

# Birr Year Review

Volume 12 - December 2012



# BIRR YEAR REVIEW 2012

Volume 12

December 2012

## CONTENTS

<i>Cover Photo - Paul Barber</i>	Page
Year in Review	3
Birr's Titanic Man	13
My Piece of Paradise	15
The Scent of Home	17
When Dan Breen Was In Birr	19
The Crinkill Connection	20
Uganda – The Pearl of Africa	21
Aces High	23
Bringing Justice to the People	25
Robert Ball	27
A Road Trip	29
Out of Africa	31
The Great Philadelphia Wagon Road	33
Willie Boland's Many Tales	35
An Afternoon with Mundy	37
John de Jean Frazer	39
Into the Heart of Ireland	41
The Former Presbyterian Church	45
Birr Pioneers Celebrate 100 Years	47
Dogs For Life!	49
Closure of the Circuit Court	51
Birr Railway Station	53
A Grand Design	57
The Day the Papparazzi Came	59
From School To The Fields	61
A New Garda Superintendent	65
Life Lessons	67
50 Years – Time to Celebrate	69
Birr's Theatrical Tradition	71
Master Printer	75
No One Really Emigrates Anymore	77
Carrying the Olympic Torch	79
1912	85
Churches of Birr	87
Greetings from our Schools	91
Wedding Bells	104
Special Occasions	106
News from Clubs & Organisations	107
News from Sports Clubs	155
May They Rest in Peace	180
Her Final Trip	184
– a poem by Jim Shortt	



It's hard to believe that another year has passed already and we are here again with this year's edition of the Birr Review. We hope that you enjoy its mix of topical news and life stories. As with other years the emphasis of the Review is on our community and the activities of its people at home and abroad in times past and present. With stories from Belfast to Africa to the Cayman Islands we can see how Birr people make their presence felt across the globe. There are two Titanic stories which stretch over a century and Birr men feature at the heart of both of them. I would particularly like to thank all those who have contributed articles and features to the Review. Thanks also to the stalwarts who gather and contribute photos and names of the deceased and also those of the newly-wed. Such information will ensure that the Review will be a valuable social record in years to come. Thanks to all my fellow committee members for their hard work.

**Michael Donegan**  
*Editor*



Look for 'Birr Review'



A very warm welcome to the 12th edition of Birr Review. I hope everybody enjoys it. Once again it is a lovely mixture of articles and photographs from past and present. Birr Lions Club is delighted to be associated with the 'Review' and would like to thank everybody who contributed to the contents. We are very grateful to our loyal advertisers, retailers and you, our readers.

The revenue received from this publication will help us greatly in providing assistance to the youth and the elderly at local level. We also work closely with other organisations in trying to help the neediest in our society.

A special thanks to editor, Michael Donegan, Emer Dolphin-Murray, George Manzor and the Review Committee without whose hard work the Review would not be possible. On behalf of Birr Lions Club and Birr Review I would like to wish you all a Happy and Peaceful Christmas and New Year.

**Paul Lynch**  
*President*  
*Birr Lions Club*



## BIRR ANNUAL REVIEW COMMITTEE 2012

Paul Barber, Tony Dargan, Sr. Roberta Delaney Emer Dolphin-Murray, Michael Donegan, Brian Hogan, Tony Hogan, Brian Kennedy, Richard Kennedy, Tony McLoughlin, Paul Lynch, Jim Phelan.

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 2011-2012

## NOVEMBER 2011

A new Irish school called 'Noinini Beaga' was officially opened at Green Street by Blathnaid Ni Chofaigh.

Intellicom, a specialist software company located in Birr, was sold to a major telecommunications service provider – Complete Telecom - for an undisclosed figure.

The town of Birr was shocked by the tragic death of Peter Parry which occurred following an accident at High Street on Friday, October 28<sup>th</sup>.

A presentation was made to Tommy Lyndon to mark his retirement as Chairperson of the Board of Management of Mercy Primary School, Birr after 25 years of service.

Birr's John Molloy received very positive reviews for his performances during the Wexford Opera Festival.

On Saturday, October 29<sup>th</sup>, the Birr minor camogie side created a piece of history as they captured the club's first minor 'A' county championship title with a 2-14 to 1-7 victory over St. Rynagh's. Orlagh Kirwan scored ten points and Ciara Dooley netted both goals, while the joint captains were Caroline Soupe and Rebecca Hoctor.

The inaugural Birr Chamber of Commerce Parish Sports awards were presented at a function in the County Arms Hotel and the three main award winners were – Hall of Fame - Willie Burns, Sports Star of the Year - Peter Dooley and Club Person of the Year - Dermot Sullivan.

The Birr Stage Guild production of 'Drama at Inish' provided plenty of comedy for audiences at the local Theatre & Arts Centre.

'The Midland Tribune' reported that shortfalls in adequate staff numbers to fulfil work by Birr Town Council was creating major problems and prompted the Council to call on the national moratorium on taking on new employees to be lifted.

It was announced that the FÁS office located at Birr Technology Centre was to close and the workers are to be relocated within the Department of Social & Family Affairs. A new book by Birr artist, Jackie Lynch, entitled – 'My Hometown – A photographic journey through the streets of Birr' – was launched in John's Hall on Sunday, November 13<sup>th</sup> by singer/songwriter, Mundy.

A public meeting was held in Dooly's Hotel on November 17<sup>th</sup> in relation to the Birr Realm Plan.

Concern was aired locally regarding the possibility of cutbacks to Birr's MIDOC service.

The Birr Chamber of Commerce 'Light up the Night' fashion show held in Dooly's Hotel proved to be a resounding success. The event raised much needed funds for the town's Christmas Lights.

A delegation from Westport Town Council visited Birr to address a meeting on examining how best to promote Birr as a vibrant hub of social, tourism and business activity. The

issue of Birr street lights failing to work properly was raised at a meeting of Birr Town Council.

Pete Grennan was wished well on his retirement from the maintenance staff of Birr Town Council.

On the evening of Saturday, November 19<sup>th</sup>, a mass of celebration was held in St Brendan's Church, Birr, to mark the 50<sup>th</sup> year in education in Birr of Bro. Denis Minehane.

St. Brendan's Community School presented the Andrew Lloyd Webber spectacular 'Joseph and the Amazing Technicolor Dreamcoat' from Wednesday to Saturday, November 23<sup>rd</sup>–26<sup>th</sup>. Kevin Fleury played the role of 'Joseph'.

The Courts Service announced that Circuit Court sittings will no longer be held in Birr and State Solicitor, Jim Houlihan, said it was a very sad day for Birr.

Birr Credit Union welcomed a delegation from the Credit Union movement in Russia as part of a five-day skills sharing and study exercise.

The 11<sup>th</sup> edition of the Birr Year Review was launched.

Birr's Donal Franks guided Ballygar to the Galway junior hurling championship title and the Connaught JHC crown. The Birr figure dancers – Leah Scully, Jane Garahy, Sian Cooke, Aideen O'Halloran, Nicole Bracken, Tara Sequin, Sarah Cooke and Grainne Nolan – won the county Scór na nÓg title.

Coolderry, managed by Ken Hogan and captained by Brendan O'Meara, captured their first ever Leinster Club SHC crown with a 1-15 to 1-11 victory over Oulart-the-Ballagh of Wexford in Nowlan Park, Kilkenny.

## DECEMBER

The Birr Minor GAA Club annual presentation night took place on December 2<sup>nd</sup> with Féile county medals and Tom Ryan Cup medals being presented to victorious sides.

An auction of works donated by the Birr Art Group took place on Saturday, December 3<sup>rd</sup> in Purcell's auction rooms to raise funds for St. Vincent de Paul.

'The Spot' youth café located on Lower Main Street, Birr re-opened on Friday, December 9<sup>th</sup> following the completion of renovation work.

New exercise equipment was launched in the 'Tone Zone' at Birr's Camcor Park by Sr. Roberta (Birr Active Retirement Group) and Cllr. John Carroll.

The December 8<sup>th</sup> edition of 'The Midland Tribune' reported that the HSE had decided to drastically reduce the hours of the Birr MIDOC service.

Grove Street TV, a public art project by Michael Fortune, came to an end after a year on air and a celebratory event was held to mark the occasion at Birr Theatre & Arts Centre. It was announced that John Aldridge's Liverpool Legends would visit Birr in April of 2012 to play a game against a

# Dooly's Hotel

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selection of players from Birr to raise much needed funds for some of the local schools.

Birr Chamber of Commerce President, Martin Kearns, switched on the town's Christmas Lights.

St. Brendan's C.S. advanced to the Leinster Colleges' Senior 'A' Hurling League Final with a 2-15 to 1-15 extra-time semi-final victory over Castlecomer C.S. Emmet Nolan scored 0-9 and Sean T O'Connor 0-3, while Conor Doughan grabbed 2-1 in the win.

Offaly County Council Cathaoirleach, Danny Owens, presented commemorative scrolls to Suzanne Dwyer (Camcor Warriors) and Karen Breslin (South Offaly Special Olympics Club) at a civic reception held in Áras an Chontae, Tullamore.

Three local solicitors, Richard Kennedy, Ken Enright and Bernadette Owens addressed a meeting of Birr Town Council where they raised fears over the future of Birr District Court.

Birr Gardaí issued an appeal to members of the public to upgrade their household security and to be extra vigilant in the wake of a spate of burglaries in the area.

Birr's Michelle Kirwan was placed 7<sup>th</sup> in Ireland in her Final Admitting Examination (FAE) held by Chartered Accountants Ireland.

Birr Stage Guild presented 'The Magic of Christmas IV' on Friday and Saturday, December 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> in Birr Theatre & Arts Centre.

Killeen N.S. launched a school calendar as part of their Green Schools programme.

Birr native, Dr. Frank Dolphin, stepped down as Chairperson of the interim board of the HSE.

Birr man, Noel Molloy, project director with Harcourt Construction, was working on and overseeing the construction of Titanic Belfast – Northern Ireland's largest tourist attraction.

An exhibition of work by local artist, Mary B. Dunne, entitled 'Nostalgia' opened at The Chestnut.

Six-year-old Patrick Barnwell Mulholland from Oxmantown School was one of twelve winners in a nationwide art competition sponsored by Colgate-Palmolive. In the Leinster Colleges SH 'A' League Final at Heywood C.S., a brave effort by St. Brendan's C.S. saw them stumble to a 1-11 to 1-6 defeat against St. Kieran's College, Kilkenny. A group of sixth class pupils from St. Brendan's Boys P.S., Birr sang at the Hallelujah Concert in the RDS where they shared a stage with The High Kings and the Billy Barry Dancers.

The Diocese of Killaloe recorded a surplus of €93,941 during 2010.

Busy Bodies Montessori School held their annual Christmas play in Carrig Church.

Professional truck driver, Emma Bailey, revealed that driving a truck is 'not simple work by any means' during an interview published in 'The Midland Tribune'.

St. Brendan's Boys P.S. Parents Association made a presentation to Mrs. Leslie de Forge to mark her retirement

after over thirty years spent at the school. Meanwhile, Santa arrived at the school on a motorbike and was greeted by Principal Niall Crofton and representatives of the Parents Association.

Members of the local business community and Deputy Marcella Corcoran-Kennedy attended the official launch of the St. Brendan's C.S. School Bank named 'Future Fortunes'.

Hundreds participated in the Birr GOAL Mile on Christmas Day.

Birr retailers reported a 'great Christmas trade'. Chamber of Commerce President, Martin Kearns, said traders were all very happy with how the 2011 festive season had gone for them.

## JANUARY 2012

'The Midland Tribune' reported that a terrifying crime occurred on New Year's Day when a man armed with a machete robbed a grocer's store in Crinkill.

Birr Town Councillors said the scourge of unemployment was one of the biggest problems facing the region as it headed into the New Year. Cllr. John Carroll remarked, "very few families haven't been affected by the economic recession."

A presentation was made to Brenda Deegan who retired from her post as Multi-Task Attendant at Birr Nursing Unit after 18 years in the position at a function in Dooly's Hotel attended by members of her family and co-workers.

Birr Mental Health Association hosted a talk on 'Celebrating the Work of the Volunteer' in Dooly's Hotel where Darren Hanniffy of GOAL gave an inspirational account of his work. On January 4<sup>th</sup>, Margaret Loughnane celebrated her 100<sup>th</sup> birthday. She said 'good food, hard work and good company' were the secret to her longevity.

Birr Town Council reduced its retail rate by 1% at its budget meeting.

Birr's impressive new Camcor River Walk was officially opened by Town Council Cathaoirleach, Noel Russell.

The transfer of the Teagasc office from Birr to Tullamore was highlighted by Cllr. Michael Loughnane.

On Friday, January 13<sup>th</sup>, the Offaly GAA awards presentation ceremony took place at the Bridge House Hotel when Pat Joe Whelahan was inducted into the Hurling Hall of Fame, and the handball award winner was Crinkill's Michael O'Brien.

Birr postman, John Kirwan, delivered a precious package on Saturday, January 14<sup>th</sup> when he successfully delivered his daughter Eireen after his wife Lorraine went into the labour as they were en-route to Portiuncula Hospital, Ballinasloe.

A public meeting was held Birr to discuss the possibility of opening a Gaelscoil in the town.

Birr Skate Park was nominated in the Best Public Park category in the LAMA (Local Authority Members Association) awards.

## BIRR Year Review 2012

Kevin Murphy took over as Chairperson of Birr GAA Club at the club's annual general meeting on January 15<sup>th</sup> in the Marian Hall.

Editor of the Sunday Independent, Aengus Fanning, who worked in Birr during the 1960's, passed to his eternal reward on Tuesday, January 17<sup>th</sup>.

The annual general meeting of Birr Tidy Towns took place and Chairperson, Cllr. Tony McLoughlin said Birr "was a beautiful town with lots of potential".

On January 27<sup>th</sup>, Birr became Ireland's Twitter capital as the County Arms Hotel was the venue for a thirty-two county 'Tweet Up' promoting the interests of small Irish businesses. The event was organised by Birr native, Debi Harper (nee Vaughn), of Tús Nua Designs.

Birr Chamber of Commerce, with support from Offaly Local Development Committee, was involved in a project that saw new street signs erected around the town.

Birr man, Ray Hayden, was appointed to the board of the cross-border body Inter Trade Ireland.

The annual general meeting of the Birr Vintage Week & Arts Festival took place in Dooly's Hotel with Liam Dumpleton remaining on in the role as Chairperson.

### FEBRUARY

Five-year-old, Oran Molloy, who was born with a serious form of cerebral palsy, flew to the United States to undergo a life-changing operation to enable him to walk.

Fayles of Birr came first in the Best Dressed Christmas Window display competition followed by Hip- Hop and in third place was Hedgerows.

Mercy P.S. girls celebrated its first-ever Grandparents Day when doting grandparents, many of whom had themselves attended the school, came together for a very special celebration in the 170-year-old school.

Some criminal activity occurred in Birr – damage was caused to a parked vehicle at a closed garage on Wilmer Road and a burglary occurred in Crinkill. The Gardaí also investigated the theft of three expensive watches as well as cash in several foreign dominations, from a home in Birr. The headquarters of Birr-based, Cancer Support Group, Dóchas, was attacked by vandals in what appeared to be a senseless act of destruction.

Birr Town Council looked back over a positive two years - a positive development in housing was the Grove Street Estate Management Action Plan and the Council has signed Contracts for a number of properties in the town under the Rental Accommodation Scheme. In the centre of Emmet Square, the column was restored, more car parking spaces were created on Wilmer Road and new street signage was erected by the Chamber of Commerce. Other positives were the Skate Park, Syngefield House Gates and the creation of the Adult Exercise Park in the Camcor Park.

The Birr Community Respond Group fund-raised to provide a defibrillator in the town.

Jasango Theatre was back in Birr with a new production of Geraldine Aron's hilarious "My Brilliant Divorce". "My Brilliant Divorce" had its World Premiere at the Apollo Theatre in London in 2001 and went on to sell out in theatres all over the world.

Birr Under-15 Rugby Team beat Edenderry 32 – 19 in a Pre-Cup work-out friendly. Team Members – Ken Cahill, Ciaran Carroll, Paddy Parsons, Conor Hogan, Aaron Brown, Lorcan Grant, Aaron Daly, Jack Clancy, Darragh Nolan, Dáire Stapleton, Oisín Kelly, Conor Molloy, Chris Maloney, McDarragh Kennedy, Jack Clancy, John Hanlon, William Spain and William Maher.

Birr Town Ladies Soccer Team defeated another Offaly side, Riverside, 3 – 1 at Frank O' Connell Park.

Birr Town Football Club was picked as the Aviva Club of the Month for December. This is a national award in which all football clubs in the Republic of Ireland are eligible. It is awarded to clubs who work hard at promoting the game and providing opportunities for their local community.

The Decentralisation Project in Birr which began in 2004 when FÁS allocated a €1.7M/5.59 acre site on the edge of the town was coming to an end and the site remains a green field. In 2007 a small group of FÁS employees moved to Birr and they were expected to leave by the end of April 2012.

A petition to change the rules in the new section of Birr's Clonoghill Cemetery was mounted. The rules dictated that the cemetery must remain a lawn cemetery where strict guidelines regarding the dimensions of monuments marking a grave are enforced and the laws are clearly explained on the wall in the graveyard for all to see who wish to purchase a site.

Birr's Mercy P.S. were winners in the Under-13 year category of the Birr Credit Union School Quiz, with Scoil Naisiúnta Naomh Eoin, Rath, winning the Under-11 category. The Mercy P.S. team was Abbey Woods, Laoise Murray, Jessica Fitzgerald and Kate Sullivan.

A car crashed into the music shop in Birr's Market Square. The car struck a bench, a bollard and the shop. The driver was un-injured.

Birr Library hosted a lecture by Michael Auret who for more than 20 years fought for justice in Zimbabwe. He first took a stand against the white minority rule under Ian Smith and when Mugabe grabbed power he became more disillusioned. He is now peacefully retired in Offaly.

The RTE Vanbrugh String Quartet, regarded as one of Europe's most successful quartet, performed at Birr Theatre and Arts Centre.

Captain Seamus Breen and Lady Captain Vera Smyth together with Presidents Sean Moylan and Mary Grennan were delighted with the large turnout of numbers and friends for the annual Drive-In at Birr Golf Club.

### MARCH

No new long-term patients are being accepted in Birr Nursing Unit. Day Care is still operating as usual, as is

respite care (where patients stay in the Unit for one or two weeks). Some were worried that, during the recession, the Unit might close but the Government has said that this won't happen.

Shannon Development announced that 3 businesses will be opening in Syngefield Industrial Estate – one is involved in supplying the plumbing trade, another manufacturing garden and street furniture and the third in the water and reservoir treatment business.

Two students from St. Brendan's Community School were among the 75 Irish Students in with a chance of seeing their doodle on the Google Ireland Home page for all to see. Emma Mulrooney (1<sup>st</sup>, 2<sup>nd</sup> 3<sup>rd</sup> year group) and Betty O'Brien (4<sup>th</sup>, 5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> year group) were finalists in the fourth annual 'Doodle 4 Google' Art Competition.

Shamita Ray, a respected contemporary and Indian Classical Dancer, visited Mercy P.S. as part of her role in the Primary School Outreach programme of Legitimate Bodies Dance Company.

Birr Under-13's Rugby Team qualified for the Leinster semi-finals.

Birr farmer, Frank Connon, and his brother Fergus made a remarkable philanthropic gesture towards Minister for Health, James Reilly, when they offered a free green field site for the development of the National Children's Hospital. They offered the land located adjacent to the M50 between Dublin Airport and Ballymun between the M1 and M7 exits.

Good news for Oxmantown N.S. – they will receive grant-aid to replace their existing prefab classrooms with permanent structures.

Birr Town Council is divided over the potential removal of railings on Birr's Castle Street. The railings, which are marked as a protected structure, have been struck by traffic on numerous occasions, are considered an eye-sore by some local people and have often been highlighted by Tidy Towns Judges as one of the town's black spots.

Margaret Sherlock retired from the Staff of Birr Town Council and Offaly County Council after over 40 years service. There was a special retirement function at Birr Civic Offices where past and present officials as well as indoor and outdoor staff gathered to wish her well and glowing tributes were made.

Birr man, John Feehan, was the chosen speaker for the 2012 Inaugural National Tree Week Lecture which was held in the National Botanic Gardens in Glasnevin. The title of the speech was "The Once & Future Forest".

Birr horse trainer, Philip Byrne, kick-started his training career when he had his first winner, as Christmas Birthday had a length to spare in a six furlong contest on the all-weather track at Dundalk. Philip's mother Mary owns the horse while his father, Michael, bred the horse.

A new NCBI retail shop opened on the Main Street, Birr.

Birr Fishing Club removed several large bags of household refuse from the Camcor River in Birr, only a short distance from where the town's drinking water supply is harvested. Birr Town Council issued a warning to all owners of unauthorised signage that all signs erected without a permit will be removed.

Birr Scouts – 3<sup>rd</sup> Offaly Troop Investiture Night and Memorial Mass was held in the Marian Hall. Cub of the Year was awarded to Louise Bergin, Patrol of the Year was awarded to Cathal Guilfoyle's Patrol and Scout of the Year was awarded to Jamie Doonan.

Billy Mullins took another Emerald Masters "A" Singles Leinster Handball title with an impressive win over Wexford's Tony Breen.

Renowned Chinese artist, Hai-jing Wu, visited Birr Castle as guest of Lord and Lady Rosse. The Parsons family has a long established link with China and Birr Castle is home to a little-known but significant Irish Collection of Arian Art assiduously assembled over three centuries.

Congratulations to St. Brendan's Community School Students who triumphed in the Offaly Student Enterprise competitions. St. Brendan's took first place in the junior category and first, second and third places in the intermediate category. The Junior Category was represented by Paul Donnels and Nicole Cooper and their enterprise (Even Tone Tan) and the intermediate category by Michael Carroll (Shelvz).

John Aldridge's Liverpool Legends, together with Jason McAteer and England Legend, Alan Kennedy, played a selection of players from Birr at Frank O' Connell Park, Birr to raise funds for some of the local schools.

#### **APRIL**

Birr Gardaí issued an appeal for information on missing Birr resident, Michael Wisnienski, who has been living in Birr for seven years and was last seen in Birr on March 21<sup>st</sup> 2012.

Birr designer, Geraldine O'Meara Shiels, had one of her designs showcased at the Peter Mark VIP Style Awards at the Shelbourne Hotel in Dublin.

Five priests, including Fr. Pat Gilbert from Birr, made a dramatic 'Leap of Faith' at Birr Airfield when they parachuted in aid of Offaly Hospice.

Two students, Jessica Davis and Aaron Coffey, from St. Brendan's Community School took part in the Graduate Online Civic Awareness Competition with a trip to Strasbourg to participate in the Euroscola – a youth parliament with 23 Students from all over Ireland and students from all over the EU.

Twenty gas cylinders worth about €30 each of the domestic yellow variety were stolen from Birr Oil on the Tullamore Road when the steel cage, housing the gas, was forced open.

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## TO DUBLIN

Departing	Monday to Friday								Saturday		Sunday			
Portumna								8.25		8.25	13.25	8.25	13.25	18.20
Banagher								8.35		8.35				18.35
Birr		5.25		5.55		6.25	6.55	9.00	14.00	9.00	14.00	9.00	14.00	19.00
Kilcormac		5.37		6.07		6.37	7.07	9.13	14.13	9.13	14.13	9.13	14.13	19.13
Tullamore	5.45	6.00	6.15	6.30	6.45	7.00	7.30	9.35	14.35	9.35	14.35	9.35	14.35	19.35
Kilbeggan	5.55	6.10	6.25	6.40	6.55	7.10	7.40	9.45	14.45	9.45	14.45	9.45	14.45	19.45
Tyrellspass	6.00	6.15	6.30	6.45	7.00	7.15	7.45	9.50	14.50	9.50	14.50	9.50	14.50	19.50
Rochfortbridge	6.05	6.20	6.35	6.50	7.05	7.20	7.50	9.55	14.55	9.55	14.55	9.55	14.55	19.55
Milltownpass	6.10	6.25	6.40	6.55	7.10	7.25	7.55	10.00	15.00	10.00	15.00	10.00	15.00	20.00
Kinnegad	6.20	6.35	6.50	7.05	7.20	7.35	8.05	10.10	15.10	10.10	15.10	10.10	15.10	20.10
Clonard	6.25	6.40	6.55	7.10	7.25	7.40	8.10	10.15	15.15	10.15	15.15	10.15	15.15	20.15
Enfield	6.40	6.55	7.05	7.25	7.40	7.55	8.25	10.25	15.25	10.25	15.25	10.25	15.25	20.25

Commuter coaches serve Trinity College, Nassau St, Merrion Sq., Baggot St, Leeson St.

Extra Service during college term Sundays @ 17.25 departing Birr. Some changes will apply to Bank Holidays  
Luggage carried at owner's risk. Valid from 01/11/2011 Subject to change without notice

## FROM DUBLIN

Departing	Monday to Friday								Saturday		Sunday		
Dublin Cathal Brugha Street								18.00	13.00	18.00	15.00	17.15	22.30
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 Brugha Street									18.00			
Portumna	18.00 from Cathal Brugha Street									18.00	15.00	17.15	

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

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

Valid from 01/11/2011 Subject to change without notice \* Travels as far as Tullamore\*

## GALWAY

DEPARTS	FRIDAY		SATURDAY	SUNDAY	SUNDAY <i>College Term Only</i>
Tullamore				7.00 p.m.	
Kilcormac				7.20 p.m.	
Birr	9.00 a.m.	3.00 p.m.	9.00 a.m.	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.
Departs Galway	1.00 p.m.	5.30 p.m.	6.00 p.m.	10.00 p.m.	5.00 p.m.

Bus departs Galway from Merchants Road. Some changes apply to Bank Holiday weekends  
During college term, Sunday service will serve Newcastle Rd., Corrib Village and Dunurus

The SUB Garda Youth Division Project Birr recently completed the "Copping-On" programme in Crinkill National School. "Copping-On" is a crime awareness initiative which aims to create awareness of the effects of crime on the person, community and the victim.

Michael Gillespie, a Physics and Science Teacher at St. Brendan's Community School, Birr was appointed to the Teaching Council, a regulation body for teaching in Ireland. He is a member of the National Executive of the TUI and a member of both the Physics Syllabus Committee and the Board of Studies with the NCCA.

St. Brendan's Community School girls made it three in a row when they won the Pauline Curley Marathon Relay for post-primary girls. The girls broke their own record by over one minute, romping home in a time of 2 hours 3 minutes and 38 seconds.

Four proposed sculptures went on public display in Birr and the public were invited to view and comment on them. The chosen sculpture will be sited on the left side of the Tullamore Road. One piece had carvings from the Macregol Gospels, some others take inspiration from the nebula discovery at Birr Castle, while another is a celebration of the town's vibrant cultural life. The materials proposed range from concrete, steel, iron and bog oak.

A LOFAR Station was installed in Birr Castle Demesne. LOFAR is an international Network of Radio Telescopes that will provide new views of exploding stars, detect previously unknown planets and enable the study of the Early Universe after the Big Bang. This telescope will transform Irish Astrophysics and ICT research, create links between universities and industry, inspire school children with the wonder of cutting-edge science and fascinate the general public.

Birr, the four times All-Ireland Club Champions, overcame a very gallant Lucan Sarsfields team after an absorbing battle in the semi-final of the Leinster Club Hurling semi-final to qualify for the final.

### MAY

Birr Chamber Of Commerce, in conjunction with Dulux Paints Ireland, organised for Ms. Kathy Bracken, a colour consultant, to come to Birr to help transform and brighten the town.

Birr Tidy Towns had a great turn-out for the various clean-ups around Emmet Square. Removing the guards around the trees and placing chippings at the base of the trees was carried out. Two days were spent cleaning away the moss between the paving stones. Thanks to all the Tidy Towns members for all their commitment and dedication.

A pub league in Charades and Bullseye was started in Birr every Friday, commencing 4 May and ran for about three months in local bars, in all 16 pubs were involved in the league. Two pub teams played each other in different venues each week.

The tenth Annual Set Dancing Festival, organised by Birr Comhaltas, took place over the June bank holiday weekend, beginning on Friday 1<sup>st</sup> June.

Team Darts in aid of the IGCPT and Cancer Research, sponsored by Brian Whelan was started and included nightly raffle prizes sponsored by John Reedy and Jim Cashen.

The St. Brendan's Community School Parents Council held their annual Golf Classic on Friday 4<sup>th</sup> May in Birr Golf Club. The students from InStep Stage School performed in Birr Theatre and Arts Centre with their production 'Spectacular Spectacular'.

At the April meeting, Birr Town Council was told by Cllr Bernie Fanneran that Dulux had kindly offered paint to the people of Birr at a discounted price as part of a project to give the town centre a makeover.

The Birr Community Responder Group was launched in Dooley's Hotel and it was hoped that this service will help save lives.

Birr Rugby Club's first XV were anxious to put on a display to reflect the standard which properly befits the team and they certainly put on a storming display at the Riverside Paddock with a score-line of Birr 29 – Roscrea 15.

Townsend House Guest House was recommended as Offaly's Best Place to Stay by Georgina Campbell's Ireland-Guide.com. This added to the list of awards from Lucinda O'Sullivan's Great Places to Stay, The Rough Guide to Ireland and Back Roads to Ireland. Townsend House will celebrate 10 years in business in 2013

The Camcor Riders Motorcycle Club held a run from Birr to Newport, Co. Mayo, on the 26<sup>th</sup> May in which over 50 bikes took part. The two-day run was a huge success as well as being very enjoyable for all those who took part. The Club distributed sponsor cards and held a bucket collection in the town of Birr prior to the start of the run. Over €5,000 was raised altogether.

### JUNE

Birr hurlers had a major scare as they recovered from a seven point deficit during the first half to come out the right end of a two point victory over Drumcullen with a score line of Birr 1-12, Drumcullen 0-13.

The President's Prize was held in Birr Golf Club and president, Sean Moylan, thanked members for turning up in such numbers. Captain Seamus Breen complimented Sean on all the excellent work he had done for the club during these difficult times. He noted that Sean was highly regarded in the club and he wished him every success for the remainder of the season.

Birr made it on to the long list in the Irish Times competition 'The Best Place To Live in Ireland'. It joined 24 other places in the race to become Ireland's nicest neck-of-the-woods. Some of the other finalists included Glenbeigh Road Area, Cabra in Dublin, Cloughjordan in Tipperary and Athlone in Westmeath.

Significant improvements in how water supplies were managed in Birr has resulted in water lost through leaking and dilapidated infrastructure being substantially reduced. An art exhibition 'Keeping it in the Family' was officially opened in Birr Theatre and Arts Centre.

It's a double celebration for Select Hotels of Ireland, Ireland's biggest independent hospitality marketing group, as two of their member hotels, The County Arms Hotel Birr and The Ardilaun Hotel, Galway, get set to celebrate 50 years in business!

With the rising cost of fuel, it is becoming more evident that electric vehicles are the future. Owners of electric vehicles were pleased to hear that Birr has a public charging point installed.

Exciting plans to transform some of Birr's streets into a film set for the making of a film on the 1916 rising were announced.

Construction work on a new facility for storing salt to combat the icy conditions on the roads during the winter months was set to get underway.

Hard luck to the Under-14 camogie team who were defeated by Tullamore in the Championship on a score line of 2-7 to 0-1. Despite being short seven regular team members, the girls battled hard throughout the match and much credit is due to all, but in particular to Nessa Hart, Caoimhe Dunne and Brooke Whelahan.

Carrig N.S. raised their 5<sup>th</sup> Green Flag. The Green School Committee and the children of Carrig N.S. worked very hard on the transport theme. One of the committee's biggest achievements was to successfully put pressure on the local council to make Carrig Village a safer environment for its residents and the school children.

The residents of Grove Street in Crinkill hosted a large crowd for the opening of the Community House (Teach Tús Nua) and the Multi-Use Games and Play-Area in Grove Street.

In a historic move, Offaly is to become a three-seat Dáil constituency of its own along with a small part of North Tipperary. The break-up of the Laois/Offaly constituency was recommended by the Constituency Commission which is reducing the size of the Dáil by eight seats.

Singers and musicians assembled in The Marian Hall in Birr to celebrate National Music Day with Birr Comhaltas. The event had to be transferred indoors from the Market Square due to the uncertain weather but that didn't dampen the enthusiasm of the performers or the good-sized attendance which came along to enjoy the evening. The sponsoring branch was supported by the West Offaly Branch and other visitors.

The 5th class of Mercy Primary School Birr launched their school's new website. The girls gave a wonderfully polished presentation, as they demonstrated the site on their classrooms interactive white board. This was an historic occasion as Mercy Primary School, founded by Ven. Catherine McAuley in 1841, is the town's oldest school. The

launch of the website brings the school, with its 171 year history, into the communication world of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. The Birr Minor GAA club minor team hosted two teams from London and Derry and entered two teams in the football Féile. Thanks to the dedication of the committee and parents, this was a resounding success. Well done to all involved.

The Leviathan Telescope at Birr Castle was named one of The Seven Wonders of Ireland. The Seven Wonders have been named as part of the launch of a new Atlas of Scientific People and Places.

Offaly Local Development Company (OIDC) Job's Club Birr has relocated to Unit 6, Brendan Street, Birr.

The annual Corpus Christi procession in Birr took place on June 7<sup>th</sup> in the grounds of St. Brendan's Church.

### July

It was announced that two new Superintendents have been appointed in Laois/Offaly and one of these will be based in Birr.

Gardaí appealed once again for any information in the case of a Polish man who has been missing from his home in Riverside Apartments, Birr for over 15 weeks.

A group of influential journalists from China – including representatives of the Beijing Times, Radio Beijing and the Shanghai Morning Post – visited Birr Castle and enjoyed a tour of the Science Centre, as guests of Tourism Ireland and Emirates.

Independent local election candidate, Liam Dumpleton, said that Environment Minister, Phil Hogan, will be "sleepwalking into the past" if he abolishes Birr Town Council. The future of the local authority will be made known when the Government White Paper is published this month.

Birr Junior Youth Club, which opened in October 2011 and ran until the end of June 2012, proved to be very popular. Birr, Roscrea and Nenagh are among 44 town areas which are to be surveyed as part of the Department of Education's process of divesting of patronage of primary schools. The surveys are among the recommendations in a report from the Advisory Group to the Forum on Patronage and Pluralism in the Primary sector.

The National Polo Crosse Championship was hosted by Birr Polo Crosse Club, with all eight clubs in Ireland competing in the grounds of Kinnitty Castle.

The July meeting of Birr Town Council was told by a Town Council Executive member that houses in Birr were to receive letters from the Council in the near future asking them to pay the Household Charge if they have not already done so.

Birr native, Very Rev. Pat Malone, was appointed as Vicar General of the Diocese of Killaloe in succession to Very Rev. Seamus Gardner, who retired.



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Some of the country's most popular GAA players joined together to launch The Festival of Finals – a commemoration of the 125<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the first All-Ireland Hurling Championship in 1887, the final of which took place in Birr on April 1<sup>st</sup> 1888.

Well-known Birr artist, Martin Spillane, held an exhibition of his recent work in Moneygall as part of the annual Moneygall American Festival.

Congratulations to all the children who represented Birr at the Community Games county finals in Tullamore Harriers. The rain held off and many children reached finals, which was a great experience for them.

The County Arms Hotel hosted a special evening of fine dining, dedicated to showcasing Offaly's top local food producers.

Gorgeous Irish models, Pippa O Connor and Roz Purcell, added sparkle and pizzazz to the Best Dressed Lady Competition at the Gigginstown Midland National Day Kilbeggan Races, where Birr's Sarah Gene Loughnane won the prize for best dressed lady.

**AUGUST**

Birr Tidy Towns Association made a special presentation to Tom King for the work he achieved in restoring the façade of Doolin's Arcade in Market Square. Awards were also presented to the 'Best Kept Estates' in the town.

A photographic exhibition titled 'Proverbs' took place in Craughwell's Pub, Castle Street, during August organised by Birr Photography Group.

Dave Farrell, director of the film '1916 – Britain's Forgotten War', which was partly shot in Birr, commented that Birr was 'a perfect location' for filming. The expected broadcast date for the film on TG4 is April 2013.

Birr Credit Union presented a cheque for €3,000 to Birr Tidy Towns Association to support their work in the community.

A re-enactment of the First All-Ireland Final played in Birr in 1887 was the highlight of the Festival of Finals held in St. Brendan's Park to commemorate the event. Former stars of the game dressed up in vintage gear and played in front of a large crowd.

The Australian Ambassador to Ireland officially opened the 44<sup>th</sup> Birr Vintage Week. Attractions during the week included the antique fair, photographic exhibitions, visual arts trail, car treasure hunt and a spectacular fireworks display.

Eileen Casey, formerly of High Street, Birr launched her new book, 'Snow Shoes', in Birr Library.

Congratulations were extended to Paul Barber as he celebrated 50 years in the family business of watch-making and jewellery.

Birr Stage Guild honoured Gerry Dolan on the occasion of his 80<sup>th</sup> birthday by declaring him Honorary Life President of the Guild.

The husband, Shane, and family of the late Sarah Turley (nee Barry) organised a very successful Golf Classic in her memory at Birr Golf Club. The event raised over €17,000 for Birr Community Nursing Unit.

Representing Ireland in the Paralympics in London was Ellen Keane. Her father, Edward, grew up and went to school in Crinkill before moving to Dublin.

Seamus Breen's Captain's Prize at Birr Golf Club was won by Dick Johnston, Crinkill.

### SEPTEMBER

A full evening dance show was rehearsed in Birr Theatre by four professional international dancers under the direction of the Legitimate Bodies Dance Company.

Mid-Ireland Tourism held a golf classic at Birr Golf Club. All proceeds from the classic went towards the promotion of tourism in the Midlands.

Offaly's All-Ireland Minor hurling champions of 1987 celebrated the 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary of their win in the County Arms Hotel. A book of memoirs to mark the event was launched on the night. Offaly beat Tipperary in the final.

Olympic boxer, John Joe Nevin, attended a Tesco fundraiser for charity at Birr Airfield. He also visited Birr Community Nursing Unit.

A workshop to brainstorm ideas to encourage overseas visitors to the area for 'The Gathering 2012' was held in the County Arms Hotel. Ideas in the pipeline include science and astronomy themed events in Birr Castle and events based on the history of Crinkill Barracks.

Birr's Costcutter store was the winner of 'Best in Fresh Produce' award at the annual Costcutter 'Store of the Year' Awards.

Top journalists from China visited Birr Castle as guests of Tourism Ireland and Bord Bia. The journalists were researching feature stories regarding holidaying in Ireland which will hopefully attract Chinese holiday-makers here.

Birr Photography Group opened their exhibition 'Reflections of Birr' in Birr Theatre and Arts Centre.

'CoderDoJo Birr' was launched in Birr Technology Centre in September. It provides young people aged 8 to 18 with an opportunity to learn computer coding skills.

Fergal Spain, originally from Church Street, Birr was named a special category winner at the 2012 RDS National Craft Competition.

A series of talks, 'Learning to Think Together' with speakers from the Irish School of Ecumenics was organised by the Roman Catholic, Methodist and Church of Ireland communities in Birr.

The Irish Hot Air Balloon Championships took place in Birr attracting teams from the U.S., Austria, the Netherlands, Scotland, the U.K. and Ireland.

Congratulations to Des O'Connor and Declan Leonard of the Riverbank Restaurant who celebrated 10 years in business and hope to continue providing excellent food with the personal touch for many more years to come. It employs eight local people and continues to thrive in these difficult economic times.

### OCTOBER

Birr Comhaltas held a well-supported night of music, song and dance to celebrate Culture Night. The occasion provided an opportunity for young performers in the area to show that our traditional culture is alive and well.

St. Brendan's Community School unveiled their newly installed wheelchair lift in the school's sports hall. Funded by the Board of Management, parents, staff and students the lift makes the sports hall fully wheelchair accessible.

A function was held in Oxmantown N.S. to mark Shirley Mahon's retirement after many years of teaching.

Offaly Enterprise Board in conjunction with Birr Chamber of Commerce ran courses in marketing, merchandising, social media, finance and sales for retailers in Birr aiming to enhance and improve shopping in Birr.

