitelaw, to raise funds for Irish Autism Action. The principle of the challenge was simple – 32 marathons in 32 counties in 32 days. Birr was day 15 of the challenge and the people of Offaly rose to the occasion, with no less than 79 people turning out to run, jog or walk the route with the two heroes including Offaly Olympian, Pauline Curley, GAA dual star Michael Duignan, former jockey Charlie Swan and local star Brian Whelahan. One of the highlights of the run was the 'relay' runners from Rhode Minor GAA club, who turned up in great numbers. The Birr marathon was organised by local man, Willie Burns, who himself walked the half-marathon. On seeing Ken Whitelaw struggling with injury, Willie did an about-turn and went out and did it all over again just to keep Ken company. Such was the spirit of the day. There was good news for the area. All monies raised on the day remained with the Laois/Offaly Families for Autism (LOFFA), the local support group by parents for parents and families of children and adults with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD). For more information on LOFFA see their website, [www.loffa.ie](http://www.loffa.ie)



**Above (L to R):** Willie Burns,  
Michael Loughnane, Brian Whelahan,  
Michael Campbell



**Above (L to R):** Oisín Scully,  
Michael Dunne, Leonard Fay



**Pictured left are (L to R):** Yvonne Claffey,  
Jennifer Coghlan, Michael Coghlan,  
Tina Hctor, Francis Kennedy, Rosie Hctor

**Pictured right are (L to R):** Martin Kelly,  
Sharon Grant, Noelle Manning, Willie Burns,  
Ann McDonald, Alan Curley,  
in front are Bill Burns and Ashton Conn





Sylvia Doyle & Thomas McInerney



Lisa Coulter & Barry Deane



Anna Moore & Derek Boyd



Andrea Eades  
& Alaercio Lopes de Souza



Karen Abbott & Kevin McDonnell



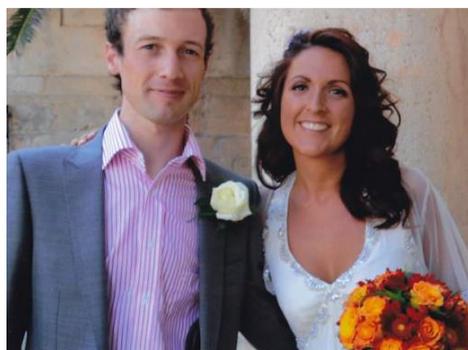
Dympna Guinan & John Looby



Elaine Gohery & Paul Smith



Debbie Martin & Conor Grennan



Lorna Doorley & Colm Loughnane



Patricia Guinan & John Devery



Susan Dooley & Paul Cleary



Susanne McMenamin  
& Mark Conroy



Michelle Hynes  
& Tony Makim



Lorraine Kennedy  
& John Butler



Lissette Fuentes &  
Jim Heffernan



Nicole Parsons & Tony Murray



Lorena Blanco & Patrick Gleeson



Clare Pardy & Thomas Dunican



Sinead Watkins & Mark Conneely



Ellen King & Seamus Kenny



Noreen Gray & Daniel McDonagh



Elaine Staunton & Des Houlihan



Tracey Kinsella & Stephen Pardy



Tara Stapleton & Michael Carter



Olivia Kennedy & Ross Walker



Hazel Vaughan & Brian Turner



Catherine Brophy & Niall Lawlor



Vanessa Doyle & William McInerney



Roseanne Aylward & Robert Kennedy



Fiona Murphy & Thomas Geraghty

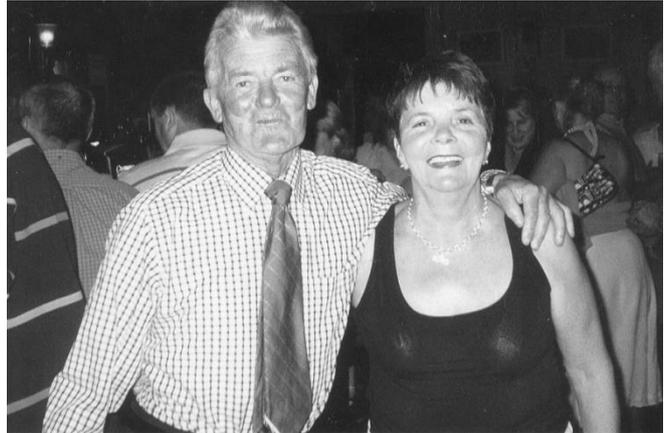


Theresa McGuinness & Alan Deane

# CONGRATULATIONS – 50<sup>TH</sup> WEDDING ANNIVERSARIES



**Dorothy & Padraig Nolan from Carrig who were married on 12th of November 1960 in St. Edmund's, Houghton, West Sussex**



**Paddy and Ann Kirwan, Newbridge Street who were married on 5<sup>th</sup> September 1960 in St. Brendan's, Birr**



**Thomas and Eileen Nallen, Banagher, who were married in St. Brendan's, Birr on 21<sup>st</sup> June 1960**



**Michael and Bríd Ryan, Burkes Hill who were married in St. Brendan's, Birr on 29<sup>th</sup> October 1960**



**Mick and Mary Caffrey who were married on the 9<sup>th</sup> November 1959 in Durrow, Tullamore**

## BIRR YOUTH CAFE

Following in the footsteps of our European family our own government has provided funding for the establishment of a number of youth cafés in Ireland. The 'youth café' itself is a relatively new phenomenon and so the model is open to interpretation as can be seen by comparing established youth cafés such as 'The Gaff' in Galway and 'The KDYS Youth Centre' in Killarney. Our youth café will stand on the shoulders of these establishments in an effort to provide services and facilities of the first class for our local youth.

So far, the voluntary effort has been a fine example of bottom-up organisation as many locals of the Birr area, with little in the way of resources, have come together to form a working committee with an effectiveness and vision capable of accomplishing the finer details of the task at hand. Those on our team recognise the personal value involved in their support of this initiative; they see that, by acting now, they can provide a better future for their own children and for their children's children. They also recognise that, without their personal effort, nothing would happen and nothing would continue to happen as long as such inaction persisted.

Partnering with the local youth organisation, SUB Project, has allowed us the security of having a long-term base from which to establish and develop the youth café. We would like to take this opportunity to thank everyone from the SUB team, without whom this would never have gotten off the ground. With a secure base, we proceeded to raise funds to provide our 25% of an Offaly County Development Board grant. This is an ongoing process and we urge local businesses and individuals to donate to the project at this

time especially, as whatever is given now will potentially quadruple. We also welcome in-kind donations of 'sweat-equity' (work hours), materials, skill-sharing and specialised help in all areas of human endeavour. With a building to make ready and generations of young people to facilitate there is room for contributions from all walks of life, be they skilled or unskilled, business-based or artistic, in-kind or economic.

Our vision is two-fold, having both a national and a local aspect. In conjunction with the establishment of a local youth café, the Thousand Stars Project has also initiated the primary movements toward the establishment of a national online social network designed specifically for productive use by members of youth-café's and youth-service organisations nationwide, with a view to providing a safe and protected online arena in which to build a national youth culture.

Due to the necessity of awaiting planning permission, the opening of Birr's Youth Café has been delayed until March/April of next year...still, every cloud has its silver lining and so we are confident that we will hit the ground running when we do open our doors at this later date continuing many projects which are currently being initiated through other local facilities such as the Community Resource Centre and Birr Library.

This Youth Café is something we can be proud of, something special that will change the way we live our lives as a community. We welcome everyone to take their part in building our shared future.



**Pictured at a presentation of a cheque to the Youth Project for funds raised from the Jamie Cooney Memorial Cup in Highfield Soccer Club**

Back Row (L to R):  
 Damien Cotter, John Pardy,  
 Stephen Parady, Dan Kennish,  
 Simon Kiernan, Nicola Bracken  
 Front Row: Gina Hehir,  
 Noel Hehir, Lorna Kiernan,  
 Lisa Parady, Siobhan Barnes,  
 Claire McDermott

## RIVER VIEW RESOURCES

River View Resources is located where Ely House was previously in Birr. It is a part of St. Anne's day services in Roscrea and has been providing resources and activities for people with an intellectual disability in Birr since 2001.

It is set in an idyllic location adjacent to The Camcor Park, where arts and crafts are undertaken from Monday to Friday. Fine quality pieces in slate, handmade cards and other crafts are on sale to the general public. These are produced in the centre. There are currently 19 individuals who use the service at River View Resources.

The facilities include a computer room, crafts room, kitchen area, dining area, therapy room, toilet facilities and an active retirement area.

It is noted by all at River View Resources the therapeutic value in producing slate and craft work. Both service users and staff equally enjoy participating in these activities. The slate and craft work enhances individual's skill and also increases their responsibilities in a work environment.

The popular craft work in River View Resources is mostly sought after for weddings, house and gift items. To add to the unique character of the crafts, each piece can be

designed to suit personal preferences and individualised to the customer's request.

The craft production in River View Resources is only one aspect of the overall activities undertaken at the Resource Centre. The main objective for River View Resources is community participation and sourcing supported employment. We are very fortunate here in Birr that a number of individuals who use services at River View Resources are employed by local business people. Additional activities include, going to the gym, line dancing, VEC courses, hosting coffee mornings for local community charities and participating in Tidy Towns. Since moving to our new premises, we had the opportunity to develop a garden and produce our own vegetables. In August of this year, the Birr X-Factor was presented in the Birr Theatre and Arts Centre to a large audience. It was a night that was enjoyed by all present.

Visitors are always welcome to view our arts and crafts which are all for sale. Our opening hours for visitors are 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. Monday to Thursday and Friday 9 a.m. to 4 p.m. River View Resources can be contacted on 057-9122552.



Pictured at the Official Opening of Riverview Resources are (L to R): Mary Kennedy, Denise Kennedy, An Taoiseach Brian Cowen, Ned Kennedy



Helena White getting prepared for the 'X-Factor'



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## CARRIG, RIVERSTOWN & KILLEEN ACTIVE RETIREMENT GROUP



**Pictured at the launch of 'Rolling Back The Years' were**

Back Row (L to R): Bill Taylor, Mary Keavney, Pat Ryan, John Woods, Christine Hough, Tommy Moody, Joe Ryan

Front Row: Mary Taylor, Detta Turner, Fr. Tony Cahir, Marge Carey, Teresa Kennedy, Mary Hocht

We are pleased to report another successful and activity filled year. Our Thursday evening indoor bowling goes from strength to strength and we had our usual social visits to other groups.

April saw us on the road again when we set out for our annual break. This time, Wexford was our preferred destination. We stayed in the lovely Summerhill House Hotel in Enniskerry and went out every day to visit places of interest in the country. The most memorable of those visits was to Wexford gaol. This was a truly remarkable place and worth a visit for anyone. There were two tour guides dressed in the uniform of the day and we had a most interesting talk from the 'gaoler' before the start of our tour. The other guide was in the garb of the school mistress of the time, the school room had several models of poor ragged children, all the cells had models of prisoners and guards with plaques and the walls describing the crimes they had committed and for which they were to be deported, some of which were the most minor imaginable. In the yard, the horror continued, with models of poor creatures being flogged by the bully boy guards. We left there in a most solemn frame of mind.

Our May meeting was an open meeting to raise funds for the Alzheimer's Society. Alas, we had no takers from the public at large but, as usual, our members stepped up to the plate and, with their usual generosity raised €250. May also saw us visiting the Punchestown races. For some time we were planning to write a little book documenting some

of our childhood memories so, this year, it was decided now was the time to go ahead, despite some misgivings and more than a little skepticism. We decided to bite the bullet, and with our literary juices flowing we got down to business culminating in the publication of "Rolling Back the Years" which we launched on October 14<sup>th</sup>.

Next year's itinerary is not yet to hand, but be assured we will be as active then as we were this past year, 'active' being the by-word for our group.



**Brian and Clodhna McNamara with the family runabout during Vintage Week 1971**

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## BIRR CHAPTER – IRISH GEORGIAN SOCIETY

Our 17th Annual Meeting was on February 10th. We held monthly committee meetings, with the exception of August. Our committee adopted that, from henceforth, our annual meetings be held in November each year.

In October 2009, Amanda Pedlow, Offaly Heritage Officer, addressed the Chapter on the Public Realm Plan for Birr and, following this, a report by Howley Hayes on the development of Birr, particularly on the possible development of Birr Workhouse and the restoration of the Cheanley Column, was considered a landmark report. As a result of this, the Chapter encouraged the Birr Town Councillors to invite the Australian Ambassador to visit Birr

and see the workhouse for himself, considering the large number of its former inmates who had emigrated to Australian - this is ongoing.

An architectural highlight for Birr was the restoration of the column, the first such in Ireland to be erected.

We are presently undertaking a project to produce a leaflet on the preservation of Georgian doors, similar to our leaflet on the preservation of Windows.

A very successful tour of Louth was undertaken with thirty participants.

Sadly our proposed trip to Edinburgh was cancelled because of lack of interest.



**Photo taken on a very successful day out by 30 members of Birr Chapter, IGS, included a visit to the premier historic house in Louth, Beaulieu House and Gardens near Drogheda, now owned by Mrs Gabriel De Freitas (nee Waddington.)**

L-R: Clodagh Dowley, Mrs. Gabriel de Freitas, Denis O'Sullivan and Theo Dillon

## CRINKILL TIDY VILLAGES – 10 YEARS OLD

The Crinkill Tidy Villages Association was ten years old in 2010. The Committee originally came together to celebrate the Millennium and, after recognising the need for a group to represent the community's interests the Crinkill Tidy Villages Association was formed. The Association's main focus was on improving and enhancing the village environment.

From the beginning, the Association decided that the Tidy Towns Competition would give motivation and focus to our endeavours and we entered the competition in 2003. The original Crinkill Tidy Villages Committee had previously entered in 1997 and 1998.

This year, the judges awarded Crinkill an extra 4 points, to bring us to a total of 255. The committee was relieved to see that the trend continues upwards. However, we are aware that a greater effort will be required in the coming years if we are to continue to gain points.

Congratulations to the Crinkill Green Schools committee on its wonderful achievement of gaining Green School status. We commend you on the great strides you have made on reducing, re-using and recycling.

Check out Crinkill on Google Maps Street View. The camera caught us on a good day, the sun is shining, flowers blooming, grass is cut and even the litter is absent.

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## CARRIG/RIVERSTOWN/KILLEEN COMMUNITY ALERT GROUP

This group was set up in October 2009, by a group of local people with the help and encouragement of our local councillor, Michael O'Meara. It was encouraged after people in the areas were upset and vulnerable due to a spate of house break-ins.

The group was officially launched on Wednesday 27<sup>th</sup> January 2010 by Inspector Pat Murray, who was standing in for Supt. John Maloney attached to Birr Garda Station. Margaret Quinn, the Community Alert Development Officer was in attendance and was very helpful in the setting up of the group. Our Crime Prevention Officer for the areas, Sergeant Sean Sherlock, gave an excellent presentation on prevention of crime and was warmly accepted and greeted. It was very informative. He tends to call these community groups, programmes of minding the elderly and minding ourselves.

We organised a joint seminar with the Lorrha Group on the 13<sup>th</sup> October in Carrig Hall. Guest speakers included Martin Quinn, President of Muintir Na Tire; Maggie McNally, Senior Social Worker with H.S.E. West; Liam Kelly, National

Co-ordinator of Community Alert and John Lonergan, Former Governor of Mountjoy Prison. There was a large attendance.



**CRK Community Alert Group Officers**  
L to R: Ger Connaughton (Chairperson), Ciaran Campbell (Treasurer), Ann Hctor (Secretary)

## BIRR GIRL GUIDES

The Girl Guides had a very busy year. We had a bag pack in Tesco in February to fund-raise for our Annual Summer Camp. Thank you to everyone who supported us and especially to the staff of Tesco for their kindness on the day. We went on an overnight camping trip in May. We went to the Isle of Man on annual camp in July for a week. We travelled by bus and ferry. We had a great time taking part in water sports and activities. We were very impressed with the Isle of Man. The people are very friendly and the island is spotless. We were very tired when we got home but it was a great experience and we have memories to last us a lifetime.

The Ladybirds celebrated their 20th Birthday (20 years in Ireland) in May. Birr Ladybirds took part by attending a Birthday Party at Turoe Pet Farm in Loughrea. We met up with other Ladybird Units in the Region. We had a brilliant day learning about all of the different animals. We had a tour of the Pet Farm, met a crocodile under the bridge and made a wish at the Turoe Stone. We ended the day with a sing song and cut the birthday cake. We all



**Birr Ladybirds and Brownies carol singing at Tesco, Birr**

received a special issue t-shirt and birthday badge. A big **THANK YOU** to our brilliant leaders who give their time voluntarily. These include Girl Guide leaders, Linda Dowling and Zara Cordial, Brownie Leaders, Bernadette Lyons, Sandra Guilfoyle and Ronnie Donovan and Ladybird leaders, Martina Cooke and Bernie Cahill. If anyone would like to find out more about Guiding, please contact Martina Cooke (District Commissioner) on 057 9125382.

42nd Annual  
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*To all Venues, Societies, Clubs, Groups and  
Individuals who helped organise, facilitate  
and run fundraisers & Festival events;*

*To all Sponsors and Patrons;  
To all those who attended Festival events*

**MANY THANKS**

FROM

**Birr Vintage Week & Arts Festival Committee, 2010**

WE ARE TRULY GRATEFUL FOR YOUR CONTINUED SUPPORT

**Looking forward to the 43<sup>rd</sup> Annual  
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## BIRR VINTAGE WEEK

Friday 13<sup>th</sup> August saw our Georgian Heritage town turning back time as the 42<sup>nd</sup> Annual Birr Vintage Week & Arts Festival began. The Festival's all-inclusive programme of entertainment appeals to a wide audience, with its dynamic range of vintage and modern events throughout the Festival Week.



**Jack Ryan on his nifty Honda 50**

The Opening Parade brought thousands of people onto the streets of the town who were in agreement that this was one of the best Parades ever seen. The spectacular display of both the vintage and modern; marching bands, floats, steam engines, vintage cars, bicycles, tractors, machinery along with street theatre performers and equine entries ensured there was something of interest for all ages, and these, along with the beautiful sunshine made sure that this was a very enjoyable family day out.

