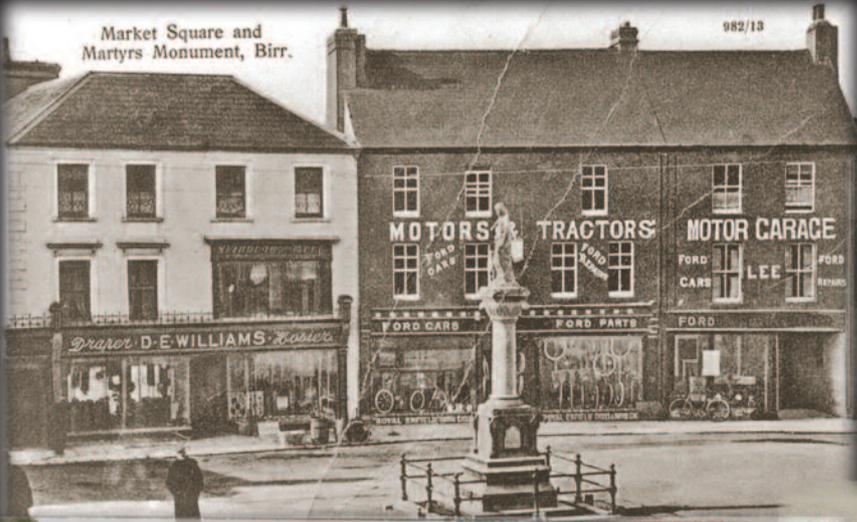


Market Square and Martyrs Monument, Birr.

982/13



Birr Year Review

Volume 11 - December 2011



BIRR YEAR REVIEW 2011

Volume 11

December 2011

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This year’s publication marks the eleventh edition of the Birr Review. That we are embarking on our second decade of the magazine is a remarkable tribute to the many people who have contributed to its success over the past eleven years. Committee members have given generously of their time and expertise to make it the successful publication it is. The business community has loyally supported it through the sponsorship of advertising and still does so even in these difficult times. The various shops have facilitated its distribution by placing it on their shelves. Many people have sent articles and pictures from home and abroad to fill its pages. A very special word of thanks is due to all those individuals, some now deceased, who have welcomed us into their lives and allowed us to share in their life stories. Above all thanks are due to you the customers, who by purchasing the book each year affirm its very existence.

Michael Donegan
Editor



Look for ‘Birr Review’



The Annual Birr Review is here again and like Christmas it may seem as if it has been with us forever. This is the 11th edition of the magazine, a chance to review in photograph and print the many and varied activities which together make up a year in Birr. The Review has now become a historical document recording life and death in our Community. I would like to extend a very large Lions Club thanks to all who continue to support our publication, the advertisers and the community by purchasing the Review and posting copies to family and friends around the globe. The Lions motto is ‘We Serve’ but we could not do this without the continued tremendous support from the community for which we are extremely grateful. 100% of funds raised by Birr Lions club goes back to the community, through our own projects and our collaboration with the many other organisations in Birr. And to the very hardworking Review Committee ably led by Michael Donegan and Emer Dolphin-Murray for their diligence, their patience, and their perseverance... Go raibh míle maith agat.

Brian Hogan
President
Birr Lions Club



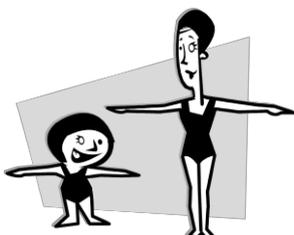
BIRR ANNUAL REVIEW COMMITTEE 2011

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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 2010-2011

NOVEMBER 2010

A group of scientists and students have made Birr and, more importantly, Birr Castle, with its notable links with astronomy, the centre of the universe in terms of detecting solar frames ejected from the sun.

Birr Stage Guild presented Agatha Christie's 'And Then There Were None'. This year's production was directed by Adrian Shine.

Erin Horticulture, Derrinlough, Birr celebrated 50 years in business with a special function to mark the occasion at the County Arms Hotel. Mr. Richard Grimmer, Chief Executive of Leisure Grow Holdings Ltd., of which Erin Horticulture is a subsidiary, highlighted major plans in the future and paid a glowing tribute to John Molloy.

There was a large attendance at the re-union of camogie players from St. Brendan's Community School.

Birr Town's Val Feeney was selected on the Republic of Ireland U-15 squad, which will travel in an International tournament in Qatar.

Frank Haslam, Director of Services in Birr, informed Birr Town Council members that owners of derelict buildings in Birr are to be notified in the coming months that they will have to carry out essential works or they will be fined if they do not comply.

Artists found common ground at Birr Art exhibition at Birr Theatre and Arts Centre and incorporated 35 exhibits, with some 25 artists involved. Martina Finn, curator, congratulated the artists on their endeavour and artistic creation; she noted that drawings are the most direct form of expression.

Following from their success last year, Birr Chamber of Commerce presented 'Light up the Night' fashion show to raise funds for the Christmas Lights.

Birr Town Council are hoping that Airtricity will provide as good a service as the ESB did, as the company has taken over the public lighting system in Birr

The unique Offline Film Festival ran from Nov 18th-21st in Birr, with four exciting work-shops taking place during the Festival.

It was musical time again at St. Brendan's Community School, Birr. The cast and crew of over 150 students were involved in this year's production of 'Back to the 80's'. Cavanagh's Foundry received the highest health and safety accolade when they were awarded the President's award for medium sized organisations at the 2010 NISO Annual All-Ireland Occupational Safety Awards recently.

Congratulations to Jessica Davis, Syngfield, on receiving the Gold medal for Violin Classical from the Royal Irish Academy of Music.

Jean White, daughter of Gerry and Margaret, Carrig, volunteered to work in Calcutta for 10 weeks teaching children.

Birr businessman James Fanning has announced his intention of running in the general election as an Independent Candidate. Aged 36, he is Managing Director of Midland Web Printing, which is based in Birr and employs 40 people.

Three Crinkill men, Des Corboy, Michael Ryan and Brian Harte took it on themselves to lose weight to raise money for the Ronald McDonald House, which is part of the Children's Hospital, Dublin. The amount raised was €2,686. There was a major increase on the Live Register at the Social Welfare office in Birr. In 2005, the number of people unemployed was 882 and in 2010 the number of unemployed recorded was 2,431, an increase of 1,549. Birr Rugby Club urges all members, supporters, friends and families to support the Club's new lotto draw. Camcor Bridge Club competition winners were as follows: 1st Prize: Mary Glendenning, Joanne Loughnane, Tess Liffey and Ena Loughnane. 2nd Prize: Teresa Kelly and John Gilmartin.

DECEMBER

Despite impressing the judges with her wonderful voice, Birr singer, Bernadette Spain, did not progress to the next round of the All-Ireland Talent show following her excellent performance on the live show on R.T.E.

The winner of the Pandora competition, held by R.J. Barber and Son in conjunction with the Midland Tribune, was Theresa Corrigan, Kinnitty who won a €500 Pandora ring. 2nd Prize of a bracelet was won by Nancy Armitage. Anne Kealy won third prize of another bracelet.

Birr GAA AGM was postponed as a mark of respect to the late Paddy Spellman. He was one of Offaly's great hurlers in the 1950's, 60's and 70's and had the distinction of playing for Leinster in the Railway Cup Competition. He played hurling with Birr senior team, and his native Carrig-Riverstown team, with whom he won the Intermediate hurling title. He never missed a match that Offaly seniors played. He attended the Offaly county hurling final in Birr every year.

Birr Goal Mile took on Christmas Day to raise money for the very poorest of the poor.

Fayle's Hardware, Main Street, celebrated 190 years in business in Birr. It was managed by three generations of Fayle's and in 1900 it was taken over by the Eades family, where it remained for 2 generations. George Watkins took over management from 1940 to 1988. Leslie Draper then took over the business and his son now helps run the business with his father and Uncle Percy. The County Arms Hotel was one of the Irish hotels launched by the Irish Hotel Federation. This International marketing drive for 2011 also included Aaron House, Kinnitty and Grennan's Country Cottages.

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A major project is currently being planned for Birr, which will completely revamp the water system. It will replace all the old mains pipes in the town. Tom Shanahan, Senior Engineer with Offaly County Council and Willie Ryan, Area Engineer, informed members of Birr Town Council of the scheduled work.

There was a rise in drink driving incidents in the Birr district during December. Gardaí confirmed that seven people had been arrested for drunk driving. In previous years the average drinking charges were one a week.

Chesterfield Community Childcare Centre received €3,000 from AIB Bank, Birr through the 2009 — 2010 Better Ireland programme. Catherine Quinlan presented the cheque on behalf of the AIB Bank to Catherine Ferncombe, Bridget Lynskey and Kathleen Gallagher. Birr man John Ryan was appointed Offaly minor football manager for 2011. Two of his prodigies, John Ryan and Brian Lonergan, are members of the Offaly senior football panel.

Martin Kearns, President of Birr Chamber of Commerce, launched the beautiful Birr Town map. The primary purpose of the map is to draw tourist attention to the many tourist areas and the many fine shops in Birr. Eight maps will be displayed at appropriate locations in Birr. The new map replaces the original map created by the late Eugene Garvey. Naomi Mooney updated Eugene's map, Martin commended Naomi for doing a fabulous job, creating the wonderful map.

Birr Review Book marked its 10th anniversary. An exceptionally detailed and varied Birr Review 2010 was launched in Dooly's Hotel.

For the last three months, young writers from Offaly have attended creative workshops in Birr Library, funded by Offaly County Council and run by novelist Catherine Barry. It was revealed during December that there were no plans for the FÁS site in Birr. The 506-acre site on the Tullamore road was purchased for €1.51 million a few years ago under the decentralisation plan.

JANUARY 2011

After the freeze-up, Offaly County Council engineers have worked night and day to restore water supplies to most parts of the county. At one stage temperatures had dropped to -17 degrees with more snow forecast. Tom Shanahan, Offaly County Council, had supervised a huge number of repairs.

A number of shops and businesses have been forced to close as a result of the severe weather.

Although there were reports of a number of pre-Christmas burglaries during Mass-times on the 15th of December in the Birr/Kinnitty/Kilcormac areas, Birr Gardaí reported a quiet Christmas period on the crime front generally.

Peter O'Meara and Willie Devereux received plaques and televisions from the staff of Offaly County Council on the occasion of their retirement.

Ger Oakley, a long-time stalwart of Offaly County hurling announced his retirement with a frank interview in the

Midland Tribune. In the interview, he expressed his disappointment with the standard of hurling in the county and also with the fact that the County Board had refused to allow him to transfer to Birr so that he would have a chance to play at senior level with his fellow county players.

Most of the members of Birr Town Council supported a proposal to extend parking metering to new areas in an effort to raise revenue to balance the books and make up a deficit of €36,000.

Mary Gaughran, Town Clerk, Birr informed Council Members that an income drop of 6.9% for 2011 would result in a reduction of services for the public.

The Exhibition 'Thuas Staighre' in Birr Theatre and Arts Centre featured work by artist Catherine Ryan.

At the 42nd A.G.M. of Birr Credit Union in Dooly's Hotel, the Chairman, John Curley, led tributes to Mr. Matt De Forge, who was retiring as manager after 24 years. The new manager was announced as Ms. Brenda Rogers. The meeting was informed that, despite the very difficult trading circumstances, the Credit Union would pay interest at a rate of 0.75%.

The councillors and executive of Birr U.D.C. complimented the town Clerk, Mary Gaughran, on her transfer to the post of Town Clerk in Tullamore and also congratulated her on her upcoming marriage.

Kevin Cooke and Sean Ryan won the 40x20 Junior 'B' Leinster Handball Championship, defeating a Wexford pair 21-13 and 21-16. Darren Madden, Alan Guinan (doubles) and Michael O'Brien (singles) were defeated in their matches by Meath and Kilkenny respectively.

FEBRUARY

Birr lady, Mary Foley, won €103,500 in the National Lottery. The winning line was a quick-pick, which Mary purchased in Square News, Emmet Square, Birr. Mary intends to buy a new house with the winnings.

Priests in Offaly have expressed disappointment with changes to Hospital visiting arrangements. The HSE announced that patient lists could no longer be given to visiting priests. This breaks a long tradition with the Midland Regional Hospital, Tullamore, and visiting priests. The reason the HSE proffered is that data protection legislation stipulates that, as a public body the HSE must keep personal information safe and secure.

Two Birr Artists launched a fine book in Birr Library which celebrates the art of dreams. Both Eileen Casey and Artist Emma Barone collaborated on the book, "From Bond to Blossom", with Eileen writing a number of poems and Emma supplying a number of pen and ink drawings. The book was launched by Rosalind Fanning.

Twenty-two local Primary Schools participated in the first stage of the Nationwide 2011 Credit Union School Quiz Competition run by the Birr Credit Union. Mercy P.S. was the winner of the Under-11 category and Carrig N.S. won the Under-13 category. Both schools go forward to the next stage in Thurles.

Birr Stage Guild launched its spring musical, 'Oklahoma' at the Birr Theatre and Arts Centre. It was attended by past, present and future casts members. Many turned out in costume.

GIY (Grow-it-Yourself) Ireland aims to establish a GIY group in every community in Ireland and it held its first meeting in Birr in March. The organisation gets together on a regular basis to talk, learn from each other and exchange tips, produce and advice.

Congratulations to the Birr Community School Junior Camogie Team for their fine victory over Enniscorthy in the Leinster Final.

What was described by Gardaí as a "professional gang" was suspected of carrying out a robbery at SuperValu in Birr. Cutting implements were used to breach the large bolted gates and the alarm was neutralised before entry was gained through a rear window. CCTV footage revealed that the gang loaded up two trolleys of cigarettes and alcohol worth an estimated value of €5,000.

A man in his twenties received gunshot wounds to his right leg when a legally held firearm was discharged in the Wood Row area of Mill Street. A resident heard a disturbance outside his home and feared that he was going to be burgled. The injured Polish man was hospitalised.

Olwyn Enright's political career came to an end on the 1st February, on the same day as the Taoiseach, Brian Cowen's, when the 30th Dáil sat for the final time. Speaking from her new home in Donegal North East Olwyn said she wasn't sure if, when family pressures were less, she would return to politics or not.

A Shop Local 10km run was organised by Birr Chamber of Commerce in conjunction with Fit 2 Run 4 Life Company Ltd. took place.

A Life-long Service to Scouting Award was presented to Jack Ryan by the Chief Scout in Ireland, Michael John Shinnick, at a surprise function held in The County Arms Hotel. The event coincided with Jack's 80th birthday and came as a big surprise for him.

Following a survey, it emerged that the large Beech trees adjacent to the Children's Play Ground railings at Wilmer Road were in fact clinically dead and will have to be removed.

The newly-appointed Town Clerk is Mr. James Hogan.

MARCH

Birr Workhouse featured prominently in a programme on NBC in America. Rosie O'Donnell, a famous stand up comedienne, appeared in "Who do you think you are?", her ancestors had lived in a Workhouse in Ireland and Birr Workhouse was selected to be part of the programme because it is relatively intact, probably the most intact and least altered of the original pre-famine Irish Workhouses.

Darren Hanniffy and Ronan Scully win Offaly Person of the Year. Both men initially came to prominence as talented hurling and football stars representing Offaly and, fittingly, it is their prominent work for the aid agency "Goal" that has won huge admiration. Birr man, Darren, has headed up

Goals Relief effort in Haiti in the aftermath of last year's earthquake disaster and had previous stints in Honduras and Uganda.

Claire Hartigan, an artist of some experience exhibited an evocative emotional and spiritually orientated body of works that explores the often forgotten space that is the internal matter that makes up the substance of all things both physical and spiritual in our world at Birr Theatre and Arts Centre.

Biorra le Gaeilge launched a new leaflet to promote new educational options for the children of Birr through the Irish Language. Biorra na Gaeilge aims to establish a Naionra (pre-school), opening in September this year, and to hold the first Campa Samhraidh (Summer Camp) in mid-July, 2011. Their main goal is to open a Gaelscoil – a primary school for 5–12 year olds by September, 2012.

The Ladies Winter/Spring League at the Glens has come to an end and the winners are the Lady Vice Captain's Team, comprising Lady Vice-Captain Vera Smyth, Marie Corcoran, Carmel Ryan, Caroline Guinan, Kate Flynn and Pat Fleury. Well done ladies.

In the wake of one of the greatest catastrophes to beset Japan since World War II, Shane Gormley, a native of Birr and an English Teacher in Japan, holds on to the hope that some of his colleagues may have survived the quake and giant tsunamis that engulfed much of the eastern coasts. After arriving in Japan he and other Irish people were instructed about earthquake preparation and where the designated disaster shelters were located for the community. Shane works in Matsue, the prefectural capital of Shimane, which was not affected.

The New Judge of Birr District Court, Catherine Staines, presided over her first Court sitting on the 8th March. This is the first sitting Judge to be appointed to Birr District Court for a number of years.

The Town Clerk, Mr. James Hogan, outlined details of the New Tenant Purchase Scheme. He stated that the Scheme applies only to Local Authority Tenants of more than 10 years standing. It allows for up to 45% reduction of the current market value of the property for a tenant wishing to purchase the property. In order to qualify for the full 45%, the tenant must be in the property for 15 years.

The Great Games Fairs of Ireland are giving lurcher enthusiasts throughout Ireland and the U.K. the opportunity of competing with the best, right here on Irish soil, with the final set in one of the best game fair locations to be found anywhere – Birr Castle.

Despite inclement weather in early spring, much work has been done in the town and its environs – trees have been planted, the dangerous wall at Oxmantown Mall towards Oxmantown School has been made safe and a railing added and work on Birr Town Realm Plan is well advanced. The Birr Chamber of Commerce are to undertake a very beneficial programme of Street Signs and Birr Tidy Towns will commence the water feature in Mill Island near Mercy P.S.

Birr Garden Club paid a visit to Angela Jupers garden in Bellfield for their outing.

Kidzart – Art and Craft Classes for 6–9 year olds is on-going at the Tin Jug Studios.

APRIL

Grove Street TV – Offaly's First Television Station, is launched in Crinkill as part of Public Art Project conducted by artist Michael Fortune.

The highly acclaimed Birr-based female vocal ensemble, "Virtuoso", launched their CD "Enchanted" in the Marian Hall, Birr.

Offaly Library Service and FÁS are working together to bring courses to the people of Offaly through Libraries. Courses are available from beginners to advanced level of computer skills and all courses are free of charge.

The Official launch of the Newly Constructed Skate Park in Birr near Drumbane has taken place amidst great support and enthusiasm from both skaters and on-lookers alike. An array of bikers, skaters and roller-bladers were busy traversing the slopes and bars of the park, entertaining the crowds. The Official opening was performed by Ann Hynes Spain, accompanied by the Skate Park Committee Members.

Oklahoma comes to Birr Theatre & Arts Centre. Rogers & Hammerstein's first and most popular musical burst into life amid the prairies and cornfields of the Mid-West Territories of Oklahoma in 1906. This is a nostalgic trip down memory lane for some and a wonderful new experience for others.

Award-winning Birr-made boiler is the world's most efficient. Grant Engineering launched their Condensing Wood Pellet Boiler at the SEAI Energy Show in the RDS, Dublin, and subsequently won the Best Renewable Energy Product award at the show.

Crinkill-based company Polydome Ltd. was announced Overall Winner in the 2011 Offaly County Enterprise Awards. Polydome Ltd., a garden tunnel and glasshouse business, was founded by Dublin native, Jonathan Pyle, who has been based in Crinkill for the past 17 years. Congratulations, Jonathan.

Birr Community School student, Donncha Carroll, has been selected on the Irish Team to take part in the 23rd International Olympiad in Pattaya, Thailand.

Peter Dooley, a member of Birr Rugby Football Club Under-17 Rugby, lined out with the Ireland Under-18 Youth Team against England. Congratulations to Peter and to his parents, Gerry and Martina and his sister Sarah.

A varied and talented art exhibition in Birr Theatre and Arts Centre by students from St. Brendan's Community School, Birr, was officially opened by Jessica Foley, herself a former student of the school. The works are a compilation of entries from 1st to 6th years, all quite unique and varied in style.

Birr Under-14 hurlers won the Offaly Féile title after a fantastic weekend of hurling. The Birr panel was Conor Smith, Eoin Cahill, Dylan Quegan, David Mullins, Shane

Donovan, Michael Milne, Brandon Beale, Jack Pardy, Stephen Shalloe, Christopher Cleary, Oisín Murphy, Mark Haines, Jack Regan, Dylan Watkins, Aaron Talbot, Dylan Murphy, Mark Nolan, Ben Russell, Ryan Kelly, Rian Dempsey, Cormac Kenny, Dean Cahill, Cathal Kirwan and Morgan Watkins.

Offaly's Heritage Officer, Amanda Pedlow, made a presentation to Birr Town Council. Miss Pedlow said a study of the workhouse was commissioned to investigate the current condition and use of workhouses in Ireland generally and Birr Workhouse specifically. The study is to be made available to the public and will help inform any future planning decision regarding the re-development of Birr Workhouse.

Three Birr premises were among the Irish Restaurant Awards 2011 – The Thatch, Birr, The County Arms Hotel and Emma's Café all picked up awards for Offaly in the scheme sponsored by Santa Rita/Sunday Independent Life Magazine.

Fashion Design student, Aoife Sheils, from Birr will be among the 15 NCAD Graduate Students to unveil their final-year collection at this year's Peter Mark NCAD Graduate Fashion Show. The Show is always greatly anticipated, as NCAD has produced some of the world's finest designers including Philip Treacy, Darrel K and Orla Kiely.

MAY

Minister of State for Forestry, Shane McEntee, performed the official opening of the Irish Forestry, Woodland & Bio-Energy Show that took place in Birr Castle Estate on Friday & Saturday, May 6th & 7th.

The County Arms Hotel played hosted to the Offaly Rose of Tralee Final on Friday, May 6th.

Miriam Page celebrated 30 years of providing swimming lessons in Birr.

The local media proclaimed that every man, woman and child in Moneygall was to get a golden ticket to see US President Barack Obama and First Lady Michelle ahead of their historic visit to the South Offaly village. Cash-strapped Birr Town Council decided to increase its pay-parking areas during their May monthly meeting.

Newly-elected Fine Gael TD, Deputy Marcella Corcoran Kennedy officially opened her new constituency office at The Courtyard, Emmet Street, Birr.

Ahead of its AGM on Thursday, May 12th Birr Chamber of Commerce through their President, Martin Kearns, encouraged people to shop locally as businesses battle against the economic downturn.

'The Memory of Trees', an exhibition by artist Emma Barone, went on display at Birr Library.

In their efforts to secure another Green Flag for the school, the pupils of St Brendan's Boys NS, Birr decided to walk to school on Wednesdays. Their WOW (Walk on Wednesday) campaign was officially launched by Birr Town Council Cathaoirleach, Denis Sheils.

Eimear Mooney, Mairead Jennings and Ciara Ryan of Birr



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Camogie Club, featured for the Offaly U-16 side that lost the All-Ireland U-16 'B' Final at the hands of Limerick, 0-9 to 3-12.

A young Birr designer, Sorcha O'Raghallaigh, designed a dress that was worn by international fashion icon and pop star Lady Gaga when she was interviewed on BBC by Graham Norton.

Carrig N.S. celebrated its Centenary on May 31st with mass being celebrated by Bishop Kieran O'Reilly and musical entertainment provided by the army band.

It was reported that Birr Town Council was operating 'on a skeleton staff', while Cllr Tony McLoughlin highlighted the fact that the local Tidy Towns Committee requires more volunteers to lend a hand.

St. Brendan's CS, Birr was the first Offaly school to receive the BBBS (Big Brother Big Sister Foróige mentoring programme) compliancy certificate.

The Offaly senior camogie team, featuring Birr's Michelle Gleeson, Sheila Sullivan and Arlene Watkins, lost to Wexford by 0-9 to 2-16 in the Leinster senior championship final.

After a nine-year absence, Ballyeighan Cricket Club secured promotion to the Leinster League for the 2011 season. "The American Dream Comes True for Moneygall" was the headline on the Midland Tribune following the Obama visit, which saw the world's media descend on South Offaly. Birr jeweller, Cathal Barber, had the huge honour of crafting a pendant entitled 'Andromeda' that was presented to First Lady, Michelle Obama.

Aileen Quaid (Best Comedienne) and Audrey O'Meara (Best Actress) two members of Birr Stage Guild were nominated for AIMS awards for their portrayals of Ado Annie and Laurie, respectively, during the Guild's excellent production of Oklahoma.

Offaly minor hurlers, who featured Birr's Eoin Hayes and Colm Mulrooney in their ranks, lost out to Westmeath in the Leinster MHC quarter-final at O'Connor Park by 0-9 to 1-14.

JUNE

GAA President, Christy Cooney performed the official opening of Crinkill GAA Grounds on Saturday, June 4th. A parachute drop-in took place prior to the throw-in of the Offaly versus Clare SH Tournament game that marked the special occasion.

Birr designer Jane McKenna, a student at Limerick School of Art & Design, won an 'AIB Business Development Award' for her collection entitled 'Toying with Reality'. 'Tu Dulce Estranjera', a play about Josephine Bracken, the Irish woman who was the love and inspiration of Philippine national hero Dr. Jose Rizal, was performed at Birr Theatre & Arts Centre on Tuesday, June 14th. And among the attendance was Philippine Ambassador to Ireland, Ariel Y Abadilla.

Michael Verney and Dylan Hayden played for an injury-hit Offaly side that suffered a 1-20 to 2-21 defeat against NHL

champions, Dublin, in the opening round of the Leinster SHC at Croke Park. Birr's Paul Cleary and Rory Hanniffy missed the clash due to injury.

Gardaí urged residents of Birr to be very vigilant in the wake of a spate of recent burglaries.

A member of the Wolftrap Cycling Club, Birr, 16-year-old Thomas Fallon, moved into the elite bracket of U-16 cyclists in the country after a string of impressive successes. Dr. Patrick Wallace, Director of the National Museum, revealed that the beautifully restored Faddenmore Psalter, which went on display at the museum, was probably manufactured in Birr.

Fianna Fáil's Cllr. Noel Russell, was elected Cathaoirleach of Birr Town Council, with Cllr. Brian Whelahan of Fine Gael taking the role of Leas Cathaoirleach.

Pupils at the Mercy P.S., Birr raised their first Green Flag award.

The Sunrise Inn held a golf classic, novelty auction and raffle in aid of the Friends of the Children of Chernobyl.

The St. Brendan's CS, Birr, All-Ireland SH Colleges winning side of 1985/'86 returned to the school to present medals to the St. Brendan's U-17 side that captured the inaugural Bro. Denis Minehane Cup All-Ireland Colleges title.

It was reported that Offaly County Council are €3m in the red.

Audrey O'Meara from Birr Stage Guild won the AIMS award for Best Actress for her role as Laurie in the Guild's production of 'Oklahoma'.

Birr Town Council members expressed anger at not receiving invites to attend the visit of US President Barack Obama to Moneygall during May.

It was announced that major disruption was in store for Birr because of the need to deal with water connections and the installation of water meters.

St Cillian's captured Féile na nGael Division 2 camogie glory with a 4-3 to 3-3 victory over Sixmilebridge of Clare at Pearse Stadium, Galway. Sarah Harding scored 4-2 of St Cillian's final tally and the team was captained by Cailin Fitzgerald. Birr were Offaly's standard-bearers in the Féile na nGael hurling competition.

Offaly bowed out of the race for the Liam McCarthy Cup after they suffered an agonising one-point reversal, 2-16 to 2-17, against Cork at Pairc Ui Chaoimh. Dylan Hayden and Rory Hanniffy lined out, with Paul Cleary and Michael Verney being unavailable due to injury. The game also marked the last game in charge for manager Joe Dooley. Earlier that week, Offaly U-21 hurlers, with Paddy Kirwan and Joe Errity as part of the management, went down to Dublin by 0-8 to 0-21 at Parnell Park. Birr's Stephen Lonergan played a key role as Offaly footballers defeated Monaghan by 1-18 to 1-10 in an All-Ireland SFC qualifier game at O'Connor Park.

The Offaly camogie side, with Birr's Sheila Sullivan, Arlene Watkins and Oragh Kirwan all featuring, recording an historic first victory in the All-Ireland Senior Championship when they overcame Dublin by 2-15 to 0-14.

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At a Birr conference, new Fianna Fail Leader, Michael Martin, was present as the party discussed education policy.

Birr Scouts were busy preparing for their annual camp, while some ladies from Tesco Birr completed the Flora Mini Marathon in aid of the Irish Cancer Society.

JULY

Census figures revealed that the population of county Offaly increased by nearly 6,000 over the past five years. The population of Birr Town has gone up nearly 9% to 4,447 while the Birr rural area has increased by 8% from 1,268 to 1,371.

'The Spot' Youth Cafe on Main Street, Birr received a grant from Offaly Youth Bank.

The Class of '66 from St John's Secondary School, Birr, held a re-union at the County Arms Hotel.

The Birr Photography Group launched their 'Black & White' exhibition at Birr Library.

It was reported in the local media that the Day Care Centre in Birr Nursing Unit was due to close for three weeks during August. However, Marcella Corcoran-Kennedy moved to allay fears about the future of the Centre, stating the reason for the closure was to enable staff take annual leave.

There was media speculation suggesting Birr could lose its District Court to a larger town.

Birr Lions Club made a donation towards the refurbishment of Birr Mental Health Centre.

Connectivity for the Metropolitan Area Network (MAN) came on stream in Birr.

The July meeting of Offaly GAA County Board was informed by Birr GAA Chairperson, Finbarr Spain, that St Brendan's Park, Birr is available again for county finals.

Bishop of Killaloe Kieran O'Reilly highlighted that the age profile of clergy in his diocese was a cause for concern. The 43rd Birr Vintage Week & Arts Festival, due to take place during August, was officially launched at Birr Technology Centre by Deputy Marcella Corcoran-Kennedy, TD.

Confusion and anger was expressed locally following the closure of some bogs.

Birr Town Council outlined at their July meeting that Drumbane and Moorpark Street were to be made one-way and that an exercise area was to be built at Camcor Park. Best wishes were also extended to Anne Heffernan, Principal of the Girls Primary School, by Birr Town Councillors after she announced she was to retire from her role at the end of August. The new principal, Barbara Hanamy, was wished every success.

Birr Town Councillors expressed concern for the future of the former Birr library.

Birr Golf Club unveiled details of their annual fund-raising golf classic. There was an excellent entry for the Wilmer Tennis Club open week.

AUGUST

The Streetwise Building Project, established by Birr man Pdraig McIntyre, is currently constructing a Don Bosco Educare Centre in the township of Delft in South Africa. Fund-raising events held locally in Offaly provide their much needed funds.

Sportswear Direct became the official new sponsor of Birr GAA in August. The company is part of Frawleys Superstores, owned by Martin and Caroline McCarthy.

Orlagh Kirwan, Birr, captained the Offaly Minor 'B' team to win the Leinster title by defeating Carlow.

Darren Hanniffy from Birr is GOAL's emergency coordinator in Kenya. GOAL is providing aid to Somali refugees fleeing from famine in their own country.

The 43rd annual Birr Vintage Week and Arts Festival was officially opened by Michael D. Higgins, the Labour candidate for the Presidential Election. Large crowds attended the opening parade. A Visual Arts Trail, St. Brendan's Flower Festival, and Antique and Fine Art Fair were some of the attractions worth visiting during the week.

Butler's Pharmacy was shortlisted for Store of the Year 2011. This is an award presented by Retail Excellence Ireland.

Wolftrap Cycling Club organised a Criterium Race to commemorate local cyclist John J. Kinahan, who was Irish Champion over various distances in 1908 and 1909. He set his first world record in 1910.

Stephen Grant was awarded the 'Exceptional Offaly Person Award of the Tullamore Show' for his commitment to constant review of product design, together with product testing and market research.

Contestants on the 'Rose of Tralee' competition had a stopover in Birr where they met local camogie players and enjoyed lunch in the County Arms Hotel.

Birr Skate Park held skateboard competitions which proved very successful and enjoyable.

The fifth Game and Country fair was held in Birr Castle Demesne at the end of August. Over 31,500 visitors attended the fair. Attractions included a lurcher championship, fly-tying demonstrations, a falconry display and 160 trade stands.

SEPTEMBER

A presentation was made to Joe Cahill by his colleagues on his retirement from Birr Town Council after 37 years' service.

Birr's Mundy performed before several thousand revellers at Electric Picnic.

Birr GIY – Grow It Yourself – is going from strength to strength, having over 40 members and partaking in a training programme delivered by local horticulturalists.

Birr Historical Society held a very interesting seminar on St. Brendan of Birr. Lectures were given by experts on early Christian Ireland.

The Community Games U-11 mini-rugby team won a silver medal in the Leinster finals.

Birr GAA club were bitterly disappointed by a proposal from the County Management Committee that O'Connor Park in Tullamore will be the main venue for all major county and club hurling games.

Birr Town Council announced a proposal to build a new salt storage depot in Croghan Road. This will leave Birr fully prepared for the next 'Big Freeze'

Birr Photography Group held a 'Still Life' exhibition at the library, showcasing the work of 13 members.

Three Sisters of Mercy, Srs. Helena O'Donoghue, Anne Hannon and Mary Bugler were congratulated in celebrating their 50th Golden Jubilee. All three taught in the Mercy Primary School in Birr.

Birr increased its overall mark in the Tidy Towns Competition by three marks. One of the major problems the committee faces is the large number of derelict buildings. Litter is also an ongoing problem.

The Office of Public Works is working with Scientific Trust in Birr Castle to restore the telescope and have it fully operational by the middle of next year.

Charging stations for electric cars will be installed around Birr in the coming months.

An Irish language pre-school, 'Nóiníní Beaga' opened its doors at Green Street, Birr in early September.

The 41st Irish Hot Air Balloon Championships took place in Birr. Pilots from America, Netherlands, U.K. and Ireland took part in the events.

OCTOBER

Birr and Coolderry qualified for the Offaly Senior Hurling Championship final.

The Eucharistic Congress Bell arrived in Birr in early October. The Bell is travelling around the country ahead of

the 50th International Eucharistic Congress, which will be held in Ireland in June 2012.

A delegation of Birr councillors travelled to Westport to meet their counterparts and observe how the Westport Council works with local groups for the betterment of the town.

Tourism Ireland in Beijing brought a group of journalists from China to Ireland to research some of our top tourist attractions for feature stories they are writing about holidaying in Ireland. Birr Castle Demesne was one of the stops on their itinerary.

A tribute night to mark Olwyn Enright's retirement from politics was held in October. Gay Mitchell, Fine Gael's Presidential candidate, was in attendance.

Work on the new Camcor River Walk is nearing completion and a grant of €30,000 for provision of lighting along same has been received.

Grove Street Estate Management were delighted to see work starting in the Community Facility at 7 Grove Street. Tús Nua will be a welcome addition to the estate.

Birr Chamber of Commerce launched the 'The Birr Parish Sports Stars Awards'. 14 local clubs put forward three nominees each for Player of the Year Awards. A Hall of Fame will also be incorporated into the annual awards.

Birr senior hurlers suffered defeat to Coolderry in the Offaly Senior Hurling Championship Final.

People are concerned that cutbacks could be on the way for Birr Nursing Unit. The Unit provides residential and respite care, as well as rehabilitation and day-care services to older people.

Birr Leisure Centre received an additional €8,000 in funding, which will be used to improve access and facilities for people with disabilities.

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

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MEMORIES OF BIRR

By Tony Hayden



Where do I start? The Leake family, my mother's side, can trace their roots back to 1790 but I arrived on the scene in 1945. We lived in Church Street with my father, Dermot, a compositor on the Midland Tribune, my sister Marese, a nursing legend in Nenagh Hospital, my brother John, a great raconteur and proud leader of the Flageolet Band, my brother Michael who became a jockey with Michael Stoute, my brother Raymond who excelled in broadcasting circles in Northern Ireland and, of course, the one who held us all together, Moira, our wonderful mother.

The mention of the Flageolet Band brings memories of being the star attraction at the opening of the Marion Hall; Paddy Hogan on drums, John Hennessy on the Big Drum with Vinnie Barber, Mattie de Forge and Liam Nolan, to name but a few, following behind. Happy Days!

The C.Y.M.S. comes to mind very quickly on this journey of remembrance, as it played a large part in all our childhoods. We would wait patiently outside until Johnnie Carroll opened up the junior section where Vinnie Barber and I passed many an afternoon belting snooker balls all over the place while Johnnie was busy ironing the tables in the senior section. Occasionally, we were allowed in to watch the senior competitions and I can recall seeing Des McDowell clearing the table like Hurricane Higgins. The handball alley at the back of the C.Y.M.S. was much frequented by Eamon Sheeran and his family who helped put Birr on the map by winning All-Ireland trophies.

Sandymount was the place for all children to be in the 1950's. Mammy would take us up to the first field, now the hospital, where we would paddle in the shallow waters watched over by all the parents who sat on the hillside. This area doubled up as the sledging area when the snow came in winter, so Sandymount was in constant use.

As we got older, we graduated to Clays Hole, via the third field, which was the girls' swimming area. We were warned to keep our eyes fixed straight ahead as we marched past because Father Vaughan may be on duty. A fate none of us wanted to encounter! Clays Hole represented the pinnacle of our swimming career. I was 'taught' to swim by Jerry Fitz. He ducked my head under the water....counted to 10....and hey presto, I sank or I swam. Having passed this initiation, the next sign of 'manhood' was to lather our bodies in the grey clay and then dive into the water. As we grew braver, we would gradually progress to diving from the top of the bank. One of the highlights of my youth was a visit to the new

cinema. Michael Bowes, the projectionist had to run from the projection box, down the aisle to open the curtains and back again to play the film. His journey was a signal that the day's delight was about to begin and so it was accompanied by deafening cheers from the excited audience before The Lone Ranger and Hop Along Cassidy filled the screen.

Fortunately, I have managed to kick the habit but smoking played a large part in my childhood. I remember John Smith of Connaught Street buying ten Gold Flake, supposedly for his mother, from the local store before we hightailed it up to Scurragh where we played Cowboys and Indians. I played the part of a smoking Roy Rogers while he played Gabby Hayes with the cigarette also dangling from the corner of his mouth.

Going to College was an amazing experience. Here, we were taught to hurl by Brother Denis. I can still hear him shouting, "hit the ball on the ground" as I played full forward with Mattie de Forge and Paddy Loughnane on the wings. We managed to get into the Leinster Schools' semi-final; a great achievement in those days. I left Birr in 1964 and joined the Royal Air Force, as did Ray Bower, Brendan Mulhern and Kieran Brophy. When I managed to get leave from the Middle East, Sean Loughnane coined the phrase, 'Hayden from Aden'.

I was very lucky to be able to return to Birr often and, when I did, I enjoyed the craic in the Small Bar in Dooley's Hotel, ably looked after by John Harte. A barman on par with Brian Guinan and Tony Kelly. We sang 'The Sloop John B' and laughed our way into the wee small hours with Clement Davis leading the orchestra. Another highlight was playing poker with Frankie and Brendan McGuirk in a room over the bank, where their father was manager. At the time, we didn't see the irony of playing for pennies over a bank with thousands in the safe.

My mother Moira, her brother Christy, my sister Marese and brothers Raymond and Michael were great reasons for returning every few months and, when we got together, Birr took on a special meaning all of its own. I only once returned to work in Ireland and that was to establish the setting up of the Slieve Russell Hotel in Ballyconnell.

Sadly, Mother, John, and Christy are no longer with us. Marese (right) sadly passed away earlier this year. However, I still love to come home to such great friends as Paul Barber, Willie Loughnane, Benny Hogan and more of the finest men to wear shoe leather You know who you are. By the way, I now live in Scotland but Birr will always be home for me and my wife, Katerina.



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CATHERINE (KATE) MAHON – A LADY OF FIRSTS

By Tony Dargan

Born on 15th May 1869, Catherine was the daughter of Winifred Mahon, a retired shopkeeper according to the 1901 census, who lived for many years in the townland of Ballykinash, Carrig in North Tipperary and in the Parish of Birr. She began her education at Carrig N.S. and then attended the Convent of Mercy in Birr. At the age of fifteen, after a competitive examination, Catherine began her five years intense study as a monitor in Birr Convent of Mercy. A qualified teacher at the age of 21, she began her teaching career with the nuns in Tulla, Co. Clare, staying only 6 months before taking up the principalship of Glenculloo N.S. in Nenagh, Co. Tipperary. Within seven months, she resigned to take up the principalship of Carrig N.S. in 1892 where she spent the rest of her teaching career, 42 years, retiring in 1934. The influence she had on the community was firstly evident in the immediate rise in school attendance. By 1900, Catherine had reached the peak of her career, reaching first class status after a year's teacher training. While teaching in Carrig, she gained the "undying appreciation of the people of the district and the respect of various generations of their children who passed through her hands". Catherine viewed teaching as "an important and responsible occupation, she valued the economic independence it allowed her and she welcomed the opportunity it provided to participate in community and public life". After retiring, she devoted her remaining years towards the social and economic advancement of people in North Tipperary.

Catherine rose in status with her involvement and memberships in local affairs. She was a member of the Irish Suffrage and Local Government Association and the Irish Women's Franchise League. She tutored the Buttermakers of Carrig and was secretary of The Carrig Bazaar. In the year of her retirement, she was elected Vice-President of North Tipperary Board of Health. She retired from this post in 1941. She was also involved in fund-raising activities in Carrig and was secretary of a committee whose purpose was to raise money for building of a new school in Carrig and repairs to the church. The old school in Carrig relocated from "The Tin Shed" (located at the front of the present new cemetery) to the present school in 1911. Catherine was very active in the Fianna Fail party and in 1934 was elected to North Tipperary County Council, the first woman to achieve this distinction. Her position was recognised in



the Midland Tribune, "she had devoted herself to imparting new ideas for the social advancement of the people ... to improving the living conditions of the less well off."

Catherine became involved in Carrig Cottage Tenants Association in which, "she had been most diligent and considerate regarding the poor ... they were her whole concern." Her committed involvement, however, was with the INTO (Irish National Teachers Organisation), which brought national recognition and more success. Catherine's first involvement with the INTO began when she joined the local branch, Birr Teacher's Association. She became secretary of this branch in 1906 and later President. Through her work, its membership increased from 12 to 24, sixteen of which were women.

The first issue in the Irish School Weekly of Lady's Teachers' Own Page helped gain prominence within the INTO. From this publicity, she set the INTO on a course of expansion with her recruitment drive. Her publications in the above, along with hard work and determination, saw a huge rise in membership and by the end of 1907, the number of women was nearly equal to that of the men who numbered 3,924. From then on, she concentrated on two controversial issues – women representation and equal pay.

In September 1906, she demanded that at least two places be created on the Executive for ladies and one of the two assistants' representatives to be a lady. As a result of her campaign, at the 1907 Annual Congress, she claimed the right of women to representation on the Central Executive of the union. Subsequently, she was urged to go forward for the vice-presidency. She did so, stating, "in the interests of the lady teachers in particular and of the organisation in general, I have, acting on the advice of many supporters, decided to go forward for Vice-President." She was nominated by eight districts but, because of negative criticism from male representatives, she did not succeed. She was, however, elected Lady Principals' Representative. In 1911, she succeeded in becoming Vice-President and, a year later President, the first lady to do so. At the end of her first term the rule confining the President's term of office to one year was revoked and she was reinstated for a second term. The following was said in a tribute to her Presidency, "Our President has put to shame "mere men" during the past two years. Her unflagging energy in the teachers' cause has been remarkable and has gained for her the admiration of every friend of education in Ireland." At the INTO Congress in 1906, Catherine attempted to have the following resolution adopted: "That as women teachers we have to teach every subject And have in addition to

teach needlework three hours in the week, we should receive salaries at least equal to those of men and we ask the same scale of salaries for all teachers, whether women or men." The resolution was of insufficient importance to merit such attention.

Her fight for equality issues including equal pay and women representation on the INTO Central Executive Committee, was noteworthy. A tribute to her commitment to the INTO, which was published in the Irish School Weekly, said "there is no other teacher in Ireland, man or woman, who takes as keen and practical an interest in the Teachers' Organisation as Miss Mahon does, and I venture to say that there is no other teacher in Ireland who does one-tenth of the work of the Organisation that she does."

In 1946, she was invited to be a guest of the INTO executive at their Congress in Dublin. In her address to Congress, she hoped the organisation would continue, as in the past, to work for peace and defend its rights. She was accorded a standing ovation.



Kate, pictured with her class of Carrig N.S., 1905

Catherine Mahon died, at the age of 71, at her residence, in Drogheda Street, Balbriggan, after a lifetime of dedication to teaching, the INTO, her locality and equality rights among her people.

On Saturday, March 6th 1948, this tribute appeared in the Midland Tribune: An Appreciation (An abridged version):

Many people of Tipperary and Offaly will learn with

regret of the death of Miss Catherine M. Mahon, late of Carrig, Birr, which sadly took place at her residence, Balbriggan, Co. Dublin, at an advanced age.

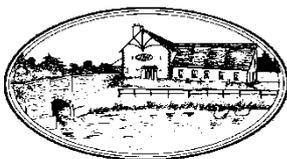
She was for 40 years the principal at Carrig N.S. and during this prolonged period she gained the undying appreciation of the people of the district and the respect of various generations of their children who passed through her hands. A woman of great character and unique intellectual attainments, her cultural talents were freely and successfully imparted to hundreds of children who came within the orbit of her educational system. Her pleasing, yet impressive, manner caused her to be regarded as one of the most successful teachers of her generation and the care bestowed by her upon her charges all down the years of her service was so impartially blended that the pupils were to her alike within the folds of her school and in the outlet of her tuition. Among the Council and Heath Board she was a lone woman amongst the personnel of both bodies and she proved herself a front bencher in any argument or debate that concerned her constituents. The new cottage scheme, catering as it did for rural workers, took shape during her years in public office and she took a deep pride in the fact that she strove hard, fast and unflinching to ensure their allocations to the most deserving applicants. When she retired from public life some nine years ago, her decision was received with feelings of very deep regret among the people she served so loyally and well. Nevertheless, the links of friendship forged during her lifetime were not easily broken; for correspondence with old friends disclosed that her heart was back in Lower Ormond with the people she loved so well. Miss Mahon's life's work remains a monument to her memory and to those in need she was a friend indeed. RIP.

Sources: Catherine Mahon – First president of the INTO – *Sile Ni Chuinneagain (1997), Irish School Weekly Primary Voice: Carrig N.S. Magazine, Issue 3, 1996 Midland Tribune: 1934 – 1948*

My own research on Catherine Mahon taken from my local history on the Parish of Lockeen.

Carrig N.S. Records – Public Records Office.

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SUNNY LIGHT- THE STORY OF MARY DUNNE

By Michael Donegan

Mary Dunne is an extremely alert and intelligent woman of 92 years of age. For the past few years she has been a resident of Elmgrove nursing home in Birr and I was privileged to meet her and talk with her there last September. In Elmgrove, Mary is very happy in the caring hands of the very kind matron and staff. Although she spent most of her life running a small farm in Kinnitty, she is not a native of there. Indeed, one of her first memories is of sitting in the back of a rowboat with her father on the Shannon. Her mother was an O'Brien from Tinakelly and ran a very successful confectionary in Portumna. She had served her time to the trade in Nenagh and now had a thriving business herself. Portumna was a good business town at that time as it had a soldiers' barracks, a convent and several schools. Mary remembers that he had bought the boat second-hand for £4 in Roscommon and had rowed it all the way down to Portumna. She had two brothers and they had the distinction of being the first two people to walk across the newly erected Portumna Bridge. There had been a turning basin for boats beside the old bridge and she remembers a tragedy occurring when a man with a horse and sidecar drove into the hole and was drowned on his way to collect a newly-married couple on their wedding day. Religious education was a very important part of her primary school education and she remembers her teacher being very hard on them if they did not know their Catechism. The pupils were always delighted to see a visitor such as the Parish priest coming in to examine the Confirmation class or the local Garda to check the attendance roll book and pass a bit of time.

Mary's mother had a friend, a nun, in Kylemore Abbey in Galway so was sent as a boarder to the school when she finished primary school. She enjoyed her time there very much and was very well treated by the sisters. She still remembers clearly the beautiful scenery all around her in that place. Unfortunately, there was an outbreak of mumps and at the same time her mother got sick and Mary had to come home, never to return there. She went to train as a nurse in the south of England. The Second World War was coming and all around her she could see the young men of the Royal Air Force frantically training for the upcoming Battle of Britain. By this time, her mother had given up the shop in Portumna and had transferred her business to a rented house in the village of Errill. This was to prove an unwise move as the location was not a good business one. Very soon, business slowed and she was forced to sell the

house. She got sick and had to spend some time in Tullamore Hospital and Mary had to come home from England to be with her. She left England as the air-raids were about to start.

When her mother got on her feet again she rented a small house in the village of Carrig, near Birr and at the same time bought a small holding near Kinnitty. Although the farm was small it was an excellent bit of land. There was a derelict cottage on the land and, with the help of her two brothers Laurence and Patrick, Mary set about repairing and restoring it into a suitable house to live in. Laurence was a good tradesman and taught her all the skills of building. It was at this point that her life in Kinnitty began. The spot on the road where she lived would become known far and wide as 'Mary Dunne's Turn'. As a small girl, Mary loved to visit her uncles and aunts on their farm in Castletown. They were all unmarried and had a great liking for children.