George Grant from the Clareen/Fortal IFA branch was the Offaly winner of the 2012 IFA/FBD European Scholarship Tour Award.

A face-lift for the Marian Hall car park area is to be undertaken to attract visitors to the Castle to the town's Main Street shopping area. It is proposed to carry out enhancement works at the old graveyard adjacent to the car park also.

Birr shopkeepers can avail of a grant of €500 each to enhance their shop fronts. It is hoped to encourage traditional shop fronts in the town.

Killeen National School launched a new travelling to school initiative called WOW, which encourages children to walk at least part of the way to school resulting in healthy exercise for the children and doing good for the environment.

Having beaten Birr in the Offaly Senior Hurling Championship semi-final, Kilcormac/Killoughey went on to beat St. Rynagh's in the final.

Birr Town Councillors are completely opposed to a proposal to abolish 80 Town Councils in the country with effect from 2012.

The OFFline Offaly Film Festival held a five-day festival which involved nine short films being filmed and shown in Birr Theatre over the course of the event.

Retired barber, Willie Smyth, received a certificate from the Minister of State for Communications, Fergus O'Dowd T.D. at the 2012 Google Silver Surfer Awards in the Over-85's category.

In recognition of her fund-raising walks for Cystic Fibrosis over the last fourteen years, Catherine Walsh was presented with the Honorary Award by the Cystic Fibrosis Association.

Birr Minor Hurling Team captured the Shield title with a win over Na Fianna.

CoderDoJo Birr, a free computer programming class for young people, held a rocketry workshop where they built and launched model rockets.

Birr Pioneers Association celebrated their centenary with a special Festive Mass of Thanksgiving. Gerry Dolan received the Fr. Cullen Award for his long service to the Association.

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

# CHARLES ALGERNON PARSONS, BIRR'S TITANIC MAN

By Brian T. Kennedy



**Sir Charles Algernon  
Parsons (1854-1931)**

Born at 13 Connaught Place, London on June 13<sup>th</sup> 1854, Charles Parsons was the youngest of six sons born to William, 3<sup>rd</sup> Earl of Rosse, and his wife Mary (the pioneering

photographer). Charles received his early education at Birr Castle, where he was tutored by many of his father's famous astronomers, including Sir Robert Hall.

As a fifteen-year-old he built a steam carriage with his brother, Richard Clare. This was to have tragic consequences, as it caused the first recorded road fatality involving a mechanically-propelled vehicle, when his cousin Mary Ward fell from it and broke her neck at the corner of Oxmantown Mall and Emmet Street in August 1869. In 1871, he entered Trinity College, Dublin and, two years later, transferred to St. John's College, Cambridge. He graduated in 1877 with a first-class honours degree in mathematics.

Following college, he worked with several engineering firms before going to Clarke, Chapman & Co., near Newcastle. They were ship-engine manufacturers and Parsons became head of their electrical equipment development. There he designed a new engine to drive an electrical generator. Parsons' Steam Turbine, as it became known, made plentiful the production of cheap electricity. This was a revolutionary development which changed marine transport and naval warfare forever.

By 1889, he had founded C.A. Parsons & Co., Newcastle, to produce turbo generators, and also set up the Newcastle & District Electric Light Co. His turbines allowed for the large-scale generation of electricity and development of a national grid. His original 7.5kw generator had increased to 50,000 kW. output by the end of his life.

In June 1897, Charles had arguably his greatest moment. At Queen Victoria's Diamond Jubilee Fleet Review, off Portsmouth, his turbine powered yacht, *Turbinia*, amazed all present, sailing at 34 knots, when the fastest gunboat could only reach a speed of 27 knots. On that occasion, he was accompanied by Alan Campbell-Swinton and Dr. Gerald Stoney (1863-1942) (son of the famous engineer Bindon-Blood Stoney of Oakley Park, Clareen). Today, *Turbinia* is on display in a purpose-built gallery at Newcastle's Discovery Museum. By 1906, HMS

*Dreadnought* the first modern battleship was powered by Parson's steam turbines and he was established as the leading marine turbine developer of his day.

As a result of his inventions, he was knighted in 1911 and made a member of the Order of Merit in 1927.

Previously in 1905, he had witnessed the building of the first transatlantic turbine-powered liners, RMS *Victorian* and *Virginian*. Eventually his turbines were used to power the ill-fated *Titanic*, built by the White Star Line in Belfast. Thus, we have Birr's link to the *Titanic*; in the year we commemorate the centenary of its sinking.

In his personal life, Charles married Katherine Bethell of Rose Park, Yorkshire in 1883. The marriage was blessed with two children. A son, Algernon George, was born in October 1886 and was killed in action on April 26<sup>th</sup> 1918, at the age of 31, while serving as a Major with the Royal Artillery in France.

Their daughter, Rachel Mary, was born in 1885 and is deserving of an article in her own right. In 1922, she became one of the first three women members of the Royal Institution of Naval Architects. The same year she was elected councillor for Finsbury. In 1923, she stood as a Conservative for Ince, Lancashire but was unsuccessful. Sadly, she was killed in 1956 by an ex-stable hand Dennis James Pratt. He was convicted of her manslaughter in November 1956. Rachel died unmarried and her death brought to an end this branch of the Parsons family.

Charles himself died on February 11<sup>th</sup> 1931, on board the Duchess of Richmond steam-ship at Kingston, Jamaica. His wife died at her country home of Ray on October 16<sup>th</sup> 1933. Both are buried in the village churchyard of Kirkwhelpington. Charles died a wealthy man, leaving £810,395 8s 9d. In today's terms, this would equate to over €49 million.

He is commemorated by a plaque at St. John's College, Cambridge and a Sir J. Ninian Comper-designed window in the north aisle, of the nave of Westminster Abbey. This was unveiled in October 1950. In Ireland, the Parsons Building in Trinity College, Dublin (housing the Department of Mechanical and Manufacturing Engineering) is named in his honour. The University of Limerick has a Charles Parsons Institute while, in his home town of Birr, the Science Heritage Centre commemorates the man who grew up in the adjacent castle.

Charles Turbine Company, now a part of German giant, Siemens, still survives in the Heaton area of Newcastle.

Given his contribution to engineering and electrical production, Charles Algernon Parsons is, without doubt, one of Birr's most famous sons.

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## MY PIECE OF PARADISE

By Rhonda Wolfe

**B**orn and raised on Newbridge Street, I went to primary school at Oxmantown N. S. and then onto St. Brendan's Community School where I graduated with my Leaving Certificate in 1983. I later completed a City and Guilds Recreation and Leisure Management course at Fermanagh College in Enniskillen in 1993.

I will, perhaps, be remembered by many in Birr as a summer lifeguard and swimming instructor (1982-83) at the pool in Birr, which, incidentally, was built by my father and his business partner, Hogan and Wolfe Building Contractors back in the late 1970's. I later became pool manager in 1988. During this time (1982) I took the first-ever swimming team from Birr to Butlins. The swimmers included Eddie Enright (Mundy), who, those of you on that trip might remember, was unfortunate not to win a gold medal in the under-eight freestyle. Eddie came in first place, but the Judges ruled that there had been a false start and second time round, little tired Eddie didn't make it into the top three. P.J. Dunne and McDara Deery also swam with distinction. I hope I have not left anyone out! Birr was represented in the variety section that year also.

In 1988, I went travelling around Australia for a year, working in restaurants and teaching swimming whenever I could, to earn money. Australia is an amazingly diverse country, with many interesting towns and cities, wide open outback country, deserts, rain forests and stunning ocean vistas. I was lucky enough to be there during their Bicentennial celebrations. They put on the most spectacular fireworks display and concert I had ever experienced in my life. With the music bellowing out from giant speakers located all around the park overlooking Sydney Harbour, it literally felt like the music was coming from the sky.

Upon my return to Ireland, I worked for the next five years at Fitzpatrick's Shannon Shamrock Hotel as their Leisure Centre Manager, before getting itchy feet again. I heard about interviews being held at the Ferrycarrig Hotel in Wexford, for jobs at the Hyatt Regency Hotel in the Cayman Islands. I applied, and much to my delight, was accepted. I initially received a six-month work permit; however, I fell completely in love with the island and, nineteen years later am still here!

I left Ireland on a cold, wet November day in 1994 for the sunny shores of Grand Cayman (the largest of the three



islands that make up the Cayman Islands). I clearly remember the shock of exiting the plane. The heat was so intense it felt like somebody had opened an oven door.

I worked at the Hyatt Regency for 12 years, first as a Camp Councillor, before getting promoted to Concierge Supervisor. At that time, there were quite a few Irish people living and working on the island and especially at the hotel, so – apart from the weather – it felt a little like home away from home. I found it relatively easy to get into the rhythm of island living, find a place to live, make friends and establish a social life. Between the glorious weather, the blue sea and the seven miles of white, sandy beach, I felt as though I had died and gone to heaven! Grand Cayman is just a tiny dot on the map south of Cuba, but what a gem in the Caribbean it is.

I loved working at the Hyatt and could probably write a book detailing some of the funny and silly questions I regularly got asked by hotel guests. For example, the concept of an island clearly escaped one visitor who asked, 'does the water go all around the entire island?' Or the time a lady got onto a dive boat with three small empty bottles tied around her neck. When asked by the Dive Master what they were for, she replied, with all seriousness, that she intended to take samples of various different coloured blue waters back home with her. We once had a couple checking in and, when the receptionist asked for their credit card for incidentals they became very confused and asked "Well, how much are the incidentals?" Mind you, it wasn't always the guests who provided light relief to the staff, sometimes we got it wrong too. We had repeat guests with the surname Casper who regularly stayed at the hotel and one Irish lass greeted them when they arrived to the restaurant with, 'Mr. and Mrs. Ghost, nice to have you back'! I could go on and on with stories like this! I got to meet many interesting people and famous celebrities over the years. For example, I had the pleasure of meeting Michael Jordan once, and David Hasselhoff could easily be spotted on the beach wearing his famous red 'Bay Watch' shorts. I have become lifelong friends with many of the staff and, even though the Hyatt has now become the Grand Cayman Beach Suites, many of the "old" Hyatt guests still keep in touch with me when they return to the island.

On 12<sup>th</sup> September 2004, category 5 Hurricane Ivan crashed over the Cayman Islands. Grand Cayman, in particular, is very flat (only 60 feet above sea level) and at one point the storm surge completely inundated many parts of the island. There were stories of people having to break through their ceilings and walls to scramble to safety as their homes flooded. I was actually away on vacation when the storm

## BIRR Year Review 2012

hit and spent the entire time listening to the news in hopes of trying to get any information about what was going on "back home," as all communication to the Island was down. When I returned two weeks later, it was like entering a war zone and I found it difficult to recognize landmarks that should have been familiar to me. In the hotel car park there was a large boat sitting on top of about six crushed cars; some homes had been washed off their foundations and were now sitting in the middle of the road; whilst trees and buildings had been knocked down and completely demolished. Ten thousand cars ruined by sea water had to be shipped off the island.

Fortunately, I was one of the lucky ones. My house was not badly damaged, but we had no electricity for the next two months. It was back to basics: catching rain water to keep in the tub to bathe and wash your hair, hauling up buckets of sea water so we could flush toilets, no air conditioning or refrigeration, and having to use candles at night when it got dark. The Hyatt was split across two buildings and every day the staff worked together to get it back into shape. One building with 300 rooms was completely unsalvageable and, in fact, is due to be knocked down soon and rebuilt. We did manage to get 53 rooms on the beach-side building up and running. Everyone pulled together and the island slowly got back on its feet.

I ended up leaving the Hyatt to take up the position of House Manager to His Excellency, the Governor of the Cayman Islands, in 2005. My dream life became even better at this point as I got to live on the beach in a

beautiful little cottage within the grounds of Government House. I was responsible for all aspects of the official residence and worked with a wonderful full-time staff of housekeepers, chef, gardeners and security guards. I even had the pleasure of meeting HRH Prince Edward when he stayed in the house in 2007 and again in 2009.



**Blanche taking it easy**

It was during this time that I adopted a puppy, Blanche, from the Humane Society to share this beautiful life with me (much less hassle than sharing with a man!). Blanche and I swim together and take long walks on the beach. Many people have watched her grow into "adulthood" and are entertained by the way she sits on a blue float, with her front legs crossed, looking out for any fish that might be swimming by.

In 2011, I left Government House and I now own and run my own business ([www.amazingexecutiveservices.com](http://www.amazingexecutiveservices.com)). Should any of you ever find yourselves in this part of the world, please be sure to contact me. I would be delighted to show you around my little piece of paradise.

### **Birr Swimming Team from the early 1980s**

Back Row (L to R): P.J. Dunne, Fergal Clarke, Ronan Clarke, Trevor Slattery, Edmond (Mundy) Enright  
Front Row: Maureen Dunne, Finola Ryan, Eileen O'Gorman, Lorinda Wolfe, Caroline Tierney



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## THE SCENT OF HOME

### THE STORY OF BRIGID CALLAGHAN

By Michael Donegan

**B**rigid Callaghan was born in Townsend Street, Birr in 1928. Her father, Michael Scully, operated a bakery there with the help of his brother Ted. Townsend Street was also called Mellisop Street at that time. Brigid remembers, as a small girl, seeing the huge oven and feeling the glow of its heat in the bake-house. First, the oven was heated up by filling it with turf and letting it build up sufficient heat. Then, it was swept clean of any ashes or embers and the loaves, which had been proving all night, were placed inside to bake. The aroma of beautiful yeast bread, freshly baked, filled the street outside. She remembers her uncle Ted's big, strong arms covered in flour and dough. Then her father would yoke up the delivery van and set off on his rounds to sell his bread in the various shops and from door to door in the town. The business lasted until the Second World War but as flour became scarce due to rationing, the bakery closed and her father went to work in Haslam's bakery. Brigid's grandparents, Michael and Sarah Scully, had operated a bakery called the Dublin Bakery in Conor Dooley's yard at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century and into the early part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, so it was a sad day for the family when the bakery closed in Townsend Street. Incidentally, Michael represented Labour on Birr Urban District Council and Offaly County Council. All was not lost, however, as Brigid's mother, Annie, opened a small shop selling groceries, confectionary and cakes, which she baked herself. There were four children in the family, Mary, who married Johnny Feehan, Sadie, who married Mickey Campbell, Nancy, who married Joe Vaughan and Brigid herself. Brigid is the last surviving sister. Indeed Nancy passed away at the very young age of twenty-three.

Brigid went to primary school to the Sisters of Mercy and remembers herself as being a very timid and shy child. It was not until sixth class that she gained confidence in her own abilities. This was due in no small way to the kindness and encouragement she received from her teacher, Sr. Vincent. At the end of primary school she transferred over

to St. John's Secondary School. Although all the subjects were taught through the medium of Irish, Brigid felt more confident and relaxed in St. John's. Brigid wore a 'Fainne' and still counts and does calculations in Irish in her head. Looking back, she feels there was not enough time given to the work of educating the girls in the practical skills of life and often at the end of secondary school they were poorly equipped to face the world. Children from the orphanage also attended the primary school. Very few of these continued on to secondary school, however as they were probably sent to work to earn their keep. After the leaving certificate exams, Brigid intended to do the Matriculation exam and attend teacher-training college but her mother decided that she would be better to attend the Vocational

school and do a business studies and secretarial course. Brigid feels this decision was made under the influence of the local clergy. At the time the clergy had huge influence over the people and she remembers being terrified of the booming voice of a curate called Fr. Ryan. He had shouted at her class that ...."they were fit to be married and didn't know the A, B, C of their religion!"

The old Parish priest was Dean Ryan. He was P.P. from 1918 to 1948 and was very feeble and half blind. John Joe Cole, the altar server, had to stand beside him with an electric light bulb on a lead as he gave out communion during mass. Brigid enjoyed the Vocational School. Miss Roache taught cookery and domestic science and Berty McCoy taught business studies.

There was no T.V. but Brigid loved to listen to the radio, especially to music programmes like 'The Jimmy Shand Show'. She never heard the full programme because it clashed with devotions and her mother inevitably marched them all to the church, radio or no radio. After finishing her course, she got a job as a clerk in Horan's butcher shop where Paul Boyd's shop is now situated. She never remembers being warm as, when the wooden shutters came

down in the morning, the shop was open to the street and, as the back door was left open, the cold wind swept through. She worked from 9.00 a.m. to 6.00 p.m. on weekdays and from 9.00 a.m. to 9.00 p.m. on Saturdays and her wages were £3-0-0.

One of her responsibilities was to lodge the shop takings in the Provincial Bank and she often met a young man called James Callaghan on her way up town. He worked in the C.I.E. yard and soon a romance blossomed. Courtship



**Brigid and James outside the gates of the White House in Washington D.C. in October 1954.**

consisted of long walks in the countryside around Birr. Her parents liked James very much and his family was well known and respected in the town. His mother ran the Labour Exchange. James's younger sister had emigrated to New York and he was anxious to follow her out there. After he emigrated, he kept encouraging Brigid to join him. Brigid was reluctant to leave her parents and the peaceful atmosphere of Birr but, finally she relented and in January 1954 she travelled by hired car to the port of Cobh and boarded the SS Corinthia bound for America. The journey to America was lonely and the seas were rough the whole way. Brigid remembers the poignant sound of a fiddler playing 'Come back To Erin' as they boarded the ship. She felt very much alone as she sat looking at the cold seas rolling around her. There was a well-known musician called Paddy O'Brien R.I.P on board and he tried to bring a bit of cheer to the passengers with his accordion. She also met a man called Mick Fogarty who was on his way to New York with hurleys for the New York Offaly team. On reaching New York she made her way to stay with a Mrs. Molloy in New Jersey. It was a lovely house and reminded her of home.

Soon she had a job in the city with Equitable Life Insurance. She spent all day filing and found the work very tedious. She was lucky to get a transfer to the legal and accounting department and began to settle in. In 1954, James and she were married in Jackson Heights, New York. Brigid experienced poor health and came home for a holiday in 1957. She also came home in 1959 but returned to America. James began to study to qualify as plumber. Times were extremely difficult as money was scarce. James had to work each evening after college to pay for his studies. Often, the only recreation they enjoyed was to walk out to Flushing Bay and look at the sea. The fact that this same sea was touching Ireland gave them much joy. She even had a small piece of turf she had brought from home and sometimes lit the corner of it to watch it smoulder and smell the scent of home. She listened to Irish-American singers like Carmel Quinn and Connie Foley and remembers being very embarrassed at seeing Brendan Behan drunk on T.V. and portraying a poor image of Ireland.

Eventually, they decided to come home for good in 1961.

~~At one point they considered settling in England but changed their mind and came back to Birr. James got a job~~

in Dublin and they lived with her aunt as there was no other place available. After a while he was employed in the briquette factory and then he got a job in Birr as the town plumber. They bought a small house in Connaught Street. It was attached to her uncle, Joe Scully's, shop. Joe was a cabinet maker and undertaker. They were to live there for the next 14 years and had two children, a boy and a girl. James was employed by a big Dublin plumbing contractor and his work brought him all over the country. They ran a little confectionary shop in Connaught Street and were very happy. There were five pubs on the street and at night it could be noisy at times so they decided to move out the country and bought a small cottage in Ballywilliam. They devoted seven years to restoring and enlarging the house and really enjoyed the beautiful countryside around them. Brigid cycled into town to work as the only staff member of Birr Credit Union. The treasurer was Michael Fallon. She really enjoyed the work and has particularly fond memories of working with Betty Dolphin, Jennie Kennedy and Michael Breen. She took her work very seriously and, until the accounts became computerised, it was a very demanding job as balancing was imperative at all times. Later, when Matty De Forge became manager he brought the Credit Union to new heights of success.

Brigid is, with John Noonan, and Gerry Kearns, one of the only three surviving members of Birr Gaelic League. The other members were Seamus Grennan, Violet Doolin, Michael Fenton, Billy Hogan, Billy Watson and Roy Breen. Brigid was a lifelong member of the Legion of Mary and the Children of Mary. She was President of the Apostolic Society. She has also given many years' service to the St. Vincent de Paul Society and enjoyed working in their charity shop on Wilmer Road. She also loves attending auctions and from her uncle, Joe Scully, she has got a keen eye for spotting antique bargains. She pursues her lifelong interests of reading and gardening and likes watching documentaries on T.V. She has a sparkling wit and a flawless memory, whether she is recounting the story of her most recent auction adventure or the halcyon days of her childhood, playing in the 'Grass Gardens' where the Crescent is situated today.

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## WHEN DAN BREEN WAS IN BIRR

By Brian T. Kennedy

This July, the 'Bureau of Military History' (Part of the Department of Defence) released their witness statement files of the period 1913-1921. These make fascinating reading but also reveal that, as we already knew, Birr was not exactly the cockpit of rebel activity during the period.

Many of the accounts of the area concern I.R.A. leaders from the Kinnitty district. However, Patrick (Paddy) Riordan of Syngefield Road gave what is the best account of Birr town during the period. His account was given in October 1957 and states that he was formerly Vice Commandant 4<sup>th</sup> Battalion, Offaly No. 2 Brigade.

Interestingly, in the light of recent constituency boundary changes, he notes the area they covered was Co. Offaly and the portion of North Tipperary adjoining Birr. In August 1920, the officers were Patrick Delahunty, Officer in Command, Patrick Riordan, Vice O/C, Denis Duffy, Adjutant and William King, Quartermaster. Michael Kavanagh was in charge of 'B' Company, covering Birr town. Interestingly, the Brigade Q/M is noted as Seán Robbins (the man after whom the Offaly Senior Championship Cup is called). Meetings of the local Brigade Council were usually held in King's of Carrig or Grogan's of Killyon.

During 1918, much of their activity seems harmless by today's standards but no doubt was risky for the time. It consisted of painting slogans and flying tricolour flags, which kept the R.I.C. active in their removal.

Also in 1918, the conscription crisis occurred. At this time there was a general raid on the homes of farmers in the area known to possess guns. It is recalled that both catholic and protestant farmers willingly handed up their weapons to the I.R.A. This shows a general support of the cause and resistance to conscription.

Then, in early 1919, after the famous incidents at Soloheadbeg and Knocklong, Dan Breen and Seamus Robinson came to the Birr area. There was a huge price on their heads and the local Battalion provided them with scouts and guides. They also billeted them at friendly houses in the Clareen area. It is recalled that, when Dan Breen and his companion decided to move on, the Birr volunteers escorted him over the Tipperary border and handed him over to local guides.

It is noteworthy, that when the order was given to demolish the evacuated R.I.C. Barracks on Easter Sunday 1920 there were no empty barracks in the area. As a result, Paddy Riordan recalls helping neighbouring battalions to burn barracks at Dunkerrin and Knock. On that night the Income Tax Office in Birr was raided and the I.R.A. removed and destroyed its income tax records. This was a big blow for the British in the pre-computer era. There appears to have existed a large level of co-operation between neighbouring battalions. For example, when the R.I.C. Barracks at

Borrisokane was attacked in June 1920 the Birr group blocked the roads at Sharavogue to facilitate the attack.

From the summer of 1920 onwards there were only two 'enemy' posts in the Birr district, Crinkill Barracks, containing 1,600 troops and Birr R.I.C. Barracks with 40 policemen, including a District Inspector, Chief Constable and two sergeants. The barracks in Emmet Square was well fortified with sand bags, steel shutters, barbed wire and, interestingly, the approaches were noted as being 'mined'. The occupiers of both rarely ventured out of Birr, except in strong convoys.

When an organiser called Liam Hogan arrived in Birr during early 1921, he wished to move the action up a pace. This plan involved attacking a combined R.I.C. Black and Tan patrol, comprising twelve to twenty armed men.

The date of the attack was March 5<sup>th</sup> 1921. Under the command of Pat Delahunty, Liam Hogan and Paddy Riordan, 26 I.R.A. volunteers gathered on the outskirts of the



Dan Breen (left) pictured with Maurice Crow in 1917.

town. They were thwarted when two scouts were fired on by a party of R.I.C. men positioned near St. Brendan's R.C. Church. This resulted in the wounding of Laurence Langton and the postponement of the mission until March 11<sup>th</sup>.

Six days later, a group waited at Bridge Street to accomplish their aim. However, the patrol only came down Main Street and turned at the entrance of Market Square. Thus despite all of their efforts, the revolutionaries were thwarted for a second time.

Another incident which could have proven tragic for the local community happened at Riverstown on May 26<sup>th</sup> 1921. On that occasion, James Murray and James Connors sniped at a lorry of Black and Tans. Firing only two shots they wounded a Black and Tan who was standing up in the lorry. The lorry proceeded on to Birr firing indiscriminately in all directions. Many in Riverstown had to lay on floors as their windows were shattered by bullets.

One of their more daring endeavours was to ambush District Inspector Doughan on route to visit a lady friend at Kyleduff, Roscrea. Doughan used typical survival tactics, however, taking a large group of Black and Tans with him on occasions. Other times, he picked up any unfortunate

civilian he met on the road using him as a hostage and guaranteeing his safe passage.

While Birr may not have been at the centre of events, we can see by perusing these articles that the area certainly was not lacking in drama and excitement during the years 1919 to 1921. The local volunteers did their best to achieve Ireland's freedom, despite living in one of the most Unionist towns in the south of Ireland. With the subsequent events in the North, it would be easy to be critical of their actions. However, they were in my opinion brave, idealistic men and women of whom the present generations of Birr people can be very proud.



Dan Breen and Seán Treacy's wanted poster from the time he was in Birr.

## THE CRINKILL CONNECTION

*By Mary Dolan, Principal, Crinkill N.S.*

During September 2011, Mrs. Pat Cotton, from Norton, Sheffield, visited Dublin and Birr in search of her roots. Church records and Crinkill school registers enabled her to trace her relatives, who lived in Grove Street. Her story, though scarce in details, nevertheless gives a glimpse into the life of a family whose fate was linked to the changes in political, economic and social history of Ireland in the 20's and 30's. Reading between the lines and judging by the beautiful evocative photographs, the family members had their share of hardship and upheaval but, with spirits unbowed, achieved a degree of prosperity and comfort through emigration.



Mrs. Cotton's parents (pictured above), Hugh Owen Woods and Susan Kearns, were married in St. Brendan's Church, Birr on June 24<sup>th</sup> 1911. Hugh Owen Woods was a soldier and the family lived in Grove Street, Crinkill. They had eight children born between 1914 and 1928.

The children attended the National School in Crinkill, in the old school, now a private residence. Registers and Roll Books in Crinkill N.S. have details of all five girls. No records of the boys from that period have survived but it is reasonable to presume that the boys also attended Crinkill N.S.

In 1935, the family moved to England, but twins Catherine and Evelyn, who were the youngest girls (born in 1921), were sent to St. Mary's Training School in Stanhope Street, Dublin, an institution where girls learned sewing and laundry skills in preparation for domestic service. They spent three years working in Stanhope Street and were then dispatched to re-join their parents and brothers in Worthing, Sussex. The family eventually moved to Sheffield and Hugh Owen Woods worked in the steelworks until he retired. Twins, Catherine and Evelyn, never spoke of their experience in Stanhope Street, and Catherine's daughter, Pat Cotton, only discovered the connection with Stanhope Street after their deaths.

Whatever their experiences in Stanhope Street, they went on to live full and busy lives. They worked in factories, loved bingo, married and had children. Catherine married James Cahill and they had three children. Evelyn married Cyril Middleton and they had one son. They remained very close all their lives. Sisters Violet and Ethel emigrated to Canada and other family members settled in Sheffield. None of the family ever returned to Ireland.



The twins, Catherine (left) and Evelyn, on their Confirmation day.

Mrs. Pat Cotton is continuing to research the family, particularly the chapter relating to her mother's time in Stanhope Street, and we are indebted to her for sharing her family's journey of emigration and for the beautiful evocative photographs.

## UGANDA - THE PEARL OF AFRICA

By Eimear Hernon and Ann Marie O'Brien

*Eimear is a daughter of Joe and Claire from Annagh. Ann Marie is a daughter of Patrick and Colette from Elm Park. Both attended St. Brendan's Community School. Eimear went on to study primary teaching in Colaiste Mhuire, Marino while Ann Marie studied in St. Patrick's, Drumcondra. Eimear now teaches in Scoil na Mainisteach and Ann Marie teaches in Scoil Brid, both in Celbridge.*

Our journey to Uganda started long before our departure date; in fact, it was a year previous that we had spotted the ad in a magazine looking for teachers, nurses and people with general skills to take part in a summer volunteer placements in Uganda with Nurture Africa, a charity which supports vulnerable people affected by HIV. With a little research, we began this journey which turned out to be an experience of a lifetime. With the help and support of our family, friends, Birr Lions Club, customers of Buckley's Super Valu, who supported a bag pack, INTO Solidarity Fund and the schools we work in in Kildare, we both reached our fund-raising target of €2,000 and, in fact, we exceeded it.

So on 21<sup>st</sup> July we set off and within 24 hours we were transported to Nansana, a town about 15km from the capital Kampala. Immediately we were hit with a culture shock... walking down the main street you could see life taking place, markets bustling, shops making and selling their wares and everybody getting on with their daily business. We were immersed in a whole new lifestyle and straightaway we knew we weren't here to cure or fix anyone. We were here to give a helping hand, new ideas, to see if we could make small improvements because above everything else, these people were happy; everywhere we went we were struck by their dazzling smiling faces, enthusiasm and resourcefulness.

The Ugandan school system is very different to here. Straightaway we were both hit with a challenge as the two schools we taught in were government-run and we saw first-hand the struggles they were having, to feed their students and keep the schools open. The numbers were huge, over 100 per class. Corporal punishment has been outlawed for the past five years but, of course, old habits die hard and this was very difficult to witness. We were asked to demonstrate positive reinforcement so as to give a good example. Education is based on rote learning and exams so we promoted a child-centred method of teaching. Also we ran weekly workshops with the teachers, showing them new skills and methodologies. The Ugandan teachers we worked with were always enthusiastic and motivated. The children were so grateful and thankful to have us there that they were really well-behaved and got so much enjoyment out of our science, English, music and P.E. lessons. Every corner we turned, we were greeted by smiles and bright eyes. Nurture Africa runs a child sponsorship programme which allows vulnerable children to receive education. While our lessons may not have been to the level of the rote learning the children were used to, the laughter we heard



**Eimear at a Welcome Party for Irish volunteers in Kasengeje**

from singing, playing games and doing art was worth the trip from Ireland alone. In the afternoons we took part in worthwhile projects run by the charity, including visits to orphanages, library outreach and home visits.

Uganda has the highest number of orphans in the world. Another Hope baby home is an orphanage in Nansana for children orphaned through HIV or taken from their parents due to neglect or abuse. Everybody was fearful of these visits, expecting the worst, imagining starving, miserable children. However, once again our expectations were wrong. We were met by smiling, happy children of all ages who wanted to be played with and hugged. The house was run down and dark and the children slept in cramped conditions. All the time, to make this situation better we had to remind ourselves that the children were being looked after, fed, cleaned and in a much better situation than if they were at home. We spent our time there cleaning, cooking, playing with the kids and washing them, it was so rewarding. While we were there, Nurture Africa volunteers painted the inside of the orphanage and provided new beds, sheets and mosquito nets. The most difficult thing about each visit was leaving and not a day passes still that we don't think of their smiling faces and wonder what they are doing now.

The experience that really brought it all home to us was the home visits. Nurture Africa opened a clinic in Nansana a year ago. This is run throughout the year by Ugandan personnel. It provides HIV testing for local people and also travels to villages for testing. Nurture Africa nursing volunteers tested over 800 people over six weeks of the summer. If found to be positive, the people are offered places on a HIV programme totally funded by Nurture Africa, providing medication, food and in the future,



**Ann Marie (left) with toddlers worn out after Nurture Africa Children's Party in Kasengeje**

business opportunities e.g. setting up a food stall. This is where the money we raised was donated. We were given the opportunity to visit some of the families who were on this programme. These people had nothing. This was real poverty. Homes that resembled small sheds, divided into two rooms by curtains, maybe a mattress, and no furniture. Elderly grandparents looking after nine grandchildren orphaned through HIV. Families who had one meal a day with which to feed their children. But once again we were greeted by positivity, people who wanted to live and people who knew the contribution we had made to the programme. While they had no English, it was clear how much they appreciated our visit and the work we were doing. The only way to describe this

experience was humbling but inspirational.

One of the highlights of the trip for everyone was a children's party organised by Nurture Africa volunteers. Over 800 children arrived for a day of fun and dancing. Children walked for miles to attend, often with an older child looking after their siblings, sometimes carrying the youngest on their back. A D.J. began at 11 a.m. and went on until 4 p.m. with the children dancing nonstop, thoroughly enjoying themselves, no complaints or arguing....just smiles and laughter. Each child received a party bag going home, containing a toothbrush, a bar of soap, a biscuit and one sticker...the appreciation shown was heart-warming. This is the type of day that is so rare for these children so to be there to experience the enjoyment they got from it was priceless.

The time we spent in Uganda was one of the most worthwhile three weeks we have spent anywhere. We could learn a lot from the children and people of Uganda. Their desire to succeed in life is inspiring. We met people who we will never forget, people who have overcome huge obstacles in their lives to be where they are today. With little material wealth they lead very happy and fulfilling lives. Children who were so gracious and enthusiastic, they appreciated every opportunity they were given. Nurture Africa's tagline is 'empowering vulnerable children' and, after spending three weeks in Uganda, we are in no doubt that this is being achieved. We feel privileged to have spent time with these people and Uganda will have a special place in our hearts for a long time to come.

(For info on sponsoring a child's education or volunteering go to [www.nurtureafrica.ie](http://www.nurtureafrica.ie))

## LONG LIVES!

If genetics have anything to do with it, Dáire and Eoin Stapleton from Castletown, Fortal, Birr, can look forward to very long lives indeed. They are the happy great-grandsons of two centenarians as two of their great-grandmothers celebrated their 100th birthdays earlier this year. Margaret Loughnane (nee Mitchell from Clondalla, Birr,) celebrated her birthday on the 4<sup>th</sup> of January in the bosom of her family in Birr while Mae Falconer had her celebrations surrounded by her family on the 8<sup>th</sup> of March at her home in Belleek, Co. Fermanagh. The boys also have a 'Nanny' Mary and a 'Nanny' Frankie so Dáire 'christened' his great-grandmother Margaret simply 'More Nanny' to avoid any confusion. As they go through life, the boys will have many very special memories of Granny Mae and 'More Nanny' Margaret.



**Dáire (right) and Eoin with Granny Mae**



**Dáire and Eoin with Granny Margaret**

## ACES HIGH!

By Billy Mullins

**M**y first memories of handball go back to 1961 when Jody Coughlan and Gene Barry won the Junior Doubles 60x30 All-Ireland. There was a bonfire in the fair green where the mart is now. After that we spent all our time in the alley. Handball was very strong in Birr in the 1960's. Every Sunday morning the alley would be packed. There were some great players to be seen on the handball court. Among them were Pat Sheeran (RIP) and his brother Eamonn, who both won All-Ireland's. There was Jackie Cahill and his brothers, Niall and Joe, and Jimmy Carter and Paddy Murray (RIP). Paddy was also an All-Ireland winner. I spent many an hour watching them. I also loved watching Pat Sheeran and, while I have seen a lot of players over the years I think Pat Sheeran had the best pair of hands in the game.

When the mart was built in 1966, handball was still going well but, after 1970, it fell back a lot. The situation wasn't helped by difficulties over the right of way to the alley. Gerry Kelly, another fine player and son of Murt, won an All-Ireland at Under-16 in the 1970's but unfortunately didn't keep it up. We had a lot of lads playing at that time, such as the O'Briens, Coughlans, Kellys and Donoghues, Peter Judge, Paddy Williams, James Odlum, and John O'Neill. Even our own Tony McLoughlin played. As the mart got bigger handball faded away and went through a bad patch in the 1970's.

We also had some very good players coming down from Crinkill at that time, such as Tommy Doherty (RIP), Willie Cahill, Cyril Goonan and Michael Connors.

I stayed playing through the lean times. I played my first Leinster Final in 1975, partnered by Joe Cahill. We were beaten by Dublin. Joe was a fine player but I always got the impression he didn't take it very seriously. I teamed up with Paddy Kealy in 1976 and we went on to win our first All-Ireland. I thought I would revive handball in Birr but it wasn't to be. We were now in the era of covered courts and Birr was gone as a stronghold. An opportunity to put an alley in St. Brendan's Park was missed when it was refurbished. It would have been a great asset and would have helped the hurlers as well. We have only to look at the likes of DJ Carey, Tommy Walsh, Joe Hennessy, Johnny Brennan and Richie Hogan, to name a few who excelled at and benefitted from the sport.

In the 1980's, Crinkill built its own 60x30 alley and followed this later with a 40x20 alley. It is now one of the finest venues in the country and is a credit to everyone who was involved, from the start to the present day. I have to

mention Jimmy Cahill (RIP), a gentleman and the driving force behind it all.

I now play out of the Crinkill club and would like to thank the Crinkill players who kept me going, such as Conor, Franko and Snippy O'Brien, Sean Ryan, Kevin Cooke and Kevin's father, Sean Cooke who travelled with us down through the years to many venues and we had some great nights! Michael Blake and his father Joe also gave me great encouragement. Michael is a very good friend to this day. Pat and Ger Milne, Ray Milne (RIP), Eamonn Sheeran, Tommy Doherty (RIP), his two sons Brian and Alan, Mickey Connors (RIP), Brian Grennan, Willie Cahill, Willie Guinan and Mick Ryan (RIP) all worked hard for handball in Crinkill also and were a great support to me.

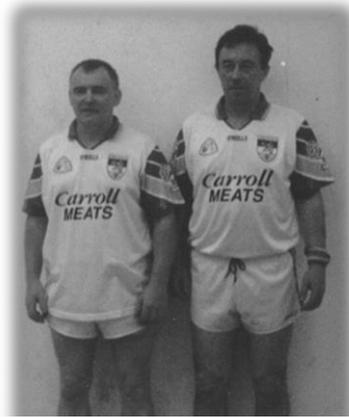
When you're young, you want to win an All-Ireland and you would be happy if you won a single one. I have been very lucky as I have won 19 All-Irelands to date and I have

had some very good partners, such as Paddy Kealy, Jim Guilfoyle, Paddy Hope, Paddy Delaney and Eamonn Sheeran. I have played every grade from Minor right up to the present grade of 'Emerald Masters'. I never thought I would be still playing in 2012.

At the time of writing, I am preparing for my third World Championships, which take place in Citywest in Dublin in October. I was beaten in the semi-final in 1994 in Ireland, and also in the final in 2006 in Canada. Maybe third-time lucky! Canada was an amazing experience. The facilities were superb, with 13 handball courts in the main hotel alone. I was partnered by Martin Bruen from Roscommon but, unfortunately, we were defeated by our U.S.A. opponents in the final of the 'Golden Masters' grade.

Also taking part in the Citywest World Championships this year are Conor O'Brien, Sean Ryan, Kevin Cooke, Alan Guinan, and Darren Madden. There will be over 2,000 entries. Handball is a truly international sport and is played in countries such as Canada, Japan, U.S.A., Mexico and England. It is going to be a great tournament and hopefully, we will have great memories to bring home with us. Already the venue is being prepared and will involve the erection of 13 portable alleys to cope with the various competitions. My ambition is to stay playing as long as I can as it is a great way to keep fit and, who knows, I might even win No. 20!

I have met some great people and made some great friends through the game of handball from different counties. I had a great time doing it all. I would like to take this opportunity to thank everyone who influenced me through the years. Thanks for everything.



Billy (left) with Paddy Kealy

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## BRINGING JUSTICE TO THE PEOPLE

By Jim Houlihan

I was appointed State Solicitor for County Offaly in 1981. I retired from that position at the end of 2011. My father was the State Solicitor before me and I did some prosecuting for him from the time I first qualified as a solicitor in 1968.