A number of exciting events took place over the opening weekend. The inaugural visit of the Middle-Lands Circus Festival delighted and amazed its audiences whilst the ever popular Olde Time Traditional Fair drew great crowds.

The Ormand Flying Club provided a spectacular display of aircraft as part of their Annual Fly In and the Artisan and Craft Market in Emmet Square, with its large range of, stalls brought a fantastic variety of sights and aromatic smells to the town.



**Enjoying the Old Time Fair were from left Gerry Dolan, George and Sylvia Vaughn**

The Festival was delighted to be able to hold a number of free Children's Events and Sporting enthusiasts had a choice of Vintage Tennis, Walking Tours, Golfing at the Glens, a Swim Competition and an U-12 Penalty Shoot-Out along with the J.J. Kinahan Criterium Cycle Race; truly a crowd pleaser. The Donkey Derby was once again a family favourite and a huge crowd thronged the Tesco carpark to enjoy fantastic live music on the Gig Rig from Ducky Fuzz and the winners of Birr's Got Talent. Fortunately, the damp conditions did not prevent the grand finale of this evening, the spectacular fireworks display, from illuminating the skies above the town.

Music lovers were well catered for. Birr Theatre & Arts Centre hosted both "Baroque Delight" and the return of virtuoso violinist Vladimir Jablovok and the Slovak Festival Orchestra, with special guest Sean Costello presented by Birr Stage Guild. Aspiring musicians of the future competed in the Michael (Dom) Egan Busking Competition on the streets of Birr, whilst the "Birr's Got Talent" competition showcased the wonderful wealth of young talent in the town. Nightly entertainment in local pubs with live music, candlelit nights and inter-pub competitions all added to the atmosphere of the Festival Week.

The role of the Arts in the Festival continues to increase. The Visual Arts Trail 2010 featured a number of local artists who have exhibited both nationally and internationally. Other exhibitions included work by 17 local artists in The Maltings, along with members of Offaly Crafty, a Children's Exhibition in Birr Library and exhibitions by Birr Photography Group, Birr Arts Group and Local History in 3D; an exhibition of models of historical buildings and monuments built by children from local primary schools. Lunch-time theatre was a highlight with two sold-out performances of 'Bed Among

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**Getting ready for the parade were from left Mary L'Estrang, Ronnie Donnelly, George Hackett and Frankie Donnelly with the entry for the Birr Community Nursing Unit**

the Lentils' performed by Maeve O'Donovan and the audience was enthralled by stories from Niall de Burca who also facilitated story-telling workshops for families at Birr Theatre & Arts Centre. Children's dance workshops, artist talks and film screenings further enhanced the arts element of the Festival programme.

As always, the Antique & Fine Art Fair displayed a wonderful array of goods on show and for sale, delighting the great numbers of people who visited it.



**Billy Scully aboard his tractor**

With annual favourites, new events, vintage flavour and modern entertainment, the 42<sup>nd</sup> Annual Birr Vintage Week & Arts Festival proved to be an exciting and vibrant festival which celebrated Birr's remarkable heritage and culture, inspiring participation and enjoyment in everyone who made the effort to come out and sample the events.



**The Annual Donkey Derby was a huge success**

The importance of sponsorship, organisation and manpower has greatly increased as the Festival has expanded. The wonderful local support and wide participation is the key to the continued success of this Festival and the Organising Committee would like to express its thanks to all those who supported the Festival in any way, to all our sponsors for their generous financial contributions and to the Clubs, Societies, Venues, Groups and Individuals for their vital volunteering spirit and enthusiasm both before and during the Festival. We would also like to express a special thanks to the local Vintners who played a key role in raising sponsorship by running fund-raisers in the months prior to the Festival.



**Dearbhaile Garahy on her pony and trap**

If you would like to become involved in next year's Festival, which runs from the 5<sup>th</sup> to 12<sup>th</sup> August come along to the AGM (see local press for details). For further information contact [info@birrvintageweek.com](mailto:info@birrvintageweek.com) or check out [www.birrvintageweek.com](http://www.birrvintageweek.com).



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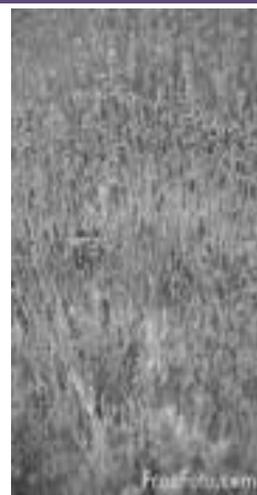
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## BIRR BOYS SCOUTS

For Birr Scouting the start of 2010 was one to remember. It was marked mainly by the tremendous encouragement and financial support by the people of the Midland area. 2009 saw extensive damage done to our log cabin by vandals. First to our rescue was "Roesy" Roe, an old scout, who donated an oil painting to be raffled, followed by numerous people who helped out financially. With additional help from our fellow scouts in the region, the cabin was restored to its former glory.

The scouting year began with visits to the swimming pool where the cubs and scouts secured their swimming badges and three of the venturers are now qualified life guards. Our meetings in January and February were spent preparing our new members for their investiture in March. The venturers did a survival weekend in the Slieve Bloom Mountains in February and, despite the inclement weather, they all enjoyed the outing. The scouts and cubs also visited the cabin to try out their skills at orienteering and backwoods living. In March, we had our usual investiture for our new recruits and our Chaplain, Fr. Pat Gilbert celebrated mass for the deceased members.

One of our major events in March was the conference of the south east region of Scouting Ireland in Tullamore which was attended by our Chief Scout. On the first evening

we had a parade through the town, led by the scout band and groups from all over the region.

The May bank holiday weekend saw us off to Portumna Forest Park for our usual training for annual camp. Included in the training was canoeing and water safety, under the supervision of Birr Outdoor Education Centre on Lough Derg. On the June bank holiday weekend it was the turn of the cubs to head for their camping adventure in Portumna, where they all succeeded in getting their skills badges.

July saw the scouts and venturers off on their annual camp to Carnsore in Co. Wexford. The programme included Canoeing, Abseiling and Coastal Diving. The photographic Competition was held on Our Lady's Island. On our last night, we had the usual Irish weather – thunder, lightning and rain and, as our motto is "Be Prepared" we were and the "craic was mighty", again a night to remember.

We could not complete this review without thanking our hard-working parents committee, who put a lot of time into fund-raising and transporting the scouts during the year and the people of Birr who supported us and also the Marian Hall Committee who made the hall available to us for some of our functions. Finally, we want to remind our young people that Santa will be visiting the log cabin in the Slieve Blooms on the 19<sup>th</sup> December and all are welcome.



**Enjoying Annual Camp in Carnsore, Co. Wexford**

Back Row (L to R): Mikie Donoghue, Emma Hayes, Mark Guinan, David Kennedy, Ruairí Keane, Stephen Lyons, Eoin Reddin, Jack Featherstonhaugh, Donnacha Carroll, Sean Egan  
 Middle Row: Padraic Connaughton, Ciarán Connaughton, Liam Larkin, Nathan Young, Conor Lavin, Martin Hynes, Stephen O'Rourke, Ronan Watkins, Brian Dooley, Jack Ryan, Mary Hayes  
 Front Row: Rós Connaughton, Mark Haines, Cathal Guilfoyle, Seán Connaughton, T.J. Talbot, Eoin Watkins, Stephen Guilfoyle, Stephen Watkins, Jamie Doonan, Kenny Cooke

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## BIRR CASTLE

2010 was another great year for Birr Castle Demesne, with great numbers attending the events held in its beautiful surroundings. The Courtyard Café proved to be a great draw for both visitors and locals alike, offering a relaxing refuge from the hustle and bustle of everyday life whilst the Discovery Gift Shop went from strength to strength with its fantastic variety of presents and goods for all tastes.

This year's events began with a very successful *Easter Bunny and Easter Egg Hunt*, followed by a most interesting astronomy talk on "2012 – Is It The End?" Birdwatch Ireland brought a large crowd on its *Dawn Chorus Walk* on 16th May, discovering the wonders of the early morning bird song. The opening of a new *Picnic and Play Area* for children 10 years and younger proved to be a great hit with the younger visitors and the team are planning to expand this further in 2011.



Hot Air Balloons Over Birr Castle

One of the highlights of the year was undoubtedly the *Birr Hot Air Balloon Event* which took place in May. Over 8,000 people thronged the grounds of the Demesne to see these magnificent balloons up close and enjoy the festive atmosphere. International star Paul Brady headlined the boutique music festival "*Astral Plains*" in June. This festival of music, arts and the cosmos, provided original and varied all-day entertainment for a broad spectrum of festival goers: from music, to arts and science.

August was a busy month with 32 beautiful Roses visiting Birr Castle Demesne as part of their journey around the country in advance of the Rose of Tralee competition followed by an *Organ Recital and Choral Performance* and a *Bat Roost and Bat Detecting Walk* later that month. The *Irish Game and Country Fair* at the end of August brought almost 35,000 visitors to the area to experience this unique cultural event.

The *Birr Whirlpool Star Party* brought the Universe to participants through a series of talks from Irish and internationally based astronomers and space scientists



Roses of Tralee visit Birr Castle Demesne  
(L to R): Bernadette Ryan - Laois Rose, Bernie Leonard, Tourism Officer Tipperary/Offaly, Katie Dunleavy - New York, Lord Rosse, Lynda Kelly - Tipperary Rose, Jacquie Jordan - Manager Birr Castle Demesne

and, as part of this, the exhibition, *Space Odyssey 2010* was opened. *Halloween in the Haunted Gardens* had children and their parents trick-or-treating in the gardens and 2010 was rounded off with *Santa* taking up residence in the Castle itself and meeting local girls and boys.



Halloween in the Haunted Gardens

2011 is going to be another exciting year, with the recent announcement that Birr Castle Demesne is going to be the venue for the *41<sup>st</sup> Irish Hot Air Balloon Championships*, sponsored by Shannon Development. Over 40 balloons are expected to attend this event, which will run from 25<sup>th</sup> to 30<sup>th</sup> September. This is an important out-of-season tourist event for Birr and the arrival of at least 160 ballooning enthusiasts will provide a much-needed economic boost to the local area.

We would like to express our thanks to all our Friends of the Demesne for their support in 2010 and with new plans already underway, we are looking forward to welcoming old friends and new to the Demesne in 2011.

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## BÁBÓG PARENT AND TODDLER GROUP

Bábóg celebrated its 10<sup>th</sup> Birthday this year. A voluntary committee of parents run Bábóg and this is very much appreciated. Bábóg was set up in 2000 and provides a great amenity for parents, grandparents, guardians and childminders to meet and chat while their babies and toddlers play together in a safe environment, which is vital for their development. Toys are provided and a play facilitator is present to assist the children with activities such as jigsaws, painting and arts and crafts. Babóg meet every Tuesday morning from 10:15 am – 12:15 pm in the

Family Resource Centre in Glebe Street. The Committee also organise some special events such as Gymboree sessions, a trip to a pet farm and, if they are lucky, they get a visit from Santa. If you would like to learn more about Babóg Birr Parent & Toddler Group, please log onto our website [www.birrtoddlers.ie](http://www.birrtoddlers.ie).

If you are interested in the group, why not join us for a coffee some Tuesday morning and see what we are all about?



Joan and Lorraine Larkin, Gillian and Timothy O'Neill, Iain and Ryan Martin enjoying Bábóg's birthday party



**2<sup>nd</sup> Class from the Presentation Brothers Boys School making their First Communion in 1968**

Back Row (L to R): B. Madden, T. Grimes, T. O'Brien, R. Flanagan, G. McDermott, T. Nolan, J. Burke, F. Kearns,  
D. Sheils, B. Kirwan, K. Dunphy, B. Vaughan, P. Donoghue, S. Hayes, D. Quigley, F. Fanneran

Middle Row: M. Lally, R. Spain, J. Shortt, M. Ryan, P. Normile, J. Dooley, P. Daly, C. Brummell, F. Spain, J. Hoare, D. Molloy

Front Row: M. Conroy, N. Ryan, W. Burns, S. O'Meara, K. Callaghan, M. Guinan, M. McCarthy, C. Kearns, J. Verney, J. Mitchell



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## BIRR COMHALTAS ACTIVITIES

The task of promoting Traditional Music, Singing and Dancing in the Birr area falls on a small but enthusiastic group of people, members of the local branch of Comhaltas Ceoltoiri Eireann, many of whom do not reside in the town of Birr. They perform this function in various ways, the most important of which is the weekly instrumental music class held each Monday evening in the Marian Hall and, while there is good support for this the facility is there to extend it should there be demand.

The huge increase in popularity in Set Dancing nationally is reflected in good support for the weekly class held also in the Marian Hall on Thursday nights, from October to April, but again more could be accommodated. These are both instructional and recreational for adults and teenagers alike.

The branch organises a high-profile Set Dancing Festival in Birr each year, which attracts supporters from many parts of Ireland and beyond. It is based in the Marian Hall but fringe events include music sessions at other locations. Writing in the popular periodical, Set Dancing News, editor Bill Lynch from Kilfenora summed up his visit to the festival as follows;

*"A little taste of heaven was available all this weekend in*

*Birr, where all factors—music, dancers, hall, town, weather, etc—merged to make a weekend as perfect as you are ever likely to see. The atmosphere lingered long after the music stopped, an ample share of it seemed to follow me home".* Bill, like many others is already looking forward to next year's event, which will be held as usual on the June bank holiday week-end.

The annual concert organised by the branch was a huge success. It featured top-class artists from many parts of Ireland giving local concert goers a unique opportunity of hearing and seeing the best performers on the traditional music scene.

"Trad for Trocaire" was a new initiative between Comhaltas and Trocaire in which the members participated and raised a considerable sum for charity. The branch availed of the Annual Feile na Nollag to honour three members who had rendered outstanding service to Comhaltas over the years; Tommy Boyle, senior musician, Mary Darcy, long time branch treasurer and Philip Hayes, former member of The Birr Dancing Troupe, now living in Borrisokane. For information on Comhaltas contact Donal Morrissey 0879347968.

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## BIRR THEATRE AND ARTS CENTRE

2010 has been another hugely successful year for Birr Theatre & Arts Centre which, along with great attendances at its wide and varied programme of events, also celebrated its 10<sup>th</sup> Birthday in July. There was also the renovation of the foyer. The 10<sup>th</sup> Birthday Celebrations began with Mundy in concert and was followed by a Street Festival the following day with live music, street theatre, dance performances, stilt walkers, jugglers, visual arts and lots more - this event was enjoyed by all ages!



Renovated Foyer of the Theatre and Arts Centre

The theatre saw performances from the Banagher Drama Group, Rathcabbin Players and Open Door Drama Group. Birr Stage Guild made a huge contribution, hosting the *One Act Drama Festival*, their production of *And Then There Were None* and the Irish Amateur Premier of *The Wiremen*. PricewaterhouseCoopers Players also returned for their tenth year with their production of *Snow White*.

Music lovers were well catered for, with performances for all tastes. Local musicians, *Mundy* and *Roesy* each held very successful concerts and the cream of Irish talent was represented by *Mary Coughlan*, *Jack L*, *Jimmy MacCarthy*, *The High Kings*, *the Garda Band*, and *Neil Hannon* to name but a few. Birr Stage Guild's *Opera Gala 2010 – Ireland's Finest* played to a packed house in April; August saw both Kerstin Doelle in *Baroque Delight* and *Vladimir Jablokov and the Slovak Festival Orchestra Musicians* return to Birr. Indeed, so popular were the latter that they returned in December for a two-night run of *Viennese Christmas*. The *National Chamber Choir* and the *Irish Chamber Ensemble* were first-time visitors, whilst *Chopin in Paris* was a theatrical concert celebrating the bicentenary of the birth of Chopin.

Birr Film Club continues to go from strength to strength, its wide genre of films show-casing presentations from around the world. This year also saw the inaugural OFFline Film Festival take place with a number of films shot and screened during the course of this 3-day Festival.

Our dedicated exhibition space "*Suas an Staighre*" played host to a number of exhibitions. Individual showings included *Ian Keavney*, *Paul Woods*, *Jock Nichol* and *Alison Rosse* and students from St. Brendan's Community School who occupied this space in April and May, giving these young artists an opportunity to showcase their talents. The *Offaly County Council Staff Photography Exhibition* and *Common Ground* - a professionally curated exhibition of local artists added to the growing reputation of Birr Theatre & Arts Centre as a centre for visual arts.

*Hullabaloo! – the 4<sup>th</sup> Offaly's Children's Arts Festival* provided a fantastic variety of workshops and performances running simultaneously in Birr and Clara. This highly-entertaining event included sessions in dance, art, crafts, circus skills, storytelling, photography, story writing, and puppet workshops along with a number of live performances. This Festival was kindly supported by Offaly County Council, Birr Theatre & Arts Centre and The Arts Council and it also acknowledged the assistance of Birr Town Council, Access Cinema, Birr Lions Club and Loughnane Concrete.

Aspiring artists of the future had great scope to explore their potential with workshops and courses. August saw a brand new addition to the Theatre's line-up with the *Middle-Lands Circus Gala*; these workshops and events from talented performers, in turn, dazzled, amazed and entranced audiences.

There was no shortage also of comedy as *Maeve Higgins* got 2010 off to a great start. The star of RTE's "*The Panel*", *Neil Delamere* made a welcome return visit to Birr as did *Jon Kenny*. *Brendan Grace* and *Des Bishop* also took to the stage and kept their audiences laughing.

Birr Theatre & Arts Centre acknowledges support from The Arts Council, Pobal, Offaly County Council and Birr Town Council and is eagerly looking forward to 2011 and to welcoming you to this top-class venue for some great entertainment!



Celebrating the 10<sup>th</sup> Anniversary

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## SCHOOL COMPLETION PROGRAMME

The Roscrea/Birr School Completion Programme (SCP) was introduced to the Mercy Primary School and St. Brendan's Boys Primary School in June 2007. *The School Completion Programme is a Department of Education and Science project which aims to encourage children to remain in school and engage in school activities.* The Roscrea/Birr School Completion Programme works with three schools in Roscrea: Scoil Eoin Naofa, Scoil Iosef Naofa and the Sacred Heart Primary, and two schools in Birr: Mercy P.S. and St. Brendan's Boys P.S.