Her uncles would lift her on to the straddle of the plough horse and hold her leg for safety on the way back from the field or, when the

pony was being taken out of the trap, she would be given a gentle jog around the yard on its back. She loved the feeling of strength and power exuded by the horses. One of her uncles was a particularly good judge of horses and had won several prizes at Templemore Show. He would point out the good and bad points of the horses to her and she learned things from him that remained with her all her life. When Mary started farming in Kinnitty she had absolutely no stock. A friend gave her three Turkey eggs. When the eggs hatched she kept one for herself and sold the other two. She brought her turkey hen to a neighbour who had a cock turkey and paid 1/6d for its use. That year she had seven or eight turkeys to sell for Christmas. She gradually built up a flock of over fifty turkeys and each Christmas she sold them as oven-ready birds to shopkeepers and private customers. It was hard work plucking and cleaning the birds but soon Mary gathered up enough money to buy three shorthorn bull calves. When she eventually sold them, she bought four shorthorn heifer calves for 30 shillings each and gradually her career in farming began to take-off. She had uncles in Dublin who kept bees and soon she had four hives herself. She never sold the honey but gave it away to neighbours and friends who helped her. She planted fruit trees and shrubs on the land and was always delighted to get the advice of the Dept. of Agriculture inspector. She grew her own vegetables and even learned how to graft different types of trees. Once she succeeded in turning a whitethorn tree into a redthorn tree by using the grafting



Mary handfeeding a robin.

technique. Mary always admired and learned from nature and, after a friend gave her a pair of fan-tailed doves, she took great delight in studying their habits. Soon she had a large flock of them and they became almost house pets and flew about her wherever she went.

Eventually, Mary's parents passed away. Her father died in his seventies but her mother lived on until she was ninety-five. She remained alert and active with all her faculties to the very end and Mary was delighted to have been able to have her at home with her right up to the end. One of her neighbours took her into her own home for several months after her mother died and helped her to cope with her loss until she got the courage to live at home again on her own. Although Mary had great neighbours, sometimes living alone was not easy. Once three men attempted to assault and rob her. Mary locked the door in their faces and chased them off with her single-barrelled shotgun. They were so scared they never came back. She learned to be independent and resourceful. Although she had the service of great vets, sometimes, rather than trouble them she often stayed up at night herself waiting for a cow to calve or a mare to foal. During those long nights she read her Bible and said her prayers and this kept her from feeling alone.

Mary's greatest love was horses and she would eventually make her money buying and selling good horses. It started when she bought a pony cob in Banagher fair from a man who wanted to get rid of 'a kicking horse'. Mary soon had the cob out of its bad habits and was able to double her money on it at the next fair. A friend in Sopwell had a three-year-old half-bred and she could get no good from it. Mary bought it at the right money and fed it well and quieted it. Eventually, she sold it for good money to a man called Stephen White, who bought horses for the army. Once at a show in Nenagh she saw a beautiful mare and foal which had just won first prize. She offered to buy the foal and

later in the autumn, made the journey to Nenagh to do just that. She 'bought her at a dear price' but she was to prove a real winner and the first time she showed her at the Birr Show she won the first prize cup and was declared Champion of the Show. She was registered as a breeding Irish Draught mare and was selected as one of only twelve mares in the entire country to be sent forward for showing at the Dublin Horse Show. Mary was to attend the show for many years as a breeder and enjoyed very much mixing with the other breeders and seeing all the beautiful horses. Both herself and her mare were picked up by the Department of Agriculture each year and brought to the Horse Show. She really enjoyed that week. By studying the pedigree of the winning horses she came on her most successful purchase of all. She believes that there is no substitute for breeding and noted that many of the winners she saw at the show were descended from one horse called 'Sunny Light'. She made it her business to bring her mare to that horse in Aherlow. She would go on to win many prizes with foals sired by Sunny Light. Mary quotes the Bible to make her point. 'By their fruits ye shall know them'. The three big cups and the over one hundred rosettes which decorate her room in Elmgrove prove that she was right about that anyway.

A bit of ill health some years ago resulted in Mary moving into Elmgrove nursing home. Although she is happy there, she misses her fields and her animals. Her brother Patrick comes to visit her regularly and brings her out to see her old home in his car. Although she drove all her life and never had an accident, she hasn't been allowed to drive since the move. Mary Dunne has a deep faith and believes strongly that her guardian angel has taken care of her all her life and will never leave her while she needs him. Her sharp wit and brilliant powers of recall are proof that hard work, peace of mind and love of nature are recipes for a life well lived.



Congratulations to Sean Kinirons, High Street, Birr who celebrated his 80th birthday this year in the company of his wife Mary (seated) and his three daughters, Marion, Ann and Bridget.

BERNADETTE O'FARRELL - BIRR'S FORGOTTEN SCREEN STAR

By Brian T. Kennedy

If you ask any Birr person today whom they associate with Birr and film, the answer would probably be 'Aidan Quinn'. However, Birr had a much earlier star of film and television, now almost forgotten in her native town.

Bernadette O'Farrell was born in the Bank House at No. 1 John's Mall on Wednesday, January 30th, 1924. Her father Gus was Bank manager at the time and her mother was a gifted amateur actress and cookbook writer. Bernadette, like so many Birr girls, was educated at the local Convent of Mercy School.

Following school, she emigrated to England where she was working as a secretary, when she was invited to an audition by Sir Carol Reed. Through Reed, she met Frank Launder, who gave her a small part in the film *Captain Boycott* (1947), opposite Stewart Granger. Bernadette was to go on to marry Frank Launder (who was 18 years her senior) in 1950. They had two daughters.



**Bernadette at the height of her fame,
playing the role of Maid Marian.**



Bernadette O'Farrell pictured in the 1950's

Her husband, Frank Launder, was born in Hertfordshire and was, in his own right, a very important part of British Film History. He started as a scriptwriter in the 1930s on such classics as *The Lady Vanishes* and *Night Train to Munich*. He joined forces with Sidney Gilliat and together they wrote, directed and produced over 40 films. Frank Launder and Sidney Gilliat are most famous for their *St. Trinian's* films. These boisterous "St. Trinian's" movies, set in a girls' school, amused filmgoers during the 1950's and 1960's. How many watching these movies ever even dreamed they had a Birr connection?

Bernadette O'Farrell was often seen in cinematic roles written by her husband. However, it was her role as Maid Marian that catapulted her to stardom. By the mid-1950s, as leading actress in the I.T.V. television series *The Adventures of Robin Hood*, Bernadette O'Farrell was one of the best-known Irish actresses in the world.

The series became one of the first British television programs to succeed in the United States and, at the height of its popularity, more than 30 million viewers in Britain and North America watched its weekly episodes. Essentially a traditional version of the legend, the series, which ran from 1955 until 1958 and starred Richard Greene in the title role, proved popular with younger viewers, partly because of its catchy theme song sung by Dick James. It also had a high standard of script-writing, some of it by Ring Lardner Jr., who had been blacklisted in Hollywood for his suspected Communist sympathies.

Despite all of this fame, Bernadette gave up the role after two years when shopkeepers started addressing her as 'Maid Marian'. She starred in her last movie, *The Bridal Path*, in 1959.

Bernadette retired from acting to spend time with her family on their farm in Buckinghamshire. Later she moved to Monaco, with Frank, and they became active in local charities and stage productions. While living in Monaco, Frank suffered a serious stroke in 1989 and, finally, a fatal heart attack in 1997. Bernadette remained in Monaco, where she died on September 29, 1999, at the age of 75, after a battle with cancer.

Her death in the small principality in the south of France brought to an end the life of a woman who could easily claim to be one of Birr's most illustrious daughters.

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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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Dublin Ha'penny Bridge	16.10	16.45	17.05 *	17.15	17.30 *	17.45	18.15					
Enfield	16.10	16.45	17.05	17.15	17.30	17.45	18.15	13.00	18.00	15.00	17.15	22.30
Clonard	16.10	16.45	17.05	17.15	17.30	17.45	18.15	13.00	18.00	15.00	17.15	22.30
Kinnegad	16.10	16.45	17.05	17.15	17.30	17.45	18.15	13.00	18.00	15.00	17.15	22.30
Milltownpass	16.10	16.45	17.05	17.15	17.30	17.45	18.15	13.00	18.00	15.00	17.15	22.30
Rochfortbridge	16.10	16.45	17.05	17.15	17.30	17.45	18.15	13.00	18.00	15.00	17.15	22.30
Tyrellspass	16.10	16.45	17.05	17.15	17.30	17.45	18.15	13.00	18.00	15.00	17.15	22.30
Kilbeggan	16.10	16.45	17.05	17.15	17.30	17.45	18.15	13.00	18.00	15.00	17.15	22.30
Tullamore	16.10	16.45	17.05	17.15	17.30	17.45	18.15	13.00	18.00	15.00	17.15	22.30
Kilcormac	16.10	16.45		17.15	17.30	17.45	18.15	13.00	18.00	15.00	17.15	22.30
Birr	16.10	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 Brughha Street								18.00			
Portumna	18.00 from Cathal Brughha Street								18.00	15.00	17.15	

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Tullamore				7.00 p.m.	
Kilcormac				7.20 p.m.	
Birr	9.00 a.m.	3.00 p.m.	9.00 a.m.	7.45 p.m.	3.00 p.m.
Portumna	9.30 a.m.	3.30 p.m.	9.30 a.m.	8.15 p.m.	3.30 p.m.
Kilimor	9.40 a.m.	3.40 p.m.	9.40 a.m.	8.25 p.m.	3.40 p.m.
Loughrea	10.00 a.m.	4.00 p.m.	10.00 a.m.	8.45 p.m.	4.00 p.m.
Arrives Galway	10.50 a.m.	4.50 p.m.	10.50 a.m.	9.30 p.m.	4.50 p.m.
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During college term, Sunday service will serve Newcastle Rd., Corrib Village and Dunurus

THE LONG AND WINDING ROAD...

By Louise Larkin B.Sc. Eq. (Hons), Dip. An. Phys., E.S.M.T.

Louise is the daughter of Benny and Mary Larkin, Hillside.



Louise at work

“What do you want to be when you grow up?” The age-old question to which every young child has an answer. A fireman, an astronaut, a ballet dancer, an actress... an animal physiotherapist!

From a young age I knew exactly what I wanted to do in life, I just wasn't quite sure how to achieve it. Horses were always my top priority, ranking higher than studying, socialising or even sleeping. Throughout my time in St. Brendan's Community School I juggled yard work and schoolwork to get the best of everything. I completed my Leaving Certificate and thought all my Christmases had come at once when I realised I'd spend my next four years studying horses – practically a dream come true.

Equine Science at the University of Limerick wasn't exactly all I'd hoped for – it was more. Despite being highly academic, there was a great mix between hands-on practical work and theory. Everything we covered, from science to marketing and through to equitation, reinforced my belief that I would make a career for myself in the equine industry.

For eight months I worked endless days, striving to impress in a busy showjumping yard in Hickstead, England. These months, labelled as co-operative education by the University of Limerick, taught me more than I ever could have imagined. Travelling the continent in sole charge of a truck full of horses – each horse worth more than the

average house – instilled in me an air of self-confidence and belief. Travel sickness, lameness and sleep deprivation became commonalities, which I dealt with every day, but helping these horses to compete and be victorious at high-level competitions made the few grey hairs along the way worthwhile!

After receiving my parchment from the University of Limerick I went on to further my education with The College of Animal Physiotherapy in Buckinghamshire, England. As the first Irish student to qualify and practice in Ireland as a certified animal physiotherapist, the duty of paving this long and winding road falls on me. Along the way there have been plenty of potholes and speed bumps, which have delayed progress, but the road is slowly smoothing out in front of me.

Animal physiotherapy is a complementary therapy that works in conjunction with traditional veterinary medicine to treat injuries, promote rehabilitation, delay degeneration and maintain performance or quality of life. Animal physiotherapy can also be included into an animal's routine as a maintenance service or as a proactive step for fitness and condition. Suitable for dogs, horses and many other animals, everything from sore, bruised muscles to broken bones and broken-down sutures to hip dysplasia are treatable by animal physiotherapy.



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It may have been a long and winding road for me, but does it lead to your animal's door? As you can imagine I am an enthusiastic believer in animal welfare and good practice in the care of pets and animals in general. Any pet or animal owner who would like to learn more can check out my website at www.louiselarkin.com.

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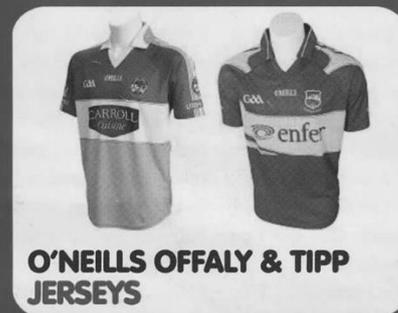
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THE CROSS ON KNOCKSHEGOWNA HILL

By Tony Dargan



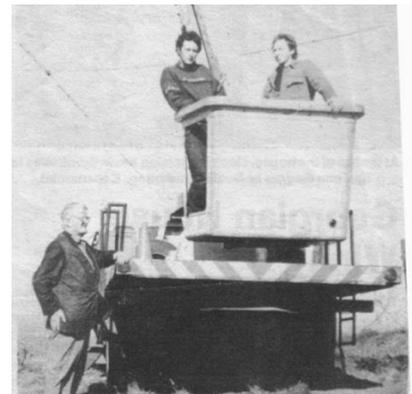
The story of the cross on Knockshe' began in 1949 when Rural Electrification came to Shinrone, which was one of the earliest rural areas to be built in the Portlaoise District and, therefore, was one of great excitement and anticipation for those who were about to experience the miracle of light, heat and power – at the touch of a switch. The driving force behind this project was Canon John Hannon, P.P. Shinrone (d.1972). It was he who conceived the idea that the Holy Year of 1950 should be celebrated by the erection of a giant cross on Knockshegowna, a hill near The Pike, Ballingarry, 699 feet above sea level and dominating the surrounding area for miles. This idea was first mooted at a rural electrification demonstration of home and farm equipment at Citeaux Hall, Ballyshenagh in early 1949. Canon Hannon stated, "The erection of a flood-lit cross – a symbol of Christianity, on Knockshegowna Hill is a project to which the resources of the ESB, the voluntary work of the engineers and crews and the assistance of the local people, is being applied and if the parishioners surmount the obstacle of finance, £60 (minimum), the cross will be placed there". A local committee was set up to oversee the erection of the cross on the lands of Mr. John Kenny. Jim Treacy, Joe Cleary, Jack Cleary, Buddy Cahalan, Leo O'Meara and Michael Carroll sat on the committee. Fr. Stanislaus of Mount St. Joseph's was also thought to be involved as he had a great deal of hands-on experience of the generating plant at the monastery in the period before the premises were connected to the ESB network.

The line was built to the top of the hill, the 50ft cross, consisting of a 110kv pole and crossarm, was brought to the summit by Kieron O'Brien (Carrig). A big night ensued in Shinrone when the lights were switched on. Its 36 bulkhead fittings illuminated the night sky and could be seen far and wide. The Cross faces east towards the lower slopes of the Slieve Bloom Mountains and west to the Shannon. On clear summer days the cross is visible from parts of Tipperary, Clare, Galway, Offaly, Laois, Westmeath and Limerick. The

blessing of the cross took place in 1951, according to local people.

In 1986, a move to raise £2,225 to renovate and rewire the cross got under way, due to the initiative of the ICA in Ballingarry. They formed a local committee to carry out the project. Chairperson was Betty Powell, Noel Smyth (Vice-chair), Teresa Watson (Sec), Mrs. Leonard (Treas) and Martin Costello (PRO). It was 37 years since the cross was erected and several years since it was last switched on and had been allowed to deteriorate to a state where the aluminium bulkheads fittings had corroded and only a few of the lamps were in working order. The steel U-bolts which held the crossarm to the main upright had rusted to the point where it was in danger of collapsing. Under the supervision of contractor Paddy Dunne, a Spencer Hoist was available to carry out the work over a period of one week. With the help of driver, P.J. Dempsey, electrician, Richard Grogan and apprentice, Willie Ryan, the work was finished on schedule.

Driver, P.J. Dempsey, apprentice, Willie Ryan and electrician, Richard Grogan pause for a moment to enjoy the view.



Presently, the Cross is illuminated every Sunday night, on Church Holidays, Good Friday and for the 12 Nights of Christmas. Vodafone erected a mast on the Cross approximately seven years ago. Although there was local opposition to the erection of the mast, it was to no avail. The committee responsible for the upkeep of the Cross receive a donation from Vodafone, which is used for any expenses incurred during the year. The ESB now pay for the units used and the committee pay the ground rent and insurance. When the Cross is lit on a Sunday night many of the locals recite a prayer passed down from their relatives: "from a sudden and unprovided death, O Lord deliver us."

*There's a Cross in the heart of Ireland
High on hill it stands,
Righteous men have carved and placed it there
With love-inspired hands.
Righteous men have carved and placed it there
With love-inspired hands.*

Sources: The Midland Tribune 1949, 1951, 1986.



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TOMMY TALBOT – A SEFFIN STORY

By Michael Donegan

Tommy Talbot is a true-born son of Birr. Indeed, since 1612, according to Cooke's History, there has been a Talbot connection with the town. Tommy was born in 1923, just as the State was being founded and lived in a house on the riverside where the entrance to the swimming pool area is now. There were three acres with the house and the family grazed a few cows there. His father was a shop-manager in Keele's shoe shop, as was his father before him. His grandfather on his mother's side hailed from Mullingar, having settled in Birr as a member of the Leinster Regiment. He died sometime after the Boer War. There were six in the family, Tommy being the eldest. In May 1939, there was a huge and unexpected flood on the Camcor. There had been a long period of drought and, when the rain came, the ground was too hard to absorb it. The Kinnitty Mountains had not been planted at that time and the water just swept down the river in a torrent. To compound matters the council had just completed a retaining wall on the riverside and the floodwater was unable to get back into the river. The result was a disaster for the families who lived on the riverside. The Wilmer road was submerged up as far as the G.A.A. field. There were three houses on the riverside at that time, although only Talbot's original house remains now. When the family came down for breakfast that morning, there was a foot of water in their kitchen and adjoining rooms. All their furniture was destroyed. Their neighbours came and helped them to salvage as much as they could but they were never sure when disaster would strike again and moved out of the house soon afterwards.

Another incident which left an imprint on Tommy's memory was the burning of St. Brendan's R.C. church in March 1937. Somebody had gained entry through a small window at the back of the church during the night and piled up seats in the centre of the main aisle before setting them alight. Luckily, the entire building had not taken fire but there was a hole in the floor and part of the beautiful ceiling was destroyed. The interior of the church was terribly smoke damaged. Dean Ryan was determined that this disaster would not stop the celebration of the mass, so he said it on one of the side altars.

Tommy liked reading as a child and was also a keen member of the Boys Scouts. Fr. Gaynor was in charge and Michael Kavanagh was the scoutmaster. The boys met at a hall at the back of the C.Y.M.S. Sometimes an instructor came to teach them first-aid. There was a very good brass band in the town at that time. It had a very high standard and, on one occasion, won second prize in an All-Ireland competition. The band had been active from the 19th century and British Army bandsmen from Crinkill barracks had helped to train the pupils at that time. Eventually, the band seemed to fade away until it was no more. Tommy is still puzzled as to what became of all the lovely brass

instruments. After primary school and a couple of years in Birr Technical School Tommy was taken into Bridge's Garage as an apprentice mechanic. World War II was just getting underway and there were no private cars on the road due to the shortage of petrol.

Bridge's started a hackney car business

and were allocated a ration of ten gallons a month for a small car and forty gallons for a big car. Tommy was selected to be a driver and often had to do two runs to Dublin in a day. The cost to the customer averaged £5-£7 per run. Roads were quiet and it was possible to park right at the door of the G.P.O. In the beginning, Tommy found the driving a novelty but, after repeating the same run time and time again he got sick of it. A job for a lorry driver came up in D. E. Williams and Tommy's experience stood to him. Soon he was hauling malt from Castle Street to the Guinness brewery on the quays in Dublin. In the early days, the malt was in bags but later it was transported in bulk carriers. He usually left Birr at 4.00 a.m. in order to be at the brewery by 8 o'clock. He rarely came home with an empty lorry, as he might have to go to the docks to pick up a load of fertilizer or canned foods to bring home to D. E. Williams.

Tommy remembers great dances in the Oxmantown Hall. The 'Cinderella' dances lasted from 8 o'clock to 11 o'clock while the All-Night dances went on from 9 o'clock until 3 o'clock in the morning. Sometimes, there were other dances called 'Practice Dances' on Friday night between 8 and 11. The main band was the Carlton Show Band headed up by the Barbers. There were frequent plays in the Birr Little Theatre and every so often touring variety groups came to the town to put on concerts and plays.

Tommy married his wife Nancy in 1955. Nancy was a Dublin girl and, after a short period living in New Road they moved to Seffin where Tommy still lives. They had two children, Tommy and Mary. Tommy junior works for Enterprise Ireland while Mary is married locally and lives quite near him in Hillside. Nancy passed away in 2003 and Tommy misses her very much. She was his dearest companion and was a person of great kindness and compassion. Indeed, for 26 years she voluntarily did laundry for people who were unable to look after themselves. He is lucky to have Mary living so close by and he visits her every day. Tommy's faith



Tommy Talbot at work making his rugs

is extremely important to him and he has been a daily mass-goer for forty-six years. He still believes strongly in the faith he learned from the catechism as a child and refers to it regularly in his reading. He considers the recent changes to the Mass unnecessary and simply confusing. Each morning, Tommy starts his day with 7.30 a.m. mass in St Brendan's Church and later visits the 'Daycare Centre' in the Birr Community Nursing Unit. He has his lunch there and spends his time making rugs by hand in the occupational therapy section. This is very skilled work but he enjoys it very much. The wool comes from Penzance and it can take about seven weeks to make a complete rug. The rugs are then auctioned off to raise funds for the centre. He likes the Day Care Centre and has many friends there. He is very appreciative of the kindness and care shown to him there.

Tommy's younger brother, Des, died some years ago while a sister, Mai, died at the age of 30. He has two other brothers, Tony and Brendan while his sister, Eileen Cloonan lives in Newbridge Street. Tommy has some regrets that he did not move away from Birr at least for a while. He loved travelling and during his lifetime has holidayed in many different places abroad such as the Isle of Man and Majorca and even New York. He liked Dublin and the city buzz a lot and often wonders what it would have been like to have lived there. One of his greatest passions was carpentry and his house is full of beautiful pieces of furniture which he made over the years. As a young man he went to night classes in the old technical school and became very skilled

with his hands. His grandfather had been a cabinet-maker in the army and he himself would have liked to follow that trade. He is absolutely delighted that his granddaughter, Paula Gormley, has continued the tradition and is, among other things, a qualified woodwork teacher.

Tommy has strong views about the way Birr has been administered at council level over recent years. He feels many of the decisions pertaining to traffic organization are senseless. He points out, as an example, that the recent roundabout at Tesco is so unnecessarily high that it is unsafe as drivers can't see the traffic coming from the other side. He believes that whoever designed it hadn't a clue. Tommy feels that, although the councillors are now paid, the service is in fact worse. He is so disillusioned that, apart from referendums, he would find it hard to vote again in any election.

Since he first began driving as a teenager, Tommy has a flawless record and has never had a crash. Each morning he drives his car down to mass and afterwards up to the Day Care Centre. When he started driving, his insurance cost about £10 a year to drive all over the country and despite a snow-white record he now has to pay €500 to drive a couple of miles a day. Tommy is puzzled as to the logic of that but, like a lot of other things in the modern world, he isn't surprised at anything anymore. Tommy is a man of simple pleasures with a keen interest in the world around him. His family and faith sustain him daily and he looks forward to many more peaceful days living among his neighbours and friends in his lovely house in Seffin.



Birr Rugby Team 1966.

Back Row (L to R): Billy Malone, Jimmy O'Neill, Jim Houlihan, Frank McNamara, Donal Kennedy, Redmond Kerins, Paddy McManus, Adam Fairclough.

Front Row: Tommy Nugent, Anselm Enright, Owen O'Sullivan, John Watkins, Phelim Kerins, Benny Hogan, Teddy Owens.

THE HIDDEN HILLS

By Jack Ryan

For many of our visitors who come to Birr and, indeed for some midlanders, the Slieve Bloom Mountains are unknown. To really appreciate the mountains you should equip yourself with a map and a pair of boots and head for the hills. Don't let the word mountains put you off for they are but gentle hills; for example, Árd Erin, the highest peak is only 1733 feet. There is nowhere in the Midlands in which one can experience a sense of freedom and space, a place where one is removed from the trials and tribulations of our economic woes like here. For the area is timeless and captivating, possessing an old-world charm in its villages and people, in its forest, glen and stream. Kinnitty is the gateway to the region where neighbourliness and hospitality is alive and well, but tread lightly here, for you are following in the footsteps of Kings and Princes.

One man who had a deep awareness of the Slieve Bloom was F.R. Montgomery Hitchcock, rector of Kinnitty, and in his book, "The Midland Septs and the Pale 1903" wrote; "The visitor who makes his way through the Slieve Bloom must be awe-struck at times by the great sense of solitude and by the vastness and silence in which he moves, which suggests the presence of the Invisible at every step. For aught that can be proved to the contrary, this district is the cradle of the Irish people, the ancient home of the mysterious Tuatha-De-Dannan, be they people or be they fairies."

William Bulfin, in his nineteenth century classic "Rambles in Eireann", had this to say about Kinnitty, "I think Kinnitty is the most beautifully situated village I have ever seen. It is embowered in woods and is a sheltered Eden in the hills." There is a local old rhyme about it.

"Kinnitty is a pretty village,
All grass and no tillage,
In every street a row of trees
Where liars dwell as thick as bees."

Now I'm told that the liars are all gone and that you would have to go as far as Birr to find one!

One mile south of the village is Kinnitty Castle. The castle was built by the O'Carrolls on the site of the old abbey. The O'Carrolls lost it in 1650. It was taken over by a Col. Thomas Winters. In 1668, he was granted 2,624 acres by King Charles II for military services. It was taken over by Col. Thomas Bernard in 1764. The remains of the building of 1630 were transformed into the present building by Lady Catherine Hutchinson, mother of Thomas Bernard in 1811. The cross in front of the castle was commissioned by St. Coleman to commemorate the conversion of his father to Christianity by St. Patrick of Cashel. There are two panels on the cross, one on each side. One shows Eve giving the apple to Adam, the other shows the baptism of



The view of the hills

King Aengus of Cashel by St. Patrick.

Some years ago, while researching the population of two of my favourite glens, Glendassaun and Forelacka with the help of my old friend Paddy Lowry, I used two maps, one surveyed in 1838 and the other surveyed in 1912. (They are but two of the 24 glens or so in the area). In the 1838 map I was able to locate 25 houses and, in the 1912 map I was only able to locate 12 houses, so thereby I suspect hangs a most interesting story. Incidentally, my friend Paddy told me that the two glens could field a hurling team (21 a side) and play for a barrel of porter. In 1852 Thomas Bernard, Conservative, stood for election in what was then Kings County and he instructed his tenants to vote for him. Most farmers were tenant farmers at this time. This was the age of British or Anglo-Irish landlords, who often owned vast estates of thousands of acres and of Irish tenant-farmers who rented individual farms from them. On polling day his tenants voted for Patrick O'Brien, Liberal (the Catholic Clergy favoured the liberals at the time) and, consequently, Bernard evicted many of his tenants and burnt their houses. It is often said that history repeats itself. True indeed, for I came across a similar incident in Bandon Co. Cork where the Bernards evicted their tenants in 1834 who were accused of immoral conduct, the immoral conduct, of which they were guilty of, that they did not vote for Bernard, the 3rd Earl of Bandon.

The O'Brien who defeated Thomas Bernard was Sir Patrick O'Brien (1823-1895). He was the eldest son of Sir Timothy O'Brien, first baronet lord Mayor of Dublin, 1844-1849, O'Connellite M.P. for Cashel in 1859 and Governor of the Hibernian Bank. Sir Timothy O'Brien was born at Tinakilly, near Birr, son of a tenant farmer. Patrick was described as the great political survivor of the nineteenth century; his parliamentary career spanned thirty-three years. In 1874, when he was canvassing in Birr, he reminded his audience that his father had been baptised in the chapel where the people had just attended Mass.

Árd Erin is best reached via the gap of Glendine. From the summit can be seen at least ten counties, from the Twelve Pins of Galway, Croaghpatrick in Mayo, and from the mountains of Killarney to Duce in Wicklow. Here too, Brian Boru on his way to Clontarf in 1014 and O'Neill on his way to Kinsale in 1601 crossed the Slieve Bloom. On the plain below at Glenafelly, the Fitzpatricks of Ossory attacked the brave Dalgais, the favourites of Brian as they returned to Kinkora, victorious and wounded from the battle. Here we

are told that seven to eight hundred wounded Delgais, unable to stand were lashed to stakes and fought the Fitzpatricks, supported by the foremost of the troops. Thomas Moore immortalized them in the beautiful lines.

'Forget not our wounded companions, who stood
In the days of distress by our side;
While the moss from the valley grew red
with their blood,
They stirred not but conquered and died.'

Jack has written his own poem about the beautiful setting of Glenbarrow in the Slieve Bloom Mountains.

Glenbarrow

By Jack Ryan

On the dying days of the Millennium
We rambled by the rushing river
Through the palisades of trees
That danced and whispered in the breeze.

Holding hands we went the Barrow way,
Looking for tooth-fairies, toadstools
And Leprechauns at play,
Collecting spruce cones along the way.

We have seen our singing lessons here,
The red squirrel sitting upright
And scurrying on the forest floor,
Harvesting for his winter store.

The cheeky cock robin and hen,
The ever elusive little wren,
The ballerina of our hidden hills
A wild goat on the glacier till.

An Orchid clinging to the cliff face
High, high up at the Clamphole falls
Where the water tumbles down;
A canvas, my Victoria falls.

I was the anchor-man on this human chain
For he had just seen four summers pass,
And she was still in infant's class
Yet she read the forest floor as we passed.

But I being old heard the living tongue speak
Of ten millennia on the glacier till
With the Bladhma ballerina,
In the changeless, ever changing hills.

CAITLÍN BRUGHA (NEE KINGSTON), TD

By Margaret Hogan

Birr and its neighbourhood have given two women TDs to Dáil Éireann recently but the first woman TD who was a native of Birr was Caitlín Brugha. She began her eventful life on 11th December, 1879 as Kathleen Kingston, born in Main St, Birr where *Très Belle* and *Hoolan England* are now. Her husband, Cathal Brugha, and their son Ruairi Brugha, were also elected to Dáil Éireann.

Family research shows how deep were the Kingston roots in Birr. John Kingston acquired two shops in Birr in the late 1790s and farmed five acres on the outskirts of the town, three of which were inherited from his father. The Kingston family traded continuously in Main Street throughout the 19th century in grocery, spirits, delph and provisions, as well as leasing sixteen acres in Ballindarra. The family was prosperous and Caitlín's parents repose under a large Celtic cross in Clonohill Cemetery, with inscriptions in Latin and Irish.

Caitlín's eldest brother, John, became a Holy Ghost priest and another brother, Charles, as Offaly County Secretary, was faced with the complex task of steering the county through the minefield that was local government during the transition from British to Irish rule. A sister, Hanoria, joined the Sacred Heart order of nuns, presumably at their convent in Roscrea, where Caitlín was educated. She was about fourteen years old when the Market Square outside her home was dug up to erect the Maid of Erin statue in commemoration of the Manchester Martyrs. The Kingston upstairs windows would have given a grandstand view of Fenian, Jeremiah O'Donovan Rossa, conducting the unveiling ceremony in 1894. Enthusiasm for Irish culture was enormously popular at the turn of the century and it was while attending an Irish class in the chapel-like building with railings in front in Green Street, Birr that Caitlín first met Cathal Brugha, whom she married in 1912.

Cathal Brugha had been travelling widely in Ireland as a director of the firm of Lalors Church Candles and promoting nationalist movements such as the Gaelic League, Sinn Féin, the IRB and the Irish Volunteers. He was seriously wounded during the Easter Rising when second-in-command to Eamonn Ceannt at the South Dublin Union where St. James's Hospital is now. He was elected as Sinn Féin MP for Waterford at the 1918 general election and was appointed temporary President of the Ministry, more



CAITLÍN BEAN CAÍTAL BRUGHA, T.D.
Elected Senior Member for Waterford City and County
August 27th, 1923.

or less equivalent to being the first Taoiseach of the First Dáil Éireann, on 22nd December, 1919. On his proposal, Eamon de Valera, having escaped from Lincoln Prison, was elected Príomh-Aire of Dáil Éireann on 1st April, 1919 and he then nominated Cathal Brugha as Secretary for Defence.

Brugha vehemently opposed the Anglo-Irish Treaty and, in the Treaty Debates implied that his wife was 'dragged in the dead of the night out of her house, hustled along through the garden, and put into a motor lorry and kept there in order that she will not be present while her husband is being murdered if the English cut-throats can get him ... his little children frightened out of their lives by the spectacle of armed men rushing in and running through the house, some of them breaking their way down through the ceilings'. In the ensuing Civil War, he was wounded in an incident behind the Gresham Hotel, Dublin and died two days

later on 7 July 1922. Caitlín, in protest against 'the immediate and terrible civil war' and because so many Anti-Treaty men were in jail or 'on the run', requested that 'apart from family relations and intimate friends, the chief mourners and the Guard of Honour should include only the women of the Republican Movement', as well as the general public. Film coverage of the immense funeral reveals the Cumann na mBan Guard of Honour.



Caitlín Brugha, veiled, with five of her children at her husband's graveside, July 1922. The two women in the foreground wear Cumann na mBan uniform.

© Brugha family

Now in opposition to the newly founded Irish Free State, she twice contested general elections as Republican Sinn

Féin candidate in Cathal's old constituency of Waterford. She topped the poll in August 1923, with 25% of the votes cast but in line with Sinn Féin abstentionist policy, did not take her seat and came in on the last count with 11% in June 1927. She did not contest the next general election later that year in September 1927.

Widowed with six small children, five daughters (including an infant) and one son to rear, Caitlín was clearly on the wrong side in the new Irish Free State, did not draw a TD's salary and life for her must have been very difficult. With assistance from her brother Charles, she founded Kingstons Menswear, first in Nassau Street and later in O'Connell Street, round the corner from where Cathal had been fatally wounded. Many of us remember the slogan of the business: 'A Kingston shirt makes all the difference'. The building is now occupied by Burger King and a bronze medallion commemorating Cathal Brugha can be seen high up on the corner, while a neighbouring street well known to Birr people as a terminus for Kearns's Coaches, carries his name.

Caitlín retained connections with extreme Republican causes and splinter groups. She became secretary to the now-diminishing Sinn Féin at the Árd Fheis in 1926 and did

not follow de Valera into Fianna Fáil in or after 1926. Ever a rebel, she occasionally assisted Republican dissidents by organising shelter for them and the wanted German agent Gunter Schütz was arrested in her house in Rathmines in April, 1942.

Caitlín's only son Ruairi Brugha married Máire MacSwiney, only child of Terence MacSwiney, Lord Mayor of Cork, who died on hunger strike in Brixton Prison in October 1920. Ruairi Brugha (FF) was elected to Dáil Éireann in 1973, was a member of the European Parliament in 1977 and served with distinction in several voluntary organisations. His wife, Máire MacSwiney Brugha, narrated the story of her extraordinary life in Germany and Ireland, her historical inheritance and eventful marriage in *History's Daughter* (2005).

Kathleen Kingston/Caitlín Brugha, born into a fairly conservative well-to-do Birr family, experienced a life that could hardly have been predictable at her birth in 1879. She died, aged nearly 80 years, on 1st December' 1959.

Photo on previous page shows Caitlín Brugha, newly elected TD for Waterford, 1923. © Brugha family



It's a Man's World.

Back Row (L to R): Willie Egan, Leo Walsh, Johnny Kenny, Michael Connors.
Front Row: Michael Parry, Camillus Rigney.

Pictured at Birr Stage Guild's First Pantomime, Little Red Riding Hood 1958.

Back Row (L to R): Eamon Connolly, Jack Lee, Gerry Dolan, Billy Hogan.

Front Row: Seamus Davis, Michael Power, Annie Noonan, Eddie Gavin, Paul Kennedy.



DAVE BROWNE-BIRR'S SHOOTING STAR

By Michael Donegan



Pictured above is Dave Browne of Moorpark Street with the medals he won at a very prestigious international shooting competition held at The Midland Shooting Grounds last August. Dave has the distinction of defeating a number one ace of the U.S.A. International shooting team on their recent visit to Ireland. Dave's interest in shooting goes way back to 1975. His Dad had been a lifelong member of the F.C.A. and Dave himself had joined up as a teenager and it seemed a natural progression to enlist in the regular army as soon as the opportunity arose. So, in 1975, Dave did just that. He rapidly achieved the rank of Sergeant there and very soon his skill as a marksman came to the notice of his superiors. He was selected as a weapons' training instructor and was soon tutoring new recruits in the use of such deadly arms as rifles, heavy machine guns and anti-tank weapons. During this time he won several 'All Army Shooting Championships', using the FN rifle and heavy machine-gun. He was a member of the winning Irish Army team which competed against and defeated teams from the British, American and French Armies in a 'Falling Plates' event held at the Curragh. Dave also served in Lebanon in 1978 as a member of the first Irish Army group to set foot on Lebanese soil. The 43rd Infantry Battalion had to tread a very dangerous and difficult path between the Israeli Army, the Christian Phalangists, the P.L.O and their various

breakaway factions. They were always under threat and frequently under fire during their tour of duty there.

In 1984, Dave's career took a different path when he joined An Garda Síochána. His first station was Birr and although his roots are in Limerick, he has remained here ever since. In 2002, he was selected for a U.N. police mission to Cambodia. After the Vietnamese withdrew from the country, the U.N. moved in to help supervise and prepare for upcoming elections. Dave thought this was a fantastic experience and really enjoyed his 12 months tour of duty there. On his return, he was selected to do a 'Firearms Instructors Course' in the Garda Training College in Templemore. This involved training fellow Gardaí primarily in the proper use of the revolver and Uzi sub-machine gun. But Dave's interest in shooting extended beyond his work. In about 1999, a small group of enthusiasts had founded a shooting club using a piece of reclaimed bogland that was leased from Bord na Móna, between Cloghan and The Blueball. At first, there were only two ranges, one for shotguns and one for .22 rifles. There were about 30 people involved initially but, under the initiative of John Paul Craven and Jim Griffin, the club began to expand. They extended the range to 1,200 metres so that more powerful firearms could be accommodated. Soon the range was attracting lots of sporting enthusiasts with legally held weapons who wanted to keep their eye in when the hunting season was closed down. There are now over 700 members in the club, with representatives from every one of the 32 counties. The club now owns its own ground and their facilities can now cater for every type of legally held firearm.

There are two main categories of weapon in the rifle section of competition shooting. F.T.R. shooting involves participants firing a specific type of rifle called an F.T.R. 308 while F Open shooting involves competitors using specific categories of weapons in competition with each other. It is in the former category, F.T.R. .308, that Dave has had his success. The figure .308 denotes the calibre of the bullet fired. Shooting as a sport does not come cheap. There is no facility to hire out guns and each member of the club must own his own personally licensed firearm. The cost of the gun itself, the telescopic sights, bipod and various other pieces of equipment can amount to over €7,000. An average shooting session would consume a 20 round box of ammunition at €55 a box. Rules are extremely strict and there is a huge emphasis on safety. Spectators are not encouraged and any who do watch must wear ear protection. Any breach of range etiquette or safety guidelines is dealt with swiftly. There are no second chances given. The offending party must leave immediately. Members of the club have been sent to Bisley in England to train specifically as safety officers. Bisley is the premier shooting range in Europe. Members of the club

must sign up to the Club Code of Discipline. A member may be asked to produce his license at any time. A swipe card system logs the movements of everyone in and out of the club. The Gardaí inspect the facilities regularly and are in close liaison with the club officers at all times. There is a great spirit of co-operation between them and the local Garda Superintendent and his officers.

Dave's recent success stems from a challenge which his own club put down to the U.S.A. rifle team to shoot for the Creedmore Cup. It appears the Creedmore Cup was first shot for on Dollymount Strand in Dublin in the 1800's by a team from Ireland and a team from the U.S.A. The distance was set at 1,000 metres and the details of the original competition are unfortunately by now very vague. The Americans accepted the new challenge and arrived down at the Midland Range last August. They had ten world champions in their team and the club ran an open shoot day to allow members of both teams to compete at 800

metres and 1,000 metres. The Americans were successful in the team events but it was a different story in the individual competition. Competition shooting is extremely scientific and a small change in atmospheric pressure or the slightest miscalculation of wind direction or speed may be the difference between success and failure. We're talking of the marksman aiming at a target the size of a saucer over a distance of almost ten football fields. Dave competed against their best marksman at a range of 800 metres and was successful, winning the gold medal outright. He is now looking forward to and preparing for the 'World Police and Fire Games' which will be held in Belfast in 2013. In the meantime, he will busy with his fellow club members expanding and developing the facilities at Blueball. The centre is officially known as the Midland National Shooting Centre of Ireland. The members are currently in the process of building a clubhouse and are doing it completely from their own resources, without any public funding.



**Birr Social Club – 25 Years Ago
The Autumn Handicap Snooker
Competition.**

Back Row (L to R): Mr. J. Guinan (Referee), Mr. D. Hanley (Runner-up), Mr. W. Murphy (Chairman), Mr. J. O'Neill (Club Treasurer), Mr. T. Nevin (Secretary)
Seated: Mr. J. Fahy (Competitor), Mr. M. McGarry (Winner).



Members of the Maher family Clonfinane, Carrig with relatives, farmers and farm workers who assisted with the Threshing c. 1933/34. Children in the foreground include Michael Maher and his three sisters, Maureen, Pauline and Bab.

A HUNDRED YEARS AGO – ON THE STREET WHERE YOU LIVE

By Jim McNamara

One hundred years ago this year the newly-formed Birr Urban District Council (it had been reconstituted in 1899), built its very first scheme of houses. A scheme of twenty-four dwellings was built in 1911 in various locations throughout the town, eight in Compton Row, seven in Cornmarket Street, five in Burke's Hill and four in Moorpark Street.

These houses were built under the Artisans' and Labourers' Dwellings Improvement Act of 1875. This was an Act of the Parliament of the United Kingdom, designed by the then Home Secretary, Richard Cross, during Benjamin Disraeli's second Conservative Government. The legislation allowed local councils to buy up areas of slum dwellings in order to clear them and then rebuild. This was part of Disraeli's Social Reform Policy. The previous owners of the land had been compensated and the redevelopments were undertaken by commercial builders on behalf of the Council.

The present houses in Compton Row replaced a row of cottages that were built between 1817 and 1820, by a local builder John Compton from a lease granted by the Earl of Rosse to house his estate workers. The architectural design of the present Compton Row houses differs from the other 1911 houses in so far as it replicates the English type design of the original dwellings built by John Compton. The contractor for the Council cottages was Mr. John Hickey, whose family lived in Chapel Lane, ancestor of the Fanning family through Isobel Hickey, the wife of the late J.J. Fanning, John's Mall.



McNamara's House on Moorpark Street

I had been aware for many years that the house where I live was part of the 1911 scheme. Indeed, my grandparents, Michael and Mary Ann McNamara, were among the very first tenants of one of these houses in Moorpark Street. They had moved from an older and smaller dwelling in the same street to the then new council house. One of their neighbours was Tim Broughall and his wife Ellen. Tim was the engine driver involved in the famous Birr to Roscrea train crash on 19th July 1910. 492 people were injured in

that accident but, fortunately, there were no fatalities. He later lived in the house where my wife Mary and I now reside and where my father John and mother Brigid were granted a tenancy in April 1935. I still have the original Tenancy Agreement, signed by my father and countersigned by Henry Barlow, Town Clerk and Patrick Sherlock, Rent Collector. We subsequently purchased it from the Council in 1969 under a Tenant Purchase Scheme.



The above photograph was taken in 1947. House 'A' is McNamara's house and the house marked 'B' was a two-storey dwelling that was demolished and 4 council properties built on the land.

According to the 1911 Census, now available on-line, there were 43 houses in Moorpark St. and 187 residents comprising 104 males and 83 females. Roman Catholics numbered 184, there were 2 Methodists and 1 Church of Ireland. The Presentation Brothers Monastery is listed as having 18 rooms and 8 residents. House no. 36 was occupied by Chas. Wesley Stott, the manager of the Birr Gas Works. He was a native of Co. Antrim and his wife was Canadian. The Head Constable of the R.I.C., Joseph Molloy, lived at house no. 40. He hailed from Donegal and could speak both English and Irish.

Among some other interesting facts about Moorpark Street in 1911, there were 10 stables, 18 piggeries, 6 fowl houses, 7 turf houses, 2 coach houses. Incidentally, on Oxmantown Mall in the same year, there were 24 stables listed, with 1 piggery, 1 dairy, 1 turf house and 11 coal houses.

An interesting fact is that Moorpark Street was the main road to Roscrea out of Birr before the present Railway Road was constructed. It might be appropriate for our present Town Council to commemorate the first housing scheme of their predecessors by, perhaps, erecting a small plaque on each of these rows of houses in this, the centenary of their construction. I'm sure there is a special fund within the accounts of the Council to accommodate such a memento.

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ST. CILLIAN'S CAMOGIE CLUB WINNERS AT FÉILE NA nGAEL 2011

By Tony Dargan

St. Cillian's Camogie Club achieved outstanding success in 2011 when their Under-14 squad became the youngest and the first Offaly team to win a Division 2 All-Ireland title at the Féile na nGael championships in Pearse Stadium, Galway. Their final performance was phenomenal but this was a very young, skillful and a hard-working team who possessed a fantastic will to win and a never-say-die attitude. All these attributes were instilled into them from the moment the season began by their coaches John Harding, Declan Fitzgerald, Paul and Margaret Ryan. All but two of this squad will be eligible for Under-14 next year. The team was representing Offaly for the third time and for the second year in a row.

The following is a report from the Féile:

"Our host club was Mountbellew-Moylough. We are deeply indebted to the club and the host families for giving our girls a wonderful time and for catering for their every need. We all had the experience of a lifetime.

The conditions for our first match against the host club were atrocious, with the match being played in a torrential downpour. We found it difficult to adjust to the conditions and only held a slender lead at the end of the first half. A different story in the second half saw Cillian's knock in goals which put the result beyond doubt.

On Saturday, there was no let-up in the dreadful weather as we travelled to Cappataggle to play two matches. Persistent rain and a water-logged pitch made camogie difficult. We beat Cappataggle comfortably but a place in the semi-final was at stake if we could overcome our next opponents from Down. The Down girls were bigger, heavier and older than our team and fully expected to book their place in the semi-final. The attitude, work rate and pure

doggedness of our girls saw them come away with a narrow victory. Cillian's third match and semi-final took place in Kilkiniron against Craughwell at 5.30 p.m. We knew that Craughwell had played in a higher division last year and would be no pushover. The huge attendance saw one of the best camogie matches of the All-Ireland series. Level at full time, level after extra time, the match went to sudden death – the first team to score would go through to the final. A goal from Chloe Costello proved the match winner. We were through to our first Féile final – a magnificent achievement for a club only 5 years in existence.

Next up on Sunday at 12 noon in Pearse Stadium were our opponents, Sixmilebridge from Clare.

Played on a beautiful surface and in ideal conditions this final was a classic encounter between two evenly-matched teams. Cillian's carried a four point lead into the second half only to see it wiped out within ten minutes. All seemed lost when "The Bridge" went into the lead. But the character that this team had shown throughout the weekend once again came to the fore. Our 'Player of the Championship', Sarah Harding, sank Sixmilebridge with a stunning goal from a very acute angle. Aisling Brennan sealed this awesome victory with a point in added time. What scenes of joy were seen at the final whistle! Our wonderful supporters, who were there all through the weekend, ran onto the pitch to acclaim their heroines.

We received a wonderful reception on our return home to the Carrig/Riverstown grounds. The memories of this Féile weekend will live in our hearts and minds for many a long day."

Bua iontach ba ea é seo don chlub agus do na cailíní go léir. St. Cillian's Abú.



St. Cillian's Under-14 All-Ireland 'B' Winners at Féile na nGael, 2011.

Back Row (L to R): Ciara Brennan, Lisa Hctor, Cailin Fitzgerald, Shiofra Ryan, Chloe Costello, Sarah Harding, Rachel Dolan, Elizabeth Harding, Aideen Freeman, Siobhan Killeen, Aisling Brennan, Niamh Killeen, Ellen Cashen.