The world was a very different place then from what it is today in the world of crime and justice, like everything else. I clearly remember one of the first State cases I handled. It was in the late 1960's. It was regarded as one of the simplest of prosecutions and my father decided it would be a suitable case for his newly qualified assistant. It involved the prosecution of a man for being in possession of an unlicensed bull. My father explained to me that there was only one State witness – the inspector from the Department of Agriculture – and only one question to ask him – when he inspected the animal, had it been castrated? It couldn't be simpler. The case was heard at a sitting of Banagher District Court, which was held, at that time, in the supper room over Quigley's ballroom at West End, Banagher. Court rooms were pretty new to me at that stage. In Banagher, it consisted of a room at the top of a rickety stairs with trestle tables on either side for solicitors and Gardaí, a table at the top for the judge and benches in the body of the Court for the public. When my case was called I had my witness come forward. I then proceeded to ask him the one simple question. The only problem was that I couldn't remember the word *castrate*. It just wouldn't come to me. I searched wildly, as the judge and entire room waited expectantly, for some alternative way of asking the question. Nothing usable suggested itself to me. After what seemed like an interminable time, my very kind and helpful colleague, the late Noel Reedy, who was sitting beside me, whispered the elusive word up to me and I was able to proceed with my examination. I was eternally grateful to Noel.

There were, of course, very much more serious cases to be dealt with in those days. However, even in 1981 when I was appointed, two of the most common types of cases today were virtually unheard of – drugs prosecutions and sexual abuse type cases. I clearly remember thinking in 1981 that drugs were an American phenomenon. It was something that happened over there, not here. Now drugs or drug-related offences account for seventy to eighty per cent of all indictable (more serious) crime. With regard to sexual abuse, we know now that it was going on all the time, but there were few prosecutions. I remember the first incest case in the office, and thinking it very unusual. I recall discussing with my father, the suitability or appropriateness of allowing a secretary in the office to read and type up a sex abuse file. Today, any secretary in a State Solicitor's office would be totally hardened to such material.

We hear much about crime figures these days, are they improving or disimproving? In 1981 and for the immediately succeeding years, County Offaly produced two to six indictable cases per year. In 2011, the figure was approximately forty. State Solicitors work for the state on a part-time basis. They are free to do civil work on behalf of clients also. As time went on I found it necessary to devote more and more of my time to state work, at the expense of time I could spend on other work in the office, which had to be dealt with more and more by other solicitors in the office. State work, as a percentage of my total work, increased from around twenty per cent in 1981 to approximately ninety per cent in 2011. These figures speak for themselves.



Another obvious change over the years is the reduction in District Court venues. One of the first things I did on being appointed was to make out a list of the District Courts that I would be required to attend. There were 12 in all; Edenderry, Daingean, Tullamore, Kilbeggan, Moate, Portarlinton, Ferbane (later replaced by Cloghan), Kilcormac, Banagher, Birr, Borrisokane and Roscrea. Parts of county Offaly lie in the District Court areas of courts outside Offaly. Now only three District Courts remain in the county; Birr, Tullamore and Edenderry. In former years the emphasis was on bringing justice to the people, for their convenience. Nowadays it is to bring the people to the centres of justice for the convenience of court staff.

Contrary to what many people think, it is my impression that, over the years since my appointment, jury convictions and sentencing have hardened rather than softened. In the early days, it was impossible to secure a conviction from an Offaly jury in a dangerous driving causing death prosecution. The jury identified with the accused – 'there go I but for the grace of God' – rather than the family of the deceased victim. The opposite is the case today. With regard to sentencing also, during my tenure there was a period of leniency. I remember one prosecution I had where a man was convicted of the rape and manslaughter of an elderly woman. He was sentenced to a mere three years. He winked at me when he was being taken down after receiving his sentence.

Birr has had a long association with the position of State Solicitor for County Offaly. My father, D. A. Houlihan, retired in 1981, having been appointed in 1946. He succeeded another Birr man, J.J. Kennedy, who was

appointed in 1926. There was a short break in the Birr hegemony between 1923 and 1926 when the position was held by James Rogers of Tullamore. Before that, James Mitchell of Birr was Sessional Crown Solicitor (the old title of the Solicitor whose duties approximated to those of present-day State Solicitors) from 1921 to 1923. Henry F. Brenan of Tullamore was the incumbent between 1916 and 1921. Before that, Birr men exclusively held the position, Thomas Mitchell (1892-1914), Adam Mitchell (1869-1892) and the Birr historian Thomas Lalor Cooke (1838-1869). [I am grateful to Michael Byrne and his book 'Legal Offaly' for the above details]. Cooke was the first, the Sessional Crown

Solicitor system having been established in the 1830s. John Hughes of Tullamore was appointed as my successor and I wish him every success.

It has always surprised me how often people, on their retirement, when asked about their work, say that they enjoyed every minute of it. Obviously things appear better in recollection than while actually happening. I would say, however, that I enjoyed my work as State Solicitor. It was challenging and rewarding, – an important cog in the criminal justice system. Having done it, I am happy now to be in a position to devote myself, without distraction, to private practice and all its challenges, in the modern world.

## PUZZLE PICTURE

*By Geoff Oakley*



### Who was he? What was he doing?

These are just *two* of the many questions posed by the photograph reproduced here of an elderly man driving a horse and cart. The picture came to light recently in a motley collection of old negatives and prints in the possession of a native of Birr now living in Tullamore.

But first, a few facts. The photograph was taken in Newbridge St., Birr, in the mid-1940s. It is almost certainly between mid-1945 and mid-1946. It shows a man in waistcoat and shirt sleeves driving a horse and cart laden with what looks like some kind of gravel or grit. The house in the background on the left was occupied at the time by Joseph and Mrs. Maud Telford and, beside it, is the residence and small shop owned by John Fegan. That much is relatively clear and verifiable. The rest is puzzlement.

At first glance, it looks as if the road is almost completely covered in snow. If that were the case, however, would the driver be in shirt sleeves? And what about the shadows cast? It looks as if the sun must have been almost directly overhead. That could not have been the case in mid-winter. And in any event, if snow had been melted by the warmth of the sun, it would have melted first on the northern side of the Street.

What was the man doing? One very likely suggestion is that he was engaged in grit spreading duty for the Urban Council. Answers to this and other questions will be welcomed and copies of the photograph will be presented to any relatives of the man who might be interested in having them.

The other photo reproduced here is a contemporaneous picture of the late Joseph and Maud Telford.



## ROBERT BALL - ASTRONOMER AND TEACHER AT BIRR (1865-1867)

By Michael Byrne

Surviving diaries and accounts of activities in Offaly (King's County) in the nineteenth century are uncommon. One such source recently acquired by the Offaly Historical and Archaeological Society for its library is *Reminiscences and Letters of Sir Robert Ball*, edited by his son W. Valentine Ball and published in 1915.

Robert Stawell Ball was born in Dublin in 1840 and died at Cambridge in 1913. His father, Robert Ball, was a distinguished natural historian and zoologist and had accepted a post teaching the three younger sons of the astronomer third earl of Rosse, who was chancellor of the University of Dublin (T.C.D.) from 1862 until his death in 1867. During his time at Birr, R. S. Ball lived at Cumberland House in Duke (now Emmet) Square.

W. Valentine Ball writes of his father-

### PARSONSTOWN: 1865-1867

After my father left Trinity College, the next few years of his life were spent at Parsonstown, where he was tutor to Lord Rosse's sons. His experiences during this period are thus recorded by himself.....

'I do not think it had ever occurred to me to embark upon an astronomical career until November 8th, 1865, when I received a letter from Dr. Johnstone Stoney. It conveyed the following message: "Would it be agreeable to you to act as tutor to Lord Rosse's sons at Parsonstown?" I was by no means sure of my qualifications for the post. Up to that time it had never at any moment entered into my thoughts to become a tutor or a schoolmaster.

In framing my reply, I added I would accept the post, provided that I was allowed to use the great telescope. A favourable reply was soon forthcoming, in which it was stated that Lord Rosse would be delighted to give me the free run of his Observatory. This decided my course in life, and I have never since regretted for a moment that I failed to become a Fellow of Trinity.

Let me describe the scenes and conditions amongst which my life for the next two interesting years was to be passed. The residence of the Earl of Rosse is at Birr Castle, in King's County, about eighty miles from Dublin. Birr Castle is situated at the little town, which was then officially known as "Parsonstown," but to the inhabitants as "Birr." Quite recently, I believe, the official designation has been abandoned, and the Post Office only recognizes "Birr." Birr Castle is a noble building of modern erection, surrounded by a moat. It is situated in a beautiful park, through which two pretty rivers flow, and these unite in a single stream before they leave. The park has also a large artificial lake, ingeniously constructed by Lord Rosse himself, which is the perennial home of innumerable wild



Robert Stawell Ball

duck. Several instances of Lord Rosse's consummate mechanical skill are to be found about the grounds. Visitors used to stand gazing in wonder on a water-wheel which, being turned by the waters from the lake, raised water from a drainage system connected with low-lying lands around. A suspension bridge was thrown across the river close to the castle. The outstanding feature of Birr Castle, by which it will be forever famous in the annals of science, is the mighty telescope. Between the lake and the castle are two great walls, which are now somewhat overgrown with ivy. Between these two walls there swings a tube sixty feet long and six feet in diameter - a tube large enough to be the funnel of a good-size steamship. At the lower end of this tube is the mighty mirror or speculum, Lord Rosse's telescope is what is known as a "reflecting telescope" - a reflecting telescope of the Newtonian type. The instrument is raised by means of a winch, which is placed towards the north, and the observers who are to use the telescope have to make their way to the galleries as the eye-piece is at the top of the tube, not, as in the refracting instruments; at the bottom. Four men had to be summoned to assist the observer. One stood at the winch to raise or lower, another at the lower end of the instrument to give it an eastward or westward motion as directed by the astronomer, while the third had to be 'read' to move the gallery in and out, in order to keep the observer conveniently placed with regard to the eye-piece. It was the duty of the fourth to look after the lamps and attend to minor matters.

Lord Rosse not only designed the great instrument, but actually constructed it. At the back of the castle he had extensive workshops, where a capable smith named Coghlan and numerous assistants carried out the work under the direction of the Earl himself. It was he who devised methods for getting over the innumerable difficulties involved in casting, grinding, and polishing the great speculum, which weighed over three tons.

When I went to Parsonstown, in 1865, Lord Rosse was advanced in years. He no longer took an active part in the work of observation, but he evinced a lively interest in all. Lord Oxmantown, Lord Rosse's eldest son, was not one of my pupils. They were his three younger brothers, who are now the Hon. and Rev. Randal Parsons, the Hon. R. C. Parsons - a well-known engineer - while the youngest is the Hon. Sir C. A. Parsons. It has always been a great satisfaction to me to remember that I had the great honour of instilling the elements of algebra and Euclid into the mind of the famous man who has revolutionised the use of steam by his invention of the steam turbine. It would seem that he inherited his father's brilliant mechanical genius, with an enormous increase in its effect on the world.

The two years I spent at Parsonstown were full of interest. Ever since the erection of the great telescope, Lord Rosse had had an astronomer in charge of it.

It must be remembered that Birr Castle is not an ideal place for an observatory. It is near to the Bog of Allen. Consequently, the skies were frequently overhung with clouds, to the distraction of the astronomer.

As already explained, I was both tutor and astronomer. The morning was spent with my pupils in the castle. Hours of study over, we indulged in certain rather strenuous forms of relaxation. Felling trees was a favourite amusement of Lord Rosse, and we frequently spent an afternoon so employed. If one desired to fish, there were great pike to be caught in the lake. But the large workshops were my chief resort during the hours of leisure. In those days there was a small workshop just off the library at Birr Castle. This was the constant resort of my youngest pupil, the Hon. Charles Parsons. In this little den he was always making all sorts of machines. I remember two of his early contrivances.

On fine evenings I would go to the observatory as soon as it was dark. I shall suppose that we are ready to commence a night's work. The assistants are already at their posts. Up we climb to the lofty gallery, taking with us a chronometer, our observing book, various eye-pieces, and a lamp. The necessary instructions are immediately given to the attendants. The observer, standing at the eye-piece, awaits the appointed moment, and the object in the sky comes before him. He carefully scrutinizes it to see whether the great telescope can reveal anything which was not discovered by instruments of inferior capacity. A hasty sketch is made in order to record the distinctive features as

accurately as possible. The object having been observed, the telescope is moved back to the meridian to be ready for the next vision of delight. At the first glimmer of dawn the order would come for the telescope to be closed up and the little party broke up for a well-earned repose.

Lord Rosse devoted years to making a drawing of the Great Nebula. Those were not the days of astronomical photography. That great advance only became possible when the dry plate was introduced. Lord Rosse's beautiful drawing was engraved on steel by Basire, and copies of it are now to be seen in all the principal observatories. It is an exquisite piece of work. In an hour or two the photographic plate will now record much more than the most accomplished astronomer can observe, even though his repeated observations over a period of several years.

The most remarkable scene I have ever witnessed took place during my sojourn there. I am now alluding to the Great Shower of Shooting Stars in 1866.

The conditions were exceptionally favourable, for on the night of November 13th, 1866, the weather was clear and the moon was nowhere to be seen. For some years a committee of the British Association had been diligently collecting information about luminous meteors and kindred phenomena. As there had been a display in 1833, it was reasonable to suppose that there would be another in 1866, and when we went out to the observatory on the momentous night, we had some expectation that the shower would appear.

On this memorable evening I had repaired, as usual, to carry on my work at the big telescope. I suddenly heard a shout. Looking up, I was just in time to see a brilliant streak of light overhead. It was all that was left of the meteor which had attracted the notice of the attendant and had caused him to shout. Great meteors flashed across the sky in twos and threes. Each of them was bright enough and sufficiently conspicuous to arrest attention. Not a sound was heard. It was in the dead silence of dark night that the heavens were scored in every direction by these wonderful streaks of light.

As the night wore on we observed that all the meteors had a special relation to the constellation Leo; in fact, they started from that group. It is this relation of the shooting stars to Leo which has given them the name of the Leonids. There could be no better demonstration of the doctrine of parallel lines than the shooting stars which we saw that night. Lord Rosse, who had come out to the observatory, watched this superb display with me for a couple of hours. The Stars appeared to come straight towards us.'

My father never forgot his pupils at Parsonstown. He retained their friendship to the end, and they frequently consulted him on scientific matters. Indeed, it was Lord Rosse who recommended him for a professorship at the Royal College of Science, Dublin in 1867, thus bringing to an end his sojourn in Birr.

## A ROAD TRIP

By Lorraine Glendenning

A road trip is always a wonderful adventure. Heading west across North America, land of the free and home of the automobile, stirs the imagination like nothing else. I live by the Atlantic in Nova Scotia, Canada. Last winter, I got to seven years perched at the eastern edge of the continent. Maybe it was time to take a look at the rest. By happy circumstance, one of my former Birr neighbours invited me to British Columbia on the west coast. We decided to drive over to Oisín Deery's house for a weekend: through Montana on the way out, and back over the Canadian Rockies.

Last July, we filled the car with camping gear and drove north through spruce trees for eight hours until we hit Quebec and the St. Lawrence Seaway. Clouds were coming in fast and the Pelerin islands were just a haze in the bay. We outran a storm for a while but, in a little town east of Montreal, we saw BBQ chicken on special offer at the Appolinaire mini-golf resort. Just as we ordered our food, a fork of lightning hit the restaurant sign, but the power flickered and held. Rain pummelled the ground and wind tore at the golf flags, and we told each other we were lucky to be going west.

It turned out the storm was headed that way too, checking in with us intermittently over the next three days. We passed safely through the golden farmlands of Quebec and the Ottawa Valley, then met it howling across the Canadian Shield near Sudbury. As we began the endless drive around the Great Lakes, it stirred up white caps way out on the water. Next day, we followed its path across northern Minnesota – power lines on the road, trees felled everywhere, cops out with chainsaws. Finally, we emerged from forest and water onto the great plains of the Dakotas. Soon we were on the prairie proper. After days of feeling hemmed in by forest, the long, long fields of rape seed and wheat seemed to stretch out into infinity, intersected by the endless line of the train tracks and the occasional one-street town. We chased hundred-carriage trains along Highway 2, waving at them to sound their iconic whistles. Above us, the sky was so huge that we could see the edges of our storm as it grumbled along the horizon south of us. The almost black clouds were trimmed in gold. The light filtered onto swamp grass along the roadside, tinting it a strange yellow.

Half through day four, we reached Rugby, North Dakota, the geographical centre of the continent of North America. We visited the Museum of the Prairies, home to a mountain of homesteader detritus. A jumble of worn-out dreams, covered in prints from fingers worn to the bone with work and weather and worry.

Towards Willeston, near Montana, we were surprised to see an oil derrick. Then another. Suddenly, we were deep in oil country. Derricks everywhere, bobbing their robotic

heads up and down. Tankers hurtled around the roads. Work camps seethed with men in pick-ups. We got the hell out of there and drove into Montana.

We pulled into Wolf Point late on the Fourth of July. The town was a melee of families cruising Main Street in old cars, kids hanging out the back windows. The fireworks had already started. I stopped at a gas station and asked a very frazzled-looking young cop carrying a four pack of Red Bull and a packet of Marlboro about camping options.

Camping in a tent?

His look made us check into the motel instead. The town had shut down, so we ate MacDonald burgers with beers in our room and then my husband slept while I listened to a cacophony of bangers and screamers and candles whizzing around the sky. As I watched the moon come up over the chaos, he dreamt he was in a gunfight all night.

Next day we hit the Hi-Line, which stretches across eastern Montana, from Glasgow to Shelby. It was one of the last parts of America to be settled, and the first to be abandoned. By the twenties, the water had gone and so had most everyone else.

This is big, empty country. The power lines. The barbed wire. The road. All of them a palimpsest on fainter tracks laid before us. The buffalo. Blackfeet and Sioux following them. Ranchers moving cattle south to water. Londoners struggling with a plough in their new world.

A few minutes out of Shelby, the road rose and turned slightly northward and, suddenly, we could see the salamander crest outline of the American Rockies. At once strange and familiar, like so many American landmarks, there is very little left of the glaciers that once crowned them. It took us another hour to draw near at Browning, centre of the Blackfeet Nation. Then we took the Marias Pass, the most northerly year-round route through the mountains.

It is heartbreaking to think that, by 2020, at the very latest, these glaciers will have disappeared forever. Nobody can predict what will then happen to the ecosystem, which is based on ice-cold water.

After a few days, we moved on, meandering through Montana's picturesque lakes and valleys meeting all kinds of weird and wonderful folk. In no time, we were in Washington State and the landscape changed again, to desert-like scree that stretches from the Okanogan Valley



Lorraine with a backdrop of stunning scenery.



**Avalanche Lake in the Glacier National Park, Montana**

in British Columbia right down to Mexico. Up, up, up we went through a canyon to a high peak, and then down through a series of switchbacks until we came out into the baking heat of the Columbia Valley wine district.

Camped by the Columbia River that night, we drank a nice Valley red and wondered at the diversity of this beautiful state. Nearby was Deception Falls, a magical ecosystem of cedar and pine, kept lush and cool by the river roaring through the woodland. We spent a lovely morning in the forest before slowly, slowly, the outer reaches of Seattle started to intrude. The coffee shacks got a lot more up-market. The sub-divisions began to have gates on them. So did the lakes.

When we reached Everett, the Puget Sound was shrouded in mist, so our first glimpse of the Pacific was muted. We travelled over to Whidbey Island and after a night there, we turned north along the coastline towards Canada. Just a couple of hundred kilometres brought us through Vancouver to the Bowen Island ferry, with its spectacular view of the coastal mountains. Total kilometres covered, 6,495. Total states or provinces visited, eleven. We spent our weekend with Oisin and his wife, catching up on ten years of news. Then, it was time to drive home. Sin sceal eile, read about it here: <http://www.hali-van-hali.blogspot.ca/>



**Pictured above is the Hehir Family of 46 High Street, over 50 years ago.**

Back (L to R): Patsy, Chrissie, Jackie  
Front: Michael, Francis, Georgie, Seamus, Thomas



**Manning the Mineral Bar in the Marian Hall are Stephen Doherty (left) and Joe Madden.**



**The Nolan family, from Ballywilliam, pictured together for the first time in many years on the occasion of their Aunt Margaret (Madge) Loughnane's 100th birthday.**

Left to Right: Willie (Ballina, Tipperary), Tommy (Ballindown), Mary Guinan (Eglis), John (Knock, Mayo), Paddy (Ballywilliam, Kilcormac), Ann (Dublin), Michael (Ballywilliam, Birr), Denis (New York), Edward (Birr)

## OUT OF AFRICA

### TINA CLAFFEY – PHOTOGRAPHER

*By Michael Donegan*

**T**ina Claffey was born in Moorpark Street in Birr. She is the youngest of three children of Maura and John, her beloved father, who died recently, RIP. John Claffey was a highly skilled craftsman in wood and his son John carries on their very successful cabinet-making and picture-framing business in Moorpark Street. It is no surprise that the creative gene handed on by John Senior should find expression in other members of the family also. Tina's sister Yvonne is a teacher of Art in St. Brendan's Community School.



**Tina with her son, Tristan**

It was during her studies for a degree in Art in Crawford Art College in Cork that Tina caught the photographic bug. Part of her course there included a module on photography and printmaking. A year studying film making in Dun Laoghaire College of Art and Design further enhanced her love of the camera so, instead of choosing the path to teaching like her sister Yvonne, Tina decided on a career in photography. Her first break was to be selected as photographer-in-residence at the National Sculpture Factory (NSF) in Cork. They needed a skilled and imaginative photographer to interpret their work so that they, in turn, could develop and explore their own ideas and designs. Soon she was working with a German photographer called Joerg Koester, who specialised in industrial, product and fashion photography. Joerg was a perfectionist and Tina learned a huge amount working alongside him.

In 1998, Joerg took her to Kenya as his assistant on a big wedding shoot he was putting together for an Irish fashion magazine. Although it was only for a brief ten day visit Tina was smitten by what she saw. It was a complete culture shock, environmentally and socially. She loved the vast spaces, the untamed wildernesses, the extraordinary light and the vibrant energy of the people. She came home transformed by an all-consuming ambition to return to

Africa as soon as possible. Sometime afterwards, Joerg told her that he had heard of an interesting guy who had won a 'bachelor of the year' competition in Dublin. His name was Graham McCulloch and he lived in Botswana most of the time and was doing research on flamingos as part of his zoology course in Trinity College. He had, in the course of his interviews for the competition, revealed that he was looking for a photographer to go back with him to record his work. After much detective work Tina got his address and sent him a C.V. She heard nothing for 6 months and then, out of the blue, got a one line e-mail - 'Are you still interested?' Needless to say Tina was. Apart from flights and accommodation there wouldn't be any pay for the work but she didn't mind. She immediately set about solving the problem of the lack of gear and photographic equipment. First she got onto the Gerry Ryan Show on R.T.E. radio and told her story. In the meantime she inveigled some of the leading photo equipment shops in Ireland to sponsor or part-sponsor some top-class equipment, with a promise that they would get a mention on the show. Despite the best efforts of the show producers to prevent this, Tina kept her promise to her sponsors and the result was a bag of camera equipment as well as suitable trekking and survival gear for the journey and, three weeks later, she was walking off a plane in the steaming heat of Gaborone airport in the capital of Botswana, southern Africa.



**An elephant on the Moremi game reserve.**

Next, there was a 400km bus journey to the rural settlement of Francistown, where she met Graham McCulloch. Together they continued the journey further out into the wilderness to where his work was based. This was her first encounter with the Makgadikgadi Salt Pans, one of the largest salt flats in the world in the middle of the dry savanna of northeastern Botswana. The pan is all that remains of the formerly enormous Lake Makgadikgadi,

which once covered an area larger than Switzerland, but dried up several thousand years ago. As the sun evaporated the water, it had left behind this huge tract of salty silt which was home to a rich and diverse collection of invertebrate species. With the arrival of the rainy season, these invertebrates miraculously spring to life and beta carotene rich algae grows on the pan surface. These attracted the biggest flocks of flamingo in the world as well as many other species of bird and mammal. It was these flocks of flamingo which, in turn, brought Graham to carry out his unusual studies. Tina was to spend the next 12 months in this amazing landscape. By day she flew over the lake strapped into a flimsy microlite aircraft taking picture after picture of the almost countless birds. By night she slept in a tree house perched precariously on the edge of the pan. As well as the flamingos there were pelicans, vultures, numerous species of eagle, brown hyenas, aardwolves, aardvarks and jackals. There were all kinds of lethal snakes such as cobras, pythons and mambas. Tina knitted her aerial pictures into composite images and meticulously counted the flamingos for



**Zebras on the Boteti River**

Graham but she also amassed a huge portfolio of other work. She regularly sent transparency film to London for developing in batches of 20. She eagerly awaited the return parcel of her slides to see how they had turned out.

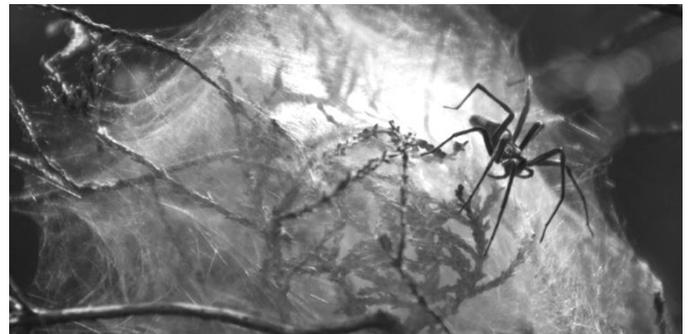
At the end of a year Tina returned to Birr with her head filled with the sounds, sights and smells of Africa and her bags bulging with the photographic record of her experiences there. She mounted exhibitions of her work in Birr, in Trinity College and in U.C.C. and she immediately set about planning her return to Africa.

By the end of 2001, Tina was winging her way back to her beloved Botswana. She had managed to secure work with a tour operator who specialised in tourist lodges. Soon her experience brought her further North West of the country to work with a bigger tour operator called 'Uncharted Africa'. She was a project coordinator, bringing guests into the native villages and out onto the salt pans to experience the landscape at its most untamed. She learned 'Setswana' the native language and became skilled at setting up advance safari camps for the various tour groups who wanted a genuine safari experience. Her safari work

evolved, as she advanced to managing the operations of mobile safaris that allowed her to travel and spend time in remote and unique camps further afield in the Moremi Game Reserve and in the Okavango Delta, one of the world's largest inland deltas. These areas are home to an extraordinary array of dry and wetland animals, including all of the Big Five, and are some of the very few true wilderness areas left on the planet. She also spent time with and photographed the native San bush people, of whom it is said we are all descendants and experienced at first hand their lifestyle and hospitality.

Tina's African adventure lasted about nine years and, while she had tried to make it home to Birr about every two years during that time, in 2008 she decided to come home for a more extended period. Her connection with Botswana continues, however, as she is preparing a photographic record of her time there for publication and is in the process, with singers and musicians John Spillane and Seosamh O'Neachtain, of setting up an Afro-Irish Festival in Botswana.

Since she has returned home Tina has begun to look at her local landscape in a new light. Just as she explored the complex relationship of flora, fauna and people in Africa she now brings her artistic eye and photographic skill to bear on the magical world of her local environment. Killaun Bog near Birr has become her wilderness.



**Killaun Raft Spider**

Here, she explores the wonderland of dewy cobwebs, mystical spiders and dancing midges. Out of this sodden mini-jungle of carnivorous plants and fierce bog beetles, her lens springs to our untrained eyes the breathtaking beauty of pearly light reflected in frogspawn. She probes the dark mysteries of bog pools with her camera as a space telescope might probe the mysteries of the night sky. Her recent Vintage Week exhibition was a mixture of work from her recent trip to Africa and her observations in Killaun and was practically sold out in the first few days. Tina is at present working on a website but can be checked out on Facebook. Search for tinaclaffeyphotography.

She is open to all ideas for commissions and, oh, by the way if you're thinking of organising that trip of a lifetime to Africa and want someone to put it together without a hitch ..... Now there's a thought!

## FOLLOWING THE GREAT PHILADELPHIA WAGON ROAD

By Oliver Craughwell

**G**reetings from Abingdon! A small town nestled in the heart of the Blue Ridge Mountains, Abingdon is located in Southwest Virginia, USA. What a long way I have travelled from my native shore. It's hard to believe it's been ten years since I left Birr!

I left Birr in 2000 after graduating college to take a position with the National Trust for Scotland. Here I met my future wife who was on a Scottish Heritage USA scholarship from the US. She was on placement while finishing her graduate degree program. Upon the end of my time in Scotland, I was able to secure a training visa with an arboriculture/tree company in Baltimore, Maryland. The company sponsored me to come to the USA with the condition I would work for them for two years. Davey Tree Experts, the company I worked for, had an annual turnover of about \$400 million, which goes to show you people take their tree and lawn care very seriously here. Not just for aesthetic reasons, trees are very important for shade in the hotter months of the year. I had the opportunity to work with some of the newest equipment in the game and took part in some amazing tree removals. We did a lot of contract work for the Pentagon and various government parks and buildings around the nation's capital, as well as helping to build habitats in the Baltimore Zoo.

While working for Davey Tree, I was living in Annapolis, the state capital of Maryland, home to the famous US Naval Academy and the sailing capital of the states. Set on the shores of the Chesapeake Bay, Annapolis is a picturesque historic town. The state of Maryland actually has close ties with Offaly. Carroll County, just west of Baltimore, is named after Charles Carroll, who was one of the signers of the Declaration of Independence and a descendant of the Lords of Ely. The family ancestors emigrated from Clareen around 1659. The last surviving signatory of the Declaration, he died at the grand old age of 95. In the movie "National Treasure", Charles Carroll is the man who dies trying to deliver a secret message in the opening scene.

In 2005, I was involved in a work accident which caused me to lose hearing in my right ear due to a traumatic head injury. Luckily I didn't break my neck, which makes me believe the statement that we definitely have thick necks in Offaly! We decided to move to my wife's hometown in the southwestern tip of Virginia, close to Tennessee, Kentucky and North Carolina.

Abingdon is another historic little town, nestled along the Appalachian mountain chain. A town of 8,000, it is probably around twice the size of Birr. In contrast to Birr, it has four pubs and over 50 churches. When I first moved here the nightlife scene was very quiet. But over the years it has progressed and we even have a micro-brewery located downtown. Hunting is popular here also, with big game like deer in abundance. The one difference compared to Ireland



Ollie relaxing in his garden

are the firearm options available for a day's shooting. Hand guns and even assault rifles are readily available at our local gun store. In fact one pawnshop in town offers a free sandwich if you buy a handgun. That always gives me a kick when I drive by it! Surprisingly enough, one of the first millionaires of Abingdon was a man by the name of William King. He arrived from Ireland with \$100 to his name and made a fortune in the salt business. The town's historical society has carried out some research and found that the King family had connections with Birr. We believe his sister was married in Birr and resided there for a few years. The historic district of the town has been lucky to escape the ravages of time and the onset of strip malls which surround most towns in the US. It has kept its historic charm, and local commissions enforce strict guidelines on construction work. The Barter Theatre on Main Street is the state theatre of Virginia. Originally set up as a "barter" theatre, (the audience would use produce and so forth to pay actors for admission) this theatre was where Ernest Borgnine made his debut. Abingdon also has an unusually large Irish and British community and, from time to time, we get together.

The whole region of southwest Virginia was predominantly populated by Scotch-Irish settlers, and I can see why, because the local landscape is very similar to parts of Ireland. Coal played a big part in this area and still does to this day. The people of this area are proud of their Irish connections. This can definitely be heard in the Bluegrass music native to this area. Bluegrass has a strong presence here, and the more traditional variety sounds very similar to Irish traditional music. One of the most famous venues, "The Carter Fold" is a relatively short drive from Abingdon. Home to the famous Carter Family, and future wife of Johnny Cash, this venue has some of the best live music every weekend. Dr. Ralph Stanley is also native to this area, and his most famous work is heard on the "O Brother where art thou?" soundtrack. Country music also has its beginnings here and not Nashville as we are led to believe. Bristol, a medium sized town about 12 miles away is referred to as the "birthplace of country music" and every year it hosts a country music festival. The Bristol

Sessions, they say, is where it all started. On a slightly morbid side, Roy Orbison's wife lost her life here in 1966, when both were involved in a motorcycle accident. Bristol is also a very unusual town because the left hand side of Main Street is in Virginia and the right hand side is in Tennessee, with different laws on either side.



The one thing we found when we moved here was the town was missing a good meeting spot and great coffee. In 2005, we decided to open Zazzy'Z Bookstore and Coffee shop. We located our new store in a beautiful old

Victorian House. We found early on that book sales are definitely not what they used to be. A huge amount of business in the US is carried out online. Amazon.com sells everything you can imagine, and with free shipping it's hard to compete. I remember when the last Harry Potter book was released, Amazon were selling it 10% cheaper than we were paying for it wholesale. However, we have found our niche with special order and collectible books. There is a big emphasis here for people to support local business, and that has been a big help.

The other side of our business, of course, is the coffee. Apart from being a full service restaurant, Zazzy'Z roasts all our own coffee. Not many people know this, but coffee is the second largest traded commodity in the world after oil. The oldest record of coffee is in Ethiopia's Harrar region. Thus Ethiopia is widely regarded as the birthplace of coffee. After many years it spread to South America, with Brazil now being the largest exporter of coffee, with Vietnam not far behind in second place. There are two types of processes involved in coffee production: the "wet process" where, after picking, the beans are washed and fermented to loosen the outer fruit for removal (this process is mostly seen in South America and is not as ecologically friendly) and the "dry Process", where the beans are left to dry in the sun and then the outer husk is

removed. As you can imagine, starting out I didn't have much knowledge of coffee, as tea was all the rage in Ireland. I decided to take a course in coffee history and production and attended a few seminars. We then ventured to Florida to pick up our new roaster.

I quickly began to acquire the knack of roasting and it caught hold. Roasting coffee is not a simple process, as there are many variables that can affect flavor, including time, humidity, temperature, bean size/density and so forth. Starting out, we were roasting a single origin coffee from Colombia, about 150lbs. Now we have varieties from over twelve different countries and three continents and roast around 25,000lbs. per year. We carry Monsooned, Peaberrys and Nuggets, to name but a few oddities. Many of our coffees are Organic, Fair Trade and Bird Friendly, which are important in today's markets. When the coffee arrives from the import companies in large sacks they are still in the raw (aka green form). It's loaded into the top of the roaster and dropped into a large rotating drum over open gas flames. After about 15-18 minutes, the beans exit the roaster into a cooling tray. The beans at this point are very hot and still "cooking", so it's important to cool them as quickly as possible. Otherwise the coffee will have a "baked" flavor rather than a roasted one. The beans are then stored for 24 hours so they can de-gas and develop their flavour.

We are lucky to supply a grocery store chain and various restaurants and stores. One cool new project we are working with is a fully self-sufficient coffee shop at the local college. They are using brand new high-efficiency coffee brewers and their power is coming from solar and wind.

On a finishing note, living away from home has its ups and downs. But I am lucky to have a family here now. Travelling between the two places is quite a challenge with two little ones. However, technology has made communications a lot easier over the last few years. Skype makes it easy to talk face to face with friends and family. The one thing I have to say (especially when I call home and hear it's raining), is the summers here are fantastic. Thirty plus degrees of heat for months is like being on vacation every day.



**1982 Presentation to Crinkill Hurling Club for Best Kept Finances by Eddie Keher**  
From left to right are Paddy Tully, Kevin Verney, Eddie Keher, AIB Bank Official, Denis Parkinson, Tony Cooke.

## WILLIE BOLAND'S MANY TALES

By Michael Donegan

**W**illie Joe Boland is a native of Killyon, Birr. He is a hale and hearty 83-year-old having been born on the 10<sup>th</sup> of July 1929. I met him in his cosy kitchen some time ago and he began by telling me some family history.

His father, Mike Boland and mother, Brigid Kealy, came from the Longford area of Clareen and they married in 1926. Mike had a thriving business buying cattle from the local farmers and sending them by train from Birr station to be sold in the Dublin cattle market by an agent. Unfortunately, disaster struck when a man who was acting as an agent for him sold a batch of cattle and did a runner to Canada with the money. The result was that Mike was suddenly insolvent and the cheques he had made out to the various farmers bounced. Willie is proud to say, all these years later, that his father paid everyone their due and no one was out of pocket but himself. He never got the money back and his cattle-buying business ended. He then acquired a truck and drew milk to Clareen creamery for a time, before getting work on the dredging of the Camcor River.

For a while they lived in an old dispensary building in Killyon before moving to a house at Killyon Cross directly across from Kavanagh's pub. The road to Kinnitty was very narrow at that point. At one time there was a toll on the road and Willie remembers seeing the spud stone and the hanging rings of the toll gate in the gable of the house. In time, the County Council knocked their old house in order to widen the road and they moved to a new house nearer to Birr, where he still lives. Grogans were the proprietors of the pub at Killyon in Willie's youth and he can remember the horse and dray coming to deliver Perry's ale every so often. He can still clearly recall the drayman putting a feedbag of oats over the head of the horse and filling a bucket of water to give him a drink. The 'nosebag' had a wooden bottom in it so that the horse could easily eat the oats. Willie remembers a sign on the cart with the words '*Guinness stout is good no doubt in either wood or bottle but Perry's ale will never fail to quench a thirsty throttle*'. Although Ellen Grogan's name was over the door of the pub she was deceased and her grandson, Pat, was now the owner. Pat refurbished and painted up the building and, in order to help pay for the



work, raised the price of the pint by a penny to ten old pence. Cheap and all as it may seem today, some of his customers complained bitterly about the price rise.

Willie started his education in Killyon School in 1933. Mrs. Hanrahan was the Principal and Mrs. Guinan was the Assistant teacher. Mrs. Hanrahan wrote up a tally of the attendance each day on a small blackboard and he can clearly remember seeing the figure 42 chalked up on the board. Sadly, the school has long since closed. Willie often missed school, as children were kept at home from school to help with the saving of turf or hay or the sowing and harvesting of the potato crop. The school was heated by

turf fires and some children brought in a sod of turf each morning while other children's fathers brought a cart load of turf once a year. Once a week, a man came on a bicycle to play the fiddle and teach dancing. Any child wishing to take part had to pay 2 pence. The man was a relative of the late Mick Dunne of R.T.E. sport fame and went around the local schools teaching music and dancing.

Willie made his Confirmation in English in 1943. The war was on and everything was being rationed. Tea and sugar were scarce luxuries and each house was only allowed ½ gallon of paraffin from

November to February. As paraffin was necessary for the lamps that lit the houses some people reverted to making rush lights as a last resort. Willie can remember peeling the rushes and soaking the soft pith in grease. The rush stem was then held in a home-made stand and lit like a candle. The light from it was very poor.

There was a hurling field up the Rath road, known as Dooly's Field, and sometimes the crowds were so big that Grogans put up a temporary extension on the side of the pub to accommodate the thirsty spectators. Before Willie was born there was a police barracks in Killyon and local tradition had it that the building material was taken from the ruins of an ancient monastery close by on the Birr road. In 1916, someone had hung a Tricolour on the chimney of the forge in Killyon and when a policeman climbed up to take it down he was shot at and wounded. He had to be brought into the doctor in Birr in a donkey cart. Willie remembers going to mass in Birr with his mother on the morning that the church was damaged by fire. He saw the

firemen rolling up the hoses and he can still recall the smoky smell of burnt timber. Men and women were separated in the church and when there were big crowds at particular ceremonies a man with the surname of Barry walked up and down the aisle directing people to their seats. He had huge feet and was nicknamed 'Foot Barry' by the mass-goers.

Willie has had a lifelong interest in all types of sport. At the age of 19 he attended the All-Ireland hurling final in Dublin between Waterford and Dublin in 1948. He was with a man named Burke from Rathcabbin and they borrowed two bikes and cycled all over the city to see the sights. There were only two cars parked on the entire length of O'Connell Street. In 1947, he had watched Galway play Kilkenny in Birr in the All-Ireland semi-final. He is very sad that all the major matches have been shifted to Tullamore and finds it hard to believe that the reason given is health and safety. At the 1947 match a group of men had got a ladder and a plank and made a seat high in the branches of a beech tree overlooking St. Brendan's Park to watch the match and no one said a word about health and safety that time. He has been in Croke Park on many occasions since but Willie loves all sport and regularly attended international rugby matches at home and abroad. He has always loved horses since his days working with them in Burns' of Killaun and he has been to Aintree on several occasions. On one visit there in the early 70's he waited until the crowds had gone and then he walked around the entire track climbing over each fence one by one. At Beecher's Brook he took a green twig from the fence and brought it home with him. He put rooting powder on it and very carefully potted it up. It is now a fine tree growing in the corner of his garden.