Part of the overall project includes the 'Copping-On Programme' which focuses on crime awareness and covers subjects such as communication, relationships, right and wrong, awareness of criminal behaviour, drug sense and the judicial system.

SCP facilitates two community-based After School Groups running in the Scurragh area. Facilitation of the Afterschool Clubs was supported by Mrs. Elaine Eastwood, Miss Rachel McMahon, from the Mercy PS, and Ms. Alicia Ryan from St. Brendan's Boy's PS. The project was also joined by Social Care students Siobhan Healy, Sarah Davy and Aine Crossan. A note of thanks for their support.

Over forty students enjoyed the Scurragh Afterschool Club throughout the year. 25 participated in a camping holiday in Dingle from Monday 26<sup>th</sup> July to Wednesday 28<sup>th</sup> July.



**Enjoying the trip to Dingle are Alanna McEvoy, Stephanie Donoghue, Natalia Piotrowska, Lara Finnerty and Caoimhe Abbott.**

Both the children and staff were delighted to be joined by a number of volunteers, along with Garda Padraic Connaughton, Sam's Mam, Shirley and Social Care students Siobhan and Aine. A big thank you to them for all their support. The Scurragh Summer Programme was made possible by the support of the parents and Scurragh committee, particularly with raising funds for these trips. Throughout the last school year, Mercy P.S., St. Brendan's Boys P.S. and the SCP have facilitated individual and small group sessions, class socialisation groups, Copping-On



**Pictured enjoying their trip to Dingle are (L to R) Stephen Bracken, John Jennings, Jake Tuohy, Paul McEvoy, T.J. Talbot, Lee Roddy**

Programme, Summer Programmes and linking in with students who have transferred to secondary school.

As well as facilitating small socialisation groups, the School Completion staff carried out a class Socialisation Programme with Mr. Carroll's 3<sup>rd</sup> class. Focusing on communication and relationship skills, these groups were greatly enjoyed by all participants.

We are delighted to have linked in with Foroige's Big Brother Big Sister Mentoring Programme and SUB Garda Youth Diversion Project.

The School Completion Programme would like to thank the West Offaly Partnership Rural Transport Section and the Lions Club for their support for the summer camp and Christmas outing in Scurragh.



**Back Row (L-R): Cathal Kirwan, Shane Donovan, Paul Seporatis, Daire Stapleton, Rory Bergin, Dylan Quegan, Danilo Hansbury, Hugh Doyle, Anthony Mooney, Alex Sadowski, David Mullins.**

**Front Row: Conor Sampson, Steven Bracken, Evan Lynskey, T.J. Talbot, Sean Reville**

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## BIRR ACTIVE RETIREMENT GROUP

Our members meet once a fortnight, every second Thursday from 7.30 p.m. – 9.30 p.m. in the Resource Centre in Glebe Street. It is open to male and female members and the only requirement is that you are over 55 years old.

Sr. Roberta and Judy O'Neill represented BIRR at the AGM of Active Retirement Ireland, which was held in Donegal.

Anna Corboy, Lily Tait, Bríd Ryan and Sr. Roberta had great birthday celebrations, with surprise cakes supplied by Imelda King and her daughter Charmaine. Plenty of candles were used on those cakes!

Members of the BIRR Group were invited to Carrig Community Centre in November where Mass was celebrated for deceased members. This was followed by a social evening of food, music and fun.

The Christmas dinner was held in the County Arms Hotel with a wonderful afternoon being enjoyed by all. Four new members, Judie O'Neill, Jean Quigley, P.J. and Phil Neavyn, joined the group after Christmas. The President of Lorrha A.R.A. invited the BIRR group to join the Lorrha group at Dooly's Hotel on 14<sup>th</sup> February for dinner, dance and craic. Maureen Kavanagh, CEO of Active Retirement Ireland and Seamus O'Shea, the regional officer from Nenagh, joined in this networking event.

Also in February the group went by coach to the Heritage Centre in Nenagh. Lunch was taken in the Abbey Court Hotel and later they visited Hanley's Woollen Mills and shop in Kilcommon. Some fine purchases were made!

Louise O'Brien from the H.S.E.'s BIRR Primary Care Team gave a talk on physio, exercises, health issues, etc. The group attended the BIRR Choral Society Concert held in St. Brendan's. The group's PRO, Lily Tait, was in the choir. Four

members attended the Physical Activity Leaders Course in Kilcormac. The World Day of Prayer held in the Methodist Church was well attended by the BIRR A.R.A.

On the 4<sup>th</sup> July we visited Tullamore Library for the opening of the Bealtaine festival. Twenty of our group attended. We had lots of entertainment, afternoon tea, song and dance.

On the 29<sup>th</sup> May we had our Annual Outing to Kilkenny Castle, which was very interesting and enjoyable. Needless to say we did some shopping and had our evening meal in the Durrow Arms Hotel on the way home.

Some members of our group participated in an Art Course in BIRR Library.

On the 2<sup>nd</sup> of June eight members attended the Chairman's Community Awards 2010 in the Tullamore Court Hotel. The group included Betty Dwyer, Sr. Roberta, Lily Tait, Bríd Ryan, Mary McLoughlin, Bríd Callaghan, Mary Nolan and Mary Coffey. Our President, Mary Coffey, was presented with a cheque for €100, which was given to each successful group.

On the 1<sup>st</sup> July we travelled by coach to the races in Mullingar and there was great excitement when we won. At the end of July we held our Summer Party in the Thatch in Crinkill, with 40 of our members attending. After dinner we had lots of entertainment by a group of Lusmagh Dancers. Anne Lovett (Chiropodist) was a guest speaker to the group in September. She gave us plenty of helpful hints and tips on how to take care of our feet. It proved very interesting.

Mary McLoughlin is the new President of the group, with Mary Coffey as Secretary. Judy O'Neill is Treasurer, ably assisted by Bríd Ryan and Lily Tait, is the group's PRO.



**Representing BIRR at the Chairman's Community Awards in Tullamore**  
**Back Row (L to R): Bríd Ryan, Mary McLoughlin, Bríd Callaghan, Mary Nolan, Mary Coffey**  
**Front Row: Betty Dwyer, Sr. Roberta, Lily Tait**

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## BIRR APOSTOLIC WORKERS GROUP

Ann Hough retired as President of the group and Imelda King became the new president. Ann has given very dedicated, committed service to Birr Apostolic and is still a much valued member. She is a brilliant fund-raiser and a great woman with the embroidery needle. She is a gifted communicator. Imelda was very generous to take on the role of President. The other committee members retained their seats. Two members, Mary Nolan and Sr. Roberta, attended the National Meeting at Clonliffe on 20<sup>th</sup> February. Imelda King and three other members attended a Mass in Ennis celebrating the 55<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the founding of Killaloe Diocesan Apostolic Work. Our new

Bishop, Kieran O'Reilly, presided and preached. Bishop Kieran paid tribute to the mission assistance given by the Irish Apostolic Groups over the years to the African missions. As Superior General of the S.M.A. Fathers he had first-hand experience of the missionary effort. He encouraged us to keep up the good work. With the help of our honorary members and generous supporters we hope to do this. The active members will continue to pray and sew for the missions for as long as they are able. The group cordially invites new members. Contact 057 9121047 for more details.



**Ann Hough, sitting, received a bouquet of flowers from Mai Farrell, Diocesan President for her service as president. Also pictured are, from left to right, Mona Micks, Catherine Murphy, Sr. Roberta, Mai Farrell, Imelda King and other friends from the diocese.**

## BIRR TIDY TOWNS

On the positive side, we increased our marks from 242 to 250. A special thanks to the various groups who contributed to the increase of 8 marks. The adjudicating by the Tidy Town Judges made it difficult to acquire additional marks. We will take on board negative issues that were raised by the judges. We had no decrease in any of the ten categories. Landscaping increased by 2 points as did Wildlife Natural Amenities. A special thanks to the staff of Birr Town Council for landscaping and tidiness and to Fiona Lucey-Devery, who generously undertook the Wildlife Natural Amenities section submission. We cannot break the 50% barrier in the litter control section. There is a definite lack of civics in this section. One would shudder to think what rubbish would be on the streets were it not for council employees, Tidy Towns group and a number of civic-minded individuals. The plan for going forward for the next five years will see Tidy Towns, Birr Town Council and

the Chamber of Commerce enhancing the town. These groups will work from the Birr Town Realm Plan. Presently, the Chamber of Commerce is in the process of providing bilingual signage for all the streets in Birr. Well done to Chamber members for that.

Thanks to Birr Town Council staff, Mary, Roger, Willie and the outdoor staff. Key points of upgrading included the two sluice gates at Mill Island, painting of Bagnall's Bridge and the landscaping at Drumbane and Moorpark Street. Thanks to Tony and Michael for their care of the parks, green areas and flower beds and to Phil and Aidan for the street cleaning. Once again, a special thanks to Mary and John Lawlor for all their hard work. Thanks to all who played their part in keeping the town tidy and to Liam and all the lads in the St. Brendan's Environmental Group. A final word of thanks goes to Birr Credit Union which sponsored our local Tidy Towns competition.

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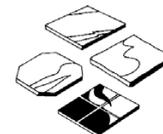
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## BIRR STAGE GUILD

2010 got off to an electrifying start for Birr Stage Guild with their highly successful staging of Shay Healy's musical *'The Wiremen'*. It tells the story of the rural electrification of the west of Ireland and the effect it had on small communities. Shay penned two brand new songs for the Irish Amateur Premier, presented at Birr Theatre and Arts Centre from March 16<sup>th</sup> to March 20<sup>th</sup>.



**Seymour Kenny (left) & Adrian Shine in *The Wiremen***

Comedy, romance, fine acting, singing and dancing captivated audiences all through the week, with the theatre packed to capacity for all the performances. Shay himself was a proud audience member, along with his family on both the opening and closing nights. Indeed, he was like a proud father when addressing the talented cast on both occasions.

The Guild next lent its support to the wonderful Opera Gala, *'Ireland's Finest'*, at St. Brendan's Church in April. Birr's very own John Molloy brought the entire event together as well as leading the stellar cast of the country's top opera performers. He was joined by sopranos, Cara O'Sullivan and Sandra Oman, fellow Birr native and mezzo-soprano Ann Hogan, mezzo-soprano Fiona Murphy, tenor Eamonn Mulhall and baritone Owen Gilhooly.

In July, the Children's Theatre Summer Camp took centre stage with kids aged between 7 and 12 years old enjoying workshops in music, dance, drama and circus over the week with tutors Enda O'Connor, Sophie Bailey, Dara Carolan, Eimhin Shortt and John Feehan.

The town was then gifted a beautiful treat during Vintage Week as the Guild presented *'Classical Twist'* with the Slovak Festival Orchestra and tenor Sean Costello. Led by the charismatic Vladimir Jablov, they enamoured the sell-out crowd from Bach to The Beatles with a special twist. Following their hugely successful performance, they returned to the theatre in December for two special performances of *'Viennese Christmas'*.

September saw a large number of the Guild take part in the AIMS Midland Region Musical Production weekend.

October and November proved to be two hugely busy months. Two of the Guild's lifelong members, Annie Noonan and Sheila O'Callaghan celebrated their 85<sup>th</sup> birthdays. Annie is a founder member of Birr Stage Guild and also acted as musical director for many years while Sheila is well known for her wonderful singing and starring roles in all the 'Goode Old Days' productions.

The October Bank Holiday weekend saw the 4<sup>th</sup> annual One Act Drama Festival take place. This year's winners were, in the Open Section, Best Play- *'The Only Jealousy of Emer'*, The Moat Club Naas; Best Director- David Cullinane & Paul O'Brien, The Moat Club Naas and Best Actor- Seymour Cresswell, St. Patrick's Dramatic Society, Dalkey. In the Confined Section, the awards went to the Shannonside Drama Group with *'Landscape'* taking Best Play, Pauline Moloney scooping Best Director and Edward Dillon named Best Actor. The Adjudicators Special Award went to Eilish Casey for portrayal of Beth in *'Landscape'*.



**Mel Kennedy and Aileen Kennedy having another domestic in *The Wiremen***

November saw two more successful productions from the Guild with the Autumn play first up. Well-known Guild member, Adrian Shine, directed his first full length play in the form of Agatha Christie's *'And Then There Were None'*. At the end of the month, *'The Magic of the Musicals'* brought audiences on a trip down memory lane with songs from *Les Miserables*, *South Pacific*, *The Sound of Music*, *Mamma Mia* as well as many others.

And there's no rest for Birr Stage Guild, with preparations already underway for their highly anticipated production of *'Oklahoma'* in 2011. The show is set to be another knockout.

Finally, Birr Stage Guild would like to thank everyone who made 2010 such a successful year, to those who made all the different productions happen, casts and crews and to the people who travelled from near and far to watch them.

## **LEGITIMATE BODIES DANCE COMPANY**

Now in their third year of existence, Birr's very own Contemporary Dance Company, Legitimate Bodies, have had a busy year resident at Birr Theatre and Arts Centre. From January to March, the company rehearsed with the Transition Year students of Gallen Community School in Ferbane to produce, together with Macdara Deery, an entirely new production of Shakespeare's Romeo and Juliet. This was a big achievement for all involved. In May the company hosted 'Youth Share', with various youth dance groups from around the country, including Waterford, Kildare and Longford.

During the summer, Cristina Goletti was awarded an Arts Council bursary, as well as a Culture to attend the Dance USA conference in Washington DC. The company also produced a top-class new work for all the family, 'The Goldilocks Zone', performed by Nick Bryson and Damian Punch, which premiered at the Midsummer Festival, Cork and went on to be one of the Irish pieces performed at Dance Base, Edinburgh Fringe Festival 2010. Nick and Damian also performed their celebrated work 'Hanging in There' at the prestigious Tanzmesse dance producers Festival in Düsseldorf, Germany. During the Absolut Dublin Fringe Festival 2010, Nick also performed his latest solo 'A Study in Absence/A Study in Presence' which had a favourable review in the Irish Times. The Arts Council, as well as Offaly County Council, now support Legitimate Bodies and the successful Offaly Youth Dance. Contact us on [legitimatebodies@gmail.com](mailto:legitimatebodies@gmail.com).

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## **ANSWERS TO RECONGISE ANYONE? From Page 96**

1. Catherine Haverty Barry
2. Ann Campbell Mulvey
3. Tony McLoughlin
4. Brian Kennedy
5. Kathleen Breen Roe
6. Lucinda Corrigan
7. Sean Hanniffy
8. Paul Barber
9. Angela Hegarty Ryan
10. Mary McDermot Mullins
11. Sean Hanniffy
12. John Carroll

## **BIRR BRIDGE CLUBS**

2009/2010 was another good year for the **Camcor Bridge Club**. Our president for this season is Ann Ritchie. The club held its usual competitions this year, culminating at the end of the season in the Presidents Prize which, this year, was won by Colette O'Brien and Margaret Feehan. Our former president, Michael Dolan, took part in this year's '4fun' teams, along with Gay Halvey from the '66 Club and Clive Robinson from Banagher. They were successful in coming 4th in this event. This was a great achievement as the competition covers the whole country. Well done to all of them.

The club would like to extend a warm welcome to anyone wishing to join. We meet every Wednesday night in the County Arms Hotel.

As we commence our 2010/2011 season we remember with great affection Marie Burke, a loyal and enthusiastic member of our bridge club. Marie was laid to rest this year and we extend sincere sympathy to her family.

**'Birr 66' Bridge Club** gets its name from the year of its inception, 1966, and there are some founding members still playing in the club. It meets every Monday evening from autumn to late spring in the County Arms Hotel. The President for the 2010/2011 season is Mary Glendenning and best wishes are extended to her for the forthcoming year.

Early in the season the Simultaneous Pairs are played. This competition gets its name from the fact that the same preset hands of cards are played all over the country and the results are compiled by the Contact Bridge Association of Ireland to whom the club is affiliated. Last season, two of the club members, Teresa Fealy and Pat Reid, came in the top 15 nationwide.

In February, the 66 Club hosted the Des Houlihan Trophy, which commemorates Des Houlihan, who was a renowned bridge player from Birr. The competition was run as a Team of Four in association with the Camcor Bridge Club and the winning team on this occasion was Aileen Watkins, Mary Byrne, Ann Hough and Michael Dolan. Towards the end of the season, Phyllis Dooley's President's Prize was played for over two weeks and the successful pair was Una O'Gorman and Peter O'Meara. The year concluded with dinner, a game of bridge, followed by the presentation of prizes for all the major competitions of the year.

Bridge is an enjoyable and challenging game of cards which can be played at many levels and is a great way to pass a winter evening and, indeed, a summer one also.

**Bridge in the Glens** commences early in November and continues throughout the winter. It welcomes all bridge players.

## ORMAND FLYING CLUB

2010 proved to be another successful year for the Ormand Flying Club. We welcomed new instructor, Niall Doherty, from Roscrea to the Club. He is proving very popular with both students and members and is a great addition to our panel of instructors.

One of the major events of the year was the launch, in March, of our Aeronca Sedan 15AC EI-BKC at our annual Breakfast Fry-In. The restoration of the 1949 Sedan had been a labour of love for four members for nine years! They completely stripped the plane and re-built it from scratch with new instruments, wiring, upholstery and fabric covering. We were blessed with glorious weather on the day of the Fry-In and had an excellent turnout of hungry pilots who flew in for the full Irish and to congratulate the lads on their great achievement.

We held our Annual Fly-In on 14<sup>th</sup> and 15<sup>th</sup> August this year. While the weather was fine on Saturday, Sunday was a glorious day with temperatures around 25 degrees and was an extremely busy day with large numbers of aircraft flying in from all over the country. We had members of the Midland Model Flying Club doing static displays in the hangar. They also wowed the public and members of our

Club with flying displays on both days. On Saturday we had the Irish Coast Guard Air Sea Rescue Helicopter, who put on a fantastic display for members and visitors. Saturday night was the Function night which was held in the new Hangar. We had a group of aeroplanes and microlights flying in formation over the start of the Vintage Week Parade on Sunday afternoon. Presentations were made Sunday for First Solo flights achieved during the year to Kevin McGrath, Emmet Lennon (Aeroplane) and Damien Cornally (Microlight) and PPL pins were presented to David Corboy and Jonathan Madden on achieving their Private Pilot's Licence (Aeroplane). Congratulations also to Colm Wright, Seamus MacSweeney, John Heffernan and Damien Cornally on passing their written examinations during the year.