Front Row: Dara Hanamy, Nicola Dolan, Katie Corrigan, Brid Ryan, Orlaith Plunkett, Michelle Maher, Aisling Larkin, Emma Cleary, Isobel Cavanagh, Megan King

Starters

Chef's Soup of the Evening ... 5.00

with home made bread

Goat's Cheese & Red Onion Tartlet ... 7.00

in a light pastry basket with red onion marmalade

Lobster & Smoked Salmon Linguini ... 7.50

bound in cream prawn bisque with fresh linguine

Classic Chicken Caesar Salad ... 6.50

chicken, lardons, croutons, baby gem & caesar dressing

Rich Duck Liver Pate ... 7.50

apple & grape chutney & Cumberland sauce

Main Courses

Char Grilled Irish Sirloin Steak ... 20.95

stout braised onions, field mushrooms & Gaelic sauce

Baked Cajun Salmon ... 18.00

marinated & finished in white wine & lemon cream

Chinese Style Duck ... 19.00

chinese vegetables, fresh egg noodles, Hoisin & sweet chilli sauce

The Supreme of Chicken ... 18.00

pan fried with wild mushrooms & Madeira jus

Mediterranean Vegetable Stir Fry... 15.95

wok fried with oyster, soya & chilli sauce with savoury rice

Desserts

Rhubarb Pannacotta ... 5.00

with fruit compote & shortbread biscuit

Apple & Strawberry Crumble ... 5.00

with vanilla ice cream

Chef's Special Cheesecake of the Day ... 5.00

(please ask your server for details)

Traditional Bread & Butter Pudding ... 5.00

with vanilla custard

Warm Chocolate Fudge Cake ... 5.00

with mint ice cream

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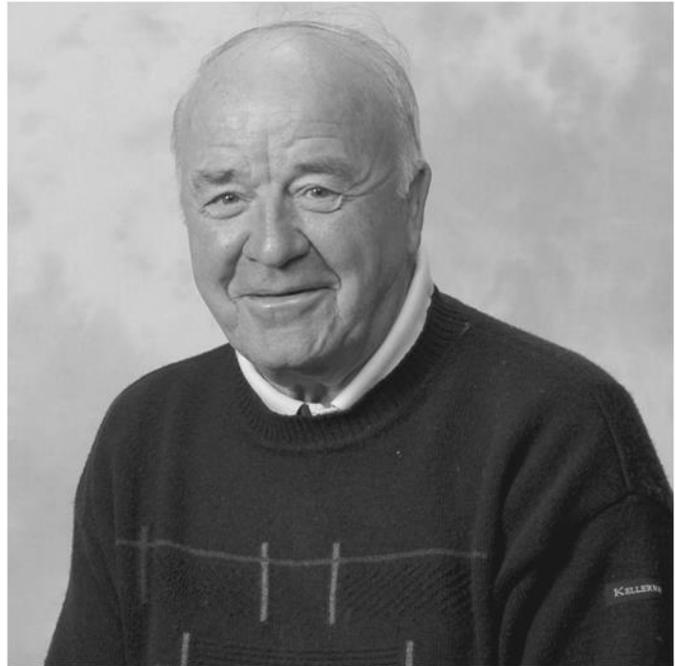
COMING TO RIVERSTOWN

By Tom Nestor

The poet Robbie Burns was a canny Scot who was responsible for a piece of wisdom that has stood the test of time, all of two hundred years and counting. It was he who advised mankind that the best laid plans of mice and men gang aft agley. They do indeed and every time I look out on King's field I am reminded of it. If I had hearkened to the promptings through which wisdom was trying to reach me, I wouldn't be here at all and someone else would be watching the crows make for their roosting perches on Gallows Hill.

You see it was never meant to be like this. This house in Riveroaks, on the outskirts of Riverstown, is the antithesis of what we had planned for. Whenever we set out from Ennis to visit Cadamstown, where my wife comes from, we invariably came the Roscrea route. Until the fateful moment when one of us, we have never agreed which one, suggested that we come by Portumna. That innocuous decision was overlaid with gang agley.

When our children flew the coop for Dublin we were rattling around in a house that had grown too big. Almost subliminally, the idea of moving house went from nonsense to possible and finally set on the notion that we should settle somewhere within easier reach for our children and for theirs. Birr, near where my wife was born, seemed ideal. But, wherever we settled there was one inviolate criterion. We would opt for a red bricked townhouse, set on a square of tarmacadam, low on maintenance, high in efficiency. Did we do it? We did like hell. We took the Portumna road on that fateful day and, shortly after passing the schoolhouse in Killeen we came upon an auctioneer's hoarding advertising a housing estate called Riveroaks. We fell for a four-bedroomed dormer on a quarter acre, sky-high on maintenance, a laggard in efficiency, and the promise of back-breaking labour stretching into infinity. Every time we drove up to oversee the building progress, always by Roscrea, and looked at the enormity of what we were taking on, I knew I would regret it all the days of my life. And then the gods conspired in my favour. That first morning in Riveroaks I awoke to see a column of sunlight moving along the bedroom wall. I watched it and remembered. I suddenly had the feeling that I was seeing the ghosts of where I sprung from long ago in west Limerick. Once, when my grandfather sold well at cattle fair in Rathkeale, he honoured his bonhomie by buying a cypress tree and planted it outside the bedroom window. When in the morning the sun rose above Harold's Wood the cypress twigs were silhouetted on the wall of the room where later my mother slept, and moved over its surface like fern fossils. It was her signal to rise and shine, set the fire, wake the household, feed the calves, start a routine of



chores that only finished when she nodded by the fire near midnight.

As the ray of sunlight moved over the wall the sparrows in the hawthorn sang their anthem to the dawn. I was home now. Home to a thatched house, set far up a country lane, five miles to the nearest town, two to the nearest shop. Every morning the sparrows chirruped a volatile chatter beneath the overhang of the thatch. It was like a salutation to some avian god proclaiming that the sun had risen and all was right with the world. The song in the hawthorn was less voluble, a testimony to the decline of those little heralds of the dawn. There was so many of them in my youth that it is hard to believe that sparrows are in decline. We have torn down the hedgerows, altered their habitat. Their decline is a blot on our humanity.

And then the wonder moved on apace. I heard a voice in the distance. It ran goose pimples on my memory because it was all of fifty years since last I heard it. I went out to the landing and there in the field beyond the garden wall, a herd of cows were ambling to the milking. On summer mornings long gone, I 'carried' home the cows from fields of aftergrass, Towser, the sheepdog and I. I was barefoot like every youngster in my neck of the woods. The places where the animals had lain during the night were warmed by body heat. As the cows arose with a creak of joints, I dallied in the spot they had vacated. The warmth seeped through my toes, ran the landscape of my spinal cord, seeped into every nook and cranny of muscle and thew.

As the cows moved onward, a kaleidoscope of the forgotten appeared. I saw Towser, plain as day, one ear hanging down and a splash of white on the taper of his tail. We had twenty cows then, every one with a name and a

small personality of behaviour. We had names for the fields they walked upon and the story of the landscape that surrounded us all. It was a landscape of self-containment, what the Romans called a mare clausum, a sea surrounded by the territory of a single nation.

I returned to the room, pulled back the curtain and looked out on the south westerly vista. The builders had dumped top soil in the middle of what would one day be a cultivated grassed area. It rose in a cone shape, spilling earth down its sides, making a ring round the bottom like a moat. But here was the wonder. Archaeologists tell us that weeds are the evidence of history, that sometime in the past the ground that they appear on was cultivated. Those plants may never appear again until the soil is disturbed at the level where they still lay dormant. Decorating the slope of the mound, lying on its top like a russet crown, was a profusion of poppies, waving and dancing in the morning sun, like a miracle on the eye that sees but the ordinary. I had never seen such a display of poppies and it took me so unawares that I failed to recognise the flashes of gold and crimson

that flitted amongst them. A flock of goldfinches was feeding on the poppy seeds. Ah, goldfinches, straight from the archives of home. I know ye well, ye birds. There was a small patch of fallow ground that encroached like a right-angle triangle into the land of our neighbour's. Blacktops grew there in multitude and the goldfinches and their cousins the linnets feasted on their bounty. Up close, the goldfinch is a phenomenon of creation, the display of gold and crimson, black, white and velvet brown, the dexterity of colour placement coordination, and the wonder of its sublime and beautiful song. I used watch them for hours from the shelter of a thorn bush wondering at the marvel of their existence. There were hundreds of birds in that fallow triangle. I have never seen a flock as large again but I keep my fingers crossed and hope for their future. We never go home. We never get back to the place we began. Home is like Brigadoon, once you leave it, you never find it again. But, in my first morning in 4 Riveroaks, I could see its outline far off in the horizon.

CUMANN NA mBUNSCOIL WINNERS



Congratulations to Crinkill National School on winning the Michael Dooley Memorial Cup in 2011 for Hurling.

This cup is awarded to the winners of the Cumann na mBunscoil Division 2 in Offaly.

Back Row (L to R): Brandon Beale, Dillon Ward, Conor Hickson, Michael Milne, Jack Parry, Kevin O'Keeffe, Conor Carroll, Jake Hart, Robert Haines, Mr. Conor D'Arcy.

Front Row: Jordan Beswick, Sean Kavanagh, Clodagh McCormack, Christopher Cleary, Oisín Murphy, Conor Smith, Aaron Blake, Ceilim King, Dylan Heffernan.

MEMORIES OF FORTAL NATIONAL SCHOOL

By Martin Delaney

I remember my first day in Fortal National School as though it were yesterday. The year was 1957 and it was a miserable wet day. I was firmly anchored between my brother Billy and my sister Kathleen. I remember looking back just before we rounded Hayden's Corner and seeing my poor mother waving to me as though I was going to the gallows. It certainly felt that way to me too. After hanging my coat in the little cloak room, I was herded into the biggest room I ever saw in my entire six years. There were rows of long desks all the way to the back wall on which there hung a huge brown clock which seemed to be ticking as loud as my poor heart. I was deposited at a little table in front of the teacher's desk and, along with Bill and Noel Scully, we were given a big slate and some white chalk to scribble with. The teacher's name was Miss Grogan; a kind-hearted, gentle lady who I'm glad to say, is still going strong. Her relief teacher was Miss Annie Noonan and, if you searched Ireland you would not find a nicer lady. She used to bring in a bag of sweets and, if you got all your sums right you got one. I'm glad to say that she is still going strong also. When Miss Grogan retired she was replaced by a new teacher, Miss Keane, who came all the way from Clare. We missed Miss Grogan terribly but we soon got used to the ways of our new teacher.

The school, like all little National Schools in Ireland then, was all right in the summer but, in winter, it was damp and freezing. The little fireplace, into which we placed sods of Clonoghill turf, was fronted by a large fireguard and when Miss Grogan got her backside up against it, that was the end of any warmth that might have come our way. When the turf was scarce we each had to bring one sod every day

to keep the fire going. From Babies to Sixth class the years seemed to take wings and, once we were in Sixth class, you really felt like a 'Big Man' when you were entrusted with some of the important tasks which had to be carried out daily. When you were asked to make the ink you knew things couldn't get any better. The big white enamel jug would be filled with water and the black powder carefully spooned into it and stirred until it was just right. The ink would then be poured into a small jug and away you went along the desks, topping up the little white ink wells. Another important job was going to Paddy Meara's pump each day for fresh water. The pump was only about fifty yards from the school and we would be in no hurry, going or coming. The water would then be boiled in the little tin kettle on the fire and we would wash down our bread and jam with the horrible black cocoa which always seemed to be cold. The toilet was a dry toilet situated down the yard in a little shed and, when you wanted to answer the call of nature you had to raise your hand and say 'An bhuil cead agam dul amach, máis é do thoil é.'

The roll book would be called every morning at 9.30 and when your name was called out, you had to shout out in a loud voice, 'Anseo'. We knew where every bird's nest was between Fortal and the Mile Tree. Sam Abbot's orchard was a regular target to fill our empty stomachs. Alas, the school is now long gone. It was closed down in the early Sixties, to be followed some years later by our old post office. Sometimes, I wonder was all this change for the better. The light of heaven to all my old school pals no longer with us and to all the great neighbours who made Fortal such a great place to grow up in.



Years Gone By at Fortal National School, 1965.

Back Row (L to R): Pat Scully, Jim Murray, Billy Scully, John Tooher, Noel Scully, Martin Delaney, Margaret Delaney, Margaret Feenane, Ann Scully, Mary Murray, Miss Keane (teacher).

Front Row: John and Brendan Kennedy, Terry Scully, Theresa Delaney, Catherine Feenane, Mary Troy, Anna Murray, Patricia Leonard, Mary Brennan, Mary Tooher, Margaret Murray, Mary Scully. Missing on the day was Margaret Noblett.

FIRST COMMUNION IN FORTAL SCHOOL

By Theresa Delaney Fealy

I have some great memories of my school days at Fortal National School but none more memorable than my First Communion Day. I remember getting all dressed up in my lovely communion dress and veil and my shiny new shoes. As we didn't have any transport at the time. One of our neighbours collected my mother and I and brought us to the Church for my big day. Communions weren't celebrated like they are in the present day, where families gather together in large numbers in a hotel for a big meal and bouncy castles and the like afterwards. It was just my mother and I, with my father staying at home to mind the house and my brothers and sisters. When we received our communion then, we had to be fasting from the night before. Needless to say, many a child felt faint either with the hunger or with the excitement of the day and had to be brought outside. The celebrant on our big day was Dean Quinn; a very tall distinguished man who looked very intimidating but had a very kind heart because he treated all the First Communion children to a lovely breakfast of

scrambled eggs on toast, with jelly and ice cream for dessert in Egan's Hotel on Main Street afterwards. The scrambled eggs were garnished with parsley and, as most of us hadn't ever seen parsley before we wondered why there was grass on our scrambled eggs. After our big feast we all headed home to change our clothes and then went out to play with our brothers and sisters. There was no such thing then about how much you "made". We were lucky if a neighbour or a shop-keeper gave us a bar of chocolate. The main focus then was receiving your first Holy Communion and trying to be good, if only for a few days. We were all very sad when Fortal School closed down in 1965 and we were sent to Crinkill National School to complete our final year before secondary school. Every time I pass the old school now I remember fondly all the good times and friendships that were made inside those four walls, and all the past teachers who were so good and kind to all of us.

**First Communion Day for
Fortal National School, 1961.**

**Back Row (L to R): Catherine Delaney,
Mrs. Kennedy, Phyllis Kennedy, Rita Scully,
Mrs. Murray.**

**On bench: Theresa Delaney, Patricia Leonard,
Pat Scully, Jim Murray.**



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BORD NA MÓNA - DERRINLOUGH BRIQUETTE FACTORY

“THE STORY SO FAR”

By Jimmy Shortt

A press wheel, which was once used in the manufacture of briquettes, was placed at the main entrance of Derrinlough Briquette Factory in 2010 to commemorate the 50th Anniversary of its official opening. A plaque in front of it says:

“THE WHEEL OF TIME”

The press wheel symbolises the passing of time, encouraging those who look at it to take time and reflect on the past, appreciate and live for the present and look forward to the future.

This is a fitting tribute to all those who have passed through the gates since its foundation. The following is a brief history of Derrinlough and how it came into being. First, we must go to the beginning, taking into account Bord Na Móna and, prior to that, the Irish Turf Development Board. Following the 1932 General Election, in which Fianna Fáil were successful, Frank Aiken (Minister of Defence), who took a keen interest in the bogs of Ireland, developed a scheme for the expansion of turf production and, in 1933, C. S. (Todd) Andrews was appointed to the Dept. of Industry & Commerce by Sean Lemass (Minister of Industry & Commerce) to implement Aiken’s ideas.

The objectives of the scheme were to stimulate private turf production, establish standards for quality, standardise prices and organise distribution throughout Ireland. As a result, in 1934, the Irish Turf Development Board was formed to “develop and improve the turf industry”. In 1935, following a Government visit to German (Sod Peat) and Russian (Milled Peat) peat producing areas, it was decided to use the German production model. In 1936, the Turf Act was passed allowing the Minister of Industry and Commerce compulsory purchase powers of bogs.

In 1936, the Board took over Turraun, Co. Offaly and purchased bogs at Clonsast and in Kerry. Sir John Purser Griffith had been producing machine turf on a small scale in Turraun from 1924, before the takeover. Todd Andrews said on his first visit to Turraun that this was a small-scale model of “what Bord Na Móna was to become in time” With the unrest and possibility of war in Europe and with Ireland’s dependency on imported coal and other fuels, the Government decided that Ireland would have to become self-sufficient in as much as they could afford to. So, in 1937, the Department of Industry and Commerce had decided that peat should be used for the generation of electricity. A rapid expansion of turf requirements during the War years confirmed a need for mechanised peat harvesting. In 1944, the Turf Development Board was asked to devise and submit a comprehensive programme for progress. The outcome was the transformation of the Turf

Development Board into Bord Na Móna in 1946 and a Government commitment to a major plan, later referred to as the “First Development Plan”. The plan provided for two ESB turf-fired power stations, the development of 24 bogs to produce over a million tonnes of sod-peat per



L – R: Diarmuid, Fiona, Mary, Niamh and Jimmy Shortt in front of the press wheel during the 50th Anniversary celebrations in 2010

annum, the building of a moss peat factory in Kilberry and the establishment of a peat research station in Newbridge. Following the aforementioned visit to Germany in 1935, Andrews was very impressed by the peat-burning stations at Weismoor and Meppen. This influenced the decision to build similar stations in Ireland. The decision to build a power station at Portarlinton was made in 1938 but, because of the war, the power station did not come on stream until 1950 and it was closely followed by Allenwood in 1952.

In 1950, a “Second Development Programme” provided for four additional power stations. Between 1950 and 1957, sod-peat power stations were generating an output capacity of 117 MW. In the early 1950s, it was decided to switch from producing electricity from sod turf (German technology) to milled peat (Russian technology). The four new milled peat stations would generate an output capacity of 290 MW when commissioned. These included Ferbane (1957), Lanesboro (1958), Rhode (1963) and Shannonbridge (1965).

In 1974, Bord Na Móna undertook the “Third Development Programme”. This involved the development of a further 20,000 ha. of peatland for milled peat production to supply

fuel for increased electricity generation and the construction of the Littleton Briquette Factory. This programme was as a result of the Yom Kippur War and the subsequent oil embargo in 1973/74. It led to the commissioning of further generating capacity at milled peat power stations, contributing 130 MW of electricity. Around this time, Derrinlough Engineering Works opened its doors to build machinery for the Third Development Programme. It was one of the finest equipped workshops in Ireland at the time, until its closure in 1988.



Derrinlough Briquette Factory 1961.

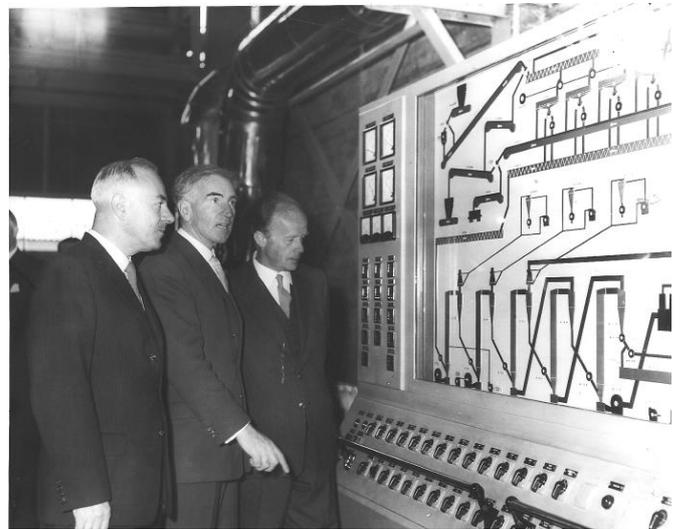
Briquettes have been experimented with and produced in Ireland since 1855. An English engineer named Gwynne had a small plant at Kilberry, Co. Kildare but a man named Charles Hodgson is credited with inventing the Peat Briquette. He was a Dubliner and Trinity College graduate who patented his "compressed peat fuel" in 1858. Briquettes were produced at his Derrylea Peat Works, Kildare from 1860 to 1867. Briquettes were produced again in Kilberry in 1906.

Lullymore (owned by the Peat Fuel Company) opened in 1936. It got into financial difficulties and its assets were transferred to the Turf Development Board in 1939. It was refurbished in 1956 and finally closed in 1992. Derrinlough was opened in 1960. Croghan was opened in 1961 and closed in 2000 and Littleton opened in 1981. Derrinlough and Croghan were sister factories.

Following the unprecedented demand for briquettes and the implementation of an allocation system, it was decided to build another briquette factory. Original proposals in 1955 had been for a super factory, producing over 200,000 tonnes, to be built near Derrygreenagh, Westmeath but this was later changed to two factories, to be situated in Offaly at Derrinlough and Croghan.

Sir Hugh Beaver (Managing Director of Guinness), who was a good friend of Todd Andrews, was anxious that Guinness' would contribute financially towards the improving Irish economy. With the approval of the two new factories,

Andrews availed of this opportunity. Funding of £500,000 was obtained from Guinness' in 1956 and a further £250,000 was received in 1959 towards the construction of the factories. The loan was guaranteed by the Government and repayment of the loan was completed in 1972.



Official Opening in October 1960.

L – R: D. L. Lawlor, Managing Director, Aodhagan O’Rahilly, Chairman, Erskine Childers, Minister of Transport & Power.

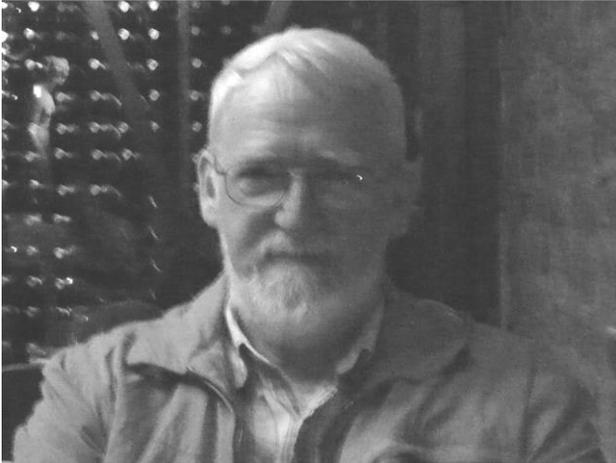
Derrinlough was built at a cost of £1.25 million, with construction beginning in 1957 and completed by 1959. Up to 400 people were employed at the construction stages. The first briquettes were produced in December 1959. It was officially opened in October 1960 by Minister of Transport and Power, Erskine H. Childers. It was designed to produce 100,000 tons of briquettes per annum and employed over 100 people when operational. Following completion of the factory many people who were employed at the construction stages were employed in an operational capacity in the factory.

The designers were Messer Buckau R. Wolfe of Dusseldorf, Germany, in conjunction with Bord Na Móna engineers. The steelwork was supplied by Thompson's of Carlow. The electrical contractors were A.E.G. of Germany and the turbine was supplied by Stal of Sweden.

In over fifty years, the principles of the process of briquette manufacture have not changed, only the people. From the outset, it has given great employment to many in the locality and the wider area and they, in turn, have passed on their skill and knowledge to the next generation. In 1993, the factory was updated and is now computer-controlled with the everyday running now monitored from a purpose built control room. It also holds the ISO 9001 and the ISO 2008, which is the latest version of this accreditation for the manufacture and distribution of briquettes. In conclusion, we thank those people who have made Derrinlough what it is today and look forward to many more years of prosperity for all involved.

ENCOUNTERS

By Damien White



The author, Damien White

“A journey of a thousand miles begins with a single step”. –Lao-tzu-

Sometimes an apparently trivial event can lead to consequences and encounters beyond our expectations. The effects branch out in a wide variety of paths which seem to be almost never-ending. The connections lead to meeting people who have fascinating stories to tell, your horizons are widened for new experiences and opportunities. One such special event took place for our family through a message in a bottle which floated across the Atlantic to Galway Bay.

In February 1972, I was teaching 4th class in St. Michael's School in Mervue, Galway. We were talking about the Gulf Stream in the Atlantic. Ireland is at the same latitude as Labrador, which has a much harsher climate. Why? Because the Gulf Stream flows from the Gulf of Mexico across the Atlantic and up the west coast of Europe, keeping our climate much milder in winter and summer than it should be. One of the pupils, James Gilchrist, mentioned about finding a bottle with a note inside on a nearby beach. He said it came from Pine View School in Sarasota, Florida. Next day, he brought the bottle in. I saw this as a useful practical way to encourage letter writing and setting up pen pals for the students. I don't know if anyone does pen pal letters anymore. We are a long way from snail mail now!



The bottle route.

The class members wrote a general letter of introduction. I sent a covering letter. My letter was passed to Mrs. Jean Henry, Language Arts teacher in Pine View School. Many received letters and later visits took place between Galway and the USA. Pine View School is a school set up for the educationally-gifted. You have to have an IQ of 130+ to be enrolled there. The school science department had put 1,500 bottles in the Gulf of Mexico, about 40 miles out from Tampa between November 1969 and April 1970. Most of the bottles were picked up on the places close to the Atlantic entrance from the Gulf of Mexico. Some reached as far as Norway.

Jean Henry and I started corresponding, initially to support the pen pal letters but later on a personal friendship basis. Jim, her husband (of 54 years as of December 30th 2010), an air-conditioning engineer, and Jean are native Floridians, “Florida Crackers”, born and raised in Florida. They have two children. They had no family connections with Ireland. We, for our part, are unusual also, in that we have no US connection in our families. Our experiences of the “*parcel from America*” of earlier generations with the toys, comics and bright American clothes as youngsters was by way of those received by neighbours.

November 1973, just as I moved to Birr to take up as Principal in Clareen NS, they came to London on a work bonus trip for Jim. They flew into Shannon to meet us and flew out the same evening from Dublin. We got on very well. Although they were born in the '30s and we in the '40s, they were members of the Methodist church and we were Catholics, we “clicked” and thus began a friendship. There was an invitation extended to us to visit Florida.

August 1977, we visited Florida. The decision was made that the trip should be for a month to make it worthwhile. We had two young children. It is only in later years I fully comprehended their courage in having this foreign family with two young children in their house! But they are “risk takers” in the best and most positive sense of the word.

We had no concept of summer heat and humidity as it is in the US. When we arrived in JFK airport in New York we had to quickly find a place, to reduce the amount of clothing we were wearing. Later that evening, we arrived into Sarasota at 9:00 p.m. after an air-conditioned flight from New York. We expected things would have cooled down outside and made sure our children put on their Aran Cardigans so as not to get cold!!! The outside temperature we met was close to 90° Fahrenheit. We just burst out laughing when we saw the Henrys looking slightly bemused at these heavily clothed people on a Florida summer's night. I finally understood that summer in Florida is quite different from summer in Ireland. Later on, we experienced Florida thunderstorms, which are a unique experience both for the thunder and lightning and also for the torrential rain. The Gulf sea water may be around 90° Fahrenheit, which can

colour one's thoughts of swimming from an Irish beach, where the temperature would be at 55° Fahrenheit.

There were many special encounters during this first visit. When we arrived at their home, we sat down to a light meal. Just as we were about to start, Jim offered the grace saying "Let us offer up a prayer of thanks for the safe arrival of our friends from Ireland". This is an example of the unselfconscious way in which they live their religious beliefs openly. Ireland in the 1970's would have been considered religious, but not openly so. This moment was significant and life-altering. We experienced open statements of convictions many times and in many different formats. I do not always agree with the US way of doing things but the ordinary people's belief closely guides their actions.

During the month we had opportunities to visit Cape Kennedy and Disneyworld. We also experienced a side of Florida that in some ways is no longer there. We stayed with Jean's parents in Zellwood, north of Orlando, and met the extended family. We arrived there the day Elvis died. Their home was a single storey timber house along the style of the Waltons, with porch and screen doors and no air-conditioning. We have experienced the hospitality of their extended family through-out the years, including Thanksgiving days and we treasure them greatly.

Thus started a connection with Florida, which is very much alive to this day, almost 40 years later. The visits have been reciprocated on both sides. Many have come from Florida and stayed with us in Birr. On occasion, we have done house swaps as well with friends there. Friends of friends visiting Ireland have used the excuse of calling to visit Birr Castle and Telescope. Some also used the opportunity to experience an Irish wedding by attending the wedding of our daughter. Among our visitors was a family, not Floridian or American but from North Korea originally. Su Bong Chae and his wife Suki Yung came south in Korea during the Korean War in the early 1950's. They came to Florida by way of Brazil where Su Bong became professor of Mathematics at New College in Sarasota. During 1983-84 he was visiting professor in University College Dublin. His family came to visit him during the Christmas of 1984. We invited them to visit us in Birr. He was one the most intelligent people one could ever meet. Yet, he wore his intelligence lightly. Although he was here only a few short months, he was deeply interested in things Irish. He was gathering a smattering of Irish as I met him here.

One of our wonderful encounters was getting to know "Grandma". Glessie, Jean's Mom, was fascinating to talk with. She was born in early 1911 in Florida, with her people coming from Georgia. She would have had people around her who were alive during the Civil War. She spoke of the hard times they encountered as she graduated from High School in 1929. She spoke of courtship by her late husband, who came from Georgia. They got married just as the depression hit and times were tough. There was a broad

similarity between her experiences and the experiences of many in this country at about the same time. She also gave a fascinating insight to us in relation to her religious beliefs. She was a lifelong member of the Church of God, a Pentecostal church. They suffered a measure of persecution in Florida from more mainstream churches because of their beliefs. She never wore jewellery or make-up. She spoke of segregation and the way people lived their lives during it.

Florida is like one huge sand bar. The highest part of Florida is only about 90 metres high. Many years later I did a driving test for my Florida driving licence. The tester said "Now we come to hill starts." I was puzzled. We were in a closed testing road. No hills like Hillside in Birr in sight. He asked me how I would do it. It was only an oral test. There are no hills there.

Our encounters have given us opportunities to meet and hear about the horrors of wars from veterans of Korea and Vietnam. We also had visits from Finns and Germans.

Your name	<i>actual card taken sent November 1969 in the bottle.</i>
Su nombre	
Votre nom	
Ihr Name	MASTER JAMES PATRICK GILCHRIST
Your address	BALLYLOUGHANE,
Su dirección	RENMORE,
Votre adresse	GALWAY IRELAND (EIRE)
Ihre Adresse	
Where was the bottle found?	53.17 N.L.
Dónde se encontró esta botella?	9.3 W.L.
Où est-ce que vous avez trouvé la bouteille?	
Wo haben Sie die Flasche gefunden?	RABBIT ISLAND
	GALWAY BAY, NR. BALLYLOUGHANE BEACH
The date the bottle was found	
La fecha en que se encontró esta botella	
Quand avez-vous trouvé la bouteille?	17th February 72
Wann haben Sie die Flasche gefunden?	
	<i>a particularly good day for going to the island as the tide was very favourable.</i>

Card which was in the bottle.

The connections keep coming. Recently, a movie, *A Dolphin's Tale*, also has connections to the area. The prosthetic engineer Danny Stremptzka and his parents are among the visitors to Birr.

There is a saying that "people come into your life for a reason and a season". As the years have passed, the people, reasons and seasons as encounters have been very rewarding. The season is now encountering the third generation. The message in a bottle encouraged our children to encounter and benefit from studying and working in the USA. Our grandchildren have come to regard Sarasota and the Henrys as close family members.

Through the years, communications have gone from the message in a bottle, snail mail, phone call, fax machines and emails to texting, all leading to wonderful encounters for three generations. Influenced not a little by our experiences with our friends in Sarasota, we would eventually move en famille to live and work in the U.S.A. for a period in the mid-eighties but that's another story.

"Plant a seed of friendship; reap a bouquet of happiness"

- Lois L Kaufman.

SÚIL SIAR

By Anne Heffernan



Joy, challenge, privilege, great pride, deep humility and huge gratitude – my memories of Mercy Primary School, Birr are made of these!

One of the nicest customs that has evolved in Mercy Primary School over the years is the presentation of a *Memory Book* to a teacher who is leaving. My *Memory Book*, compiled by staff and pupils, is filled with

photographs, poems, letters, jokes, artwork and messages that bring a smile or a tear with each memory. Turning the pages of this book leads me to reflect on the challenges, privileges and pleasures I experienced in Mercy Primary School, Birr.

My association with the school began many years ago and I am proud to say that I have been a pupil, teacher, parent and principal (and to countless junior infants during book week – even a Gruffallo!!).

My family lived in Castle Street and Seffin during the 1950's and 1960's and many people will remember my father, Jack Grogan, a builder and great Comhaltas man, my mother Úna (O'Brien), herself a primary school principal, my sister and good friend Mary (Morrissey) and my step-mother Sally (Pilkington). I was blessed to learn the simple values of life from them all and, with them, learned to love and appreciate the town and people of Birr. Biorra abú i gcónaí!



I began Primary School in Miss Hill's Junior Infants, sitting at little wooden tables that survived almost to the present day. Although school at that time was not the pupil-centred model of today, I have many happy memories, including; learning to bake milk rolls in Fifth Class; ironing a man's shirt for a laundry exam in Sixth Class; wearing brass curtain rings as gypsy earrings while performing in the operetta *Zurika* staged in the Marian Hall and being presented with a certificate for Comhrá

Gaeilge at the local Feis.

Favourite playground/street games included skipping, hopscotch and red-rover. Happy days with pals including Lucy Tynan, Emily Keneally, Yvonne Eades, Chrissie Kealy, Catherine Snow, Mary Lyndon and Ann Gormley.

My early teaching days took me to Dublin and later to St. Anne's Roscrea, Cloughjordan and Dromakeenan before finally bringing me back the full circle to Birr. Past pupils love to remind me of their memories of "poetry hours",

when they read their own poems, being brought to play tin whistle at The National Concert Hall in Dublin and Ceilí dancing. I tell them that my memories also include teaching diligently the 3 R's!

During my career, I became very interested in teaching pupils with special education needs and the skills I learned early on served me well ever since.

As a parent, one of my most treasured photographs is of me and our three daughters in their Mercy Primary School uniform while they were pupils in the school.

In September 2002, I was honoured to be appointed the first lay principal in Mercy Primary School, Birr. My time as principal brings a collage of images to mind – the happy morning faces, the determination and application of pupils and staff in academic, artistic, sporting and pastoral pursuits. I greatly enjoyed our times of celebration – St. Bridget's and other feast days, camogie triumphs, welcoming local sporting heroes, recognising our pupils' triumphs great and small, whilst always rewarding effort and commitment.

I recall the compassion and support given when times were tough for any of us in the school community, the wonder and awe on faces in classrooms and around the school (teachers and students alike) on Science Days, Book Days, Chess Days, dancing and singing in the Halla during Seachtain na Gaeilge, with even St. Patrick himself putting in an appearance on occasion; the sheer excitement when Santa found time in his busy schedule to drop by. Wonderful memories too of welcoming with joy and pride new parents, new pupils and, in time, past pupils returning as parents, teachers and friends.

I have been privileged to work with so many wonderful hardworking people – staff, pupils, parents, board of management members, parish clergy and Sisters of Mercy. I deeply appreciate the learning, teaching and community building that happens not only in Mercy Primary School but in all the schools in Birr.

It's been challenging but rewarding work teaching children to count and teaching children *what* counts. I've enjoyed the journey from "chalk and talk" to "interactive white boards and World-Wide-Web".

The last page of my memory book contains a quote from Archbishop Oscar Romero – *"It helps now and then to step back and take the long view. We cannot do everything and there is a sense of liberation in realising that. We may never see the end results, but that is the difference between the master builder and the worker. We are workers, not master builders, ministers not messiahs – we are the prophets of a future not our own."* Comforting words to a teacher looking back on a career in education.

Mar fhocal scoir, to the community that is Birr – **Thanks for the memories.**

SPEED OF LIGHT



Members of the Birr Athletic Club in Killeigh, August 1948. They include John Hayes, Murt & Danny Hynes, Mick Parlon and in front is Val Johnson who won the 100 yds., 220 yds. and 440 yds. races on the day.

CONGRATULATIONS



Congratulations to John & Connie Gormley, Woodlands Park, Birr who celebrated their 60th Wedding Anniversary in 2011. John and Connie were married in Dublin on 11th September 1961. They celebrated the occasion of their Diamond Anniversary in the company of family and friends. They are pictured in their wedding day above and below with their children Anne, Kathleen, Eleanor, John and Helena on 11th September 2011.



GUESS WHO?

Jackie Hehir



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A JOYFUL CELEBRATION

By Sr. Anne Hannon

On the 20th of August 2011, many Mercy Sisters converged on Birr to celebrate the Golden Jubilees of Srs. Helena O'Donoghue (Sr. Laboure), Mary Bugler (Sr. Matthew) and Anne Hannon (Sr. del Rey). The first part of the celebration, Holy Eucharist, took place in the chapel in St. Brendan's Community School. This was a lovely setting for the Mass. It had been beautifully decorated by Srs. Maura and Breda. Fr. Tony Cahir was chief celebrant and there were sixty Sisters present. The liturgy, while being simple, was very meaningful.

After Mass we all went to Riverside, where we spent the next four or five hours enjoying a delicious meal, reminiscing, and comparing life when we had entered the convent to life as it is now. We had been in St. Catherine's Boarding School in Nenagh together and we joined Religious Life in 1958. This was four years before Vatican II and life in the convent at that time was very regimented, well-regulated and isolated from family influence. The latter made little sense to us as family was the place where our vocations had been nurtured and regimentation and regulation had been part and parcel of our lives as boarders. We spent the next few years together in the Novitiate before going our separate ways. After Vatican II, we had an exciting time of renewal, adaptation and return to the founding spirit of Catherine McAuley. We shed much that was stifling in our life-style and embraced a new and energising theology of Religious Life. Change confronted us at every edge of our lives. We gave ourselves to this change with varying degrees of openness. We began the long journey from a narrow-focused diocesan group of religious women to a world-wide network of Mercy Sisters, who broadened our focus to answer world needs. We had our first international conference in 1981, in Dublin, and today world-wide Mercy leaders meet yearly to share views, plan and pool resources.



Sr. Anne Hannon, left, with her sister Pauline



The ceremonial cutting of the celebration cake
(L to R): Sr. Anne Hannon, Sr. Mary Bugler and Sr. Helena O'Donoghue

This exciting time was tamed by the fact of a number of our sisters leaving religious life and a gradual reduction in the number of those entering religious life. We were as deeply involved as ever but became more and more aware that we were slowly but surely becoming redundant. The State was exerting its right and capacity to provide for the educational and healthcare needs of its people. In response to our charism, we sought to adapt. We retrained in new areas of service. Helena went from being teacher to principal, to Prayer Ministry to Leadership. Mary began as teacher and served at home and on the missions and, eventually, became a Hospital Chaplain. I trained as a Primary School teacher, spent seven years on the missions, returned to teach in a number of schools in Ireland and became involved in Leadership. I now work to make Catherine McAuley (right) known and loved and hope this will culminate in the canonisation of our Foundress.



During this time, although far apart physically, we kept in touch and met at regular intervals. It was stimulating and energising to listen to each other's stories and to encourage one another on our faith journey. The first twenty-five years seemed to pass quickly and we came together to celebrate our Silver Jubilee in Nenagh. The last twenty-five years have flown. We can say in all honesty that all fifty years have been enjoyable and happy. We have made many, many friends and we are grateful to them and to each other for the gift of good company, deep sharing, strong support and joyful laughter.



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THE YOUNG MASTER

By Richard Kennedy

For a man whose being became so interwoven with theatre, Michael Donegan's life has also had its fair share of drama, comedy, and tragedy. Born in Achill in Co. Mayo, where his father was stationed as a Garda, he was the youngest in a family of six. They lived in the old coastguard station at Purteen harbour and when Michael was six, his father was promoted to Sergeant and they moved to Ballymote in County Sligo. This was a time of happiness and contentment. The town was small and easy-going, seamlessly connected with the surrounding rural community. With school friends he would play on the street, or sit watching the cobbler at work or, if someone was going to the bog, he would join the expedition. The schoolhouse was typical of its time, with bare walls and floors and a stove to be lit each morning. The Church was woven into the fabric of society. From school, the boys might be marched off to serve a High Mass at the drop of a hat and, on Sundays, the wide ranging views of the Monsignor were pronounced with authority from the pulpit, from matters of doctrine to berating women for wearing slacks.

Want and necessity were the common shared experience. To receive clothes from a relative in England was a treat. They didn't have a television and, with school pals he had to make do with watching a snowy Rin Tin Tin on the T.V. in a local shop. The radio, however, occupied a special place in their home. *"It was like the Arc of the Covenant. Each time we moved house, the radio was wrapped up and the first act in the new house was to put up a shelf for the radio. It was a valued thing, only turned on for the News and the Archers or the Foley family."*

As a son of the local Sergeant, Michael also experienced the life of the quiet rural barracks. Much of the time of the Guards was spent accounting in ledgers for how they passed their time, sometimes going on mysterious patrols or investigating matters of ragwort and unlicensed dogs, but always finding time to cultivate a vegetable garden. Of these years, Michael remembers watching, listening and taking it all in. *"I had freedom as a child. It was an idyllic time, I learned and absorbed so much"*.

This idyllic life came to an end in 1965 when his father was transferred on promotion to Sligo town and here they lived for a number of years. Another promotion followed and his father was assigned as Inspector to Cavan town. There, Michael attended St. Patricks College. At this point he was facing in to his Leaving Certificate and, with his parents belief in the value of education and perhaps also, to avert his attention from the delights of Cavan town, he became a boarder for the last term before the exam. It was during his Leaving Certificate exam in 1972 that a brutal and savage act changed his life and that of his family forever. Having completed a morning exam he was on his way in to the exam hall for the afternoon paper

Right – A relaxed Michael Donegan



when a day boy, back from his lunch, approached Michael in an excited state and asked him how his father was. It had been on the radio news that he had been injured in an explosion. The report of the boy was so unexpected that Michael couldn't take it in and, at the same moment the school President came hurriedly in to the room and, dismissing the day boy, said, *"whatever you heard is a lie. Just sit down and do the exam."* He has no memory of the exam. He just got through it and, after the exam, he was met by two, obviously upset, Gardaí, who brought him to the hospital. Over the next couple of hours, amidst scenes of terrible trauma, the details were filled in. His father, with an army Officer, was investigating a suspected bomb on a quiet border road. In the course of carrying out their inspection, the device was deliberately detonated from a remote vantage point, fatally wounding Inspector Donegan and causing horrific wounds to the Officer.

Michael was returned to school that evening, with a hope that his father would recover. He was sharing a room with another boy and he remembers asking his roommate to say the Rosary with him. While they were praying he heard footsteps coming down the hallway and he knew they were for him. He was brought out to a waiting Garda car and, this time, there was a garda sergeant in the car, crying. His father had died. Michael's memory of this time is of awful family trauma, his mother's grief, the very public funeral ceremony, with guards of honour and he not yet being able to fully comprehend what had happened. Somehow, he completed his exams, but, not surprisingly, achieved unremarkable results and he repeated the exam in the following year.

The standard vocational choices were either the bank, the Guards, the Civil Service, teaching or perhaps university. For a typical Cavan boy, university was regarded as being perhaps a bridge too far. The first port of call was the bank. This involved a three-week training course in bank headquarters in Dublin. There, it was impressed on the trainees that they were a privileged bunch to be considered for the coveted job of bank clerk. Part of their training included instruction on personal hygiene and, at

mealtimes, they were corralled in a separate area of the dining room, out of the sight-line of the worldly bankers. For a young country boy in the city, this was an intimidating experience. He remembers going up and down in the lift, trying to find a way out, while sophisticated bankers came and went, talking loudly about their continental holidays, as he huddled unnoticed in the corner. Happily for all of them, he received an acceptance into teacher training college and he left the bank *"as if I was leaving a blazing house"*.

Michael was amongst the first lay students to enrol in the Christian Brothers teacher training college. With falling vocations, the Brothers had negotiated an arrangement to train lay students along with their own postulants. However, the full consequences of allowing a blending of immature and naive trainee Christian Brothers with lay students who were savouring their first taste of freedom had not been fully considered. It was a mutual eye-opener. The influence, however, was not mutual and about half of the postulants had abandoned their vocation by the time Michael had completed his time there. It was also at that time that he first met Maria, with her calm and moderating influence, although he still remembers that time as being occasionally wild and chaotic and, after a very chequered career scraped through his final exams.

His first appointment as a teacher was in Banagher, following a brief interview conducted by the Principal, Tom McGee on the footpath outside the school. He soon made the acquaintance of Tony Hogan and, on his recommendation moved to a flat in Birr, above Mahon's paper shop. It was Tony who introduced him to the Stage Guild, an event which marked a turning point in his life. Performing on stage was a revelation to him. He describes the discovery of his natural ability as being like a swimmer discovering water. *"All my senses were geared to this. As a child, I had been a watcher and a listener and I now realised from acting how much I had absorbed. I had such a databank that I could draw on, and I could understand all the nuances of personality in a character. Everything seemed to come together."* The discovery represented more than just the un-earthing of a hidden ability. The trauma and pain which followed the death of his father remained close to the surface. Of his father's death, he says, *"We mark our lives with certain points and that is the one I date my life from."* With his discovery of the stage and drama came a realisation that here, at last, was an escape route from this trauma into a different life.

Side by side with the theatre, was a robust social life and a wide circle of friends. Unfortunately, many of the stories of this time are still stamped *"Classified"*. Having followed his instincts into drama, it has to be said that comedy and farce occasionally followed him back home. Once, before they were married, Maria bought him a book called *"Cooking in a bedsit"*. He never progressed further than the section called *"Cooking to Survive"*. Once, after a difficult weekend, he was virtually penniless and close to starvation.

Desperate, he consulted the book for the cheapest possible stew. With his last few bob, he joined the queue in John Dwyer's butchers and mumbled his order for the cheapest cut of beef. John's immediate response was, *"Is it bait for a rat trap you want, sonny"*. He slunk home and put on the pot with his scrap of meat and a few vegetables. Almost feverish with hunger, he took a long walk around town to take his mind off the food and to prevent himself from eating it raw. On his return, he noticed an instruction in the cookbook to add seasoning. Impatiently, he grabbed a container of Saxa salt and gave it a good squeeze into the casserole. However, just as it was squirting out he realised that it was Quix washing up liquid he was discharging into his food and, as it began to bubble and froth, he realised that it was a choice of saving the situation or starve. Grabbing a spoon he rescued as much as he could and lived off the salvage for several days.

After a short spell teaching in Banagher, he was appointed as Principal in Shannonbridge. This was the beginning of a happy and satisfying part of his life. He formed a deep attachment with the village, with its intimate pastoral community so reminiscent of the atmosphere of his childhood. The attachment was mutual, as I learned from my researches in Killeen's, and the Christmas plays which were written and produced by him are still fondly recalled, with many of the cast remembering the improbable names of the characters they played on stage. In the village, Killeen's was an institution where you could get groceries from the shop, paraffin out the back and maybe a cabbage from the garden, and then wander in to the pub, a place that was never empty. It was a homely place, and sometimes, he felt, too homely for his own good.

His relationship with Maria had continued and grown since college days and soon after he took up the post of Principal she was appointed as a teacher in Shannonbridge. They married and soon afterwards, built a house in Clonmacnoise, where they lived contentedly with their growing family for twenty years. All the while he maintained an involvement with Birr Stage Guild but also, through his friend, John Boland, became involved with the Ballinasloe drama group, "Relays", with whom he performed in Theatre festivals countrywide.

As their children got older and became involved in different activities, they felt the attraction of moving back to town and they settled on Birr. Michael was appointed as Principal in Rath in 1997, where he spent three very enjoyable years and then moved as Principal to St. Brendan's Boys P.S. in Birr, where he remained until his retirement in 2010.

While his life has been enriched through dramatic expression, this has been achieved with the support of a loving family. The contemplative aspect of his nature is expressed through walking and spiritual observance and is nurtured through his love of literature and poetry. Now retired (while still little more than a youth), he has the freedom to immerse himself in the life of the theatre, enriching our lives in the process.

JOHN SIMON KEARNS (1915-1985)

NAVAL HERO FROM BIRR

By Ben Oakley

It was April 1949. Civil war raged in China between the Koumintang, under Chiang Kai Shek and the Communists, led by Mao Tse Tung. The antagonists were squared off across the wide and tidal Yangtse river when a British frigate, H.M.S. Amethyst, came steaming up the river with supplies for the British Embassy in Nanking. Although Britain was neutral, the ship came under fire. The ship was hit and more than half of the crew of 150 and almost all its officers killed. The ship ended up stranded on a mud-bank on the Communist side of the river.

A lot is known about the incident itself (a film was made starring Richard Todd) but very little is known about the Assistant Naval Attaché at the Nanking Embassy who was sent to sort out the problem. He was John Simon Kearns. He had been born in Birr in the Crinkill/Whiteford house now owned by Dr. McGovern - then called St. Kildas and now called Williamsbrook. He lived there under the guardianship of his uncle, Colonel Charles Kearns. John Kearns' own father had died when he was only eleven years old. He was remembered as an affable youth who mixed easily with the Crinkill youngsters and played football on the parade ground of the old burnt-out barracks. In later life, he kept contact with friends made in Birr.

In 1928, he was enrolled in the Dartmouth Naval Academy. On the outbreak of the war in September 1939, Kearns was a lieutenant in Singapore but transferred to the Mediterranean shortly afterwards. There, he saw a lot of action in several ships and had some traumatic experiences. In Port Alexandria in Egypt, a ship loaded with refugees was dive-bombed. The bomb penetrated the top deck and exploded below, killing 300 people. Kearns was put in charge of the work-party assigned to literally digging out the dismembered remains. On another occasion, his ship was torpedoed and he spent an hour in the water before he was rescued. On top of all this he learned that his brother had been killed in action. His first command was a destroyer, H.M.S. Blackmore, which showed up his deficiencies as a ship handler and also his dearth of man-management skills. There were numerous incidents. In Orkney, the vessel became entangled with a boom and was disabled by cables which became wound around its propeller. In Malta, there was an incident of drunken members of the crew jumping into the sea and a suggestion that Kearns himself was one of them. Also, he had unwisely accepted a gift of six bottles of whiskey. He had started drinking heavily. After the Orkney incident he went back to sea briefly as the captain of a minesweeper. In that role, one of his senior naval colleagues described him as the "stupidest officer in the Royal Navy". Then, with the rank of Lieutenant Commander, came his appointment as

'Assistant Naval Attaché' in Nanking. This was the 'non-job' which accidentally led to his moment of glory.

The negotiations for the release of H.M.S Amethyst extended over 101 days, with no sign of a resolution. Under Kearns' direction and, unknown to the enemy, the crew managed to make the ship seaworthy and free it from the mud-bank.



John Simon Kearns

Although he had been ordered by the Admiralty in London not to do so, Kearns decided to break out and run the gauntlet over the 150 miles to the sea. So, on the night of 30th July 1949, without any lights showing and tucked in behind a large freighter, the Amethyst slipped its moorings and headed for the open sea. The freighter was hit and set on fire but, with Kearns in charge, the Amethyst continued until it reached the open sea. The media played up the event as a great triumph for the Royal Navy but little was said of Kearns who was given a desk job in the Admiralty in London and finally axed from the navy in 1958.

For the rest of his life, he drifted in and out of jobs. As a technical advisor to the subsequent film, the director described him as 'an arrogant bore who listens to no one'. Other jobs were with Sun Alliance Insurance, George Wimpey and a spell as Conservative MP for Hartlepool in 1959. As an MP, he showed himself to be compassionate, unassuming, dignified and modest. He didn't contest the 1962 election and the seat reverted to Labour. He ended his working life, aged 65, in 1980 as a civil servant sitting on the Pensions Board.