Willie got married in 1961 to Mary Hynes. He met her at a dance in the Oxmantown Hall. He liked going to the dances but sometimes there were special supper dances which cost 10 shillings to get into and funds were naturally scarce. On those occasions, a group of his friends would club together to buy a ticket and when one got in he would pass out the ticket through the toilet window to the next fellow until they were all in. Once, as Willie waited his turn in the

darkness outside the window, a voice called out 'Are you there Willie?' At the same time a cardboard box was handed out the window to him. To this day he doesn't know which Willie it was meant for. It certainly wasn't him. He accepted it without a word and when he opened it there was a new bottle of whiskey and an expensive sweet-cake in the box. Willie collected his bike and hit off for Killyon as fast as he could. He attended the Little Theatre in Birr whenever there was a play on. He saw famous stars like Jimmy O'Dea, Maureen Potter and Emmett Dalton on stage there. A man called George Daniels brought a touring theatre company to Birr every so often. He would set up a tent like structure and put on marvellous shows like 'Murder in the Red Barn', 'Lily of Killarney' or 'The Bishop's Bonfire'.

Willie is a lifetime teetotaller and, when others were drinking and celebrating in the pub after matches in Dublin or abroad, he used his time to investigate the local area by visiting museums and seeing the interesting sights on offer. He feels he has learned a great deal in this way. On one occasion, he visited Glasnevin cemetery and was allowed to lift the coffin of Daniel O'Connell where it lay in its mausoleum. That day he also had his picture taken beside the grave of Michael Collins. A major coincidence occurred in his life when as a 9-year-old boy, he got a ride in the first Aer Lingus passenger plane, 'The Iolar', at Baldonnell aerodrome. Ten years later, he got a spin in the same plane when it visited Ballingarry as the property of the Kennedy family and, in 1986, when the now restored plane visited Birr airfield as part of Aer Lingus' 50-year celebrations, he was again brought up in it as a guest of honour. Willie has been a blood donor on 48 occasions and would still do so if he was allowed.

His wife Mary passed away in 2010. They had been married for 49 years and he misses her very much. His son Mike lives with him now and he has lots of visitors. He loves to chat and is a mine of information about his local area. Unfortunately, space does not allow me to do justice to his many tales about the people and places in his locality. May he tell his stories for many a day to come!



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## AN AFTERNOON WITH MUNDY

By Richard Kennedy

For Mundy, home is the foundation of everything. Despite having experienced international recognition, he still retains and celebrates his connection with the place of his youth.

The influences in his music are various, but the influence of home and childhood play an important role; "Sometimes the more distant from a memory I am the better I can describe it. In my memory, running around the Mill Island when I was 10 or 11 is more poetic than if I was down wandering around Mill Island right now". He knows and accepts that such memories are an idealised version of the past but in many ways, this version is just as valid as any other.

His family background was steeped in politics, and yet, surprisingly, he never got involved. He feels that there may be undercurrents there in himself and, if he were to turn his attention to politics, the interest would develop, but at present he is happy with where his focus is directed, towards music and his family. He also feels that, being surrounded by politics in his youth, steering away from it helped him in his quest for his own independence.

One of his great interests when he was younger, an interest which still endures, is his love of horses and horse riding. He spent a lot of his youth in Cosgraves, and willingly helped out in the stables, and, as occasion demanded, on the bog, in return for the opportunity to ride horses. As he puts it "That was the trade-off, it was part of the gig". Many school mornings he would be up at 6.30 heading up to the stables to work up credit and then, in the evening, after some more work would be the opportunity for horse-riding. Working on the bog wasn't new to him, since his family had always had a plot of turf, and it was expected that he and his brother would provide the labour for this when needed.

In school, he progressed well academically, and he had the added good fortune to be there at a time when many of his classmates were fit and athletic and when involvement in sport of all kinds was the norm and was regarded as something worthwhile to aspire to.

He was a talented swimmer and swam at competitive level. He still remembers the lost opportunity at the Community Games in Butlins when a false start deprived him of victory. Hurling in Birr was at one of its peaks, and Mundy was as keen as the rest of them. Part of the reason for his keen interest was the influence of some teachers like Mr. Sampson and Mr. Killeen, who nurtured and encouraged his talent. Another no less important reason was the fact that he realised that the girls took a shine to you if you were good at hurling and that in itself, was a good enough reason to persevere. Then as he progressed through secondary school, his interests began to broaden, and around that time Fr. Pat arrived in the school. "He had a drum kit and

an electric bass and I noticed that the girls' heads started turning towards the musicians. I decided to drop the hurling stick for the guitar".

Apart from the introduction to music, Fr. Pat had an influence on Mundy in other ways. "He came with a fresh attitude and was open to all sorts of ideas. We had the annual mass every year and everybody was

encouraged to get involved. Even if you didn't have a particular talent you were still encouraged to be part of it. That made an impression on me, making the effort to include everyone"

The discovery of music was a revelation to him. Up till then, music hadn't played any significant part in his life, but, once he began to play, it resonated with him and he found that it came to him naturally. He began to immerse himself in music to the extent that the year the family business moved to Emmet Square he spent the entire summer practicing with his guitar behind the bar. Luckily for him he was on the day shift and at that stage day trade was limited and so he remained undisturbed for most of the time.

He knew at that point that music was what he wanted as a career, but he hadn't thought through any plan. He remembers once playing in Kelly's pub and talking to a teacher who advised him that he had two choices, go to music college and learn it their way or go it alone and preserve his natural instinct.

As it turned out, Mundy choose a middle ground and, following his Leaving Cert., he left home in September 1992, and headed for Dublin. He attended Rock school in Ballyfermot and, during this time, lived with his aunt in Dublin. It was an interesting experience, which brought him into contact with a lot of like-minded musicians, and gradually he began to get into the busking scene in Dublin. This immersion was a very demanding and enjoyable learning experience for him, and his music and writing skills developed quickly. By the time he was 19, he had secured a publishing deal with Warner/Chappell music, one of the largest music publishing companies in the world. He shared a catalogue with some of the most well-known artists in the world, from Cole Porter to Eric Clapton to Led Zeppelin. He had a good deal of money and a record deal and the future looked bright and full of opportunity. Looking back on that



time, he realises that he is only now beginning to understand it all. Life became very intense, very quickly and, while what was happening had been the grand dream, this dream had been more in hope than in expectation. The dips and peaks in his fortunes since those days have been well documented, but through it all he has retained his individual spirit and his integrity, both personal and musical.



**Mundy (front) with his team-mates in Butlins in the early 1980s are left to right, Kieran Keegan, P.J. Dunne, Maeve O'Dwyer-Tierney, MacDara Deery.**

While Mundy didn't come from a family where music played a large part, there were some family influences of which he was aware. He had an aunt on one side and an uncle on the other side who were musical and he also had a family of cousins who possessed a wide-ranging and eclectic mix of vinyl and who listened together with enthusiasm to each other's choice. On his visits, he sat on the couch with his cousins, listening to the music, and marveling at how music could bind people, even banishing conflict, however temporarily.

He now has the realisation; "At a universal level that's what I love about music, the way it can unite people together". The other aspect of music which fascinates him is the fact that all songs, or at least all good songs, are a form of storytelling. Songwriters such as Bob Dylan, Leonard Cohen, Kris Kristofferson, Woody Guthrie, Hank Williams, all fine musicians who use their music to tell a story. He believes that this love of story-telling comes from having grown up in and around a family pub, where there was always someone with a story or a yarn.

He has a few stories of his own of that time.

On the other side of the Main Street was Garahy's shop and, in crossing the road for some groceries, Mundy was not only crossing a street, he was crossing a deep political divide. The Enrights were staunchly Fine Gael, Patsy Garahy was passionately Fianna Fáil. In fairness, that divide was no bar to commerce and Mundy was regularly sent across to Garahy's with a shopping list, and when Patsy was there he would tick off the list the various items as he put them on the counter, and then return the list to Mundy, to be

delivered personally to his father, having inscribed at the bottom of the list the exhortation, "Up Fianna Fáil".

Another memory he has of that time was when his father had his auctioneering office in Main Street and had ordered a consignment of pens proudly displaying the logo, "Edward. J. Enright Auctioneer Phone Birr 291". Mundy was about six at the time and knew an entrepreneurial opportunity when he saw one. He provisioned himself with a couple of boxes of pens and set up his stall outside Mahon's shop (as was) and, between his charm and the incredible value he was offering, he managed to clear the stock in no time. Mundy learned a valuable lesson that day, or rather that evening, when his father got home, and that's another way of saying that the story doesn't have a happy ending.

On visits home, he sees the many changes which have taken place since his childhood. Main Street was a residential street, with almost everybody living over the shop. It was the centre of the town. There were so many thriving family businesses; Mahons, Hardings, Eileen Walsh, Molloys, Garahys, O'Connors, Eamon Hacketts. On his way to school in the mornings, he could meet a different character on every street corner. All is changed.

Yet for Mundy, while the landscape may have changed, and will always be changing, the memories are permanent, and just as they have been an influence on him, and who he is, they also fuel his creativity and are a part of his story. He tells his stories through his songs and his lyrics and the well of his memories is far from dry.

His music has developed to a stage where he feels that he has reached a plateau from which he has gained the perspective, and the insight, of knowing what he knows. From that waypoint, he can more clearly choose and understand the next stage of his musical journey. He is aware of the pitfalls of becoming somebody other than himself; "It's a bit like painting, you might adopt someone else's style, but it will be at the expense of your own"

At present, he is in the process of preparing a new album, and successfully resisting the temptation to put it out just for the sake of getting the album out there.

His world, and the musical world, is changing. The changes in the musical world are far-reaching. As a solo artist, he has the freedom to express himself and the freedom to choose his own path. On the other hand, he has had a number of very successful and rewarding collaborations with other artists and he sees that this can add another dimension to his creativity. Collaboration also involves feed-back and criticism and he appreciates the value of this. Technology has also changed the musical world and the music business hugely, for good and bad. Record sales have dropped dramatically and the challenge is to exploit the digital world, rather than have it exploit him.

His personal world now has the joy of his wife Sarah, and his two children, Eden and Belle. His words; "Life is getting more real in a very good way".

# JOHN DE JEAN FRAZER - BIRR POET AND PATRIOT

By Jack Ryan

John de Jean Frazer was born in Birr in 1809 and died in Dublin in March 1852 at the young age of 43. He is buried in Glasnevin Cemetery in an unmarked grave. During his lifetime, he was the author of over a hundred poems which he contributed to the Nation newspaper. He founded and edited the Traders Advocate, probably the earliest attempt at labour journalism. He also published a book of poems, 'Poems of the People', in 1845. A few of his affluent associates on the Nation published a selection of his best poems in 1851 under the nom de plume of Jean de Jean and a year later he died. He was the son of a Presbyterian father, an Orangeman who came to Crinkill



Barracks with a Scotch regiment. The family lived in Connaught Street in what is now Smiths residence.

In Birr he had many schools to choose from to get a good general education.

The area in 1808 had the following schools:

1. Elm Grove, John Gibbs, Catholic taught Greek and Latin
2. Castle St, Maria Burke Catholic, French and needle work
3. Castle St, Ester, Protestant, French and needlework
4. Connaught St, William Sheflin, Greek and Latin
5. Church lane, Patrick Egan, Protestant
6. Connaught St, William Syng, Protestant
7. Connaught St, Mary Toole, Catholic
8. Back Lane, Elisabeth Gould, Protestant
9. Graveyard St, Denis Keenan, Protestant
10. Birr Glebe, John Carroll, Catholic
11. Birr Glebe, Winifred Broughally, Catholic
12. Whiteford, John Redford, Protestant
13. Burkes Lane, Patrick Grogan, Catholic
14. Lockeen, John Abbot, Catholic

As a young boy, he choose cabinet-making and went to Dublin as a cabinet-maker's apprentice. Here a whole new way of life was opened up to him as the Young Ireland movement was in its infancy. The politics of the party captivated the imagination of the young poet. Fundamentally, they were looking for a parliament of their own and their Nation paper was a great success; here John contributed to the poets' corner. He also contributed to Fintan Lalor's republican paper, the Irish Felon. The Young Irelanders called on Protestant and Catholic to unite for the deliverance and nationality of Ireland. Gavin Duffy, who founded the Nation, Thomas Davis and their comrades united liturgy with their politics. S. A. Brooke and T. W. Rolleson, in their book, "A Treasury of Irish poetry",

included one of Frazer's poems, "Song for July the 12th 1843".

*Come! pledge again thy heart and hand-  
Our Grasp that Ne'er shall sever;  
Our Watchword be-"Our Native Land!  
Our motto Love forever!"*

He was in prestigious company such as Davis, Duffy and Lady Wilde and, on Davis' death, he wrote "Lament for Thomas Davis".

*Is he gone from our Struggle-the pure of the purest-  
The staff that upheld our green banner the surest-  
Is he gone from our struggle away?"*

In his book, "Poems", he recalls his childhood days in Birr, especially his fascination with the bogs. Here he highlights Clondallagh.

The Wild Ducks.

*'Twas a glorious day -I remember it well  
as we hunted, Thro' sedge and shallow,  
a wild duck's brood that just got the smell  
Of the summer breezes, and left the shell,  
Bog-trotting it through Clondallagh.*

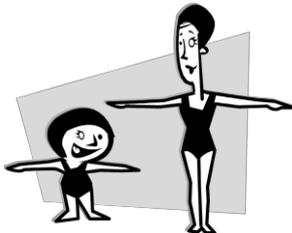
He went on to say that he brought the brood home in his hat and placed them in the moat that surrounded the Duke of Cumberland in the town square. Cook in his history of Birr, confirms that there was a moat around the pillar. There was formerly a fosse with water surrounding this pillar in Cumberland Square, Birr, the water being conveyed to it by a channel from a higher part of the Birr river, between the town and Syngefield. This is recorded in the old map of Birr. Here again he shows his affection for Clondallagh.

*Are the orchards of Scurragh  
With apples still bending ?  
Are the wheat -ridge and furrow  
On Cappaghneale blending?  
Let them blend -let them blend!-  
Be they fruitful or fallow  
A dearer old friend  
Is the bog of Clondallagh.*

In the preface of his last book of poems he apologies for publishing at all when every interest of the community is involved in such distress and for publishing with so many imperfections and he sums it all up by quoting Pope's satirical line "Obliged by hunger and a request of friends". Two of his children died within a few weeks of one another, Robert Alexandra, age 12 years and, Louisa, age 16 years. He was a prolific writer up to the death of his son during the choleric epidemic in 1849. A forgotten poet, a working man who died in poverty and lies in an unmarked grave in Glasnevin.

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## INTO THE HEART OF IRELAND

By Malcolm Ross McDonald

*Malcolm Ross McDonald is a world renowned author with 50 novels to his name and 10 non-fiction titles in the fields of Science, Medicine, Technology, Nature, Exploration and Architecture. In 1984, he won a 'Best Historical Novelist of the Year' award in America. He now resides in Crinkill.*

It began in 1973 with an ad in the *Sunday Times*. Under Irish Property, we read: "Coolfin House, once the property of Queen Victoria. Extensive parkland with 100s of mature specimen trees, private lake, stables, gate lodge, walled garden, yew walk; 20 rooms, 6,600 sq. ft. on three floors. £30,000." Worth a look, we thought, for by now we had a problem of a kind that we could only have dreamed about earlier. The buzz about my novel *The World from Rough Stones* suggested that, for the first time in our lives, we looked like handing over large amounts of loot to the Inland Revenue. "Get thee to Ireland," said my publisher. "They've passed a law exempting from taxes all income derived from creative work." Next week I was on the ferry to Dublin—and then onward to Banagher—to meet the person behind that *Sunday Times* ad.

Bernard Monk was a cockney, an ex-hairdresser, and now self-taught property developer in Ireland, driving a Jensen sports car. He showed me over Coolfin House and it looked interesting enough to bring Ingrid over, too. We agreed it had great 'potential' - one of the most dangerous words in the language.

What really decided us was the quality of Banagher National School. Everything about it felt right – from the work hanging on the walls, to the textbooks they were using, to the calibre of the teachers we met, to the behaviour of the children in the playground and on their way home.

*"You do realise that the education here is very Catholic?" Tom McGee, the Master, said.*

*"Well," I replied, "our girls have been at a Church of England school until now, so a change will do them no harm."*

*He came out with it then – straight. "I'm trying to discover which foot you kick with ... d'you follow?"*

*"Neither foot, really," I assured him.*

*"Ah, well," he said cheerfully. "That will count as Protestant." And so it did.*

A more serious worry was, of course, the IRA. We had already had a bomb of theirs in our nearest town, Welwyn Garden City – not aimed at me personally, I think – but it does rather concentrate the mind. It just so happened that Sinn Féin held a rally in Birr that weekend, and it was most encouraging: a single disc jockey sitting under a tarpaulin, playing republican and rebel songs over a loudspeaker in an utterly deserted main square

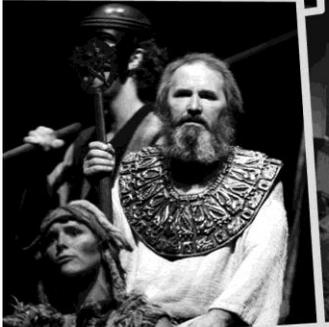


while the rain fell in torrents.

As for Coolfin House ... we found that almost every word of the advertisement was untrue. The nearest Queen Victoria had ever been to the place was to have her name used in the title deeds (along with the Empress of Austria and Princess Mary of Teck) as part of a 'fee-farm grant' – a quaint old leasehold system. The 'lake' was a weed-mottled doughnut of water, about six yards in diameter, lost in the almost impenetrable jungle the ad had called 'parkland.' The 'gate lodge' was roofless and its thick stone walls rocked if you pushed against them with only moderate force. The 'stables' couldn't have sheltered a horse for decades. And then there was the history of the place.

The original two-storey Georgian house and 3,000 acres of mainly bog land had been a hunting lodge of the Burdetts of Charleville, Co. Cork until around 1904, when Archie Burdett made it his permanent home. We know this because it was written on one of the rafters in the loft; also, hidden on the back of one of the window-shutter panels, was the pencilled message: 'Africa war. English is getting the worst of it. Two ridgements is missing.' This wonderful news of an English defeat in the Boer War could obviously not be spoken aloud in the Protestant-Loyalist carpentry shop in Birr, where the casements were made up. I still have that bit of wood.

Archie B added a brick top storey with projecting bay windows to the east and south (the first use of cast-iron beams in domestic architecture in Ireland), and developed 18 acres of parkland around it, which included two gate lodges, one at each end of a half-mile drive that snaked roughly in the shape of a horseshoe through the grounds. In the 1920s the estate, now down to a few hundred acres, was sold to a Rev. Talbot, a Protestant clergyman in his fifties who had just married Helena Briscoe, a lively 19 year-old from Edenderry way – so lively, in fact, that she almost immediately decamped with her cousin and had a son by him. When she came of age she and the boy



# 44th Annual BIRR VINTAGE WEEK and Arts Festival

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returned to Talbot and Coolfin and accepted the gift of the estate, where she started breeding horses and Irish setters, for both of which she had an unrivalled eye. But she had no corresponding head for money and the bailiffs were soon able to find their way up the drive blindfold.



The run-down gate lodge at Coolfin

Over the following decades, up to 1973, she lost almost all the Coolfin land, leaving her with only 14-acres of the demesne to sell to Bernard Monk. Two of the original 18 acres had already been sold to a couple named Ingram, who are now at rest in Clonoghill, and the other two she kept for herself – a small field by the tradesmen’s gate and a boggy chunk at the eastern end.

Okay – you’ve got the picture. The place was an overgrown wilderness, the house was structurally sound but would need all new windows (37 of them), complete re-furnishing, re-decorating, re-wiring, and re-plumbing, but, given its *potential*, £30k was not unreasonable.

All this was early in 1974. But my artist’s exemption would not start until April 1975, so a nail-biting year lay ahead. Undeterred, we came over to Banagher for the children’s Easter holidays to spend a week or so living in Coolfin before committing ourselves irrevocably. We almost burned the house down on our first night when we kindled a fire in the girls’ bedroom, not realising that the rooks had filled the entire chimney with twigs. Fortunately, I could get into the loft where there was access to the roof. So, while Ingrid stuffed sodden rags into the throat of the chimney I held a spare slate over the chimney-pot and between us we starved the fire of oxygen. Next day we carted out three large wheelbarrows’ worth of twigs from that one chimney alone – and even more from the ones downstairs.

An important item on our tick-list was to test the drains. We had no rods and it was Good Friday. Brennan’s in Banagher had no rods. Nor had Fayle’s in Birr. So we ended up in Roscrea, arriving at the door of Mahon’s only to find they had closed for the day. As I turned disconsolately away a man on the opposite pavement said, “Knock on the door – sure, they’re still inside.” Such behaviour was unheard of in Hertfordshire – or, if heard of, would have been futile. But Mahon opened up, listened to my plea, unlocked the back door, crossed the yard, mounted some steps, unlocked the storerooms,

found everything on my list, tied it all neatly in string, and handed it to me with a “Good journey and safe home now!”

The previous week I had tried to buy something in Harrods, fifteen minutes *before* closing time. The shop assistant refused to sell it because, “I’ve already cashed up the till ... sir.” *Let every single drain in the house be bunged-up, I thought, we’re moving to Ireland!*

We came to Banagher in June. Bernard Monk was still working on the house, or, rather, hiring local craftsmen to repair or replace the worst of the defects. Among them was Harry Johnson, a retired carpenter, who continued working with us for the next nine years. He was a great talker with a host of sharp memories that soon became our memories, too – the sort of trivial little facts you absolutely need in order to feel you belong ... that *knit* you into a landscape and its people.

It was Harry who showed us the spot – an unmarked grave – where they buried the first body in the cemetery opposite Coolfin. During the War of Independence, the IRA shot an R.I.C. sergeant and buried him in an unmarked grave in the then new, and so far, unused cemetery – after which, no one in the town would consent to be buried there. The embargo was not broken until, in 1926 – and by a neatly symmetrical coincidence – the family of a sergeant in the Garda Síochána consented to his burial there. And now Harry’s grave, distinguished by a wonderful little shrine he made for his wife, Margaret, is not fifty paces from that same spot.

And it was Harry who told us of an old IRA man, retired but still on the Garda watch list, who boasted down in the pub one evening of having hidden many a weapon in the ivy that grew luxuriantly all over the wall of his house (the one at the inner end of The Crescent, if you know Banagher). This was back in the 1930s so it was the Gardaí who spent an entire day probing and finally pulling down the ivy in question – finding nothing. Afterwards, in that same pub, he explained that the oul’ wan had been giving out to him for months, up and down the banks, about getting rid of the ivy but he just never had the energy to do anything about it. Stand on any street corner in Ireland and you’d soon fill a book of short stories, for the spirit that was in dear Harry will never die.

Another great advantage of moving to Banagher was, of course, Birr! And it was a no-brainer to move to Birr in 2004 when a 5-bedroom house and its 2 acre garden became too much for us. Another attraction for us was the restoration of the Oxmantown Theatre and the resulting growth of the many cultural communities around it. I forget the year but, quite early on, I was honoured to open an Art exhibition by local artists and was astonished at the calibre of the paintings in the show. And, of course, the superb contribution of the Tin Jug Studio, founded by Rosalind and Derek Fanning played a key role too. Our lives were culturally much richer than they had been in England.



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## THE FORMER PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH IN JOHN'S MALL

By Margaret Hogan

The opening of the former Presbyterian Church in John's Mall in 1886 was a joyful occasion, reported for the Synod of Ulster as follows: 'I have never seen a people so inspirited and cheered by a change of location as our people in Parsonstown since they entered their new church ... occupies one of the most central positions in the pleasant and prosperous-looking town. Architecturally, it is most tasteful ... bright, compact and commodious. It was well filled morning and evening by the most attentive congregations; and it was pleasant to see the continuous streak of red-coats in the back seats from the neighbouring barracks.'

The writer, Rev. H. Magee, went on to relate that there was the utmost good feeling among all the Protestant denominations in Birr in 1886 and, at the laying of the foundation stone, there were 'even Roman Catholics attending in large numbers and listening with uncovered heads to the impressive service'. Rev. David McMurtry collected most of the money needed and he was followed by Rev. John Morrow Simms, who was minister when the church opened. Rev. Simms went on to be Chaplain to the Forces and served for two years as Moderator. The church was opened by Rev. James W.W. Whigham from Ballinasloe.

Rev. Magee declared that 'since the removal into the new building, the attendance is generally most encouraging and is in quite a contrast to what it was in the old tumble-down and dingy edifice'. The dingy edifice was, of course, Crotty's Church in Castle Street, where Presbyterian worship had been taking place for forty-seven years since Rev. James Carlile came at the invitation of Rev. William Crotty in 1839 to establish a Presbyterian congregation in Birr.

The story of the Crotty Schism is too well known in Birr to recount here in detail. Two cousins, maverick Catholic curates, Frs. Michael and William Crotty rebelled against their fellow priests and bishops, initiated a kind of reformation and tried to occupy the Catholic Church in Birr, reputedly taking the majority of the congregation with them. The Crotty Schism lasted about twenty years before the strategies of the cousin priests diverged, and, while Michael was in England raising funds from Anglican sources for their new church in Castle Street, William applied with 109 local signatures to have his congregation accepted into the Presbyterian Church in 1839.



The early nineteenth century in Ireland was a period of religious ferment of a kind difficult to imagine here nowadays, though appearances could be very deceptive and society then was just as complex as it always is.

The eighteenth century penal laws had been relaxed, there had been rebellions against English rule in 1798 and 1803, the tithe controversy was still ongoing, the large Catholic majority was more restive and proactive, Daniel O'Connell campaigned for Catholic Emancipation and fear, as well as worthier motives, inspired many evangelical missions, with a view to converting rather than coercing Catholics. The

problem was that many of these missions tended, even with the best of intentions, to slide into proselytism and what was called 'souperism'. But Birr seemed different because, now in Birr, it appeared that Catholics were converting themselves – at least for a while.

In Belfast, the Presbyterian Church was reluctant to respond to the invitation of Rev. William Crotty but eventually, Rev. James Carlile, who had been ministering at Mary's Abbey in Dublin, came to Birr. A prominent man in Presbyterian circles in Belfast, he had been Moderator of the church in 1825 and served on the *Whately Royal Commission on the Poorer Classes in Ireland*, which reported in 1833 and was rejected in favour of the

workhouse system.

A National Education Board set about establishing a new national system of primary education in Ireland in 1831 and James Carlile was appointed the first Resident Commissioner, practically in charge of the new project. Controversy raged around the National Board from the beginning and around his undoubtedly immense contribution to organising schools, teachers, teacher training and inspectors. A wary eye was kept on religious education by all denominations and here he inevitably caused controversy, being considered somewhat biased. He even wrote some textbooks himself but, unfortunately, included much more about Scotland than of Ireland in a history text – he had been born in Paisley in Scotland. He retired from the Board in 1838.

William Crotty was a difficult man, in conflict with his cousin Michael, with other clergy, with members of the congregation and with James Carlile. Eventually in 1843, the General Assembly, in the best interests of all, transferred William to Roundstone in Connemara, while Carlile remained active in Birr, preaching, raising funds, publishing pamphlets, organising Sunday school, a lending library and scripture-readers to make door-to-door visitations. He later founded several schools with the

## BIRR Year Review 2012

assistance of the Edinburgh Missionary Society with an attendance of about 170 pupils at one time.

During the famine he was able to distribute food, clothing and money in Birr and numbers soared then but fell off again when the famine was over. His missionary activities were inevitably perceived by other denominations as overzealous. Towards the end of his life he laid claim to only a 'modest ministry' in Birr, a number of genuine converts 'not from Popery to nominal Protestantism, but from Popery to God'.

He retired to Dublin in 1853 where he died on 31 March 1854. His wife and helper Jane had died in November 1852 and both are buried in the small Presbyterian burial ground behind Crotty's Church in Birr under a kind of pyramid inscribed as best I could make out:

**Front panel:** Erected to the memory of the Revd James Carlile, D.D. in testimony of affectionate remembrance by the congregation of Mary's Abbey, Dublin of which he was one of the pastors for 40 years. During the latter portion of that period he labored as a missionary in this neighbourhood, illustrating by his example the lesson he had so often inculcated of self-denying effort for the glory of God and the good of mankind. Distinguished by vigor of mind, honesty of purpose and

consistency of Christian character, he exemplified the words of the apostle, 'To me, to live is Christ and to die is gain'. Died 31<sup>st</sup> March 1854 aged 70 years.

**Right panel:** Jane, the beloved wife of Dr Carlile and partner of his labors. Died Novr 1852 aged 52 years.

**Left panel:** Agnes, sister of Dr Carlile. A woman of kindred spirit. Born in Paisley. Died in Parsonstown, Feby 1<sup>st</sup> 1847.

These events in early nineteenth century Birr have led to fascinating and revealing research by both Presbyterian and Catholic historians. The congregation of the Presbyterian Church in John's Mall declined and the building was sold to Offaly County Council. It was subsequently used as the Town Library from the 1960s where Violet Doolin presided for many years. It was she who erected the only monument in the workhouse cemetery and she is affectionately commemorated by the Doolin Room in the children's section of the much-admired new Birr Town Library opened in 2006 in what was formerly the Convent of Mercy chapel.

As of late 2012 both Crotty's Church and the former Presbyterian Church are sadly in need of being put to new and practical use.

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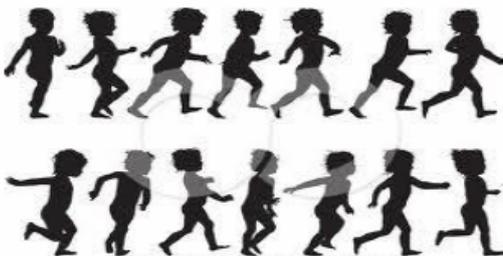
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## BIRR PIONEERS CELEBRATE CENTENARY OF FOUNDATION

The Birr Pioneer Total Abstinence Association was founded in the Convent of Mercy, on Mercy Day, September 24<sup>th</sup> 1912. This year, on September 24<sup>th</sup>, the Pioneers celebrated their centenary with a special Concelebrated Mass, in St. Brendan's Church. The Association's origins were remembered in the presentation of the original register from 1912, at the beginning of Mass.

Chief Celebrant was Fr. Bernard McGuckian S.J., National Spiritual Director of the P.T.A.A. He was joined by Fr. David Carroll P.P., Fr. Tony Cahir A.P., Canon Noel Carey (Shinrone), former Spiritual Directors Fr. Michael McInerney and Fr. John Kelly.

In the course of his homily, Fr. McGuckian referred to the ideals of the Association and, in particular, its spiritual devotion to the Sacred Heart of Jesus. Thanks were given for the graces brought to so many families in the Parish of Birr through the witness of thousands of members over the last 100 years. It was interesting to note that there are still 100,000 adult

members of the P.T.A.A. in this country. Overall, he noted there is a huge growth in devotion in Africa and South America. Members were strongly encouraged to continue with their efforts and to face the future with courage.



**Gerry Dolan (centre) receives his Fr. Cullen Medal from Fr. Bernard McGuckian S.J. (right) with Fr. David Carroll.**

Following the Homily, a number of Gold Medals (50 years membership) and one Fr. Cullen Medal were presented, to the joy of all present. It was great to see five 1<sup>st</sup> Year students who joined following their Confirmation involved in the Offertory of the Mass. They are the future of the organisation.

Church organist, Enda O'Connor, led the music for the occasion, while the combined choirs of the Brendan (Birr) and Cronan (Roscrea) Clusters were splendid on the night. Great

credit is due to the local P.T.A.A. members who participated so fully in the Mass.

Following Mass, all were invited to refreshments in the Mercy Primary School, P.E. Hall. Congratulations are extended to all in the Birr P.T.A.A. and best wishes for the next century.



**Back Row (Left to Right): Brian Kennedy, John Wrafter, John O'Brien, T.P. Sullivan, Patrick O'Meara, Helen Keogh, Mary O'Connor, Billy Coffey**  
**Middle Row: Enda O'Connor, Michael Liffey, Fr. John Kelly, Canon Noel Carey, Fr. Michael McInerney, Fr. Bernard McGuckian S.J., Fr. Tony Cahir, Mary Davis, Maura Wrafter, Gerry White**  
**Front Row: Dom Richard Purcell OCSO, Fr. David Carroll, Stacy McEvoy, Elaine Mullins, Shauna Duffy, Niamh Kearns, Allie Harding, Nessa Harte, Gerry Dolan**

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## DOGS FOR LIFE!

By Janet White-Spunner

**D**ogs and activity have been a part of my life as long as I can remember! Currently, I have 2 miniature poodles that organise my life for me. We compete regularly in Dog Agility, which involves both of us running at speed for about 40 seconds while trying to remember where the next obstacle is! Dib, aged 7, is now grade 4, grade 7 is the highest. The trouble is the higher grade one achieves the less time is given to complete the course, so I am trying to train her to follow voice and hand signals from a distance, so I only have to cover half the ground that she does. Gounod, aged 3, is still a major embarrassment! He loves the sport but not taking directions from me!

As a dog-lover one of my favourite activities is Peata visiting.

The name 'Peata' comes from the Irish word for 'pet'. Peata is a voluntary organisation for therapy pets and their owners. Established in 1996, its main objectives are: 'To provide a pet therapy service to nursing homes, hospitals and other caring institutions and to promote an awareness of the benefits people derive from pets.' All 'visiting teams' have to be assessed and passed. There are so many wonderful pets that would be highly suitable if their owners had time to give. Please, if you have a friendly, outgoing, sociable pet and a little time to spare, do think of joining, [www.peata.org](http://www.peata.org) will give you details. Basically, the dog must be under control, relaxed in any circumstance, outgoing and friendly.

On Mondays I make two Peata visits. The first is to Riverview Resources in the old community care nursing home building. The clients take both dogs for walks, on a fine day outside, or, if it's wet, up and down the corridors, then Dib curls up on someone's lap on the sofa, while Gounod catches and retrieves a ball thrown as often as anyone is prepared to throw it! A great cup of tea is always made for me, so I sit back and watch my dogs being entertained and entertain the clients.

We come home briefly before heading off to St. Kieran's Nursing Home in Rathcabbin. Home, because Magic, my black fluffy cat, also makes this visit! She travels in a box and wears a harness. I think she now realises what a special job she has to do. Both she and Dib have a gift for making someone feel very special. They sit on a lap and visibly say 'there is nowhere else in the world I want to be'! Gounod is a much more restless spirit so, again, the ball provides



Janet with her dog, Dib, competing in a Dog Agility competition.

entertainment. The physiotherapist encourages ball throwing and Gounod will catch or retrieve endlessly, causing most amusement when the ball goes under someone's chair! The smiles on peoples' faces, even the animation they engender, are reward enough for me.

Magic is an amazing cat that came from the Galway SPCA near Portumna. I specified 'black and fluffy' to match my two black poodles (who don't lose their hair, but she certainly does!) For affection and sociability she never fails to amaze me. We always had a cat in the house with our dogs, they live peaceably together having respect for each other; but it's never stopped them chasing other cats!

For years while we were farming at Milltown, Shinrone, I bred Labradors, trained them as gundogs and worked them on shoots, especially the one here in BIRR.

How the dogs enjoyed those days and the feeling of satisfaction I had from the work they did.

I 'puppy walked' many puppies for the Irish Guide Dogs for the Blind,

some of them bred by myself. Giving the pups from 6 weeks old to a year, the equivalent of national school education! I took them everywhere with me, shopping, visiting, going in public places, even taking them to church, where I was totally embarrassed on one occasion when we had slipped quietly into a back pew, the dog almost unnoticed, until there was a long pause for thought in the sermon, and the dog at my feet gave a loud, bored, moan, that I'm sure everyone still thinks was me!!

We also had collies to work the cattle and sheep. The first, an ordinary farm collie, Shep, would work for anyone, a wonderful dog with cattle. He was followed by two border collies, Millie and Rona, who used their eyes and were far superior at housing sheep. These dogs made handling stock a pleasure. Watching their dedication, cleverness and enjoyment in their work, took the 'work' out of work.

My last Labrador became arthritic as she grew older and I had to help her by lifting her in and out of the car, something I already found quite heavy and difficult. I looked around for a small breed and settled on the miniature poodle, which had the added advantage of not losing its hair. If you've lived for years with Labradors you know how desirable a dog that does not shed its hair could be! What I was totally unprepared for was the intelligence of this breed. She could buy and sell me!

With all my 'doggy' experience, I thought I knew how to handle 'dogs'. Wrong! At four months old I had no control over this bundle of energy! In desperation, I started going to obedience classes in Borrisokane. Dib could behave to

## BIRR Year Review 2012

perfection, top of the class, then spoil it all by going round and round like a whirling dervish saying 'catch me if you can'! At these classes, which were also superb socialisation occasions, we were introduced to jumps and it was obvious that Dib had a real talent for the sport of Agility. These obedience classes continue in Feebeg, Borrisokane on Saturday mornings and I recommend them to all dog owners. Since then, I have spent a fortune on petrol, traveling the country for training sessions and competitions. I am addicted. But more than that, it is a motivating force to keep myself active. After illness earlier this year, the dogs got me up and running, when I might have stayed in and 'looked after' myself.

Agility competitions involve jumps, seesaws, high ramps and other equipment, and always against the clock. We all walk the course first (without the dog) trying to remember what follows what, because the number of an obstacle may be on the far side, and working out the most

advantageous way to run the course, much like a show jumper walks the course, but the dog and handler are allowed to complete the course even if they have been eliminated by the dog taking the wrong obstacle.

Sometimes I say I had an E with an A, Elimination with Alzheimer's!! because I directed the dog to the wrong jump! The best thing about dog agility is that we all make fools of ourselves or are made fools of by our dogs. It is great fun for man and beast and, when it goes right, there is nothing like it. It is a sport for all ages and all breeds or no breed, of dog.

Working with animals, whether horses, dogs, cats or any other, is so special because of what they give us in return for so little. Their trust and affection which we all too often take for granted, their willingness to work with and for us, whether on the farm, guiding the visually impaired, or competing in an agility competition, make life worth living. To care for our four-legged friends is a privilege that they amply reward us for.



Tidy Towns hard at work in the old St. Brendan's graveyard the mid-80's.

Left to Right: Paul Barber, Joe McLoughlin, Matt Spain, Tony McLoughlin, Patsy Garahy, Donal Donnelly, Matt Darcy.



Sam, Luke & Daragh Morris from High Street, pictured with John Aldridge when the Liverpool Legends played in Birr earlier in the year.



Enjoying the Old Time Fair in Green Street during Birr Vintage Week are John Gleeson (left), Finbar Spain & Johnny Kennedy.

## THE CLOSURE OF THE CIRCUIT COURT IN BIRR

By Des Houlihan

The citizens of Birr and South Offaly lost an important service in November 2011 with the regrettable announcement by the Courts Service that the sittings of the Circuit Court in Birr were to be terminated. Remarkably, the history of a Circuit Court in Birr can be traced back almost four hundred years to the 1620's and, throughout this period, local people have been able to access justice in their own town, while local businesses have also enjoyed the commercial benefits associated with the court sittings.

The manner in which the Courts Service communicated their unpopular decision left a lot to be desired. On the Friday preceding what was to be the final sitting, word came through of what was to happen and it was quickly apparent that what was being presented was very much a fait accompli. To dissolve four centuries of tradition with just four days' notice was felt to be anti-democratic and arrogant and the news was met with shock and anger in the community. In addition the complete lack of prior consultation with any of the relevant stakeholders drew sharp criticism.

Up until this, the sittings in Birr of the Circuit Court usually consisted of a week in May and a week in November annually. Briefly, the Circuit Court has jurisdiction to hear claims in contract and tort having a monetary value not exceeding approximately €38,000. Equity proceedings such as an action for the specific performance of a contract for the sale of land or action brought for administration of the estate of a deceased person are also heard. In addition to civil jurisdiction, the Circuit Court has jurisdiction in criminal matters, family law matters and it also hears appeals from the District Court. From now on, however, anyone seeking justice in any of these areas

must travel to do so, namely to Tullamore. Access to justice has always been a core principle in any democratic society and, as Aristotle once said, "At his best, man is the noblest of all animals; separated from law and justice he is the worst." So we have been warned!