In September we were visited by SkyDive Ireland. They were with us for a month and brought great life and activity to the airfield. It was also a new dimension for us to have parachuting at Birr Airfield.

Finally, if anyone is interested in learning to fly or purchasing vouchers for Christmas presents please contact 087-7479555.

### Enjoying Vintage Fair Day 2010

(L to R): Tommy Faulkner, Phil Stapleton, Orla Donovan, Michael Carroll, Aimée Donovan, Seamus Carroll



Enjoying the Vintage Parade are brothers Willie Joe (left) and Seamus Mahon

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## CAMCOR PARK HALL, SCURRAGH

2010 was a year of ups and downs for the residents of Scurragh, Camcor Park & Macregol Clós. The School Completion Club Afterschool Programme proved to be an enjoyable programme for all the children from the area culminating in the annual trip to Kerry. They had a brilliant time under the care of the much-loved Sam and Mairead. The children visited the Aquarium in Dingle and also got to race around the bay with the now-famous Fungi the dolphin. The trip would not be possible without the fund-raising throughout the year by the Resident's committee and we would like to thank everyone who has been so kind and generous with their support. We would also like to thank Birr Lions Club who have been supporting us over the past two years and, without their generous assistance, we would not be able to bring the After School Club to such a brilliant end each year.

This year's After School Club Juniors had a very successful Halloween Party and we all look forward to another successful year at the club.

Another success story this year was when seventeen Birr women received certificates in Camcor Park Hall, Scurragh, on completion of a 20-week *Women Returning to Learning* course. The programme included modules in Cookery, Personal Development, Communications, Colour Me Beautiful, Jewellery-Making, Information Technology Skills and Fitness. The women had been meeting twice a week since January. The course was designed and delivered by County Offaly VEC, with funding from Pobal and the Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform, and facilitated by ROSCAM (Residents of Scurragh, Camcor Park & Macregol Clós), with the aim of bringing women in the Birr area together to participate in a variety of short courses, with the emphasis on participation and fun, as well as learning new skills.

Unfortunately, this year brought some great tragedy and sadness to our community with the sad passing of Chelsea Kennedy. The loss and sadness was felt throughout the town of Birr, but even more so within our small community. Friends and neighbours rallied around to express their sympathy and help in whatever way they could. It was heart-warming to see that community spirit is still thriving in modern Ireland. Chelsea's family was very touched by the amount of support, compassion and kindness shown to them at this sorrowful time.



Enjoying the Family Fun Day are Brenda Finnerty, Ethan Brown, Tricia Maloney, Lisa Hand, Jackie Rimes, Danny Wells, Millie Wild, Abi Coughlan, Leo Coughlan and Amy Wells.

As a thank you to all the children and their families from the community, a fun day was held at the community centre in May. The weather was glorious and the children had a brilliant day.

Work continues behind the scenes by the dedicated committee and, without their time and effort, a lot of the events within the community would not happen. The AGM will be held in January and we look forward to seeing some more new faces in 2011.



Receiving their certificates from the Women Return to Learning course were Catherine Abbott, Veronica Alexander, Edel Anderson, Maria Bizzell, Pauline Cleary, Sandra Coady, Jacqueline Delahunt, Betty Grimes, Catherine Hough, Siobhan Hough, Helen Kenny, Bridget Lynskey, Miriam McEvoy, Jean Mooney, Sherilyn Moore, Judy O'Neill, Vilma Seporaitiene. Also present are Alison McEvoy (Offaly VEC), Catherine Oakley-Dickson (Cluid) and Tony Dalton (Offaly VEC)

## **ART FOR FUN AT THE RESOURCE CENTRE**

Art classes for adults are given on Monday evenings 6pm-8pm in the Family Resource Centre, Glebe Street. The participants are encouraged to discover the media and subject of their choice, which means that every student in the class is painting or drawing whatever they wish. They are using oils, acrylics, oil pastels pencils, pen and ink, etc. Classes run for six weeks and are restarted after short intervals.



**Jewellery making class with Tatiana**

(L to R): Natasha Daly, Catherine O'Toole, Karen Alexander, Mary Wright, Lena Keane, Geraldine Bennett, Phil Bennett

Jewellery making classes are given on Monday evenings from 8pm-9.30pm. Materials are provided with the class.

The students learn to make pendants, bracelets and necklaces, following beading patterns adjusted for the level of a particular group. Children's art classes are held on Wednesdays in three groups from 5 pm until 8 pm. Classes are ongoing throughout the school year. In August, the works of all students are presented in an annual Children's art exhibition in Birr library.



**Children's art classes with Tatiana**

(L to R): Avril Fleury, Roisin Donovan, Niamh Horan, Dervela O'Donovan, Clodagh O'Carroll, Benedetta Transmezotti and Laura Moloney.

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## **BIRR HISTORICAL SOCIETY**

Birr Historical Society was started in the 1970's to provide a forum for people interested in history and to encourage discussion of local history. There was also a need to raise public awareness of the rich and cultural heritage of Birr.

We organise outings and talks once a month from September to May. Some of the topics of interest over the past year have been a talk given by Paddy Heaney of Cadamstown on the O'Carrolls of Letterluna. There were twenty-six O'Carroll castles situated in Offaly and part of North Tipperary, including Birr, Kinnitty, The Leap and Emmel. One of the O'Carroll descendents, Charles O'Carroll of Maryland signed the American Declaration of Independence in July 1776.

In November 2009, we celebrated with the Georgian Society the restoration of the column in Emmet Square with a talk from James Howley, conservation architect. The column, which was designed by Samuel Charnley, was erected in 1747 to honour the Duke of Cumberland. The statue of the Duke, sculpted by John Cheere, was removed in 1915. The column is the oldest monumental column in Ireland.

To mark the closing of the Meteorological Station in Birr, we had a very interesting talk from Joe Kerins and Finnarr

Maher outlining their work at the station over many years. The Met station is now in the grounds of Gurteen College.

In July, James Scully gave us a very informative tour of parts of west Offaly, starting with the fortifications of Banagher, including the Martello Tower and Fort Eliza on the banks of the Shannon. We then proceeded to Shannon Bridge and on to Shannon Harbour. The fortifications on the Shannon were in anticipation of an invasion of the French in about 1810.

To mark Heritage Week in August, Brian Kennedy conducted a walking tour of John's Mall and Newbridge Street. Other talks included the Birr to Portumna Railway by Ben Oakley, the life of Michael Crotty by Liam Doran, photographs of the Post Office in Birr by Jack Ryan and the Civil War in Ireland by Brian Kennedy. In May, we welcomed Ronnie Matthews from the Laois Heritage Society who spoke about Historical Sites in the Midlands.

Meetings are chaired by our President, Reverend Irene Morrow and take place on the third Monday of each month at 8pm in Dooly's Hotel. New members are always welcome.

## CARRIG AND RIVERSTOWN COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT ASSOCIATION

The Community Centre in Carrig plays host to a wide variety of activities throughout the year. It has become an integral part of the fabric of community life in the Carrig, Riverstown and Killeen areas no matter what age you are, granny, mammy, teen or toddler. There is an event in the hall for you to enjoy. From Monday to Sunday there is a constant stream of people in and about the centre.

Sporting activities include the young hurlers and camogie players of the area, ages 4 to 8, meeting every Friday night during the darker evenings for training with John Bergin and Martin O'Brien.

The Active Retirement Group holds their monthly meeting on the third Monday of the month. Every Thursday sees their members enjoying indoor bowling and a wide array of activities that fill their program throughout the year. Tuesday night is card night and while you may not win the jackpot you will be sure of a cup of tea and some nice buns or cake thanks to Tony Doorley and the dedicated ladies and gent. Tuesday also sees some High School Musical wannabes at Hip Hop classes and the local wildcats dance to the instruction of Grace and her boom box. Those of you who read the last sentence and had no idea what it was about may be more interested in the Social Dancing which takes place once a month in the hall. So polish up your dancing shoes and join Joe Ryan, John Smyth and Ann Kennedy and give it a whirl. On Wednesday morning the parent and toddler fill the hall with laughter. The Carrig and Riverstown Foroige club is now a whole year old and going from strength to strength. These young people are between 12 and 18 years old and are a pleasure to work with according to Mary King, Frank Higgins and their ever

expanding group of volunteers. They hold their meeting on Monday nights during the school term and carry out a wide range of activities. Carrig N.S. uses the hall for speech and drama and school concerts where the new Jedward or Mary Byrne can be spotted. The local children who receive First Holy Communion at the local Roman Catholic Church also enjoy a Communion breakfast in the hall each year where the parents all chip in to make it a day to remember. The Tidy Towns Committee, IFA and the GAA and the Community Alert group also hold meetings in the hall. Every December, the hall committee hosts a delicious Christmas dinner for the older members of the Community, where everyone eats well, meets up with old friends and dances the night away.

The Carrig and Riverstown Community Centre is indebted to the very dedicated and increasing number of volunteers who give their time and energy so freely to help keep the Hall at the centre of the community in the Carrig, Riverstown and Killeen area. The hall is now 20 years old and is a testament to the local community leaders who at that time saw a need in the area, acted on that need and delivered results. Without those people who give so freely of their time, energy and sandwich making skills during happy times and sad events, we would only have an empty building and not this wonderful outlet to showcase the spirit of community development that exists in the Carrig, Riverstown and Killeen area.

The officers of the Development Association are: Geraldine Connaughton (Chairperson), Frank Higgins (Sec.) and Tony Dargan (Treasurer).



Say 'Hello' to all at  
Busy Bodies Montessori  
School, Killeen

## **SKATE PARK**

### *A Vision to become a Reality*

Since last year's edition we had an exciting and busy year. The Committee continued to drive the project forward with passion and persistence, assuring ourselves that this would reach it's fruition in 2010. Mid-year we got fantastic news that after a lot of work and meetings with Offaly Local Development, we would be strengthening our financial situation with the agreed security of 75% funding towards the project. This was a great boost to the committee. So, with backing from them, Birr Town Council and our own funds, we reached our target during the summer months. The process of tendering and building the facility could now begin. After input from the Committee and the help of the Town Engineer, the contract was awarded and the successful contractors were McManamon Developments Ltd. The Skate Park will be a turnkey project supervised solely by the Committee and where necessary the Town Engineer will offer any advice needed.

The construction process will be in 3 phases. The first phase will be the clearing of the site, underground works, a boundary wall and fencing. The 2<sup>nd</sup> phase will be the structuring and creation of the skate park with poured

concrete and the final phase is the landscaping, lighting and seating. The date for completion is to be on or before the 26th of November 2010. We are all extremely excited and wait in great anticipation to see our design and build come to life.

Roesy, our local, successful artist and musician, also agreed to work with us using his artistic skills to create some art work in the park. This will create a unique feel to the park. A lot of people have contributed to the success of this project in many different ways and we wish to acknowledge all of them, from the very early days to date. A big sincere thank you! Your generosity and support will provide a healthy, active and fun outdoor facility for all ages.

Our Present Committee Members include Ann Hynes-Spain (Chairperson), Kathleen Gormley (Secretary), Imelda Smith, Fergal Clarke (Joint Treasurers), Isaac Smyth, Luke Garland, Damian Gormley, Jack Fetherstonhaugh, Oísín Clarke, Scott Feenane, Vivian Maher, Donal Spain, Rachel Spain, Rebecca Hctor, Fergus Garland, Majella Fetherstonhaugh, Liam Spain, Brendan Fogarty and Frankie Watkins.



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## SAOL ÚR BIORRA (SUB) PROJECT

During the course of 2010, with the assistance and support of Offaly County Council and a local artist, youths of the community identified a problem area in the town with a huge amount of graffiti. However, the youths involved not only saw the problem but, more importantly tried to find a solution. With local support, they were able to showcase their artistic talent to the community, where they transformed the once eyesore to a work of beauty in Keele's Archway.



**Brightening up Keeles Archway**

More importantly, their hard work did not go unnoticed and they were nominated for the Chairman's awards with Offaly County Council and additionally for the Permanent TSB Citizenship awards, where their hard work was recognised and celebrated. Additionally, some members have taken an active role in the Offaly Comhairle na nÓg, ensuring that Birr youths are represented at county level.

With the support of AIB's Better Ireland fund we were able to deliver a fantastic orienteering programme with the assistance of Birr Outdoor Education Centre.

This funding assisted in the delivery of the soccer programme which ran throughout the course of 2010 and concluded with a trip to Galway to participate in the Galway world cup. This provides an opportunity for young people to come together for a national fun week-end tournament promoting self esteem, teamwork, friendship, sportsmanship and to integrate with other people from around the country.

We ended the summer programme with a fun soccer challenge against the local Gardaí, where the Garda Youth Challenge Plate was graciously accepted by the SUBs Team Captain. It was a great day and the Gardaí Team were challenging opponents, but the SUB were victorious by one goal in penalties. We look forward to next years match and hope to retain the plate, but we will have to keep up the hard work!!

Other programmes delivered with local agencies include The Copping On programme, which was delivered in all the local national schools in conjunction with the School Completion Programme. Students from YouthReach completed Fetac Level 3 Module on Crime Awareness. A Road Safety Programme was delivered to local youths with the support of our local Fire Brigade and Gardaí and prizes from Doyle's local Driving School.

If you have any queries regarding our services or are interested in volunteering, please contact Hazel on 086 3845646 or Lorna on 086 7805243.

Many thanks to all for support throughout 2010 and we look forward to an exciting and prosperous 2011.

Happy Christmas!



**Garda Youth Challenge Plate**

Back Row (L to R): Aidan McNair (Coach), Garda Padraic Connaughton, Garda Eddie Meeney, Garda Kiernan Stead, Garda Brendan Mulvey, Garda Gerry Campbell, Garda Jamie Donnelly, Garda Tom Kennedy  
Front Row: Nicholas Bennett, Frankie Hanlon, Daniel Molloy, Brendan Daly, Michael Spain, Connor Roddy, Garda Brian Small, Frankie Touhey, Ian Kelly, Jordon Parsons, Ondrej Turtak, Michael McCarthy

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## RIVERSTOWN/KILLEEN TIDY TOWNS

Riverstown/Killeen Tidy Towns group re-formed in early 2009, after five years absence from the national competition. As anyone living locally would know this area has a great history of working together for a better environment, with great results both in the Tidy Towns competition and through feedback from many passers-by who choose to stop and enjoy the beautiful surroundings. In 2009 and 2010 the group organised weekly clean-ups of the area from approximately March to end of August. Each of these clean-ups involved many different types of work from sweeping, power-washing, painting, weeding, planting, watering, litter control and of course grass area maintenance. We hope that everyone enjoyed the increased planting, development of grass areas on the Portumna road, fixing of stone piers and the addition of the bridge hanging baskets in 2010. We had much interest from locals and would love to compliment all who helped out on these nights. The group are also very lucky to have many locals who, on an ongoing basis, maintain the areas close to their own homes and, without this constant upkeep, the area would have no success in the national competition. We were also very fortunate that the people living locally were happy to re-paint and update their properties on a voluntary basis and this all added to the overall look of the village and surrounding area. The group held one fundraiser in 2010 and hope to hold another one in early 2011. The group were also lucky to receive funding from North Tipperary County council and through Offaly Local Development Company and North Tipperary Leader group, which they used throughout the year in planning for the village and in the many practical



### Planting for Points

(L to R): Martina Riordan, Sarah King, Teresa Flanagan, Sean Wynne, John Bergin

maintenance areas. We hope to work again in the future with the North Tipperary Rural Development Programme to further enhance the infrastructure in the area. We scored 263 points out of 400 in the 2009 national competition and improved to 270 in the 2010 competition – these may seem like small steps but the group are very hopeful that with the support from locals and the agencies, we will continue the steady progress for the next three years.

**Do they make them this big anymore?  
Pictured with at 15-Tier Wedding Cake in the Continental Bakery in  
1972 were from left to right**

Jackie Hehir, Phil Carroll, Seamus Hehir, Catherine Milne,  
Seamie Carroll, Mick Daly.

Missing from the photo was Oliver Clarke



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## BIRR LIBRARY

Come in and find out what is happening in your local library – you might be surprised .....

It was a busy year in Birr Library. The events mentioned below are a few examples of the numerous programmes run by the library service. Why not call in and see what is happening in the library that might interest you?

- ✓ 2<sup>nd</sup> year of the Boys into Books



- ✓ Expanded reading initiative, including Coolderry Central School, Seir Kieran Clareen, and Mercy P.S.
- ✓ Free Wi-Fi facilities
- ✓ Free FAS e-learning classes in the library
- ✓ Summer Reading challenge
- ✓ Knitting circle every Wednesday night from 5.30pm
- ✓ Exhibitions by local artists and photography groups



- ✓ Community Scarf
- ✓ Internet access
- ✓ Vintage Week & Leinster Regiment Association lecture
- ✓ Heritage Week and a display by the Leinster Regiment Association



- ✓ Partnership with YouthReach – ongoing activities for teenagers
- ✓ World Book Day – visit from Dolores Keaveney
- ✓ Coillte exhibition
- ✓ Bord Gais – sponsors of Readiscover Week
- ✓ Table Quiz for the World Cup with the Modern Language Initiative
- ✓ New Self Check machine
- ✓ Creative Writing for Teens – began in September 2010
- ✓ Children Book Festival
- ✓ Hullabaloo activities



- ✓ Publication of “The Birr Road to Croker” by the 6<sup>th</sup> class boys from St. Brendan’s PS and Offaly County Library, kindly sponsored by Birr Town Council
- ✓ A new teachers’ card – borrow up to 50 books for three months
- ✓ And much more

Mrs. Patricia Dillon – (Pat) retired from the library after 23 years serving the local community. She was a valued member of the team and will be missed by all her colleagues in Offaly County Library Service.