Kearns had married in 1946 and had spent his honeymoon in Birr. They had two daughters, who now live in England, as does his widow. His mother died in 1957 leaving him £30,000 in her will. This was entrusted to a banker friend who lost the lot in a speculative investment. John Kearns died of cancer at the age of 70 in 1985. He had never been happy in retirement and thought that he should have gone further in his Navy career. Although of proven courage and originality, he was not 'lucky' and obviously possessed a complex and rebellious nature not suited to the constraints of a large hide-bound organisation. Certainly, the sailor from Birr deserves a full biography.

Author's note:

I am indebted to the late Diana Alley, nee Kearns, for much of the above information.

Your local voice at national level

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CHERNOBYL 2007

By Nicky Larkin, video-artist & filmmaker.

Arriving in Borispol airport in Kiev is quite a shock to the system, particularly having earlier transferred in the glass and steel empire that is Amsterdam's Schiphol Airport, possibly Europe's slickest airport, with toilets so automatic they almost know your name. Slick is not a term that springs to mind in Kiev. There is no glass and steel in Borispol; just miles and miles of rough concrete. Concrete walls, concrete floors and concrete ceilings, inhabited by thousands of people all pushing and shoving and generally looking a bit....concrete.

I stood nervously waiting for my equipment to emerge beside the world's shoddiest conveyor belt; more glorified duct-tape than rubber belt. All I could think about was what a tragedy it would be if my camera gear hadn't also successfully negotiated the transfer through Schiphol. I was on a schedule and the idea of making it all the way to Chernobyl with no camera equipment horrified me.

I was also slightly anxious that my driver wouldn't find me in this cattle-mart of an airport, but I needn't have worried. Six-foot red-heads are thin on the ground in Borispol airport. A short stocky man wearing an Iron Maiden tee-shirt approached me as I stood beside the conveyor belt, gruffly introducing himself as Yuri, informing me that he was my driver. Finally, the gear emerged, one piece at a time, and Yuri took me out to his car.

The Chernobyl Hotel is not really a hotel. It's a big yellow prefabricated fibreglass structure, kinda like a massive portakabin, that was driven down from Sweden and plonked in place. It exists to house the scientists who come to the exclusion zone to study the warped environment and the odd obsessed filmmaker. On that particular week, however, I was the only guest.

However, despite being the only resident in the big yellow portakabin, the kitchens were still in operation; it appeared especially just for Yuri and me. We were to begin each day at 6am and I was informed that there would be breakfast served for us before we left. I arrived down the first morning and Yuri had already assumed the position. I sat down opposite him and he poured tea. Next thing, out from the kitchen arrived a hefty middle-aged woman, bearing two bowls of purple soup, moving at incredible speed for a woman of her girth. Yuri told me that this was borsch, a Ukrainian specialty and that it was fantastic. The obvious thing about eating the national dish with a native is that you run the risk of highly offending your host if you don't appear to love the food as much as they say you should. Borsch is made from beetroot and tomatoes. I hate both



beetroot and tomatoes. I hate them both at any time of the day; never mind at 6 am. Yuri, however, loved beetroot and tomatoes. He loved borsch so much he was horsing it into himself; he couldn't get enough of the stuff. I struggled manfully, trying to look as if I at least *kinda* liked it, all the while wondering what we'd be getting for lunch. Just when I thought my troubles were over, the hefty woman came out again, this time bearing two plates overflowing with vegetables and what appeared to be chicken. Steamed chicken. Yuri informed me that this was also a Ukrainian specialty. He started horsing into it

yet again; he loved this too. It's incredibly hard to maintain a polite expression towards your happy host when you're actually gagging; retching, desperately trying not to vomit all over the table. Yuri stood up to get more tea from the hefty woman and I seized the opportunity and threw half the plate into my bag, all quickly wrapped in tissues. As soon as she took away our second course, she arrived back out with a third; dessert. Dessert....at 6am. I gave up at this stage, telling Yuri I enjoyed the previous specialties so much that I just hadn't any room for dessert. He looked momentarily disappointed, before he shrugged his shoulders and grabbed my plate, emptying it onto his; a mountain of cake in front of him.

The Chernobyl power-plant isn't actually in the town of Chernobyl, where I was staying. Pripyat, the empty city which was my focus point for the film, is closer to the power-plant, about two kilometres away from the looming reactors and about ten kilometres from our fibreglass lodgings. We drove at speed towards the empty city; traffic cops and penalty points are just not an issue in the exclusion zone. The exclusion zone itself is a thirty kilometre radius out from the power-plant. Within this there is another ten kilometre radius, the inner zone. We passed through this several times a day on our journeys to and from Pripjat. The border was manned by some hardcore-looking Militia lads in blue camouflage gear. You can't just wander into the zone; each morning Yuri had to produce my passport and permit papers. Each evening on the way out, the car would be searched by the Militia; it's highly illegal to bring anything out of the inner zone, for fear of contamination.

Despite having done so much research and having a virtual map of Pripjat in my head, nothing can ever prepare you for the overwhelming sense of sheer emptiness when you actually arrive there. To stand in this once great town's central square, shout, and hear your voice bounce back at you against the huge empty Soviet apartment blocks is something I will never forget.

When you're leaving the exclusion zone you are advised to

leave behind any clothes you wore inside the zone. For this reason, you keep a sealed bag of clothes that you only open upon your departure. When you reach the border, you are required to leave the vehicle and step into a sort of shed-type building. Inside, there is a big metal machine, which is a little bit similar in shape and structure to those machines we have in pharmacies in Ireland for checking how obese you are, except this is a much bigger, cruder version. I was instructed to stand up onto the machine. There are two pads to put your feet onto and two pads to put your hands onto, and a big red light in the middle at chest height. The machine apparently scans through your body to see whether you've managed to ingest particles of cesium or strontium. These are the single biggest worry when in the exclusion zone. These evil little particles are a fraction of

the size of a grain of salt, completely invisible to the human eye. They attach themselves to foliage in particular so, for this reason you have to try to avoid grass or trees while wandering around the exclusion zone and stick to concrete as much as possible. If you do manage to get a grain of either of these inside you, your days are numbered. You bleed to death within a few weeks, horrible internal bleeding that destroys you from the inside out. You have to stand on that machine for about ten seconds while it sends the detective wave up through your body. The light stays red all this time and only when it turns green do you know you're safe. It feels like an hour, standing there, waiting for that light to go green. However, eventually it did go green, and I was cleared to leave the zone.

More of Nicky's work can be see on www.nickylarkin.com.



Meet the Kelly family from New Road, Birr.
Back Row (L to R): Christy, Gerry, Kevin, Berry, Paddy, Martin.
Middle Row: Geraldine, Mary, Rose, Eileen, Pauline, Josie, Noleen.
Front Row: Christy, Mono, Shirley, Kathleen.

Swing Out Sister.

Our photo (right) shows the Dooley sisters from Lisheen. Left to Right: Mary Rourke, Ann Connell, Teresa Ryan and Catherine Troy.



RUN FOR YOUR LIFE

THE STORY OF TOMMY FEENANE, FORTAL

By Michael Donegan

The Feenanes have been in Fortal since 1918, when Matt Feenane from Terryglass purchased a farm there. Tommy, his son was born in 1924 and can clearly remember walking to school at six years of age. Miss O'Sullivan was the school mistress and she cycled out to the little school from Castle Street each morning. Tommy was confirmed by Bishop Fogarty in Birr Church in 1938. The house in which Tommy was born and in which he still lives has the distinction of being the last house in the parish of Birr and the diocese of Killaloe. The very next house is in the diocese of Ossory. Dean Ryan was Parish Priest of Birr at that time.

From a very early age, Tommy learned that he had to contribute to the work of the farm. Farming was labour intensive and there were cows to be milked, sows and pigs to be fed and turf to be cut. It was all horse work. The good thing was that it was unmechanised and the price of diesel or road tax was not an issue. The highlight of the year's work was thrashing day. Pat Downey of Clareen or Percival Bailey would draw the thrasher into the yard to begin the work of thrashing the barley, oats or wheat. The neighbouring men would come to do the work of lifting and forking and stacking. Tommy's mother prepared the main meal of bacon and cabbage and potatoes to feed the men and, when the day's work was done a half barrel of porter was tapped to slake the thirst of all who had helped. The 1930's were a time of self-sufficiency. De Valera had told the people to 'burn everything British except their coal'. As a result of the economic war, there was no price for cattle and so the farmers had no income. The one thing they could do was put food from their own farms on the table. Wages were small, if there was any work at all. There was huge emigration. There was no such thing as a bank loan and, if you could not live within your means, you simply did without.

With the onset of war, things began to improve. There was more of a demand for labour in England and all farmers had to sow tillage crops to produce food. One of the main crops farmers sowed was sugar beet. Sugar factories were built in Thurles, Carlow, Cork and Mallow. Beet harvesting was very tough work, as it had to be harvested by hand. It was



Tommy Feenane with a plaque containing his 10 Marathon awards.

pulled, crowned, dragged and heaped on the side of the road for collection. In the beginning, it had to be carted into the railway and loaded into the wagons with beet forks. Later in the 50's the beet was brought directly to the factories in lorries. Despite the many hardships associated with farming, Tommy liked the healthy open work and the idea of being his own boss.

He liked football and played with 'White Rovers', the local team that represented Crinkill and Fortal. They were trained by Jack Grennan and Hughie Devery and had the great distinction of beating Ballinamere in the Intermediate Final in 1951. Sadly, the only surviving members of that team are himself, Chris Hoare, the goalkeeper and Dinny Parkinson. Tommy is not quite sure when his interest in athletics exactly came about. His father was always interested in sport and, as a boy, he had attended and participated in a children's sports day each

year in Birr on June 29th. Tommy excelled at running and his favourite distance was 440 yards. He trained on his own by doing laps of the fields at home after long days working in those same fields. From meeting

other runners at sports days he picked up hints and strategies and even managed to purchase a pair of spiked running shoes from Elverys in Dublin. There was a Birr Athletic Club in existence. It had been founded by Jack Scully, Joe Scully, Tommy Hynes and Ciaran Horan. In 1946, the name was changed to St. Brendan's Athletic Club so that it could include a wider area of members. The first meeting was held in St. John's Hall, Birr. The officers of the club were as follows: Chairman was Tommy Hynes, Secretary, PJ O'Neill and Treasurer, Tommy Feenane himself. Other committee members were Michael Madden, Tim Callaghan, Michael Delaney and Sergeant Glynn.

At that time, there was a sports event held in almost every parish and the club put out teams to compete against clubs in Kilcormac, Tullamore, Edenderry, Clara, Ferbane, Daingean, Killeigh, Shinrone and Roscrea. They also competed in Ballinasloe, Nenagh and Galway. They contested all field events, including the 56lb weight, long jump, high jump and hurdles. There was a lot of interest also in cycling, with Martin Costello, Joe Blake, Johnny Hynes, Jack Scully, Mick Carty and Paddy Earley being very involved. J.J. McCormack from Fortal became Irish Champion three years in succession. John Murphy from

John's Mall was 120 yards hurdles champion. Training was taken very seriously and sessions took place every Sunday and two nights a week in Brereton's field at Syngfield corner. Tommy was also very involved in the Coursing Club and there were coursing meetings held at Crinkill and Clonkelly up to the 1960's. Tommy stayed running in the over 40's veteran class and, with Johnny Davis and Andy Dooley won several All-Ireland Championships at that level. However, it was not until he reached the age of 59 that his marathon career took off. In 1983 when he was 59 Tommy ran his first marathon and then ran one a year after that until he reached the age of 69 in 1993. While he was always glad to finish, he found the day after harder than the actual race itself. Ten marathons would be a superb achievement for anyone, not to mention a man in late middle-age but,

Tommy makes light of this. He thinks the tragedy of today is the way children are carried everywhere in cars. They would be better, healthier and fitter getting up on a bike or running or walking to where they want to go. Tommy married his beloved wife Mary Ellen Mahon when he was only twenty-four and they had seven children, four boys and three girls. His son Brendan is managing and working the farm now. 'That's the way of the land,' says Tommy. 'You only have it while you are alive and then it must pass on'.

And, after all that running, Tommy has learned to take things a bit easier now but he still looks as straight and as strong as the day he first crossed the finish line of his tenth marathon.

CONGRATULATIONS



Congratulations to Joe Cahill who retired from Birr Town Council in 2011.

Back Row (L to R): R. Smith, J. Hogan, A. Hogan, P. Egan, C. Brophy, M. Daly, M. Darcy, W. Ryan, T. McLoughlin.

Middle Row: M. Cahill, J. Cahill, M. Burke, M. Sherlock, P. Grennan, T. Reilly, P. Clancy, D. Donovan, P. Sharkey, T. Murphy, F. Heslin, D. Sheils, B. Coffey.

Front Row: M. Campbell, S. Delahunt, J. Cahill, R. Cahill, H. Cahill, Z. Cahill, R. Cahill, A. Cahill, L. Cahill, D. Cahill

GUESS WHO?



Richard Kennedy

REMINISCING IN POUND STREET



(L to R): Kathleen Brien, Pat Curley, Josie Walsh, Evelyn O'Brien.

FAREWELL SWEET FOREIGNER

By David O'Brien

Us Offaly folk get around a bit but as the old song goes, that heather scented air does tend to draw us back. Immigration is once again tearing away the ones we love, with Birr, like every other town in Ireland losing many of its best and brightest. At this time of the year, it certainly does us all (especially the last two great institutions of Ireland; the mammy and the publican) good to see many of our émigrés return.

As we all know, the silent and peaceful Brosna will always call her sons from far and near. Although how anything, especially a river, can silently call anyone has always puzzled me. And why just her sons and not her daughters? Maybe it's best not to get into the semantics of the Offaly Rover; it can take from it a bit.

Anyway, it's been quite a year for homecomings, what with Joseph Kearney's great-great-grandson, young Barack, drinking pints to bate the band out in Ollie Hayes' in Moneygall. While we didn't have the glamour of a presidential visit in Birr, we did have the homecoming (of sorts) of another extraordinary Offaly person.

In June, His Excellency Ariel Y Abadilla, the ambassador of the Philippines came to Birr to celebrate the all too short life of Josephine Bracken, a woman hardly known here but famous to all in his country as the wife of the hero of Philippine independence. His name was José Protasio Rizal Mercado y Alonso Realonda, or Jose Rizal, for short, and one of his last acts before he faced a firing squad in 1896, aged 35, was to address her in a famous poem "Farewell, sweet foreigner".



Josephine Bracken in Filipino attire.

Josephine Bracken was born in 1876, the daughter of James Bracken from Ferbane and Elizabeth Jane McBride from Belfast. James served in the 28th Foot Regiment based at Crinkill Barracks. Army records show that he enlisted aged 18 in 1858. About four months after their wedding in 1868, Bracken's regiment was posted to Gibraltar. Elizabeth remained in Ireland, where she gave birth to the couple's first child, Charles, in April 1869. Shortly afterwards, along with Charles, she rejoined her husband at Gibraltar, where she gave birth to a daughter, Nelly, in 1871.

The following year, the regiment was posted to Malta and there the couple had two more children: a daughter, Agnes, born in 1873, and a son, Francis, born in 1875 who survived just three months. The regiment's next posting was to Hong Kong and it was there that their fifth and final child, Josephine, was born on 9th August 1876.

A month after Josephine's birth, her mother Elizabeth Bracken died and was buried in the Military Graveyard at the Happy Valley Cemetery. Subsequently, the baby Josephine was given for adoption to her godparents, a married couple, George Taufer, believed to have been of German-American origins, and his wife, Leopoldine Marie Magedo, a Macao-Portuguese. In about 1893, Taufer began to lose his sight. Desperate for a cure, he contacted a Filipino doctor, Dr. Jose Rizal, whom Josephine had met when he had lived in Hong Kong.

Jose Rizal, the son of affluent parents, was born near Manila in 1861. Shortly before his 21st birthday, he went to Spain to continue his studies. There, he soon became the principal spokesman and inspiration for a political movement composed of fellow expatriate Filipinos that sought by peaceful means to achieve reforms from Spain for their homeland.

From the earliest times, the Spanish colonisers were accompanied by their clergy, who set out to convert the natives to Roman Catholicism and, in this, they were largely successful. Over time, the principal religious orders - Dominican, Franciscan and Augustinian friars recruited exclusively from Spain - became in effect the ruling authorities. While in Europe, Rizal wrote *Noli Me Tangere*, a novel that ridiculed the friars. In 1887 he returned to his country and practised as a doctor and ophthalmic surgeon for about five months. The friars, incensed by the reaction to his novel, sought to have it banned and Rizal tried for treason. Concerned that his life was in danger, he decided to return to Europe.

It seems Bracken met Rizal when he spent several months in Hong Kong in 1891-92. She later recommended that her blind adoptive father travel to the Philippines to be treated by Rizal. In 1893, Rizal was in political exile in Dapitan, on the Zamboanga Peninsula. Father and adopted daughter travelled to Dapitan where the relation-

Pictured right is Jose Rizal

ship between Jose and Josephine blossomed. Around early March of 1896, Josephine gave birth prematurely to a stillborn son. Inspired by Rizal's writings and speeches, a group known as the Katipunan (meaning 'association' in Tagalog) had formed, with the intention of winning independence through violent revolt. When, in August 1896, revolution broke out, the authorities accused Rizal of being an instigator and shortly afterwards, at a rigged trial in Manila, he was found guilty of being involved and sentenced to death. On the eve of his execution, as Joseph Mary Plunkett and Grace Gifford would do ten years later, the couple wed.



After Rizal's death, Bracken joined the revolutionaries for a time. When called before the Spanish Governor-General, she was threatened with torture and imprisonment if she did not leave the Philippines, so she voluntarily returned to Hong Kong.

She subsequently married a Vicente Abad, with whom she had a daughter, Dolores in 1900. Sadly, Josephine was to die of tuberculosis just two years later and was buried in an unmarked grave.

The extraordinary story was told to a packed Birr Theatre on June 14th 2011, in a new play whose title echoes the poem: *Tu Dulce Extranjera or Farewell Sweet Foreigner*.

So, while the link may be a bit tenuous and while (back to the Offaly Rover again) she may never have strolled the fields around Ferbane or seen the woodbine in full bloom in Kinnitty, this extraordinary and tragic woman was one of our own and this year was her homecoming, at least in dramatic form.



A LETTER FROM ORAN MOLLOY

Hello,

I'm Oran and I am 4 years old. I live in Birr, Co. Offaly with Dad and Mam and big sister Ava. I love Horrid Henry, Buzz Lightyear, playing on the laptop and getting my own way. When I was born I was very, very, sick and, because of that, I now have a condition called spastic diplegia cerebral palsy, which means I can't stand or walk on my own like all of you.

The good news is that a doctor in America called Dr. Park at the St. Louis Children's Hospital has said that he can do an operation called a selective dorsal rhizotomy that will make my legs work a lot better, but the bad news is that it costs a lot of money which neither my Health Insurance or the HSE will contribute towards. In the middle of August of this year, my family and friends set about trying to raise the money that was needed for my operation in America and lots of people did fun things to help. There was a car wash by Firemen, people got waxed, shaved and dyed, my friends did bag packing in Tesco, 34 brave people jumped out of an aeroplane in Birr Airfield, lots of people played golf, there were quizzes, charades, cake sales, coffee mornings, fun days, jumble sales, ladies nights, martial arts seminars, sponsored walks and football matches and a lady called Risa ran the Dublin City Marathon for me and there are still a few more things to come. With all these events, we have managed to raise the money for my operation, thanks to all of you.

So, my family and I would love to say a big thank you to all the people of Birr and surrounding areas for their generosity that has made it possible for me to travel to America in February and have a chance at being able to run and play just like all my friends. There are still a few events coming up before I travel to America, such as a really large tractor being pulled from Tullamore to Birr and a music night. These had been planned before we had the money raised and all of this money will go to help pay for the post-op physio I will need for a couple of years once I come back from America.

I will keep you all updated on my progress with my big adventure in St. Louis, you can follow me on Facebook Orans Wish to Walk or on my website www.oranswishtowalk.net. Thanks again for all your help and only ask now that you would include me in your prayers.

Thanks,

Oran.



CARRIG N.S. CENTENARY CELEBRATIONS

By Tony Sampson

Carrig N.S. celebrated its centenary on 31st May 2011. The celebrations on the day began with a mass in Carrig Church. Mass was celebrated by Bishop Kieran O'Reilly. Bishop Kieran was joined by Fr. Carroll, Fr. Cahir and Fr. Reddan from the parish and by Fr. John Kelly, past curate of Birr, who kindly joined us on the day. The children all sang, read and brought up the gifts on the day, which added hugely to the occasion.



Mr. Tony Sampson (Principal) left, holds the tree for Bishop Kieran O'Reilly as he fills in the hole.

After Mass, everyone moved across to the school, where Bishop Kieran planted a tree and balloons were released, to mark this important occasion. The children displayed

some of their talents to an appreciative audience.

Everyone then moved inside to view an exhibition on Catherine Mahon, who was the first principal of Carrig N.S. in 1911. She was also the first woman to become president of the Irish National Teachers Organisation. She actually went on to serve a second term as president of the organisation and her contribution to the I.N.T.O. is widely accepted as being a very significant one. We also had old copybooks, books, photographs, awards, etc., on display, all of which were kindly donated to us for use on the day. A highlight for many people was the opportunity to go through the old roll books, stretching back to 1911 and to go through the many photographs that were displayed on the day. Our guests were also afforded the opportunity to view the extension which was built in the past few years and to look at the original part of the school and see how things have changed over the years. Later, everyone moved next door to the parish hall, where a meal was provided. Our thanks to Ciaran, Monica and the staff of the Village Store, who did such an excellent job with the food. Due to the fact that some people obviously couldn't join us on a working day, we held an open evening so that they could come along and view the various exhibitions, roll-books, photographs, etc. and have a look around the school. Many of our older ex-pupils enjoyed having a look around and took the opportunity to regale each other with stories of their own school days over a cup of tea. We, at Carrig N.S., extend our gratitude to all who contributed in so many ways to making our centenary celebrations such a success.



Children release balloons to mark the occasion of the 100th Anniversary of Carrig N.S.

Left to Right: Michael Gleeson, Ryan Martin, Ben Fogarty, James Brennan, Anna Dickson, Brendan Hctor, Clodagh Hayden, Aoife Bond, Bríd Ryan.

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生活在咆哮的老虎 - LIFE IN A ROARING TIGER

By P.J. Cleary

After being in China for two and a half years and asked to write an article for the Birr Review magazine I contemplated on how to explain what life in this exciting and interesting country has been like but it's always better to give a bit of background to a story, so I decided to start from the beginning.

I'm a qualified civil engineer and had been working for an engineering consultancy in Dublin for a number of years but, due the economic downturn, the company folded. This, and I'm sure many people back home were left with a similar dilemma, was a tough situation to be in and I was faced with not many prospects for further employment.

I always try and look at every situation with a view that something good can always come out of the bad. You just have to look for it. So, with this in mind, I took the opportunity of my new found freedom and decided to pack my bags and go on an adventure.

I decided that teaching English would be an excellent way to experience real life in another country and really get the feel of something that I had never experienced before. After completing my TEFL (Teaching English as a Foreign Language) course, I was offered a six months internship in China, which upon successful completion, I would be a fully-certified English teacher. So, I accepted this and prepared for my departure. The hardest thing about leaving was saying goodbye to all my family and friends back home in Birr. My parents, Pat and Bernadette Cleary of Burkes Hill, were reluctant to see me go but were happy for me to be able to experience this opportunity. So, in 2009, I set sail for China. I was based in Shanghai for the duration of the programme.

This truly was an experience which changed my outlook on life forever. Arriving in Shanghai, the sheer size and mass of this city was mind-bending. Over 20 million people live and work in this city which, compared to Birr, is only slightly a few more. Shanghai is a very cosmopolitan and vibrant city but, upon arriving, the smell, the language and the food just hits you. If you like chickens hearts with your bones, I know a good place! In a city this size, even Chinese people themselves speak various dialects of the language. The whole way of life here was something I had to come to grips with very quickly. Shanghai and China never ceases to amaze me. It is a truly amazing place, steeped in history and beauty. It's a spectacular place to live in and be part of.

After completing my internship, I took a break from teaching and traveled around China and South East Asia for a number of months, which truly was magnificent. After that I was then offered a full-time contract back in Shanghai in a kindergarten where I am now currently working. Shanghai had got under my skin and I hadn't felt like I had experienced all it had to offer so I gladly accepted the contract offer and returned.



L to R: Mrs. Chen, P.J. Cleary, Mrs. Grace Lee, Mr. Chen

I work for a kindergarten in the northern part of Shanghai city. I'm the senior foreign teacher for the mother company of my kindergarten, which has 5 campuses throughout the city. My duties include training of new staff, general management of the foreign teachers, developing the material which is used in the school, providing activities for the students and, of course, teaching. I gained valuable experience during my internship, which gave me an excellent footing to develop my skills as an English teacher. I currently teach the most senior students in the kindergarten, class K-3. The students are aged between 5 and 8 years and there are 42 students in total in the class. My basic day with the students includes teaching them how to read, write and get a fundamental grip on the language and giving them the opportunity to develop the basics they have already learned, which is the most valuable thing to achieve. I spend my day singing, playing games, explaining how to write and spell, developing proper pronunciation using phonics and generally having fun and making my classroom an exciting place to learn. We even had our own St. Patrick's Day celebration last year, which was great. The students really enjoyed learning all about Ireland and, of course, my home town of Birr.

As I have been here for a number of years now, I have adjusted to life in Shanghai and thoroughly enjoy teaching my students. It's a great feeling being part of the journey which they experience through the English language.

Although life in China is amazing, I still ponder about life back in Birr, my family, my friends and how life is, especially in this tough time that everyone faces. I actually live with a fellow Birr man, Pierce Cavanagh from Military Road, so it's nice to have a friendly face from home to talk about all our fond memories of times in Birr.

If you asked my colleagues or friends here in Shanghai they would tell you that the old saying, 'there's no place like home' is never too far away from my lips and it's true, there certainly is no place like Birr.....xièxie hé zài jiàn.....谢谢，再见

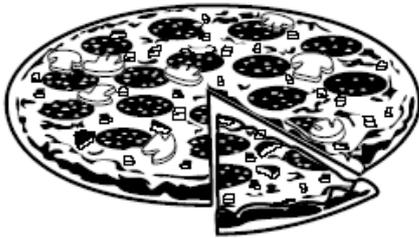
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THE FAMILIES AND STREETS OF BIRR IN 1821

By Michael Byrne

While many are now familiar with the value of the 1901 and 1911 censuses for family history, less use has been made of these documents for social history and population studies. Given the excitement created when the censuses were made available free online through the good offices of the Irish government and the people of Mumbai in India who transcribed them for us at no great expense. Now the Department of Heritage proposes to make the 1926 census available again by outsourcing the work to a far country. Professional genealogists have been pushing for this for some time as it will be more raw materials to harvest and sell on to others at greatly enhanced costs. How much more excitement there is for some places where the 1821 census survives. This is the case with Birr and the entire barony of Ballybritt. Some years ago, some 16,500 entries were indexed by the Offaly Historical and Archaeological Society and can be consulted for a modest fee on RootsIreland.ie as part of the promotion of Irish family history and the families of Laois and Offaly. This site caters for the DIY family history enthusiast. In time, the entire Ballybritt census will be published and, in doing so, it will be utilised for social, economic and population history as was done with the County Cavan material some years ago.

So much for being able to trace back one's family for 100 years when the opportunity is available, as it is for Birr town and district, for 190 years. It is a wonderful thing. Family members of a great age in 1821 bring us back two to three generations further. The oldest person in the town at the time seems to have been Ellen Egan of Graveyard Street.

Castle Street, for example, was then a crowded place, with some 32 occupied houses and over 200 people. Probably the principal business there was the distillery of Arthur Robinson (later the Woods brewery and in the 1980s the Williams Waller business). But in the same street lived a horse breaker, comber, bakers, a chandler, a hatter, jeweller, a copper smith, publicans and labourers. The story of the street can be put together from that time and even back to the leases of the 1740s and beyond.

On the northern side of the town in Cumberland St. (now Emmet St.) lived the soon-to-be local historian, then fresh from his controversies over Fr. Crotty (who would later have a church in Castle St.), none other than Thomas Lalor Cooke. He published his first history of Birr in 1826. Cooke was then 31 years old and living, on 28 May 1821, with his wife Lucinda (26) and sons William (1) and Richard (5). There were several other families in the town of the same surname. Lucinda was connected with the legal family of Antisell and her mother, also Lucinda (48), lived with them – at least on census night. Working in the house were a servant boy, cook, nurse and servant-maid.

The Census of Ireland - Population of the Town of Birr in 1821 and number of houses in each street.

	Houses	Inhabitants
Pound Street	39	197
Charles Street	39	200
Melsop Street	34	137
Love Lane	6	30
Burke's Hill	50	243
Cumberland Street	35	234
Old Bridge Street	33	182
Davis's Close	2	12
Moor Park Street	87	488
Old Post Office Lane	23	111
Walcott Place	10	52
Back Lane	47	249
Burke's Lane	14	81
William Street	5	43
Langton's Lane	8	33
Duke Square	13	84
Duke Street	13	80
Pig Market	3	17
Main Street	67	439
Graveyard Street	124	639
Mount Sally	4	23
Lower Eden	41	190
Upper Eden	37	189
Turf Market	9	51
Castle Street	32	203
Spinner's Lane	30	150
Mill Lane	21	62
Church Lane	25	128
Chapel Lane	11	74
Connaught Street	35	109
New Bridge	76	366
The Green	38	203
Oxmantown Place	5	34
The Castle of Birr	0	19
	1027	5429

The streets of the town were densely populated. It was not until the 1900s that one saw the development of new suburban housing for the working classes. Prior to that, people were crammed into the lanes and courts behind the bigger houses and paying 6d to 1s per week.

The street names, number of houses in each street and total population for each street will be of interest to those studying urban history. The study of the urban history of Birr is greatly enhanced by the estate records, parish records and, from the 1830s the mapping and valuation surveys. The atlas of Birr published some years ago by John Feehan and Alison, Lady Rosse, must make the study of the town so much more enjoyable.



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A WOMAN FOR ALL SEASONS

By Sr. Maeve Quinlan

Mother Mary Lua entered this world as the second child in a family of two boys and four girls. Her father's name was Tom Murray and his wife was Elizabeth Fogarty. She was named Elisha at baptism. She was educated in Clonakenny N.S., not far from her home in Longford Wood. The Murray family still live in the homestead. The present owner, Michael, is Mother Lua's grand-nephew. She died on December 16th 1975.

I had the privilege of living with Mother Lua in St. John's Convent of Mercy, Birr for three years. She lived the traditional way of Mercy life to the full, arriving in the chapel with the other sisters at 6 a.m. for morning prayers and meditation, followed by L'auds or morning prayer from the Divine Office at 7.30 a.m. Mass was celebrated by one of the local priests. Later, this Mass was celebrated in the nearby church at 7.30 a.m. and attended by the sisters. This mass continues to the present day, *buíochas le Dia*. The Presentation Brothers and a number of pious parishioners joined us for the celebration of the 7.30 a.m. mass in the convent. Imagine spending two hours in the high-vaulted Pugin chapel in frosty weather, with no form of central heating!

Mother Lua was a lady of deep spirituality, known by her sisters as being one of the first in the chapel and among the last to leave at night. The working day began after breakfast, eaten in silence, except on special feasts in the year.

Before going to school, hospital or house duties, the sisters attended a half-hour of spiritual readings from the holy rule and the lives of the saints, read by the superior while the sisters sewed, knitted or embroidered diligently. At mid-day, sisters prayed another section of the Divine Office before lunch. Then, it was back to work again until 4 p.m. when all gathered for dinner in the dining room, during which a sister read aloud some spiritual reading. This was followed by recreation and walking in groups in the garden, where laughter and joviality rang through the well-kept grounds. Sisters gathered in chapel for Vespers. Then there followed study-time, during which time copies were corrected and lessons were prepared for the following day. Tea followed, during which time the sisters talked and laughed and recounted some of the funny or maybe not-so-funny incidents of the day. This was followed by a period of 'recreation' in the community room. Here, again, needles and threads were produced and many vestments

and church linen were lovingly stitched. At 9 p.m. night prayer, known as Compline, was recited in the chapel – not to be confused with today's nightcap 'Complan'. Lights were turned off at 10 p.m. and one would want to be at death's door before thinking of breaking the 'Great Silence'. Many a sleepless night was spent in pain as sisters offered their sufferings for the Holy Souls or reparation for local, national or world-wide misdemeanours.



Mother Lua with her grand-nieces.

Mother Lua was in charge of the infirmary and always put patients before the observance rule of silence. She was in attendance at all hours, as her kindness knew no bounds. She was engaged in every form of 'social work' before the term was known. She taught in school and did night duty in the workhouse. Sisters of Mercy were originally known as 'Walking Sisters'. In her lifetime, Mother Lua must have walked hundreds of miles attending to the needy, the sick and the un-educated. She belonged to the pre-antibiotic age and administered her home cures with great tenderness and success. I accompanied her on her Sunday morning 'Visitation' on a number of occasions. Before leaving the Convent, we visited the Blessed Sacrament in the chapel, where an appropriate prayer was said. The 'younger' sister carried the black bag, which could contain anything from a needle to an anchor! But usually food, clothing, footwear and a little treat.

Mother Lua carried the money hidden in a deep pocket. I remember her bringing whiskey to an old man dying of fever. She greeted him saying 'sit up my good man and put this inside your shirt'. On another occasion on our travels, she entered a pub to bring home to his good wife a man whom she considered to be 'too fond of the drop'. He offered no resistance and left his glass half full when she told him that the taxi-driver was outside the door. Her message to us novices was 'do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing'. Should there be a visitor in the house she visited, she just carried on a normal conversation. Before leaving, she invited all to join her in a prayer. At the door she would whisper to the woman of the house 'call on me later'.

She served the community of the sisters in every aspect. She was Mother Bursar for years. Without the help of an auditor or an accountant, she presented her annual accounts. If she were missing a penny she 'searched Jerusalem with lamps' to find it. She invested any surplus cash in shares in C.I.E. and had vouchers for Sisters

travelling by train. She was before her time and before Charley Haughey and his free travel for the elderly! She was farm-manager when we owned 25 acres of land, now the Scurragh estate, without ever putting a foot inside an Agricultural College! At the Birr Show, her animals often came home decorated with a rosette. Her calves were sought by local farmers, who believed that they had to be lucky. One instance from this era is worth telling. She needed a heifer calf to replace an old cow. She had the herdsman praying for this. The new arrival was not what she wanted but the herdsman came into the convent to ask her to come and bless the newly born. He believed that Mother Lua had such faith that she could change it from a male to a female!

We were almost self-sufficient from her garden. We had vegetables and fruit in abundance. The apple house had supplies from one autumn to the next. Every October boys and girls from the schools went home with their satchels laden with the windfalls. In the culinary department she was head bottle-washer. What the garden did not supply she purchased in the town. She lived the slogan 'Shop Locally'. She served wholesome food. She had no knowledge of the burger or the soufflé – 'fast foods' did not enter her vocabulary. Her hens were free-range and the non-layers were served in the dining room. A witty Sister once remarked, as she laboured to chew the chicken, 'this must have been the Mother Abbess'. When the deep-litter hens were introduced, Mother Lua took the idea on board for her laying hens. A witty member of St. John's Community remarked 'we now have the walking hens and the cloistered hens, just like the Mercies and the Poor Clares'. Mother Lua treated the staff with great reverence, never asking them to do overtime, except for funerals or professions perhaps, but they were handsomely reimbursed.

Mother Lua's nieces and nephews regarded her visits as the highlight of the year. She always remained close to her grass-roots and passionately loved Clonakelly. The family says that the painting and scrubbing that preceded her visits involved young and old. The best china was produced and meals were served in the parlour. The 'fatted calf' was killed and nothing was left undone to express their love and regard for her. She would have been embarrassed by such attention. Among the family heirlooms are her beautifully embroidered table cloth, chair backs and tray cloths. The christening robe used down through the ages was crocheted by her and is still in perfect condition. Where did she find the time for such delicate crafts? Did she steal a few hours from the night? Why did she not go blind having nothing to sew by but candlelight?

Mother Lua was a true daughter of Mother McAuley in every sense of the word. At profession, she was garbed as the Foundress dressed – black, pleated, serge habit, ankle-length, having a train that was hooked up during working

hours and let flow at other times, covering the feet in choir, a leather girdle that she would threaten to use on a bold child but never did and a rosary beads with an ebony cross hanging from the girdle. Her shaven head was covered in a coif, covered by a black or white veil in earlier days. A funny incident happened on Fair Day in town. As she was on her rounds, her train became unhooked and she swept the street with it. On her return to the Convent all noses were sniffing but her only apology was 'there is no smell as healthy as the farmyard one'.

After Vatican II, a change of dress from the habit to a simpler style was recommended - a simple knee-length dress. Sisters were to come out of their ivory towers but Mother Lua was out years before Vatican II. Hair was now showing and there was such a change that Sisters hardly recognised each other. The novices were the first to appear in the new look. She remarked to a contemporary, 'they have legs showing and hair out, the end of the world must be around the corner'. She got that one wrong! The next big innovation was a holiday house by the sea in Spanish Point. She provided the cost of the same but never availed of the luxury of a holiday there. She considered this a waste of two weeks away from her beloved friends in town.

Schools were paid by capitation or so much per pupil in Mother Lua's time. There was no pension at the end of a Sister's career, which often ended at 75, not 65. Classes ranged in number from 40 to 55 and posed a marathon task for the teachers. Heating and cleaning grants were unknown. Sales of Work and Fun Fairs were the order of the day. Mother Lua managed several stalls on those days, selling farm produce, confectionary and fancy goods among other things. Her 'baby' was the Wheel of Fortune and her personal Christmas gifts and those of the other sisters were the prizes. All gifts were used for the common good. The takings from the wheel were used to provide free lunches for the less-privileged children and her comment on one occasion when I gave her the takings from the soft drinks stall was 'you must have drunk more than you sold'. One of the big upsets in her life was witnessing the damage done to St. Brendan's Catholic Church when it was maliciously set on fire. She was sacristan at the time and literally risked her life to procure the safety of the Blessed Sacrament. She organised night vigils among the sisters as reparation for such a hideous crime.

Mother Lua was surely a woman for all seasons. It is unbelievable how her tiny frail body could achieve so much and her brain could carry all she knew. Volumes would have to be written to give a full account of her dedicated life as a Sister of Mercy. These few words fail to do justice to her by any means but give some small insight into such a true Sister of Mercy in her time. I conclude without fear of contradiction with the well-known Gaelic phrase "Ni bheidh a leithéid ann arís."

MY MEMORIES OF BIRR

By Kieran O'Callaghan

I grew up in Emmet Street, the eldest of Liam and Margaret O'Callaghan's five children. Birr was a great place to grow up in and I have many fond memories.

We had many great neighbours in Emmet Street. Miss Roe, next door, also owned the jewellers across the street. She was very accommodating on the many times when we needed to retrieve a football. On the other side we were always in and out of Purcell's house. For a time, we had the Garda Station directly across the road whilst the barracks was being built in Emmet Square.

My education was provided by The Presentation Brothers. I believe my year was the last to pass through the National School to be educated from start to finish by the Brothers alone. Lay teachers were beginning to outnumber the Brothers by the time I finished in 1973. Apart from one Brother, I have fond respect for them and the high standard of education I received from them.

In last year's Review, my class' Holy Communion photograph was published. Back then we wore short pants. I'm smack in the middle of the front row, with a beautifully scarred left knee. Despite my mother's best attention, I kept falling and cutting the knee before the big day. She nearly killed me when she saw the photograph, as she had instructed me to keep the knee out of the frame and not to ruin it!

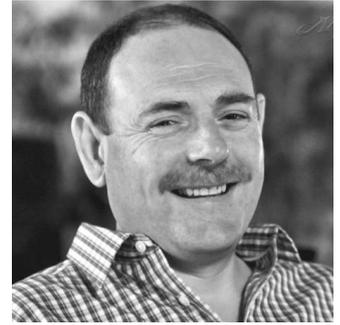
Sport was a big part of my childhood. I tried as many as possible. Rugby was, and still is, my favourite. I was introduced to rugby by Willie Burns, who went on to play for Leinster. We used to change behind the ESSO Service Station opposite St. Brendan's Park after school and then we trained in the half-light during the winter. I really enjoyed it. We had a great team and won most of our games, losing two Leinster Finals in my time. Gerry Lewis was a great coach to us.

In particular, I remember travelling to play Blackrock in Dublin. The pitch was like a lake but we won comfortably by 8 tries to nil and missed all 8 conversions. We also travelled to play Navan in January 1973 and afterwards travelled on to Lansdowne Road to see Ireland play the All-Blacks. This was to prove to be Ireland's best ever result against the All-Blacks, a 10-10 draw. I have vivid memories of a great day, including travelling through a tree-lined village called Blanchardstown. Little did I know that, seven years later, I would be living and working there.

Hurling was the number one sport in school, particularly in PBC. Brother Denis was a great influence in raising the standards to All-Ireland level. Many of the lads in the college whilst I was there went on to win All-Ireland Senior Hurling medals with Offaly. Brother Denis was also a great teacher.

Summer consisted of trips to swim in the Camcor at Sandymount on sunny days. I loved to roll down the grassy hill there on my way down to the river. The Wilmer Tennis

Club was a great place to play, my parents were great stalwarts there. With a few jumpers and a ball we played soccer up on the grassy section on Oxmantown Mall. We had no Nintendos or day-time TV to detain us from being out and about enjoying ourselves in the company of friends.



When the fire siren sounded, we converged on the Town Hall to watch the Fire Tender leave with the volunteer firemen. "Where's the fire? Where's the fire?" we cried. Usually, to our immense disappointment, it was the bog on fire. When there was a chimney fire we scrambled on our bikes after the tender to survey the "inferno", however, we were always disappointed at the lack of drama at the scene, a feeling not shared by the unfortunate homeowners.

A bicycle was a great asset for getting about and also provided me with my first job as a paper boy, delivering the morning newspaper all over town before school. As we got older, we ventured further afield and took regular trips to Banagher to visit schoolmates out there and swim in the Shannon. In those days, Birr was a great draw for lads from the Banagher/Lusmagh area who wanted to study for their Leaving Certificate so we got to make great friends with the likes of Brian Hogan, Declan Fogarty, Jim Troy, Eoghan O'Riordan, Gerry Duffy and many others.

Vintage Week was a great time in Birr and, given the town's history, heritage and architecture, Vintage Week was the ideal concept as a Festival. It has stood the test of time. I particularly loved the homage to that great BBC TV programme, "The Good Old Days", in the Oxmantown Hall with Tommy Lyndon in the Leonard Sachs role. In 1979, I was part of a segment which did a Percy French medley in the show.

Subsequently, we went on to showcase this segment in the annual AIMS competition, reaching the All-Ireland Finals at Leisureland in Salthill. That was one fun journey, with young and old involved. It was a pleasure to be on the same stage as my Dad during this period. He had devoted so much time to the dramatic and musical societies in Birr. When we moved to Boyle in Co. Roscommon, he was instrumental in reviving the musical society there, starring in a number of roles before he died in 1986. The Society there is still going strong.

I began my piano music lessons with Mother Genevieve in the convent. She was a patient and calming teacher. Ultimately, Mrs. Bergin in Emmet Street became my music teacher and got me to Grade 4. She was a super teacher and always made you feel better than you were. There is

no one more surprised than me that I made it to Grade IV. I was the great pretender.

If I was asked now, I couldn't play the piano to save my life. I was unable to read music, so I learned the pieces off by heart and knew vaguely where they were on the sheet music and fooled the Examiners into believing that I knew what I was doing. I still don't know how I managed the Aural and Scales elements of the Exams. After scraping Grade IV I knew the game was up. My father, on the other hand, could hammer out a tune on the piano without any formal training as he had an ear for music, which my son Niall inherited.

Whatever about letting down my mother when it came to piano exams, as she funded my lessons I felt a deep moral obligation that I could also not let Mrs. Bergin down. On Exam Day, she suffered through every exam with all her pupils. Her rosary beads went into overdrive. She was more nervous than her pupils and I loved her for it.

Birr had many great amenities for a young lad. The Boy Scouts, the swimming pool, Birr Town FC and the Community Games provided me with lots of entertainment, along with all the other great sporting clubs I joined. Looking back, we had a great childhood in Birr and I have great memories. I do hope it's still the same.

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A BIRD NEVER FLEW ON ONE WING! – THE PICTURES OF KATIE FARRELL

Katie Farrell is the daughter of Mick and Eileen Farrell, who formerly ran Farrell Electric in Main Street, Birr. From an early age she was interested in photography and even remembers, as a child, making her first imaginary camera out of stickle bricks. She was a keen artist as a schoolgirl in Mercy Primary school and later in St. Brendan's Community School and it seemed a natural progression that she should express her talent for perspective through the medium of photography. Katie has left her life in Birr behind her for some years now but the themes and tones of the town she grew up in remain with her still. Nowhere is this more obvious than in her series of photographs depicting the clientele of Nolan's Public house in Connaught Street. In these photos, she manages to find a subtle distinction and elegance where others would cast only a passing glance. The stills have a uniquely Irish flavour and capture the essence and spirit of the Irish pub and its patrons as it was in most small towns and happily still is in Nolan's of Connaught Street. Katie has been commissioned for documentary and commercial work, including weddings, portraits, corporate and entertainment shoots. You can visit her website at www.katiefarrellphotography.blogspot.com and the full Nolan's Pub posting can be viewed at <http://katiefarrellphotography.blogspot.com/2011/05/mammy-nowlans.html>.



Paddy Kirwan



Frankie Donnelly



Dan Hanlon



Chris Hoare



Looking Straight Ahead.

(L to R): Mick Flanagan, Dan Hanlon, Chris Hoare, Eamon Sutton, Frankie Donnelly, Paddy Kirwan.

A PROUD MOMENT



Birr jeweller, Cathal Barber (left), had the proudest moment of his jewellery career when he was commissioned to make a piece of jewellery for US First Lady, Michelle Obama, as a memento of her trip to Ireland in 2011. Offaly County Council commissioned Cathal to make

the piece — at nine days notice. “I can assure you there were a lot of late nights!” he confirms.

The one-off piece, a pendant, (picture far right), was designed by architect Rachel McKenna, who came up with the idea of using the flower from the Offaly Coat of Arms, *Andromeda Polifolia* or Bog Rosemary. Two open flowers and two buds represent the Obama family. They sit on a leaf fashioned from highly-polished silver. The flower

representing the First Lady is completed in 18ct gold with a secret diamond.

Cathal says he is delighted with the final piece “It was perfect. I just hope Michelle Obama’s stylist tells her to wear it on St. Patrick’s Day!” he jokes.



Based in Birr, Cathal is the fourth generation in R.J. Barber & Sons, which was established 120 years ago.

Since the historic visit, Cathal says the reaction from the public has been great for business. “In the midst of the downturn, the publicity of this has been a great boost. Sales

of my own range have gone right up. A lot of people have commissioned me to create personal one-off pieces for them, which is great.”



Enjoying the South Offaly Ploughing Championships held in Boherdeel, Crinkill in February, 2011 are Marty Bannon (left) and Fr. Michael Reddan.

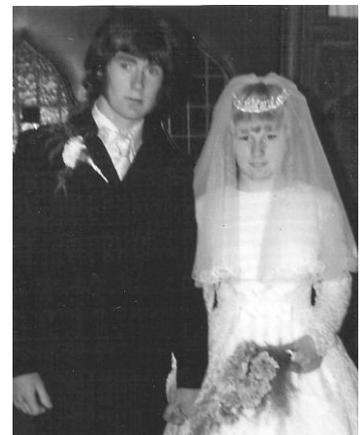


Ringling the Eucharistic Congress Bell in St. Brendan’s church in October, 2011 are Eithne and Kieran Garahy.



How many men does it take to start the engine?

Waiting for the Vintage Parade, 2011 to start are (L to R): Mick Verney, Tommy Bennett, Stevie Grant, Billy Scully, Seanie Porter and Donie Porter.



Congratulations to Michael Lucas (Banagher) and Alice Cahill (New Road, Birr) who celebrated their Ruby Wedding Anniversary this year.

WORLD SCOUT JAMBOREE - 2011

By Jamie Doonan

My journey started in the car park at Dublin airport at 2.30 p.m. on the 27th August, where my friend, Nathan Young, and I met up with our contingent troop. There were two of us going from Birr, to the 22nd World Scout Jamboree (WSJ), which took place on the fields of Rinkaby, not far from the city of Kristianstad in southern Sweden, from July 27 to August 7. As almost 800 scouts from every county in Ireland were travelling, we were divided into troops. All the troops were named after native Irish trees and the Irish hosted a gathering place at the Jamboree called An Crann. The name of our troop was the Feoras Troop and we had scouts from Offaly, Tipperary, Wexford, Kilkenny, Carlow and Waterford. In total, there were 17 troops in the Irish contingent.

This was the largest Irish contingent ever to attend a World Scout event. It took three days to get all 800 of us out to Rinkaby, which in itself was no mean feat.

It was a lovely sunny day when we left Ireland, unlike the previous few weeks of rain and little did we know that it was to be the last nice day for a week. At 3.00 p.m., once everyone had arrived and were accounted for, we all headed over to Terminal 1 to check in. We flew over to Sweden with SAS and the journey was enjoyable and exciting, with anticipation of what we would experience when we arrived.