The main reason cited by the Court Service for ending Birr Circuit Court was that the facilities on offer in Tullamore are superior. Granted, the Tullamore court buildings are indeed of a very high standard as a result of significant investment and refurbishment in 2007 but the present courthouse in Birr (thought to have been constructed sometime before 1810) has perfectly adequate facilities, which could be easily improved on with only modest investment. If an argument based largely on facilities is applied in other areas, where does one draw the line? Will towns like Birr lose further services in favour of a centralisation in the county town? This is indeed a very dangerous precedent which, unfortunately at the time of writing appears to be set to continue with the proposed abolition of Birr Town Council.

Another very real fear, of course, is that the redirection of the Circuit Court to Tullamore is merely a precursor to an attempt to discontinue District Court sittings in Birr, something that has already happened in Roscrea, which has recently lost both its District and Circuit Courts. While everyone is acutely aware of the scarcity of resources in these recessionary times and the need to maximize result, it is worrying that some of the decisions being made appear to be badly thought-out and short-sighted. While the apparent rush to cut numbers and services may make good headlines, have the decision makers considered the long term impact on towns like Birr, which could be left behind once the country finally turns the corner and begins upon a better economic times?



Pictured left is Mrs. Quigley receiving a 'Golden Heart' award from Paul Barber and John O'Callaghan (Midland Tribune) in 1990



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## BIRR/PARSONSTOWN RAILWAY STATION (1858 – 1962)

By Jimmy Shortt

This year, on the fiftieth anniversary of its closure, we remember fondly a service which catered to the people of Birr and surrounding areas for over a hundred years. Birr Railway Station officially closed on Monday, 31<sup>st</sup> December 1962 and, as captured in the words of the poem by the late Jim Shortt of Killeen,

*It was the last day of December in the year of sixty two,  
The day that Birr inhabitants will ere have cause to rue,  
The train that plied into their town for a hundred years or more.*

*On that dreary day did drive away to come back to them  
no more.*

Birr Station, located on the Roscrea Road, has many happy and sometimes sad memories for the people of the locality. For those people who remember it, they all have their own story to tell, both of people who worked there and of people who came and went, some maybe never to return to their home. It gave great employment to many over the years and there are still many families in the locality that would have had strong connections with the railway, including my own.



Parsonstown (Birr) Railway Station came into existence after various proposals by the Great Southern & Western Railway (GSWR) to connect Dublin with Limerick by rail had been discussed. The eventual route chosen was from Ballybrophy, located on the Dublin to Cork line, via Roscrea. The initial section, a trunk line from Ballybrophy to Parsonstown was authorised in 1854 as the Roscrea to Parsonstown Junction Railway. The section of line from Ballybrophy to Roscrea opened on 19th October 1857 and the following year the section from Roscrea to Parsonstown opened officially for business on Monday 8<sup>th</sup> March 1858, catering for goods and passengers services. The Great Southern and Western Railway (GSWR) employed Messrs. Bagnell and Edwards as contractors to build the line from Ballybrophy to Parsonstown, a distance of 22½ miles, while the section from Roscrea to Parsonstown was 11¾ miles long. Later, when a line from Roscrea to Nenagh was opened on 5<sup>th</sup> October 1863, Roscrea was now classified as a junction and Parsonstown,

a branch line.

The contractors, Messrs Bagnell and Edwards, along with a workforce of local people, laid the line in less than a year. They overcame many obstacles such as the cutting of a path through a large hill as the line left Roscrea, the construction of a bridge consisting of three large arches at Sharavogue and the draining and laying of a section of line through Ballyegan bog. It is noted that, during the time of construction, not one fatality occurred and this was mainly attributed to the precautions taken to the care and safety of the workers.

The opening and inspection of the line occurred on Thursday 25<sup>th</sup> February 1858 when a special train consisting of first class carriages was brought into Parsonstown station to collect invited guests, including the Earl of Rosse and members of the local gentry. The contractors, Messrs Bagnell and Edwards, along with their passengers, left the station at 11 a.m. for Ballybrophy. There they collected the Chairman and company directors of the GSWR and Colonel Wynne, who was the Government Inspector of Railways.

On the return journey, the inspection of the Roscrea to Parsonstown section of the line took place. Mr. Bagnell had the honour of driving the train for the occasion. The passengers commented, while complimenting the contractors and the workforce, that they had never travelled over a smoother line or one where there was less jolting or tremulous motion, which astonished them when they considered the short time in which it had been under construction.

On its arrival at 3 p.m., many hundreds of the town's inhabitants were there to meet the train as it entered the station. The band of the King's County Rifles entertained the crowds with a number of airs. Later, the invited guests, accompanied by the Earl of Rosse, adjourned to the Castle to inspect the telescope and its workings. Afterwards, refreshments were served in Dooly's Hotel and several speeches made.

The Brosna Halt, a stop which was added later to the line, was opened in 1910 and this was classed as a "request stop". The terrain from Birr to Brosna would be described as fairly level but from Brosna to Roscrea there was a continuous rise with a gradient of 1 in 100. This gradient would contribute to the rail crash, which occurred on July 19<sup>th</sup> 1910 when the Sacred Heart Sodality excursion train that had left Birr earlier that morning for Cobh was having extra carriages shunted to it at Roscrea. During this manoeuvre, the stationary carriages slipped their brake and travelled down the gradient towards Birr while, at the same time, the regular train was on its way from Birr to Roscrea. The driver and guard of the regular train spotted the oncoming carriages coming at speed and put their

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own train quickly into reverse. This helped to lessen the impact but still a large number of people were injured in the crash but, thankfully, no fatalities.

Another event associated with Birr was the story of the famous "Stolen Railway". This was a branch line which opened from Parsonstown to Portumna Bridge in 1868. The GSWR operated the line until 1878 but, with two trains a day, the line was losing money and shut in December 1878. The Public Works Loans Commissioners, who had given financial support to the line, repossessed it but, other than appoint caretakers, made no effort to work it and eventually in 1883 they withdrew their staff. As no person now laid claim to ownership of the line it disappeared bit by bit over time and hence the name.



Birr Railway Station was built primarily to service Crinkill Barracks, catering for the troop movements of the Leinster Regiment located there who were serving in many theatres of war both in Europe and beyond. When the barracks was in full operation from the latter end of the nineteenth century to more or less the end of World War I there were at least five services running each way on the Birr - Roscrea line but, with the evacuation and burning of the barracks in 1922, the noticeable decline in passenger traffic became evident.

After the closure of the barracks, the GSWR decided to locate a Road Traffic Depot in Birr and develop the station as a railhead for heavy goods for South Offaly, North Tipperary and East Galway. Later still, when CIE came into operation, they increased the size of the Road Freight Depot in the town, which would eventually go into direct competition with the railway for much of its trade. By 1931, the branch now had only three trains running both ways and by 1958 there were only two "mixed" trains running, indicating the decline in rail use over time.

Following World War II, there were coal shortages countrywide when a miner's strike occurred in Britain in 1947. That, in turn, saw passenger services being suspended from Birr on the 24th February and goods services followed a month later on 10<sup>th</sup> March. As coal became available again, goods services were restored on 24th May and passenger services on 16<sup>th</sup> June of that year.

The last steam train (Loco 124) left Birr in 1959 to be replaced by the new-style diesel engine (C209). It was thought locally that when the modernisation occurred it would help to alleviate the threat of closure which had hung over the station for a number of years but, as history would later tell us, this was not to be.

Prior to the actual closure of the station CIE announced in October 1962 that the Birr - Roscrea branch line was losing almost £9,000 a year. This led to the death knell sounding for Birr Railway Station.

On its final day, the normal incoming and outgoing trains operated, C231 bringing five wagons into Birr that morning on the "mixed" while the 3.45pm was the last to carry out passengers. This consisted of thirteen wagons, the composite coach and brake. C231 returned later that evening with the 7.45pm scheduled run from Roscrea. This left C231 as the last train to officially leave Birr Station at 10.30pm that night with the "beet special" destined for Thurles. The weather on the day was described as bitterly cold, with snow swirling in the east wind.

Roscrea and Birr Branch. Week-days																	
Distance Roscrea	DOWN TRAINS	1		2		3		Distance Birr	UP TRAINS	4		5		6			
		Goods as Required	PAS.	Goods as Required	PAS.	MIXED	MIXED			L.E. as Required	PAS.	MIXED	MIXED				
Mls.		arr.	dep.	arr.	dep.	arr.	dep.	Mls.		arr.	dep.	arr.	dep.	arr.	dep.		
—	ROSCREA	☉	☉	7 45	...	12 10	...	7 45	—	BIRR..	☉	☉	5 30	...	9 00	...	3 45
5	BROSNA HALT	N	C.R.	C.R.	C.R.	C.R.	C.R.	6	BROSNA HALT	N	...	...	C.R.	C.R.	C.R.	C.R.	
11	BIRR	W	☉	8 15	...	12 35	...	8 25	...	11	ROSCREA	☉	Pass	5 55	9 25	...	4 20

C.R.—Calls when required on notice to Stationmaster or Guard. N—No Telephone Communication.  
☉—Birr Branch —Now worked by manual staff, Reversion to E.T.S. working if required.

The 3.45pm train that day was checked out from the platform by Michael Grogan, the last stationmaster to serve at Birr. The driver was Tom Doherty and William Parkinson was guard. Also there for the sad occasion were three retired long-serving men who gave many years of service to the Birr Branch line, Mr. Frank Hynes (Guard), Mr. Danny Shortt (Parcels Porter) and Mr. Dan Shortt (Engine Driver). Others employed at the station at the time of closure were Vincent Cordial, Joe Shortt, Jimmy Carroll, John Dwane, Phil Purcell and Michael Hoctor.

Following the closure of the station, CIE provided a twice-daily bus link between Birr and Roscrea to connect with the Limerick - Dublin train while the freight service at the station was transferred to the local CIE Road Freight Depot located at John's Mall but, alas, all since gone.

By coincidence, the beginning and ending of the service from Birr Railway Station occurred on a Monday, a delightfully fine day for the opening in 1858 but a bitterly cold snowy day for the closing in 1962.

At present, there are a number of residential and business units located in the station buildings.

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## A GRAND DESIGN

By Noel Molloy

Noel Molloy is a native of Eglis, Birr and as project manager for Harcourt Developments, played a central role in the construction and development of the recently opened Titanic Centre in Belfast.



Noel Molloy stands in front of Titanic Belfast

**H**arcourt Developments is a Dublin-based property development, management and investment company. It has hotels, shopping centres and other assets in Ireland, Britain, Europe and the U.S. It has more than 800 people in its business. When I was asked to manage a project in Belfast in September 2008 for the company, little did I know that it would be the Titanic Belfast, which would prove to be the most complex, innovative, and exciting project of my career. Despite the change from the sunshine of the Bahamas to the slightly wetter Belfast, the relocation was made all the easier when I realised the full scale of the project.

Working across a project from the initial stage of negotiating with the Northern Ireland government, managing the design and build team, overseeing the large scale construction elements, coordinating the fitting out of the exhibition and ensuring that everything would be ready on the opening night was a unique experience and one that anyone in the construction industry would be proud to be working on but, because the project was so unique and so important to the wider economy of Northern Ireland, the project took on a life of its own, whereby even the construction process became a must see.

Titanic Belfast, a £100 million iconic building, would commemorate the fact that the Titanic and her sister ships, the Olympic and the Britannia, were built by Harland and Wolff in Belfast over 100 years ago. At the time, they were the largest man-made moving objects in the world and the most luxurious ocean liners to sail the seas. The building in itself had to be unique to ensure that it was eye-catching and a landmark in its own right and the exhibition inside was to tell the full story of the Titanic from the first ideas of building her to her eventual discovery, 72 years after she

sank, 2.5 miles under the ocean. For added enjoyment there is a banqueting suite on the 5th floor which can accommodate over 1,000 guests, with panoramic views over the slipways where the Titanic was built and Belfast Lough. There is even a replica of the grand staircase on the Titanic.

The building itself was a huge challenge, the timelines were absolute, the building had to be delivered for 31st March 2012, to commemorate the 100th anniversary of the ship leaving Belfast and our contract would not allow for any time extensions.

From 28th May 2009, when we first commenced on site, to 30th March 2012, when we handed over the building to the public (we actually finished 1 day early), the work was relentless and some of the figures involved in the construction were staggering:

- digging a 10 meter deep hole in the ground, covering 2.5 acres,
- 300 truck movements in and out of site in a single day,
- pouring the largest concrete pour in Europe on 4th December 2009, a concrete slab 1.2 meter thick and 1 acre in area, with over 4,000 meter cube of concrete delivered within 20 hours.
- building a concrete and steel structure leaning out at 72 degrees on all 4 corners which could not be tied together until we got to the 5th floor, over 40 meters above the basement.
- installing over 3,300 individual aluminium panels, all in their own unique position, through some of the roughest wind, rain and snow that the weather could throw at us down the Belfast Lough.
- lifting and carrying in the replica of the grand staircase in 8 sections onto the 6th floor after we had the roof on the building.
- putting in a glass floor that people could walk over and see the wreck of the Titanic underneath.
- putting together the longest unsupported escalator in Ireland in 3 pieces while suspended from the underside of the banqueting floor.
- installing over £1.2 million worth of Audio Visual equipment in a dust free environment.

All of these challenges required new and innovative design and construction methodologies and the most satisfying part of the project for me was the way that each designer, manager and construction worker rose to the challenge and really became a part of the story of the building of Titanic Belfast. There were over 2,000 working there throughout the life of the project

In designing the exhibition, we needed to ensure that every visitor enjoyed the experience, whether they just had a mild interest in the story or if they were truly fanatical about the Titanic. We called these people "titananoraks" and you would be surprised how many there are out there! Our designers were constantly envisaging new and unique ways to tell the various parts of the story, whether it was about boomtown Belfast at the turn of the last century, or the story of the design drawings of the ship, to the work carried out in the shipyard, the fateful maiden voyage, and how the Titanic story has been told through film to the eventual discovery of the ship. At each stage our designers were using interactive technology, computer animation, large scale models and story boards to get the story of those individuals who had designed, built, worked on and unfortunately perished on that amazing ship.

The project involved an unusual amount of additional work not typical to an ordinary project, such as various lectures to historical societies around Ulster with regard to the exhibition and, presentations to engineering, architectural and project management students and wider construction industry bodies with regard to managing the delivery of large scale, complex projects.

In addition, we carried out over 450 site tours during the construction phase in order to show various tourism and media outlets how the project was progressing and what the final project would be like.

In the middle of all this work I met another guy from Birr, Ray Hayden who was managing a lot of the media and PR in the lead-up to the opening events and also a painter who had married a girl from Birr.

The project has proved to be a huge success, with over 500,000 visitors going through the doors in the first 5



**Noel working during the largest European concrete pour.**

months, it was only supposed to get 400,000 visitors a year! And, of these, over 60% are from out of state, so the project had a very positive impact on the tourism numbers for Northern Ireland.

Once the project was handed over on 30th March 2012 my work was complete so it was onto pastures new. On 2<sup>nd</sup> April 2012 I commenced work with the Strategic Investment Board of Northern Ireland as Programme Director of the Regional Stadium Development, which will involve the investment of £130 million in the re-development of Ravenhill Rugby Ground, Windsor Park Soccer Stadium and Casement Park GAA grounds.

So it has been a long journey from the national schools of Eglisk and Rath, the Community School of Birr, and playing with Drumcullen and Birr RFC, to where I am now but it is a journey which would not have been possible without the influence of my family, neighbours, teachers, team-mates and friends who were all there in my formative years and are still there whenever I return to Birr for a visit or pint.



**St. John's Secondary School  
circa 1956**

Back Row (L to R):  
Mary O'Connor, Sheila McIntyre, Phil Garahy, Mary Loughnane, Margaret Tynan, Noreen Garahy  
Middle Row: Nora Reddan, Josie Melsop, Maura Hogan, Bernadette Molloy, Mary Roe, Bridie Stephens, Noreen Smith, Evelyn Cleary  
Front Row: Lily Mullaly, Mabel Ryan, Bridie Byrne, Brigid Tierney, Ena Brereton, Olive Hoey, Anna Grogan, Anne Milne.

## THE DAY THE PAPARAZZI CAME TO BIRR

By David O'Brien

Britain's royal newlyweds have long been a source of fascination, with an insatiable appetite among newspaper editors for the latest pics, the latest movements, the latest hats and skirts and all the other seeming banalities that their readers enjoy so much.

Prince William and his new bride Kate have already experienced plenty of this and, indeed, one Irish newspaper found itself facing a very uncertain future earlier this year when it published pictures of the couple enjoying a private moment on holiday in France.

This is nothing new, however. Over 50 years ago, Birr found itself at the centre of an astonishing royal media firestorm which provoked the Queen Mother to issue an appeal for calm and privacy and left many residents of the town most unimpressed.

In 1960, the Queen's sister, Princess Margaret, and her new husband, society photographer Anthony Armstrong-Jones, who would be given the title Lord Snowdon, were probably the most famous couple in the world. They had been married on the 6th of May 1960 at Westminster Abbey.

Towards the end of the year it was announced that they would visit Anthony's mother, the Countess of Rosse, at Birr Castle, where they would spend the New Year, leading to much excitement.

Margaret's love life had already been front-page news in Britain and, indeed, almost provoked a constitutional crisis when she fell for a recently-divorced commoner 16 years her elder, Group Captain Peter Townsend, her father's equerry.

Her father, King George, died in 1952 and her sister became Queen. Margaret told her sister in early 1953 that she wished to marry Townsend. Many in the government felt that Townsend would be an unsuitable husband for the Queen's 22-year-old sister, and the Church of England refused to countenance the marriage of the sister of its head to a divorced man.

Had she gone ahead with the marriage, she would have been forced to give up her royal titles, as her grandfather Edward had done in 1932 when he gave up his throne to marry the twice-divorced American, Wallace Simpson.

The world's media had lapped up the doomed love affair of Princess Margaret and Captain Townsend and her subsequent marriage to Armstrong-Jones. The visit to Birr

was, therefore, certain to attract much press attention; nobody was quite prepared for just how much, though.

The couple was due to arrive in Birr on New Year's Eve

and would make one public engagement the following day by attending New Years' Service at St. Brendan's Church of Ireland. The rest of the visit was to be private. However, newspaper reports of the time show that it would turn out to be anything but.

The Irish Times of the December 31<sup>st</sup>, 1960 reported that the visit "had drawn one of the biggest crowds of English journalists ever to visit this country. One group of English newspapers has six staff men in Birr...while the BBC will operate six cameras". The paper also reported that American network NBC would cover the visit and that every available room in Birr and the surrounding towns had been booked by journalists.

The paper also reported that 30 British detectives had been sent to the town and had to sleep in makeshift beds in the Garda barracks because of the lack of any available rooms. Birr folk, however, seemed unfazed by all the activity, with the paper describing how the people of the town went about their business "quietly and seemingly unconcerned". "Naturally we are going to watch the couple on Sunday but we are also going to respect the fact that this is a private visit," the paper quoted one Birr resident which it did not name but described as "a leading store-keeper".



The crowds gathered on Oxmantown Mall

Unsurprisingly, a huge crowd gathered on Oxmantown Mall the following day to gather a glimpse of the royals. According to the Irish Times of January 2<sup>nd</sup>, the crowd was "pushed and shoved by police outside St Brendan's Church. One policeman drew his baton as the crowd surged around the royal car. A little girl was pushed by the crowd right under the wheel of the car, just as it stopped, and a small boy screamed as he was crushed against the railings and had to be rescued by a church-warden".

The following day, the newspaper reported that a party from the castle had to abandon their shoot on farmland nearby "when a number of English pressmen ran the party to earth just off the main road". The paper also reported an incredible incident when the royal couple decided on



Capturing the royal moment.



**Crowds gather outside St. Brendan's Church of Ireland hoping to see the royal couple.**

an evening drive without informing their Special Branch protection officers. The panicked officers began a frantic search for them, eventually finding their car speeding towards Cloghan. The police managed to stop the car just as a number of cars being driven by photographers arrived on the scene. By January 5<sup>th</sup>, the paper reported that a shooting party was again chased by reporters while Princess Margaret had covered her face with her hands when her car passed a group of photographers.

The following day, the Queen Mother took the, at the time, unprecedented step of appealing by letter directly to newspaper proprietors to allow the couple some privacy during their visit to Birr. According to a BBC report, the appeal did result in a reduction in their number of journalists, with one newspaper group reducing its number in Birr from fourteen to eight. However, the Irish Times of January 7<sup>th</sup> described a "powerful amount of journalists still around".

The following day it was announced that the couple would leave Birr for Abbeyleix. The journalists and police were quick to depart and Birr would return to peace and quiet, much to the relief of its residents who, the paper reported, were quite fed up with being at the centre of media spotlight.

Princess Margaret and Earl Snowdon visited again in Birr in 1965. The worsening security situation in the North, however, meant that further visits were not possible. The couple divorced in 1978. Birr would never again find itself at the centre of such media frenzy.



**6<sup>th</sup> Class in St. Brendan's Boys P.S., 1968**

Back Row (Left to Right): Jack Tait, John Coolahan, John O'Neill, Seanie O'Brien, Eugene Smith, Pat Malone, Joe Normile, Eugene Hanniffy, Paul Fitzpatrick, Jack (Jackdaw) Kelly, Larry Broderick.

Middle Row: Kieran Egan, Mick O'Meara, Joe (Blackman) Kelly, Harry Ryan, Ger Roberts, Joe Walsh, Connie Carter, Michael Colclough, Tom Dooley, Tommy Coolahan, Alfred Magee, Sean Lyndon, Johnny (Doxie) Leary, Pat Kelly, Sean O'Keefe, John Ahearn, Pat Devery, Christy Carter.

Front Row: Bill Harte, John McKenna, John (Mousey) Ryan, John Dunphy, Eamon (Wedger) Pardy, Connie Gallagher, Michael Garahy, Kevin Burns, Willie Kelly, Tony Billane, Joe Pey.

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## FROM SCHOOL TO THE FIELDS

By Richard Kennedy

We have the choice of looking back and seeing only the unpleasant influences of our past, or we can choose instead to see the influences of kindness and gentleness, which were just as abundant, but which, like all good things, are lost in the murk of negativity. From Danny and Mary Bridget Egan, brother and sister, I learned that it is much better to savour the good and, for me, both of them are a treasured part of my good memories.

Gentle, reserved and shy, they lived all of their lives in their neat, modest and very old farm cottage in the compact little townland of Annaghanerrig. I encountered them as a youngster and maintained a friendship with them over a span of almost 35 years until they, in their turn, died. Although they had lived through harsh and unforgiving times, they seldom complained and were thankful for any good fortune or kindness that came their way.

I first met them after my mother realised the value of buying in bulk for a large family and, on a recommendation, made contact with Danny to buy potatoes by the sack. The initial contact was made by letter to Derrinsallow and, some days later, Danny arrived at our house, with his donkey and cart, to deliver the first of many consignments. The brown hessian sack carried on his back from the cart to the door contained a generous hundredweight of the finest Kerr's Pink potatoes.

As the weeks went by and the stock dwindled myself and my brother James volunteered to walk out to Danny's house on one Saturday morning to place the next order and that day was a turning point for me.

We had never been on a farm before, had never encountered the beauty of a real working thatched farmhouse and what we saw was a revelation. We were made welcome and brought in to the kitchen. My first impression was of the orderly self-sufficiency of the place. At that stage I was not sensible enough to realise that the self-sufficiency was a reflection of years of poverty, but the neatness that attended it came from the innate sense of order that was shared by both Danny and Mary Bridget. Electricity was still new to them and spared only for light. There was no fridge, electric kettle or TV. Even the radio was an old battery model. Water came from the well.

Mary Bridget fussed over us and gave us tea and griddle bread and, in the warmth and homeliness of that kitchen, I knew that I would be coming back. Over the next couple of months we cautiously progressed to dropping in if we were just passing. It took a long walk and some planning to be "just passing" their laneway.

As always, there was a welcome and our visits became more frequent, and lengthy. By degrees, we grew from being a hindrance about the place to being of some use in

our awkward way to either Danny or Mary Bridget in their work around the farm.

The attraction of the farm was so great that we began to spend a lot of our spare time out there and our only difficulty was that there was only so much spare time available. Our summer holidays were now over and school was taking up an inordinate amount of time. With only so much time available to us, cuts had to be made somewhere and, since school was never a happy place, there was an obvious solution. This involved what I like to think of as the prototype Transition Year, which worked very well for us, although later versions confined the transition period to just one year rather than allowing you to spread it indiscriminately throughout your school career.

After Christmas, my brother James went to boarding school and, secure in the knowledge that at least one of us was managing the education side of things, I maintained, as much as I could, the connection with Danny and Mary Bridget.

As I continued my trips to the country I was aware of some misgivings on their part when I turned up on the doorstep on what were obviously school mornings and, when no amount of imagination could invent yet another school holiday. But I persisted, and they relented, and soon when I turned up I fitted seamlessly into the day. It possibly helped that at that stage I could be moderately helpful, or perhaps I provided some entertainment with my innocence and incompetence. My careful and demure style of climbing into a creeled cart amused Danny, who likened me to old Simon Burke, of Burke's Hill, a man biblically old. I was also aware that, for Danny, I represented a break in the monotony of the long day of working alone. His was the type of personality which could stand a talkative youngster at his side if that youngster was also able to turn his hand to something useful and, by his teaching, he achieved and gained from me a small measure of competence.

At that time their mother Annie was still alive and she was a very definite presence in the house. She was small and old, always dressed in black, and she spent her days



Danny and Mary Bridget Egan



**Mary Bridget by the fire**

sitting over the fire, being humoured, hushed and pacified by Danny and Mary Bridget. Annie had been widowed as a young woman, at the age of 40, left with her son and daughter, little more than infants. Their father had been married previously and was a widower when he married Annie. When they married she was aged 35, he was close to 75. Mary Bridget was a child of five when her father died, Danny only four. Being so young, they could remember little detail of their father's death, the only shared memory being of a large black horse drawing a black hearse into their yard.

As a young widow, Annie Egan faced into a life of hardship and difficulty. The main challenge was to hold onto the scrap of land they owned, against the malign wishes of those who considered that it wasn't right for a woman to own land, much less a widow. Annie persevered and survived and, in the process, managed somehow, to instill in her children a kindness and compassion that endured.

As children, they went to school in Annagh, a place where frequent beatings were regarded as an aid to education. Saturday morning attendance was compulsory for religious class. Once, Danny missed Saturday morning school and, in the early afternoon, the priest arrived into their yard, astride a large palomino horse, and, having dismounted, proceeded to take the horsewhip to Danny for his impertinence. Having survived national school Mary Bridget worked for a while as a domestic help in the locality and Danny worked for a time at Derrinsallow mill which, at that time, had the distinction of generating electricity which supplied parts of Birr. Their farm at that time was a small holding but, over the years, they were allotted parcels of land by the Land Commission, gradually increasing their holding to the status of a viable farm. Danny didn't have a father to teach him the skills of farming but he watched how others did it, and learned. His love and respect for animals made him a natural farmer. While the farming was varied, a large part of the

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land was devoted to tillage. Since Danny never learned to drive, the work was almost all carried out without the aid of machinery. The engine on the farm was Sally, a beautiful and gentle draught mare. She was his pride and joy. She ploughed, harrowed, opened furrows, willingly put her shoulders to any task asked of her. Her dedication was rewarded with kindness. When Sally was almost ready to foal, Danny spent the nights in the stable with her. He named her foal Paddy and, in due course, Paddy joined Sally in harness to till and cultivate the land. A little further down the social scale was Ned, the donkey, who accepted the responsibilities of carriage, transporting everything from turf to spuds to dung in a spirit of un-enthusiastic humility.



**Dan with Ned, the donkey**

Looking back, the memories are like poetry. Taking the reins of two horses over my shoulders, turning them off the headland and facing them down the field to plough another long furrow, with Danny walking watchfully by my side; sheltering under a hedge as another April shower passed through, the horses getting the worst of it, and the scent and crackle as Danny put a match to his freshly filled pipe; hot summers days on the bog, making myself dizzy blowing at a twig fire to boil the kettle; the warmth of a still summer day at noon, and the postman cycling down the laneway, red-faced from the heat. Whatever the news, courtesy prevailed and he would invariably accept the invitation to a bottle of stout, leaving his bicycle propped against the porch wall to sit at the kitchen table in his dark heavy uniform, a warm glass of Guinness in his hand, in a little respite from the sun; my lack of faith in the laborious winding of a wooden churn full of sloshing cream, despite the encouragement of Mary Bridget, and my astonishment when it suddenly began to turn to butter; Danny sharpening the blade of the scythe on a summers evening, anticipating the backbreaking corn-cutting day to follow; the arrival of the threshing machine into the yard, and the throng of willing helpers, friends and neighbours, to see the harvest safely home. It wasn't all men's work, as Mary Bridget faced the challenge of feeding a neighbourhood of hungry men in relays, making sure there was enough stout

for the thirsty.

For me, another summer went by and then I was dispatched off to boarding school to join my brother. Inevitably the contact with Danny and Mary Bridget slackened and my visits became occasional. Time passed and the next time I met them was at the funeral of my brother James, who had died following an accident at the age of 23. When I visited again, maybe a year later, there was the same welcome and, now that I was older, a generous measure of whiskey. During these years they made the happy discovery that they had Egan relatives in America, one of whom, Monsignor Jack Egan, was a highly respected civil rights activist who had, in his time marched alongside Martin Luther King. This discovery, and the subsequent visits by Fr. Jack and cousins, was a source of great joy and pride for them.

Then the circle began to join again. Having completed my studies, I returned to Birr and we began to re-establish our relationship. When we bought from them the site for our house, Mary Bridget's delighted anticipation was "The kiddies will be coming across the fields to see us". For her, it came to pass, though sadly not for Danny, who died before we began to build. Mary Bridget found the loss and loneliness difficult but had the comfort and help of many neighbours, friends and relatives. The "kiddies" provided her with somebody to fuss over after their little treks across the fields. She also had the valuable kinship and reciprocated affinity with her American cousins and one of the highlights of her life was to attend the wedding of a relative in Chicago. Her latter days were darkened by illness but, true to her character she maintained her faith and her philosophical outlook to the end. Mary Bridget died in 2005 at the age of 83.



**Mary Bridget and 'The Kiddies'**

On the plot of ground where we now live, I had the experience of cultivating and harvesting land using methods and implements which had changed little in the previous hundred years. I'm sure, while I was busy with all of that, I must have missed out on something important at school but I'm also equally sure that the schooling forgone was little loss compared to the treasure of my memories of Danny and Mary Bridget Egan.

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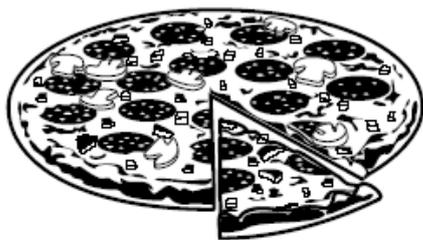
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## NEW GARDA SUPERINTENDENT FOR BIRR

July, 2012 saw the appointment of Superintendent Sarah Meyler (*pictured right*) as District Officer for the Birr Garda District, replacing Superintendent David Kavanagh on the occasion of his retirement. Superintendent Meyler transferred from the Garda College in Templemore, in her capacity as head of Training & Administration there. Superintendent Meyler assumes responsibility for Birr (District Headquarters), Shinrone, Kinnitty, Kilcormac, Ferbane, Cloghan, Banagher and Shannonbridge Garda Stations. Lorrha Station, formerly attached to Birr District, is now part of Nenagh District. Superintendent Meyler is looking forward to a very successful and rewarding tenure at Birr. She sends best wishes to the following Gardaí who have been transferred over the last number of months; Inspector Aidan Farrelly transferred on Promotion to Bailieboro. Garda Kieran Staed transferred from Birr to Sligo Station. Garda Ed Meany transferred from Birr to Anglesea Street Station in Cork. From the outside looking in, it would appear that there has been little change to Birr Station over the last number of years. The building remains the same, the patrol cars still have their markings and sirens and Gardaí are observed going about their daily duties. But, from an inside perspective, change is continuous and unrelenting, nothing to be feared though, just inevitable progress. A subtle indication of personnel change is truly evident when one stumbles upon a photograph like the one displayed below. The photograph depicts Assistant Commissioner O'Toole's Inspection at Birr Garda Station almost 20 years ago. Only five members remain serving. In a copy of the First Commissioner's Inspection report of

Kilcormac Garda Station on the 26th November, 1924, Commissioner Eoin O'Duffy, at the time, makes reference to the conditions of the Station, including cooking on a small fire. This situation would have been mirrored in many Rural Stations all over the country during that period. Talk of cooking on a small fire in the Public Office or Day Room wouldn't exactly cut it nowadays. Today, all the necessary tools and technologies are available, either in situ or by deployment of Specialist Units - From Scenes of Crime Examiners, Forensic Laboratories, Emergency Response Units, Air Support Units to the humble Garda who will sit at your kitchen table and talk GAA.

All in all, the faces of those who provide a Policing Service in Birr may change as time progresses but the inherent goal of each Member of An Garda Síochána is to give of their best and to provide an efficient and professional service to our community. Superintendent Meyler is confident that the mutual spirit of co-operation that exists in the community will continue long into the future.



**Birr District Personnel - A/C's Visit Circa 1993**

*Back Row (L to R): O. Duggan, C. Donovan, John McHugh, P. Derrivan, J. Hussey, J. Martin, D. Sheehy, B. Ward, W. Lowry, M. Keogh, K. Egan, C.J. Walsh, J. Madden, N. Lowry, M. Ashe.*

*Middle Row: L. Allen, J. Hogan, R. Campbell, P. Costelloe, D. Lawlor, T. McGee, T. King, A. Corcoran, D. Kavanagh, J. Wimms, G.P. Tierney, P. Forrestal, J. Muldoon.*

*Front Row: T. Coen, P. Kelly, J. Gibbons, B. Garvey, P.J. Colleran, A/Comm O'Toole, Inspector, M. Doran, J. Slattery, D. Goode, P. Sullivan, F. Ryan*



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## LIFE LESSONS

By Tom Foley

In this reflection, I try to give a sense of St. Brendan's Community School as a learning community and one that I have been happy to be part of for twenty-five years. I also sketch some features of the changing pattern of the educational landscape during my time there.

My first employment in a school was in a private boarding school in the mid-1970's as a maintenance man or caretaker. I learned there that non-teaching staff have angles of observation that allow them to see and understand things that, if recognised by the school, can be of benefit to the welfare and progress of students. However, schools then, like most institutions of the past, were structured like pyramids – with all authority and decision-making concentrated “at the top”. The points of view of people like me “at the bottom” were not relevant. To get a sense of what a school is one must try to see it through as many eyes as possible, through the eyes of both teaching and non-teaching staff, the eyes of parents and particularly through the eyes of students.

My professional education about schools, teaching and learning began in earnest with my first teaching position, for one year from September 1977, in Dunlavin Vocational School, Co. Wicklow. This was followed by seven stimulating years on the staff of Kilcormac Vocational School with its dynamic Principal, John Keane. I quickly found that teaching for me was not just a job. I had experienced plenty of “jobs” in the past. I found teaching to be a way of life.

A person's own experience of being a child in school permanently colours judgement and opinions about education later on in life. A child has little or no idea of the thinking behind what goes on in class, of the way things are done in the school, or of how the wider world of politics, economics, values and philosophies shapes the way schools are at that point in time. As a teacher it is useful to reflect on such matters so as to understand the forces that shape educational policy and influence what we teach and how we do it. To a child or young adult however, it is simply the teacher who makes the experience what it is.

For example, over fifty years ago when I was a pupil in third class in a very large primary school in a working-class suburb of Dublin, my teacher was an enthusiastic, kind, good-humoured, even-tempered man. He had a very inclusive classroom, in which over fifty boys were kept involved in learning and in which he created ways for the better able students to willingly help those less able. He was teaching us many things – not just the subjects on the

curriculum but also ways of becoming better people, the value of a work ethic, of compassion and of patience.

We sensed that other classes were under tight control, their lessons were less interesting, there was much less active participation in the class and they seemed to fear their teachers. What we all had in common though, was

that none of us had any idea of the economic and ideological reasons for huge classes, the historical reasons for corporal punishment or the political reasons for how curriculum was designed. We were also ignorant of the fact that, four years down the line, free secondary education would be introduced by Donagh O'Malley, Minister for Education. Even though the fees for secondary education now seem quite small, many working-class families back then found it difficult to consider or impossible to afford.

There was no Vocational School, with its alternative learning pathway in the area and so, many of my classmates at the time would probably have been looking for some kind of job after primary school had it not been for the introduction of free education.

Of course there were parents then, as there are now, who considered food for the mind and spirit (education) at least as important as food for the body. Such parents, including my own, valued education as essential for their children and put their children's welfare and progress first and did not even consider their own comfort.

The arrival of free education in 1967 triggered many changes. Some changes happened immediately and were obvious. The need for other changes was not recognised fully for many years. Although there was a massive increase in the school-going population at second-level, followed by an increase in school building and in the numbers of teachers, the curriculum remained pretty much the same, narrowly academic, mix of subjects. It took until the 1980's for a proper analysis to show that 20% of students nationally were not achieving even five passes in the Leaving Cert. It was clear that the curriculum did not suit the aptitudes, talents and learning styles of many unfortunate students.

When I was appointed Deputy Principal of St. Brendan's in 1986, my first impressions of the staff were formed that summer. Over thirty of the staff had voluntarily committed two weeks of their holiday to preparing to introduce a new senior cycle programme in the school that September. I met my new colleagues on a residential training course in Dungarvan. The new programme was called Senior Certificate and was designed to offer students a course that



addressed many of the shortcomings of the traditional Leaving Certificate. It was student-centred, practical, and relevant to the lives of students, used active-learning methods and was assessed in a structured way during the two-year course rather than in a one-chance-only final exam. This excellent course was later mainstreamed nationally as the Leaving Certificate Applied. A number of schools were to pilot both programmes through the development stages and St. Brendan's was one of these schools.

Recognition of the educational needs of all students in a rapidly-changing world has led to profound curriculum review at primary and second-level and the introduction of programmes such as Transition Year; Social, Personal and Health Education; Civic, Social and Political Education, and a range of vocational, personal safety, and welfare programmes. All of this has meant that schools, as organisations and teachers themselves, have had to consistently learn anew and master a succession of changes in what is taught and how to teach it. The old emphasis on controlling the students has given way to the fostering of their willing participation in education. Old-style authority and top-down decision-making has been succeeded by more shared thinking, shared leadership, consultation and collaboration among staff, students and parents. Since St. Brendan's opened in 1980, it has been at the leading edge of such changes, with individual teachers and subject departments piloting new developments either in partnership with the Department of Education and Science or as internal innovations in the school. St. Brendan's, earlier than most schools, also developed a strong commitment to Pastoral Care of the individual student and developed structures to implement it.

A constant theme of my time in Education has been, and remains 'change'. The second element of constancy that emerges from my time relates to the staff of St. Brendan's. My first impressions have lasted to this day. The idealism, energy, collegiality, generosity with time and creativity that the staff brings to the student's experience of education are ever-present.

The third constant is the nature of the students of St. Brendan's and of young people in general. It has been said to me regularly over time that young people present more difficulties and challenges now than in the past but the essential good nature of young people remains as it always has been. They bloom under kind regard and encouragement but grow stunted and thorny from neglect and disrespect.

We live in an era of revolutionary media change, in which young people are most vulnerable and may be exposed to models of behaviour and to influences that are inappropriate, unhealthy and even dangerous. They need the time, the attention and the wholesome guidance of adults now more than ever. The students of St. Brendan's,

in my experience, have enormous generosity, a great sense of justice and fair play, loyalty to sound values and a lively sense of fun and humour.

There is a fourth constant that stands clear in my reflections amidst the changes and that is the unchanging commitment of parents to the development of the school. From 1980 until the present day, the work of the Parents' Association has been exemplary. Thanks to the excellent working relationship between Parents, Staff and benevolent friends of the school, the students of St. Brendan's enjoy a self-contained campus with wonderful facilities appropriate to their educational needs. Indeed, in the early 90's, because of such a community relationship St. Brendan's even acquired stewardship of a unique learning environment of 74 acres of bogland at Killaun.