Join us on Facebook, follow us on Twitter or visit us on our website – [www.offaly.ie](http://www.offaly.ie)

## **BIRR NEIGHBOURHOOD WATCH**

Birr Neighbourhood Watch was set up in 1994. We are a voluntary group with a working committee. We provide alarm systems that can be monitored by either a relative, neighbour or by a centrally controlled monitoring system operating on a 24-hour system. We also provide security lighting, door and window locks and door chains. We provide these services free to the individual — the only charge being an annual monitoring fee.

Neighbourhood Watch is a crime prevention and community safety programme for urban areas. It operates as a partnership between An Garda Síochána and the public. It works on the basis that every member of a community can help to improve the quality of life in the area by keeping a look-out for, and reporting suspicious activities to the Gardaí.

The aims of Birr Neighbourhood Watch are:

- To improve community safety
- To prevent crime
- To develop Garda and community links
- To increase public confidence in An Garda Síochána
- To foster a caring environment for older and vulnerable people
- To reduce anti-social behaviour, including graffiti and harassment

Neighbourhood Watch will only succeed with active input from all members. Your actions and support help to make it work. Don't leave it to others. Play a part in any way you can.

Birr Neighbourhood Watch raises funds voluntarily. We hold a Church Gate collection in November and a raffle at Easter. We also raise funds by holding raffles at bingo by kind courtesy of the Marian Hall committee and this year we had a bag pack courtesy of Tesco, Birr. *Donations from the public to assist the service are also welcomed.*

Our AGM is held in October each year and, at the 2010 AGM, the following officers were elected: Chairperson - Michael Hough, Vice-Chairperson - Rosaleen Harding, Treasurer - Helena Kennedy, Secretary - Dympna Mackintosh and PRO - Judy O'Neill.

If you are an elderly person in need of an alarm, security lighting, door chains or a smoke alarm, please contact any of the above.

Ideally, each area of our town should have representation. Birr Neighbourhood Watch would welcome and appreciate new members, so get involved in making this town a safer place to live for all, young and old.

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## **ST. BRENDAN'S PARK RECEIVES A FACELIFT**

The surge of activity that been ongoing in St. Brendan's Park, has seen the home of Offaly hurling, under-go a major renovation. Works included a new drainage system being installed and a heaving sanding process of the surface being undertaken. The roadside grass banks have been replaced by terracing running the length of the field. These works are now completed. The construction of terracing at the town end has now begun. The capacity of the park will be

approximately 11,000. It is expected to be fully re-opened in the spring of 2011. The club thanks everyone for their patience while the works have been ongoing. The club also expresses a big 'thank you' to everybody who has supported the weekly lotto, golf classic and other fundraising events and looks forward to hosting as many games and patrons as possible in 2011 in the new, much improved facilities.



**Pictured above, the new terracing at the road side of the pitch and, right, the new drainage system being put in place.**



## SOCIETY OF ST. VINCENT DE PAUL

The Society of St. Vincent de Paul (S.V.P.) is a voluntary Christian Society, whose membership is open to all who support its ethos. In Paris, 1833, the society was founded by a 20 year old university student, Frederic Ozanam. Today, the S.V.P operates in 120 countries, with over one million members worldwide. The name "Society of St. Vincent de Paul" was given to the movement as Vincent de Paul is the Patron Saint of the Poor.

The aims of the society are to bring the love of Christ to the poor and the underprivileged, to promote self-sufficiency, to share the burden of the deprived and to try and make a difference to society. In St. Brendan's Conference, Birr, there are full-time and auxiliary members. The Conference has a Spiritual Director, as spirituality is at the core of S.V.P. Each member is a trained volunteer. During training, the confidentiality of the work of the Society is emphasised. Members attend seminars on justice, visitation and shop work, at S.V.P. headquarters, Sean McDermott St. Dublin. The Conference in Birr provides various types of assistance to those in need locally — subsidising school buses, summer camps, grinds, primary, second level and third level

education, day trips, summer holidays, food vouchers, fuel, trips to Knock, home visitation, hospital and nursing home visitations. S.V.P. Birr works in conjunction with Home Fix, who do minor repairs to the homes of senior citizens.

Funding comes from a variety of sources, the main source being the thrift shop at Ozanam House and also the Annual Collection at Christmas. Occasionally, the Conference receives donations and bequests. An Annual Golf Classic raises substantial money for the area's under-privileged. A Christmas bingo raffle is another source of funding. The S.V.P. Birr works in close co-operation with some statutory bodies, including social workers, social welfare officers, school liaison officers, M.A.B.S., Lions' Club, clergy and Gardai.

The Society of St. Vincent de Paul, Birr would like to take this opportunity to thank most sincerely all those who give so generously to help alleviate the hardship and burden of the underprivileged in the Birr area and who enable the S.V.P. to ***'Make love accomplish what justice and law alone can never do'***. (Frederic Ozanam)



**The Vincent De Paul Committee – 2010**

**Back Row (L to R): Pat Pilkington, Louie Hassett, Sarah Murphy, John Tierney;  
Monica Boyd; Paddy Mc Intyre, Owen O'Neill**

**Front Row: Elaine Eastwood, Sr. Roberta, Maire Purcell, Enda Manzor, Anna Corboy**

## **CHAMBER OF COMMERCE**

With all the talk of the recession, and the pressure that businesses were finding themselves under, Birr Chamber of Commerce members were determined in 2010 to promote Birr as a viable town. The Chamber is working to promote and encourage existing and new businesses in the town, with a partnership of professional and individual people concerned with working together to build and improve a healthy economy in Birr.

Starting in January and February, the President, Adrian Haines, organised speakers at the monthly meetings with business topics and advice such as tax payment difficulties, promoting your own business and The Impact Factor – a training day held in conjunction with Shannon Development and the O'Maille Group.

Working with Garda P. Connaughton and Garda P. Farrelly, the Chamber has been working to establish Business Watch – an initiative which connects all the businesses in the town to each other, providing a network between them to help communicate with each other to attempt to combat criminal activity in the town.

In April 2010, the Chamber held its AGM and Adrian Haines stepped down as President, to be replaced by Martin Kearns. It was widely acknowledged that Adrian had given a huge amount of time and effort to the Chamber in his term as President, and his experience was invaluable, and continues to be. Alma Mannion was elected as Treasurer and Sinead Ryan continued as Secretary and PRO.

The Chamber has been very active organising Art Exhibitions by local artists in various shops in town. This has an added advantage that there are a very few vacant shop fronts, and helps promote these small enterprises.

Concerned with the fact that the tourist office has seasonal opening times, the Chamber worked in conjunction with Shannon Development to provide a number of Tourist Information Points in the town – at Square News in Emmet Square, Whelahan's Newsagents in Main Street and at Birr Castle. There is an ongoing project to have street names fitted throughout the town, and the Chamber, along with Birr Town Council are hoping to have this rolled out very shortly.

The Chamber holds its meetings on the second Thursday of every month at 9pm. At September's meeting a new tourist initiative was launched. It consisted of a New Birr Town Map, which identifies local amenities, accommodation, shops, pubs etc. A huge number of businesses subscribed to it, and the map is located in four garages on each approach road to Birr, in each *free* car park (Marian Hall and Wilmer Road) and at the entrance to Birr Castle.

Following the huge success of the fashion show in 2009, it was held again in November 2010. The night was fantastic, with surprise guests, Elvis and plenty of fashion, fun and craic. Businesses in the town had the opportunity to advertise and sell their wares, the atmosphere was brilliant.

Again the Christmas lights, Radio 3 Broadcaster and Santa help to round off the year! The President, Martin Kearns, would like to thank all the committee and ask for newcomers to join the Chamber and help keep jobs and business in our town. We would also like to thank all the shops and businesses who helped the Chamber with all the events, and to all the people who SHOP LOCAL and support our town. *Looking forward to a busy 2011!*



**This unusual hurler (left) was spotted on the Birr to Portumna road at Walsh Park in September**



**Enjoying the Party – 1987  
(L to R): Nellie & Mick Whelan, Ann Roberts**

## BIRR MENTAL HEALTH

Birr Mental Health Association is a local voluntary organisation affiliated to the Mental Health Association of Ireland. Our aims are to help mentally-ill people and their families and to promote positive mental health. Our members comprise of a group of volunteers from different ages, backgrounds and interests.

We organise social and leisure activities for clients availing of local community mental health services. The local mental health services are facilitated at the Community Mental Health Centre, Old Convent, Wilmer Road, Birr. This is a Monday to Friday service available to people with mental health problems.

Birr Mental Health Association aims to improve community understanding and acceptance of mental illness and promote a positive awareness of mental health and the availability of self-help organisations.

2010 was once again a very busy and eventful year for the Association. We sponsored the annual holiday to Galway this year, with many people benefiting from this holiday. Mental Health Association members took a number of people to Knock, Clonfert and other local areas of interest. Transport is provided to all events by the Mental Health Association's minibus.

The Association is always available to support people with mental health difficulties. We aim to educate the younger generation by organising quizzes and involving secondary schools in the National Public Speaking Competition.

The theme for World Mental Health Week this year was 'Building Resilience' and the Association hosted a very successful talk in Dooley's Hotel in October. The main speaker was Mr. John Bannon, Cognitive Behavioural

**Pictured at the 'Building Resilience' Talk are Mary Turley (left) and Veronica Higgins**



Therapist. John outlined many ideas for building resilience and coping with stress. The talk was very well attended. We were also associated with other projects held in the Community Mental Health Centre, including the Annual Physical Activities, the Fun Day in October as well as the Halloween party.

Each year we purchase a pass to Birr Castle. This is a lovely amenity to avail of. The beautiful grounds provide inspiration for the art group, which takes place weekly in the Centre. Samples of their work can be seen in O'Connor's shop window, Main Street, Birr.

Through the National Lottery Funds, the Association secured funding for social outings and holidays, including sending three people on a trip to Lourdes.

All the above were provided as a result of the generosity of people who contributed to our fundraising efforts during the year, which included Church Gate Collections, Raffles, and the Annual Christmas Party and Raffle. Anyone wishing to contact us may do so by telephoning (05791) 20576 or 20540 or call in person to Community Mental Health Centre, (Old Convent) Wilmer Road, Birr. New members are always welcome.



**Members of the Birr Mental Health Association attending 'Building Resilience' talk in October**  
(L to R): Brid O'Connell, Claire Heron, Mary Kerins, Josephine Burke, Margaret Capindele, Jackie Conneely, Finola Colgan, John Bannon

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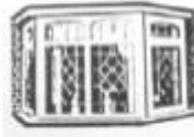


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## BIRR MILITARY HISTORY GROUP

### – TOUR, SEPTEMBER 2010

This year, eight intrepid voyagers assembled in Dublin Airport on Tuesday, 14th September for our travels to Jersey, Normandy and the Somme. The group, pictured, comprised of Ger O'Meara, Billy Gleeson, Derek Coulter, Joe Breen, Martin Horan, Oliver Craughwell, Martin Hynes and Eamon Coonan.



The first day was spent exploring St. Helier, the capital of Jersey. The Channel Islands were the only part of the UK occupied by Germany during the Second World War. The Group explored a large underground hospital excavated by the Germans using concentration camp labour during the war. The nearby café and small museum had display cabinets giving details of life during the German occupation. One display piece recorded an incident where a Mullingar man was sentenced to a term of imprisonment for striking a German. The German had taken offence when the Irishman didn't salute him. He took off the Irishman's hat and stood on it.

Thursday, 16th was an early start, catching the Condor Ferry for St. Malo in France, and after collecting our hired vehicle, commenced our 2 hour drive to the Grand Hotel Du Luxembourg, in Bayeux. Home of the famous Bayeux Tapestry commemorating the Norman invasion of England in 1066, Bayeux is ideally located for visitors interested in the Normandy landings.

We visited the scene of the American landings at Omaha Beach, Saint Laurent-sur-Mer. Our day's travel ended at the American Military Cemetery at nearby Colleville-sur-Mer. This Cemetery contains the remains of 9,387 soldiers killed in Northern France. It overlooks Omaha Beach and was the location for the memorable opening scene in the film "Saving Private Ryan".

On Saturday, we stopped at Ranville and Pegasus Bridge. Ranville was the first town liberated in France after the landings. There is a large British Military Cemetery in Ranville. Many of the soldiers buried here are from the British Airborne Division. Among those interred is Lance Sergeant Richard Dick Henry Johnson, son of William and Elizabeth

Johnson, of Birr. After landing on D Day, Dick Johnson was killed in action 2 days later. The group did leave a suitably inscribed poppy cross on Dick's resting place. Dick is a brother of our regular fellow traveller, Val Johnson who wasn't able to travel this year.

Nearby, Pegasus Bridge was the location of the British glider landings just before the D Day landings. Pegasus Bridge is the historical and spiritual home of the British airborne regiments. The original Pegasus Bridge is in the adjacent museum along with many other large items – tanks, anti-aircraft guns, gliders and bailey.

On Sunday, the group went on a WW 1 tour. Our first stop was Bertangles Cemetery, where Manfred Van Richtofen, the Red Baron, was first interred. He was shot down at Morlancourt Ridge on 21<sup>st</sup> April 1918 by Australians using small arms.

Next stop was the British military cemetery at Lovencourt and then on to Ovillers Cemetery. We then continued to Thiepval. Among the 73,000 men with no known grave commemorated on this hugely impressive memorial is Sergeant Patrick Craughwell, Northumberland Fusiliers, who was killed in nearby Delville Wood on 4<sup>th</sup> July 1916. Sergeant Craughwell is the uncle of tour group member, Oliver Craughwell.

Apart from well known personalities, the military cemeteries on the Somme contain the remains of many young Irishmen and many members of Irish regiments. The group acknowledged their sacrifice by placing poppy crosses on some of their graves.

We engaged a guide on Monday, the last day of our tour. Longueval was the scene of continuous fighting for much of the war, our guide can see 5 British Cemeteries from his house. His focus was on the German Offensive of 1918 or what British soldiers called "the Great Retreat". In particular, we followed the route of the 16<sup>th</sup> Irish Battalion during the retreat. This Battalion, which included many members of the Leinster Regiment was virtually wiped out in a few days. We also visited the Australian Memorial Cemetery at Villers-Bretonneux and stopped at the field where the Red Baron crash-landed. Very badly wounded, he survived for just a few minutes. According to our guide, local legend has it that the only word he managed to say to the Australian soldiers who reached his aircraft was "kaput".

Our departure time from nearby Beauvais the following day, Tuesday, 21<sup>st</sup> September 2009 was at 5.25pm. As well as some last-minute shopping for our loved ones in Birr, we spent time in Amiens Cathedral. Completed in 1266 the Cathedral, along with Amiens itself, did not suffer significant damage during the war.

Despite roads being cordoned off due to a bomb scare, our ever-efficient driver, Joe Breen, still managed to find a route to Beauvais Airport.

Then the short flight to Shannon and onto Kearns bus for the journey home to Birr.



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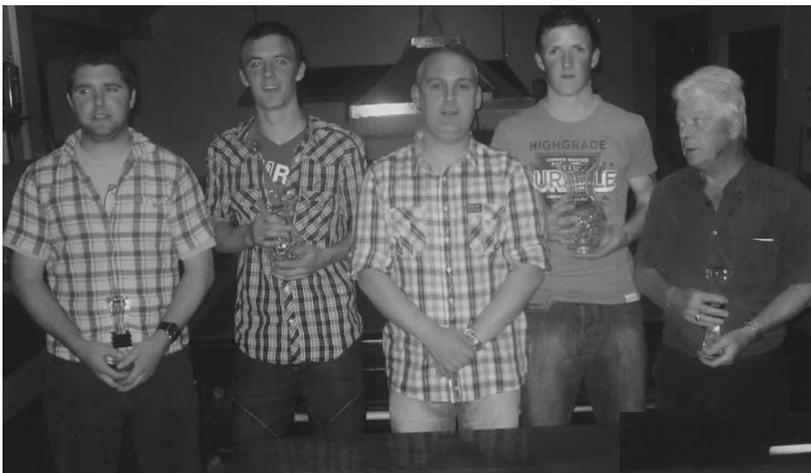
## BIRR SOCIAL CLUB

This year was our second year to host the Town Championships, in conjunction with the Open Darts Championships. Sullivans of Kilcormac were the Open winners with John Milne's of Crinkill coming out tops in the Town event. Sullivans beat Flannerys, who are runners-up two years in a row now, 14-13 in a super final. Milnes beat Pilkingtons, 14-11, in the Town final. It was one of the most enjoyable games seen in the club.

On the snooker front, the Teams Tournament was won by Tom Nolan's. They beat POCG, a team made up of prison

officers and Calor Gas reps, by a score of 3-2. In the singles snooker, Eamon Bevans beat Brian Guinan 2-1 in the final. In the Summer Snooker Competition, history was made when the Bevans brothers met in the final. (The nearest we had to that was when father and son, Mick Daly Jnr. beat Mick Daly Snr. in the Scratch Cup final). Damien beat brother Eamon 2-1 in a very open game of snooker.

Chairman Derek Kelly would like to thank all those who took part in the various competitions to make them such a success.



**Summer Snooker Prizewinners pictured left**  
(L to R): Richie Donnelly, Eamon Bevans (Runner-up), Derek Kelly (Chairman), Damien Bevans (Winner), Brian Guinan

**Pictured, right, at the Team Snooker Presentation**

Back Row (L to R): Dermot Nolan, Michael Nolan, Barry Kennedy  
Front Row: Derek Kelly (Chairman), Brian Nolan, Andrew Sullivan



**Pictured, left, at the Town Darts Competition**  
(L to R) Derek Kelly (Chairman), Padraig Horan (representing the Winners, John Milnes), Pat Scully (Sponsor)

## **LITTLE BROSNA AND CAMCOR FISHING CLUB**

Another season has come and gone. The gear is packed away for most, save the few hardy souls, who take on the pike or continue in some of the stocked fisheries that remain open throughout the winter.

Our fishing started off well in early June but, owing to our unusually good summer, water levels remained low for quite a while, resulting in poor enough fishing, as the summer progressed. Unselfishly, many fishermen decided not to fish during this period, which gave the fish a more than sporting chance to cope with their new found surrounds. By September, things had picked up again and good fish catches were being reported. We would like to thank the fishermen who practice 'catch and release' in the September-time, as the fish prepare to spawn. This is done in the true spirit of the sport.



and the Club wishes to thank them also for their assistance, especially Mr. Pat McDonald. Once again to our water keepers, pollution officers and indeed our members as a whole, who all play their part in protecting our precious rivers and waterways, a big thank-you.