We arrived in Copenhagen at 10.00 p.m. local time and met up with some of the Portuguese scouts waiting for the bus to take us to Rinkaby. Finally, at 11.30 p.m. we departed for the WSJ campsite. When we finally arrived in the dark at the campsite, it was 1.50 a.m. in the morning. We still had to register, find our camping pitch and then get something to eat before setting up our tents to get some sleep. The campsite was divided into four towns: Summer, Autumn, Winter and Spring, with the main square being aptly named Four Seasons Square. The Feoras troop was staying in the Summer Village. So, after a nice meal of soup and bread in the Irish House, we made our way back to our allotted pitch, pitched our tents and tried to get some sleep. Although at 4.00 a.m. in the morning, it was very bright. The days are longer in Sweden and nights shorter during the summer months, maybe that's why they made us bring sleeping masks with us!

The following day was the day of the Official Opening Ceremony. This was held in the main square. It was a magnificent spectacular, with loads of special guests from around the world, including the King and Queen of Sweden (the King of Sweden is also the chief scout of Sweden) and, for me, more importantly, Bear Grylls (also the chief scout of the UK), who abseiled down onto the stage. The King of Sweden spent a lot of time over the next two weeks at the campsite as he is an ex-scout and a big scouting fan. The Chief Scouts from all over the world



Jamie, second left in back row, with his friends from England, Scotland and the Lebanon

attended the World Jamboree and we were very proud to receive our own Chief Scout, Michael Shinnick, to our camp. There were hundreds of stimulating, fun, inclusive, modern, quality activities, focused on discovering new cultures, the environment, sustainable development, global development issues, respect for oneself and for others, health, community development, peace and much, much more! The Irish contribution to the activities was the Quest module. It was a very big obstacle course, made only from wood and rope, no nails, no screws or anything else. This turned out to be a favourite with all the scouts at the Jamboree.

During the Jamboree, we all took part in a camp-in-camp, where our troops went off to camp with other troops from different parts of the world and experience the real Sweden. This is where I made two new friends, George from the Lebanon and Mark from Manchester in the UK. I am still in touch with them today and we hope to meet up again next year, if possible.

There were lots of food houses scattered throughout the campsite but one of the most visited ones was the Irish house. Anytime you wanted to go there for a bit of craic or food, you had to wait in a very long queue, which was nearly going out the door! The hospitality of the Irish was talked about throughout the campsite. The Irish contingent organised a flash mob dance in the main square, so you can imagine nearly 800 Irish scouts slowly forming and doing their best at a good old Irish jig.

The Swedish did a great job on making us feel so much at home, by even providing us with rain for the first week of the Jamboree. I was grateful for the sunshine when we had our lake challenge to do and went canoeing during our camp-in-camp.

The whole experience was amazing. We met people from other countries, other religions, other cultures and everyone accepted and respected each other. One of the things that make the Scout World Jamborees so special is the swapping of scouting memorabilia. Scouts from all over the world would give anything to get hold of the Irish



neckerchief. I kept my last one, as it will be something to remind me for years to come just how special this whole trip was. I came back

home with loads of pieces of scouting memorabilia from all over the world. One of the special ones is the neckerchief given to me by the Chief Scout from Nepal, as there were only seven scouts from Nepal on the Jamboree.

The closing ceremony was another amazing spectacle and the fireworks were really something I have never seen before. Then we went to Kristianstad, where we stayed for four days visiting and seeing the real Sweden. Unfortunately, our time had come to go back home to

Ireland. There were tears of joy to see our relatives waiting in the arrivals hall and tears of sadness to say goodbye to all our friends from the Feoras troop. We are meeting for a re-union in November, so it will be nice to meet up again and share our stories and have some fun in the Slieve Blooms once again.

The next WSJ is being held in 2015 in Japan and I can't wait!! I have wonderful memories and wonderful friends from the experience. I have to say a big Thank You to the leaders of my local 3rd Offaly Scout Troop in Birr, Mary Hayes, Padraic Connaughton, Sean Egan and we cannot forget 'Mr. Scouting Birr', Jack Ryan. None of this would have been possible if these people did not give up their free time to coach and lead us in Scouting.

LOCAL VOLUNTEERS PRODUCE INFORMATION DIRECTORY

In June, households in Birr and South Offaly received a free copy of a new information directory that had been produced by a group of volunteers from the area. The directory, which contains information on a range of local services and supports, has proven a useful resource to all people living in the area. The need for the directory was identified in 2010 as part of a local initiative involving the communities in the area, Birr Primary Care Team, HSE, Offaly Community Forum and Offaly Local Development Company. The group of volunteers - representing different areas in Birr and South Offaly - was supported by these agencies to bring the project to fruition.

The 43-page directory contains a brief description of relevant services as well as phone numbers, e-mail and website addresses, with a range of national freephone and low-call numbers included, allowing for ease of access

to the services listed. Many of the services listed are located in Birr, Roscrea and Tullamore, while a number of regional and national services are also listed, where appropriate.

The publication outlines supports relating to Education, Employment, Young People, Childcare, Parenting, Older People, Business, Health, Environment, Disability, Farming, Welfare and much more.

The distribution of the directory was predominantly undertaken by a huge effort on the part of volunteers throughout Birr and South Offaly, ensuring that as many households as possible received a copy of the publication.

Additional copies are available in local shops in the area. The directory can also be downloaded at www.offalyldc.ie or, to request a copy please contact Offaly Local Development Company on 057 9151 622.



Volunteers who produced the Birr & South Offaly Information Directory.

Back Row (L to R): Steve O'Donohue, Peter Ormond, John Carroll, Marguerite Walsh, Ronan Clarke, Tony McLoughlin.

Front Row: Bernie Fanneran, Julia Bergin, Sean Cooke, Concepta Cooke.

PARISH SPORTS STARS AWARDS

The first ever Birr Parish Sports Awards, organised by Birr Chamber of Commerce, were presented at a Presentation Night in the County Arms Hotel, Birr on Friday 4th November 2011. Sports clubs in the parish were asked to nominate 3 people for Sportsperson of the Year as well as someone for Club Person of the Year Award. Before the winners for each club were announced a short video, produced by the Hello Camera crew, outlining the history of the club as well as footage of the 3 nominees was shown. The MCs for the evening were John Irwin and Anne Coughlan. The adjudication panel included, John O'Callaghan, Midland Tribune, Alan Walsh, Offaly Express and Will O'Callaghan, Midlands Radio. Peter Dooley, a member of Birr Rugby club was named overall Sports Star of the Year; Dermot Sullivan of Carrig & Riverstown GAA was declared Club Person of the Year. Willie Burns was inducted into the Hall of Fame. Fourteen other awards were presented to representatives of different local clubs. These included the following with the award sponsor in brackets:

Birr & District Motor Club: Pat Horan (*Romaquip*)
Birr Camogie Club: Arlene Watkins (*Fleury Insurances*)

Birr GAA Footballer: Stephen Lonergan (Brian Whelahan's)
Birr GAA Hurler: Brian Mullins (R. J. Barber & Sons)
Birr Golf Club: Billy Donlon (Pharmacy Plus)
Birr Rugby Club: Peter Dooley (Emma's Café)
Birr Town Soccer Club: Alan Corboy (Sportswear Direct)
Crinkill Handball Club: Michael O'Brien (Ryan & Associates Chartered Accountants)
Crinkill GAA Club: David McEvoy (Milne Foods)
Carrig & Riverstown GAA Club: Michael Kennedy (Buckley's SuperValu)
Eagles Soccer Club: Irek Ubowski (Macari's)
Highfield United Soccer Club: Brendan Gallagher (Costcutter)
South Offaly Special Olympics: Damien Breslin.
 Merit Awards – Christopher Ryan & Marion Horan . (Butler's Pharmacy)
Wolfrap Cycling Club: Thomas Fallon (Haines of Birr)
Overall Sports Star: Peter Dooley (My Tee Print & Embroidery)
Club Person of the Year: Dermot Sullivan (Birr Lions Club)
Hall of Fame: Willie Burns (County Arms Hotel)



L to R: Kieran O'Callaghan, Adjudicator, Martin Kearns, President, Birr Chamber of Commerce, Willie Burns, Hall of Fame, Peter Dooley, Overall Sports Star of the Year, Dermot Sullivan, Club Person of the Year.



Pictured above are, left to right, Olivia James, Hello Camera, Gary Hctor, Hello Camera, John Irwin, MC, Lauren Hatchard, Hello Camera and Anne Coughlan, MC.



The Awards Organising Committee
 (L to R): Martin McCarthy, Kevin Mahon, Adrian Haines, Barry Loughnane, David O'Meara, Paul Barber.



David McEvoy, winner of the Crinkill GAA Club Award was presented with his award by Declan Milne of Milne Foods.

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CHINA – A LASTING IMPRESSION

By David Baker

My family and I took the opportunity to visit China as my daughter Lyndsay is on Erasmus from UCD studying Chinese and business in colleges in Beijing and Shanghai. My first visit to China has left a deep impression.

China is a country of many contradictions. It has city skylines that can easily compete with New York or London. It has space missions, Maglev trains, sophisticated computer engineering and giant industry. Despite all this, its GDP is \$8.75 trillion or \$6,600 per head, which would suggest a low income for many.

I knew that a visit to China, and especially rural China would bring me back out of my comfort zone but it would also show our teenage children a different culture away from what we have had here in Ireland especially during the Celtic boom years.

Our journey to China began in mid-October. My wife, Tory, and I arrived from New Zealand, via Australia and Singapore to meet our children, Lauren and Jack, who had flown from Ireland. We all met Lyndsay in Beijing, where she had been for 6 weeks at that stage. We landed in Beijing (population 110 million) late at night, the smog was particularly bad and the haze met us as we walked up the walk-way off the airplane as a door to the outside was opened. We hired a taxi to bring us to our accommodation. Communication with taxi drivers was continually difficult throughout our visit. I couldn't tell him where I wanted to go and, as the maps were often in Chinese I didn't know where I wanted to go myself anyway. Beijing is a huge city and is 120 km. east to west.

As we decided to go low budget accommodation (our beds did not exceed €6/head per night, except for our last two nights when we spent €35 euro per head), we chose from the Lonely Planet travel book. Our first hostel was in a Hutong in Beijing. These are alleys formed by lines of traditional courtyard residences. Hutongs up to 10 years ago covered the inner cities of China but, since the boom these have been largely destroyed and the inhabitants moved to high-rise accommodation in the suburbs. A whole life exists here and food/retail/repairs/services all done on a primitive scale are carried out within. Some are being retained and we did see houses being built within Hutongs, where Bamboo scaffolding, up three stories, was being used. Our health and safety boys would have a field day. To purchase bottled water, a pack of biscuits, a bunch of bananas, and 2 bars of chocolate costs less than €1. The hostel was basic, with hard beds, normal for China, clean sheets and shower and internet facilities. Our kids were disappointed to notice that Facebook was not available in China, presumably as it would distort teenagers' views. Jack also was surprised to notice no teenagers holding hands or showing attention to the opposite sex; this apparently is forbidden.



David, with his wife Tory and three children, Lyndsay, Lauren and Jack.

We visited 'The Forgotten City' and Ming Tombs, where emperors were buried underground in vast tombs built by thousands of people who were then killed to protect the location. We visited the 'Summer Palace' and 'Tiananmen Square'. A day tour took us to the Great Wall of China. We climbed by steps and then walked three kilometres on top of the wall and slid down on a toboggan in a stainless steel chute at great speeds and fun, an example of how the Chinese can do Disney too!

We flew four times within China at reasonable cost, firstly to visit the Terracotta warriors in Xian, moulded from clay and put in place close to the buried emperor to protect him, all buried thirty metres underground.

We visited The Giant Panda breeding station in Chengdu, Sichuan province, where great efforts are being made to protect the Panda, as only 2,000 are in existence worldwide. Captive breeding and artificial insemination are helping numbers increase. The sight of nine 3-month old cubs had our family oohing and aahing!!

It seems difficult to escape the hustle and bustle, as their vast population means there is housing and people everywhere but we flew to Guilin just north of Hong Kong, from where we drove for two hours to Xing Ping in a mini taxi. I sat in the front, with my knees half way up the windscreen. However it was a pleasant surprise that the trip for five of us cost €20. Again, we stayed in a nice hostel but our luck ran out and three of us got sick with a 24-hour bug. We had eaten all local foods until this point. As a major critic of how over-the-top we in Ireland are on food safety, I still feel we could let 90% of our food inspectors go to China and both countries would be better off. Open sewers and poor sanitary conditions are a feature, but especially noticeable in small towns such as Xing Ping.

In the early mornings, locals go to the street markets where all fresh produce is laid out on the road and the housewife purchases their daily requirements. Whole fowl and fish

are chopped up and all parts are eaten, including heads and feet. I did eat what I thought was a ducks drumstick in a poorly-lit restaurant but the family laughed when telling me it was a duck's head and I was holding its beak! It is also noticeable that every inch of spare land is used to grow corn or rice and all crops are very well cared for. A feature of the area are the rice terrace fields, a spectacular view of very steep mountains perfectly contoured to allow irrigation flow gradually down in a spiral to nourish the growing rice plants. There is a stunning river boat ride on the Li River showing off the limestone, sharp peaked mountains. Locals can be seen leading water buffalo to the river edge to graze the vegetation that lies two feet under water.

We finished our journey in Shanghai. It has a lot of very western features (which was a relief for me) and is the business centre of China. All the leading retail brands, as well as several Porsche and Mercedes show-rooms, are evident. Five-star hotels abound. For a communist country,

inequality is apparently amongst the most extreme in the world and the urban middle class seems to be growing rapidly. Some people predict a property crash but the government has tried to cool property prices by preventing people speculating on second houses by establishing house ownership registers, insisting banks demand a higher down-payment before loans are sanctioned and increasing interest rates on home loans. It is a big worry that young couples with good jobs were being priced out of the market.

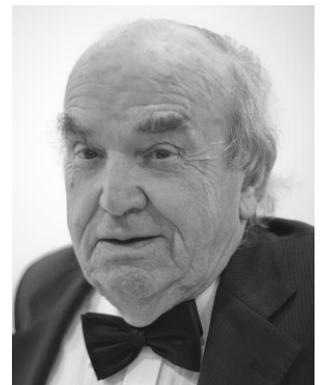
We skimmed around China, so it would be unfair for me to judge but what I saw made me realise again how uneducated I am about other cultures, how lucky I am to have the comforts we enjoy, that we enjoy a clean environment in Ireland, which we must protect. Busy markets, jam-packed underground trains and zigzag traffic travelling at great speeds with horns blowing makes me realise that milking cows from good green grass around Birr Castle is a good place to be.

MEMORIES

By Frank McNamara

The Devil makes work for idle hands', my late mother would quote after she had just extricated me from my latest teenage scrape. This truism was never more apposite than on the occasion of my visit to West Cork back in the middle of the last century. Some years previously I had been elected secretary of the Offaly Agricultural Show Society, with responsibility for organising the annual Birr Agricultural Show. The chairman of that committee was the late Willie Joe Kinsella, RIP. Willie was on the national panel of Shorthorn judges and his services were in great demand at agricultural shows all over Ireland. Willie arrived at my hall door one Friday morning. He was to judge the Shorthorn section at the Clonakilty Show on Saturday and his fellow judge from Athlone had just rung to say he was unable to travel. Willie wanted to know would I go as judge in his place. Now, Willie knew that I would not know the difference between a Kerry Blue and a Hereford, never mind a Shorthorn, but he assured me he would do the judging and all I would have to do was mark the catalogue and hand out the rosettes as he decided. No problem, and off I went to O'Mearas to get myself kitted out with wellingtons, a long coat and, of course, a cap. Satisfied that I looked suitably judgmental, I joined Willie and we set off for Clonakilty, arriving safely, late of Friday evening, having successfully ignored every traffic light in Limerick and Cork cities. The Show committee in Clonakilty was very welcoming and hospitable and we were up early on Saturday morning. After breakfast, we repaired to the showground, where we collected our judges badges, catalogues and rosettes. Our ring was enclosed by a barrier

and soon enough Willie was in full mode doing his judging while I contented myself with trying to look intelligent, while lifting up cow's tails and inspecting their nether regions whilst holding my nose. Tiring of this, onerous task I leaned up against a barrier when I was approached by two of the exhibitors. 'Excuse us, sir', they said 'but would you



Frank McNamara

mind explaining why you are after giving our little calf third prize in her class. We took our calf to the Fermoy Show, to Bantry Show, to Bandon Show and even to Limerick Show and everywhere we went she was awarded first prize but ye are only after giving her third prize. Why?' Now I have kicked more balls to touch in my time than Paul O'Connell so I told my friends that they should query the Senior Judge. I called Willie over and he listened intently to the two Cork gentlemen. They repeated their rant, 'we took our little calf to the Fermoy Show, to Bantry Show, to Bandon Show and to Limerick Show and she won first prize everywhere but you only gave her third prize. Why?' Willie looked at the two lads and, after a pause of about ten seconds, he took the pipe out of his mouth and, in very solemn tones, informed them, 'lads, your little calf, she's worn out from all the travelling' and that, my friends, is the last time I was in Clonakilty!

1911 IN THE LOCAL PAPERS

By Tony Hogan

Hurling in Birr

Kilcormac v Coolderry in September. Everybody knew that Kilcormac would go pretty close to victory in the match with Coolderry in Birr on Sunday, but very few thought that the latter would be so highly pressed. It is not often that one has the pleasure of witnessing such an interesting match between local hurlers as that of Sunday last.

The play opened brilliantly and looked as if it was going to be lively from the start, which was not long made when Kilcormac scored a goal. There was no loss of time and no wavering in this game – the ball was kept rolling and at a rate that it seldom rolled before in these parts.

Coolderry notched a point and got a lead with a major shortly after. They kept the ball in the Kilcormac quarter, and there the play remained for a considerable time – much longer than the results showed, for the defence was good. But there was no real force at this point of the game, and it was only when an unexpected spurt by the Coolderry players that the leather went through – another goal for Coolderry.

At half-time the score was Coolderry 2 - 1 : Kilcormac 1 - 0. The next half of the game was lively and a spell of all-round good play ended in a goal for Coolderry; when the game became hot and fast again. This time the Coolderry posts were being stormed. Kilcormac then added a goal and for some time their opponents were kept on the alert or more would have followed. An interval of very neat play, in which the dexterity of both teams was much admired, followed. Kilcormac played splendidly and a good sporting spirit was maintained.

Kilcormac scored two goals near the end when the excitement became intense and the game went on amid shouts of encouragement and continued cheering. The final score was Coolderry 4-3 and Kilcormac 4-1. (*Midland Tribune*.)

Lenten Pastoral

In his Lenten pastoral letter, Bishop Michael Fogarty wrote on the life of St. Flannan, patron saint of the diocese of Killaloe.

In a long letter he noted that there was a time when the name of St. Flannan was a dear and household word in every home in Thomond.

‘Our forefathers venerated his memory for centuries with the greatest devotion. The children were named after him in Baptism and to him as their loving and powerful intercessor they were wont to have recourse in their hours of greatest sorrow, danger and temptation but now to our shame and, I fear, to our loss, all this is unhappily forgotten as much as I fear few amongst of us know of this illustrious prince and bishop. It is my kindest and most ardent desire to see devotion

to St. Flannan established in the hearts of St. Flannan’s spiritual children.

His life as Bishop was one what you might expect from one so saintly – a life of transcending holiness, incessant labour, preaching and prayer. He was invaluable, we are told, as a peacemaker, not only in Thomond but overall Munster – a work for which he was highly qualified because of his royal descent, his great charity and eloquence.’ (*Midland Tribune*).

Visit of Hon. Geoffrey and Mrs. Parsons.

‘The Hon. Geoffrey and Mrs. Parsons, recently married, are at present visiting the Earl and Countess of Rosse at Birr Castle; and as the people of Parsonstown have truly evinced a truly Irish regard for the noble family, it is our province as local chroniclers to say it affords genuine pleasure to learn that the distinguished visitors have made a first rate impression. The young bridegroom looks in robust condition and the bride is a charming young lady.

Accompanied by Lord and Lady Rosse, they paid an inspection look at his lordship’s Manor Saw Mills where the busy hum of the machinery and the sight of the hands at the benches denote the circulation of wages and its good effect in his own town. Mr. Parsons is associated with his uncle of Turbine fame in the North of England and though a young man, he has travelled over three continents in the pursuit of the firm’s affairs.’ (*King’s County Chronicle*).

Crinkill Pump: ‘a serious affair’

A serious discussion took place at the District Council meeting relative to an ineffective Crinkill pump. The Assistant Clerk said that £80 was originally struck for the sinking of the pump which work was carried out by the Artesian system; but before it was finished it was calculated that the work would cost £250. The clerk said that it was breaking the council and the cost would fall on a very small area and it would cripple the Council. A Mr. Langley said that the people of the area were all poor people of the labouring class. The Council would have to draw down a loan which would send a lot of the unfortunate people into the workhouse. Another member said he had inspected the pump and it gave only a bucket of water in 15 minutes. (*Midland Tribune*).

Taken from the 1911 microfilm files of the *Midland Tribune* and the *King’s County Chronicle*.

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9

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METHODIST CHURCH, BIRR

For much of the year, the Church calendar dictates what's going on. December: cake sale and Christmas services. January: Christian Unity. February has a World Mission focus; Lent and Easter follow, while June always brings the Annual Conference at which changes in 'stationing' are approved. Some churches then receive new ministers in July. Summer holidays are followed by Harvest festivals; November focuses on mission at home. All of this is predictable.

But occasionally we get a few surprises. One such this year was the invitation to our Birr church to find about a dozen people to attend the Garden Party at Áras an Uachtaráin on July 12.



Pictured at the Garden Party in Áras an Uachtaráin

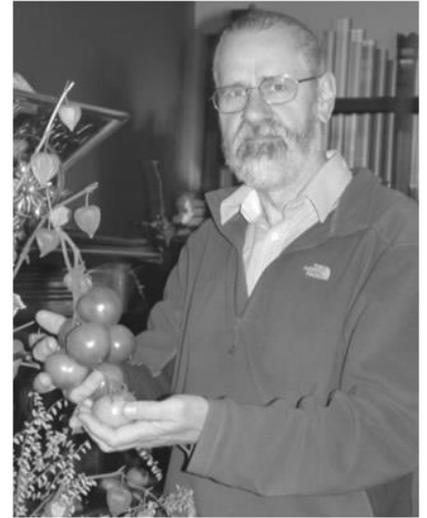
L-R: Phyllis Gee, Ida Coghlan, Elisabeth Guest, Hannah Gill, Robert Gill, Kathleen Bailey, Rosemary Lindsay, Arthur Guest, Jude Lindsay, Stephanie Lindsay.

The Twelfth was one of the few brilliantly sunny days this summer! The guests were able to see the gardens at their best, as they mingled with about 400 others from both sides of the Border, and there was plenty of elegant finger food, as well as music, a tour of the State rooms and a little take-home box of chocolates.



Foreground: Richard Bailey, Rosemary Lindsay, Kathleen Bailey and Jennifer Bailey in the Manse.

Less obliging was the weather for another party a few days later, when 50 people were obliged to squash into Birr Manse rather than spreading out around the garden as planned! But those who came to lunch sashayed good-humouredly around each other and did justice to the work of the chef, brought down from Dublin especially for the occasion. (Well... he is Rosemary's son, who works with computers and enjoys cooking in his spare time!)



Rev. John Parkin inspecting the Harvest decorations!

It was our pleasure to welcome a former minister, Rev. John Parkin, back to our Harvest Thanksgiving in October. John, who is now serving in Waterford, was glad to see a lot of faces he remembered from his time here – at least 15 years ago – and to meet some who weren't even born then! A less happy aspect of the year has been the loss of one of our most loving members, Joan Coghlan. Everyone has some story to tell of how Joan blessed their lives. Anyone who came in to the Cake Sales will remember her smiling face at the fancy goods counter and many will have bought her home-made cards there. Joan passed Home to God at the end of May, after three major operations, and is sadly missed. Our deepest sympathy goes to her mother, Ida, father, Fred and brother, Brian.

We were also sorry to lose a faithful friend of our church, Elizabeth Lucey. Mrs. Lucey never abandoned her Presbyterian roots but happily supported the Methodist community after the closure of Birr Presbyterian church. She was much appreciated by us all. We said goodbye to her in a joint Methodist/Presbyterian ceremony on what would have been her 95th birthday, and we offer our deep sympathy to William, John, Lorraine, Jimmy and Fiona.

Another loss to our community has been that of Bennie Abbott, whose marriage to Leah has taken him up north to live. Bennie was a tireless worker, whose presence and input we greatly miss, but we wish him every happiness in his new life.

ST. BRENDAN'S CHURCH OF IRELAND

Greetings from the Church of Ireland congregation in Birr, as we reflect on a busy year since we last went to press at the end of 2010.

The year 2010 ended on a sad note, with the death on the 4th of December of Willie Fitzgerald, husband of Helen. And then, on the 19th of December, Ina Alexander passed away, mother of Sandra, Sammy, Norman, Richard, and Georgina. Our sincere sympathies to both families as the anniversaries of those losses come near. Sympathies as well to Mrs. Millie Bruce and her family, on the death of her brother-in-law, Mr. Reggie Bridge, in England. His ashes were interred in Clonohill Cemetery on the 27th of July.

After our usual busy Christmas season, we began the long lead-up to the unusually late Easter season. We had a Lenten programme in the Church on Wednesday nights, culminating in a joint Holy Communion service with the Methodist congregation on Maundy Thursday, celebrated by the Revd Rosemary Lindsay.

Our annual Summer Fête took place at the Rectory grounds in June and brought the usual combination of fun, fellowship and fund-raising. Our Flower Festival, which was held during Vintage Week in August, was a great success. Entitled "Birr, Our Heritage Town", it was in aid of the "Share a Dream" Foundation (which provides holidays and other activities for severely ill children and their families),

as well as parish funds. The opening ceremony featured local musicians and singers, with each performance being given a comprehensive introduction by Dr. Salters Sterling. The flower arrangers, under the watchful eyes of Richard Haslam and Joe Bergin, put on wonderful displays, each one outstanding in its own right. As a prelude to the Flower Festival itself, Richard Haslam led a fabulous Flower Demonstration in May, entitled, "I dreamed a dream."

Willie and Phyllis Wolfe once again organised a Parish Dance in Dooly's Hotel on the 8th of September, in aid of parish funds.

On Saturday, 1st October, Deirdre Walsh and Neil MacLean were married in a wedding celebrated by the Revd Ruth Gill.

Our annual service of Harvest Thanksgiving took place in Birr on the 9th of October. The guest preacher was the Revd Albert Hemenstall from Protestant Aid, who reminded us that Protestant Aid is not about aid to Protestants, but from Protestants to needy people in Ireland from any denomination and none. As 2011 comes to an end, we are preparing for our annual Mission Sunday service, when we will be raising funds for a major project in Swaziland.

May we offer to the people of Birr our best wishes for a joyful and meaningful Christmas season, and a more prosperous and hopeful 2012.

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ST. BRENDAN'S PARISH, BIRR

The year 2011 was a very active one for the Parish of Birr. In January, the Parish Pastoral Council was reconfigured and new committees selected to direct many areas of Parish life. Following elections, Brian Kennedy was elected Chairman of the Pastoral Council and Joan Hogan elected secretary. The new system is evolving gradually to give more power to the lay parishioners over the pastoral and temporal areas of life in the Parish. There are now committees spearheading Liturgy, Building, Finance, Pastoral Planning, Catechises, Communications and Youth. As ten years have passed since the last major renovation of St. Brendan's Church, the Building Committee organised a major architectural survey of the building and this revealed the need for extensive repairs to the exterior stonework of the building. For reasons of health and safety and the preservation of the church, stone-masons were engaged to carry out the necessary pointing and remedial works. Decoration of the interior porches, mortuary, gallery seating and exterior doors was accomplished over the summer period. There was also a major cleaning of the entire Church interior and a new amplification system was installed. Remedial works necessary to the lead valleys were discovered during a survey of the Church fabric and these were accomplished in the early autumn. These works, along with maintenance of the heating system, will hopefully make St. Brendan's Church a fitting place of worship for years to come.



At the Eucharistic Congress Candle lighting ceremony are Willie Smyth, Peggy Dolan and Agnes O'Brien.

Two First Communions were held in St. Brendan's in May for the Mercy P.S., St. Brendan's Boys P.S., Crinkill N.S., Oxmantown N.S. and Killeen N.S. First Communion for the pupils of Carrig N.S. was held in the local Church. Confirmation for 98 students from the Parish schools was celebrated by Bishop Kieran O'Reilly on May 16th. This was bishop Kieran's first major pastoral visit to the Parish. Great credit is due to all involved in preparation of the children for the sacraments.

Celebrations were held in Carrig on May 31st to mark the centenary of the current Carrig N.S., which opened in 1911. Bishop Kieran O'Reilly was Chief Celebrant at Mass in the

Church of the Annunciation. The army band was also in attendance on the day. Mercy P.S. celebrated 170 years of education in 2011. The long awaited extension of Crinkill School commenced during the summer vacation. The launch of the 2012 International Eucharistic Congress, to be held in Dublin, occurred in all Parishes of the Killaloe Diocese at the end of June. In Birr, this was held during the Corpus Christi Procession in the Church grounds. The Congress Bell visited the Birr cluster of parishes on October 17th. Special ceremonies were held in St. Brendan's to mark the occasion.



Bringing the Eucharistic Congress Bell into the church are (L to R): Eugene Sullivan, Mary Long, Gerry Dolan, Teresa Cleary, Adrian Haines

One of the greatest changes in 2011 was the introduction of the 3rd edition of 'The Roman Missal' to all countries in the English speaking world. As the official launch was marked for the first Sunday of Advent, the Liturgy Group, Clergy and Pastoral Council prepared for the gradual introduction of the Missal. This began with the people's responses, then the new postures and finally the Priests' parts of the Mass. It was also a busy time for choirs as they had to learn the new sung responses to the Mass. While change is never easy, the introduction of the new Missal was successfully achieved over a period of time.

The Legion of Mary organised the annual Rosary Rally on October 19th. As usual, this was a very prayerful occasion with participation by students of all our five primary schools. Credit is due to the Legion members for their dedication to this event.

During the year, a new Liturgy Group was formed in Carrig and it is active in preparation of the liturgies there. The Holy Week Ceremonies were their first accomplished task.

On November 5th, the Annual Mass for the deceased of the Parish of Birr (in the last 12 months) was celebrated in St. Brendan's. This has become a very moving and integral part of our Church year.

The Parish Clergy and Pastoral Council wish a very happy Christmas and peaceful 2012 to all 'Birr Review' readers.

To contact the Parish Team or for any information on Birr Parish, please consult our website www.stbrendansbirr.ie or call the Parish Office 057-9122028.

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Middle Row: Kevin Pardy, Dan Harte, Oisín Digan-Sullivan, Killian Massa, Noah Richardson, Charlie Loughnane, Brad McEvoy, Antonio Anspoks, Emil Daly, Barry Tierney.

Front Row: Anthony Croasdell-Dowling, Luke Sheils, Denis Konev, Peter Touhy, Sebastian Lagace, Ruairi Mooney, Keith Hanlon, Conor Gallagher.



6th Class

Back Row (L to R): Abdur Rahman, Patrick McDonagh, Lee Hanlon, Hubert Doyle, Piotr Osinski, Sasha Sernjonovs, Kostas Kocius, Alan Gora, Darrell Lally.

Middle Row: Mr. Michael Carroll (Teacher), Mrs. Mary Roddy (SNA), Declan Burke, Luke Alexander, Ryan Walker, Conor Hynes, Kevin Hutchinson, Lee Hehir, Jordan Morrissey, Niall Lenihan, Joseph Kelly, Mr. Niall Crofton (Principal).

Front Row: Conor O'Meara, Reece Molloy, Kevin Dragon, Conor Saxby, Campbell Boyd, Darragh Coffey, Leon Hogan, Donal Coughlan.

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Front: Katie O'Meara, Aoibhe Brewer, Róisín McIntyre, Leah Emaike, Ellie Cox, Doireann Abbott, Ella Talbot, Ciara McPartlan, Hannah Pardy, Laura Stokes.



6th Class

Back Row (L to R): Katie Sullivan, Ms. R. Treacy (Teacher), Laoise Murray, Tiffany Bennett, Chloe Lally, Tianna McEvoy, Jordan McKenna, Karina Stankute, Jemma Nolan, Abby Woods, Niamh Campbell, Mrs. Barbara Hanamy (Principal).
Front: Eve Masterson, Chloe Buckley, Jessica Fitzgerald, Tanya Kearney, Alice McCarthy, Grace Fanning, Shannon Corrigan, Nicole Williams.



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Middle Row: Maya Fogarty, Emilija Tunylaite, Daniel Finnerty, Callum McGovern Dempsey, Dylan Delaney, Joshua Flanagan, Tara Ashe, Aine Lennon, Molly O'Meara.

Front Row: Eleanor O'Meara, Charlie Chen, Daniel King, Ceileim Hutchinson, Jack Ryan, Max Kinahan, Jack Smyth, Evan McEvoy.



6th Class

Back Row (L to R): Shane Kirwan, Jack Pardy, Michael Milne, Jake Hart, Moya Dickson, Aoibhe Whelahan, Aoife Maher, Johnny Kiely, Conor Fleury.

Middle: Sylwester Paszkowski, Conor Connole, Robert Haines, Jack Carroll, Brandon Beale, Grace Gorman, Chloe McInerney, Hannah Garahy.

Front: Jamie Tsang, Alannah Hehir, Saoirse Hart, Riya Rose Matthew, Doireann Errity, Britney Meehan.

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Infants

Back Row (L to R): Ms. Sinead Parsons, Emmet Watkins, Seán Connaughton, Molly Hogan, Kate Hogan, Eva Reams Quigley, David Guilfoyle, Áine Kennedy, Alana O'Sullivan, Ms. Fidelma Ryan.

Front Row: Caelum Larkin, Grace Watkins, Eva Lynch Murray, Leon Reams, Katelyn Smyth, Aideen Purcell, Eoin King, Brona O'Neill.



6th Class

Back Row (L to R): Mrs. Bríd Connolly (Principal), Rós Connaughton, Sinéad Bergin, Rachael O'Sullivan, Nicola Dolan, Daragh Delahunt.

Front Row: Aoibheann Carty, Ciara O'Rourke, Katie Corrigan, Ebony Hogan, Sophie Parkinson, Stephen Cooke.



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Infants

Back Row (L to R): Mrs. A Hogan, Tony Sampson (Principal), Miss Geraldine Fox (Teacher).

Middle Row: Paul Fogarty, Diarmuid Brennan, Matthew Costello, Oliver Cashen, Timothy O'Neill, Ben Hogan.

Front Row: Brian King, David Leonard, Siofra McDermott, Katie Harding, Alex Gallagher, Roisin Molloy, Erica Fogarty.



6th Class

Back Row (L to R): Tony Sampson (Principal), Ryan Hogan, James Brennan, Cameron Culbert, Brendan Hctor, Mrs. Ita Houlihan.

Front Row: Michelle Maher, Labhaoise McDermott, Emma Cleary, Brid Ryan, Roisin Smyth, Laura Ryan, Ciara Brennan.

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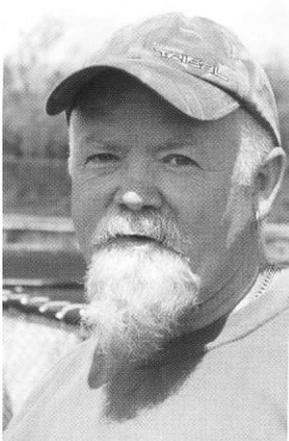
Johnny Kennedy retired from the Maintenance Staff of Birr District Nursing Unit in December 2010. Pictured are Lorraine, Johnny, Helen & Barry Kennedy



Cathal Ely (left), formerly of Main Street, Birr who picked up his 'Student of the Year' Award from Minister Barry Andrews in February 2011. Cathal is studying Sound Engineering & Media Studies at the Institute of Art Design & Technology in Dun Laoighre, Co. Dublin



Congratulations to Paddy and Sheila O'Callaghan, Moorpark Street on the occasion of their 60th Wedding Anniversary, celebrated on 4th June 2011



Congratulations to Paddy Kelly, Drumbane, for the marvellous work he has carried out to help rescue the Grey Partridge from extinction. In 2002 there were under 20 pairs left breeding in the wild. This year there are over 90 pairs. Well done Paddy.



Congratulations to Jack Ryan (left) who received a 'Life Long Service to Scouting Award' from the Chief Scout of Ireland, Michael John Shinnick. Also pictured, is Jack's wife Kathleen.



Gemma Gallagher & Hubert Cooke



Donna Kelly & John Nettleship



Ann Whyte & Eugene Wynne



Mary Murdock & Gerard Quinn



Clodagh Fay & Niall Byrne



Jennifer Bliss & Barry Ryan



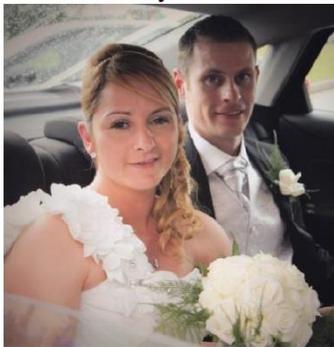
Lorraine Landy & Martin Kearns



Noirin Duggan & Darren Nolan



Caroline Gleeson & Padraic Deane



Ann Nevin & Brian Hynes



Nuala Morris & Trevor Hogan



Remona Nevin & Gary O'Meara



Aisling Bergin & Richie Donnelly



Finula Regan & Barry Whelahan



Michelle Corcoran & Conor Egan



Helen O'Sullivan & Paul Hough



Sandra Kennedy & Garech Doorley



**Sarah Naughton &
John Milner**



**Derval Kirwan &
Emmet Scully**



**Stacey Hogan &
Michael McGrath**



**Susan Kearns &
Marco Izzi**



**Shireen Caisley &
Robert Bennett**



**Barbara Cleary &
Eugene McGeough**



**Shirley Deane &
Peter Dunican**



**Emma Sullivan &
John McBride**



**Annette Ryan &
Brian Gath**



**Siobhan Mullins &
Dermot O'Meara**



**Joan Kelly &
Barry McFadden**



**Karen LaComber &
James Condrón**



**Deirdre Walsh &
Neil MacLean**



**Charlene Kiely &
Martin McDonagh**



**Bridget Kirwan &
Joseph Gleeson**



**Annette Maher &
David Downey**



**Maeve Sullivan &
Alan Kelly**



Jacqueline and Michael Quealy,
Hillside, Birr who were married
on 26th July, 1961 in
Holy Rosary Church, Limerick.



Tom & Louie Hassett from Crinkill
who were married on 12th July
1961 in Kilcolman.



Rody and Catherine Carroll from
Killeen, who were married in
St. Brendan's, Birr on 5th April, 1961.



Tony and Mary McLoughlin,
Main Street who were married in St.
Brendan's, Birr on 7th August, 1961.



Stephen and Dilly Martin from Lacka,
Carrig who were married on 9th August,
1961 in Manister, Croom, Co. Limerick.



Paddy and Chrissie English from Ascot
who were married in St. Brendan's, Birr
on 3rd April, 1961 pictured
with Fr. Vaughan.

BIRR GIRL GUIDES



Enrolment Ceremony at Log Cabin in Mid-1980's

It's 2011 and Girl Guides are 100 years old. The first Boy Scout rally was held in 1909 at The Crystal Palace in London. It attracted 10,000 boys and several hundred un-invited girls. When writing his book, *Scouting for Boys*, Robert Baden-Powell had recognised that girls could make good scouts but was not prepared for the many bands of girls in different variations of the Scout uniform who turned up at Crystal Palace. Baden-Powell himself admitted how well the girls were suited to his scouting programme and lamented he hadn't found time to devise a programme for them. So, Baden-Powell and his sister Agnes set about adapting *Scouting for Boys* for girls and together they wrote *How Girls Can Help to Build up the Empire* (1912). In 1910, Baden-Powell gave the Girl Scouts the name of Girl Guides. A year later, the Baden-Powell Guide movement was started in Ireland. It operated under the umbrella of the UK association and 'Headquarters' was in London. The first Irish company started in Harold's Cross, Dublin in September 1911.

On the 7th of May 2011, the Irish Girl Guides (IGG) held a huge fun day (Bailiu) to celebrate 100 years of changing lives here in Ireland. Over 6,200 girls and Leaders descended on Thurles, Co. Tipperary to join together for a day of exciting activities.

Frances Fitzgerald, T.D., Minister for Children & Youth Affairs, officially opened the day. She said "this is a wonderful, historic, colourful day for you all; it is amazing to see so many young people, young leaders and people who are simply young in spirit! The organisation has an incredible role to play in supporting the young people of this country; helping them to develop to their fullest potential, as they are our greatest natural resource."

During the rest of the day, the girls tried activities such as Drumming, Circus Skills, Dancing, Workshops, along with enjoying large scale inflatables, Helter Skelter, Carousel, giant paint-by-numbers and street entertainers. The excitement of the day was plain to see in the face of every happy girl. To end the day on a high, the girls and leaders

partied to an ABBA tribute band, ABBA-ESQUE. All of the Birr IGG Members attended and had a very busy and enjoyable day.

The Birr Units of Girl Guides, Brownies and Ladybirds had a very busy year celebrating the Centenary. In February, the Girl Guides organised a Thinking Day Ceremony and invited guests to come and help them celebrate.

We all went to Limerick for our region's Centenary Opening Ceremony, which was an afternoon of prayer and song. All IGG members in attendance received a Centenary Candle as a memento. We went to McDonald's as a treat on the way home.

The Girl Guides went camping to Donegal in July. Preparations are well underway now for Camp101. Camp101 is the International Girl Guide Camp, taking place in Lough Key Forest Park in July 2012. We attended a Gang Show and Closing Ceremony in Thurles in November to mark the end of our Centenary Year.

As all of these trips cost money, we had many fund-raisers throughout the year to help reduce the costs on our girls' parents. We wish to thank everyone who supported us. We had a Church Gate Collection in January. We had a bag pack in Tesco in June. We did Carol Singing in Tesco just before Christmas. We sincerely wish to thank Tesco and the Marian Hall Committee for their constant help and support.



Girl Guides, Brownies and Ladybirds on their way to Thurles on 7th May 2011

The Birr Units would like to thank all of the leaders who give their time so generously:

GIRL GUIDES: Linda Dowling

SENIOR BRANCH: Aisling Guinan, Eimear Guinan, Leoni Harte and Kahlia Harte

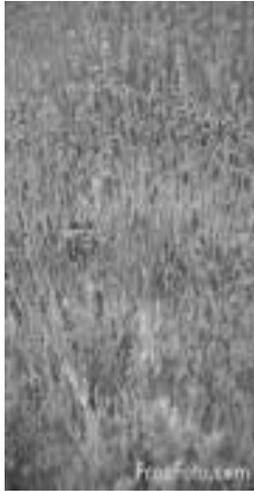
BROWNIES: Joan Hogan and Pauline Bradley

LADYBIRDS: Martina Cooke, Michelle Digan and Niamh Heffernan (Young Leader).

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BIRR MILITARY HISTORY GROUP

While previous tours have been to Turkey, Northern and Southern Italy, this year's trip to Poland was very much a venture into the unknown. Most of our previous tours had an Irish theme but it is difficult to establish a connection between Ireland and the South East of Poland.

Most people associate Polish military history with Poland's dreadfully tragic experiences of the Second World War. However, many major First World War battles were fought in Poland, when Poland as a nation did not exist. It is very possible that the nine members of the Group who spent the first week of September in Poland were the first Irish people to visit WW1 sites in Southern Poland. The trail-blazers were: Joe Breen, Eamon Coonan, Derek Coulter, Billy Gleeson, Martin Horan, Martin Hynes, Val Johnson, John Joyce, and Ger O'Meara.

We arrived in Krakow, on 31st August, spending the next three days there. Krakow, the former capital of Poland, was spared the devastation of the Second World War and is, indeed, a very beautiful city, ably catering for visitors from all over Europe. While Krakow was besieged by Russian troops during the First World War, there appears to be little evidence of that event.

The group spent the following day, at the Auschwitz-Birkenau concentration camp, about an hour's drive outside Krakow. Whilst the Nazi authorities made every effort to destroy the camp as the Second World War was nearing its conclusion, much of the infrastructure remains. Visiting the railway siding, the camp buildings (really sheds), the punishment building, the gas chambers, the crematoria and the various memorials was a sobering experience and gave plenty of cause for reflection. During the early days of the camp, the Nazis took numerous photographs for identification purposes and kept meticulous records. Seeing photographs of fine, fit, young men, whose lifespan for a period of abuse, starvation and overwork was a scant six weeks, was a vivid reminder of the hopelessness endured by the many victims there.

Friday, 2nd September was spent in the nearby Wieliczka Salt Mines. Salt has been mined there since time immemorial and the first shafts were built during the 1280's. The shafts now reach a depth of 327 metres. After flooding in the early 1990's, salt extraction was stopped in 1996. Much of the mine is open to the public, with lakes, galleries, chambers, churches, artworks, statues, mining history and artefacts on view at all levels.

The following day, we entrusted ourselves into what turned out to be the very capable hands of our bus driver Wojtek Hasiar, as we headed into the less developed Eastern part of Poland. A two-hour drive brought us to the town of Gorlice. Gorlice was one end of the Gorlice-Tarnow offensive by the Austrian-Hungarian army, along with their German allies against the Russian army. This ended in a defeat for the Russians, with 140,000 men



**The trail-blazers on top of Fortress in Przemysl.
(L to R): John Joyce, Martin Horan, Val Johnson,
Ger O'Meara, Julian Smuk (guide), Eamon Coonan,
Billy Gleeson, Joe Breen, Derek Coulter.**

taken prisoner. In 1915, Poland did not exist and Gorlice and Tarnow were in Hungary. Polish soldiers fought with all the armies fighting on the Eastern front. During the Second World War, the large Jewish Community in Gorlice was exterminated by the Nazis. Not content with that, the Nazis, converted the local Synagogue to a fire station. They also forced the local Polish population to uproot the headstones in the Jewish Cemetery and use them as flagstones in the fire station. In recent years, the headstones have been transported back to the Cemetery and efforts are in hand to improve its upkeep. A small number of Jews still live in Gorlice.

Next stop was Przemysl, 3 hours drive from Gorlice, where we spent two nights. Literally in the corner of Poland, Przemysl is next to the border with Ukraine. A very large fortress town, then part of Hungary, Przemysl was besieged by the Russians in September 1914, in the very early days of WWI. The siege ended in March 1915, when the garrison surrendered.

Most of the group used the opportunity to pay a short visit into the Ukraine. We walked through the Passport and Customs procedures, which took quite a bit of time. In the Ukraine, we hired a small bus to take us to Mostys'ka, the nearest town. We observed horse-drawn transport, a lot of agricultural work being done manually, and many other scenes reminiscent of the Ireland of our childhood.

Coming back through Polish customs, Derek Coulter was greeted by one official with the immortal phrase, "Conas atá tu"? Travelling through the furthest corner of Poland, it was certainly a big surprise to us all - note previous comment re Irish trail-blazers. Turns out he had spent two years in Ireland as part of the Polish diaspora and seemed to have happy memories of his time here.

Our first visit to Poland gave us an appreciation of the huge scale of the fighting on the Eastern Front – about which most Western military enthusiasts know very little.

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BIRR ORDER OF MALTA



Shane and Damien Harte with a group of children from Crinkill after a First-Aid demonstration.

We are fortunate to have a very active unit of the Order of Malta based in Birr. This unit began in the sixties. It went to great strengths under the leadership of Michael Moloney, when he took over at a later stage, it having faltered slightly for a while. We have the privilege of having many great leaders over the years. Thank you to all of them.

Our unit is presently under the command of John George, who inspires all with leadership and confidence. Most of our present "more mature" members were trained by Mary D'Arcy and her late husband Mattie, RIP. They were both wonderful examples to us all of selfless dedication to the people of Birr and it's hinterland over many years. Indeed, Mary is still available for advice and consultation. And then, of course, we have Mr. Order of Malta himself, Johnny Kennedy, whose steady hand and mind, over many years, guided us through. Where would we be without him and Helen? They have both given of themselves selflessly to the cause over the years.

Our very capable instructor now is Damien Harte, whose patience and knowledge has brought many of our newer members into our fold with confidence and expertise at their fingertips. Indeed, Damien is responsible for a lot of First Responders throughout the country, not just in Birr and its environs. He has the ability to teach with wit in a relaxing environment. A great way to learn.

Louise Murphy is someone who has held many posts within the organisation, from OIC to "patient" for training purposes, to driver, while attending to patients with humour and goodwill.

Thanks to all of these and our present very capable band of workers, our association has gone from strength to strength. 2011 has been a very busy year for the Birr unit. With a very strong emphasis on training we have a number of First Responders and we now have six more in training. Providing ambulances and first aid cover at many local and national events, our training has been put to use several times during the year. As always, we were involved in supporting a wide variety of activities: namely Vintage Week, the Camcor Capers, Street Fair in Green Street, and of course, the Parade itself. Whenever the Blood bank comes to the Marian Hall we support them by organising

ads in local papers, putting up posters in advance and attending during Donor sessions to assist the Blood Bank Staff. Our members give talks on First Aid to local Active Retirement Groups and schools. We also provide First Aid Courses to members of the public. As well as all this we provide First Aid cover to local groups collecting for charity e.g. the Wolftrap Sponsored Cycle, the Threshing Festivals in both Ballyboy and the Blackbull and many tractor runs and cycle runs such as the bicycle race during Vintage Week. We attended 10k and 5k walks in the Slieve Bloom, in aid of Chernobyl Children's Fund. We also provided first aid cover for many racing events such as the Point to Point in Ballygarry, Hunter trials and events at Gurteen. Many of our members provided cover at major events such as Oxygen and the Electric Picnic. We also provide support at many sporting fixtures.

This year the unit organised fund-raising activities such as Pub Quiz, Church gate collection, and raffle at Bingo in the Marian Hall These were as always very well supported by the community in Birr. We are eternally grateful for this support, especially in these recessionary times.