The camaraderie, the enthusiasm and energy that are generated around so much great work on many fine projects for the school are always truly memorable and enriching for those who get involved.

As Deputy Principal, I had the unfailing support of Brother Denis until I was appointed Principal upon his retirement in 1997. He continued to be a priceless mentor to me and benefactor to the school ever since. While I was Acting Principal during 1993-1994, when Brother Denis was on a year's sabbatical, Michael Quealy was my able and supportive Deputy. The collective wisdom of the Board of Management has always been a consistent source of strength and guidance. Furthermore, during my twenty five years, I came to appreciate more and more the work of the school's Administrative Staff, who are always kind and responsive to the students. They are courteous, professional and highly effective across an extraordinary range of daily tasks.

Two of these former colleagues are now Principal and Deputy Principal. Mrs. Ming Loughnane, now Principal, was my Deputy from 1997 and brought boundless energy and dedication to her role. Mrs. Loughnane, as Principal, and Mr. Brian Hensey as Deputy bring rich and varied experience to their roles in the school.

The most important personal constant for me during all this time has been the inspiration provided by my children and the moral and emotional support of my wife, Christina.

It has been a privilege to have worked and learned with the students, staff and parents of St. Brendan's, and with the Principals of all the Primary schools. The Community School is, and has been since its foundation, a vibrant and energising learning environment. Everyone who works there brings something special to it. Most important of all, of course, are the students, each of whom brings a unique and individual goodness.

(Footnote: My teacher in third class was Mr. Tim Bergin. I encountered him again many years later when, in my role as Deputy Principal of St. Brendan's, I met him in his role as Principal of Rathcabbin National School.)

## 50 YEARS - TIME TO CELEBRATE

By Beverley Jones (nee Ogle)

**B**y the time you are reading this, I will have achieved the milestone of my 50th birthday in September 2012. Happy memories are bought back to me whilst I sit typing this at the bar in Dooly's Hotel in Emmet Square. My name is Beverley Jones (nee Ogle) and I live in Surrey in England. My parents are Liam Ogle from Rathcabbin, a friendly, gentle man with lots of stories to tell, and Eileen Ogle (nee Coolahan) from High Street, Birr. Many of you will know her friendly smile and have enjoyed a good chat with her over the years.

I have been coming to Birr since I was 10 months old either flying or travelling across the Irish Sea with my parents, and I continue to make the journey regularly, thankfully now in a shorter time and with a bit more comfort.

**Beverley, Sonny Ogle and Liam Kennedy in Granny Ogle's Kitchen in Walsh Park**



There were many happy days spent out at Granny Ogle's lodge house in Walsh Park, Rathcabbin, popping into Duffy's Garage next door to get ice-cream from Dinny and, after being out in the fields in the early morning picking mushrooms with Uncle Sonny, bringing them back in for Granny to throw on the range with some butter to eat straightaway off the fork.



**Nanny "Mrs" Coolahan and I out for walk**

Best of all was the freedom of being able to run around outside with all the dogs, chickens and geese. This was so different from life in England.

The majority of my time was spent, however, sitting swinging on the gate outside 27 High Street, Nanny Coolahan's house. From that gate I could watch life go on around me in High Street with neighbours stopping to chat and children coming into "Mrs. Coolahan's" for a drink and some sweets. All the

front doors were always left open so I was always in and out of the neighbours too and remember fondly sitting in Mrs. Hennessy's kitchen with her and Eileen (Hynes) or running in to see Gertie Butler, who lived next door to Nanny and still lives there now. On Sundays we would get dressed up for Mass and be treated to an ice-cream on the way home. My mum and Eileen Hynes (*pictured above right*) have been lifelong friends and, when we visit, there is always time to see Eileen and her family. Nanny Coolahan



loved having her family around her and everyone was always welcomed with tea and freshly-baked soda bread! Oh, and who could forget having to run up and down the hill to Pilkingtons or

Haslams for messages?

We came over to Birr every year for our six week holiday.

The family grew with the arrival of my two sisters, Allison & Lisa. One year we came back with an addition to our family, my cousin Margaret who came to live with us in England – so now there were five women in the house, but my dad loved having us all around and the fuss we made over him.



**My cousin John Coolahan and I**

Later on, when I was a little older, I was allowed to go off to the Marian Hall or the County Arms to the disco and the nights were always ended with a trip to 'TONY'S', the chipper. When I walk in there now it feels like I have stepped back in time! Though sadly both my grandparents are no longer alive, I still feel a connection with Birr and Rathcabbin as I still have lots of family and friends living in Offaly and Tipperary.



**Liam and Eileen Ogle on their 50<sup>th</sup> Wedding Anniversary**

50 seems to be a special number in our family, as my parents celebrated their 50th Wedding Anniversary in 2010. I am sharing the photo above of my much loved parents, Liam and Eileen, on their Golden Wedding Anniversary.

Though this story is a little bit about me, I just wanted to let my parents know how much their heritage and history means to me but, more importantly, how much I love them.

With love, Beverley Jones (Nee Ogle).

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## BIRR'S THEATRICAL TRADITION – A GUIDED TOUR

By Geoff Oakley

Is everybody here? Right. Keep your brollies handy in case it rains. In a few moments we will be off on a mini-tour of some of the sites and buildings associated with the development of a tradition which surely gives our town a unique place in the theatrical history of Ireland.

Birr does not have any great forum in which presentations have been staged continuously down through the ages. There is no place that one can enter, as one would enter the fine stone amphitheatres of Greece or of ancient Troy and sense the presence of actors and audiences dead, and gone these 2,000 years or more. What it does have, however, is a great variety of sites and buildings, big and small, which have provided venues for a wide range of public entertainments.

We are starting our tour in Emmet Square, which was known as Cumberland Square until a statue honouring the man known as 'The Bloody Duke' was removed for safety reasons (or boo-ed off the stage) in 1915, leaving a vacancy on his pillar which has never been filled. The building in the corner just behind us was once a Concert Hall – and indeed could be categorised as the town's first opera house because Dame Nellie Melba, the legendary operatic soprano, sang here once upon a time. Since then, it has featured, on and off, as the venue for a variety of entertainments.

Off we go, heading round the corner into Duke Street / O'Connell Street, to see the location of the first professional theatre in the town. Yes, you heard right. Birr had a professional theatre way back in the early 1800s. We know that because Harry Harte, a well-known Birr man of more recent times, had a map of the town drawn by historian Thomas L. Cooke and dated 1822, on which a building just to the West of Main Street, was clearly marked 'Theatre'. We are half-way there now. That's Connaught Street to our left and to our right is Church Street, location of another landmark, the old Banba Hall. We carry on up Main Street in search of this site. The precise location is now shrouded in the midst of history but it was in a two-storey stone building somewhere to the rear of Lorenzo's Hair Salon. It was this building that once rang to the applause of delighted audiences. The genuine original Tom Thumb appeared here and a family called Pike was running a variety of entertainments in the theatre around the middle of the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

The professional theatre – like professional sport in the world of today – provides wonderful entertainment for the general public. Of at least equal importance, however, is the way in which it can inspire its audiences or spectators to get involved in similar activities on a purely amateur basis, with life-enriching results for themselves and their communities. Amateur theatricals of one sort or another

certainly were flourishing in Birr more than 150 years ago. Even if there were no physical or documentary proof, the existence of a well-established and sophisticated theatrical tradition could be deduced from the amazingly advanced design of the Oxmantown Hall, built in the late 1880s. That is our next port of call. To get there, we will head back up Main Street, on through the Square, into Emmet Street, turning left into Oxmantown Mall. Here we will pause for a few moments to admire the sheer beauty of the Mall itself – a broad tree-lined thoroughfare stretching between St. Brendan's C. of I. and the imposing entrance to Birr Castle. This provides just one of many reminders of how lucky Birr has been in its traditional 'landlords', the Rosse family!

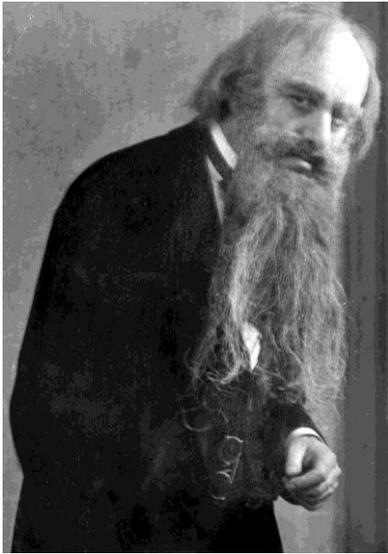


Now, here is the hall. Very extensive renovations have been carried out to the interior and it has been renamed as the Birr Theatre and Arts Centre but the exterior remains virtually unchanged. It certainly is the single most iconic building on our trail because of the way in which it links the past with the present – and we will be back here again later to have a peek into the future!

In the decades following its construction, the Oxmantown Hall became the headquarters of dramatic presentations in Birr. It was a Church of Ireland hall, but it was made available to the community in general and playgoers enjoyed presentations by the C.Y.M.S. group, as well as the Y.M.C.A. In Y.M.C.A. circles, the old Cam-Cor Coons, a Negro Minstrel group, were succeeded by the Drama Group, formed by a curate with a talent for production, Rev. J.E.C. Lawlor. Most of the plays staged around the 1920s were by Irish dramatists but the Y.M.C.A. also tried their hand at Shakespeare with a production of 'The Merchant of Venice'.

The C.Y.M.S. group had a number of incarnations, including one spearheaded by Father Patrick Gaynor which specialised in rebel plays with marvellous titles like 'The Red Redeeming Dawn'.

It was from these various societies that there emerged the next major peak in Birr's theatrical history – The Little Theatre – because attendance at their productions played a big part in fostering a love of drama in a young local man, Jimmy Fanning, owner / Editor of the Midland Tribune. 'We used to go along to see the Y.M.C.A plays' he recalled later, 'and we sat waiting for Jim Austin to come on!' The C.Y.M.S. also had a marvellous group of character actors, including Aggie Carroll, Lar Bowe, Jim Marks and Joe Hernon. For Jimmy Fanning, there was inspiration in the very thought of getting these people on the same stage as Jim Austin.



**Jim Austin,**  
a star of the Little  
Theatre, played the  
title in the  
production of Lady  
Longford's play  
Mr. Jiggins.

Time now to go in search of the building which was to help give Birr such a prominent place on the theatrical map of Ireland. We retrace our steps to the former Offaly Chronicle premises in Emmet Street where the inaugural meeting of the Birr Little Theatre Players was held in February 1934. It was a pretty revolutionary gathering for those pre-cumenical days, when so many activities were run on strictly sectarian lines. An attendance of 41 people heard Jimmy Fanning put forward his ideas – and promptly elected him as President and Director. Jim Pennefather (subsequently to become Canon Pennefather, a Church of Ireland clergyman) was appointed Secretary.

Right from the start, the new group had plans for developing their own 'Little Theatre' in the rooms above the Chronicle printing works but financing was needed, so it was in the Oxmantown Hall that they made their debut on April 12<sup>th</sup> 1934 with a three-act comedy called 'The Big Sweep'. A profit of £19 on a turnover of £34 was an encouraging start and all through that long hot summer, willing volunteers laboured at transforming their dream into reality. Opening night in the new premises was November 14<sup>th</sup>, 1934, when the curtain went up on 'Vigil', a one act play by A.P. Fanning, (brother of the Producer, Jimmy Fanning), which had been staged already in Dublin's Abbey Theatre. 'Cartney and Kevney', a play by George Shiels, was the main event. The ground-breaking



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nature of the enterprise was indicated by the coverage given by the National press. There was even a leading article in 'The Irish Times' to welcome the birth of the new theatre! Present for the occasion was playwright T.C. Murray, who warned all concerned of the difficulties they would face in keeping the theatre going after the first flush of enthusiasm. Such projects, he said, tended to lack staying power. In the end, perhaps, his fears were to prove justified. But not for a good while yet.

Birr Little Theatre survived what Mr. Murray had viewed as the danger period. And it survived the Second World War – with a reduction in the number of annual productions but with the addition of special shows for the troops in Templemore and Athlone. It stayed, in fact, for 14 years and it earned Birr national and international recognition. The Theatre received lengthy coverage in 'The Manchester Guardian' and other leading newspapers .... It was linked with the Abbey Theatre and the Gate Theatre in a Bell magazine article that aroused the jealousy of many other amateur groups! Yes, those were exciting times for everyone involved. Everything they did was 'news'! At show after show there was acclamation for the players, and for the Producer, Jimmy Fanning, whose talent for lighting was noted specifically. Some of the greatest names in the Irish theatre were pleased to be associated with this amateur group with the professional approach. Ria Mooney was guest star in the first production of 'The Light of Ulster' by David Sears; Michael MacLiammoir designed the sets. And as well as being outstanding artistic successes, virtually all productions showed a profit at the box-office.

But, of course, there were problems. And controversies! Undoubtedly the most traumatic experience of the early years was in December of 1938 when production of Paul Vincent Carroll's 'Shadow and Substance' was cancelled hours before the curtain was due to rise on opening night. 'Play withdrawn at request of local clergy' is the cryptic note in the accounts book, under notation of a loss of £13.10.9d. Undeterred, the Players were back in business by the end of January with Lennox Robinson's 'The Far Off Hills'.

Some minor difficulties had their humorous side. For example, there was the complication which threatened to prevent Town Crier Tom Ward from fulfilling his role in publicising one of the productions. Let me read you this letter, carefully preserved by Annie Fanning, mother of Jimmy Fanning:

*'Please, Mr Fanning, let me know if you want the bell rung for the Little Theatre to-night, and if you do, would you oblige me with the loan of 4 shillings to get the bell out of the pawn. You can stop it out of my money when the play is over.'*

A check with the accounts book shows that expenses for bell-ringing ranged from 7s.6d. to 15s. per show.

An interesting development in the 1940s was the setting up of a No. 2 Company, which grew out of a series of drama classes given in the Vocational School by Jimmy Fanning and gave a number of young people their first experience of being on stage.

But the end was nigh. Birr's years of Little Theatrical glory terminated on 18<sup>th</sup> December, 1947 when the curtain fell for the last time on a magnificent production of 'Ill Met by Moonlight', starring Jim Austin and Isabel Fanning. Ironically, takings for this show were an all-time high. Receipts totalled over £167.

Demise of The Little Theatre was a matter of business necessity for founder Jimmy Fanning, who wished to transfer the family newspaper works, 'The Midland Tribune', to the 'Offaly Chronicle' premises which he had recently acquired. And sadly, the accommodation occupied by the theatre was needed for machinery and cases of type. Could another venue have been found? Possibly, but in the event, no alternative accommodation was secured and Birr found itself without either its famous theatre or a drama group. One of these deficiencies was filled fairly soon – in duplicate. Establishment of the Birr Drama Group brought together most of the ex-members of the Little Theatre Players and the C.Y.M.S. Drama Group was revived once again. The former staged several fine shows, including 'Dial M. for Murder', 'Blythe Spirit' and 'Shop at Sly Corner'. For the C.Y.M.S. group, Joe Herson encored the tremendous interpretation of Owen Keegan in 'Autumn Fire' which had been one of the most outstanding performances in the Little Theatre years. Sadly, neither of these groups survived for long but some people never lost heart and January 1955 brought a really big occasion for the Parish and the town, with the opening of the magnificent Marian Hall. It is located in William Street and it will be the next stop on our tour.



Here we are. This is the Marian Hall. It is looking very well and it has been providing a fine venue for a very wide range of activities for more than half a century. At the start, the energetic P.P., Dean Quinn, identified the vacuum left by loss of the dramatic

societies and, in conjunction with Father Martin Ryan, C.C., he called a meeting at which a new group, 'Birr Stage Guild', was brought into being. Dr. John Lucey was appointed as Chairman, Jimmy Fanning as Director of Productions, and J.F. (Bud) Burke as Secretary. Also very much involved were Jimmy Fanning's wife, Isabel, and Noel Reidy.

This truly was the start of something big but it's time now for a lunch break. We'll see you all back here in one hour and one year – and on the same page of the Birr Review, 2013. We can assure you that the best is yet to come!



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## FRANK MASTERSON-MASTER PRINTER

By Michael Donegan

Although it is many years since Frank Masterson called Dublin City his home, his accent is still coloured with the distinctive lilt of its streets. He was born in 1936 in St. Anthony's Lane just behind Temple Street Hospital and went to school first, to the nuns in Gardiner Street and, after his first communion to the Christian Brothers in St. Canice's Primary School near Croke Park. He wasn't a great fan of the classroom, with its tedium and terror, so he mitched quite a lot. His favourite mitching haunt was the seashore of Dollymount Strand, amusing himself with whatever debris the sea flung up on the beach. The Dublin streets were the natural playground of all the children in the area. The girls chalked the pavements and played hopscotch with a sand-filled shoe polish tin while the boys played marbles or cowboys and Indians through the streets. At night, Frank and his pals congregated under the streetlamps to read and swap comics such as 'The Hotspur', 'The Bean' or 'The Dandy'. The Hotspur was Frank's favourite, as it had more written stories than the others had. The heavy clip-clop of horses' hooves was a much more familiar sound than that of engines, as cars were very scarce. There were seven stables in the lane behind Frank's house. These housed the horses of the jarveys who plied their trade with their black cabs and high hackneys on the city streets. Going to the pictures was a big part of his childhood. For four old pennies he could get into a cinema such as the Roxy at the Rotunda at the top of O'Connell Street or even the Plaza or the Tivoli in Francis Street for the 2.30 p.m. showing. Those four pennies bought a ticket of dreams to a world where Hop-a-long Cassidy or Roy Rogers held sway, where herds of Buffalo ran amok on the plains and stagecoaches lurched and swayed over the dusty trail just yards ahead of the galloping ponies of the redskin hoards. Frank learned how to sink low in the seat to evade the flashlight beam of the usherette in the hope of 'staying in' for the follow-on programme and maybe seeing the show a second time. All the kids were mad about cowboy films and re-enacted the feats of their heroes in the fantasy of their play but the Sunday afternoon romantic films were a dead duck as far as they were concerned.

Childhood had a shorter span for a boy in 1940's Ireland than today. In 1948, at the age of 13, Frank took the first steps into the world of the working man. Employment of any description was scarce but, through a contact of his brother, he got a job with a printer in Amiens Street. The pay was 7/6 per week. At first his job was to keep the



workshop clean and orderly but soon he was given more responsibility and began to pick up the routines and tricks of the printer's trade. His boss was very skilled and Frank was a fast learner. One of the specialties of the house was the production of highly finished 'staying at home' cards for the posh ladies of Dublin. The lettering was very ornate and often raised above the card surface. Frank's job was to compose the layout and content of the cards. He had boxes of letters from which he made up the words. His years of comic reading stood to him as he was an excellent speller. Soon he was getting the knack of setting the type upside down and visualizing it the right way up on the page.

After two years, the owner sold the business and went back to a job in the print business in Birmingham where he had originally come from. He saw Frank's potential and wanted him to go back with him but Frank's mother felt he was too young. The next owner of the business, a Mr. Casey, took Frank on, however, and he moved to his printing works in Leeson Street. All the time he was gaining experience and also a reputation as a good and competent worker. After two more years he moved employment again. This time the wages went up to £2-10-00 per week. Frank was living at home and gave his mother half his wages each week. He wanted to get a union card so that he would get better pay and conditions and have more opportunities for employment as he was 18 years of age by now. He decided that, as it was so difficult to do this in Dublin, he would have to go to England to get a suitable position. He had two friends who had emigrated to London as bricklayers and he decided to give in his notice and go over to them.

Armed only with a letter of reference from his employer and a few meagre pounds, he took the Dun Laoghaire mail boat to Hollyhead and the train from there to London. His mates met him at Euston station. They were in bad shape because they had no work, due to a heavy fall of snow. Between supporting himself and his friends, his few pounds were almost gone by the time he saw an advertisement for 'an improver printer'. The pay was to be £5-0-0 but his bed and board was costing £2-14-0 so there wasn't going to be a lot left. His new employer was a decent man and quickly realised Frank's worth so, by the second week Frank was earning £12. He stayed with him for nearly six years but, as it was not unionised, he still had no union card. He then moved into a bigger printing works called The Bridgewater Press in the centre of London. He was promoted to a position of foreman over all the machines. He was the only Irishman there and, although they all called him 'Paddy', his reputation and expertise meant that his fellow workers treated him with a lot of respect. This firm was in turn sold on and Frank approached the new owner about the union

card. As a result, the entire operation became unionised and he at last got his card.

Frank spent 13 years living in digs all over London. Sometimes the accommodation was very poor and he remembers seeing signs in some boarding house windows saying 'No Dogs or Irish'. Social life mainly centred on the Galtymore ballroom in Cricklewood. The Irish congregated there as if it was home from home. He fell in love with a nurse from Lisdoonvarna who was now working in a pub he used to visit. The first time he asked her to marry him she asked him how much he had in the bank. He told her he had £9. She told him to come back when he had £1,000. A year later he asked her again and she enquired how much had he now. He told her he had £19. She replied 'near enough' and they were married in Kilburn on St. Patrick's Day, 1955. They were very badly off and often went to the snooker hall because it was warm there and they could drink cups of tea at a penny a cup. By scrimping and scraping, they eventually managed to get together a deposit for a home of their own in Ilford. As their family of three boys and a girl came along and began to grow up they decided in 1977 to move back to Ireland. They moved back to the Limerick area as Frank felt it might be a good place to find work because of the Shannon Industrial Zone but after three months he was still unemployed. He was told by one prospective employer that although he had all the

qualifications and skills required, at 41 years of age, he was too old. He saw an advertisement for a job on a three month trial basis at the Midland Tribune Office in Birr and applied and got the job. He was soon appointed production manager and spent seven happy years working there. The Tribune operation had spread into more general printing work as well as producing the weekly paper and Frank had all the skills required to take on any work. Under his management the Tribune was soon hitting the street on Wednesdays, a day ahead of time. He has very fond memories of working there with dedicated workers like the late Johnny McDermott and Frank McGilton, Sean Tait and Joe Delaney, all R.I.P.

In 1984 Frank decided to start his own printing business. He was living in Coolderry and with the help of his sons he was soon taking in lots of work from the surrounding area. Although the business thrived, due to failing health, Frank decided to retire for good in 1993. Sadly his wife Teresa died 15 years ago and he has since moved in to live in Birr. Frank begins his day with 7.30 a.m. mass in St. Brendan's church and he loves to meet and swap stories with his many friends as he makes his way around town. His very positive outlook is reflected in his wry turn of phrase and that keen 'Dub' wit first honed on the cobbled streets of his childhood all those years ago.

## THE GATHERING IRELAND 2013

The Gathering Ireland 2013 is a national tourism initiative launched in 2012 by An Taoiseach Enda Kenny. The initial response from Offaly was the setting up of a County Steering Group in early summer 2012 (chaired by Cllr. Peter Ormond), and the organisation of two substantial community meetings on this topic, in September 2012.



The Gathering Ireland 2013 meeting in Birr

***"The Gathering Ireland 2013 is a people's project. It's all about you, your family, your neighbours, your sports club, your school, your place of work – in fact, whatever community or group you belong to – planning special events in 2013 that will highlight what is great about your***

***town and county. The people of Offaly have a great spirit and some wonderful suggestions for Gatherings."***



Many Offaly community projects are now already underway for The Gathering 2013. These include clan gatherings, genealogical projects, school reunions, business invites to international contacts and initiatives where local communities will contact people who have left the country.

***"We're asking everyone in Offaly to get involved in the Gathering in 2013. This is an exciting opportunity for each and every one of us to play our part in showing what is best about our County and our people. We have some great networks and ideas here as to how we can reach out to our friends and loved ones overseas and invite them home next year. 2013 is going to be an incredible year in Ireland and we want Offaly to be part of it."***

Check out [www.thegatheringireland.com](http://www.thegatheringireland.com) for more details, or, for Offaly information, contact the Offaly Gathering 2013 County Co-ordinator at Community Enterprise & Economic Development, Offaly County Council, ph: 0579346829 or e-mail: [thegathering@offalycoco.ie](mailto:thegathering@offalycoco.ie).

## NO ONE REALLY EMIGRATES ANYMORE!



*Mark Wrafter (pictured left) from Birr was in Barcelona when he wrote this. He'll probably be somewhere else by the time you read it.*

They're the whipping boys of Europe, but Ryanair single-handedly eradicated emigration. It makes sense that an Irish

company would solve an Irish problem. No one really emigrates anymore. Take London, it's a fifty minute flight and tickets cost less than four pints of bitter in a Hackney pub. It's harder to get up to Dublin airport, or avoid getting sprung for speeding on the road down to Shannon. These days, the lads come back for the 21<sup>st</sup> parties, the stag dos and the weddings of second cousins. We think nothing of it.

I know an Irish trio from Banagher who got stuck in the Italian city of Ancona because of the volcano in Iceland. Over twitter they arranged for a Serbian chap to drive them overnight to Le Havre for a boat to England. Travel is in our blood. The CEO of Qantas is an Irishman, Alan Joyce. The new British Airways/Iberia combo is run by Willie Walsh. There's Conor McCarthy, the brains behind AirAsia and Jetstar. Michael O'Leary's entity carries the second greatest number of passengers in Europe.

We're in every nook and cranny where a nook or cranny exists. I once saw an Offaly jersey on a street kid in Karol Bagh in New Delhi. There's an Irish lad on the Gili Islands off the coast of Indonesia who puts a sign outside his door whenever Munster is playing in the Heineken Cup, inviting passing Irish to drop in and watch it with him. Back in 1995, there was an Irish lad living in The Hague in the Netherlands who passed the Irish consulate every day and in so-doing stopped to clean the plaque outside with his sleeve. Actually, that was me.

I remember the first time I took a holiday out of Barcelona to another location and the question back home was "Why?" It couldn't be fathomed why someone supposedly "on holidays" would want to take holidays from holidays.

There's a chap from Coolderry, based in Australia, circling the globe by boat at the moment. He makes me envious with his weekly Facebook posts from places I'll never live long enough to visit. We're talking Fiji, Tonga, Tahiti, Bora Bora and places like Papeete and Moorea. He tells me they've crossed 30,000 miles of water at this stage.

Parents in every town across Ireland see their kids going away. The economy is in tatters, there's little work and it rains constantly. Our young have ambition, they're educated and there's no huge barrier to integration into other cultures anymore. It's an easy decision.

Some 50,000 Irish emigrated in 2012, the Guardian told us. Sounds like a lot. But it accounts for 1.1% of the population. It's but a smidgen. Imagine the local shop giving you 1.1% off the price of a pair of trousers, you'd laugh at them! Emigration is a dirty word. It has been cried over. Love has been lost because of it. People have never come back because of it. But 2013 beckons and it needn't be this way anymore.

Look at how the internet is changing things. RTE streams news and sports to all sorts of devices now, even the PlayStation. There's an 82-year-old guy from Dublin here in Barcelona who sups his pints of Guinness nightly with a Stetson on his head, an iPad propped-up on the bar counter and he watches the 9 o'clock news as it happens. He's putting me to shame. Mothers video chat with daughters in Mexico; grandparents see half-Irish/half-Japanese grandkids for the first time gurgling over iPhones; e-mails bounce from metro lines in Canada to clothes lines in Birr in the blink of an eye.

We are probably the most migratory nation on earth and we're living in an age where it's easier to move around than ever before. Borders are down, airfares are cheap and the English language is predominant. Our particular flavour of passport is welcome everywhere.

But good for those who leave our shores, let them take their destiny in their hands, visit wondrous places, meet open-minded and exotic people, gain new experience and learn new things. Return home or not, let them tan their faces in a land where the sun actually shines, where the health care system actually works and where there's more to life than watching X-Factor.

Those that don't come back will be as Irish in 50 years as they are today and they'll spawn a new generation of sons-of-Irish who will look fondly on their country, visit it, live in it, invest in it, talk positively about it.

Frank Bruni's 3,000 word article in the New York Times on October 26, "To Ireland, a Son's Journey Home" is a case in point. Bruni is the 48-year-old chief restaurant critic for that publication and a born and bred New Yorker. In September, he did something he had never done before, he visited Ireland. He did so, he said, in honour of his mother, "in tribute to her, in acknowledgement of the Irish in her background, her blood and mine." In visiting the country, he was doing something his mother, who died 16 years ago, had never managed to do herself. Here, at last, two generations later, a son of this green isle returned and penned the most exquisite piece about Ireland I've ever read. I urge you to seek it out.

Bring on another 50,000 exodus, I say, for there are opportunities in crises, and it's only then you truly value what you have: your education, your health, your voice, your intelligence, and your long-suppressed desire for adventure. It's a changing world, take your place in it!

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## CARRYING THE OLYMPIC TORCH

By Neil Fallon

**G**rowing up in Birr and learning that the railway station closed on the 1<sup>st</sup> January 1963, little did I think that I would end up driving trains for a living, as it was never an option when taking career guidance at St. Brendan's Community School, all those years ago. My years in Birr ambled slowly by, with time spent on Mill Island playing football and exploring the old mill, playing rugby for the Black and Greens and regular trips to the log cabin in the Slieve Bloom Mountains with the Scouts. The peace and tranquility I encountered up there is a far cry from the hustle and bustle of life on the underground trains of the District Line, driving in the rush hour and having up to 1,200 people crammed on the train. I remember my older brother coming home from London with an underground map. At the time, having only the train system in Ireland to compare it to, I couldn't figure out how a city could need such a system of



Neil with the Olympic Torch

transport. Little did I think that years later, I would be employed to drive trains on that system for a living. My favourite memory of the Olympic flame was when Muhammad Ali lit the flame in Atlanta in 1996 and, when we heard that the Olympic flame was going to be coming onto the underground for a trip, it caused much excitement at work. Workers from different lines on the underground can be quite territorial, so when the District Line was chosen, we were very proud. My manager called me into his office and told me that I had been chosen to drive the train that would carry the flame. I had to keep quiet about it due to security risks. With the build-up to

the Olympics on the television and in the papers, the enormity of the task I was chosen for started to sink in. The personal stories of the people that had carried the flame from Athens to London were being shown on the news on a daily basis and now I had been chosen to play a part in the flame's journey for the 2012 Olympics. The day itself finally came and I picked up the train from the depot, collected the flame in Wimbledon and drove it one stop to Wimbledon Park where the media were waiting. Then it was taken to a special breakfast reception. Despite the surreal feeling this had left me with, I continued with my normal days work.



Neil beside the Olympic train

I had played my part in the journey of the Olympic flame and now life was back to normal. Still, a memory that I never thought I would have will remain with me forever. I, Neil Fallon from Birr, Co. Offaly have contributed to the transportation of the Olympic Flame for the 2012 London Olympics. I was the only London Underground train driver to have that honour and I am sure that I will describe that memory to my grandkids over and over again!

### Community Games Committee 1992

Back Row: David Lynskey,  
Noel Coughlan, Pat O'Gorman,  
Martin Spillane, Junior Callaghan,  
John Gleeson

Front Row: Lucy O'Grady, Mary O'Grady,  
Laura Brown, Catherine Fanneran,  
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## MAGIC MEMORIES - BIRR GAA CLUB THROUGH THE LENS



On October 29th Uachtaran Cumann Luthchleas Gael Liam O'Neill performed the official launch of a new book and DVD entitled "Magic Memories - Birr GAA Club Through the Lens" and earlier that evening unveiled a memorial plaque commemorating the late Aidan 'Boo' Rosney. "Magic Memories - Birr GAA Club Through the Lens" is a comprehensive 240-

page historical publication which features more than 330 photographs and 50,000 words recounting the club's many successes and it was published to coincide with the centenary of Birr's first Offaly senior hurling championship title triumph in 1912.

The book and DVD was the brainchild of Martin McCarthy, who himself captained Birr minor hurlers to county glory back in 1979, and he brought together a committee that included Liz Kennedy (secretary), Gary Cahill & Herbert Hennessy (treasurers), Alan Walsh (PRO), Patrick 'Junior' O'Callaghan, Mick Spain and Cllr. Tony McLoughlin.

The book incorporates eleven chapters, covering every era of the club from 1884 onwards and the 'For The Record' statistical chapter includes facts, dates and figures from Birr's 'A' championship triumphs in hurling and Gaelic football. There is also a chapter recounting the massive contribution of the Presentation Brothers to Birr entitled 'Nurturing Future Generations'. The 'Dual Stars' that kept Gaelic football alive in the club are also remembered.

In conjunction with the book which retails at €10, a DVD also entitled "Magic Memories – Birr GAA Through The Lens" was produced by Gary Hctor of Hello Camera. The DVD features interviews with All-Ireland club winning captains Johnny Pilkington, Joe Errity and Simon Whelahan and Millennium Man, Brian Whelahan, along with 1971 SHC winning captain Declan Hennessy and Johnny Hogan and Christy Walsh from the 1938 – '48 era, renowned and celebrated underage coach Brother Vincent and many more well-known personalities including Brother Denis, Pat Joe Whelahan, Herbert Hennessy, Declan and Rory Hanniffy, Ken Hogan, Pdraig Horan, Martin Walsh, John Ryan and Newstalk / TV3 GAA pundit Daithi Regan.

The DVD was produced with support from the Offaly Local Development Company. John Irwin was behind the microphone asking the questions of those interviewed, while Michael Donegan provided the voiceover that brings the story of the club together. Darragh Molloy's recording of a Birr song written as a tribute to the 1948 county championship winning side also features on the DVD which retails (separate from the book) at €10 also.

The book and DVD would make the perfect Christmas gift and they are available for sale at Whelahan's, Square News, Super Valu, Loughnane's Centra, Frawley's, Horan's, Ger Claffey's and Crinkill Stores.

People can arrange to have the book and DVD posted to them by contacting Magic Memories Chairperson, Martin McCarthy, at 087 7649804 or alternatively drop an e-mail to birrgaabookpics@gmail.com



**The committee pictured with Liam O'Neill (GAA President) who launched the book.**

*Back Row (L to R): Gary Cahill, Martin McCarthy, Alan Walsh, Liz Kennedy, Herbert Hennessey, Patrick (Junior) O'Callaghan, Bro. Vincent.*

*Front Row: Mick Spain, Roisin Lennon, Liam O'Neill (GAA President), Tony McLoughlin.*

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## 100 YEARS YOUNG

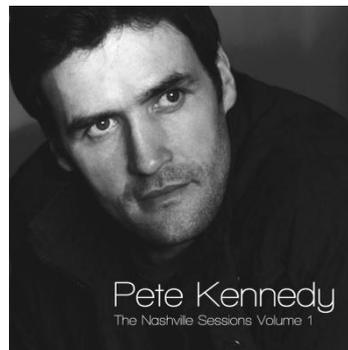
Congratulations to Margaret Loughnane (pictured right) who celebrated her 100<sup>th</sup> birthday on 4<sup>th</sup> January, 2012. Margaret was born in Clondalla, Birr on 4<sup>th</sup> January, 1912 to William and Mary Ellen Mitchell, with her sisters Kathleen, Brigid, Annie and brother Tommie. Margaret spent her life on the family farm and married Michael Loughnane in Eglisish on 12<sup>th</sup> June, 1940. Margaret and Michael commenced their married life in Carrig before eventually settling in Birr. They were blessed with 11 children. Sadly, Michael passed away suddenly on 24<sup>th</sup> May 1964 leaving Margaret or Madge as she was universally known to continue to rear her large family. Madge was blessed with good health, courage and great faith which have sustained her over the years. Madge now enjoys the company of her 31 grandchildren and 25 great-grandchildren who joined her as she celebrated her 100<sup>th</sup> birthday with a Mass of Thanksgiving for her good, long life. We wish her continued good health.



## PETE KENNEDY IS 'THE ONE'



2012 has been a really singer/songwriter Pete album, *The Nashville right*), which has received named UK Album of the Country Music Awards. award. He also completed am the One' in Nashville and promoting 'The Album on the country autumn he engaged on a tour where he accompanied legendary performer, Neil Sedaka, for ten shows and then hooked up with the well-known soul group, The Stylistics, to play eighteen dates across Britain. Congratulations Pete and every best wish for the future.



busy year for Birr Kennedy. He released his first *Sessions Volume 1* (pictured critical acclaim and was Year at the 2012 British Pictured left, is Pete with his a video presentation called 'I and then writing, recording Nashville Sessions Vol 2' music circuit in America. This three-month, international

## MEMORIAL PLAQUE UNVEILED



On Monday 29<sup>th</sup> October 2012, a plaque in memory of Aidan 'Boo' Rosney was unveiled in St. Brendan's Park by GAA President Liam O'Neill, Bro. Vincent and Bro. Denis. Family and friends gathered for the unveiling and pictured above are (Left to Right): Aideen Rosney, Pat Carolan, Concepta Coughlan, Stephanie Rosney, GAA President Liam O'Neill, Bridie Rosney, Beverley Carolan, Arnold Rosney, Gavin Beere, Shirley Beere, Jamie Rosney, Christina Rosney, Brendan Rosney, Wyn Beere.

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## 1912 IN THE LOCAL PAPERS

By Tony Hogan

During 1912, all national and provincial papers devoted column inches to the pros and cons on the Third Home Rule Bill. Other issues such as the Titanic disaster and the Women's Suffrage Movement were also dealt with in detail but above all else the Home Rule Bill was the predominant national and local topic.

Our two local papers, the *King's County Chronicle* and the *Midland Tribune*, took opposite sides on the issue. The ardently nationalist *Midland Tribune* welcomed the Bill with open arms while the *King's County Chronicle* was anti and adopted the unionist side.

The *Midland Tribune* wrote in April 1912:

*The long sought Bill which is to give Ireland control of her own affairs has arrived, having been introduced last week by the English Prime Minister, Mr. Asquith. It is, as Mr. Redmond described it, 'a measure to give a country management of its own affairs'. The new Bill is better than any of the previous Bills introduced by Mr. Gladstone in 1886 and 1903. But though it is a good and acceptable measure, there is nothing bold or courageous about it. It is the least Ireland would accept and the most England or our enemies would grant. Clearly it was inspired by a very sincere wish to submit a Bill that would pass. There is much in it that would make it acceptable to Ireland, but there is equal attention given to the other side where its powers are controlled and modified. It is unsparingly sprinkled with limitations, restrictions and safeguards. While it is worth accepting by Ireland, the irreconcilables in the North East corner have had their way, we have had ours too, at least as much as was permissible in the circumstances. The people who don't trust us because of our religion have had the satisfaction of seeing our hands tied. If they were further safe guarded a wholly spoiled Bill would have resulted. Up to that point they got what they wanted, though a thousand times more than they deserved. We think that such unreasonable people should not be considered on such a vital and important a matter. They should not be allowed dominate more than their status would justify.*

In June, the *Midland Tribune* in an editorial noted that, a motion from the Ulster Unionists seeking an exemption from the Home Rule measures for the four counties from the North East was discussed in the Commons. The paper quoted John Redmond leader of the Irish Party who spoke tellingly – *'The idea of two nations was revolting and hateful. We want the union in Ireland of all creeds, classes and races. We shall resist violently as far as is in our power the setting up of permanent dividing lines between one creed and another and one race and another'*.

The paper noted that the greatest evil that could befall Ireland would be the setting up of two parliaments rather

than one and stated that strong Ulster representation would be absolutely vital in a Dublin parliament.