Happily, our Club continues to go from strength to strength, and, with the continued help of the Fisheries Board and the ESB, we hope to continue to develop the catchment for future generations. Indeed, the pictures here show some of the great work that has been done by the ESB, at the site of the old stone bridge in Sandymount. This is a lovely amenity, one that blends in seamlessly with the local environment and we thank all those involved in its delivery.

Finally, to anybody who might be thinking of taking up this sport, we would be delighted to welcome you to our Club. Fishing is a relatively inexpensive sport to start and, so, in these recessionary times, it might be worth giving it some serious consideration. We can assure you, it will repay you tenfold, in terms of, the hours of endless enjoyment it provides. Best wishes to one and all and tight lines for the season ahead.

*Pictures show the new bridge and bank work carried out by the ESB at the site of the old stone bridge in Sandymount*



At the time of writing, it is great to see a very healthy stock of fish in the river and we hope this bodes well for the future. The benefits of 'fly-fishing only' from the bridge at Newbridge Street to the mountains is the main reason for the improvement of fish stocks in the system. Most fishermen now, realise, respect and appreciate this and the Club thanks them most sincerely for their on-going co-operation in this regard.

The fisheries officers were very active during the season

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## BIRR & DISTRICT MOTOR CLUB

Now in its 42<sup>nd</sup> Year, 2010 was another successful year for the Birr & District Motor Club. In February, Welsh Visitor Melvyn Evans in his Subaru Impreza won our Stages Rally. The rally was based in Nenagh and attracted 110 Starters. Local drivers who finished included Eoin Woods, Mike Garahy, David Forde, Paul O'Brien, Andrew Slattery, Benny Kennedy, Frank Dwyer, Barry Foyle, Mark Lennon, Chris Crowe, Declan Rigney, Pat Horan, Gary Higgins and David Ryan. This rally was a counting round of the Dunlop National, Top Part West Coast & Loughran Signs.com Midlands East Rally Championships. Well done to all involved in running our annual showcase rally.

The Annual Tom O'Reilly Memorial Car Treasure Hunt was an outstanding success, with over 50 cars partaking over a route covering Killyon, Kinnitty and Rath Areas. All participants enjoyed the clues and the banter. Ida Delahunt emerged as a popular winner on 652 points followed closely by runner up Susan Molloy on 633 points with Birr publican, Oliver Craughwell, coming in 3<sup>rd</sup> on 630 points. The prize-giving was held in Dooley's Hotel Birr. As part of the Vintage Festival Parade, the club also assisted in traffic management around Birr, in conjunction with the Birr Gardai with great assistance from Sgt. Michael Dardis and Sgt. John Mahon.

Our 2-Day Grass Autocross was held in Killeen by kind permission from Terry Smyth and Billy Delahunt. Chris Culleton won the event outright with best Club Driver going to Liam Higgins Jnr. from Birr. Well done to the event organisers, Kieran O'Brien (Carrig) and Mike Croker (Kinnitty) on another well-organised event. Shinrone was the venue for our next event, the loose surface autocross, which was held by kind permission of A&R Poole in their quarry at Glasshouse just outside the village. This event

attracted a lot of local spectators as the sun split the stones on the counting round of the Jerry Murphy Tyres Hankook Munster Autocross Championship. Wexford's Joe Cullen was the overall winner, with club members John Cavanagh and Whitby Moynan receiving class awards. David Percy and his team did a fantastic job on the club's 4<sup>th</sup> event of the year.



In October, the club ran a Night Navigation Trial in the Shinrone, Carrig, Aglish and Cloughjordan areas. 21 cars partook in this event and all participants enjoyed the route and we must thank the residents and Gardai along the route for their assistance and co-

operation.

Sadly within the club, we lost two very special people this year. On March 21<sup>st</sup>, one of our founder members, Billy Cavanagh died peacefully. He was one of Ireland's legendary motorsport figures and the noise of the V8 Special will always be a memory for all who came to admire Billy. On the 5<sup>th</sup> October, the club members learnt of the sad passing of Mrs. Mary Boland, Ballinree, Killyon, Birr, mother of Mick Boland, our loyal equipment officer. Mary was a very special person to all members who called to Ballinree to collect and organise club equipment. She always expressed a deep interest in the on-goings of the Birr Motor Club and its members. Our sincere sympathies are expressed to the families and friends of the Cavanaghs and Bolands.

This year our members were seen helping out at events from Cork to Donegal and we hope that next year we can continue to organise and promote motorsport in the Offaly & North Tipperary Areas. Finally, we thank all those who helped, participated and supported our club events and look forward to your continued support in 2011.



### Motor Club Function from the 1970's

Back Row (L to R): Noel Garahy, Tom O'Reilly, Joe Shortt, Gordon Percy, Bertie Grogan, Pauric McDermot, Billy Percy, Conor Murphy (child), Ramsey Henderson, Mick Larkin  
 Middle Row: ?, Mary Garahy  
 Front Row: Joseph Shortt, Mike Garahy, Tom Garahy, Gerry Garahy

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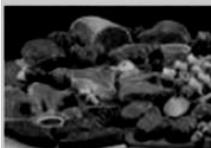
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## ST. CILLIAN'S CAMOGIE CLUB

St. Cillians resumed training in February after the winter break. For the first time, the club entered teams in 4 different grades, U-16, U-14, U-12, and U-10. As we had a wonderful experience as a host club in Féile na nGael in 2009, one of the goals set for the U-14 panel was to qualify for the finals of 2010 which were held in Clare. We defeated Tullamore, Birr and then Shinrone in the final to qualify to represent Offaly. This was a tremendous honour for a club established in 2006 to play in an All-Ireland competition. After several successful fundraising events, bags were packed and all roads led to Clare. We received a warm welcome from Ballyea, our host club and played them in our first game on the Friday evening which we won comfortably. On Saturday morning, we beat Kilmaley. The final group game between Camross and us, decided who qualified for the quarter finals. Though St. Cillians led for most of the game, they were beaten by a point in the end and our Féile dream was over. However the girls had a wonderful week-end and will carry great memories for many years to come and will encourage younger players to compete for next year.

On returning from Féile we were straight in to the U-14 championship. Having played Banagher, Shinrone, Tullamore and Naomh Brid, we advanced to the U-14A final against Tullamore in Kilcormac and we succeeded in bringing home the silverware.

As reigning U-12 champions, the management's ambition was to retain the title in 2010. Due to large numbers, the management team took the decision to participate in a 12-aside and a 9-aside championship. While all the U-12 panel got to participate in competitive games, it was the 12-aside team which emerged victorious. This was a remarkable feat for some of the girls who won their third consecutive U-12 final.

Our U-10s participated in a 9-aside competition. This was a great success as it allowed the girls to play numerous games and encouraged further development of their skills. A decision was taken early in the year to enter the U-16B competition. This decision allowed our girls to have competitive games later in the season. Though an experiment, as we had only one player over 14, it was a tremendous success as we reached the final but were beaten by a very strong Shinrone team.

St. Cillians were very proud of having 7 players and 2 mentors involved with the U-14 Offaly team which went on to convincingly win the U-14B Leinster title. They also participated in two intercounty blitzes and their year culminated in an opportunity to play in Croke Park. This gave them a chance to experience the thrill and excitement of playing there. Overall it was a highly successful and eventful year for St. Cillians and we look forward to the challenges of 2011.



**Pictured with the Silverware**

(L to R): Lisa Hctor and Aisling Brennan (Under-12 Joint Captains), Laura Hogan and Emily O'Brien (Under-14 Joint Captains)



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## WOLFTRAP CYCLING CLUB

Wolftrap Cycling Club was formed in 2005. We had fourteen members on our first training spin, which took place on 21<sup>st</sup> August of that year. Our membership has grown steadily since then and now exceeds sixty. This was our busiest year to date, with our members organising and cycling in many events throughout the year. Last May, ten members of the club had a very enjoyable cycling trip, in eastern Spain. The cyclists were based in a rural area roughly half way between Valencia and Alicante, doing a different route each day. They travelled through rural areas and small villages, in glorious sunshine.



For Vintage Week someone suggested that we organise a criterium. This is a very exciting, high-speed, and thrilling event where cyclists race each other at speeds of up to 50 kmh around the streets of Birr. It lasts for about an

hour and we named it after the great J.J. Kinahan, a world cycling champion from Clareen. The race was an outstanding success and will be held again next year.



Thomas Fallon (pictured right), the youngest member of Wolftrap CC, achieved amazing success in his first year of competitive cycling. In August 2009, he won the U-16 Leinster Youth title, in a 25-mile road race. This event took place just a few months after Thomas had taken part in his first race. This is all the more significant an achievement as he will be eligible to

race in this age category next year also.

A few weeks later Thomas took part in the U-15 National Youth Championship in Coalisland, Co. Tyrone. There were three events in the competition, a time trial, a criterium and a road race. Thomas took silver in the criterium and the road race and was just ten seconds behind the winner in the time trial and was awarded overall second place in the championship. This event attracted cyclists from the top clubs in the 32 counties of Ireland and there were thirty-two cyclists competing in the Under-15 age category. This young cyclist, who is showing great promise, is in fifth year in Mercy College, Woodford, Co. Galway. Without doubt, we will be hearing a lot more of Thomas on the racing circuit in the future.

Check out [www.wolftrapcc.eu](http://www.wolftrapcc.eu) for more information. We have members ranging in age from 16 years to 72 years.



### Members of the Wolftrap Cycling Club

Back Row (L to R): Paddy Breen, John Kennedy, Pierre Griegemans, Thomas Fallon, Finn O'Sullivan, Shane Lonergan, Pat Mannion, Declan Ward, Marie Brady, Alan Dempsey, Laura Brown, Dave Brown, Ed Maher, Kate Rudd, Aidan Horan, John Plunkett, Peter Doyle

Front Row: Gary Bracken, Warren Yeates, Bridget McAteer, Liam Butler, Willie Burns, Brian Fogarty, Cormac Hoare, Ronan Clarke, Pearse O'Donoghue, Joe Mannion.

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## BIRR GAA



Pictured above at the Tom Ryan Memorial Cup – Under 12's presentation are, from left, Seamus Ryan, Simon Ryan-Feehan, Teresa Ryan-Feehan, Conor Smith, Patricia Smith, Barry Smith and Celine Clarke

Below Morgan Watkins receives the Nevin Cup – Under 10's from Tony Nevin (left) & Eddie Nevin

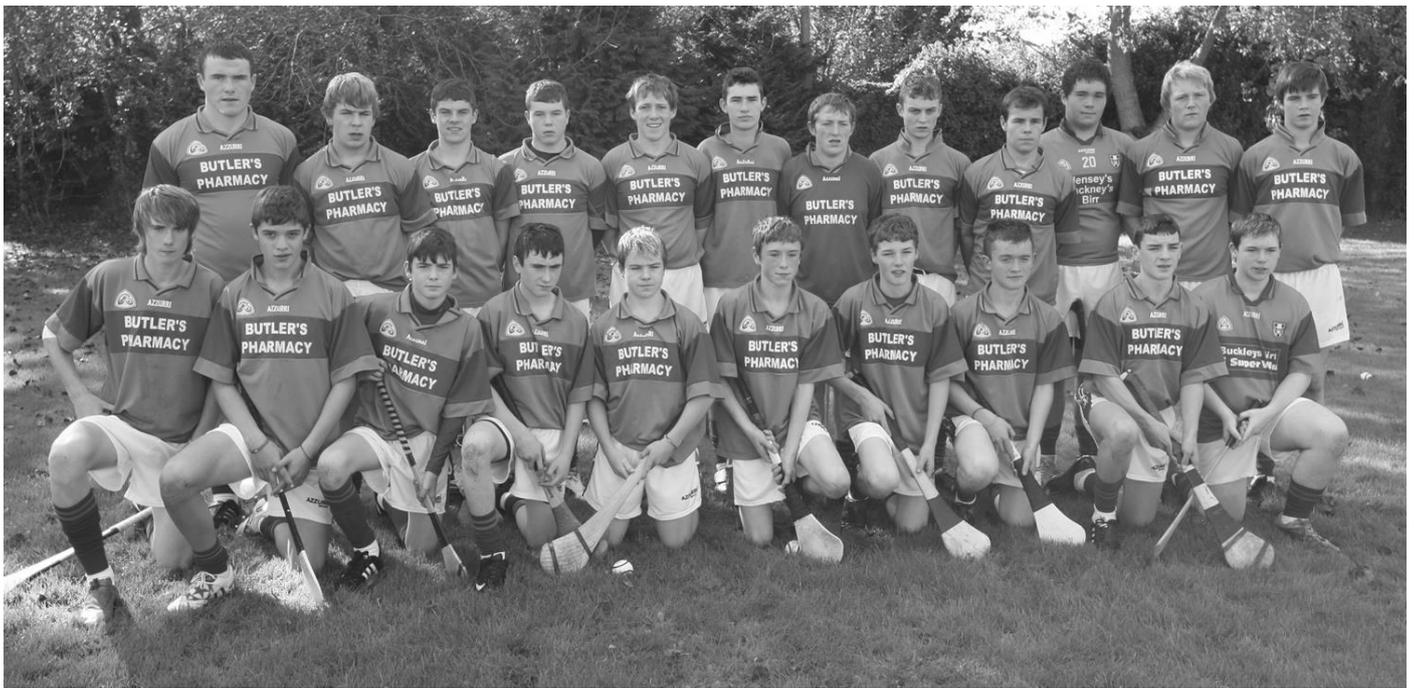


Craig Taylor, right, pictured with GAA President, Christy Cooney at Feile na nGael National Final's. Craig represented Offaly and the Birr GAA Club in the 'Skill Star' Hurling Competition at Feile na nGael National Final's in Ennis in June 2010



Craig Taylor, left, and Stefan Feehan who attended the D. J. Carey School of Hurling in Kilkenny.

Craig and Stefan were part of the Offaly U-14 Hurling Team this year and went to the D. J. Carey School Of Hurling in Kilkenny during the summer. It was a great experience for the young hurlers. They got to play other counties. They met top coaches and players and had a training session with Brian Coady, manager of the Kilkenny Senior Hurling Team. Both Craig and Stefan have lined out for Birr at both Under 14 and Under 16.



**Under 16's County Finalists**

Back Row (L to R): Peter Dooley, Peter Horan, Oran Regan, Craig Taylor, Cathal Hogan, Eoin Pilkington, Conor Grimes, Paddy Mullins, Marek Komendera, David Kearns, Conor Guinan, David Sheils  
Front Row: Emmet Nolan, Ronan Murphy, Conor Nolan, Scott Feenane, Stefan Feehan, Aaron Coffey, Michael Cashen, Michael Ryan, Sean T. O'Connor, Darren Cahill



**Winners of the Tom Ryan Memorial Cup – Under 12**

Back Row (L to R): Gary Cahill, Conor Brummell, Mark Haines, Dylan Quegan, David Mullins, Oisín Murphy, Dylan Watkins, Ryan Kelly, Johnny Kelly, Jack Parry, Conor Ryan Smith, Michael Milne, Dylan Heffernan, Richie Fitzsimons, Christopher Cleary, Nicholas Cordial  
Front Row: Ben Russell, Brandon Behan, Morgan Watkins, Noel Watkins, Barry Smith, Campbell Boyd, Darragh Coffey, Aaron Blake, Ailbe Watkins

## CRINKILL HANDBALL CLUB & SPORTS & RECREATION CENTRE

It was another busy year for the club, with plenty of handball action. In early January, with a team consisting of Conor Smith, David Mullins, Dylan Quegan, Aaron Blake and Michael Milne, we started our Community Games campaign defeating both Clara and Rhode in the County finals. We progressed through to the Leinster final where we were beaten by Wexford by 14 points. They were very unlucky as one of the players picked up an injury in the last game and had to concede the match. This team went on to play in the Féile na nGael finals in Clare, where they were accompanied by Jordan Hart. They went very well in the competition only to lose out on a semi-final place by 17 aces. There is no doubt that this team will gain success in the not too distant future.

In the Leinster 40x20 juvenile 'C' championship Offaly dominated this competition, with all Offaly players making the finals in the various age groups. Crinkill's Conor Smith was defeated by James Murphy of Rhode 15-8, 15-14 in the under 12 singles and in the under 13 singles Jordan Hart was defeated 15-11, 15-14 by Keith Murphy of Rhode.

Our adult players had better success, with Billy Mullins winning the Emerald Masters 'A' Singles All-Ireland final where he beat Tom O'Brien of Limerick in a three game encounter. In the doubles of the same grade Billy was partnered by Jim Guilfoyle. They were up against tough

opposition throughout their campaign but they were able to go on and win out the championship. Next year, this duo will try and make it three wins in a row in both the singles and doubles.

In the Junior 'B' Inter-Club 60x30 championship the Crinkill team was defeated by St. Canice's, Kilkenny in the Leinster final. The team consisted of Noel O'Brien, Kevin Cooke, Sean Ryan, Declan Cooke and John Mullins.

On the International stage, Michael O'Brien played in the Simple Green Men's 'B' US Open where he was defeated by Paul Hedderman of Limerick on a scoreline of 21-18, 21-17.

On the recreational side of things there is a lot of activity with classes taking place in the morning and evening. There are classes of Pilates, Bums "n" Tums, Self Defence, Circuit Training and Boot Camp for all abilities. We also host Kick-boxing for juveniles a couple of times a week. During the summer months, we held Tennis and Basketball training along with a very successful summer camp. We currently run classes for St. Cronan's, Birr River View Resource Centre and the H.S.E.. Numerous sporting organisations use our facilities for training and meetings. Over the coming months we hope to add to our list of activities for people in the locality.

We would like to take this opportunity to thank everyone who has supported us during the year.



**Emerald Masters A Doubles All-Ireland Handball Winners**

were Jim Guilfoyle & Billy Mullins (pictured right)  
with John Frazer & Tom O'Brien, Limerick

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## WILMER TENNIS CLUB

The Wilmer Tennis Club is one of Birr's most progressive clubs and continues to attract new members every year.