Monies raised from these fund-raisers and from doing duties go towards training members and equipping and maintaining ambulances. We would all like to take this opportunity to say a huge thank you to the people of Birr. Your donations are greatly appreciated, without which help, our unit could not survive.

Between June and the end of August this year almost 700 hours were worked on duties alone, not to mention training and meetings which occur every week. All such work is unpaid. A huge big thank you is due to all our volunteers. We are always looking for new members.

Anyone wishing to avail of our services, including First Aid training or talks or indeed Ambulance / First Aid cover at an event is welcome to contact us at 087 9557394. We look forward to working and serving our community again in 2012



On Duty are (L to R): Shane Harte, Ann Corcoran, Seamus Redmond and John George.

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SAOL ÚR BIORRA-THE SUB PROJECT

The SUB project, which stands for Saol Úr Biorra and translates into New Life in Birr, is a community based and supported, youth development project. It engages young people, aged 12-18, from the Birr area, in a range of positive and constructive activities to facilitate their own personal development and promote civic responsibility.

The SUB is part of a network of Garda Youth Diversion Projects, which are multi-agency, crime-prevention initiatives that seek to divert young people from crime and anti-social behaviour. The project is managed by Foróige, a National youth organisation, and funded by the Irish Youth Justice Service and the European Social Fund and supported by the local community.

The SUB had yet another very busy and successful year. We proudly share our new premises with the local youth café 'The Spot' and are now located on the Main Street in Birr. We have had many highlights over the past year, and must thank all the young people for their participation.

We have had a great soccer season this year with Garda Jamie Donnelly coaching the lads and training them hard! We participated in our Annual Garda Youth Challenge with an 11-a-side soccer team, this time on the big pitch. Unfortunately for SUB, the Garda team was the better team on the day and took the coveted shield with them. We hope to have it back in its rightful place next year!

We are delighted to have had one of the young people accepted onto the Albert Schweitzer's Leadership for Life Programme this year. This programme aims to present meaningful, state-of-the-art youth leadership and mentorship programs to 15-18 year-olds. He was chosen among 250 young people from all over the world and spent five days at NUI Maynooth learning and developing

the skills and qualities of strong leadership.

We participated in the first ever 'Shane Lowry' Golf Tournament, which is a new initiative in conjunction with Offaly Sports Partnership. Our SUB team of three young people, along with five other youth projects, received professional training under the guidance of Donagh McArdle in Tullamore Golf Club, and were further mentored by Seamus Breen in Birr Golf Club. Our team played a great game of Golf during the tournament and came fourth. The lads enjoyed the experience and we hope to enter a new team next year!

We had a busy summer programme this year with a wide range of activities. The SUB went to Lilliput Outdoor Adventure Centre for two days of outdoor pursuits, including bog-hopping, orienteering, canoeing and team building games. We even made it to the Aviva Stadium to watch the Irish rugby team play before they headed off for New Zealand!

The young people have enjoyed many new experiences and have had the opportunity to learn more on a variety of programmes, including Homework Support, Crime Awareness, Road Safety, Drugs & Alcohol Education and Teenage Health. We would like to give a big **THANK YOU** to our leaders, who give their time voluntarily. They include Gardaí Pádraic Connaughton and Jamie Donnelly, Pat McManus and Seamus Breen.

If you would like to find out more about the SUB or would like to volunteer, please do not hesitate to contact the project workers, Hazel, Sophie and Sharon on 086-3845646 or 086-7805243 or drop into us to say "Hello".

Happy Christmas and a prosperous 2012 from all in the SUB Project.



The SUB Soccer Team

Back Row (L to R): Conor Roddy, John McCarthy, Michael McCarthy, Brendan Daly, Frankie Hanlon, Shane Loonam, Barry Hehir, Frankie Touhey, Paddy Kelly, Aaron Flanagan, Daniel Molloy.

Front Row: Ryan Hanlon, James Feeney, Dillon Delaney, Jordan Parsons, Ian Kelly, Michael Spain, Ondrej Turtak.



Photograph taken at the presentation to Peter Grennan on the occasion of his retirement from Birr Town Council on 20th October, 2011.

Back Row (L to R): Michael Deforge, Jackie Cahill, Margaret Burke, Philip Clancy, Siobhan Quinlan, Laura Coffey, Aidan Hogan, Michael Loughnane, Michael Campbell, David Doyle, Roger Smyth, Michael Daly, Willie Ryan, Tom Reilly, Tony Murphy, Pat Sharkey, Denis Sheils.
Front Row: Sarah Delahunt, Paddy Quigley, Margaret Sherlock-Boland, Peter Grennan, Christine Grennan, Eoghan Grennan, Bronagh Grennan, Joseph Cahill, Willie Coffey, Joseph Mannion.

BIRR COMHALTAS ACTIVITIES



The highlight of the year, as far as the members of the local branch of Comhaltas are concerned, was the Annual Set Dance Festival, held over the June Bank Holiday week-end in the Marian Hall. Once again, dancers from various parts of Ireland and abroad attended and were entertained by three of the country's top Ceilí Bands. Instruction for all ages was provided by expert tutors at workshops in Sean Nós and Set Dancing and it was encouraging to see so many young people taking part. The event also featured a Seisiún and BBQ hosted by The Chestnut.

Throughout the winter months, instruction is provided at a weekly Set Dancing Class in The Marian Hall on Thursday nights (8.30 to 10.30), which is proving very popular. New members are always welcome. Also, on the educational side, there is a traditional music class held in The Marian Hall each Monday, at which one-to-one instruction is given on the popular instruments.

The branch was involved in a number of fund-raising events, the most important of which was the nationwide, "Trad for Trocaire". A very enjoyable session was held in the Slieve Bloom Lounge and a sizable sum was raised for

this very good cause. The annual "Féile na Nollag", held at Christmas in The County Arms Hotel, gives musicians, singers, dancers and supporters an opportunity of getting together for a social occasion. The Annual Concert, which brings top class artists from various parts of the country to the Birr Theatre and Arts Centre, was moved from November to a Spring Date.

The new initiative for the promotion of the Irish Language locally, "Biorra le Gaeilge", has been warmly welcomed by the branch. One of the aims of the organisation is the promotion of the language and this helps it fulfil this role. New members are always welcome and further information on Comhaltas locally, is available from Branch Secretary, Donal Morrissey at 087-9347968.

Guess Who?

Patsy Carroll (nee Hehin)



43RD ANNUAL BIRR VINTAGE WEEK & ARTS FESTIVAL

Friday 5th August saw Birr turning back time as the 43rd Annual Birr Vintage Week & Arts Festival began. The Festival's all-inclusive programme entertained a wide audience with its dynamic range of vintage and modern events throughout the week.

The Vintage Parade, opened by special guest, Michael D. Higgins, brought thousands of people onto the streets of the town and all were in agreement that this was one of the best ever seen. The spectacular display of both the vintage and modern; marching bands, floats, vintage cars, bicycles, tractors, machinery, along with street theatre performers and equine entries ensured there was something of interest for all ages, guaranteeing a highly enjoyable and entertaining family day out.

The Vintage Sunday Festival Mass celebrated the community's activities during the week with choirs of the parish and instrumental music. The Ormand Flying Club provided a spectacular display of aircraft as part of their Annual Fly-In; the Artisan and Craft Market in Emmet Square, with its large range of stalls brought a fantastic variety of sights and aromas to the town; the ever popular Olde Time Traditional Fair drew great crowds and the beautiful Flower Festival, which ran for four days delighted and enthralled its visitors over the opening weekend of the Festival.



Dan Coolahan Rides Again!

The Organising Committee was delighted to once again be able to hold a number of free children's events. Weather couldn't dampen the spirits of over 130 children who took part in the largest of these; an indoor version of the Pavement Art Competition. Sporting enthusiasts' highlights included Vintage Tennis, a Vintage Carriage and Bicycle Ride, an U-12 Penalty Shoot-Out and hurling for the Tom Errity Memorial Cup, along with the JJ Kinahan Criterium Cycle Race, which saw cyclists achieving speeds of up to 60 kph. The Donkey Derby was once again a huge family favourite and the lively music provided by the Converse All-Stars on Thursday evening's Gig Rig had the large crowd dancing the evening away before the spectacular fireworks display illuminated the skies above the town.



**Getting ready for the Vintage Parade
(L to R): Billy Scully, Seamie Carroll and John Scully**

Music lovers had a fantastic range of events to choose from. Birr Theatre & Arts Centre hosted the School of Rock Gig, the amazing Jack L and The Good Old Days of Music Hall. Festival favourites Fanfare Piston returned to Birr and played at numerous venues across the town and the Garden Sessions provided three nights of wonderful sounds. Aspiring musicians of the future competed in the Mick Egan Busking Competition on the streets of Birr and nightly entertainment in local pubs, with live music, candlelit nights and inter-pub competitions all adding to the atmosphere of the Festival Week.

This year's Visual Arts Trail 2011 hosted over 100 artists in 20 venues across town, many in non-traditional spaces and shop windows. Special events, like the guided social stroll along the Trail, concluding in Therry Rudin and Cliona Shaffrey's talk at Birr Theatre & Arts Centre; Redmond's Photo Map competition and the walk on Killaun Bog Reserve, led by Dr. John Feehan, all offered a welcome insight into the featured artist's work and practices. Contemporary dance performances by Legitimate Bodies Dance Company, film, music and lunchtime plays were also widely enjoyed.



One of the groups taking part in the School of Rock at Birr Theatre & Arts Centre.

The highlight performance of 'Love All', set among Victorian Tennis stars, found its perfect site-specific home at Wilmer Tennis Club where the vintage-costumed audience was held captive by this brilliant comic piece by

the Cheery Wilde Theatre Company. As always, the Antique & Fine Art Fair displayed a wonderful array of goods on show and for sale, delighting its great number of visitors.



Waiting for the parade to start are Michael and Mary Smyth

With annual favourites, new events, vintage flavour and modern entertainment, the 43rd Annual Birr Vintage Week & Arts Festival proved to be an exciting and vibrant week, 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 importance of sponsorship, organisation and manpower has greatly increased as the Festival has expanded. Local support and participation is the key to its continued success and the Organising Committee would like to express its thanks to all those who supported the Festival, to the Funders and Sponsors for their generous financial contributions, to the local Vintners who played a

key role in raising sponsorship, to the Arts Council, Offaly County Council Arts Office, Birr Town Council, Offaly Local Development Company, Shannon Development, Birr Chamber of Commerce, Birr Garda Siochána, Birr Lions Club, Birr Theatre & Arts Centre and to the Clubs, Societies, Venues, Groups and Individuals for their vital volunteering spirit and enthusiasm, both before and during the Festival. If you would like to become involved in next year's Festival which runs from the 3rd - 10th of August, 2012, come along to the AGM (see local press for details). For further information follow us on Facebook or check out www.birrvintageweek.com.



Children wearing fantastic, colourful costumes take part in this year's parade.



The Cleary family from Riverstown, pictured on their trip to Lourdes in April, 2011.

(L to R): Benny McHugh, Mary McHugh, Ann Kenny, Kathleen Scully, Pauline Cleary, Trish Nolan, Carmel Larkin, Benny Larkin, Rita Nagle, John Cleary, Gerry Cleary.

In front are Ruth Scully, Moya Larkin and Ben Larkin.

BIRR ACTIVE RETIREMENT GROUP

Our members continue to meet once a fortnight in the Resource Centre in Glebe Street. At our last A.G.M., the following were elected to the Committee: Chairperson - Mrs. Mary McLoughlin, Secretary – Mrs. Mary Coffey, Treasurer - Ms. Judy O'Neill, Assistant Treasurer – Mrs. Bríd Ryan, P.R.O. - Mrs. Lily Tait.

Two members, Sr. Maeve and Sr. Roberta, attended the A.G.M. of Active Retirement Ireland in Killarney House Hotel. It was a worthwhile, informative experience as representatives of many groups throughout the country shared their experiences and members of the National Executive Committee gave guidelines about funding sources and policy.

We invited Speakers to address the group from time to time. Anne Lovett gave us a talk about Chiropody and Foot Care. Jackie Booth, an herbalist from Portlaoise, spoke to us about the properties and value of various herbs. Tatiana Daly, a local artist, gave a demonstration on the making of Christmas and greeting cards. David O'Meara, a local chemist, gave us tips on the treatment of the common cold, chest infections, and other health issues.

Declan Costello met some of our group at the Civic Offices to discuss the possibility of getting outdoor physical exercise equipment for the elderly in Birr. Some members of Birr Town Council were also present. Declan Costello also arranged a bus to take a number of members to the Retirement Village in Portumna to view the outdoor physical equipment and most of our members tried all the equipment. The outcome was very positive and enjoyable. We attended a talk given in Birr Library by Jacqueline Merne, who is a nurse and qualified herbalist, during the Bealtaine Festival. She gave us some insight into the benefit of wearing magnetic buttons and bracelets. She also gave valuable advice about avoiding dehydration, by drinking plenty of water, taking physical exercise, and healthy eating habits were among her snippets of advice. We were invited to join Banagher Active Retirement Group, with other Groups, to participate in the Bealtaine Festival

celebrations. We had a great afternoon of dance, drama, music, singing, plus lovely refreshments and a raffle.

We had a few visits from Sr. Therese Brophy, R.S.M., who guided us in "Go for Life" exercises as part of the Extend Programme. These exercises can be done with music using scarves, or just by stretching.

We did networking with Shinrone and Carrig & Riverstown Active Retirement Groups. We visited Shinrone Community Centre, where we had music, dancing and refreshments. Carrig & Riverstown Committee invited us to a Thanksgiving Mass for deceased members, followed by a very enjoyable evening with music, dancing, raffle and refreshments. Some of our members went on an outing to Bellfield House, Shinrone, where some plants were purchased.

Quite recently we had a very pleasant trip to Kinnitty and the Slieve Bloom area. We travelled by coach from Birr and did a few short walks. Brigid, our tour guide, was excellent. We visited St. Kieran's Well and the ancient Monastery Ruins in Clareen en-route. We had tea in Kinnitty Castle on our return journey. Judy, our treasurer, has recently got some Bingo Books and we have a game of Bingo at some of our meetings where the winnings are of small monetary value. But the "Go for Life" exercises are nearly always part of our programme, as they help us to keep "Fit and Funny". We hope to have our A.G.M. before the end of 2011 and look forward to seeing at least seven candidates looking for positions on the Committee! This will help us to keep in line with the national trend. We had a very informative and interesting talk on the Leinster Regiment and Crinkill Barracks on 29th September, 2011. The guest speaker was Brian Kennedy, who is a History Teacher in St. Brendan's Community School. Well done Brian.

Members of our group are extremely grateful to Catherine O'Toole and her two lovely daughters, who provided refreshments and were most helpful at all our meetings at Birr Resource Centre. They have recently returned to Carlow and we wish them every success.



Pictured at a recent outing with the Banagher Active Retirement group were (L to R): Sr. Roberta Delaney, Fidelma Clavin, Jean Quigley, Eileen Hynes, Lily Tait and Anna Corboy.

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THOUSAND STARS PROJECT

TRADING AS THE SPOT YOUTH CAFÉ

2011 was a busy, exciting, challenging, fun but, most of all, a huge learning experience for all involved in the establishing of a youth café in Birr town. A premises, which is shared with the SUB project was secured in late 2010 and we opened the doors to 'The Spot' in January 2011. Even though the building was in need of some renovation, most urgently a proper heating system, the young people were eager to get started! Members of the management committee made a visit to two youth cafes, "The Vault" in Carlow and "The Drum" in Kilkenny, to meet with the co-ordinators for some advice and guidance and have found working alongside the qualified youth workers at the SUB Project really useful and they have been a great support to us.



Painting the Mural in Castle Street

One of our main objectives is to ensure that the Café is youth led from the beginning. A youth committee was elected. They then received training provided by Foróige, which taught them more about being on a committee and the roles of all the officers. It was named 'The Spot' by a majority vote by all young people involved. Our logo was chosen from a number of design ideas created by the 2010/2011 Transition Year students of St. Brendan's Community School. The idea chosen was created by Shannon Bergin.

The young people and the adult leaders have worked well together to organise events in the Café such as acoustic sessions, movie nights, hair and make-up demo nights, art projects, career information evenings and DJ workshops. Fridays after school have proven 'The Spot' to be a popular place to hang out and meet friends and unwind after the week. The youth committee, on behalf of the members applied for funding through the 'Youth Bank' for a project to clean up Camcor Park. They received €700 which will be used for the painting of fences and benches, sowing flowers and planting a tree. Over the summer members of 'The

Spot' created a mural for the old Cash's building on Castle Street, in conjunction with St. Brendan's Env. Group and Birr Tidy Towns. I'm sure you'll all agree it really brightens up the area. Many in the community may be aware of our major fund-raising efforts to put towards a



The Spot logo created by Shannon Bergin

grant with Offaly Local Development Company. We were successful in our application and received funding. Building work is finally complete and this funding has helped to achieve the following: insulation and dry-lining of entire building, a new oil heating system, wheelchair accessible toilet and a fully-equipped kitchen. The space was then partitioned to provide an office, workshop area, and a cosy chill-out café to the fore of the premises. We would like to thank all who contributed time and money to this effort. As we are an entirely voluntary organisation, we will have to raise money annually for electricity, heating and equipment. We would ask that you keep supporting us on our fund-raising initiatives. Our famous "well Mush" T-shirts are available in Jocks & Frocks, Main Street, Birr and all proceeds will help sustain the café. Wishing you all a very peaceful new year and we're looking forward to 2012.



The Committee includes Oisín Clarke, Aoife Joyce, Emily O'Brien, Rebecca Kinsella, Ciarán Cooney, Revina Murdock, Ria Harding



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BIRR BOYS SCOUTS

It was a great year for the scouts, both nationally and internationally, a year full of fun and adventure. The year started with a visit to our log cabin in the Slieve Blooms in January for the scouts and venturers. The venturers did a survival night out in the mountains. The next event was a surprise party for two of our leaders, Maureen Corrigan and Jack Ryan. Maureen was presented with an oil painting of the Log Cabin, in recognition of her twenty five years in scouting. The Chief Scout of Ireland, Michael Shinnick attended the function and presented Jack with a Life Long Service Award to Scouting. The parents committee pulled out all the stops to compile a book, "This is Your Life" for Jack. It was a most memorable night in the County Arms Hotel, with present and past scouts coming from all over Ireland to attend.

As usual, the cubs and scouts had further trips to the log cabin to improve their scouting skills. The next outing was to Portumna in Co. Galway in preparation for their annual camp. With the help of the Birr Outdoor Education Centre, the water activities were a great success. In July, our long-awaited annual camp to Inistioge in Co. Kilkenny and our visit to the Tall Ships Festival in Waterford arrived.



The Tall Ships spectacular, Waterford

It was a 'high seas' spectacular, breaking new ground for our scouts, with the Cutty Sark race for Tall ships, and what a sight it was. The tall ships, with their masts rigged with great sails, are the most majestic sight of the sea. The Cutty Sark race is the most prestigious sailing event anywhere in the world and we were there, joining in the fun. It was not the first time the Birr Scouts visited the Tall Ships Festival. Past scout, Adrian Haines, reminded all present of a past visit to the tall ships race in Cobh in 1991. For a real treat, all our scouts, in full uniform were welcomed on board the Russian ship Mir. We were also allowed below deck, which is a privilege limited to uniformed personnel. What a sight the 110m long ship was. It is a three-masted sailing vessel, said to be the fastest ship of its kind on the planet. We met some of the Cadets-scouts from Russia. Just after 8.00 a.m.

on the last day we watched the entire fleet of around fifty of the world's most beautiful tall ships make their way down the harbour. It was a magnificent and unforgettable sight.

The following week, Jamie Doonan and Nathan Young joined the 40,000 scouts and guides at the 22nd World Scout Jamboree. This event brings together contingents from 150 nations to celebrate their common humanity and belief in the scouting ideals. The event took place in southern Sweden, but participants encountered cultures as varied as Saudi Arabian, Israeli, Korean, and French. It brought young people from across religious, political and geographical divides together in one place. The scouts from Birr departed on the 26th July as part of the 775-strong Irish contingent. The world jamborees have been an important event in Scouting, bringing young people together from across the world to the one place for an experience on a global level. It occurs once every four years and is open to scouts aged 14 to 17 years old. Scouts were camping in tents, cooking on open fires and practicing scout craft. Unlike other scout activities, scouts learned how people the world over sing, dance, play, worship, cook and live, allowing scouts to make friends from different countries. The Swedish Guide and Scouts Council, with help from the local people, international scouts and the King of Sweden, Carl XVI Gustaf, who is a scout, organised the event. The next jamboree will take place in Japan in 2015.

Finally, the Scouts would like to thank the Marian Hall committee and especially the people of Birr for their help and support during the year and, if there is any young man or woman out there interested in the great outdoors and want to share in the fun do come and join us at the scout den next to the Marian Hall.



Scout Leader Sean Egan with scouts Stephen Guilfoyle, Liam Larkin, T.J. Talbot and Eoin Watkins at the Tall Ships festival in Waterford.

Aisling Photography



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BIRR APOSTOLIC WORKERS GROUP

Our committee is made up of a small number of people who are very committed to helping the Missionary effort in our parish and in the Diocese of Killaloe. Imelda King is president, Sr. Roberta is secretary and Catherine Murphy is treasurer. Other active members include Mary Nolan, Ann Hough and Kathleen Ryan. We miss the other active members who had to retire, including Mona Micks, who has relocated to Nenagh following the death of her husband Mick, RIP. We also miss those who have passed away. We have a large number of honorary members who are very loyal and supportive. We have a display of vestments and Mass requisites every summer along with a raffle. We visit the displays of neighbouring groups in the diocese as far as possible.

Four of our members attended the Thanksgiving Mass, meeting and 50th Anniversary celebratory meal of the Borrisokane Apostolic Group, held recently in the Methodist Hall in Borrisokane. Representatives of our Birr group also attended the National and Diocesan Executive meetings.

The greatest needs of missionaries in recent times are prayers and financial help towards transport and local projects such as clinics for AIDS victims, funding for Catechists, schools and church buildings, etc. Our group members would like to thank the many generous people in Birr for their huge support of our church gate collection, bingo night raffle and other fund-raising events. Míle buíochas. New active and honorary members are always welcome.



Pictured left are Maureen Dunphy and Sr. Roberta organising affairs for the Mission Raffle held during the Annual Display Weekend.



Enjoying the 50th Anniversary Celebrations in Borrisokane.

Back Row (L to R): Fr. Peadar O'Loughlin, Mary Collins, Mai Farrell, Nora Byrne, Fr. Tom O'Halloran.
Front Row: Mary Nolan, Sr. Roberta, Ann Hough, Doreen Cahill, Imelda King.



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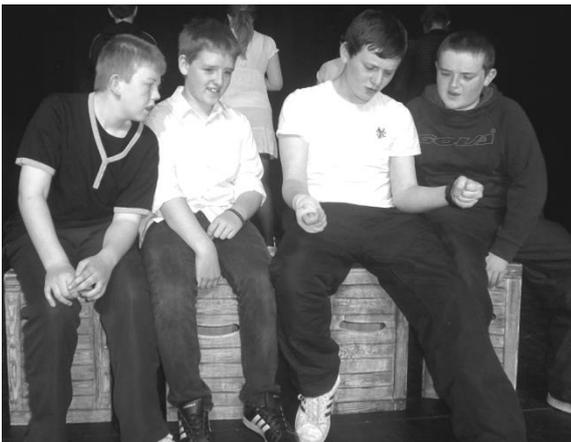
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OFFALY YOUTH THEATRE - BIRR

October saw the establishment of Offaly Youth Theatre, Birr, following a very successful pilot programme last January. Offaly Youth Theatre advocates the inherent value and the unique relationship between young people and theatre as an art form and is committed to extending and enhancing young people's understanding of theatre and raising the artistic standards of youth theatre across the county. Offaly Youth Theatre aims to bring the arts closer to young people from all socio-economic backgrounds and currently has three chapters; Birr, Banagher and Tullamore.

Youth Theatre is a good introduction for young people interested in developing drama skills or with an interest in all aspects of live performance. As well as the weekly workshops, members also have the opportunity to meet with other Youth Theatre groups countrywide, through exchanges and festivals. Youth drama encourages the development of the whole person. It is not just about producing plays for people to see. The process involved is considered equally as important as the finished product.



Martin Dolan, Joey Moloney, Oisín Kelly and Evan McCormack from Offaly Youth Theatre.

Youth Theatre in Offaly has an important role and value in that it provides young people opportunities to develop social and personal skills and positive self-esteem, achieved by participating in a variety of theatre strategies, such as Contact Improvisation, Voice and Movement, Theatre Exercises, Improvisation, Role-Play and Characterisation, Text Work and Mask Work. Youth Theatre participants also build a vocabulary in theatre, namely Genre and Stagecraft. Youth Theatre has an ethos of placing more emphasis on process than product.

There are two terms; October - December and January - April. Each term will be 10 weeks in duration, with a final year show in Birr Theatre & Arts Centre next June/July. Offaly Youth Theatre will also have the privilege of visiting other professional theatres and productions throughout the year.

Open to all young people between the ages of 14 and 18, these fun weekly workshops are developing participants' acting abilities in innovative ways through great activities, games and processes. This year, the workshops in Birr are being held on a Friday evening from 7.30pm to 9.00pm.

This project is facilitated by committed local theatre professionals; Anne Moloney, Macdara Deery and Angela Ryan, all of whom have experience in developing theatre with young people. The project is funded by Offaly County Council and fees are being kept low to maximise accessibility. This project is being supported by Offaly County Council and the Arts Council and the intention is for it to become a long-term developmental theatre project for young people in the county.

For any young person interested in this project, please contact Anne on (087) 8223175 or Janine on (087) 2071258 for further information.

Offaly Youth Theatre Members.

Back Row (L to R): Ciara O'Sullivan, Amy Finnegan, Joey Moloney, Axalina Hegany, Ciara Ridgney, Martin Dolan, Liam Tierney, Oisín Kelly, Mark Boylan.

Front Row: Evan McCormack, Ciara Tierney, Louise Flannery, Michelle Lyons, Diarmuid Kelly.



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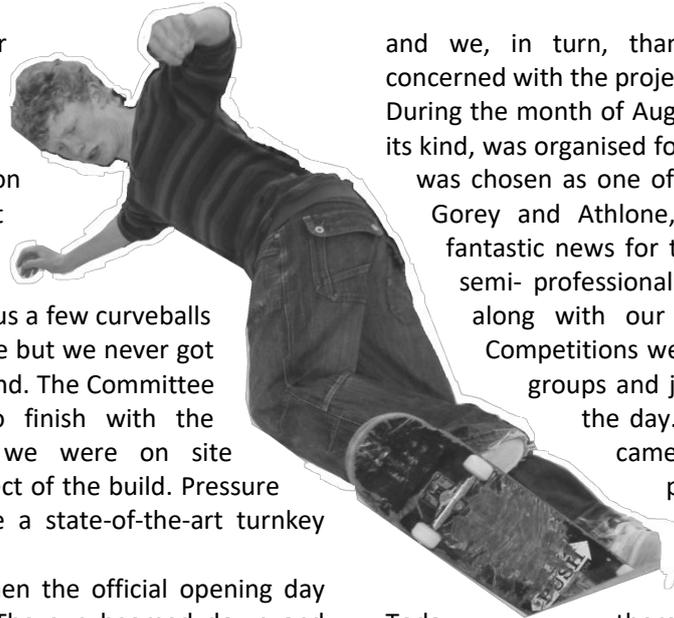
BIRR SKATE PARK

A SUCCESS STORY IN ITS CREATION

In last year's edition of the Birr Review we announced that construction would begin on the skate park project. A year on, we are over the moon to actually see the project accomplished and in place.

It was a tough year, with weather conditions throwing us a few curveballs and delaying the finishing date but we never got distracted from the task in hand. The Committee was involved from start to finish with the contractors, ensuring that we were on site regularly, checking every aspect of the build. Pressure was on everybody to ensure a state-of-the-art turnkey project.

The wait was finally over when the official opening day arrived on 16th April, 2011. The sun beamed down and excitement screeched through the park as young people enjoyed themselves, braving the different obstacles in their new skate park. We were as proud as punch and smiling from ear to ear, knowing it was all worth it. An ecumenical sermon was performed and the Skate Park Committee then officially opened the park. The crowd who gathered on the day in support congratulated us with their loud applause



and we, in turn, thanked everybody there and all concerned with the project.

During the month of August a sponsored tour, the first of its kind, was organised for skaters throughout Ireland. Birr was chosen as one of the top three parks, along with Gorey and Athlone, to host this event. This was fantastic news for the Committee. Professional and semi-professional skaters visited Birr for the day, along with our own resident, skilled skaters. Competitions were organised for the various age groups and judged professionally throughout the day. A couple of our local teenagers came up trumps and won some great prizes. It was a hugely successful event and all who took part had a great arena to show off their skills and tricks.

Today, there stands a fantastic recreation facility for both boys and girls. It's ideally situated, with open viewing. Passersby can stop and enjoy the colourful display and the variety of skill demonstrated by the youngsters on skate boards, BMX's and rollerblades. Respect is key and this is shown by all who make use of the park. The Committee members wanted to encourage a healthy fun sport and social scene and this, we believe, has been achieved to date.



Pictured at the Official Opening of Birr Skate Park in April 2011.

(L to R): Daniel Deegan, Ronan Watkins, James Loughrey, Luke Garland, Isaac Smith, David Maher, Oisín Clarke, Damien Gormley, Jack Featherstonhaugh.



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CARRIG FORÓIGE CLUB



Foróige leaders from left to right are Frank Higgins, Margaret O'Brien, Laura Pardy

After a number of years where there was no outlet for the teenagers in the Carrig and Riverstown area outside of the traditional sport's clubs and dance lessons, some of the youngsters approached a few of their parents and suggested, with a bit of arm-twisting, that there was a need for a youth club in the area. The kids were sent away to research the idea and came back with all the information needed to go about starting a Foróige youth

club. Meetings were held with the local Foróige youth officer and a "willing" bunch of adult leaders were trained and vetted to a very high standard. A registration night was arranged in Carrig Hall, where over 60 youngsters and their parents signed up for a trip into the unknown. Now, two years on, the club is really getting into the swing of things. We have attended discos, gone bowling and to the cinema in Tullamore, held self-defence and make-up classes. When the meetings are held in Carrig Hall, we use the table-tennis tables, pool table, air-hockey table as well as listen to music and catch up with friends. This year, we are also using Gurteen sports hall to burn off any excess energy. We would like to thank the Carrig Hall committee and both Gurteen College and Carrig & Riverstown GAA Club for the use of their venues. Also without the support of Foróige, the Offaly Leader Company and the VECs in both Offaly and North Tipperary, we would not be able to provide such a vital resource and safe outlet for our young people. The year ahead is looking like it will be full of new and exciting experiences, with a host of new adult leaders and new and old club members mixing well.



Enjoying Foróige activities in Carrig Hall.

Back Row (L to R): Steffi Maher, Leanne Maher, Aideen Ryan, Rachel Brennan, Cailin Fitzgerald, Niamh Collins, Sarah Harding, Isobel Cavanagh, Rachel Daly, Orlaith Plunkett.
Front: Emily O'Brien, Laura Hogan, Ciara Hocter, Lisa Hocter.



Birr Pipe Band circa 1920s or 1930s

(L to R): -----, Martin Corrigan, -----, Rody Tierney, James Connors, John Connors.



John Connors, Gurteen who worked on the construction of the Birr/Portumna railway in the 1860's.

ART FOR FUN AT THE RESOURCE CENTRE



Children's art classes with Tatiana are held throughout the school year in Family and Community Resource Centre. Children learn various techniques in drawing and painting and create beautiful works of art. Every August all the students take part in a group children's art exhibition in Birr library.



**Stephen Cooke, Liza Lisovtsova, Saoirse Rice and Katie Corrigan
creating Works of Art.**

GEORGIAN SOCIETY - BIRR CHAPTER

Our summer season opened with a tour of Carlow during May. Visiting Lisnavagh near Rathvilly, family seat of the Bunbury brothers, William and Turtle Bunbury, set in 800 acres of park and woodland. Next, we visited Huntington Castle, Clonegal, built in 1625 by the First Lord Edsmonde, now home to Moira Durdin-Robertson, where a delicious lunch was provided. We had an unusual afternoon here, ending with a visit to the Temple of Isis before boarding the coach to take us to Borris House, built in 1731 by Morgan Kavanagh, a descendant of the former Kings of Leinster, where our hosts were Tina and Andrew Kavanagh. This is a house with a lot of history attached to it. In 1953, when Major McMurrough-Kavanagh died suddenly without leaving a will and having no sons, many family treasures

had to be sold to cover the cost of death duties and legal costs. The house became impossible to maintain and Joanne Kavanagh's son of her second marriage to Lt. Col Archibald Macalpine-Downie, Andrew, assumed the surname Kavanagh. He and his wife Tina Murray returned from England to run the estate of 600 acres.

It is well worth a visit, is open to the public and considered to be one of the finest houses in Ireland. Our members certainly enjoyed the day.

Our chapter has sponsored a photographic book of significant architectural features relating to Birr, which is due for publication shortly, as well as a leaflet giving advice on the preservation of Georgian doorways.

ASSOCIATION OF PEOPLE WITH INTELLECTUAL DISABILITY

The Birr branch of the above Association operates under the umbrella of the Offaly Association. Due to the recession and the embargo on recruiting staff, our activities have been very limited. Although the Birr branch is very small, it gets marvellous help from volunteers with collections and with fund-raising in general. It now appears as though a

change to direct funding to individuals is in the pipeline, although this may be slow to get off the ground. Another change may be the introduction of a 'Capacity Law' for adults with intellectual disability. We are always looking for new members for our association. Please check our website, www.offaly.ie, for further information.

BIRR TIDY TOWNS

In the context of the National Tidy Towns adjudication judged in Birr, Birr received a total of 257 points, up 3 from last year. The group put in a lot of hard work and was disappointed with a meagre 3 points extra. Every Wednesday was clean-up night but volunteers were thin on the ground. The 'old reliables' of John and Mary Lawlor, Bernie Fanneran and Tony McLoughlin were always present.

The group undertook to build a water feature at the entrance to Mill Island. This was achieved with the help of Pat Loonam and Billy Kelly, both from St. Brendan's Environmental Group. Billy provided the digger for all the heavy work and Pat provided the artistic stonemasonry. There have been a large number of compliments about the quality of their work.

The group also purchased flowers for the 52 hanging baskets in the town. With the help of Billy Harding and his van, who kept them watered on a daily basis, they were a colourful addition to the town. We would like to thank John Gleeson Engineering Works for providing us with a water container.

Thanks to the St. Brendan's Environmental Group workers who painted Cash's in Castle Street. This was beautifully finished off with murals painted by children from the Youth Café. Thanks to their leaders, Lisa Pardy, Siobhán Barnes and George Kennedy.

Thanks to John and Gail Kelly of Kelly's Pub, Green Street for the venue for the Tidy Towns Quiz, to Birr Credit Union

for their generous support, to the Midland Tribune for advertising and to all who helped and supported us on the night. Thanks to Bernie Fanneran and Ann Finnane for their help on the night.

Thanks to Liam Moran and Margaret Maher from the St. Brendan's Environmental Group for their daily help and to the Offaly Community – Enterprise section of Offaly County Council, Edel Boyd, Niamh Dowler, Amanda Pedlow (Heritage Officer), who work daily to enhance and plan for the town. This latter group of people has drawn up a 5-year plan for Birr Tidy Towns.

Thanks to Birr Fishing Club members for providing photos and history of the Croneen trout. Thanks to Tom Clancy, ESB, for the wonderful walk he is undertaking at Sandymount and the new bridge across the Camcor River, replacing the old stone bridge.

We can assure the people of Birr that there will be a major enhancement programme completed in Birr. This will be achieved in conjunction with Birr Chamber of Commerce, Lions Club, Birr Credit Union and the Offaly Local Development Company.

Thanks to Birr Town Council staff for building the walk from Bridge Street to Mill Island and to Brendan Garry for his part in the walk from the Maltings to the Castle.

Good luck to Joe Cahill and Peter Grennan following their retirements from Birr Town Council. Both were involved with building sluice gates and walls around Birr and made a big contribution to the enhancement of Birr.



Getting the flower baskets ready.

(L to R): Liam Moran, Bernie Fanneran, William Harding, Peter Loonam, Tony McLoughlin, Paul Davy.

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CARRIG, RIVERSTOWN & KILLEEN ACTIVE RETIREMENT GROUP

"Active" is indeed a by-word for this group of retirees. No sooner had they completed last year's crowded programme, they had plans to fill the months of 2011 with trips far and wide and activities to suit all age groups. Dorothy Nolan takes pride of place as the organiser-in-chief of many of the away trips as she is the "Social Organiser" of the group. Backed by a committee of Pat Ryan (Chairperson), Mary Taylor (Sec), John Woods (Treasurer), Bill Taylor (Ass.Treas.) and Martin Kearns (PRO), Dorothy is not short of people to assist her if the need arises. There are 47 paid-up members in the group.

Indoor bowling and board games are a feature of Carrig, Riverstown and Killeen Active Retirement's winter programme and these take place every Thursday night at 6.30 p.m. During the long summer evenings, pitch and putt is very popular with the members. There are many accomplished artists within the group and they have completed a number of courses in years gone by. In 2011, without a tutor I may add, they organised "Art for Pleasure" for their members. They bring along their own pictures and painting ideas and offer each other helpful hints on various aspects of their creativities. Ollie Nolan, well-known publican from Moneygall, conducted First-Aid classes for the members earlier in the year. They also paid frequent visits to other Active Retirements groups in Lorrha, Cloughjordan and Eyrecourt. For members who cannot avail of many of the away trips of the summer, "An Afternoon Tea Party" was held in the Carrig/Riverstown Community Centre in October.

This year's highlight was the group's four-day visit to Belfast. These are Mary Taylor's memories of the trip north:

"We arrived in the city in the late afternoon. We were fortunate that our driver, Mike, was very familiar with the North and, in particular, Belfast. He brought us on a tour of the city, taking in both sides of the divide. We saw murals and slogans of both a Nationalist and Loyalist nature. Although one could not but admire the artistry of the murals, they were a little intimidating. Our hotel was just around the corner from The Europa - the most bombed building in the city!

The following day, we had a wonderful excursion along the Antrim coast and the Ards Peninsula, the highlight of which was a visit to Mount Stewart House and Garden, a fabulous place. On our third day, we took in Stormont. Stormont is situated in a large park and is approached by a spectacular tree-lined avenue of some hundred metres. To say we were impressed is an understatement. This was followed by visits to City Hall and the Linen Museum.

However, the trip wasn't entirely of a cultural and historical nature. Mike, the driver, brought us to a city bar with the unlikely name of Ronnie Drew's! Given a private room by the landlord, who also laid on suitable entertainment, we all had a jolly good night indeed. We left Belfast with great memories of a beautiful city and nice people."

During the months of May, June, July and August, they visited Glenstal Abbey, where they were given a guided tour of the monastery and garden and enjoyed afternoon tea and scones with the monks; Bru Bru in Cashel for an Irish Cabaret night; Castletown House and Newbridge Silverware respectively. These visits completed their programme for the year. Who would not want to be a member of this very, very active retirement group?



Carrig, Riverstown & Killeen Active Retirement Group on a recent trip to Belfast.

Back Row (L to R): Billy Reddan, Mary Keavney, Jean Maher, Joe Ryan, Frances Ardell, John Wrafter, John Curley, Maura Molloy, Mary Murphy, Patricia Ryan, Pat Kennedy, Ann Kelly, Kathleen Bass, Gertie Higgins, Aggie Walsh, Sean Touhy, Mary Nolan, Mike Nolan, Bill Taylor, Bridget Barber, Una O'Brien, Kathleen Walsh.

Front Row: Mary Taylor, Maura Wrafter, Marie O'Brien, Evelyn O'Meara, Cissy Kearns, Betty Burns, Teresa Loughnane, Mary Treacy, Helen Glynn, Susan Delahunt, Mary Curley, Francis Delahunt, Chrissie King, Mary McLoughlin, Margaret Guilfoyle, Michael Walsh, Teresa Kennedy, Margaret O'Brien, Maisie Conroy.

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BIRR THEATRE & ARTS CENTRE

2011 has been another hugely successful year for Birr Theatre & Arts Centre, whose numbers increased from its 2010 attendance figures, at its wide and varied programme of events. There was no shortage of professional theatre throughout the year, with both local companies and national companies treading the boards. Amongst these were performances from Seir Kieran Drama Group (*I Do Not Like Thee Dr Fell*), Barna Players (*The Chastitute*), Spellbound Theatre Company (*The Lonesome West*), Jasango Theatre (*Bombshells*); *Fruitcake* starring Mary McEvoy and *I'll Live Till I Die* – a celebration in talk, story and song of the iconic Delia Murphy. Birr Stage Guild, as always, made a huge contribution with their presentations of *Oklahoma!* and *Drama at Inish* and PricewaterhouseCoopers celebrated their eleventh visit to Birr with their production of *Pinocchio*.



Mary McEvoy in 'Fruitcake'

Music lovers were catered for, with performances for all tastes. Local musicians, Mundy and Pete Kennedy each held very successful concerts and the cream of Irish talent was represented by *The Furey's and Davey Arthur*, *Ireland's Fiddlers Green*, *Jack L* and *Frankie Gavin and De Dannan*, to name but a few. Opera and classical lovers were well catered for with *A Musical Brindisi* (*Jonathan*

Carter, David Martin, Sinead Conway), Music Network presented *Terpsycordes Quartet*, the *Irish Chamber Ensemble*, *Celtic Ais and Graces* (*Karin Leitner & Cormac deBarra*) and the return of the ever popular *Vladimir Jablovkov* in *Classical Twist*, who delighted and uplifted all who attended.

Dance continued to increase its profile, with Legitimate Bodies Dance Company holding a series of classes for all ages and fitness levels, along with a number of performances. *Life Circles* was the culmination of a unique project whilst the performance of *Edge*, the Post-graduate Performance Company of London Contemporary Dance School thrilled its audience and the fourth annual *I.F.O.N.L.Y* rounded off the year in style.

Birr Film Club continues to go from strength to strength show-casing presentations from around the world. *OFFline Film Festival*, which took place in October proved to be another huge success, with plans already afoot for the 2012 event. 2011 also saw the inaugural *Bo Leictreach, the GreenPlay Writing Festival*, take place to great critical acclaim. This year also saw Birr Theatre & Arts Centre become very successfully involved in two nationwide events; Bealtaine Festival and Culture Night 2011, during

which venues throughout the country opened their doors free to the public. To celebrate this we were delighted to present *It's a Cultural Thing...Or Is It?* performed by Michael Collins.

Our dedicated exhibition space "*Suas an Staighre*" played host to a number of exhibitions. Individual showings included *Rowena Keavney*, *Caroline Conway* 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. Contemporary artist *Therry Rudin* showcased a visual arts installation for the month of August; and *Gillen, Gormley, Greene* and *Common Ground* - professionally curated exhibitions of local artists added to the growing reputation of Birr Theatre & Arts Centre as a centre for visual arts. A series of talks by the artists exhibiting *Suas an Staighre* proved to be a great attraction and gave audiences the opportunity to understand the thought and work processes behind their work.

Hullabaloo! – the 5th Offaly's Children's Arts Festival provided a fantastic variety of workshops and performance 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 Local Development Company, Offaly County Council Arts Office and Birr Theatre & Arts Centre.

Birr Theatre & Arts Centre is instrumental in encouraging young artists of the future and they had great scope to explore their potential with a range of workshops and courses throughout the year. These included *Lights Up!!! – Youth Dance and Drama Week*. *Drama Dayz – Children's Theatre Summer Camp*, *The Reel World Film School*, workshops and classes by *Offaly Youth Theatre* and the *Summer School of Rock* - something for everyone.

There was no shortage also of comedy as *Neil Delamere* got 2011 off to a great start. *Man 1 Bank 0* by Patrick Combs, *Choke Comedy Improv* and the two One-Act Plays during Birr Vintage Week & Arts Festival; *Melody* and *Dinner For One* also ensured much hilarity.

Birr Theatre & Arts Centre acknowledge support from The Arts Council, Pobal, Offaly County Council, Birr Town Council and Offaly Local Development Company and is eagerly looking forward to 2012 and to welcoming you to this top-class venue for some great entertainment!



Jack L

BIRR CHAMBER OF COMMERCE

A letter from the President



Birr Chamber of Commerce is working to promote and encourage existing and new businesses in Birr town. The Chamber is a partnership of professional and individual people working together to build and improve a healthy economy in Birr.

In the past year we worked on many different projects. On December 4th, 2010, the

Christmas Lights were switched on in Emmet Square by Mr. Denis Shiels with the Birr Church Choir providing beautiful music for all present. Santa Claus arrived with bags of presents for all our local children, which were distributed in Dooly's Hotel. Later that evening, the Chamber of Commerce launched their New Birr Town Map which was met with great approval. The Birr Map shows local amenities such as shops, public houses, accommodation and local points of interest. There is one located in both the Wilmer Road and Marian Hall Car Parks, in Emmet Square and in the courtyard of Birr Castle.

The Chamber of Commerce met with Birr Garda and Superintendent, Mr. Dave Kavanagh and Sergeant Mr. Michael Dardis gave a presentation on Crime Prevention in January 2011. Since then, Birr Business Watch is in full operation, with all businesses taking part to make Birr a safer place to live and work in.

The next big project undertaken, which has just been completed, was the provision of street name plaques for

the entire town. This was 75% funded by Offaly Local Development Company, the balance being funded by the Chamber. These street names add to Birr Heritage Town immensely.

In June 2011, the committee spoke of running a Sports Star Awards Night. The date of October 30th 2011 was set. This event was a great success, with 15 local clubs taking part and over 360 people attending a meal and dance in the County Arms Hotel. This event was used to highlight the dedication that our local sporting clubs gave to our Community.

The Annual Fashion Show, "Light up the Night", which has been held in the County Arms Hotel very successfully for the past two years, was held on November 11th, 2011 in Dooly's Hotel. It was a very successful night and raised much-needed funds for the Christmas Lights in the town.

The Chamber of Commerce sees how businesses in Birr are struggling in the current economic climate, so we are asking people to shop local and keep our community spirit vibrant and alive. Shopping local keeps jobs local.

I would like to thank all our businesses for their generous financial contribution throughout the year, which is greatly appreciated by the Chamber of Commerce. Finally, I would like to thank our hard working committee and ask for new members to attend our meetings, which are held on the second Thursday of each month in the County Arms Hotel.

Yours sincerely,
Martin Kearns,
President.

CARRIG TIDY TOWNS

The committee unfortunately had to put all their plans for the village on hold for the past two years. North Tipperary County Council is putting the finishing touches to the Traffic calming measures which are still on-going. The Committee would like to acknowledge all the hard work carried out by the Residents, the owners of commercial premises, the school, community centre and our church who all keep and maintain our village to a high standard.

The committee is planning to put a New Village Plan in place early in the New Year and we would WELCOME everyone's involvement in this new project. We would like to take this opportunity to wish everyone a Merry Christmas and Peaceful New Year in 2012.



BIRR STAGE GUILD 2011 PRODUCTIONS



Oklahoma – Men's Chorus

(L to R): Mel Kennedy, John Lynch, David Shiels, Darragh Molloy, Sean Ryan, Sam Pearson, Vincent Liffey, Sean Stone.



Oklahoma - Michael Donegan (Carnes) and Darren Franks (Ali Hakim).



Oklahoma - Barbara Hanamy (Aunt Eller) and Shane Broderick (Curley).



Oklahoma AIMS 2011 Award Winners, Aileen Quaid (Ado Annie), left & Audrey O'Meara (Laurie).



Oklahoma - Ladies Chorus

Back Row (L to R): Noelle Camon, Fiona Ward, Dawn Lagace.

Front Row: Annette Ryan, Zena Kirwan, Audrey O'Meara.



The Cast of 'And Then There Were None'.

Back Row (L to R): Jack Feehan, Michael Donegan, Mel Kennedy, Seymour Kenny, Shane Broderick, Tony Carroll.
Front Row: Tina Ryan, Dawn Lagace, Barbara Hanamy, Ruth Kenny, Kathleen Cooke.
Adrian Shine (Director) in front.



Birr Stage Guild members attending the AIMS Awards ceremony in Killarney, June 2011.

(L to R): Esther Boulton, Heather Colohan, Noelle Camon, Dawn Lagace, Lynn Brophy, Audrey O'Meara, Darragh Molloy, Liza Byrne, Adrian Shiels, Aileen Quaid, Paul Norton.

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A WORD FROM SHANNON DEVELOPMENT

Shannon Development's Birr Office is anticipating a major dividend for the local economy from the visit earlier this year of President Barack Obama, the 44th President of the United States, to his ancestral home of Moneygall in Co. Offaly. The Heritage Town of Birr is only 33 kms from Moneygall, home of Falmouth Kearney, great-great-great grandfather of President Obama.

Leading up to the visit, Shannon Development established a Media and Tourist Information Centre in Moneygall and produced a special commemorative souvenir guide and map, containing the Obama-Kearney family tree and details of visitor attractions in the area, including Birr Castle Demesne & Historic Science Centre. During the U.S. President's visit, crews from top international and national TV stations filed positive news stories from the area, creating an equivalent advertising value of circa €100 million. Among the international TV stations briefed by Shannon Development were: CNN, Fox News, ARD, SKY, RTE, ITN, TV3, and NBC – the Today Show.

Shannon Development, in partnership with Tourism Ireland and Fáilte Ireland, is working to maximise on President Obama's visit to Offaly and the Shannon Region. Numerous campaigns have been undertaken, urging the 40 million people in the US who claim Irish ancestry to come and explore their Irish heritage and walk in the footsteps of President Obama.