When the Bill was introduced in April, the *King's County Chronicle* wrote that:

*The occasion was recognised by all as great and historic. The speech of the Prime Minister who spoke with great deliberation from carefully prepared notes was heard throughout with intense interest and occupied about two hours. Every now and again the excitement of the Ulster Unionists found vent in angry exclamations and mocking cheers and near the end of Mr. Asquith's speech there was a display of passion and a violent scene seemed imminent but members succeeded in restraining themselves.*

The *King's County Chronicle* went on to give an analysis of the Bill and its salient provisions. In July a meeting chaired by Lord Rosse was held in the Oxmantown Hall to oppose Home Rule. The paper noted that:

*Lord Rosse was greeted with ringing applause, the significance of which spoke eloquently of the sentiments of the Irish Unionists. The audience comprised all classes who have an interest in the peace and prosperity of their native land and their demeanour bore witness to what was passing in their minds at this crisis in our history. Major Head of Derrylahan in proposing the resolution said, 'We protest against the Home Rule Bill now before Parliament because it is a measure for the creation of a separate Irish Parliament and a separate executive which will produce most dangerous confusion, involving disastrous conflicts of interests and classes and a serious risk of civil war. This Bill will endanger the commercial relations between Ireland and Great Britain. It will imperil personal liberty, freedom of opinion and the spirit of tolerance in Ireland.*

*The principal speaker, a Mr. A.W. Samuels dealt with the many financial and taxation clauses of the Bill. The proceedings lasted one and a half hours and the resolution was passed amid loud applause. The meeting ended with the entire audience putting their whole heart and voice into God save the King sung to the piano accompaniment of Miss Armstrong of Garrycastle. The wings of the platform displayed large Union Jacks.*

Despite the determination of Ulster Unionists and some sympathisers in Ireland and England to oppose the majority in Ireland and to defy the Westminster parliament, the Home Rule Bill was eventually enacted in 1914. However, implementation was deferred due to the international situation at the time. But before World War I ended, the Irish Parliamentary Party and Home Rule had been superseded by Sinn Féin. Ironically, the only part of Ireland to be granted home rule was Unionist Ulster which had so vehemently opposed it. The rest is history which will be played out during the centenaries over the next few years and parallels with the current movement for Scottish independence are quite fascinating.

## **BIRR REVIEW PUZZLE PAGE**

**CAN YOU IDENTIFY THE FACES BELOW? ANSWERS ON PAGE 155**



**1**



**2**



**3**



**4**



**5**



**6**



**7**



**8**



**9**



**10**



**11**



**12**

### **Do You Know**

1. Where was an area in the town known as 'The Green Plot' was located?
2. Where did the Canadian Maple trees that are planted in 'The Chains' came from?
3. What is the name of the bell in St. Brendan's Church of Ireland Church?
4. What is the name of the bell in St. Brendan's R.C. Church?
5. In whose memory the lamps on the entrance pillars of St. Brendan's R.C. church were erected to?
6. What is the connection between Crinkle Barracks and Mt. St. Joseph's Abbey?
7. Where was the Hippodrome, Birr's first cinema located?
8. Who donated the chain of office worn by the Chairperson of Birr Town Council?
9. Where the Shamrock Hotel was located?
10. Where the Old Wilmer Tennis Club was located?

## METHODIST CHURCH, BIRR

In small communities, such as the Methodist ones here in the Republic, weddings and funerals are the exception rather than the norm. So it's nice to report that we had a wedding in October, when Janet Haslam married Colin Christie. Janet, daughter of Brian and Ruth Haslam of Rathcabbin, works as an occupational therapist in Aberdeen, and it was there that she met her, now, husband.

The marriage was performed by Rev. Ivor Owens, who was minister in Birr while Janet was growing up. The wedding had a distinctly Scottish flavour, with all the Scotsmen wearing kilts – right down to the youngest and smallest, who was also wearing a bib! Janet was piped into the church by a piper who hailed, not from Scotland, but from Achill Island where, apparently, there are five pipe bands.



The wedding fell on the same weekend as the Harvest Thanksgiving service, and the lovely flower arrangements (courtesy of Richard Haslam

and Janet's aunt, Sarah) were then supplemented on Saturday evening with fruits and vegetables to form a more traditional Harvest display. The result was beautiful! The guest preacher on Sunday was Rev. Alastair Graham, from the Church of Ireland in Mullingar. Mr. Graham recalled fondly the visits he made to Birr in the time when his brother, Winston, was the Methodist minister here. He was also pleased to see that Birr Choral Society, which Winston was instrumental in forming, was still in existence. The choir sang a piece written by Peter Whyte, who was also in charge of rehearsals on this occasion.

From the good news to the less good... Last year we reported the untimely loss of a faithful church member, Joan Coghlan; this year, on October 7, Joan's father, Fred, passed away. Fred had suffered with Alzheimer's for several years and had been in the Sandymount Care Centre for much of that time, but the full church for his removal and funeral bore witness to the affection and high esteem in which he was still held. Our sympathy goes to his widow, Ida, and his son, Brian.

Another family affected by a death last year, the Armitage family, gathered twice more this year in Birr Methodist Church to bid farewell first to Hazel Armitage and then to her father, Rowland. Rowland moved from Shinrone to Mullingar when he was 27; he was 95 when he went Home to God. In his younger days he was a lay preacher and his faith remained strong to the end. Hazel was



Vera Haslam

unwell and for the last thirty years of her life he was her carer. She passed away in June; Rowland followed her in July. Both were interred in Roscrea. They are survived by Adrian, Hazel's brother; our sympathy goes to him.

The rest of the year has been taken up with the usual activities: Bible studies; fundraising! – especially the Christmas and Spring sales; the World Day of Prayer which (as has been the custom) took place in the Methodist Church and the speaker this year was the Rev. Janet White Spinner; and a visit in February from a Brazilian Methodist pastor, Rev. Joyce Torres, who spoke of her work throughout the churches in South America. Other churches joined us for this event – from Athy, Portlaoise, Mountmellick, Carlow, Kilkenny, Roscrea, Borrisokane, Tullamore and Athlone. Joyce spoke relatively little English, so she spoke in Spanish and the rusty skills of Rev. Rosemary Lindsay were called upon to translate for her!

Most recently, some of our numbers have been glad to participate in the initiative of the Irish School of Ecumenics, in which speakers gave weekly talks in the County Arms Hotel during October. These we decided would be an interesting springboard for continuing Bible study during the winter months.



Revs. Dr. Sahr Yambasu (Carlow), Rosemary Lindsay, Joyce Torres and Brian Griffin (Roscrea)

## **ST. BRENDAN'S PARISH, BIRR**

The Parish Pastoral Council had a busy 2012. The year began with the news that Bishop Kieran O'Reilly has introduced a 'Listening, Reflection and Conversation Process'. A representative from the Parish attended a seminar to discuss issues of relevance to Parish life. The seminar was told that the role of Parish Pastoral Councils will change in the future with the shortage of Priests. This seminar was followed up by a meeting of the Parish Pastoral Councils in our Cluster (Birr, Coolderry, Kinnitty and Shinrone), which took place on 29th March and was facilitated by the Killaloe Pastoral Development Office. The issues discussed at this meeting were as follows:-

- What energises and gives life to your Parish
- What discourages us
- Fears about young people and their faith
- The Church we hope for
- Challenges.

Two First Holy Communion ceremonies were held in St. Brendan's in May, for children from Mercy P.S., St. Brendan's Boys P.S., Crinkill N.S., Oxmantown N.S. and Killeen N.S. First Holy Communion for the pupils of Carrig School was held in the Church of the Annunciation. Confirmation for 92 students from the Parish schools was celebrated by Bishop Kieran O'Reilly on May 18<sup>th</sup>. Great credit is due to all involved in preparation of the children for the sacraments.

The highlight of 2012 was undoubtedly the Eucharistic Congress, which took place in Dublin from 10<sup>th</sup> to 17<sup>th</sup> June. There was a huge programme of events each day in the RDS, culminating in a celebration of the Eucharist in Croke Park on the final day. The Parish was well represented at the Congress, which was a very moving and spiritual experience for all who attended.

The issue of School Patronage has been a topic of discussion at most parish council meetings during the year. Minister for Education & Skills, Mr. Ruairí Quinn, T.D. has announced that Catholic Patronage could be removed from schools throughout the country and Birr has been named as a town where this may occur. At present the Department is surveying parents in the affected parishes. For more information on this matter please see [www.education.ie](http://www.education.ie).

The Annual Mass for the deceased of the Parish of Birr (in the last 12 months) was celebrated in St. Brendan's on November 10<sup>th</sup>. This has become a very moving and integral part of our Church year.

To contact the Parish Team or for any information on Birr Parish, please consult our website [www.stbrendansbirr.ie](http://www.stbrendansbirr.ie) or call the Parish Office on 057-9122028.

The Parish Clergy and Pastoral Council wish a Very Happy Christmas and Peaceful 2013 to all 'Birr Review' readers.



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**PANDORA**  
UNFORGETTABLE MOMENTS

## ST. BRENDAN'S CHURCH OF IRELAND

The year 2012 was a very busy one in the St. Brendan's Church of Ireland congregation in Birr. It began with a post-Christmas 'get-together' on the 27<sup>th</sup> of January, when Susan Jackson gave an entertaining and informative talk on gardening. It was before we were into Lent, and we had a series of 'Home Eucharists' in the homes of local parishioners, with guest speakers from local and international mission agencies, including Caroline Guy from Dóchas (cancer support), Tony O'Riordan from Midlands Simon, and a representative from the Citizens' Information Service. As well, parishioner Jonathan Pyle told us about his trip to Iona, and Linda Chambers from the USPG mission agency gave us more information about our Diocesan Mission project, Luyengo Farm in Swaziland. This farm is being organised by the Diocese of Swaziland, as a profit-making venture to help pay for their diocesan mission projects. Swaziland has the highest rate of HIV/AIDS in the world, and because of this, life expectancy has dropped to 32 years of age and a third of families are headed by children because of the death of parents. We have maintained the momentum of this Mission drive throughout the year, with fundraising by the pupils of Oxmantown School in Lent, and donations from our Harvest collections. In October, parishioners Salters Sterling and Michael Hanna accompanied Bishop Trevor Williams to Swaziland to get a first-hand look at the activities on Luyengo Farm.

We wouldn't consider a year to have passed if there weren't some repairs required to our soon-to-be 200 year-old church building. Structural repairs to the roof were needed in 2012, which necessitated the removal of a large section of slates. All was completed before the autumn, and now we are concentrating on repairs to the Gate Lodge and the Rectory. The St Brendan's Hall got a great paint job over the summer as well.

We had two weddings in Birr this year – on the 28<sup>th</sup> of April, Caroline Whyte and Kevin Morgan were married. The ceremony was conducted by the Revd. Ruth Gill with Fr. Pat Gilbert assisting. Caroline's father, Peter, composed the music for one of the hymns, which the Choral Society sang with great enthusiasm. On the 5<sup>th</sup> August, Trevor Bailey, son of Ernie and Denise, and Doireann McDermot, daughter of Noel and Carol, were also married in St. Brendan's, with Fr. Tony Cahir giving the homily.

Our Parish Fête was held on the 27<sup>th</sup> of May in Oxmantown School, instead of the Rectory grounds. The weather was terrific and warm and great crowds came to the church to celebrate the Feast of Pentecost, and then made their way



to school to enjoy the usual Fête activities and games, in addition to Zorbing, horse racing (!), pillow penalty shots, a karate display, face painting, raffles, rucks, a nail bar, pancakes, burgers, ice cream, and much more. Many thanks to all who came and all who helped!

After many years of bravely fighting illness, Ben Oakley died on the 27<sup>th</sup> July, with his funeral service on the 6<sup>th</sup> August. Ben, who contributed so much to the parish and the community over many years, will be sorely missed. Condolences to his family and many friends.

Our annual Parish Dance was held on the 13<sup>th</sup> of September at Dooly's Hotel, in aid of

the Church Repair Fund. Many thanks to Willie and Phyllis Wolfe for organising this once again; it was a great success in fellowship as well as fund-raising.

After 36 years as teacher at Oxmantown School, Shirley Mahon retired at the end of June. At a special Retirement Service on the 15<sup>th</sup> of September, the church was thronged with present and past pupils, parents, and well-wishers who paid tribute to all she did and all she meant to them.

Our Harvest services in the Group of Parishes were especially well attended this year. The Revd. Gary Paulsen, Rector of Adare, was the preacher in Birr. Gary, originally from our Companion Diocese of Saldanha Bay, near Cape Town in South Africa, brought a fresh and inspired look at the Gospel in his Harvest message. Fr. Michael Reddan, from the other St. Brendan's parish, was the Harvest preacher in Dorrha Parish and also brought a mission perspective to the celebration.

Autumn brought our participation in a series of evenings at the County Arms Hotel, with speakers organised by the Irish School of Ecumenics. This was a pilot project from the ISE, and we were delighted that, because of its reputation as a centre of ecumenism, Birr was chosen as the location for this venture for the people of the Republic.

Our Sunday School continues to grow in numbers of children and of volunteers to help look after it. The second Sunday of the month is our Family Service, where children are encouraged to bring in objects (anything at all!) to 'Perplex the Preacher', who has to tell the children how the object reminds him of God. This continues to be great fun. Many thanks to all who contributed to the life of the Parish in 2012 in so many ways, both among our parishioners and the wider community. May we wish everyone in Birr a holy Christmas and may the New Year of 2013 bring less anxiety and more hope in all our lives.

Archdeacon Wayne Carney  
The Revd. Ruth Gill

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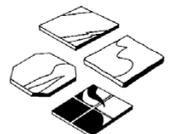
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## MERCY PRIMARY SCHOOL



### Junior Infants

*Back Row (Left to Right): Carmina Mulcahy Viegas, Rachel Touhey, Shakira Touhey, Caitlin Fogarty, Mrs. Paula Carey, Dectera Stevenson, Szanel Ciwinska, Lily Kelly, Margaret McCarthy.*  
*Middle Row: Vanessa Piotrowska, Lori Coughlan, Linda Mannion, Jasmine Bennett, Kaitlin Parsons, Smilte Latuskeviciute, Ava O'Toole, Alicia Hansbury Atomori.*  
*Front Row: Grace Kelly, Ella Talbot, Gulmakai Zafar, Gulfarkha Khan.*



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

*Back Row (left to Right): Katherine Revill, Shauna Duffy, Rachel Bracken, Edel Hoare, Clodagh O'Sullivan McBride, Ciara Murdock, Aisling Mullins, Rebecca Nevin McEvoy.*  
*Middle Row: Clare Ann Nolan, Róisín Donovan, Caoimhe Abbott, Natalia Piotrowska, Allie Harding, Emma Guilfoyle, Niamh Kearns, Niamh Lyons, Ella Coughlan, Tara Fanning, Linda McDonagh, Shannon Byrne, Nikkita Morrissey, Natalia Szoma, Ms. Ann Hennelly.*  
*Front Row: Caoimhe Claffey, Keisha Byrne, Caoimhe Bergin.*

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**6<sup>TH</sup> CLASS**

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## KILLEEN NATIONAL SCHOOL



### Infants

*Back Row (Left to Right): Ms. Hogan, Adrian Betkier, Leah Smyth, Oisín Dolan, Lucy Bailey, Cian Daly, Caoimhe Keogh, Eoghan Fallon, Mrs. Connolly*  
*Front Row: Michelle Fallon, Síbhéal Corboy, Sábh King, Éabha O'Hare, Aoife Stokes, Oran Molloy*



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

*Back Row (Left to Right): Oran O'Neill, Luke Sheridan, Mark Hogan, Patrick Campbell*  
*Middle Row: Una Murray, Rory Carty, Colm Hogan, Diarmuid Scully, Ben Larkin, Mrs. Connolly*  
*Front Row: Caroline Purcell, Dara Hanamy, Aoife Hogan, Saoirse Rice, Emma O'Rourke, Ciara Errity, Alex Carroll Tully*

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## CARRIG NATIONAL SCHOOL



### Junior Infants

*Back Row (L to R): Class Teacher, Geraldine Fox, David Sharp, Liam Ralph, Anna Hogan  
Front Row: Natasha Cahalan, Emma Gallagher, Sarah Delahunty, Daniel Webb*



### 6th Class

*Back: Tony Sampson (Principal).  
Middle Row (L to R): Miguel Ryan, Michael Fitzgerald, Mark O'Brien, Derry McDermott.  
Front Row: Aoife Hctor, Aoife Cogavin, Sarah Pingree*



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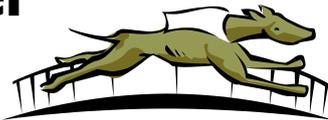
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## ST. BRENDAN'S BOYS PRIMARY SCHOOL



### Junior Infants

*Back Row (L to R): Ms. Alicia Ryan, Wayne Donoghue, Victor Danczak, Seán Loonam, Arturs Laizans, Muhammad Khan, Dean Nettleship, James Woods, Dinny Kelly.*

*Middle Row: Odhrán Hensey, Alex Hough, Dylan Clear, Conor Kelly, Rico McDonagh, Toby Pardy.*

*Front Row: Harry Reynolds, Damian Nowicki, Emerson Molloy, Luke Kealy, Josh Deane, Luke Lynch, Rian Quinn, Leo Shannon. Missing from photo is Matas Daukintis.*



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

*Back Row (L to R): Luke Guinan, Niall Cunningham, Luke Barry, Ronan Loughnane, Kieran Riley, Stephen Kelly, Eoin Stapleton, Alex Smyth.*

*Middle Row: Mr. Michael Carroll, Sean Thompson, David Ryan, Deimantas Almazovas, Blane Lynskey, Richie Camon Maybury, Mark Reddin, Brandon Molloy.*

*Front Row: Dylan Murdock, Morgan Watkins, Rian Digan Sullivan, Matthew Molloy, Brendan Doyle, Michael Doyle, Shane Maloney.*

*Missing from photo are Nikolas Turtak, Jeffrey Hehir, Jake Tuohey, David Slowikowski, Kevin Agbenisi, Callum Doonan, Dylan Hehir, Paul McEvoy.*

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## CREATIVE ART ENGAGEMENT AT ST. BRENDAN'S COMMUNITY SCHOOL

The National Association of Principals and Deputy Principals (NAPD) sponsors the Creative Engagement Initiative in a project funded through the Department of Education and Science and the Department of Arts, Sports and Tourism, and is designed to provide students with opportunities to express their experiences through varied arts practices.

There are currently 60 schools involved in a range of arts projects. NAPD provides some of the funding, drawing on grants made by the Department of Education and DTCS.

Mr. Tom Foley, former principal, was amongst the founders of this association which was set up in the late 70's to try to bolster funding for the arts within the Irish educational system. This funding received via the NAPD, allowed a variety of artists to work in tandem with the students at the school's Art department with a specific project in mind, to create works of Art.

*"I have been repeatedly struck by the enthusiasm for creative work in schools around the country. It has been shaped by the needs of the individuals and often by a sense of place, community or heritage. I have watched the ownership of work change and increase as it has evolved. I have been told again and again of how the availability of a*

*little seed capital has set in motion things that otherwise would not have happened.*

*"Creative Engagement" has offered a freedom to the participants to define and develop responses to their own individual and communal needs. While some schools have shown remarkable dexterity in bringing their work within the ambit of the established curriculum, what really characterises the best of this work is its capacity for diversity and genuine identity."*

*Derek West, Chair An Fo-Choiste Ealaíne agus Cultúrtha, NAPD, and of Steering Committee "Artists Schools"*

### Art on Entry

All Transition Year students worked with stain glass artist, John McCarthy, to create two permanent stain glass light boxes which are on permanent display in the entrance of St. Brendan's. This project was funded by NAPD Creative Engagement, Offaly County Council and St. Brendan's Community School.

Each student plus staff members had the opportunity to design and create their own individual stain glass panel and these in turn were put together to create this beautiful and colourful permanent exhibit at St. Brendan's Community School.



**Pictured with Art on Entry - Stain-glass project are Conor Bracken, Dillon Patel, Leanne Dooley, Kiera Dooley, Caroline Kealey, Eleanor Heagney and Conor Guinan.**

**Left to Right: Ming Loughnane (Principal of St. Brendan's), Bro. Denis (former Principal), Derek West (NAPD), Yvonne Claffey (Art teacher), Tom Foley (former Principal), Sharon McConnell (Art teacher), Brona McDermott, (Art teacher), Sinead O'Reilly (Offaly Arts Officer)**



# CELEBRATING SPECIAL OCCASIONS



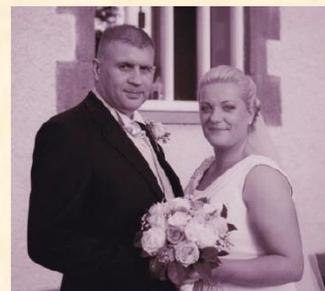
**Nicola Flanagan & Gary Byrne**



**Arlene Kelly & Donagh Wiseman**



**Caroline Whyte & Kevin Morgan**



**Siobhan Morris & Ben Webster**



**Michelle O'Gorman & Kevin Brady**



**Tracy Jennings & Daniel Casey**



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**Doireann McDermot & Trevor Bailey**



**Fionnuala Cashen & Stephen Kennedy**



**Deirdre Ryan & Colin Bane**



**Cynthia McNamara & Michael Donoghue**



**Helena Niland & Jeffrey Pardy**



**Celina Hehir & Padraig Woods**



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# CELEBRATING SPECIAL OCCASIONS



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James O'Malley**



**Irene Hogan  
& Gary Mangan**



**Emiline Quigley &  
Gerard Moran**



**Kate Egan &  
Kieran O'Brien**



**?? &  
Eamon Coughlan**



**Eileen McCarthy &  
Thomas Delaney**



**Orla Deane  
& Gavin Jennings**



**Natalie Walsh &  
Adrian Brown**



**Michelle Sampson &  
Barry Bennett**



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Ronan Morrissey**



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**Therese Haverty &  
Patrick de Chaumont**



**Sinead Campbell  
& Michael Kennedy**

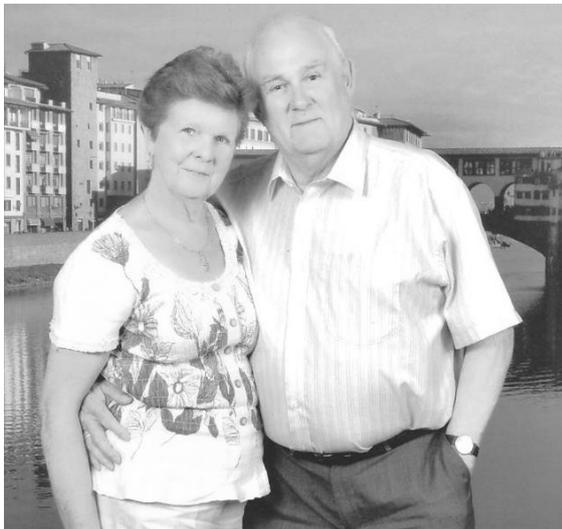


**Shelley McDonagh &  
Vincent McDonagh**



**Joanna Martyn &  
Eoin Doorley**

# CELEBRATING SPECIAL OCCASIONS



**Congratulations to Liam & Maura Guilfoyle from Meadowbrook who celebrated their 50<sup>th</sup> Wedding Anniversary this year. They were married in St. Brendan's Church, Birr on the 4<sup>th</sup> June, 1962.**



**Congratulations to Gerry & Agnes O'Brien from Westgate who celebrated their 60<sup>th</sup> Wedding Anniversary this year. They were married in Stoke Newington, London on the 16<sup>th</sup> June, 1952**



**Congratulations to Kathleen Mulhern and John Walsh on their Golden Wedding Anniversary. They were married in St. Brendan's Church, Birr on 10<sup>th</sup> July 1962.**



**Congratulations to Liam and Eileen Ogle who were married in St. Brendan's Church, Birr and recently celebrated their Golden Wedding Anniversary by renewing their vows in Westminster Abbey, London.**



**Congratulations to Patrick and Linda Fitzgerald, Hillside who recently celebrated their Ruby Wedding Anniversary. They are pictured here on their wedding day with Bridget and Patricia Hamilton and Monsignor P. J. Hamell.**

## BIRR SKATE PARK NOMINATED FOR THE 2012 LAMA AWARDS

Birr Skate Park Committee was honoured to be nominated by Cllr. Michael Campbell for the Best Public Park and Best Recreational Facility category in the Local Authority Members Association (LAMA) Awards 2012. First held in 2006, the LAMA Awards were created to recognise local projects of excellence in the areas of infrastructure, community development, recreation and national impact initiatives.



**Fergal Clarke pictured with the certificate that the Skate Park committee was presented with at the Awards night.**

With great enthusiasm, we submitted detailed entry forms for each category. The forms required information such as materials used, design and theme, what would the site allow, how we could blend the facility into a Georgian town, how the recreational facility contributes to the community – who does it benefit, also photographs of the park. We were advised that our submission form would be graded and we would be notified in due course whether we would be selected to move on to the finals. We were so thrilled when we got the fantastic news that the skate park had been short-listed in the Best Public Park category.

The Committee members were invited to attend the Awards night in association with the Irish Public Bodies hosted by Miriam O'Callaghan, which took place on February 11<sup>th</sup>, 2012, at the Crowne Plaza Hotel, Santry, Dublin.



**Pictured at the Awards night in Dublin were committee members, from left to right, Ann Hynes-Spain, Liam Spain, Kathleen Gormley, Imelda Smyth and Fergal Clarke**

The skate park was show-cased on the night, along with all other finalists. The winner announced on the night of the Best Public Park was Poppintree Park, a regional park of approximately 45 acres, shared by the communities of Glasnevin, Ballymun and Finglas.

We were honoured to have been short-listed throughout Ireland for 2012 as one of the top eight parks picked in this category. We were presented with a certificate for being a finalist in this category.

The park today is continuously active with all age groups, both boys and girls. We regularly have visiting skaters who come to the park and spend the day there interacting with the local skaters and swapping skills and tricks. There's a great outdoor social scene at the park, with everybody having fun in a safe and secure environment.



**Local girls preparing for 'The Message of Fatima' at the Oxmantown Hall in May 1948.**

*Back Row (L to R): Ann Kennedy, Mary Hogan, Bernadette Quinn, Teresa O'Loughlin, Eleanor Butler, Maura Kennedy, Chris Delaney, Nan Grennan, Eunice Walsh, Mabel O'Loughlin, Mary Harte, Sheila Bowe, Lucy Hogan (at back), Zena Kelly, Ann McNamara, Renee Hogan, Catherine Kavanagh, Ann Sullivan.*  
*Front Row: Ann Hickey, Rosie Sheeran, Maura Hogan, Betty Dwane, Maura Mulhern, Monica Molloy, Ann Mulhearn.*

## **BIRR BALLOON FESTIVAL SOARS TO SUCCESS**

During the last week of September 2012, over 30 hot air balloon teams from all over the world descended on Birr and took to the skies as part of the Irish Hot Air Balloon Championships.

The Birr event, sponsored by Shannon Development, Fáilte Ireland and the Offaly Local Development Company sees teams drawn to Birr from all corners of the globe to soar into the skies over Offaly in an event recognised internationally as one of the best events of its kind in the world. Last year's Championships saw over 8,000 people visit the town to witness the remarkable spectacle of dozens of balloons floating majestically into the skies over Birr.



President of the Irish Ballooning Association, Joseph Leahy, an experienced balloon pilot who originally hails from Navan, has flown balloons at 10,000-feet over the Alps, as well as in India, Sri Lanka and Zimbabwe.

Mr. Leahy says "there are beautiful buildings here and the town looks beautifully laid out from the air against the backdrop of the Slieve Bloom mountains. There are so many great cafes and pubs here and the event always has a very strong social aspect. The teams all love the town and its people and Birr Castle is an amazing venue to fly from. The farmers in the area are absolutely great and are very happy and helpful when they see a balloon coming

down on their land. We actually landed on one farmer's land at the week-end and ended up going for tea and sandwiches in their home and they helped us pack up and load the balloon. We treated the farmer's son to a ride in one of the balloons after that. One thing we always hear back from the teams over the years is how they were struck by the friendliness of the local people.



"All the teams managed to get in some successful flights and we had an excellent weekend when weather conditions were ideal for flying. This year three teams from the US travelled to Birr for the event, as well as teams who came to Birr from Austria, the Netherlands, Scotland and the United Kingdom. Usually the teams are comprised of four members. However because the Birr event is so popular, teams can often number eight or more people" added Mr. Leahy.

The balloons are totally weather-dependent and can only fly in conditions where winds are less than ten knots and if there is no rain - which adds weight to the balloon and affects their buoyancy.

The competition works by picking a particular spot before the balloons go up and whoever successfully lands closest to that marker is considered the winner. The balloons usually land within about 100-feet of the target.

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## SOCIETY OF ST. VINCENT DE PAUL



**Members of the BIRR Conference of the Society of St Vincent de Paul.**

*Back Row (L to R): Enda Manzor, Catherine Deacon, Nancy Tierney, Alma Mulvey-Naughton, Sonya McDermot, Helena Kennedy, Marian Carter, Paddy McIntyre, John Tierney.*

*Front Row: Sister Roberta, Louie Hassett, Anna Corboy, Catherine Murphy, Margaret Kenny.*

St. Brendan's Conference is located on the right hand side as you enter the town car park located off Wilmer Road. The venue consists of a charity shop downstairs, a conference room upstairs and a furniture store. The shop is open from Tuesday to Friday each morning from 10.30 – 12.30. Meetings of members are held on Mondays from 7.30 p.m. to 9.30 p.m.

The people of BIRR are very generous in bringing clothes, footwear, household goods and furniture in good condition. They also contribute generously to our annual collection and at other times during the year. This past year, 2012, has been a very eventful one for St. Brendan's Conference. Two of our devoted and dedicated members have departed this life. Anne Mulvey died last Christmas, R.I.P., and Monica Boyd passed away during the month of

May, R.I.P. Pat Pilkington, who had given unstinted service to the Society as Conference President and Area President, retired and a new member has taken his position as Conference President. We were also fortunate to recruit four new members as the current recession has given rise to numerous appeals for help and we had greatly missed our dedicated colleagues. But God always provides in His own wonderful way. We have only to trust in his goodness and keep up the effort.

A training course for new members is being held in the near future. Retreats in the Cistercian Centre in Roscrea, Glenstal Abbey and at Our Lady's Shrine in Knock from time to time help to keep focus on the Vincentian ethos and on great Christian values.

**Congratulations to Willie Coughlan, Pound Street who celebrated his 90<sup>th</sup> birthday this year. May you have many more happy and healthy years to come Willie.**



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## BIRR GIRL GUIDES

The Birr Branches of the Irish Girl Guides had another busy year in 2012, starting with fund-raising by singing Christmas Carols in Tesco and a Church Gate Collection in January. Thanks to Madeline and the staff at Tesco, Birr and to the people of Birr for your generous support. We also sang Christmas Carols for the residents of the Birr Community Nursing Unit and would like to thank the staff and residents for their warm welcome.

The Girl Guides met up with Birr Tidy Towns on Mondays in May and June to help out with litter picking.

The Brownie Group went on a week-end to Ballacolla with the Borris-in-Ossary Brownies in June. The theme for the weekend was "Olympics". The girls had a very active weekend and learned new skills, such as cookery, housekeeping and crafts.



The Birr Girl Guides attended at CAMP 101. CAMP 101 was the International Girl Guide Camp that took place in Lough Key Forest Park in Co. Roscommon from 4<sup>th</sup> – 11<sup>th</sup> July 2012, with Guides from around the world in attendance. Worldwide, Girl Guiding is focused on the Global Action theme "Together We Can Change Our World", which encourages girls and young women to change the world around them. The Irish camp adopted this as its theme and, through the week-long activities, campers learned about the positive changes they can make in their own communities and beyond. The Guides had a host of other great activities to choose from, including outdoor survival skills, canoeing, night survival, drama, radio skills, how to

make videos for YouTube, pioneering, orienteering and much more. Great use was also made of Lough Key's fabulous amenities, such as the Boda Borg and Zipit, adding even more adventure and excitement to the week.

The Ladybirds and Brownies visited CAMP 101 for the day on 7<sup>th</sup> July. We got t-shirts specially made by My Tee (Alpha Fashion, Birr) which were greatly admired by everyone we met. The girls had a brilliant time taking part in activities such as the Tree Top Walk and the Adventure Kingdom. In the afternoon, they experienced life on a campsite and made crafts to bring home. They got to meet girls and leaders from Australia and Canada. The girls were given a specially designed wooden Camp 101 Badge each as a memento of the day. The girls left camp with new friends from around Ireland and around the world, lots of camping experiences and are already looking forward to the next Irish Girl Guides camp.

Thank you to Tesco, My Tee (Alpha Fashion) and the Marian Hall for their help and support throughout the year.

Special thanks also to our dedicated leaders, as without them, it would not be possible to run the groups so successfully.

*Girl Guides: Linda Dowling, Aisling Guinan and Eimear Guinan*

*Brownies: Joan Hogan, Pauline Bradley and Zara Cordial*

*Ladybirds: Martina Cooke, Michelle Digan and Niamh Heffernan*

The Brownie and Ladybird groups are currently full and there is a waiting list. Please contact Martina on 087 6270003 if you would like more information about Guiding.



**Brownie Camp in Ballacolla June 2012**

## **2012 GAME AND COUNTRY FAIR IN BIRR**



The Irish Game and Country Fair came to Birr Castle again this year on 25th and 26th August. It is widely recognised as both the country sports enthusiasts' fair and an enjoyable fun-filled countryside experience.

The Fair this year had an unequalled range of competitions, displays, demonstrations, trade stands and exhibits to appeal to anyone who lives, works or plays in the Irish countryside.

The Irish Game and Country Fair at Birr is not only the "country sports enthusiasts' show" but an action packed family day out. Recognised by the sporting organisations and the country sports enthusiast as the Republic of Ireland's foremost national game and country fair, the Birr Game Fair did not disappoint and was an excellent meeting point for all of Ireland's country people.

The Birr Fair was supported by all the major country sports organisations, such as the NARGC, FISSTA, CAI and IFA Countryside, so it is no surprise that all the sporting organisations pulled out the stops to make this a showcase for the important work they carry out to promote and defend our sports. The Irish Game and Country Fair was supported by Shannon Development and Fáilte Ireland. Every year, the fair introduces new attractions, competitions and themes. This year was no

exception as the 'Year of the Salmon and Trout'. This fishy theme was the focal point for the huge 'Angling Village' at Birr Castle, with everything one would expect at a top-class angling show and more! Masses of tackle and plenty of bargains, boats, angling competitions, instruction and demonstrations, vintage tackle, fisheries, sporting art, taxidermy, and even speciality game and fish cookery with Emmett McCourt.

The rural Midlands receive a significant boost from country sports followers and their families over the two days of the Birr Fair. The beautiful venue of Birr Castle Demesne, with its world-famous gardens and Science Centre, is open to the public and offers a full day's entertainment on its own. This was supported by a huge number of 'have a go opportunities' for kids, plus a dedicated children's area and a living history village filled with authentic re-enactors; the action-packed main arena running programme featured a rich mix of country sports and living history attractions, including a re-enactment of the 1690 attack on the castle with cannon and muskets. The huge tented village offered superb shopping opportunities and real bargains for the whole family.

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## BIRR MILITARY HISTORY GROUP

This year's trip was planned around visits to three main centres in Germany, Berlin, Leipzig and Dresden, and included an overnight stay in Colditz Castle.

We arrived in Berlin early on Tuesday 11<sup>th</sup> September and had lunch on Alexanderplatz beneath the massive Television Tower and beside the unique World Clock. We took an open-top bus tour of the city and then visited the German Historical Museum where historical exhibits tell the story of people, ideas, events and historical processes in Germany from the first century BC to the present day. After lunch we strolled down to the Brandenburg Gate, one of the most iconic structures in Berlin, passing on the way the Holocaust Memorial.

The next day, we set out for Leipzig and visited the Berlin Graveyard where there are 5,850 graves beautifully maintained by the British War Graves Commission. We then travelled on to Berlin Gatow Airfield Museum. This airfield played a significant role in the 1948/49 airlift of supplies into Russian-occupied Berlin. There are several indoor exhibitions and outside, over 70 planes, helicopters and major pieces of equipment are on display, which have been operated since the 1950s by the German Air Force, NATO and Warsaw Pact countries.

The following morning, we drove to the massive and impressive Monument to the Battle of the Nations. This commemorates the battle of Leipzig in 1913, where over half a million men fought a battle that changed the political landscape of Europe forever. By 1913, the present redesigned and greatly-expanded monument was inaugurated as Europe's largest monument. A programme of conservation, begun in 2003, will be completed by 2013, the anniversary of the battle. After lunch we took a bus tour of this most interesting city.

On Saturday, we headed for Colditz Castle where we had booked an overnight stay. This was a long drive over very flat countryside where the most notable feature was the number of wind farms and the acres of solar panels. The camp was specifically designated as a prison for Allied officers and was claimed to be escape-proof. There were hundreds of attempted escapes, with 130 getting clear of the castle and 18 resulting in the prisoner reaching home. The castle has had a long and varied history, and is currently a museum, music academy, hostel and cultural centre. This was one of the highlights of the trip and it is only when you see the actual tunnels and the subterfuges used by the prisoners that you can appreciate the ingenuity and bravery of those who tried to escape.

On our way to Dresden, our next destination, we stopped for lunch in Meissen, home of the world famous porcelain and one of the oldest cities in Germany. On arrival in Dresden, we admired the magnificent buildings and squares completely rebuilt since the city was virtually

razed to the ground by Allied Bombers in 1945. It is now one of the most beautiful cities in Germany, justifiably called 'The Florence of the Elbe'.



**Pictured at the Berlin-Gatow Airfield Museum were (L to R): Eamon Coonan, Martin Horan, David Wilson, Derek Coulter, John Joyce, Joe Breen, Martin Hynes, Ger O'Meara**

On Monday, we visited the Museum of Military History which is housed in a most interesting building. The old arsenal section shows the exhibits from the year 1300 AD in chronological order, while the new extension shows the exhibits in thematic groups. We then headed for Konigstein Fortress, which is a fabulous castle on a high rocky outcrop overlooking the Elbe and then drove across the border into the Czech Republic to a little border village called Hrensko. On Tuesday, we took an open-top bus tour of Dresden, one of the most beautiful cities in Saxony, and then headed back to Berlin in glorious sunshine. We strolled up past Checkpoint Charlie and saw sections of the Berlin Wall, which is a much lighter construction than it appears on television. A very good history of Berlin and the stand-off at the checkpoint is displayed on panels along the street giving a clear picture of life in Berlin at the time.

On our last day, and we headed for the Reichstag Building. Security checking of passports and hand luggage was as stringent as at any airport but, once inside, it was totally relaxed and in keeping with the new philosophy of openness and transparency in German politics. It is an amazing building, completely rebuilt since its destruction in the war and designed by an English architect, Sir Norman Foster, whose innovative heating, ventilation and energy conservation systems won him the design competition. It is notable that there are no red carpets, no big chandeliers or signs of power and glory and, in fact the door to Angela Merkel's office is just another door on a corridor with her name on it, no guards, and no special security. After the Assembly, we walked up the circular dome, which gives an unrivalled view over the city of Berlin.

It was a very enjoyable trip, made all the easier by the good pre-planning by Joe and Derek, the good financial management by Billy and the good company of all.

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## BIRR COMMUNITY AND FAMILY RESOURCE CENTRE



Birr Community and Family Resource Centre, situated in the car park at Costcutter's, Townsends Street, has been open to the public since 2002. Our aim is simple; to provide a safe and comfortable environment in which people of the community and surrounding areas can avail of the many classes and groups that we facilitate on a regular basis. Members of disadvantaged families will have access to educational and social activities which goes towards improving the quality of their lives.



**Children at the BabÓg Mother and Toddler Group**

As of November 2011, the Centre has been under a new Board of Management, which includes a number of people from the local community. This is a voluntary management team, who give a considerable amount of time to the upkeep and running of the centre. The Centre is also run in conjunction with St. Brendan's Environmental Group and we currently have one CE worker employed in the Centre to oversee the co-ordination of the groups using the Centre. Many changes have been made to both the running and the interior and exterior of the Centre with a great amount of help from Liam Moran (FÁS Supervisor) and St. Brendan's Environmental Group CE participants, without whom none of the work would have been done so efficiently.

As a voluntary agency we depend largely on local funding, grants and income from the small rates we charge for the hire of the centre. The local Lions Club kindly gave us funding this year, with which we bought an over-head

projector for the centre. A big thanks to them. The centre consists of a large meeting area, toilets and a fully functioning kitchen, all of which makes the centre ideal for hosting birthday parties, communion and confirmation celebrations, all at a reasonable rate. There is also a small office area where we have computers at our disposal, all of which have broadband. One of the many computer classes being run in the centre at present is an introduction to Google, E-mail, Skype and Picture Downloading. This course is run in conjunction with the Ballycommon Teletwork and Training Centre in Tullamore. There has been a great amount of interest in this which is held on a regular basis.