The club's excellent facilities ensure that tennis is played all year round and that has certainly been the case over the last 12 months. Despite the inclement weather last Winter, it didn't deter the brave tennis players and play continued on a regular basis under floodlights throughout the Winter, leading to a very busy Summer season.

The Club hosted its usual array of tournaments and events throughout the year, while many members also competed at Open Weeks and other events held by other clubs.

The year proved to be a successful one for the Wilmer Club with two of the club teams capturing Midland League titles. For the first time since 1988, the club won the Division 1 League title. The team did very well in their group games to qualify for the final but had to travel to Puckane to face the home team in the decider. It didn't start too well for the Birr side as they lost both the men's doubles and ladies doubles ties, so they went into the two mixed games knowing they couldn't afford any more mistakes.

The Wilmer team won both mixed to tie the game at 2-2 so it was into extra time – the reverse mixed. The Wilmer were 3-1 down early in that tie but fought back to win 6-4 and thus capture the Liam O'Callaghan Cup for the first time in 22 years. Congratulations to the team of Chris Collins, J.P. Savy, Csilla Varga and Gail O'Meara.

That was the second title claimed by the club in 2010 as a few weeks earlier, the Division 3 side had captured the John Joe Sheeran Cup for the third time and first time since 2003.



**The Wilmer Tennis Club Division 3 team pictured following their victory over Athlone in the final.**

(L to R): Brendan Mullins, Karen Smith receiving the John Joe Sheeran Cup from Pat O'Gorman, chairman Midland League, Sinead Watkins, Jim Bob O'Donoghue.

Having beaten another Wilmer team in the semi-final, this team also had to travel to an away venue for the final as

they faced up against an Athlone side they had drawn 2-2 with in the group stages.

The tie was delicately balanced after the doubles. The Wilmer won the mens in a tie-break but the ladies were narrowly defeated, so it was 1-1 going into the two mixed. The Wilmer held the upper hand in the two mixed and won both to seal victory by a 3-1 margin. Congratulations to the team members Karen Smith, Sinead Watkins, Jim Bob O'Donoghue and Brendan Mullins on their victory. The first three named members were also successful in Division 4 last year, so made an immediate impact in Division 3 and now they will move up to Division 2 next year. The club had teams in all six divisions of the Midland League this year and as well as winning two titles, they also made semi-finals in Divisions 3, 5 and 6, which is a great achievement for the club.

There was a very good entry for the Club's annual Open Week in July with players from Abbeyleix, Athlone, Nenagh, Puckane, Roscrea, Templemore and Tipperary Town joining the local players for a very competitive week of tennis. Very wet conditions on a couple of the nights didn't dampen the enthusiasm and spectators stayed late every night to watch the matches conclude.

Wilmer players performed very well over the week and the club was represented in all eight finals and managed to claim five of the titles for the host club.

The prizes were presented at the clubhouse following the final by Club President, Lily Gibbons. Club chairperson, Mary Horan, thanked everyone who had taken part in Open Week and the people from other clubs who travelled to support the event. She extended special thanks to the sponsors of Open Week and said their sponsorship was much appreciated in these difficult times.

The Wilmer players who won titles were Chris Collins (men's singles), Chris Collins & J.P. Savy (Men's 'A' Doubles), John Lynch & Tadgh O'Flynn (Men's 'B' Doubles), Michael Costello & Gail O'Meara (Open Mixed Doubles), John Lynch & Karen Smith (Handicapped Mixed Doubles).

The club also held all its usual events during the year. There was a wonderful turnout for the annual Vintage Tennis Tournament with most people making the effort to dress in vintage costume and participate in the spirit of the event. The prizes for the best dressed man and woman on the night went to Conor McGlone and Sinead Watkins respectively.

The club also entered a float in the Vintage Parade, as it has done in many years in the past. Great effort went into preparing the float and thanks to everyone who helped to put it together and also those who were on the float on the Sunday.



**The Wilmer Tennis Club won the Midland League Division 1 for the first time since 1988 with a victory over Puckane.**

Back: Tim Conway, secretary Midland League presenting the Liam O'Callaghan Cup to Chris Collins, Pat O'Gorman, chairman Midland League.

Front (L to R): Gail O'Meara, J.P. Savy, Csilla Varga.

In the latter part of the year, the Club Championships were held and, once again, provided plenty of competitive tennis into the Autumn months. The event culminated in a very enjoyable finals night when the five titles were decided. Chris Collins won the men's singles, defeating J.P Savy in the final. Csilla Varga collected the women's title, beating Catherine Barry in the decider. Michael Costello and Billy Jordan won the men's doubles, getting the better of Jim Bob O'Donoghue and John O'Callaghan in three sets. Mary Horan and Catherine Barry defeated Karen Smith and Stephi Harte to win the ladies doubles while the mixed doubles crown went to Chris Collins and Therese Haverty, who defeated Michael Costello and Sinead McMahon in the final.

The Club holds a number of other events, including Spring League, Inter-firms tournament and a very enjoyable Christmas event, all of which provide plenty of competitive tennis for members throughout the year. The Friday night social tennis nights are also very popular where the focus is more on fun and enjoyment rather than real competition. These are also very good nights for new members to help them get to know other members and provide an enjoyable social aspect to the club. So, if you are looking for a new sport to take up, have a look at the Wilmer Tennis Club. There will be a warm welcome waiting for you!

## BIRR LEISURE CENTRE

The past year has been a relatively successful year for the centre but, unfortunately, like all other businesses and households, we have not been immune to the effects of the drastic downturn in the economy, with our income for 2009 down considerably on previous years. This decrease in income is making the job of running the centre on a viable basis more challenging. We are assisted in our efforts by the continued support we receive from Pobal, Offaly Co. Council, Birr Town Council. The Midland Tribune assists through the weekly notes.

The centre continues to be well-supported by the community, schools, clubs and various other groups. Activities include 4 Aquafit classes, 5 Child Swim Lessons, 3 Adult Swim Lessons, 2 Swim Club, Gym Activities per week include 2 Gymnastics, 2 Spin, 2 Bums and Tums, 2 Fitness Pilates, 2 Circuit Training, 2 Step Aerobics, We also run Lifeguard and Swim-Teachers courses, We are open 100 hours per week. Check out the latest timetable on our website on [www.birrleisurecentre.ie](http://www.birrleisurecentre.ie).

Over the next few years with people's disposable income coming under more and more pressure, we imagine the centre's turnover will suffer accordingly. We have decided, therefore that, in order to help keep the centre on a sound financial footing, we have to cut our costs, and in particular our energy bill. To this end and with the help of the Offaly Leader Programme, we have recently completed an energy

conservation/green energy plan for the facility. The main aspects of this plan are:

- The installation of two wood pellets boilers, replacing our current oil based system.
- The installation of solar panels on the roof.
- Complete upgrade of the building's insulation.
- The installation of a rainwater harvesting system.

We did consider a wind turbine as part of the plan, but a survey at the site found it not to be suitable. We hope this project will cut our energy costs by up to 40%, while having the added benefit of reducing the facility's carbon footprint.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank our staff at the centre, full and part-time, for their work throughout the year and, in particular, our manager, Marian Carter. I would also like to thank my fellow committee members John Carroll, Pat Connolly, Cronan Grennan, Helena Kennedy, Liam Spain and Des Corboy for their hard work and support. It is through everyone's continued hard work and support I believe we can optimistically look forward to a vibrant facility which will continue to meet the needs of the community.

And remember Birr Pool is owned by the community, run by the community for the community.

## BIRR CAMOGIE CLUB

This was a good year for the Birr Club. We entered teams at U-10, U-12, U-14, U-16, Minor and Senior Grade again this year, and membership is increasing every year. It's great to see all ages enjoying the game of Camogie. We have girls as young as 4 years of age at training.

Our U-8's played in several blitz competitions and did very well. Our U-10 team qualified for the 'B' Final but was unlucky to be beaten by a very determined Kilcormac/Killoughey team. Our U-14's & U-16's both qualified for the 'B' Semi-final losing out to Shinrone on both occasions. Our U-12 team qualified for the 'B' Final against Tullamore and a great team performance saw them win.

Our Senior team commenced training in February under the management team of Mick Hough, Patrick Hoctor and Martin McCarthy. Things started really well with victories over Tullamore, Naomh Brid, Kilcormac/Killoughey, Lusmagh, St. Rynagh's and St. Sinchill's. We lost to Drumcullen and Shinrone before losing by 1 point to Kinnitty in the last round but secured a place in the senior semi-final against Tullamore. This game was played in Lusmagh and a fantastic team display by every player resulted in a victory and meant Birr would play Drumcullen, who defeated Kinnitty in the other semi-final.

This was Birr's first appearance in a Senior Final and they went in as complete underdogs to this game, which was played in Kilcormac. A huge crowd witnessed a fantastic game of camogie and Birr were very unlucky to lose by 4 points on a 2-11 to 2-7 scoreline on the day. The girls, especially the younger players, did fantastic on the day and with six of the starting team under 18, the future of the club looks really good.

Our U-18's have achieved victories over Drumcullen, Lusmagh and Kilcormac Killoughey. With only St. Sinchill's to play, we have already qualified for the Minor 'A' Semi-final. Hopefully, this team will continue on their winning ways all the way to the final. This team is managed by the same management team as the senior panel.

Our Club was well represented on the county teams this

year. Representing us at U-14 level were Ciara Ryan, Dawn Whelahan, Sarah Lyons and Fiona Guinan and the team manager was Mick Hough. These girls won Leinster U-14 B medals. Jessica Spain and Eimear Mooney were the representatives on the county U-16 panel and they won a Leinster U-16B medal. Shauna Carroll, Orlagh Kirwan, Gillian Molloy, Jane McCarthy, Julie Stephens, Rebecca Hoctor, Kate Dooley, Emily Quinlan and Caroline Soupe were on the County Minor panel and won Leinster 'B' Medals. Martin McCarthy and Patrick Hoctor were part of this management team. We had six players on the County Intermediate team this year. Audrey Kennedy, Arlene Watkins, Sheila Sullivan, Orlagh Kirwan, Michelle Gleeson and Katie Bergin made history again this year as they won the Intermediate All-Ireland in Croke Park against a strong Wexford team on the second Sunday in September. The Birr Club organised a great "homecoming" event in the Square and the celebrations continued into the early hours in the County Arms Hotel, the team sponsors.

These girls will now be part of the first team to play Senior Camogie for Offaly in 2011. Well done to them. Arlene Watkins was also part of the Leinster Panel who won Gael Linn medals this year.

2010 has been a very successful year for Birr Camogie, with so many young girls playing the game and great work being done in our National Schools - Mercy P.S. and Crinkill N.S. especially. Thanks are extended to everyone who has helped the club in any way especially our fund-raising events such as bag packing, church gate collections and bingo raffles. Thanks to all the parents who are always willing to help out and for their support at our games. Thanks to Crinkill GAA club for the use of their facilities as always and helping us out in every possible way. The use of the 'Brother's Field' has been a great help to the club for underage training and games and we are very grateful for its availability. All our management teams have done fantastic work for the club and they are wonderful people, who give of their time freely.

### Under-12 Shield Winners

Back Row (L to R): Deirdre Cahill (Manager), Emma Behan, Aoife Hogan, Ciara Murray, Rachel Kealey, Caitriona Reddin (Joint Captain), Linda Tyrell, Francis Hoare, Mariesa Cleary, Meghan Kinsella, Amy Lyons, Niamh Campell, Rochelle Patel, Niamh Horan, Doireann Errity, Danielle Ryan (Manager), Aoife Hoare.

Front Row: Trudy Feenane, Roisin Donovan, Brooke Whelehan, Laura Maloney, Jamie Spain, Niamh Middleton, Alanna Roddy (Joint Captain), Aoibhe Whelehan, Caoimhe Abbott, Clodagh O'Carroll, Sarah Dooley.



## **CRC GAELS**

CRC Gaels is an amalgamation of Carrig, Riverstown and Crinkill juvenile GAA clubs. The club caters for juveniles from the age of 7 up to minor level. After years of progressive development, the fruits of the hard labour finally blossomed in 2010, with the club contesting two county finals. Our Under-14s were beaten by a very strong

Ballinamere/Durrow team. Great credit is due to our Under-12 team who, after a very tough match, beat another strong Ballinamere/Durrow team to claim their 1st ever piece of silverware. The future certainly looks bright for CRC Gaels and we look forward to another progressive year in 2011.



**Under 12 Cup Winners**

Back Row (L to R): Aislinn Brennan, Adam O'Riordan, Rós Connaughton, Raymond Nolan, Callum Dempsey, Aidan King, Shane Collins, Daniel O'Meara, Kellan O'Brien, Eoin Bergin, Meathail Carroll, Cameron Colbert, Joe Kelly, Christopher Hayden, Rachel Dolan

Front Row: Ryan Hogan, Jack Carroll, Michael Gleeson, Aron Dickson, Brendan Hctor, Michael O'Brien, Michael Fitzgerald, Eoin Maher, Sarah Harding, Shíofra Ryan, Ciara Brennan, Aideen Freeman

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## **CAMCOR WARRIORS SPECIAL OLYMPICS**

The Camcor Warriors Special Olympics was formed in June 2009 by wonderful volunteers and the parents of children with intellectual disabilities. It caters for children from the ages of 6 to 16. The aim of the Club is to prepare these young people and assist in their training for future sporting events with Special Olympics Ireland. It is run on a voluntary basis, with all involved giving generously of their time and skills. The Club has the use of the County Arms Leisure Centre, Birr Leisure Centre and St. Brendan's Community School each week for training purposes. The children are currently in training for a swimming event in Wexford. Other activities that they are involved in are Athletics and Equestrian. If you have a child who would like to become a member of our club, or would like to become a volunteer yourself please contact Susanne on 086 8273639.



**Little Warriors**

(L to R): Dylan O'Dwyer, Robert Reid, Tara Kenny, Conor Dwyer, Isabel Dempsey

## BIRR RUGBY CLUB

During the 2009/10 season, the 1<sup>st</sup> XV, captained by Cronan Kennedy and coached by Camillus O'Meara, having played well in most games, were unfortunate to lose many by a single score. Birr's habit of losing games in the final quarter was detrimental to any success in climbing towards the top



of Division 3 in the Leinster League. The 1<sup>st</sup> XV were drawn and lost to Portlaoise in the second round of the Provincial Town's Cup.

The 2<sup>nd</sup> XV, meanwhile, had a relatively good season, given that it was a new team built from scratch. Under captain Maurice Rigney and managed by Peter Conway, the 2<sup>nd</sup> XV had a very good run and finished 4<sup>th</sup> in the highly-competitive South Leinster Provincial Seconds League. Along

the way, they beat notable clubs, the likes of Tullamore, Athy, Carlow, Edenderry and Enniscorthy. In the Anderson Cup, the 2<sup>nd</sup> XV beat Tullow and Clondalkin in the first two rounds before being beaten by the eventual winners of the cup, North Meath, in the quarter-final.

Early in the off-season the club undertook a major drainage development of the Scurragh pitches, costing €50,000. The

pitches are now showing the benefit of this development, which rectified severe compaction of the surface.

Also, in the summer, the club appointed Carlow man, Gordon Row, as club coach. Gordon has brought a fresh approach to training and has included in the squad for the 1<sup>st</sup> XV many of the players who showed promise in last season's 2<sup>nd</sup> XV. In the current season, 2010/11, the 1<sup>st</sup> XV are going well, despite losing earlier matches in the Leinster League to North Meath and Athy. This season's club captain, Evan Williams, is very anxious that the team finishes up the ladder in the Division. The 2<sup>nd</sup> XV started this season slowly with a draw to Athy before being beaten by Enniscorthy. The team building continues for the 2<sup>nd</sup> XV this season under the evergreen captain, Stephen Boyd. If the recent momentum is maintained the club and its teams should see some success this season.

The club fielded teams at U-13, U-15, U-17 and U-19, competing in the Midland League and the Leinster Leagues, with the U-19 team progressing to the semi-final of the Leinster League Division 1. Peter Dooley, Isaac Smith and Donal Spain, all members of the U-17 team, played with the Midland Area Team that won the Shane Horgan Cup.

Peter Dooley (pictured above left) was selected on the Leinster Youths Team that won the Interprovincial Series.



**Under 19 Team 2010**

Back Row (L to R): Paul Kelly (Youth Co-ordinator), Liam Delahunt, William Gleeson, Liam Grimes, Eoin O'Shea, Dara Culbert, Michael Hough, Daniel Culleton, Noel Lane, Sean Claffey, Peter Kelly, Liam Hogan (Coach)  
Front: Shane Delahunt, Dean Bracken, Paddy Donohue, Mark Guinan, Damien Gormley, Brian Hctor, Dillon Parsons, Colm McEvoy, Malcolm Campbell

## **BIRR LEPRECHAUN AND MINI-RUGBY**

We have a thriving Mini-Rugby division in Birr Rugby Club, thanks in no small measure to tremendous work being done by many parents and rugby enthusiasts over the past decade. Mini-Rugby covers all ages from 5 to 12 years of age and is open to girls and boys alike.

In 2007 we introduced teams playing at less than 7 years of age. This is under the rules of Leprechaun Rugby which is a non-contact game. As part of the IRFU long-term player development programme, the rules of Mini-Rugby vary according to the various age groups in order to match the child's natural mental and physical development. More information on the variations can be downloaded from [www.irishrugby.ie/clubandcommunity](http://www.irishrugby.ie/clubandcommunity).

Coaches, Ronan McGuckin and Marian Silke have bravely taken on this year's 'Leprechauns', who are aged from 5 to 7, with John Bergin, Tony Morris and Frank Higgins running the show at Under 8's. Brian Hogan, Willie Burns and Catherine Barry are tasked with the demands of under 9's and 10's while Eamon O'Meara, Robert Alexander, Tony Murphy and new recruit Peter Baker help direct the more experienced under 11' and 12's



**Birr Under 8 squad and coaches hosting blitz March 2010**

Birr regularly hosts mini-rugby blitz days where 2 or 3 other clubs will be invited to compete with us at all age levels. This can mean from 200 to 300 players competing, from 5 to 12 years old. With lots of help from parents and older

club members, these have proved a great success and provide a fun day for all the family.