More recently, Dr. Leo Varadkar, TD, Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport, launched the 41st Irish Hot Air Balloon Championships at Birr Castle Demesne. Shannon Development were delighted to sponsor this exciting event, which is estimated to have generated in excess of €200,000 spend in the local area. Pilots from America, Netherlands, United Kingdom and Ireland were represented at the championships.

Shannon Development's Birr Technology Centre was the venue for a free business networking event on Tuesday, 4th October. The theme of the event, which was organised by Shannon Development in conjunction with Midpoint



Pictured at the launch of the Hot Air Balloon Festival.
(L to R): Cllr Percy Clendennen, Brian Keating, Shannon Development, Róisín Lennon, Offaly Local Development Company, Jacqui Jordan, Birr Castle Demesne, Dr. Leo Varadkar T.D., Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport, Bernie Leonard, Shannon Development, Deputy Marcella Corcoran Kennedy, T.D.

Group HR and Business Advisors was 'Nurturing Business & Tourism – The engine of success in the local economy'. The event was well-attended and speakers on the night were Mr. Anthony O'Gara, Managing Director of the International Rose of Tralee Festival and Mr. Niall O'Connell, Managing Director of Midpoint, the HR and Business Advisors Group. Among the topics covered was how SME's can motivate their teams in a downturn.

RESPOND! CHESTERFIELD COMMUNITY CHILDCARE CENTRE

2011 was a very good year for the Respond! Chesterfield Community Childcare Centre. The pre-school is full for this term and has already started a waiting list for September 2012. Children have a variety of activities each day some of which include; arts and crafts make and do, cooking, messy play, sand and water play.

The centre also runs a successful Summer Camp each year. This year we ran the summer camp for three weeks as there was a great interest for another week. The first and second weeks for children aged 5 to 8 years and the third week for

children aged between 9 to 12 years. Each week consists of arts and crafts day, sports day, day trips. The three members of staff at Respond! Chesterfield Childcare Centre are Catherine Ferncombe Childcare Leader, Kathleen Gallagher and Bridget Lynskey, Childcare Assistants.

A new Afterschool project has opened in the evenings for primary school children to avail of. Children will do their homework and then take part in a variety of activities which include arts & crafts, various games and outdoor games.

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BIRR PHOTOGRAPHY GROUP

Birr Photography Group was established in November 2008 at The Tin Jug Studio by a small group of photographic enthusiasts. The purpose of the group is to promote photographic skills and knowledge in Birr and the surrounding area. All members are keen amateur photographers, with skills ranging from beginner to advanced. Members are encouraged to expand their knowledge and abilities as photographers by learning from and teaching their fellow enthusiasts. The group has regular meetings, talks, discussions and demonstrations on a variety of photographic topics at Craughwell's Pub, Castle Street, Birr.

2011 has been a busy year for the group, with a membership of over 30 active photographers. The group held regular talks and tutorials on various photographic topics and techniques. Topics included what to consider when choosing a new camera to how to use studio lighting equipment. Workshops on the use of studio lighting equipment were held at Dooley's Hotel and Craughwell's pub. Tutorials on the computer manipulation of images using Adobe Photoshop software were organised. The aim of these events was to take better photographs by improving camera knowledge and technique. With the aid of an Offaly County Council Arts Grant, studio lighting equipment was purchased for members to advance their studio photography skills.

Regular photo theme nights throughout the year encouraged members to constantly improve their photographic skills. Typically members had 3 weeks to get out and photograph images on a selected topic, anything from food to movement. Then everyone's images were viewed by the group for discussion.



Martin Roberts on the Lough Boora Trip.

A photography field trip to "Lough Boora Sculpture Parklands" was organised in July. The group outings are a valuable learning event, as well as a social occasion. The more experienced photographers would give help and advice to other members.

The group had four public exhibitions: "Birr" at Emma's Cafe in April; "Black and White" at Birr Library in June; "Playtime" at Craughwell's and Birr Library in August as part of the 43rd Birr Vintage Week; and "Still Life" at Birr Library and The Granary Cafe in September.

Members gave slide shows of their own work which was of interest to the group. These included travel photography in India and Eastern Europe and local events such as The 41st Irish Hot Air Balloon Festival, The Forestry Show, and The Irish Game and Country Fair.

Each year the group grows from strength to strength, with the skills of members constantly improving. New members are always welcomed, as more exciting events are planned for the coming year. Go online at www.birrphtogroup.org for more information.



Exhibitors at the 'Black and White Exhibition' at Birr Library in June 2011.

Back Row (L to R): Joe Kearns, Terry Smith, David Polden, Elaine Gohery, Billy McLoughlin, Paul Purcell.

Middle Row: Emma Nee Haslam, Julien Kennedy, Tina Claffey, Antje Joel.

Front Row: Nonee McLoughlin, Fiona Cleary, Rosalind Fanning.

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CRINKILL TIDY VILLAGES AND DEVELOPMENT ASSOCIATION

The Tidy Villages Association continues to make progress in the National Tidy Towns competition, scoring an extra two points in 2011, to bring the total to 257 (out of a potential 400).

The comment from the judge was that "it was great to revisit Crinkill after an absence of many years. Thankfully, the attractive, peaceful village atmosphere still survives."

The focus of the competition is now on wildlife and waste minimisation and Crinkill is losing points in these categories. The committee intends to make more effort next year to identify improvements under these categories. The committee has had many meetings over the years with the local county council engineer and has identified urgent works needed in the village. One of the priorities was drainage and re-surfacing on Boherdeel Road and we are delighted to see that this work has finally been completed. We look forward to continued co-operation with the Offaly County Council team in the area.

Once again, we would like to thank the RSS team, who did Trojan work to keep the grass and litter under control over the summer months. Thanks to all the local businesses and residents who supported our fund-raising throughout the year.



Eco-friendly grass cutting in Crinkill graveyard.

LEGION OF MARY



Pictured above are
 Back Row (L to R): Cecily Dolan,
 Maureen Reedy, Sheila Delahunty (hidden).
 Front Row: Mary McGee, Maura Wrafter,
 Bernie Bolger.

Pictured are Legion of Mary members who
 enjoyed a trip to Glenstal Abbey in Co. Limerick.

Pictured below, from left to right, are Fidelma Clavin,
 Maura Sherlock, Maura Wrafter, Sheila Delahunty, Mary O'Meara.





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TÚS MAITH, LEATH NA HOIBRE!



At the official opening of *Noíníní Beoga Naionra*,
L to R: Eilís Artigan (Liz Hartigan), stiúrthóir, *Blaithnaid ni Chofaidh* with Colum.

In December 2010, four figures sat huddled over their mugs of tea and dreamt up the concept of 'Biorra le Gaeilge'. Rosalind Fanning introduced us to each other that night. However until then, Donncha Ó Ceallaigh, Seán Ó Cearbhaill (comhairleoir) and Stella O'Malley didn't really know each other very well. The common link between us is that we're all enthusiasts of the Irish language and we had come together for the first time to discuss how we could promote the Irish language in Birr and the surrounding area. That night in December we settled on three objectives; to run a *Campa Samhraidh*, to open a *naíonra* (an Irish language playschool) and, ultimately, to open a *Gaelscoil* so that the children of Birr could have the choice to learn their lessons through the medium of Irish.

With the support of *Comhaltas Ceoltóirí Éireann*, we launched *Biorra le Gaeilge* with a bang at the annual *Oíche Scannáin* in the Tin Jug Studio during *Seachtain na Gaeilge* in March and, from then, we proceeded to Craughwell's and had a traditional music session until late into the night. We decided that there was a demand for a *Ciorcal Comhrá* in Birr. We meet on the second Wednesday of each month in Craughwell's.

We ran two different *Campa Samhraidh* during the summer and it was great fun for everybody concerned. Stella O'Malley, Jamie Dooly, Antoinette Fahy and Laura Dolan were the *múinteoirí* and the children were aged from 7 to 14 years old. We held the *Campa Samhraidh* in St. Brendan's Community School and we had the use of fabulous, state-of-the-art facilities. We also had support from *Ógras* and *Foras na Gaeilge* and could afford to go on boat trips up the Shannon to Clonmacnoise and on a bus trip to Portumna to play pitch and putt. We were surprised and delighted when we saw how quickly the children were happy to speak *cúpla focail anseo agus ansiúd*.

After a whole slew of paperwork, nerves, effort and enthusiasm, we finally opened the *naíonra*, 'Noíníní Beaga', in Green Street in September. Eilís Ní hArtagáin is the *múinteoir* and all the children love her dearly. Eilís is from Ballinasloe and was one of the first pupils to enter the *gaelscoil* in Ballinasloe (*Scoil Uí Cheithernaigh*) in 1990.

Biorra le Gaeilge has been very lucky with all the support we have received from *Foras na Gaeilge*, *Forbairt Naíonra Teo*, *Gaelscoileanna Teo* and *Offaly Childcare Committee*. We look forward to the day when 'Noíníní Beaga' becomes a standard point of reference for the Irish-speaking community in Birr. We are exceedingly proud of our *múinteoir* and our *cúntóir*, Laura Parry, and we are delighted with the goodwill from the people of Birr towards our non-profit undertaking.

Due to demand arising from our *Ciorcal Comhrá*, with the support of *Offaly VEC* we have been able to hold Irish classes for adults in the new *naíonra*. The class is on every Wednesday and the beginners' class is at 7pm and the improvers' is at 8pm. D'fhéadafá a rá go bhfuil *Biorra le Gaeilge* ar an bhfód faoin am seo agus ag dul ó fheabhas go feabhas. We believe we have certainly re-affirmed the place for the Irish language in the Birr area.

Biorra le Gaeilge is a not-for-profit organisation and we rely on goodwill and support to keep ourselves going. We are on Facebook so you can support us, read about new events and add your own comments if you so wish. If you have a child aged between 2 and a half and 5 we would very much appreciate it if you would consider sending your child to *Noíníní Beaga*. Ring our stiúrthóir, Eilís Ní Artagáin, at 087 7678130 for further details. If you'd like to join the Irish classes for adults, contact Stella at 085 7112211. For the *Ciorcail Comhra*, or if you'd like to be involved in any way with *Biorra le Gaeilge*, just give us a call or come along to Craughwell's and meet us one Wednesday night.



The *Biorra le Gaeilge* committee at the official opening of the *Noíníní Beoga Naionra*.

L to R: Rosalind Fanning, Denis Kelly, Antoinette Fahy, Brian Carroll, John Carroll, Liz Hartigan, Blaithnaid ni Chofaidh, Maire ni Chofaidh.
(Missing from picture is Stella ni Mhaile).

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BIRR HISTORICAL SOCIETY



Bridget Sullivan, Anne Ward and Irene Morrow prepare for the St. Brendan seminar.

We have had an interesting series of talks and lectures over the year. Starting off in January, Sister Anne Hannon spoke very fluently about Catherine McAuley, founder of the Sisters of Mercy and their arrival in Birr in 1840. In

February, Rebecca Armstrong, the owner of Clonony Castle near Shannon Harbour, gave us a fascinating talk about her restoration of the castle. She is very knowledgeable about the history and the previous owners of the castle. She invited us to visit the castle, which we did in July. We also saw the grave slab of the two Boleyn sisters, who lived there in the 16th century. The headstone was excavated in 1820 from a nearby quarry. The tour concluded with a visit to Belmont Mills, which Tom and Sandy Dolan have done a terrific job in restoring.

Other interesting talks were from Amanda Pedlow, who outlined the five year heritage plan for Offaly and Berni Moran's, 'From Lynally to Durrow'. She spoke about travel between the monasteries in the midlands, suggesting that it would have been easier to travel by boat or coracle, as the land was very flooded.

To celebrate Heritage Week, which occurs during the last week of August, we organised a seminar on St. Brendan of Birr (not to be confused with St. Brendan the Navigator). See below for Irene Morrow's account of the day. Birr Historical Society meets on the third Monday of the month, from September to May, in Dooly's Hotel.

ST. BRENDAN'S DAY



Cistercian monks lead worship in the ruins of St. Brendan's Church

Birr Historical Society celebrated the life of St. Brendan in September 2011. Birr Theatre and Arts Centre was an ideal venue, where Adomnán's Bell, Cross and the Manuscript of his Law were displayed on stage.

The opening address was by our own Michael Donegan who welcomed all – and especially those from away – and spoke of the significance of a holy man in the community and how he is remembered in stories told about him. 'That was the best bit of the day for me', one lady said afterwards.

Professor Máire Herbert from UCC spoke about the many references made to Brendan in the Lives of the Saints and in the annals. There are references to the Life of Brendan but, over the centuries, that book has been lost. Despite

this, the other sources show Brendan to be a man of insight, kindness and tolerance.

Professor Dáibhí Ó Cróinín from NUIG spoke about the world in which Brendan lived in relation to his contemporaries like Colmcille, Brendan of Clonfert and Finnian of Clonard. He ably answered questions about the Easter Controversy. Salters Sterling expressed our thanks to the lecturers and our appreciation of the work of the organisers.

In the afternoon, Caimin O'Brien showed us some of the other monastic sites in Offaly which helped to identify the monastic site in Birr. He argued also from ancient canon law that the ruin on Church Street is probably on the site of Brendan's monastery.

Then, it was out from the theatre on a lovely sunny day to walk to the ruined church, led by the Cross of Adomnán. It was carried in turn by four Brendans who were part of our number. In the ruined church, we were led in worship by the Abbot of Roscrea and two of his monks. Being the feast day of Gregory the Great, it was fitting to worship using Gregorian Chant as Brendan's community would have done. 'A study day became a pilgrimage' as one lady said. From there, we continued to Brendan's Well at the invitation of Lord Rosse, where the monks sang again and where many took water from the well. For a few, the day ended with a field-trip to Fortmoyle, which Dáibhí Ó Cróinín particularly enjoyed. 'You are so lucky', he said. 'You have so much in Birr.'

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BIRR LIBRARY

It was another exciting year for Birr Library - this is just a small sample of the various courses and events in the library.

- Boys into Books
- Reading initiatives
- World Book Day
- Author visits by Oisín McGann and Mary Arrigan
- Leinster Regiment seminars
- Seachtain na nGaeilge
- Bealtaine
- Heritage Week
- Children Book Festival
- Offline Film Festival- Primary school screenings
- Helpful reading collection
- Art Exhibition
- Online learning
- eAudiobooks on NetLibrary
- And much much more

The FÁS e-learning courses were a great success, with a 20% increase in demand for the courses in 2011. A revised programme of the FÁS e-learning will be launched in 2012. Due to the success of the creative writing for teenagers, this workshop was extended until June 2011. Once again, the group of teenagers impressed with their open mic morning in the library. On this occasion, the group worked on several short plays - these were enjoyed by all. These can also be seen on the library website – www.offaly.ie/libraries

The community scarf is now over 50 feet long, so come along and create your own line.

Come along to the library, enjoy our happy hour, avail of the free wifi or simply browse.

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Thursday 9.30am – 5.30pm, Friday 9.30am – 5.30pm and

Saturday 9.30am – 1.00pm.

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Oxmantown NS - Storytelling with Liz Weir



National Music Day



Knitting Circle



Mercy P.S. Launch of World Book Day



Book Launch for From Bone to Blossom

BIRR JUNIOR YOUTH CLUB



Wren Higgins and Jade O'Meara enjoying the Halloween party.

Birr Junior Youth Club was established in October of this year and is based in Birr Community School. So popular was the turnout for membership that the club is now operating a waiting list for membership to the club. This club is open to children in 2nd class up to 6th class

only. It provides an opportunity for children to participate in a range of activities in a safe, caring and fun environment. The club is affiliated to the Midlands Regional Youth Services Limited and works within a Code of Practice which set basic standards that ensure the welfare of young people and leaders in the club. Programme of events includes recreational and educational activities. Adult/Leader Induction Training and Child Protection Training for volunteers took place during the summer. Volunteers who help out in the club include parents, staff from Birr Community School and students who are in transition year. The Club meets on Thursday nights from 7pm to 8.15pm. The committee welcomes ideas and input from the community. If you would like to volunteer to help out with Birr Junior Youth Club, please contact a member of the committee on Club night.

BIRR LIONS CLUB

Over the past 12 months, Birr Lions Club has been very active and has raised in excess of €30,000 through various projects, such as the annual Birr Review magazine, church gate collection, table quiz, Christmas fast and a 2-day collection at the Irish Game and Country Fair held in Birr Castle Demesne.

The funds were then duly distributed to various organisations, clubs and individuals, including the following: St. Vincent De Paul, Birr Neighbourhood Watch, Northside Bus Committee, Birr Youth Café, Marie Keating Cancer Foundation, Birr Mental Health Association, St. Brendan's Boys P.S. Parents Association, Respond!

Chesterfield Community Childcare Summer Camp, Birr Vintage Week, Share a Dream Foundation, OFFline Film Festival and various others.

The club organised a party for the senior citizens in the Day Care Centre during the year and a very enjoyable day was had by all. We also gave our support to Birr Vintage Week in helping them organise and run the Camcor Capers.

Finally, we would like to take this opportunity to thank you, the general public, most sincerely for all your support throughout the year and to assure you of our continued commitment to the area, the youth and the underprivileged. Your generosity is much appreciated.



Lions District Vice-Governor Ciaran Mullooly (third from left) opening Birr Vintage Week Antique Fair with Lion Pat Connolly, President Brian Hogan and Birr Lions founder, Jim Phelan.

BIRR MENTAL HEALTH ASSOCIATION

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. In this regard, we organise public lectures, workshops - e.g. personal development, public speaking projects in schools, book lending, parenting courses and free information leaflets.

2011 was once again a very busy and eventful year for the Association. We sponsored the annual holiday to Galway this year. Thankfully, the weather was beautiful and many people benefited from this holiday. There were a number of very enjoyable parties organised by our own and other Mental Health Associations.

Mental Health Association members took a number of people to Dublin Zoo, the Botanical Gardens and Knock during the summer months. Visits were made to Clonfert and local areas of historical interest. Transport is provided to all events by the Mental Health Association's minibus.

Deserving cases are catered for in times of financial difficulties and, at Christmas, by the provision of hampers, fuel, etc. This is more important than ever in the current financial climate. Practical help is also provided in the area of home improvements. 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. This encourages acceptance of same. The theme for World Mental Health Week this year was "Celebrating Volunteering" and the Association

hosted a very successful talk in Dooley's Hotel on Tuesday 25th October. Darren Hanniffy, GOAL, gave an inspiring and moving account of his work with GOAL in Haiti and Africa. John Bannon spoke about the "Rewards of Volunteering". Later, Birr Mental Health Association presented a cheque to Darren for GOAL and, also, Ethna Carroll presented a cheque from the proceeds from a Bric a Brac Sale recently held in the Community Mental Health Centre, which was organised by staff and clients of the Centre. There was a very enjoyable party held for Halloween, where fun and games were had by all, with some very interesting fancy dress costumes.

Each year, we purchase a pass to Birr Castle. This is a lovely amenity for service users at the Community Mental Health Centre to avail of. The beautiful grounds can provide inspiration for the art group, which meets weekly in the Centre. Samples of their work can be seen in O'Connor's shop window, Main Street, Birr.

All the above events were provided as a result of the generosity of people who contributed to our fundraising efforts during the year, which included Church Gate Collections, Bag Packing Days, Raffles, etc. Our next big event to look forward to will be the Annual Christmas Party and Christmas Raffle, which be held in a local hotel.

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.



The Mental Health Association Committee making a presentation to Darren Hanniffy of GOAL.

(L to R): Angela Ryan, Margaret Cahindale, Mary Kerins, Josephine Burke, Darren Hanniffy, Finola Colgan, Claire Hernon, Pauline Cleary.

CARRIG/RIVERSTOWN PARENT AND TODDLERS GROUP

Carrig and Riverstown Parent and Toddlers Group has been running for almost 12 years. It runs every Wednesday morning from 10.30 – 12.00 in the Carrig/Riverstown Community Hall. Toddlers and Pre-school children get to enjoy a variety of toys, arts and crafts, stories, music and dance whilst playing with old and new friends. It also gives a chance for Mums and Dads and child-minders to catch up over a cup of tea or coffee. The group is funded through the HSE grant programme, which allows it to survive.

Highlights this year included a trip to Turoe Pet Farm, trips to local Jump'n'Gyms and all our annual festive parties. We welcome all parents, minders and children. This is a great way to meet new families with toddlers/pre-school children to foster strong friendships. New members are the life-blood of our group and are always especially welcome. We wish our graduates of 2010/2011 the very best of luck as they move on to "big school" and thank their parents for all their support and friendship through the years.



Family and Toddler day out at Turoe Pet Farm. Toddlers and their siblings all enjoyed a fun day out.

ST. BRENDAN'S ENVIRONMENTAL GROUP



(L to R): Joe Guilfoyle, Seamus Hehir and Barry Reynolds carried out improvement works on old buildings on Castle Street.



The beautiful water feature that was built at the entrance to Mill Island during the year.

BIRR BRIDGE CLUBS

The Monday night bridge club was founded in 1966 therefore is called the Birr 66 Club; it celebrates 45 years this year. There are some founder members still playing in the club.

The President for the 2011/2012 season is Sadie Leonard and best wishes are extended to her for the forthcoming year. The club has a membership of just fewer than 40 and would be open to welcome new members and former members back.

The club plays every Monday night in the County Arms Hotel from autumn to late spring. Apart from the weekly competitions, members play for turkeys in the lead up to Christmas, as well as other major competitions throughout the year. We all look forward to the coveted Presidents Prize which is played at the end of season. Last year's president Mrs. Mary Glendenning's prize was won by Delia Naughton and Kathleen Lowry.

We also play a qualifying round each year to compete in the Regional Presidents prize which was played in Athlone last April. Mary Kerins and Paul Kerins represented the Monday night club while Sadie Leonard and Lena Guinan represented the Wednesday night club at the Regional prize. Peter O'Meara, Regional PRO, was invited by the Regional President, Mr. John Daly to play. Peter invited Teresa Fealy to play with him on the night. It was a great honour for our club when Peter and Teresa proceeded to win the Regional Presidents prize. Our heartiest congratulations to them. Sadie and Lena were also in the top prize winners.

The Camcor Bridge Club also goes from strength to strength playing every Wednesday night in the County Arms Hotel. It's a very sociable club and is also pleased to welcome new

members. Camcor President for 2011/2012 is Mrs. Teresa Kelly, and we wish her well in her year. Last years President Ms. Ann Richie's prize was won by Maura Kerrigan and Gladys O'Meara.

On alternate years, each club hosts the Des Houlihan trophy. A Team of Four Competition is played between the clubs in memory of Des who distinguished himself at club, regional and national competitions so much that he was selected to represent Ireland on a number of occasions. Bridge is by far the greatest card game of all, and it can provide immense challenge and enjoyment for the rest of your life. The Bridge card game is a fascinating game, unrivalled from other card games by its depth. If you learn to play the game you will develop memory skills that are useful not just for playing bridge, but for many other mental activities. It can also provide great discussions on how hands are bid and played which can provide endless hours of entertainment.

Joe Kerins one, of the founder members of the club has for years taught almost all of our members how to play the game. His passion and love of bridge continues to this day. Anyone interested in learning the game can contact him on 057-9122671.

Bridge is also played every Tuesday mornings in The Glens, Birr Golf Club from November to early May. It is now entering its 9th season and caters for all players who enjoy the morning game of bridge. Over the years a number of local charities have benefited from the end of year balance. All are welcome, the game commences at 10.30am for further information contact Mary O'Gorman on 087-2380461.



Winners of the Mr. John Daly, Regional President's Prize in Athlone, 2011
L to R: Peter O'Meara (Birr 66 Club), John Daly (Regional President), Teresa Fealy (Birr 66 Club).



The Carrig Group at the Parish Sports Star Awards

Back Row (L to R): Billy Guilfoyle, Christina Guilfoyle, Shane O'Brien, Ronan Joyce, Paul King, Stephen Guilfoyle, Tadhg Sullivan, Siobhan Carey, Greg Hanlon, Betty Kennedy, Nuala Hanlon, John Kennedy, Mary King, Anne Hctor, Orla Meehan, Donna Shiels, Denis Hctor.
Front Row: Tadhg Sullivan, Mary Sullivan, Sheila Sullivan, Dermot Sullivan, Michael Kennedy, Eoin Sullivan, Tadhg Carey.

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RIVERVIEW RESOURCES



Riverview Resources is located in Ely House and is part of St. Anne's Centre in Roscrea. It has been providing resources and activities for people with intellectual disabilities in Birr since 2001.

It is set in an idyllic location adjacent to Camcor Park where arts and crafts are undertaken from Monday to Friday. Fine quality pieces of slate, handmade cards, head pieces and other crafts that are produced in the centre are on sale to the general public.

There are currently 19 individuals using the service at Riverview Resources. The facilities include a computer room, crafts room, kitchen area, dining area, therapy room, toilet facilities and an active retirement area. The therapeutic value in producing slate and craft work is noted by all at Riverview Resources. Both service users and staff equally enjoy participating in these activities. The slate and craft work enhances individual skills and also increases responsibilities in the work environment.

The popular craft work in Riverview Resources is sought after for wedding and gift items. To add to the unique

character of the crafts each piece can be designed to suit the personal preferences and individualised to the customer's request.

The craft production in Riverview Resources is only one aspect of the overall activities undertaken at the Resource Centre. The main objective for Riverview Resources is community participation and sourcing supported employment. We are very fortunate here in Birr that a number of individuals who use services at Riverview Resources are employed by local business people.

Additional activities include going to the gym, courses, hosting coffee mornings for the local community charities and participating in the Tidy Towns. Since moving to the new premises we had the opportunity to develop a garden and produce our own vegetables.

Visitors are always welcome to view our arts and crafts which are for sale. Our opening hours for visitors are 9.00 am to 5pm Monday to Thursday and 9.00am to 4.00 pm Friday.

SOCIETY OF ST. VINCENT DE PAUL



The Vincent De Paul Committee – 2011.

Back Row (L to R): Pat Pilkington, Louie Hassett, Sarah Murphy, John Tierney, Monica Boyd, Paddy McIntyre, Owen O'Neill.

Front Row: Elaine Eastwood, Sr. Roberta, Maire Purcell, Enda Manzor, Anna Corboy.

RIVERSTOWN/KILLEEN TIDY TOWNS

Riverstown/Killeen Tidy Towns got going in early March, 2011. A new chairperson, Theresa, PRO Martina, and our very reliable committee members, formed the basis of a work plan for the year. Weekly Wednesday clean-ups were immediately undertaken. The year progressed and everything from sweeping, cleaning, repairing, sowing, planting, painting, strimming and of course mowing grass took place. We hope that everyone enjoyed the increased planting, development of grass areas on the Portumna road, fixing of stone piers, development of the butterfly garden and the maintenance of the bridge hanging baskets in 2011. 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 are regularly maintaining 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 two fundraisers in 2011, both successful and novel. The first was a 'toll the bridge day' and we thank all the locals and volunteers who helped to make it a big success, the second was a 'car treasure hunt and bbq'. We thank all of our sponsors and volunteers who gave of their time to make both a success. We hope to make both of these annual events to sustain the group for many years to come. We scored 270 points out of 400 in the 2010 national competition and improved to 274 in the 2011 competition – these may seem like small steps but the group are very hopeful that with the support from locals and the agencies that we will continue the steady progress for the next three years. We really need extra help for the 2012 season and would love to hear from anybody with spare time and energy. Please contact any member of the committee locally to get involved. We will re-commence in early March 2012.



Members of the Riverstown/Killeen Tidy Towns Committee.

Back Row (L to R): Martina Riordan, Noel Larkin, John Bergin, Noel O'Rourke.
Front Row: Sean Wynne, Sarah King, Teresa King.

Missing from photo are: Brendan Hanamy, Brian Kelly, Jim Delahunt and Mick Liffey.

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SOUTH OFFALY SPECIAL OLYMPICS CLUB

The South Offaly Special Olympics Club was first started in 2005. It started in the Rugby Club in Birr and involved athletes from the surrounding areas. As the number of athletes grew, so did the need for a larger hall and training moved to Cloghan.

The athletes participate in swimming, bowling, and basketball. Swimming is held every second week in Birr Leisure Centre. On Monday nights, we have basketball in Cloghan hall and, on alternative Wednesday nights the athletes practice bowling in the Cosmic Bowl in Tullamore. There are 38 athletes affiliated to the club. These athletes are from Banagher, Lusmagh, Cloghan, Ferbane, Birr and Clareen. The Special Olympics has a 4-year advancement cycle; Year 1 is area events, Year 2 is regional events, Year 3 is the All-Ireland Games and Year 4 is the World Games which were held in Athens this year.

The club was represented by Damien Breslin last year at the All-Ireland Games in Limerick and Damien proudly returned home with a gold medal for swimming. The next 4-year cycle begins in November 2011, with athletes taking part in swimming events in the Curragh, Kildare. The vision for the club is to enter each athlete in the various sports and to have as many as possible in the All-Ireland Games in 2014. Every year, our athletes represent our club in St. Patrick's Day and Vintage parades. The athletes wear their distinctive green, white and gold tracksuits with pride and there is no doubt what county they represent!

The club would like to thank those who donated money on our collection days in June. This money will help greatly to keep the club running for the next three years. The club would also like to thank all the volunteers who gave their



Birr Parish Sports Awards winners are (L to R) Marian Horan and Christopher Ryan (Merit Winners), Damien Breslin (Award Winner), Liam Butler (Sponsor).

time each week to the club and also our coaches Eamonn O'Meara (basketball), John Dunican and Niall Fitzgerald (bowling), Brendan Fogarty and Gráinne Hogan (swimming) for their flawless attendance at each training session.

We would also like to thank the staff and management of Cloghan Hall, Dooly's Hotel, Birr, Cosmic Bowl, Tullamore and the Leisure Centre, Birr for the use of their facilities over the year.

We hope that you will follow and support us in our progress in all competitions and events in the coming year in the local papers.

The Special Olympics motto is:

Let me win

If I cannot win

Let me be brave in the attempt.



Athletes from club welcome home Tullamore Athletes from Athens (summer 2011).

Left to Right: Kieran Shiels, Noel Morris, Martina Lowe (volunteer), June Stanley, David Shaughnessy, Regina Blake, Damien Breslin, Gary McCabe (Silver, Basketball World Games), Patrick Moore, (Gold, Soccer World Games), Christopher Ryan, Dessie McDonagh, Tony Shaughnessy, Mathew Clifford, Alison Rock, David Radcliffe, John Claffey.

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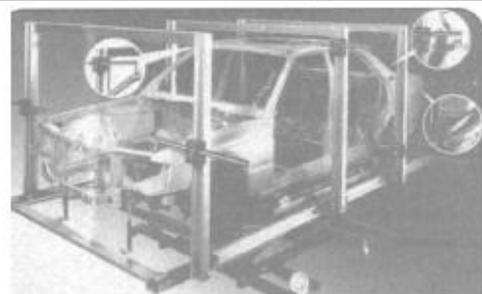
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WOLFTRAP CYCLING CLUB

Wolftrap Cycling Club is named after Wolftrap Mountain in the Slieve Blooms. The origins of the mountain's name are uncertain, but it was a logical choice for the name of a cycling club based in the area. Wolves became extinct in Ireland in the 1700's. Cyclists, on the other hand, have been multiplying rapidly over the last five or six years and the Slieve Blooms contain some of the most popular roads in the country for cycling.

On most weekends between spring and autumn, road cyclists test their legs on the climbs to Wolftrap Mountain and The Cut or, if they are feeling particularly strong, Glendine Gap. It is rare not to meet other cyclists along the way; many drive from other parts of the country in order to cycle the Slieve Bloom roads. If the weather is fine the views are spectacular. In summer, when the furze bushes are in flower, a 'coconut oil' aroma is strong along the road from Clonaslee to The Cut.

The road up to Wolftrap Mountain is particularly popular with cyclists from Birr because it is only a 30-minute spin to the start of the climb at Kinnitty, then an always difficult, but ultimately satisfying, 8 km ride to the top. The descent back to Kinnitty is exhilarating, especially now that most of the road has been resurfaced.

Given the Wolftrap's popularity, in 2005 a group of cyclists based in and around the Birr area borrowed the mountain's name for their new club and Wolftrap CC was born. Eighteen people turned up for the club's first spin on a rainy



Having a coffee break are, L to R, Olive Mannion, Bernie Grennan, Mary Grennan (hidden), Teri Finnerty, Deaglan O'Bric, Paddy O'Brien, Mary Lonergan, Sue Reidy, Tory Baker.

Sunday morning. Six years on, membership has reached 70 and continues to grow.

Wolftrap CC is predominantly a leisure cycling club, although a handful of its members race and one of its junior riders has represented Ireland. This year, a group of 14 rode from Mizen Head to Malin Head over five days. Since the club began, many members have ridden the Ring of Kerry charity cycle, the Wicklow 200 challenge, the Border Trek, the Tour de Burren and the Sean Kelly Tour of Waterford. There was a club trip to Sicily earlier this year,

Spain in 2010 and the Pyrenees in 2009.

This September, the club organised its first Slieve Bloom Challenge, a 147 km loop that included all seven climbs – The Wolftrap from both sides, The Cut from both sides, Glendine from both sides and Lackaroe (or Hoor's Hill, as those with tired legs call it). It wasn't a race and there was all day to do it. For some, that's how long it took, but the satisfaction of finishing was immense.

Cycling is a perverse sport in some ways. Riding up steep mountain roads is hard. Sometimes it hurts. Arriving red-faced, panting and sweating at the county border sign at the top of the Wolftrap or the viewing point at The Cut is not terribly dignified, but it is enormously satisfying. Swooping down again is the icing on the cake. Whichever way you look at it, Wolftrap is the perfect name for a cycling club.



Wolftrap Cyclists celebrate their arrival in Malin Head.

Back Row (L to R): Jan Griejmans, Rief Griejmans, (Holland), Aidan Horan, Gerry Brennan, Pierre Griejmans, Peter Doyle, Paddy Breen, Declan Ward, Joe Fallon.

Front Row: Tony Fahy, Cronan Grennan, Marie Brady, Joe Mannion, Noreen Garahy, Ronan Clarke, John Plunkett.



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CRINKILL HANDBALL CLUB

It was another busy year for the club, with plenty of handball action and other activities. Our facilities have once again taken centre stage on the national handball circuit due to our geographical location and top class alleys. Crinkill has been the most used facility outside of Croke Park for national handball fixtures. We renovated our 60x30 court this year, making sure that these games will be played in our venue for years to come.

The club had another phenomenal year, with National and International success. The club continues to grow with new members each year and, more importantly, the main sport that we offer caters for both male and female players of all ages, thus making handball a game for life.

In early January, with a team consisting of Shane Murtagh, Finn Dempsey, Jimmy Cooke, Aaron Blake and Michael Milne, we started our Community Games campaign defeating Clara in the County Final. We progressed through to the Leinster final but were beaten by Carlow. Our Community Games girl's team made it through to the Leinster final but were defeated by Wexford; the team on this occasion was Clodagh Hanniffy, Bronagh Byrne, Kerrie Byrne, Erin O'Meara and Andrea Cooke.

These teams went on to play in the Féile na nGael finals in Galway. The boy's team failed to qualify out of their group but the girls did exceptionally well, reaching the semi-final. There is no doubt that these teams will succeed in the not too distant future.



Crinkill Féile 2011 Girls Team.

(L to R) Clodagh Hanniffy, Kerrie Byrne, Andrea Cooke, Bronagh Byrne, Erin O'Meara.

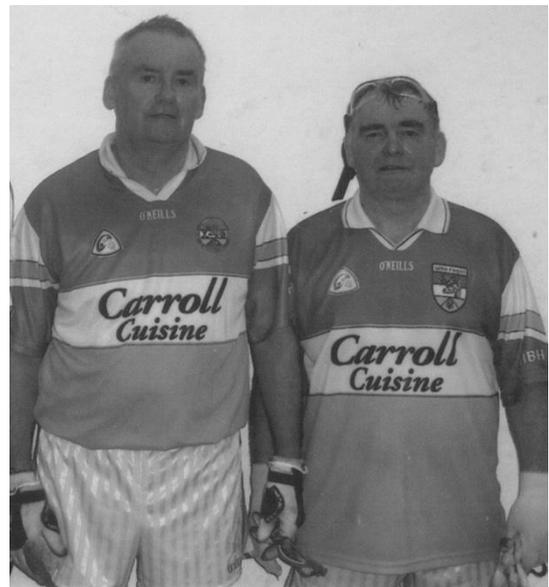
In the Leinster 40x20 Juvenile B championship, Crinkill's Conor Smith won the Under-13 singles final. In the Under-12 final Michael Milne was defeated in the tie-breaker. The Leinster 60x30 championship started in July and the club performed very well in the competition with six players reaching the semi-final stages. Raymond Nolan reached the final of the Under-13 singles but was defeated by Kildare's Michael O'Donnell. The club had a total of twelve players, both male and female, represent Offaly in this year's 40x20 and 60x30 championships.

In the 40x20 two of our adult players had great success with Jim Guilfoyle and Billy Mullins winning the Emerald



U-13BSB 40x20 Leinster Final, Michael O'Donnell, Kildare, R-Up, Eamon Doheny, Conor Smith, Offaly, Winner.

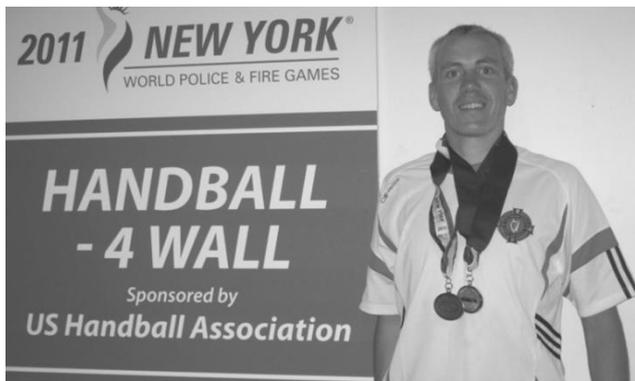
Masters A Doubles Leinster and All-Ireland Final. This duo, have set a record, winning this competition four years in a row. In the singles of the same grade, Billy Mullins won the Leinster final but was narrowly defeated in the All-Ireland Final.



Offaly's Jim Guilfoyle (left) and Billy Mullins, All-Ireland 40x20 Emerald Masters A Doubles Winners.

In the junior inter-club 40x20 championship, we defeated O'Loughlin Gaels of Kilkenny in the Leinster semi-final and went on to defeat another Kilkenny side, Clogh in the final. Unfortunately for the club the team was defeated by Salthill of Galway in the All-Ireland semi-final. The team consisted of Kevin Cooke, Michael O'Brien, Sean Ryan, John Mullins and Noel O'Brien.

Our club chairman, Michael O'Brien, had international success when he competed in the World Police and



Michael O'Brien, who won the World Police and Fireman's Games Senior Doubles title.

Fireman's Games in New York. Michael partnered Paddy Donovan of Laois when he won the final of the senior doubles, seeing off challenges from some of the Worlds top ten players along the way. Michael also won a bronze medal in the singles of the same competition. On his return, Michael had three days to recover before he competed in the All-Ireland 60x30 Junior Doubles Final. He was partnered by fellow county player David Hope of Rhode on this occasion. With a hard-fought campaign throughout the season, this duo brought back the Junior Doubles Cup to Offaly. The last time Offaly won this cup was twenty-one years ago when it was won by Billy Mullins and Paddy Kealy.

CRINKILL SPORTS AND RECREATION CENTRE

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, Dance and Circuit Training for all ages and abilities. We also host Kickboxing classes for both juveniles and adults every week. During the summer months we started kids mixed sport activities and they still continue twice a week. Also, we held a very successful summer camp this year, with over twenty children taking part. We currently run classes for St.

Cronan's, Birr Riverview 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 our list of activities for people in the locality. We would like to take this opportunity to thank the community for their valued support, without which the club would be unable to function at the level at which it does.

CAMCOR WARRIORS SPECIAL OLYMPICS



These 'warriors' are member of the Camcor Warriors Special Olympics club who meet on a regular basis to train for future sporting events with Special Olympics Ireland. These activities include swimming, athletics and equestrian. If you have a child who would like to become a member of our club, or you would like to become a volunteer yourself, please contact Susanne on 086 8273639.

Pictured left are the coaching team, Liam Grimes and Mary Dwyer (at back). The athletes include Conor Saxby, Tara Kenny, Conor Dwyer and Isobel Dempsey (gold medal winner)

ORMAND FLYING CLUB

Despite another year of recession, 2011 proved to be a very successful year for the Ormand Flying Club.

One of the major events of the year, the Annual BIRR Breakfast, was held on 27th March. We were very lucky to be blessed with glorious weather on the day and had the largest turnout ever, with 96 aircraft flying in for the full Irish and the chance to catch up with fellow aviators after a long winter in the hangar.

The Aer Lingus 75th Celebrations were held on Saturday 28th May at Dublin Airport. Only people who were invited were allowed to land at Dublin Airport, which is mostly closed to general aviation. EI-BKC from BIRR was invited to participate in the celebrations and joined around 20 invitees in helping Aer Lingus celebrate 75 years in the aviation business.



Joe Davy (CFI) at BIRR pictured in front of the Aer Lingus 'Iolar'

We held our Annual Fly-In on 6th and 7th August this year, in conjunction with BIRR Vintage Week. The bad weather, unfortunately, played a huge role by putting a dampener on the week-end. We had members of the Midland Model Flying Club doing static displays in the hangar. They also thrilled the public and members of our Club with flying displays on both days, in between showers.



Air Sea Rescue helicopter putting on a display

During a torrential shower on Saturday the Irish Coast Guard Air Sea Rescue Helicopter arrived and bravely did their promised display for members and visitors in very bad visibility. The Aer Lingus 'Iolar' was displayed over both days at the Fly-In weekend and we were delighted to have it again in BIRR, as it was many years since its last visit.



Colm Wright (Centre) pictured after passing his PPL (M) with Paul Walsh (Left) Examiner and Joe Davy (Right), Chief Flying Instructor at BIRR.

Congratulations to those who achieved Private Pilot Licences and passed their exams during the year:

PPL (Aeroplane) John Heffernan, Kevin McGrath and Stephen Mooney.

PPL (Microlight) Colm Wright

PPL Exams – Emmet Lennon and Damien Cornally



Jonathan Madden in the cockpit of his plane which he is in the process of restoring

Congratulations also to Club member, Jonathan Madden who purchased a Jodel for restoration this year. He hopes to have it flying over the next few years.

Finally, if anyone is interested in learning to fly or purchasing vouchers for Christmas presents please contact 087-7479555.

SKYDIVE IRELAND AT BIRR AIRFIELD

Skydive Ireland, in association with the Irish Skydiving Club and Ormand Flying Club, had a very successful year at Birr Airfield. It was forecast to be a very difficult year ahead, with an increasingly challenging recession, but the greatest challenge proved to be the Irish weather.

We provide skydiving all over the country at the various regional airports but we have been made to feel incredibly welcome at Birr and so we consider it our home. Our greatest focus for the club is to recruit dare-devils from all over the country and encourage them to jump from 10,000ft in aid of charity. This year, we selected 'Make A Wish Foundation' as our nominated charity as we feel children should be kept the highest priority during this recession. Over €1,000,000 is fund-raised each year in Ireland from charity parachute jumps.

Our greatest day of the year was on the 24th of September when we had our local neighbours from Birr and nearby areas come together and fund-raise in excess of €16,000 for Oran's Wish to Walk. Thirty three participants took place in the Tandem Skydive from 10,000ft and, while securely attached to our instructors, got to experience the Freefall at speeds of 200 km/h over Birr Airfield. On site at the Airfield, there was fun to be had by all with three bouncy castles, free BBQ and music to keep all the supporters entertained. We were so

thrilled at the level of support received for this fantastic event. Thank you God for providing the weather!

We are blessed to have Birr Airfield as our home as it is one of the longest-established and most friendly airfields in the country. Many thanks to the Ormand Flying Club for supporting us over the past year and we look forward to many more years working together to get people in the sky to experience the freedom of flight and to raise more money in the coming years for deserving charities.



**'Oran's wish to Walk' Charity Skydive
Group Organiser Aisling Yeats with Tandem Instructor
James O'Flaherty both in the air and on the ground.**

CRC GAELS

CRC Gaels is an amalgamation of both Crinkill and Carrig & Riverstown clubs. They amalgamated a number of years ago and have had a varying degree of success throughout that time. This year, the club catered for children from grades of U-8s through to minor level. The U-8s, U-10s and U-12s were non-competitive this year and the emphasis was solely on participation and fun, which the children



**Captain of CRC Gaels,
Ryan O'Meara, in action
during the U-16 final
against Shamrock's.**

thoroughly enjoyed. Our U-14 team unfortunately failed to progress out of their group but enjoyed some very good games and fulfilled all their fixtures. In 2011 the club's "pride of place" has to go to our U-16 team, who successfully progressed through their group and clinched a county final spot against Shamrocks, which was played in Kinnitty. However, it was never going to be CRC

Gaels day as a very strong Shamrocks team controlled the game throughout and ran out convincing winners. CRC Gaels continues to grow and grow and we will continue to build into the future.



**CRC Gaels half-back, Damien Maher, clearing
his lines during the U-16 final.**

BIRR SOCIAL CLUB

This year was another fruitful one for us. We played off several snooker and darts tournaments. In snooker, Tom Nolan's team won the 5-man event, beating Mick Verney's team with a score of 3-2. Brian Nolan won the Scratch Cup, beating Richie Donnelly in the final. Brian went on to record a break of 123 during the year. He is becoming a very promising snooker player. Steve Lonergan won the Spring Singles, beating Barry Harding 2-1. Richie Donnelly finally came good in the Autumn Handicap, beating Mick Verney in the final with a score of 2-1.

On the darts front we ran a club Doubles Darts Tournament for the first time and the winners were Nigel Dooley and John McIntyre. The Team Darts honours, in aid of the I.H.C.P.T., went to Nigel Dooley's team, who beat Sullivans (Kilcormac) in the final, and the Town Section was won by Milnes for the second year in a row.

This year we were saddened by the loss of former chairman (1985), Michael Madden. May he rest in peace.



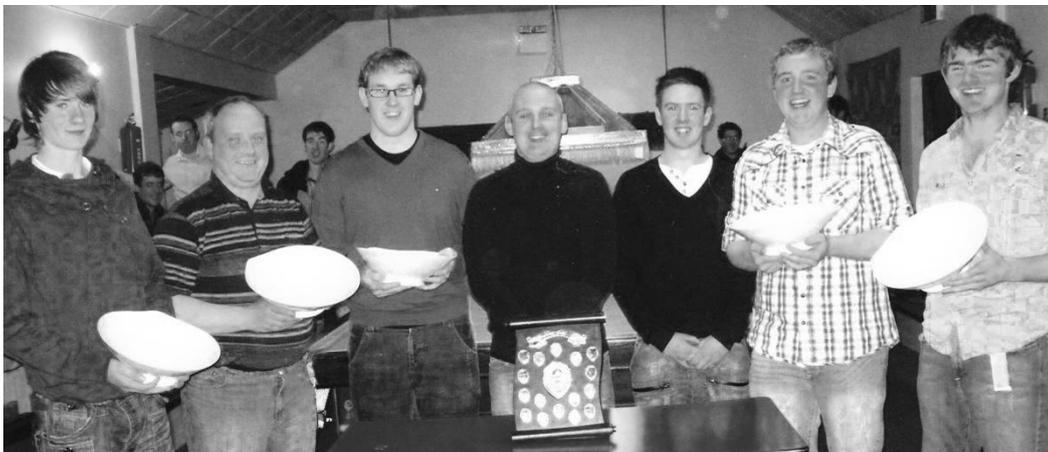
Town Section Darts Tournament

in aid of IHCPPT and sponsored by Pat Scully.

Back Row (L to R): Derek Kelly (Club Chairman), Frank Tully, Mick Moten, Mick Bracken, Padraig Horan, Tom Murtagh.
Front Row: David Deegan, Lorna Tully, Pat Scully (Sponsor).



Winner of the Summer Handicap Tournament, Richie Donnelly (left), receiving his prize from Pat Dunphy.



Team Snooker Tournament Winners – Tom Nolans (Sponsored by Costcutter).

L-R: Emmet Nolan, Dermot Nolan, Barry Kennedy, Derek Kelly (Club Chairman), Trevor Dolan (Costcutters), Andrew Sullivan, Brian Nolan.

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BIRR RUGBY FOOTBALL CLUB - YOUTHS

The club fielded teams at U-13, U-15 and U-17 levels in the Midland League and Leinster League competitions. The U-17 team was the most successful, winning the Midland league. The team included Andrew Browne, William Connors, Peter Dooley, Colm Daly, Emmet Nolan, Sam Eaton, Conor Fitzgerald, Conor Guinan, Brendan Heffernan,

Cathal Hogan, Philip Hogan, Peter Horan, David Kearns, Jack Kennedy, Graham Lynch, Neil Joe Maher, Evan Moylan, Gary O'Brien, Pdraig O'Brien, Kevin O'Connor, Seamus O'Connor, Ryan O'Meara, Raphael Slowikowski and Sean T. O'Connor.



Peter Dooley (left) was selected on the Ireland Youths (Under-18) team, travelling to Germany and France and was appointed captain of the Leinster Youths (Under-18) team.



Shane Delahunt (left) was selected on the successful Leinster Schools Team (Under 18).

BIRR LEPRECHAUN AND MINI-RUGBY



Pictured left at the Under-11 Coyle Cup Festival, Wexford. On bottom, from L to R: Mark O'Brien and Matthew Molloy. Middle row, Conor O'Meara, James Dooley, Darragh Coffey and Eoin Stapleton. Keeping them all in their place is Doireann Errity. In the background is Rory Carthy.

Birr Mini-Rugby division includes players (boys and girls) from as young as 5 years to the ripe old age of 11. We field teams at ages under 7 (referred to as Leprechaun Rugby), U-8, U-9, U-10, U-11 and U-12.