At Easter 2010, after much fund-raising, preparation and excitement, the Birr under 12 squad embarked on a rugby tour to Cardiff, organised by then coaches Tony Murphy and Brian Hogan and a group of very supportive parents. 51 people travelled for 4 days to Cardiff City, where we enjoyed a mix of sporting, educational and social activities. Highlights included a Millennium Stadium visit, a Science Exhibition, and a trip to the Welsh Valleys to play Blackwood Rugby Club.



**Above...Birr and Blackwood après match.**

However, if you ask the players for their favourite memory of that trip it will undoubtedly be the fixture against Rumney Rugby Football Club. It is now commonly referred to as 'The Mudfest', played in atrocious weather conditions. Rugby came second that day to true sporting spirit when an outplayed Birr team bravely fought an excellent Rumney squad.

In 2010, we have over 100 players participating in Mini-Rugby in Birr. We have fielded teams in Leprechaun, U'8, U'9, U'10, U'11 and U'12 age categories. We train on Sunday mornings at our Moorpark grounds at 11.30 am. Please come along and introduce yourselves if you are interested in playing or helping out. Brian Hogan (087 6833760) is the current contact as Mini-Rugby coordinator. Email: [brianhogan@axiscommunications.ie](mailto:brianhogan@axiscommunications.ie)

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## BIRR TOWN FOOTBALL CLUB

Birr Town Football Club, founded in 1969, has now become an integral part of life in Birr. In 2010, it has nearly 400 members, when the Club has achieved a few firsts: the girls under 14 side won their first ever League medals and the Club formed a girls under 10 side and now compete in the Midland League.

Our under-age structure continues to flourish and this year over 250 children will represent the club, from U-8 Boys to U-18 Youths. We also fielded 3 girls' teams at U-10, U-12 and U-16. There are two mens senior sides competing in the Combined Counties League.

Current Officers of the Club are: Chairman - P.J. Hocter, Secretary - John P. Kenny, Treasurer - Dermot Horan and PRO, John Cahill. The Club runs a weekly lotto, which is their main source of income. Tickets are available from any member of the Club and if you wish to contact the Club on this or any matter, please visit their website on [www.birrtownfootballclub.com](http://www.birrtownfootballclub.com)

For the first time this season Birr Town fielded an over 35s team in the C.C.F.L. This was met with great enthusiasm. The support of the many people in the town for this venture could be seen with the large crowds which attended each home game on Saturday evenings. Players from both local clubs banded together to relive the drama and passion of their 'younger' playing days. Players such as Tony Grainger, Pascal Byrne, Kevin Nolan and Jim Hayes from Highfield played alongside former Birr Town players like Alan Hennessy, John Cahill, Liam Maloney and Jim

Spain. New players also came into the club including Paul Smith, Peter Stokes, Derek Boyd and Larry Stapleton and played their part. After early promise in the group stages, the fairytale ending was not to be. The great return fell short in the quarter- finals as Birr unluckily bowed out on a 2-1 scoreline to Mullingar.

The club has a number of players in the League's Emerging Talent Programme. This programme identifies emerging players and offers places to them to improve their skills in the leagues teams and training centres. They include U-11 players Brandon Beale and Michael Milne, Stephen Hanrahan, Dylan Quegan, Dean Cahill and Cathal Kirwan. At U-12 and U-13 there is Eoghan Cahill, Michael Gilligan, Joe Curran, Jamie McBride and Stefan Shalloe. We had three players attend International and Regional Trials at the back end of last season. Emmet Nolan and Connor Freeman were two of the players to attend and we hope they are recognised on the international teams in the near future. Val Feeney was the third player and has been called up to the Irish U-15 squad. This follows on from representing Ireland in the Hibernian Cup competition during the summer. Val has also been on trial with Manchester City (played two games, scoring in one) and will shortly travel for trials with Leicester and Middlesbrough and is wished the best of luck with these. Hopefully, this season we can have some other players start the first steps on this road to their dreams.



**Under 14 Girls Cup and Shield Winners**

Back Row (L to R): Ann Feenane, Ciara Moloney, Dawn Guilfoyle, Megan Sheils, Shauna Byrne, Maeve Monaghan, Ger Harte, Kerrie, Byrne, Sinead Garland, Grace King, Leanne Madden, Leona Tyrell, Lisa Byrne (Manager),  
Front Row: Gillian Irwin, Megan Lavin, Emma Hart (Capt), Kayleigh Sheils, Erin Byrne, Laura Sheils, Mairead Jennings



**The Under 12 Girls Team**

Back Row (L to R): Gemma Nolan, ?, Mary Gleeson, Aoife Maher, Rochelle Patel, Mariesa Cleary, Leanne Hogan, Stephanie Donoghue, Alana Duffy, Clodagh Hanniffy, Chloe Lally, Leah McDonald, Chloe Walsh, Linda Tyrell, Catriona Nolan  
Front Row: Shauna Duffy, ?, Sarah Dooley, Frances Hoare, Melissa Gleeson, Laura Moloney, Jordan McKenna, Aisling Garland, Alanna Pardy, Niamh Middleton, Abby Woods, Eve Masterson

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## BIRR GOLF CLUB

The 2010 golfing season began with the fervent wish that a repeat of the 2009 weather stricken season would not be inflicted on us. Things looked ominous when the heavy frost and rains caused havoc in January and February. Fortunately the weather gods took a siesta and not one competition was cancelled throughout the rest of the season.

Captains, Bernard Kennedy and Kathleen Doorley with Presidents, David McDowell and Doreen McKenna held the traditional Drive-In in February. All were high in their praise of the fairways and greens especially when taking into account the difficulties endured by the course staff.

During the summer Captains Kathleen and Bernard held their prize days with Patsy Burke collecting the Ladies and Christy McGarry winning the Men's. President David McDowell's prize was won by John Murphy with Pauline Needham winning President Doreen McKenna's.

There were many highlights during the year. In July the club was among the first to be awarded approval under the National Standards Framework which entitles the course to avail of specialised Business and Marketing supports provided by Fáilte Ireland.

In September Billy Donlon, a staunch club member, was selected as a member of the 'Seniors' team chosen to represent Ireland against the Home Countries at Crail Golf Club near Edinburgh. Ireland, for the third year in a row scored a comprehensive victory over the other three countries. In July Rita Delaney and Liz Pardy were proud winners of the Countess of Granard All-Ireland Trophy from an entry of eighty four teams

Our Junior Team consisting of Eric Byrne, Conor Stone, Sean Stone and Ronan Murphy reached the semi finals of the Leinster Foursomes. Conor and Eric were selected for special coaching by the GUI. Our Diageo Mixed team under managers David and Doreen had a very successful run.

Unfortunately, in the final they went under to a very strong Mitchelstown team. In November the traditional Club Matchplay Championships took place with Brian Nolan winning the Kenny Cup, John Connell the Hackett Cup and Paul Daly the Loughnane Cup for Juniors. Joe Lyons, winner of Opens all over the country, captured the Club Championship. Jerome Molloy and Angie Hough were Golfers of the Year in the Men's and Ladies sections respectively.

A number of fund raising events took place during the year, chief of which were two club classics, a poker classic, a table quiz and very successful raffle won by Paddy O'Brien. All of these raised much needed finance.

During the year several local clubs and organisations ran Classics and fund raising events. The course is very popular with societies and it was encouraging to welcome over seventy representatives of these clubs to a 'thank you' day during October. Obviously we hope to have them all back during the year and bookings can be made by contacting the office at 057 9120082.

Some excellent landscaping and attractive features were added during the year especially in the areas of the first tee and on the edges of the fourth and fifth fairways. Several tees were attended to and despite the very dry summer the course held up well.

A special surprise during 2010 was that all beginners could avail of single membership for €450 with family membership for €750. There is presently no entry fee which is an added attraction.

Incoming Captains Joe Slevin and Rita Delaney with Presidents Tony McTague and Gemma Butler will have the honour of leading the Club for 2011. We wish them every success. During the year we lost Tom Hayes, a dedicated member who had an association with The Glens going back to the early twenties. May he rest in peace.



Lady Captain Kathleen Doorley's Prize and prize winners

Back Row (L to R):  
Yvonne Claffey, Mary O'Gorman, Frances Ashe, Rita Delaney, Sheila Brennan, Maeve Garry, Caroline Guinan, Mary Lonergan, Patrice Delaney, Catherine Tooher.  
Front Row: Gemma Butler, Tory Baker, Patsy Burke (Winner), Captain Kathleen Doorley, President Doreen McKenna, Liz Nolan

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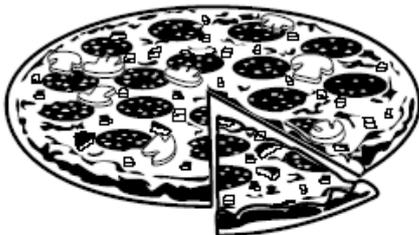
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## COMMUNITY GAMES



2010 was another successful year for Birr Community Games. Many children joined us for the first time this year and numbers were well up on 2009. We had two national winners in 2010. Well done to Nicholas Turtak (*pictured left*) who won silver in Boys U-12 Ball throw and Ellen Regan who obtained a certificate in Girls U-8 80M.

The Girls U-14 Camogie team was thrilled to win a county title this year by defeating Kilcormac/Killoughey. They progressed to the Leinster semi-finals, where they were unfortunately drawn against a very strong team from Lucan, Dublin, who stopped the girls reaching the final. Well done to the team of Rachel Dolan, Sarah Lyons, Gillian Irwin, Shiofra Ryan, Audrey McAuliffe, Ciara Ryan, Emily O'Brien, Laura Hogan, Aisling Brennan, Aoife Plunkett, Linda Tyrell, Rachel Brennan, Ciara Hoctor, Sarah Harding, Katie Harding and Ciara Brennan. Thanks to Michael Lyons, Gail Hayes, Denis Hoctor and Eddie Dolan for their hard work coaching the girls.

The Boys U-11 Hurling team made great progress through their competition by defeating both Ferbane and Clara, but, on reaching the final, their opponents, Sinrone-Coolderry proved too strong on the day. Well done to the lads on winning a silver county medal and to their team manager and coaches.

Art and Model-making continues to be as popular as ever in the Birr parish. Thanks must go to the teachers and principals of our local schools for continuing to encourage and help their pupils with this event. Birr had 3 county gold medalists who represented Offaly at the National Finals in Athlone including Sufyan Anjum (U-12 Boys Art), Danyaal Anjum (U-14 Boys Art) and Clodagh Hanniffy (U-14 Girls Model-making).

2010 was a great year for the U-13 Boys Handball team, who won a well deserved county title. This title has eluded Birr for the past number of years and to win gold on home soil was a proud achievement for the boys. Sadly, the boys were beaten in the Leinster finals. The team included Michael Milne, Conor Smith, Aaron Talbot, Dylan Quegan, David Mullins and Jack Parady. Thanks to their manager/coach, Kevin Cooke.

We had two Draughts teams who represented Birr at the county finals in Croghan. Congratulations to the U-10 team who claimed a silver medal in a very tight final!

Our U-11 Rugby team was unlucky in the county final to lose to a very strong team from Ferbane. However, for the first time ever, Birr managed to win a gold medal, on home turf, in both the U-11 and U-14 Tag Rugby competitions. The U-11 panel included Laura Sampson, Doireann Errity, Luke Barry, Conor O'Meara, Eoin Stapleton, Dylan Hanniffy, Barry Smith, Roisin Smyth, Mark Hogan, Shauna Duffy, Eve Masterson and Christopher Masterson. The U-14 panel was made up of Michael Gleeson, Erin O'Meara, Clodagh Hanniffy, Conor Brummell, Daire Stapleton, Conor Sampson, Aoife Hogan, Alana Duffy, Thomas Hogan, Rhys Culbert, Donnacha Purcell and Aron Dickson. Unfortunately, both teams were knocked out in the Leinster quarter-finals. Thanks to the team coaches, Eamonn O'Meara and Catherine Barry, for their help.

Interest in Swimming has grown over the last year, with record numbers of participants at both area and county competitions. With such great facilities on our doorstep, and with Marian Carter and Paddy McDonnell so ready to lend a hand, we have no excuses. Three children represented Birr at the National Finals in Athlone. Well done to Kieran Riley (U-10 Boys Backstroke), Kerrie Farrelly (U-14 Girls Freestyle) and Liam Pingree (U-14 Boys Backstroke). Congrats and keep up the good work!

Athletics continues to be our most popular event in Birr. The annual sports day was a huge success and, again, we were blessed with good weather. Birr did well at county level, with a total of 9 athletes winning gold county medals and progressing to the National finals- Ellen Regan (U-8 Girls 80M), Nicholas Turtak (U-12 Boys Ball throw), Oisín Murphy (U-12 Boys 600m), Linda Tyrell (U-14 Girls 100m), Gillian Irwin (U-14 Girls 800m), and Linda Tyrell, Gillian Irwin, Sarah Lyons, Ciara Maloney, Andrea Cooke, Amy Lyons (U-14 Girls Relay). Well done to all for making it so far in the competition. Nicholas was sensational in the ball-throw and managed to take home a silver medal. This was a huge achievement and great credit must go to Michael Kenny and Tony Murphy for their coaching, guidance and encouragement of Nicholas. Ellen Regan ran 3 races, reached her final and received a certificate for her efforts. It has been a long time since any competitor in Offaly has achieved this at under 8 level! Ellen certainly has bundles of talent and hopefully she will keep on running! Thanks to all who helped at training this year — Margaret Irwin, Jeanette Field, Valerie Reynolds, Michael Kenny and Catherine Barry.

Community Games is alive and well in Birr. We are always looking for new volunteers, so do contact any member of the committee if you would like to become involved. The committee includes Tony Murphy, Noel Coughlan, John Gleeson, Catherine Barry, Valerie Reynolds, Margaret Irwin and Eamonn O'Meara.

# MAY THEY REST IN PEACE



*James Doran*



*Rita O'Meara*



*Michael Raleigh*



*Ellen Mellsoy*



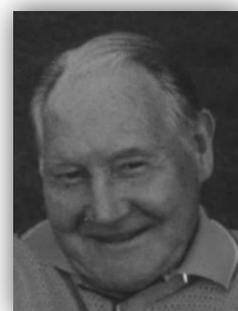
*Josephine Higgins*



*Edgar Roe*



*Sarah Nugent*



*Thomas Reynolds*



*Michael Daly*



*Susie Pardy*



*P.J. Spain*



*Mary Madden Warrington*



*Annie Murtagh*



*John McDermott*



*Rita Scully*



*Michael Breen*

# MAY THEY REST IN PEACE



*Joe Kennedy*



*Dorothy Haslan*



*Mark Shortt*



*Patricia (Trish) Rimmer*



*Patrick Corrigan*



*Annie Kearns*



*Jim Normile*



*Patrick McCarthy*



*Margaret McGloin*



*Eddie Dooley*



*Pat White*



*Chelsea Kennedy*



*Frank Coughlan*



*Bridie Smyth*



# MAY THEY REST IN PEACE



*Nora Grennan*



*Michael Kennedy*



*Sadie Campbell*



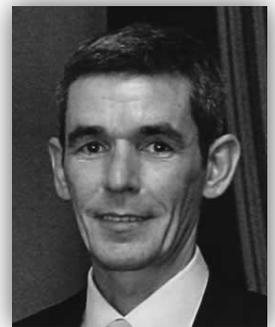
*Florence Susan (Sue) Hayes*



*Peter Murphy*



*Catherine (Kit) Delaney*



*Patrick (Pat) Murphy*



*Joseph (Joe) Vaughan*



*Maureen Loonam*



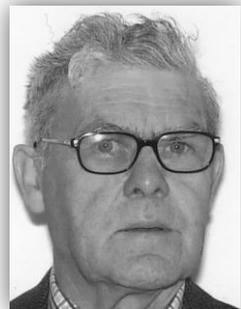
*Edward (Eamon) Gunning*



*Mary McCarthy*



*Susan O'Leary*



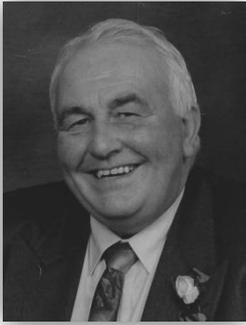
*Anthony (Tony) Micks*



*Anna Walsh*



# MAY THEY REST IN PEACE



*James Fryday*



*Monica Connery*



*Tom Hayes*



*Nancy Blake*



*Winifed Mongan*



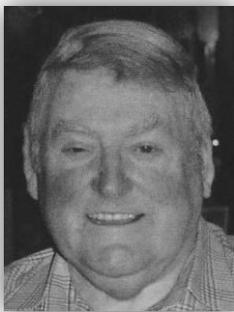
*William Spain*



*Bridget Harte*



*Stephen Tierney*



*P.J. Dunne*



*Bridget Byrne*



*Martin Guilfoyle*



*Alice O'Neill*



*Eva O'Meara*



*John Pilkington*



*Adeline Bray*



# A MIDNIGHT HIKE

*by Jack Ryan*

By an ancient route  
Through gentle hills,  
To the south  
Ely O Carrolls.

Here in the night  
Mystically bright  
Against the Lunar light  
Stands centuries

Tread lightly by here  
For treachery and evil  
Deeds abounded there  
History everywhere

Blast You! Andrew Merry  
And your ghostly manifestations  
For here moon walkers  
Hurry

Perhaps it comes  
With its stench and grime  
And its lustreless eyes  
To transfix mine.

Midnight mutterings of an owl  
From the majestic keep  
Where the wind howls,  
And the Leap

Erupts in the moonlight,  
Spouting ivy covered monsters,  
Wind dancing to the music  
Of the night

A flickering light  
From the Gothic doorway  
Spirit or spirited lamplighter  
O'er the oubliette.

O'Bannon the keeper  
Bridge building on dreams  
Unaware of the  
Grim Reaper

With his brief  
This bridge breaker  
This proverbial thief  
Hijacks the chief.

Destiny played its hand  
Question not who won,  
Enough to say he now  
Holds the secret of the Oubliette