Leprechaun rugby is a non-contact game designed to introduce children to the game in a safe and fun manner. Frank Higgins is the key coach here, having shown endless patience and great humour in managing a group of children, with a massive enthusiasm matched equally by their complete lack of any clue of the laws of the game! However, with the help of many a bemused parent, each year this group turns into budding stars and provides the following year Under 8's with teams that no Midland Club has yet matched. Under 8's to Under 12's are coached and

helped by a team of highly enthusiastic parents, without whose help the club could not provide for the large numbers attending mini-rugby. Led by rugby legend Willie Burns, all the parents, coaches and players are enjoying their rugby in an atmosphere of fun, mixed with a competitive edge. Coaches Eamonn O'Meara, Robert Alexander, Tony Murphy and Peter Baker oversaw the Under 11s and 12s, while Brian Hogan, Catherine Barry, Willie Burns and Richard Dolan looked after the under 9s and 10s. Tony Morris and Stephen Finneran coached the newcomers to 'contact' rugby at Under 8's.

Keep a watchful eye on these potential stars each Sunday morning at our Moorpark Grounds, where training and games take place from September to April.

We regularly host 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.



Enjoying the rugby are from left to right Dylan Murdock and Martin O'Brien.

BIRR RUGBY CLUB



The Tag Rugby Team

Back Row (L to R): Liam Delahunt, Simon Eades, David Dooley, Joe Dempsey, Michael Donoghue.
Front Row: Andrew Carney, Susan Cleary, Eimear Corcoran, Laura Guinan, Eoin O'Shea, Paddy Donoghue.

Last year, BIRR RFC tag team played many matches and tournaments, both home and away, and made it to the finals in Tullamore and Portlaoise. Travelling to tournaments is a long day as there are at least six matches that need to be played to reach the final, which we did many times. A tag team consists of 7 players and must have 3 girls on the field at all times. A female try is worth 3 points and a male try is worth only one. This is a fun, fast non-contact sport played during the off-season of rugby. Tag was great pre-season training for many of the rugby players, with Philip Haslam, Eoin O'Shea, Dara Culbert, Paddy Donoghue, Donal Spain, Simon Eades and David Dooley amongst the players who competed in many of the tag tournaments!

BIRR RFC 1st & 2nd XV had a great season. Gordon Rowe, in his debut season as coach was extremely impressed by the two squads. The 1st were captained by Evan Williams, with the seconds being captained by Stephen Boyd. This

season's club captain, Alan Guinan, is very keen that the team finish high in the league, with this year's 1st & 2nd's already on course for 2 Midland League Titles. This year, Frank Doorley has been elected Club President, taking over from Ray Walsh. The young players have really made a strong impact in the club, breathing new life and energy into the teams, with Chris Molloy and Eoin O'Shea receiving "Player of the Year" and "Most Improved Player" respectively.

Chris Molloy and Eoin O'Shea were nominated for this year's Parish Sports Star Awards, along with Peter Dooley, who captained Leinster Under-18's team, which won this year's interprovincial series. Congratulations to Peter on picking up the award, as well as Sportsperson of the Year Award.

As with all sports teams, fund-raising has become an integral part of keeping clubs going and BIRR are delighted to have launched their very own club lottery.



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BALLYEIGHAN CRICKET CLUB

Ballyeighan Cricket Club had an up-and-down season this year. The club re-entered the Leinster Cricket League after a break of ten years. The club was put into division twelve and, out of fifteen league and cup games, they only managed three wins.

A home and away win over Sandyford helped them escape relegation. The other win came against Halverstown in the Wallace Cup. In a 'bowl out', which is similar to a football penalty shoot-out, due to rain, Pieter Swanepoel was the only player from either side to hit the wicket. As a result, Ballyeighan went through on a score of 1-0. In the second round, they were not so lucky, being beaten by Bagnelstown. The biggest plus of the season was the fact that a number of young lads came through the club. Matthew and Ryan Walker and Conor Daly were ever-present throughout all the league games. Matthew's being behind the stumps is pushing Mark Shakespeare all the way for the wicket-keeping spot. No mean feat for a fifteen-year-old who is doing the job for the first time. Matthew's fielding can only be described as electric. At twelve, Ryan, his younger brother, is improving all the time. Although he is the youngest player in the club he never retreats from the challenge of older visiting teams and can only be described as being like a pit-bull on the field of play. Conor Daly is a convert from G.A.A. but has brought all the skills of catching with him from that game, with some marvellous catches. The latter part of the season saw Peter Hennessy and Nick and James Corcoran join in. All three are bowling

well, which gives skipper Denis Walker extra options for the bowling attack. All these young lads can be proud of their achievements this season.

The rest of the season was made up of eight friendly matches, with victories over Laois and two visiting clubs from England, White City and Mad Hatters Cricket clubs. The outstanding batting display of the season came from Smith Kumar, with a fabulous innings of one hundred and fifteen runs against Merrion in Dublin. Other notable scores were Naoise Brooks' eighty-five runs against Sandyford and Mark Shakespeare's score of seventy-eight against White City. Smith Kumar was the leading runs scorer with a total of two hundred and eighty seven runs for the season. We saw some excellent bowling displays also and a few players, such as Naoise Brooke, Peter Harris, Johnny Heaslip and Denis Walker, took four wickets in a single match. The pick of the bunch came from Prem Margabahdau who got five wickets in the last game of the season away to North County. Denis Walker was top wicket-taker with twenty-eight wickets for the season.

The hope now is that Ballyeighan can push on to bigger and better things and hopefully next year will bring some better results. The wonderful success of Ireland over England in the World cup in India has to be the result of the year and should give a great boost to Irish cricket in general. The new season for Ballyeighan begins next May and new members are always welcome.

The Ballyeighan Cricket Club Team that played Athlone in May 2011.

Back Row (L to R): Johnny Heaslip, Conor Daly, Peter Harris, Naoise Brooke.

Middle: Chris Lind, D.P. Walker, Mathew Walker, Denis Walker.

Front Row: Ryan Walker, Paul Maloney.





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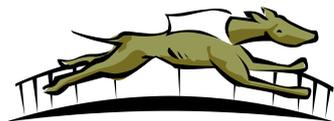
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BIRR GOLF CLUB

At a well-attended AGM in November 2010, the Hon Sec., Tony Hogan, expressed the fervent wish that the weather demons that caused so much upset during 2010 would not carry their bile into 2011. But ill-luck followed, with the course closed for several weeks during the icy and snowy winter.

Incoming Captains, Joe Slevin and Rita Delaney, with Presidents, Tony McTague and Gemma Butler, held their traditional drive-in in March in benign conditions. The very popular Poker Classic took place in February and was well-supported by the members and their friends. During spring, the ladies organised lessons for new members, a project welcomed by all.

The final of Captain Joe Slevin's Prize was run without a hitch in perfect weather conditions at the end of August. A shotgun start at 1 pm got the competition underway.

President McTague, in introducing the Captain at the presentation, noted that Joe, the first Kilcormac man to be Captain of the Club, had worked tirelessly for the promotion of golf in Birr and had been an excellent leader during his time at the helm. Joe, in reply, thanked Bernard Kennedy, who invited him to be Captain. He knew it was going to be an onerous task but, with the help of the many members and the various staffs and committees, his work was made both enjoyable and productive. He was extremely grateful to Paschal and Catherine Troy for their generous sponsorship and he wished them continued success with their Sales Company. He was especially

grateful to Lady Captain Rita, Lady President Gemma and the Ladies' Committee for their great work.

He congratulated all who won prizes and, in particular, Pat Doyle who collected his Captain's prize. In conclusion Captain Joe called on all to support the Club in these difficult times and quoted Abraham Lincoln, who said, 'Everyone has the right to criticise if they have the heart to help out.'

Birr Golf Club hosted in October the annual Glens Trophy Competition. This is a great day every year for the ladies branch and a huge effort was made by the committee of Lady President Gemma Butler, Ann McIntyre and Vera Smyth to ensure this day was one of the best days of the year in the Glens. We are most grateful to Peter Fox Pharmacy, who has generously sponsored this competition since it commenced. It was also very fitting that Mona was present, as the Mona Collins Perpetual Trophy was lifted by the Rathdowney ladies for the first time! Representing Birr ladies on the day were: Lady Captain Rita, Elizabeth Pardy, Mary Byrne and Therese Fealy, who were very narrowly beaten out of third place. Rathdowney represented by Marie Duggan, Mary Harte, Nora Harte and Teresa Norton won the trophy with 68 pts.

In June, Lady Captain Rita Delaney had all aspects of her prize planned to precision. It was a glorious day and a wonderful evening's entertainment followed the Captain's Dinner. There was one of the largest entries for the



Pictured at the Captain's Prize.

Back Row (L to R): Padraig Moylan, Peter Keane, Pat Maher, Michael Feighery, Robbie Sheils, Cormac Moylan, John Murphy, John Carroll, John Conniffe, Aidan Farrelly.

Front Row: Tony McTague (President), Declan Gath, Joe Slevin (Captain), Pat Doyle (Winner), Seamus Breen (Vice Captain), Michael Lyons.

18-Hole Competition and there was a separate 9-Hole for beginner ladies. The Lady Captain's day was generously sponsored by Liam Butler, Butler's Pharmacy, Birr, who has a long association with Birr Golf Club and to whom the lady members are most appreciative. Patt Grogan was thanked most sincerely for her beautiful floral arrangements. Lady Captain chose an attractive specially-commissioned piece by Cathal Barber, Jeweller, Birr as her prize and the remainder prizes from the very popular Newbridge Grace Kelly Collection. Congratulations to Rita and to all the prize winners on the day and to Caroline Guinan who won this year's prize.

President Gemma had an excellent turnout for her prize sponsored by AIB. A shotgun start at 1 pm got the day off to a splendid start. Fortunately, the rains and winds held off until later in the evening. President Gemma congratulated the winners especially Annette Ryan who won her prize. She remarked that Annette is a beginner to golf and she was happy to see newcomers winning prizes.

Well done to the organising committee and all involved in organising the Annual Club Development Classic. At the presentation of prizes, Captain Joe Slevin thanked especially all the members who turned out in exceptional numbers and helped to make the event such a success. He singled out our main sponsors, Michael Kennedy of Kennedy Motors and David Corbett of D. L. Cullinane, for

their generosity and support. Other sponsors who were thanked were: Tommy Rohan, Glennons Wholesalers, Michael Foxe, Eugene Flynn, Banagher, Michael O'Connor of Shop and Hotel Supplies, Birr and Pat Milne of Milne Foods, Birr.

President Tony McTague's prize, sponsored by Brendan O'Carroll of Premier Insulations, was held in June. Conditions were ideal, with excellent scores returned. President Tony said it was a privilege to be involved with such a friendly club and praised all who played in his competition and helped to organise the event. He thanked in particular Brendan O'Carroll of Premier Insulations for his generous sponsorship and wished his company continued success. Tony congratulated all the winners, especially winner Brendan Hoare, who returned a fine 64 nett off 11.

We congratulate the winners of the major trophies during the year.

Kenny Cup: Michael Yates. Hackett Cup: Tommy Hogan.
Members' prize: Matt Feenane. Scratch Cup: Alan Lowry.
Bennett Cup: John Dwyer. Dooley Cup: Martin Young.
Golfer of the Year was Joe Rowland.

Incoming Captains Seamus Breen and Vera Smyth, with Presidents Sean Moylan and Mary Grennan, will have the honour of leading the Club in 2012. We wish them every success.

LAST OF THE SUMMER WINE!



(L to R): Pat Kelly, Richie Nolan, Jimmy Kelly, Christy Coughlan.

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MIDLAND MODEL FLYING CLUB

Though 2011 will not go down as the busiest summer at the MMFC club in the beautiful Boora Parklands, we still managed to hold several events and the more active members also travelled to participate in other events, including several public air-displays.

In mid-April, the club hosted a round of the model helicopter competition, called 'Heli-Challenge Trophy'. This competition was actually the brain-child of Birr man David Nee, who has since emigrated to Chicago. David was instrumental in promoting this great area of the hobby and showing people that, with the right attitude and approach, it is possible to take your helicopter flying from basic hovering all the way to the awe-inspiring 3D (three-dimensional) flying. The competition that David designed is a very competitive and demanding form of flying, in which the competitors have to fly and be judged on a selection of pre-defined manoeuvres and also have 3 minutes to make up their own routine. David got this competition up and running with the help of Liam Broderick from Clare and David McIntyre back in 2005 and, six years later, it is going from strength to strength.

The airplanes were also catered for when, in late May, the club hosted and ran a round of the 'Scale Championships'. This type of competition is a little easier to imagine as the main goal is to closely replicate real fixed-wing aircraft in take-off, flight manoeuvres and landing. Some would say this area of the hobby is less intense and demanding than helicopters. However, the time spent in building and finishing the planes to the highest standards and with meticulous attention to every last detail, has to be admired and actually flying your masterpiece can be just as nerve-racking as hovering a helicopter inverted. On the judging panel was local expert Ger Carter. Ger is one of the unsung heroes of Radio-Controlled model aircraft in the country. He has been the back-bone of the Midland Model Flying Club since its inception and has devoted countless hours and Euros to make the club what it is today.

In June, we decided to let our hair down with a 'Fly-in'. This is an open invitation for our flying friends from all around the country to come and have some craic in the best model-flying site in the country. This year, we added an invitation to camp onsite for the night to watch and partake in the almost unbelievable pursuit of 'Night-flying'. If any Kilcormac locals reported some UFO's in mid-June, then they can rest assured it was just us flying our almost silent electric powered models with bright lights high in the sky at all hours.

August saw a return to one of our favourite and most well-received events of the year, the Ormand Vintage Fly-in at Birr Airfield. This event is a great platform to show-off our model aircraft alongside the full sized aircraft. As well as flying his large Extra 330, David McIntyre managed to pluck up the courage to put on a demo of his recently obtained

Weston Magnum, which can achieve speeds of 200 mph - now that's some screamer.

Congratulations go out to our excellent club secretary, Puckane man Declan Heneghan, who successfully obtained the coveted B-Certificate in flying standards which is an official recognition that you have achieved a very high standard of flying and safety, to such an extent that you are cleared to fly public displays. This achievement is awarded by the Model Aeronautics Council of Ireland.

Also in July, some of us took part in a Flying Display at the Athlone Summer Fest. We had a large static display of models and also flying based in the Burgess Park area. It was a massive success and even ended up with our flying being featured in news-media and YouTube videos. On August 16th we participated in the now very well known Abbeyshrule Airshow. Static and flying displays were again very well received and, even though these displays are very hard work, it was a massive buzz for all involved.



Pictured at the Abbeyshrule Airshow

During the summer of 2011, Lough Boora Parklands was short-listed as a finalist in the European Destination of Excellence (EDEN) and as part of the community some delegates of the MMFC participated in their judging of the finalists. We put on a flying display as the judges toured the parklands under the knowledgeable eye of Tom Egan from Bord Na Móna. We also attended the presentation given to the judging committee to answer any questions about our club to promote the Parklands. The Parklands are a fantastic amenity and we place huge importance on maintaining the area and working in conjunction with the Parks & Wildlife, Farmers and Bord Na Móna.

We are looking forward to more flying through the frosty winter months and can still be found most Sunday afternoons at the club site. Please keep an eye on www.midlandmfc.ie for news on events and other links of interest. Our club has a very 'open door' policy and training is done completely free of charge; you just have to bring plenty of patience.

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BIRR TOWN FOOTBALL CLUB

Birr Town Football Club had another successful year, both on and off the field in 2011. On the playing pitches, we won titles ranging from the Under-12 Boys Shield to being Divisional Champions in the Over-35s League for the first time. Last season, we had 275 young players in the club from Under-8 up to Under-16. Of those teams, three were all-girls teams at 10, 12 and 16 and 8 all-boys teams from Under-8 to Under-16. All these teams are active from September through to May. Last season was very successful as all but one team reached the final of their respective knock-out competitions, leading to a very enjoyable medal presentation evening in the County Arms Hotel. Also, on the night all teams had their 'Player of the Year' selections. In the senior divisions, we fielded four teams including Youths, who won the Ita Farrell Cup and were runners-up in their League, First Team, Reserves and an Over-35s side who won their division. The Over-35s played during the summer months and was a coming together of players who played football all their adult life in Birr and surrounding areas. The new season started in September and due, to an influx of new players, we have had to increase the number of teams. As a result, we are now fielding two sides in some divisions. We also have reformed our Ladies team and they play every Sunday along with our First Team and the Reserves. We also have an Under-17 side this year playing every Saturday. That means that, from September, we provide football for nearly 400 club members each week-end. This is made possible thanks to the support of the parents, who give their time to transport teams to matches on the week-end and to the people who support our Lotto and fund-raising events during the season. A big thank you to all who do so as this is vital to the club. We thank Tesco's and SuperValu for facilitating our very successful bag-pack fund-raisers.



Birr Town Under-8 Team

Back Row (L to R): Ben Haslam, Billy Butler, Ryan Cahill, Colin Farrelly, Liam Butler

Front Row: Dean Byrne, Sam Smith, Maxwell Boyd, Conor Hanamy, Darragh Morris



Under-12 Boys Team wearing the kit received through collection of 'The Star' newspaper mastheads.

We also ran a very successful Easter draw for a Samsung Tablet, sponsored by 3Mobile through Ray Nolan and won by Patti Nee. During the year, we were lucky enough to be selected to take part in the collection of mast heads from 'The Star' newspaper for new sets of kit. Thanks to everyone who also supported us in this. We collected enough to get three free sets.

At Easter, in conjunction with the F.A.I., we ran a girls-only Soccer Sisters camp. The girls were expertly coached and received an individual set of gear. We also had a hugely popular summer soccer camp open to both boys and girls which, despite the bad weather, was enjoyed by over 100 children from the surrounding areas. During the year, we were lucky enough to have players represent the club on various League representative sides. The most prominent were the four lads who helped the Kennedy cup squad finish fifth in this highly-recognised competition, the highest positional finish that the Midland Schoolboys/girls League has enjoyed. We had one player who achieved the highest honour of representing his Country at Under-15 and Under-16 level. Val Feeney, who has been with the club since 6 years of age, played for Ireland in Qatar last December and, during the year, added to his caps playing against Belgium, Latvia and Estonia. Val has also been on trial at Manchester City, Leicester City and Birmingham City. This year, we hope to have some more internationals in the club. Our all-weather pitch is open for rent and at the moment is in full use for the winter months. As a proud member of the local community, Birr Town provides our facilities to the local Sub Group and this year a highly enjoyable inter sub soccer competition was held there and won by the local group. So, any Saturday or Sunday that you are at a loose end, why not take a trip out to the club grounds, grab a coffee or tea from the Clubhouse and support these local young players. Rumour has it Santa might even make a return trip to the Clubhouse near Christmas. For any information on games or club events, please contact club Secretary, Mr. John Kenny, on the club phone 085-1622651 or on the club website www.birrtownfootballclub.com.



Birr Town F.C.'s Over-35 League Winning Team

Back Row (L to R): Sean Lowry, Harry Kearns, Pascal Byrne, Sean Maher, Sean Ryan, Kevin Nolan, Willie Shortt, Ricky O'Brien, Tony Grainger, Ger Sweeney.

Front Row: Paul Johnson, James Hayes, Willie Coughlan, Shane Corboy, Alan Hennessy, Liam Maloney, Alan Cooney.
Missing from photo are Larry Stapleton, Joe Sheils and John Cahill.

BIRR LEISURE CENTRE

Throughout 2011, the centre was well supported by the community, as well as by a lot of schools, clubs and various other organisations. The year as a whole did pose a challenge, however. That challenge has been the running of the centre on a break-even basis. This proved to be very demanding and difficult. This is understandable, given the current economic situation, with people's disposable income decreasing and costs increasing. We are aided by the continued support we receive from Pobal, Offaly Co. Council and Birr Town Council.

The activities in the centre include Public Swim, Child and Adult Swim Lessons, Aquafit, Swim Club, Lifeguard and Swim Teaching Courses, Pilates, Bums and Tums, Spin, Circuit Training, Step Aerobics and Gymnastics. Booking is essential, on 05791 20343, for all lessons and classes. Our Website is www.birrleisurecentre.ie. We also have two Massage Therapists available for Sport Injury, Holistic and Aromatherapy massage.

The main project undertaken during 2011 was the implementation of our 'energy conservation/green energy' plan. We are always striving to make our Leisure Centre more cost efficient, to save money and reduce any adverse impact on the environment. This project was supported by Offaly Local Development under the Rural Development Programme.

We installed 2 Biomass Boilers, 16 Solar Panels, a Rain Water Harvesting System and an Energy Management System, costing a total of €227,726. We received a grant of €150,000 from Offaly Local Development. This plan was completed in August 2011 and is showing good results in reducing our energy costs; it is estimated that over the year, it will reduce our energy bill by 30% to 40%.

We would like to take this opportunity to thank our staff, full and part-time, for their work and effort throughout the year and, in particular, our manager Marian Carter. We would also like to thank the committee, Charlie Delahunt, John Carroll, Pat Connolly, Cronan Grennan, Helena Kennedy, Des Corboy, Richard Kennedy and David O'Meara for their continued hard work, support and time that they give to the committee.

At the moment the Centre is debt-free and through prudent management, we hope to remain so. Looking forward, it is through this good management and hard work on everyone's part that I know we will have a Centre that will continue to give the community the facilities it needs and deserves.

Birr Leisure Centre is owned by the Community, run by the Community, for the Community.

CARRIG & RIVERSTOWN GAA

This was a year of mixed fortunes for the Carrig & Riverstown senior hurling teams. It saw the Intermediates and Juniors reaching the final in three of the competitions they were involved in; the Division 2 and 4 league finals and the Junior C Championship final. Unfortunately, despite good form in getting to these campaign finals, they were only able to turn the Division 2 final into silverware. Whilst the Intermediate championship did not go as well as planned, they gave a good account of themselves in all other competitions and would feel confident heading into next year.

The early-year form was good and the club qualified for the Division 2 league semi-final after only losing one game in their group. Meanwhile, the Division 4 team showed that they too were serious contenders, also reaching the semi-final after winning out their group. Both teams played well in their respective semi-finals, with the Division 4 team beating Ballyskenagh by a large margin and the Division 2 team showing their bottle by overcoming Lusmagh in a tight game. The Division 2 final was played in Kinnitty against Killurin and, after a tough and extremely tight game, Carrig & Riverstown edged out winners by four points. The division 4 team unfortunately lost their final to an impressive Coolderry team.

Confidence was high following the success of the leagues and it was hoped that this would encourage the club's championship form. Indeed, the Intermediate campaign started brightly, with a good win over Killavilla, but a narrow one point loss to Killurin halted the progress just before the break in the championship took place. Following its resumption, the team was back to winning ways, playing a very useful Kilcormac side and emerging victorious by two

points after scoring a goal and two points in the last five minutes of the game. This was a very encouraging performance from the team but, unfortunately, it was to be the last win of the campaign. Two weeks later, following an extremely lacklustre display, the team succumbed badly to Birr in a very disappointing match. The final game of the group was against St. Rynaghs and, although the team upped their performance greatly from the previous match, they did not convert enough scores and eventually lost by four points. Despite the poor end-of-season form, the team had done enough to qualify for the quarter-final but, unfortunately, lost to a strong Brosna Gaels' side, who were the eventual winners of the competition.

The Junior C's had a somewhat more successful championship. They won all but two games in their group before beating Crinkill by a point in the semi-final and going on to play Killeigh in the final. Taking place in Clareen, the weather conditions played a big part in the running of the game, with Carrig & Riverstown giving a poor first half showing when playing into the strong wind. Going in six points down at half time, the second half was always going to be tough and, indeed, despite great effort, the gap proved just too big to bridge. It was a disappointing six point defeat to bring the year to a close.



Captain, Eoin Sullivan, with the Division 2 Hurling League trophy.



The victorious Carrig & Riverstown Intermediate Hurling Team, winners of the Division 2 League Final 2011.

Back Row (L to R): M. Hoctor (Selector), E. Gleeson, A. O'Brien, P. King, D. Gleeson (Selector), S. Guilfoyle, M. Larkin, M. Keane, R. Joyce, D. King, M. O'Brien, W. Gleeson, J. Cashen, D. Egan, N. Lane, S. O'Brien, A. Ryan, D. Ryan, G. Oakley.
Front Row: D. Brady, M. Kennedy, R. Bourke, D. England, A. Carney, P. McCarthy, E. Doorley, L. Deane, E. Sullivan (Captain), T. Sullivan, S. Brady, M. Hough, N. Larkin, G. O'Brien. Seated: Emma Teehan (Physio).



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BIRR CAMOGIE CLUB

This was a good year for Birr Camogie Club. We entered teams at U-10, U-12, U-14, U-16, Minor and Senior Grade again this year and we have a growing membership. Our U-8's took part in a number of blitzes and did very well. Our U-10 team was beaten in the shield final by Naomh Bríd. Our U-12's won the Shield Final beating Lusmagh 3-2 to 0-2. This was a great victory for these girls.

Our U-14's were beaten in Féile final and U-14A final by St. Cillians but I'm sure if these girls continue to train they will be winning medals very soon. Our U-16's were beaten semi-finalists in the 'A' competition losing out to St. Cillians again. Our Minor team made history by winning the Minor 'A' title for the first time by beating St. Rynaghs by 2-14 to 1-7. This was a fantastic team display with every player playing her part. Our senior team was beaten in the Senior semi-final by Drumcullen. It was a good team performance but we just fell short at the end.

Our Club was well represented on all county teams; U-14 had Mairead Jennings, Gillian Irwin, Mariesa Cleary and Tiegan Hegarty. U-16 had Ciara Ryan, Deirdre Cashen,

Eimear Mooney and Sarah Lyons. These girls won U-16 All-Ireland Runner-Up medals and U-16 Leinster 'B' medals.

Caroline Soupe, Eimear Mooney, Emily Quinlan, Jessica Spain, Katie Dooley, Orlagh Kirwan and Shauna Carroll won Leinster Minor Medals. Sheila Sullivan, Arlene Watkins, Michelle Gleeson and Katie Bergin all played at Senior Championship level for the County team.

The Birr Parish Sports Star Award in Camogie went to Arlene Watkins.

2011 has been a good year for Birr Camogie and it was great to see Mercy Primary School win Cumann na mBun Scoil for the first time this year. A big thank you to all who have helped in the running of our club and supporting our fundraising events such as the church gate collection, bingo raffle and bag packing. Thanks to Birr G.A.A. and Crinkill G.A.A. for the use of their pitches. The use of 'The Brother's' field has been a great help with underage training and matches. Well done to all management teams, let's hope 2012 will bring more success to our club.



Birr Camogie Minor Team.

Back Row (L to R): Katie Dooley, Fiona Jennings, Deirdre Cashen, Ciara Ryan, Sarah Lyons, Ciara Dooley, Dawn Whelahan, Eimear Mooney, Rebecca Hctor (Joint Captain).

Front: Orlagh Kirwan, Caroline Soupe (Joint Captain), Eimear Teehan, Roisin Watkins, Ria Harding, Jessica Spain, Shauna Carroll, Emily Quinlan.



U-12 Team.

Back Row (L to R): Danielle Ryan (Captain), Megan Kinsella, Doireann Errity, Rachel Kealey, Frances Hoare, Clodagh O'Carroll, Niamh Campbell, Niamh Middleton, Aoibhe Whelahan (Captain), Emma Behan, Elaine Mullins, Emma Guilfoyle, Deirdre Cahill (Manager).

Front: Caoibhe Abbott, Nessa Hart, Roisin Donovan, Sarah Dooley, Caoimhe Kearns, Trudy Feenane, Roisin O'Connor, Clíodhna Heavin, Jane Garahy, Ellen Regan, Edel Hoare, Ali Harding.

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BIRR COMMUNITY GAMES



The Community Games U-11 Mini-Rugby team celebrating winning the Leinster silver medal.

Back Row (L to R): Kieran Riley, Ronan Loughnane, Luke Barry, Bill Burns, Padraig Watkins, Kevin Tierney.
Front: Dylan Hanniffy, Rory Carty, Peadar Talbot, Matthew Molloy, Nathan Williams.

2011 brought many new children to Community Games. The highlight of the year was the winning of a Leinster silver medal for the U-11 Rugby Team. The journey started earlier in the year, when the boys overcame Ferbane in the county final, with a score line of 9-2. For many of the team, this was their first ever rugby medal, a gold! The team travelled to Carlow for the Leinster competition, where they were drawn against Rathoath from Meath. The team put in a great performance to win the game 5-2. With only a 30 minute recovery time, the team lined out in the final against a fresh Twomilehouse team from Kildare. Unfortunately, Kildare proved too strong on the day. However, a Leinster silver medal is a wonderful achievement for the team.

Both U-11 mixed rugby and mixed tag-rugby teams won county titles earlier this year, by beating Brosna and Banagher. This was a wonderful achievement for them. Unfortunately, they didn't make an impact in the Leinster competition. Well done to the teams; U-11: Allie Harding, Caoimhe Kearns, Siobhan Heffernan, Luke Barry, Kieran Riley, Tara Seguin, Courtney Dwyer, Jake Touhey, Nathan Williams.

U-11 tag-rugby: Niamh Horan, Laura Sampson, Alana Duffy, Erin O'Meara, Clodagh Hanniffy, Natalia Piotrowska, Amanda Pardy, Donnacha Purcell, Dylan Murdock, Conor Brummell and Michael Seguin. Thanks to the rugby coaches, Eamon O'Meara and Catherine Barry.

The interest in Swimming appears to be increasing every year, and this is predominantly due to the fabulous pool at our disposal and to the staff of Birr Leisure Centre, who encourage the children through swim club, training etc. Well done to all who participated at both local and county levels. Birr hosted the county finals which ran smoothly.

Well done to all six swimmers who competed at the National Finals in Athlone – Darragh Guinan, Eve Murray, Kieran Riley, William Dwyer, Liam Pingree and Conor Hickson. Many thanks from Birr Community Games to Marian Carter and Paddy McDonnell for all their work.

Birr Community Games also had three handball teams representing Offaly at the Leinster finals in Carlow. The standard as usual was extremely high. The U-15 boy's team, who beat Westmeath in the quarter-final, was beaten by Kells (Meath) in the semi-final. Well done to the team: Dylan Quegan, David Mullins, Raymond Nolan, Conor Smith and Jordan Hart. Many of them are under-age for next year so keep up the training. The U-13 boys, who are reigning county champions, clinched a Leinster silver medal. Bree/Davistown (Wexford) was too strong on the day. Congratulations to the team on their achievements: Michael Milne, Aaron Talbot, Finn Dempsey, DJ Cooke and Shane Murtagh. The U-15 girls team, who are all under-age for next year, put up a great fight against Wexford, but Wexford's experience won in the end. Congratulations also to this team; Erin O'Meara, Clodagh Hanniffy, Bronagh Byrne, Andrea Cooke and Kerrie Byrne. Thanks to Crinkill Handball club for their facilities and to their mentor Kevin Cooke.

Our U-11 Hurling team had a very good victory over Ferbane but was beaten in the semi-final by Edenderry. Thanks to their coaches and to the team manager, Tom Carty.

The Art & Modelling competition continues to thrive in Birr. The co-operation of our local schools with the running of this competition is invaluable. Birr hosted the county finals again this year. Birr had four county winners who represented Offaly at the national finals in Athlone. Well

BIRR Year Review 2011

done to them all: Luke Barry, (U-12 Model-making), Mark Hogan (U-12 Art), Ciara Murray (U-14 Art) and Jamie Doonan (U-16 Model-making).

Numbers for Athletics were definitely down from last year. Perhaps the poor weather was a contributory factor. Birr had a successful local sports day and it was great to see the competitors' progress in the running in the Tullamore Harriers at the county finals. Birr had four athletes progress to the national finals: Caoimhe Kearns (U-12 Ball Throw), Wren Higgins (U-13 Walk), Nathan Williams (U-10 60m Hurdles) and Diarmuid O'Carroll (U-16 1600m). The highlight of the weekend was Caoimhe Kearns finishing a respectable 7th out of 32. Thanks to all our trainers and volunteers throughout the year, especially Valerie Reynolds, Margaret Irwin, Jeanette Field, Michael Kenny and Catherine Barry.

The U-14 Camogie team captured another county title this year, beating both Kilcormac-Killoughey and Shinrone-Coolderry. They trained hard for the Leinster competition and saw off the Westmeath representatives in the quarter-

finals. The girls had a great victory over Wexford in the semi-finals in Carlow. They were drawn against Lucan (Dublin) in the final, the team who beat them in the semi-final last year. The girls knew this was going to be tough. The sun shone but, unfortunately, the girls lost by one point. However, a Leinster silver medal is a great achievement and an improvement on last year. So, roll on 2012. Well done to the team: Aoibhe Whelahan, Aisling Brennan, Rachel Dolan, Elizabeth Harding, Aideen Freeman, Gillian Irwin, Amy Lyons, Audrey McAuliffe, Linda Tyrell, Lisa Hctor, Sarah Harding, Ciara Brennan, Shiofra Ryan, Jamie Spain, Ellen Kelly and Mariesa Kelly. Thanks to all their coaches and team manager, Michael Lyons.

Thanks to all our committee for all their hard work: Noel Coughlan, Tony Murphy, John Gleeson, Valerie Reynolds, Catherine Barry, Margaret Irwin, Frank Higgins and Connie Carter. We are always looking for volunteers, so don't hesitate to contact any of the committee if you would like to help or if you would like to enter a child or team in an event that Birr does not yet compete in.

HIGHFIELD UNITED FOOTBALL CLUB



The 2011 Highfield United Soccer Team.

**Esther Roberts from Eden
rings the Eucharistic Congress Bell
in St. Brendan's Church in October 2011.**



WILMER TENNIS CLUB

The Wilmer Tennis Club has enjoyed another very enjoyable and successful year. The club created a bit of history in the Midland League this year, winning Division 6 for the first time, while the club's regular annual events went off very successfully, with an unusual added attraction at the annual Vintage Tennis tournament.

As usual the club was well represented in the Midland League with teams participating in all six divisions. For the first time ever the Club won Division 6, which is an all ladies division for newcomers to the game. Birr had to travel to Roscrea for the final and the match was tied 2-2 so came down to a reverse doubles, which the Wilmer won 6-0, so the Birr team came through successfully to claim the title for the very first time. The members of the winning team were Pauline Walsh, Paula Quinlan, Lisa Pardy, Trisha Talbot and sub Dawn Lagace.

The Wilmer's Division 5 team also qualified for the Midland League Final. They also had to travel to an away venue (Templemore) for the final but on this occasion luck was not with the Wilmer team and they lost narrowly. The members of the Wilmer team were Joanne Kenny, Jacinta Fitzpatrick, Teresa Ryan Feehan, and Eve Larkin.

At the time of writing the club's Division 1 team is still in contention to retain the Division 1 title, which they won for the first time in 22 years last year, while the club's teams were also competitive in all the other divisions.

There was a large entry for the Senior Open Week in July and an excellent standard of tennis was on display throughout the week. Because of the big entry the organisers started the tournament a day earlier than planned in order to facilitate all the games to be played. There were good crowds in attendance every night and they were treated to some top quality matches.

There was great support from surrounding clubs with entries from Nenagh, Puckane, Abbeyleix, Roscrea and Limerick along with a big entry from the host club.

The Wilmer Club had its share of success with club members featuring in six of the nine finals, including two all-Wilmer finals. In the end the club claimed three of the titles with Chris Collins and Csilla Varga winning the Open Mixed, while Csilla teamed up with Jean Canning to win the Ladies 'A' Doubles. The third title was collected by John O'Callaghan and Mary Horan in the Handicapped Mixed 'A'. There was a fantastic array of prizes on display at the clubhouse on the final night. Club chairperson Mary Horan thanked all the people from the other clubs who had supported the event and helped make it the success it was. She also thanked all the sponsors for their generous support of Open Week. These included Sportswear Direct, Main Street, Birr, AIB Bank, Paul Barber Jeweller, Liam Butler Pharmacy, Emporium @ The Stables, Henri Hoffman, and Mary Noonan, Hedgerows.

The chairperson also thanked the tournament organisers for efficiently running the event and getting through the

schedule of games in good time, with particular thanks to Brendan Mullins, Pat O'Gorman and John Lynch.



The Wilmer Tennis Club Division 6 team that won the Midland League.

Front Row (L to R): Lisa Pardy, Trisha Talbot.

Back: Pat O'Gorman (Chairman Midland League), Pauline Walsh (captain), Paula Quinlan, Tim Conway (secretary Midland League). Missing from photo is sub, Dawn Lagace.

The Club's annual Vintage Tennis tournament had an added twist this year. In conjunction with the event, the club hosted a performance of 'Love All', a madcap comedy about Ireland's first Wimbledon finalist (1879) Vere St. Leger Gould and his wife Marie Violet who later found themselves embroiled in a murky world of gambling and murder! This fascinating story was turned into this wonderful play by Cheery Wild Productions, which comprised of Tadhg Hickey and fellow actress/writer Aideen Wylde. 'Love All' is their first work as new writers and won the Judge's Choice Award at the Clonmel Junction Festival Awards!

It proved to be a huge success on the night with a large crowd enjoying a very funny production, adding to the enjoyment of an evening which is now an integral part of the Vintage Week festival with Wilmer members getting into the spirit of things by dressing in vintage whites and getting out the old wooden racquets. It made a very entertaining night for everyone involved.

The club championships came to a conclusion in early November after another very competitive event. The championships culminated in a finals night where all five finals produced some very good tennis and tight contests. Chris Collins retained the men's singles title with a victory over Michael Costello while the ladies singles title was also retained this year with Csilla Varga getting the better of Christine Bruce. Christine got a measure of revenge in the ladies doubles final when she teamed up with Karen Smith to defeat Csilla Varga and Pauline Walsh. The men's

BIRR Year Review 2011

doubles final was won by David O'Meara and Jim Bob O'Donoghue, who defeated Michael Costello and John Carroll in the final. The fifth event was the mixed doubles final and victory went to J.P. Savvy and Paula Quinlan who defeated Michael Costello and Catherine Barry in the final. The club was delighted to welcome a number of new members over the last year, some of whom went on to enjoy success in both the Midland League and club championships. The fact that tennis is played all year round at the Wilmer Club is a great attraction as it provides constant activity for members throughout the year. Members enjoy events from the Spring League right through to the annual Christmas tournament as well as plenty of social tennis right through the year. New members are always welcome and as this year has shown, they are quickly welcomed into the fold and can quickly make their mark on the club. Hopefully 2012 will see many more join the club and enjoy the great game of tennis and

the friendly and welcoming atmosphere at the Wilmer Tennis Club.



The Wilmer Tennis Club Division 5 team.

(L to R): Pat O'Gorman (Chairman Midland League), Jacinta Fitzpatrick, Joanne Kenny, Teresa Ryan Feehan, Eve Larkin, Tim Conway (secretary Midland League).

THE GENERATION GAME



The late John & Annie Coolahan on their Wedding Day. Photo was taken outside No. 2, Bridge Street.



(L to R): Margo, Pascal Dan and Jimmy Coolahan, Cathey Ryan (Rhode Island, USA). They are all descendents from Michael Coolahan (b. 1820) and Annie Tierney and the photo was taken outside the site of No. 2, Bridge St.

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THE LITTLE BROSNA AND CAMCOR FISHING CLUB

The Club can look back on a very busy season, with a lot of work having been done. In conjunction with TAFI and the IFI, a very successful children's day was held in the Mill Island, at which all aspects of fishing (fly-tying, fly-casting, bait making to name but a few) were taught and demonstrated.



**Paddy Nugent
teaching the next
generation.**

appreciated work was done. As ever, we extend our thanks to all. Thanks also to Fisheries Officer, Pat McDonnell, and his staff, whose ongoing assistance and help is invaluable to the Club.



The Croneen Trout is a species unique to the Birr area.

Unfortunately, the fishing over the season wasn't as good as previous years. The early run was small enough but it did bring with it some big Croneen Trout into the system, a few of which were caught. Fairly constant floods ruined the night fishing but rewards were forthcoming for those few brave hearts who persevered and some nice fish were caught. A very large run of fish was reported entering the system after the season ended so, hopefully, this should be promising for the future.

Sad to say this year, we lost a number of fishing enthusiasts and friends of the Club. Our sympathies to the families and friends of Brian McManus, Jim Gallogly and Michael Madden and, indeed, to all those bereaved in the last year. Not wishing to end on a sad note, I will share with you if I may, a funny notice I saw recently. It read:

A fisherman lives here with the best catch of his life

Clever words indeed, if only it was more PC and read, let's say, as:

A fisher-person lives here with the best catch of their life

Which, in turn, could universally translate as:

The best of both worlds!!

**Brendan McGarry,
teaching the art of
fly-tying.**



Throughout the season, the Wild Trout Trust surveyed the lower Riverstown area of the Little Brosna and their report states that, happily, things are not as bad as presumed and that there is a good stock of fish in the river. Good news indeed! Also, they recommended work that could be carried out in order to further improve the fishing in that area.

I'm pleased to report that the ESB have finished their work in Palmers and they are cleaning and trimming along the riverbank at present. Hopefully, they will resume work on the river in the New Year. As usual, the hard-working members of the Club itself were out and about, carrying out their duties efficiently and a lot of much-needed and much-



Fly fishing on Mill Island

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BIRR GAA CLUB

The main highlight in 2011 for Birr GAA Club must be the near completion of St. Brendan's Park. The playing surface is finished, with the east terrace and the north terrace just completed. It is hoped that before the middle of 2012 all works will be completed and we will see more games returning to St. Brendan's Park.

It was great to see high profile games being played in St. Brendan's Park; e.g. The TG4 Ladies Football Championship that was played over 4 weekends. We also hosted other finals within the county; U14B, U16A, and Junior B Hurling Finals as well as all finals in Camogie.

On the hurling side, things did not go as well for us as we had hoped but we did reach the senior county final against our old rivals, Coolderry, the last meeting having been in 2008. The team was trailing by 7 points at half time and were unlucky to lose out following a brilliant second half performance on a score-line of Birr 0-16 points, Coolderry 2-14. The team included Brian Mullins, John Paul O'Meara, Paul Cleary, Michael Verney, Brian Watkins, Barry Harding, Neil Rogers, Rory Hanniffy, Paul Molloy, Barry Whelahan,

Dylan Hayden, Gary Hanniffy, Brendan Murphy, Sean Ryan and Thomas Bolger. Subs used on the day were Brian Lonergan and Brian Nolan.

The club did have some success at underage level. The Under-14 hurling team won the Féile na nGael competition in Offaly by beating Coolderry. They went on to represent Birr in Galway under the management of Barry Whelahan, Johnny Kelly, John Paul O'Meara and Brendan Behan. Even though they did not reach the knock-out stage of the competition they did the club proud.

Birr has a proud Féile tradition, winning Division 2 in 1976, '77, '85 & '98. 'Millennium Man', Brian Whelahan was on the '85 side and his brother Barry is current U-14 manager. Maintaining the '85 links, current selector Johnny Kelly, whose son Ryan features in the squad, was in the triumphant squad as was Adrian Cahill, uncle of this year's captain Eoghan Cahill, Dean Cahill and Shane Donovan. Alan Watkins hurled in '85 and the 2011 panel includes his son Morgan and nephew Dylan.



Under 14 Féile na nGael Squad.

Back Row (L to R): Stefan Shalloe, Mark Nolan, Dylan Murphy, Eoghan Cahill (captain),
Dylan Quegan, Rian Dempsey, Cormac Kenny, Jack Regan.

Middle Row: Dean Cahill, Ryan Kelly, Dylan Watkins, Mark Haines, Jack Pardy, Michael Milne,
David Mullins, Christopher Cleary.

Front Row: Oisín Murphy, Aaron Talbot, Ben Russell, Brandon Beale, Morgan Watkins,
Cathal Kirwan, Shane Donovan, Conor Smyth.

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ST. CILLIAN'S CAMOGIE CLUB

In 2006, St. Cillian's Camogie Club was formed, comprising of girls from Carrig, Riverstown, Killeen and Ballingarry. During the first year, St. Cillian's affiliated an Under-19 team in Go-Games competitions.

In 2008, we achieved the double, winning both the U-10 and U-12 championships. This was a magnificent achievement after only two years in existence.

In 2009 both titles were retained. The U-14 girls were narrowly beaten in the final of the U-14 championship that year. During 2009, we had 6 girls in the Offaly U-14 panel and 7 girls were players who won a Leinster U-14B title.

2010 was another excellent year – winning the U-12 and 14 titles. Our U-16 team reached the final, only to lose out to Shinrone.

In 2011 we participated in Go-Games at U-10 and U-12. Our U-10 coaches were Catherine Dickson, Frank Higgins, Anne O'Meara and Ciara Fogarty. We retained our U-12 title for the fourth year in a row by beating Banagher on their home turf. Congratulations to the coaches, Donie Corrigan, Jackie Plunkett, Brendan Hanamy and James Hoctor. Our Under-14 team swept the boards, winning the Offaly Féile Championship, Offaly County Championship and Féile na nGael All-Ireland Division 2 title. They also took part in the All-Ireland mini-sevens in Dublin, where they reached the semi-finals.

Our U-16 squad was beaten in the final by Banagher. This team was coached by Ger Brennan, Catherine Brennan, Eddie Dolan and Denis Hoctor. Most of these girls are eligible for next year's championship.

We congratulate Laura Hogan, Rachel Brennan, Aisling Brennan, Cailin Fitzgerald, and Leanne Maher, who won a Leinster title with Offaly. They lost to Limerick in the All-Ireland final. Earlier in the year, Niamh Collins and Rachel Brennan became Offaly Junior Skills winners.

The resounding victory at the Féile na nGael competition spurred Carrig man, Dermot Sullivan, to pen a poem in honour of the girls' great achievement.

Féile 2011

The "Féile" weekend was initially begun
In Thurles in the year of nineteen sixty one.
Now some forty years later, we are privileged today
As our club St. Cillian's are guests in Galway.

We left home on Friday in excitement and glee,
To meet our host along the N-63.
Mountbellew-Moylough the twin parishes where we
Are spending the weekend in elite company.

The games that we play are important to win
And we strive to evoke the spirit from within.
But sportsmanship and fairness must of course always be
The ultimate winner in the game of camogie.

Since tomorrow we leave now in gratitude we speak
To our wonderful hosts for the welcome we received.
May the friendship and camaraderie forever continue
Between the girls of St. Cillian's, Moylough and
Mountbellew.



Pictured heading to Féile na nGael are, from left to right, Paul and Margaret Ryan, John Harding, Mattie, our bus driver, Declan Fitzgerald and Tony Dargan.



Joan O'Flynn presenting Cailin Fitzgerald with the Féile n nGael winners plaque.

MAY THEY REST IN PEACE



Owen McGloin



Maria Madden



Patrick O'Neill



Mary Pilkington



Reginald Bridge



Carmel Ryan



Larry Kinsella



Kim Lynam



Michael Madden



Josephine Kealey



Jack Leake



Michael O'Regan



Lisa Guilfoyle



Michael Hickey

MAY THEY REST IN PEACE



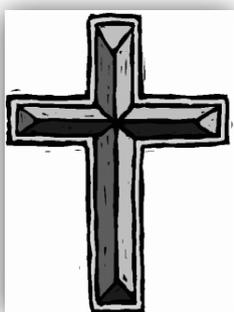
Maria McInerney



John Hanshaw



Maeve Shiels



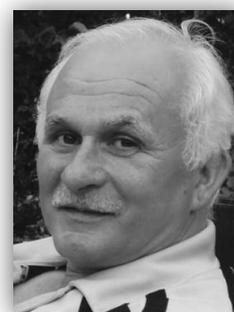
Jean Armitage



Michael Murphy



Helena O'Toole



Brian McManus



Mary English



Michael Tait



Sadie Bergin



Frank O'Keefe



Diana Alley



Eamon 'Sambo' Kelly



Anne Sherlock



MAY THEY REST IN PEACE



Padraig Pyne



Aine Pyne



Tommy Doherty



Frances Mitchell



Brendan Keeshan



Margaret Broderick



Chris O'Donoghue



Mary Murray



Paschal Cullen



Joan Coghlan



Jackie Burke



George Smith



Bernadette Corboy



Michael O'Brien

MAY THEY REST IN PEACE



Maureen Ryan



Michael O'Meara



Mary Neilan



Mary Coolahan



Christy Kelly



Georgina Alexander



Tom Kinsella



Bill Fitzgerald



Peter Pardy



Maureen O'Brien



Harry Twanley



Charlie Rooney



James Gallogly



RIVERSTOWN

By the late Jim Shortt, Killeen

*There's a purtie wee village its called Riverstown
On the edge of Tipperary not far from Birr town
Many a mile you would travel its equal to see
Where the Brosna rolls by heading on to the sea*

*If some fine summers morning you would ramble that way
Just pause for a while the scenes to survey
The sylvan surroundings advertently green
With peace and tranquillity reigning supreme*

*The old world bridge, the quaint winding street
The rows of white dwellings trim tidy and neat
The old village pump sporting Tipp's blue and gold
The flower bedecked gardens a delight to behold*

*And should you have the leisure to linger a while
To gaze down from the bridge on the ancient Crow Isle
The swans and the wild ducks may also be seen
As they gracefully glide o'er the clear Brosna stream*

*The thrush and the blackbird from each from each bow and tree
Cause the air to resound with rich melody
The notes of the wee birds make vocal espray
Shedding o'er the village the long summer day*

*Or stroll along the banks of the rippling rill
Neath the ivy clad walls of that once busy mill
Nearby stands the old schoolhouse now silent alas
Where our men and our maidens their childhood did pass*

*But things in this village were not always the same
Just a wee bit untidy with no one to blame
The people decided that in a short while
T'would be second to none in the Emerald Isle*

*So they all worked together the large and the small
The rich ones the poor ones the old ones and all
And today in this land there is no tidier town
Than that spot by the Brosna that's called Riverstown*