There are a number of groups currently using the centre such as, BabÓg Mother and Toddler group, who meet every Tuesday morning from 10 a.m. to 12 noon. The Active Retirement Group also avails of the centre for their many activities throughout the year as well as their weekly meeting every Thursday night.



**Enjoying Tatiana's Art Classes**

There are also many Art Classes availing of the centre for both adults and children, such as Kathleen Gormley, Birr Art Group, and Tatiana Bondareva, who runs children's and adult's art classes twice a week in the centre. We also facilitate Richard Haslam, who runs a Flora Art Workshop and Flower arranging classes on a regular basis in the centre.

The Birr Community and Family Resource Centre is an integral and essential part of the community of Birr and the surrounding areas. The facilities we offer should be used to their full potential. For any further information on the groups or classes currently being run in the centre or to make a booking, please contact Barbara on 05791 21912 or 0860631721. Thank you, the community of Birr, for your continued support.

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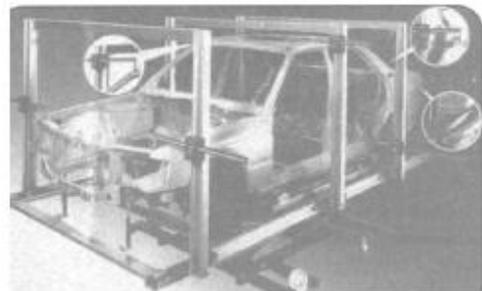
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## BIRR SCOUTS 3<sup>RD</sup> OFFALY TROOP



**Annual Camp 2012**

Back Row (L to R): Dominic Ryan, Callum Dempsey, Stephen O'Rourke, Colm Hogan, Ciaran Connaughton, Conor Lavin, Kenny Cooke, Jamie Doonan, Nathan Young, Geraldine Connaughton, Sean Egan

Middle Row: Michael Gleeson, Luke Sheridan, Ben Larkin, Cathal Guilfoyle, Luke Barry, Stephen Guilfoyle

Front Row: Padraic Connaughton, Stephen Watkins, Sean Connaughton, Leon Hogan, Rós Connaughton, Emma Hayes, Connor Brummell, Mary Hayes

Another successful year for the Birr scout troop has passed. The year started with a trip to the log cabin, where old friends met and new friendships were forged. Another trip to the log cabin occurred later on and, this time, the venture scouts and patrol leaders went on a survival hike. Next was the camp at Christmas, with cubs and scouts making merry and Santa Claus stopping in for his annual visit. In February, we had our investiture ceremony where we welcomed our new members and gave rewards to Scout of the Year, Jamie Doonan, and Cub of the Year, Louise Bergin, before feasting on goodies that were kindly donated by the parents.

Next up was a canoeing trip on the Grand Canal near Shannon Harbour and we also visited Belmont Mills. We had great fun racing and trying challenges, and learned how a canal gate works. We would like to thank Dominic Ryan for putting us up for the weekend. A trip to Tayto Park in

Dublin followed for the cub scouts. The cubs and scouts then enjoyed their annual May Bank Holiday weekend in Portumna Forest Park, which was a great success, despite the weather not co-operating. The final event of the year was the annual camp for the scouts in Boyle, County Roscommon. The scouts enjoyed many activities, including hiking, kayaking, "Boda Borg", mountain climbing, rock climbing and a tree top obstacle course called "Zipit". Also on the site were scout troops from as far as Germany and new friendships were made.

The scouts would like to thank their parents, and especially their leaders, for making the years events possible, and for being understanding, helpful and good fun all year and we would like to thank the people of Birr for all their help and support throughout the year, and the Marian Hall committee for their special support. We look forward to all the fun in the year ahead.

**Congratulations to Sheila Sullivan from Birr Camogie Club who received a Senior Camogie All-Star Award in the left-back position. She is pictured here receiving her award from Olympian, Annalise Murphy (left) accompanied by Camogie President, Aileen Lawlor.**





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## BIRR APOSTOLIC WORK

The Apostolic Work movement in Ireland developed against a backdrop of religious and missionary zeal throughout Europe in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Apostolic work has been graced from the outset by a galaxy of great women with vision and enthusiasm. Three women, Agnes McAuley from Enniskillen, Mary McCall and Mary Nihill from Belfast, pioneered the foundation, organisation and expansion of the work in 1929. Apostolic work commenced in the diocese of Killaloe, with the first branch and headquarters established in Ennis in 1955 by Evelyn Barron. She had learned of the organisation from her friend, Mrs. Ferrigan, originally from Armagh who had come to live in Ennis. Materials were sent from Armagh to Ennis to get the work underway. So 'co-operation North' was in vogue among the women before ever the political process started! Apostolic work branches were established in parishes throughout the Diocese. BIRR Apostolic Work group was set up in 1969 and is going strong since then. There is now a branch of Apostolic Work in nearly every parish in Ireland.

The objectives of the group are to share in the missionary Apostolate of the Church by prayer and by supplying materials and financial aid to areas where the church is not yet fully established and to sanctify members lives by their participation as active or honorary members.

Active members of Apostolic Work recite daily the Our Father, Hail Mary and Gloria, with the invocations to St. Francis Xavier and St. Therese of the Child Jesus. They also attend regular meetings of the branch. Those who cannot engage actively in the work by sewing, knitting, embroidery or fundraising may become honorary members by reciting daily prayers for the spread of the Gospel and make a financial contribution towards the work.

Many missionary priests, sisters and lay missionaries have been greatly helped by the generosity of the Apostolic Workers and Associates.

Displays of work and fundraising events are held by the BIRR Branch every year. Members also network with other branches in the Diocese. New members are always welcome.



**BIRR Apostolic Work Group photograph taken on the occasion of the visit of two Zimbabwean Carmelite sisters to BIRR in 2012.**

*Back Row (L to R): Catherine Murphy, Fr. Tony Cahir, Kathleen Ryan, Dolores Hegarty, Mary Nolan, Imelda King.  
Front Row: Sr. Pauline, Sr. Roberta, Sr. Ernestina.*



**The Hackett Family 1932**

*Back Row (L to R): William, Thomas Snr, Thomas Jnr  
Middle Row: Richard, Marian, Josephine  
Front Row: Paddy, George, Elizabeth*

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## BIRR LIBRARY

It was another busy 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 Patricia Gibney and Dolores Keavney
- Birr Vintage Week and Arts Festival events - tour of the library
- Leinster regiment seminars in August
- Seachtain na nGaeilge with the family fun day
- St. Cronan's Film club
- Adult book club – meet on the last Thursday of the month
- Bealtaine
- Heritage Week with the Genealogy lecture and Clinic with Susan Chadwick



Enjoying music day at Birr Library



- Knitting Circle every Wednesday evening at 5.30pm
- All-Ireland Poetry Day
- Children Book Festival
- OFFline Film Festiva I- Primary school screenings
- Art Exhibition
- Hullabaloo
- And much, much more

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6<sup>th</sup> Class Girls from Mercy P.S. with their teacher Miss Treacy and Marcella Corcoran-Kennedy T.D. and Denis Shiels of Birr Town Council

## **BIRR JUNIOR YOUTH CLUB**

Birr Junior Youth Club had a very busy year and proved to be very popular with children in Primary School. The club is open to children aged from 8 years upwards. The number of children joining the club increased steadily throughout the year and 81 children were registered members of the club when the club took a summer break in June 2012. A core team of trained adult leaders, supported by Transition Year students from St. Brendan's Community School, put in a huge effort planning and organising a range of club activities on a limited budget during the past year. Activities included mixed sports, arts and crafts, themed nights, board games, fancy dress, competitions and a disco. Children from six Primary Schools in the Birr area are members of the club and it was a great opportunity for children to come together to have fun with their friends, mix together and make new friends. Transition Year students from St. Brendan's C.S. played an active role in the running of club activities. The young children really enjoyed their leadership and mentoring skills and both the TYs and young children benefited from each other. The TYs who helped out with the club and who successfully completed 13 hours in Community and Personal Development gained the Gaisce Bronze Award. The location of the Community School for the club, together with the involvement of the Transition Year Students in the running of the club provided a good stepping over facility for 6<sup>th</sup> class Primary School students

into the bigger environment of the Community School. Children got to know their way around and felt comfortable in the Community School, liaised with older students and members of the teaching staff through membership of the Junior Youth Club. Many thanks to the Board of Management of St. Brendan's C.S. for the use of the school for club nights, including allowing the club to use the school facilities for the popular cookery classes.

The committee would like to thank our sponsors, Butler's Pharmacy, Tesco, O'Connor's Shop and Hotel Supplies, Michelle Ryan and Jimmy Dunne for the tag rugby equipment and the teachers of St. Brendan's Community School who did a sponsored cycle to raise funds for the club. Claire Ryan and Sr. Breda O'Driscoll, from St. Brendan's C.S. gave cookery classes — a great hit with the children and was voted top of the list for activities this autumn. Louise Reid showed the girls glamorous hairstyles, much to the amazement of some of the boys, who took an interest in looking at how creative you can be with girl's hair.

This year, our club hopes to expand the activities of the club and network with other organisations, including Tidy Towns, Youth Projects, other clubs and much more. Our club welcomes new volunteers and people who would like to share their skills and help out with club activities. Well done to all of the children who came to the club and helped to make the club a success during the year.



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## BIRR ACTIVE RETIREMENT GROUP

Members of the Birr Active Retirement Group have their meeting once a fortnight in the Family Resource Centre in Glebe Street. One of the highlights of the past year was the launch of the outdoor exercise equipment in Camcor Park. Cllr. John Carroll and Sr. Roberta officiated at the launch. Members of Birr Town Council, staff from Birr Swimming Pool and members of Birr Active Retirement Group attended. The park is maintained in pristine condition and is an excellent facility for the adult citizens of the town of Birr. The equipment is designed for adults over 50. It aids functional fitness and helps users to maintain and improve ability to perform everyday tasks. There are pieces of equipment at five stations in the park. The exercises are graded with basic, intermediate and advanced levels and include walking, cycling, squatting, stretching, lifting and rotating. It is advisable to consult your doctor or healthcare professional before you start the exercises and if you feel stress during any of the exercises. On a fine day, using the equipment is a great way to lose weight and improve fitness. Unfortunately we did not have an abundance of sunshine during the past year. However, we did manage to avail of the facility during the Bealtaine festival.

Janet White-Spunner visited us and gave us a very interesting account of her travels abroad. She spoke at length about her interest in dog-walking and horse-riding. Margaret Hogan gave a talk to the group on the history of Birr Workhouse. She illustrated the interior and exterior of the workhouse and life there in the past. Barry O'Meara visited the group and told members about the Hope Foundation and his visit to Calcutta. He experienced and witnessed poverty and the child-labour situation there. He told us there are 8,000 registered charities there and he had to raise €4,000 to go. Sr. Therese Brophy came for an exercise session. She guided us through the 'Extend Programme' of physical exercises for the Active Age groups. These exercises are performed to music and involve

stretching of the upper and lower limbs and can be done at any time. They help circulation and prevent cramps. Therese was a volunteer at the Eucharistic Congress and has since sent us DVD's of some of the talks.

On 22<sup>nd</sup> March, we were invited to the Carrig Community Centre by members of the Carrig, Riverstown and Killeen Active Retirement Group. Mass for deceased members was celebrated by Fr. Michael Harding. We were refreshed in soul and body as we had a lovely evening of prayer, music, dancing and fine food. In early June, our members visited Donaghmore House, where Trevor Stanley filled us in on the history of the place and told us many sad stories of life during the famine. We also had a tour of the Agricultural Museum and saw machinery which was used long ago and is now in display there.

Some of our members branched out and launched a new branch, Crinkill Active Retirement group. We wish them every success and hope that this will be very beneficial for members in the Crinkill area. We are very grateful to Bernie Fanneran and her H.S.E. helpers, especially Pauline and Ann, for organising and facilitating the Tea-Dance in Dooly's hotel for the Bealtaine festival. It was thoroughly enjoyed by all. Some of our members availed of the Basic Internet Classes held at the resource centre during the month of June. The two sessions were very beneficial and enjoyable. A few of our members had the wonderful experience of being present at the International Eucharistic Congress held in Dublin in June.

Sincere sympathy is extended to the Larkin family on the death of Jean, to Mary Coffey on the death of her husband Paddy, to Bríd Ryan on the death of her husband Michael and to Mary Nolan on the death of her brother Tom and sister Agnes.

New members, male or female, are always welcome to join the Birr Active Retirement group. You must be over fifty of course!

### Members of the Active Retirement Group enjoying a trip to Kinnitty Castle

*Imelda King, Frances Ardell, Jean Quigley, Carmel Brummell, Bessie Fleury, Mary Garahy, Bernie Kirwan, Kathleen Bass, Sr. Roberta, Greta Delaney, Mary McLoughlin, Nancy Tierney, Mary Spellman, Mary Nolan, Lily Tait, Fidelma Clavin, Dolores Hegarty, Eileen Hynes*



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## ROSCREA/BIRR SCHOOL COMPLETION PROGRAMME

The Roscrea/Birr School Completion Programme (SCP) had another busy year working with children from the Mercy Primary School and St. Brendan's Boys Primary School.

Senior Infants from the boy's school and Junior Infants and First Class from the Mercy P.S. enjoyed sessions of fun and games in their class socialisation groups. The sessions focused on communication, play, self-esteem and friendship. Each session finished with social games and play activities. Both Mairead and Sam enjoyed their trips to Birr Castle with Junior Infants from the Mercy and Turroe pet farm with St. Brendan's Junior and Senior infants.

Sixth class students from both schools participated in the Copping-On Programme. This Programme focuses on crime awareness and covers subjects such as communication, relationships, right and wrong, awareness of criminal behaviour, drug sense and the judicial system. This programme was supported and facilitated by School Completion staff and Garda Padraic Connaughton from Birr Gardaí. This programme included a visit to Kilmainham Gaol in Dublin, Birr Court House and Garda Station. To mark each student's participation in the Copping-On Programme, the children were presented with Certificates at their end-of-school celebration.



**Sixth class students from St. Brendan's Boy's PS have their day in court with Garda Padraic Connaughton.**

Throughout the year, SCP facilitated two community-based After School Groups in Scurragh. These groups were divided according to the participant's age and their school class. The sessions were activity based, with a focus on social skills. This gave each participant support with personal and social development, along with developing their interests and individual talents. Support was also given to students who wished to do their homework. Facilitation of the Afterschool Club's was supported by Mrs. Elaine Eastwood and Ms. Fiona Ward from St. Brendan's Boys P.S. The project was also joined by Social Care students. Thank you to all for their support.

The Scurragh Summer Programme was made possible by the support of the parents and Scurragh committee, particularly with raising funds for these trips. This year's

programme included a two-night stay in Delphi or an overnight stay in Srahan Centre in Camross. Children from the Scurragh Afterschool Group teamed up with some children from Roscrea and enjoyed a holiday in Delphi Adventure Centre from Tuesday 24<sup>th</sup> July to Thursday 26<sup>th</sup> July. The children got to avail of numerous water sports. The Scurragh Junior group enjoyed a picnic in Birr Castle, followed by dinner in the Scurragh community hall provided by Cindy Parry and Suzanne Dwyer. A group of children then made their way up to Srahan Scout centre for a sleepover. Activities for the night included a walk through the woods, followed by some games. The following day was enjoyed in Salthill Leisure Centre. The group dined in McDonalds on the way home.



*Left: Friends hanging out together*

*Right: Having fun in McDonalds on the way home from Salthill*



*Left: Taking a well earned rest*

The School Completion Programme appreciates all the support it receives from everyone associated with it. Sam, Mairead and the SCP Board of Management would like to take this opportunity to thank the School Principals, Mrs. Barbara Hanamy and Mr. Niall Crofton, Home School and Community Liaison Co-ordinator, Ms. Margaret Fitzgerald, all the staff in the Mercy P.S. and St. Brendan's Boys P.S., to Garda Connaughton and all the agencies that worked with them throughout the year for their interest and support. Their input has been invaluable.

## **NEWS FROM THE SPOT YOUTH CAFÉ**

We would like to say thanks, once more, to the Offaly Local Development Company for funding under the rural development scheme granted to The Thousand Stars Project, the continued support of the community with regards to our ongoing fund-raising initiatives, to Foróige and The SUB Project GYDP for their support and guidance. Thanks to Seamus Kennedy Builders for the works that have transformed The Spot beautifully. The facility is available to the young people of Birr and is open every Friday and Saturday from 3pm – 7pm for 13 – 18 year olds. On Monday evenings from 6pm-8pm, it is available for Juniors (10-12 year olds). It's great to have this wonderful space available to the community. All adult leaders are fully vetted and receive training through the support of Foróige. Last year, The Spot Youth Committee was successful in obtaining funding from the Offaly Youth Bank. We received funding for a clean-up of the Camcor Park. On the 24th of March, 19 young people and 7 adults turned up to help. This included members from the Birr Tidy Towns Committee and we are very grateful for their help on the day. We did a general clean-up of the park and painted all of the benches and fences. Everyone worked extremely hard and succeeded in completing all the work. We finished off the day with a Pizza Party at The Youth Café. Well done and thank you to all who participated.

On Easter Saturday 7th April, The Spot held a successful, Annual Open Day and Cake Sale that raised €420. We wish to thank everyone who donated buns and cakes and everyone who came along to support the cake sale. For the first time this year, we held an Easter Cake competition. All

entries were excellent and standards were so high it was hard to choose a winner. First place went to Maria & Fleur, second to Dolly's Kitchen in Banagher and 3<sup>rd</sup> place to Saoirse Rice, who is only 11 years old. We are looking forward to next year's competition already.

A group of young people and their mentor painted a beautiful mural in the Spot Youth Cafe as a summer holiday art project. Well done to everyone who took part. The mural was finished very well and will be enjoyed by members and volunteers for many years to come. Thanks to Alan Kennedy for his hard work and dedication to our art projects.

We held a fund-raising raffle in Tesco and raised just over €700. Thanks to everyone for their support and a special thanks to Madeline and the staff at Tesco for their ongoing help and support. This money will go towards insurance for all young members. Thank you to Grant Engineering employees for their generous donation last Christmas. We would also like to thank the Camcor Riders Motorcycle Club for their donation to the Project from their annual fund-raising motorcycle run. Some of these funds, at their wish, will be made available to young people for emotional support.

Most of all we wish to thank all our adult leaders who give their time voluntarily at the Café. They attend training days and help out in any way, big or small, be it fundraising or a few hours at the café.

We look forward to another year of fun at the Spot. If you would like to get involved or keep up-to-date, follow us on Facebook [www.facebook.com/spotbirr](http://www.facebook.com/spotbirr).

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## **BIRR NEIGHBOURHOOD WATCH**

Neighbourhood Watch is a crime prevention and community safety programme for urban areas. It operates as a partnership between An Garda Síochána and the public. It works on the basis that every member of a community can help improve the quality of life in the area by keeping a lookout for their neighbours and reporting any suspicious activities in their area to the Gardaí.

Some of the aims of Neighbour Watch include:

- To improve community safety and prevent crime
- To develop Garda and community links
- To increase public confidence in An Garda Síochána
- To foster a caring environment for older and vulnerable people
- To reduce anti-social behaviour, including graffiti and harassment.

Birr Neighbourhood Watch will only succeed with active input from all members. Your actions and support help to make it work. Don't leave it to others, play a part in any way you can.

Birr Neighbourhood Watch provides a variety of security systems for the elderly in our community. These include monitored personal alarms, sensor lighting, door and window locks, spy holes, security chains, smoke alarms, etc. To enable us to provide these we have to fund-raise and do this by an annual church gate collection and an Easter Raffle.

The committee of Birr Neighbourhood Watch are:

Denis Sheils (Chairperson), Rosaleen Harding (Vice-Chairperson), Helena Kennedy (Treasurer), Dympna Mackintosh (Secretary), Judy O'Neill (PRO).

The Neighbourhood Watch enquiry telephone number is 086-1772520.

## BIRR STAGE GUILD

Once again, it has been a busy year for all the people involved in Birr Stage Guild. After seeing 2011 out with 'The Magic of Christmas IV', an evening of festive charm in song and story, it was time for a short festive rest to see in 2012. This was another busy year for all. In early January, the first production of the year got underway with the reading and casting for "Kevin's Bed", by Bernard Farrell. This was staged in March under the direction of Mr. Michael Donegan.

At the AGM in April, the Guild acknowledged the years of dedication and service given by another of its members, by appointing Mr. Tony Hogan as Honorary Life President, joining Mr. Frank McNamara with this honour.

For many years now, Birr Stage Guild is delighted to be part and parcel of Birr Vintage Week and Arts Festival. In August, the Guild presented a Lunchtime Concert in Birr Castle Courtyard as part of the festival, whilst the same evening, some of the Guild members presented 'Unforeseen Family Members' in the Emmet Restaurant in Dooly's Hotel. It was during the Lunchtime Concert that one of our founding members, Mr. Gerry Dolan, was bestowed with the title of Honorary Life President to the Guild.



**Gerry Dolan was presented with an engraved crystal plate to honour and mark his 80<sup>th</sup> Birthday by Adrian Shiels and Maureen de Forge**

Mr. Dolan's wonderful voice and stage presence became the highlight of many musical productions over the years and his work with young and old encouraging so many to become members of the Guild is commendable. So many people have such wonderful memories of time spent on and off stage with Gerry.

Thank you to all the players and sponsors who supported our Golf Classic and to Birr Golf Club, for their help and for the use of the course on the day. A great day was had by all and the barbeque on the 11<sup>th</sup> tee went down very well with all the participants. Kelly's, Green Street, hosted a table quiz on 12<sup>th</sup> October which was a great success. A very grateful 'Thanks' to all who contributed to our fund-raisers. Birr Stage Guild once again hosted the 'One Act Festival'



**And They Used To Star In The Movies**

From left to right: Brian Comaskey (Donald Duck), Tina Ryan (Minnie Mouse), Declan Ward (Bar Man), Adrian Shine (Mickey Mouse)

over the October Bank Holiday weekend. Hosted by Birr Stage Guild, the festival is organised jointly by The Drama League of Ireland and The Amateur Drama Council of Ireland. The festival ran over three nights with three plays per night, which were adjudicated by Dara Carolan. Birr's One Act Drama Festival has become one of the most sought after Festival's in Ireland for award winning drama groups as they compete for a place in the All-Ireland One Act Drama Finals, with Birr festival winners taking top awards in the past. The winners of the Open section of this year's festival were "The Duck Variations" by Lurig Drama Group (Comedy) and the winners of the confined section were "The Bear" by Masquerade Drama Group (Drama). Birr Stage Guild entered the circuit this year with their production of "And They Used To Star in the Movies", a comedy, written by Campbell Black.

Rehearsals are underway for the upcoming pantomime, 'Treasure Island', directed by John Irwin with musical direction by Alan Recks and choreography by Julianne McNamara. There was a wonderful turnout for the workshops, indicating that the love of the 'Panto' is still alive and well in Birr. It promises to be a rib tickling, swashbuckling, high drama, villainous skullduggery, high seas trip to Treasure Island, with many familiar and new faces.

Already, plans are underway to stage the musical 'Oliver' in April 2013, so with a quick rest over the Christmas and New Year, it will be back to work in January.

Finally, Birr Stage Guild would like to thank all its members both on stage, backstage and behind the scenes for another successful year. We are privileged in Birr to have such a strong presence in both musical and drama productions. New members are always welcome and you do not have to sing or dance or act as there are many jobs backstage as well. All talents are put to good use. We all look forward to a successful and busy 2013.

## **BIRR MENTAL HEALTH ASSOCIATION**

Birr Mental Health Association aims to promote a positive awareness to mental health and encourage community understanding and acceptance of mental illness.

Birr Mental Health Association had a very busy 2012. As in the past, we supported people with mental health difficulties during the year. We sponsored annual holidays so that service users were able to enjoy short breaks and also a weekend break in the Harbour Hotel, Galway was also won through a free draw. We gave sponsorship to some people who travelled to Lourdes. Our members, along with clients attending Community Mental Health Centre, were also given the opportunity to enjoy some day trips to Knock and other locations. We continue to support deserving cases, of which there are many in our current climate, by providing hampers at Christmas, fuel vouchers and in other appropriate ways. Our Halloween party is an annual treat which is attended by many from Birr and also associations in Tullamore, Rathdowney and Portlaoise. Of course, the Christmas party is the icing on the cake and is eagerly awaited every year.

This year we have taken on two projects, which we hope will help promote awareness and also support for those affected by mental health issues.

In February 2012, Mental Health Ireland promoted a drama initiative. We recognise the important role the arts can play in the recovery of people with mental health difficulties and how increasing access to such cultural experiences plays a vital role in this. Birr Mental Health Association decided to take on the project at local level and, with the co-operation of the service users, staff of CMHC and with the guidance of a drama teacher, the work began. On 12<sup>th</sup> October, they performed their play 'Freaky but Friendly' in front of friends and families. The play tackled the subject of stigma around mental illnesses and was written and performed by a number of service users. Huge enjoyment was got from this project by all involved but it was the impact it had on the

audience that was the highlight. Our second project was to create an information board promoting positive mental health and also providing information around services and helplines people can contact in a crisis. We hoped to target people who may be at risk of suicide or self-harm. They will be distributed free of charge to clubs, societies and schools. Here are a few tips for good mental health:

- Take time to yourself
- Accept who you are and don't judge yourself too harshly. **Nobody's** perfect, we all have our good points and bad points.
- Set realistic goals and keep things in perspective.
- Spend time with people who make you feel good.
- Talk about your feelings - Talking is a sign of strength, not weakness.
- Ask for help when you need it - If you are unable to talk to those close to you, call a Helpline.
- Maintain a healthy diet- Good food is essential for your mind and body to work properly.
- Be active every day in as many ways as you can.
- Avoid binge drinking - Excess alcohol can increase anxiety and lead to depression.
- Dare to dream.

All our activities are possible through the goodwill and generosity of the people in our locality. We would like to take this opportunity to thank everyone who supported and helped us in any way during the year.

For further information you may contact us by phoning 05791 20540/ 05791 20576 or call to CMHC, Wilmer Road, Birr. Our meetings take place on the 2<sup>nd</sup> Tuesday of each month at 8pm, in above centre. New members are always welcome.



In June this year the International Eucharistic Congress was held in Dublin. Whilst many people attended and enjoyed the Congress it had not much impact on people's lives in general. However in 1932, the last time the Eucharistic Congress was held in Ireland, it was a different story. There was great excitement throughout the country with towns and villages flying flags and bunting in honour of the event. These rare photos show Pound Street in Birr bedecked with flags and bunting for the occasion.

## BIRR GEORGIAN SOCIETY

The Australian Ambassador to Ireland, Mr. Bruce Davis visited our town during August to open the 44<sup>th</sup> annual Birr Vintage Week and Arts' Festival. Afterwards, visiting the workhouse, he saw for himself where many young girls left for Australia during and after the great Irish Famine of the 1840s. He was greatly moved and keenly interested in promoting its retention as a reminder of the origins of many Australians today. The Birr Historical Society is planning on holding a conference in relation to the building in 12 months' time when it is hoped it will engender great interest.

Our Chapter members visited houses in north Tipperary and Clare in July. In Loughton House, Moneygall, our hostess, Dorothy O'Reilly, was most welcoming. She outlined the history of this very fine house built in 1777 for Major Thomas Pepper, with later additions by James Pain in 1835. We were free to see and touch for ourselves old letters and memorabilia, which were of great interest.

Next, we called to see Mount Levers Court in Clare, built for Col. Henry Levers in 1736 by John Rothery and is considered to be among the finest tall Irish country houses. The house was in great order but awareness and advice is needed for the restoration of the sunken gardens and surrounds, as it would appear the house is not being viewed at its best.

Our onward journey then took us to Lough Cutra Castle in Gort where our hostess Susie Wynne-Jones entertained us to a magnificent lunch and allowed us to roam freely throughout the castle and grounds. The Castle started building in 1809 until 1817 when it was almost finished. Viscount Gort was forced to sell the Castle and estate due to bankruptcy in the late 1840s. The entire building operation was completed in 1858 under the ownership of

General Sir William Gough, an eminent British General who added large extensions to the original building and grounds, including an American garden to the south west of the Castle.

In the 1920s, the family moved out of the Castle as they could not afford the running costs. Some of the stables in the Courtyards were converted into a residence for them. The Castle was effectively closed up for the next forty years although, during WWII the Irish army was billeted within the Castle and on the estate.

The Estate changed hands several times between the 1930s and the 1960s when it was purchased by descendants of the First Viscount Gort. They took on the task of refurbishing the Castle during the late 1960s. Having completed the project, they too were bankrupted and were forced to sell up. At that time it was bought by the present owner's family.

In more recent years, there has begun another refurbishment programme to the Castle and the Estate generally. In 2003, a new roof was completed on the main body of the Castle, with some of the tower roofs also being refurbished and the internal Castle brought up to modern standards. Around the estate, there has been reconstruction and rebuilding works in the gate lodges and courtyards. There has also begun extensive works to some of the woodlands in order to try and retain the earlier character of the Estate. As the Castle looks today, it is a great achievement and a credit to the hard working owner and staff.

In November, we had our annual meeting and, as always, new members are welcomed.

## BIRR LEGION OF MARY



The Legion of Mary wish to thank all who donated memorabilia for the recent International Eucharistic Congress display at No. 16 Main Street, Birr. Included were items used at the last Eucharistic Congress in 1932. Thanks also to Paul Barber for the kind use of the window.

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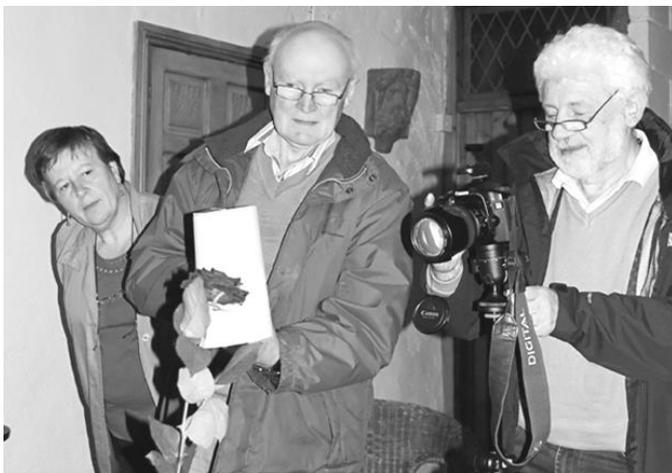
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## BIRR PHOTOGRAPHY GROUP

Birr Photography Group has regular meetings, talks, discussions and demonstrations on a variety of photographic topics at Craughwell's Pub in Castle Street. 2012 has been a busy year for the group, with a membership of over 20 active photographers.

The group held regular talks and tutorials on various photographic topics and techniques. Topics included understanding how a digital camera works and the use of photographic equipment. Workshops on the use of studio lighting equipment were held at Craughwell's pub. Tutorials on the computer manipulation of images using Adobe Photoshop and Adobe Lightroom software were organised. The aim of these events was to take better photographs by improving camera knowledge and technique.



**Julien Kennedy, Billy McLoughlin and Paul Barber at a Low Key Lighting Workshop**

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 nature to abstract. Then everyone's images were viewed by the group for discussion. Members gave slide shows of their own work which was of interest to the

group. These included travel photography in Iraq and Spain, also local events such as the 42<sup>nd</sup> Irish Hot Air Balloon Festival and The Irish Game and Country Fair.

The group was invited to "Sizzlers Tandoori" to photograph Indian Cuisine in June to produce images for the restaurants website. These group outings are a valuable learning event, as well as a social occasion, the more experienced photographers giving help and advice to other members.

The Offaly Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals invited members of the group to submit images for their 2013 calendar. One member had an image "highly recommended" in the Irish Farmers Association 2013 Calendar competition. Several other members also had their images printed in local and national papers.

The group had three public exhibitions: "Abstract" at Birr Library in May; "Proverbs" at Craughwell's Pub and Birr Library in August as part of the 44<sup>th</sup> Birr Vintage Week; and "Reflections of Birr" at Birr Theatre and Arts Centre in September and October. The "Reflections of Birr" exhibition was opened by local historian Margaret Hogan (right) and was well received by the general public for its technical as well as artistic content.



Some members also had their work exhibited individually at the Tullamore Arts Festival on the May Bank Holiday and at other exhibitions during the 44<sup>th</sup> Birr Vintage Week in August.

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 <http://birrphotogroup.wordpress.com/> for more information.

### **Building the Birr Ball Alley 1951**

(L to R): Johnny Williams, Johnny Taylor, Bill Hegarty, Christy Mooney, Anthony McLoughlin, Joe Cahill, Georgie Plunkett





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## BIRR HISTORICAL SOCIETY

Birr Historical Society meets on the third Monday of the month from September to May in Dooly's Hotel at 8pm. We invite speakers, both local and from further afield, to speak on topics of historical and archaeological interest.

Some of the talks over the year were especially interesting. Lady Rosse spoke about the Coptic Churches which she had visited in Ethiopia. Margaret Hogan discussed Caithlin Brughna and her connections in Birr and the Kingston family. Many people will remember The Radharc films shown on RTE in the late sixties and seventies. In February, Peter Dunn, brother of Father Joe Dunn who helped make many of the films, showed us two of the Radharc films. Many of the films are available to buy as CDs.

In January, Jim Houlihan brought us up to date on his further studies for his Masters on the Cain Adamnain and finally, we had a fascinating talk from Alf Monaghan who is from Carrick-on-Shannon. Alf traced the connection and links between ancient Egypt and the Coptic Church to early Irish monasticism.

Our outing in July was to the Cistercian Monastery in Mount St. Joseph in Roscrea. We had a very interesting tour led by Dom Kevin. He showed us around the Church and outlined the history of the arrival of the monks from Mount Mellary in 1878 and the building of the Church which was built from local limestone in less than 4 years. He then showed us the beautiful wood-lined library, the refectory and, finally, the original farm courtyard. The tour



**The Society's Summer Outing to Mt. St. Joseph's Abbey**  
 Front: Shirley Kenny, Bridget Sullivan, Fiona Moran, Dom. Laurence Walsh O.S.C.O. (Guide), Simon Feehan, Joy Haines  
 2nd Row: Jo O' Donoghue, Rev Irene Morrow, Anne Ward  
 Back: Pat O' Donoghue, Patricia Coughlan, John Joyce, Estelle Wrafter, Teresa Ryan-Feehan, Mary Fogarty, Brian Kennedy.

ended with a photograph on the steps of the guesthouse and a welcome cup of tea and freshly-made cakes.

We celebrated Heritage Week on the 18th August with a walk led by James Scully and Margaret Hogan along the Camcor River in Birr. James Scully is writing a book on the bridges of Offaly, so it was very interesting to examine the bridges leading from the Maltings, through the Camcor Park and finishing at Syngfield Bridge. Margaret Hogan enlivened the walk with snippets of history about the many fine buildings along the river.

### Two Little Boys!



**Billy Shortt (left) and Seamie Hehir in 1965**

### Did you know that there was once a garage on Pound Street?



**Tom Corcoran's Garage in Pound Street in 1937**

**Pictured right are members of the Corcoran family, Jim, Mary Christina and Pat.**



## **BIRR BRIDGE CLUBS**

### **Camcor Bridge Club**

The 2011/2012 season has been yet another progressive year for the Camcor Bridge Club. The Club continues to thrive, with over forty members for this season. We meet every Wednesday night in the County Arms Hotel from October to May. Outgoing President, Teresa Kelly, did an excellent job last season. We extend a warm welcome to in-coming President, Maura Kerrigan, and trust she will enjoy her term of office.

The club held its usual competitions during the year, culminating at the end of the season in the President's Prize, which was won by Gay Halvey and Delia Naughton; well done ladies. Well done to all our members who took part in the various club competitions and congratulations to all of the winners. In May of this year, we held our annual outing at the Greyhound Stadium in Galway. This was a great night out and was thoroughly enjoyed by all.

### **Birr 66 Bridge Club**

The President for the 2012/2013 season is Maureen Hayes 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. *We would like to thank the County Arms Hotel for providing us with such wonderful facilities and help during the year.* Apart from the weekly competitions, the club plays for turkeys in the lead-up to Christmas, as well as other major competitions throughout the year. We all look forward to the coveted President's Prize, which is played at the end of each season. We would like to congratulate last year's president, Sadie Leonard, on

her year and a special thanks to her for her beautiful prize; well done to all the winners, of which there was a wide number.

On alternative years, The Camcor Bridge Club and Birr 66 Bridge 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. Bridge 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. That's what keeps people coming back to the bridge table and, it's why bridge will always be the world's most popular game. Joe Kerins one of the founder members of Birr 66 Bridge 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 05791 22671.

### **Bridge in the Glens**

Bridge is also played every Tuesday mornings in The Glens, Birr Golf Club, from November to early May. It is now entering its 10<sup>th</sup> 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 10.30 a.m. For further information, contact Mary O'Gorman on 087 2380461.



**Congratulations to Margaret Sherlock who retired from Birr Town Council after almost 45 years of service. Margaret was presented with a bouquet of flowers by Margaret Bourke from Birr Town Council at a special retirement function at Birr Civic Offices. Past and present Council officials as well as outdoor and indoor staff gathered to wish her well.**



**Birr Stage Guild Men's Chorus – mid 1960's**

*Back Row (L to R): Peter Murphy, Seanie Plunkett, Willie Maher, Billy Hogan, Arthur Kelly, Jack Lee, Paul Glennon  
Front Row: Seamie Davis, Michael Davis, Frank Custy, Seamie Brien, Gerry Ryan, Paddy Nugent.*

## **OFFLINE FILM FESTIVAL (10th - 14th October 2012)**

**Film-making, Screenings, Workshops**

### **OFFline Film Festival 2012**

#### **Runners up in the Filmmaking Competition**

(L to R): Bébhinn Hctor, Gary Hctor, Daniel Fieldhouse, Paddy O'Connor, Olivia James, Eugene O'Brien, Marcella Corcoran Kennedy TD, Patrick Nolan, Lauren Hatchard, Lisa Daly, Patrick Nolan and Niall Cahir.



### **OFFline Mini Movies**

Back Row (L to R): Clodagh Fay, Michael Loughnane, Emma Nee Haslam, Peter Ormond, Katie Finnegan, Sinead O'Reilly, Emma Barone  
Front Row: Children from Primary Schools who took part in the Mini Movies Youth Film Programme with Michael Fortune during the year.

## **BIRR LEISURE CENTRE**

Once again we were very well supported in 2012 by the local community as well as schools, clubs and various other organisations. The year as a whole did pose a challenge, i.e. 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 continued support from Pobal, Offaly County Council and Birr Town Council.

Further to the cost efficient, eco-friendly changes that were implemented in 2011 we are now installing a backwash water recycling system in order to recycle up to 90% of the back-wash water. This recycled water will be used for showers and toilets. This project will assist in keeping the business sustainable i.e. cutting the cost of water charges which were implemented this year by Offaly County Council. The overall cost will be €50,520 with Offaly Local Development Company once again providing grant aid of €37,890 (75% of the cost).

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 like to thank committee members, 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.

Activities at the Centre include: Swimming, Child and Adult Swim Lessons, Aquafit, Swim Club, Lifeguard and Swim Teaching Courses, Pilates, Bums and Tums, Spin, Circuit Training, Step Aerobics, Gymnastics, Ballet. We also have a Massage Therapist available for Sport Injury, Holistic and Aromatherapy Massage. Booking is essential on 05791 20343 for all lessons and classes. For more information visit our website [www.birrleisurecentre.ie](http://www.birrleisurecentre.ie).

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 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.

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## CARRIG/RIVERSTOWN/KILLEEN ACTIVE RETIREMENT GROUP

We have enjoyed another active and enjoyable year. We had our usual weekly bowls and visits to play pitch and putt in Portumna. We also visited other groups in our area where we enjoyed some excellent hospitality. In April we travelled to Cork for our annual break. We stayed in the very smart Montenotte Hotel and travelled from there to many places of interest, including Clonakilty Model Village and the Railway Museum. Another highlight was a train trip around the town.

Just recently we had a day trip to Kilkenny which included a visit to an activity park in Castlecomer. However, the highlight was a visit to a museum in Bennettsbridge called Nore View Folk Museum. This house holds a fantastic collection of objects of Irish historical interest including the Great Famine, Old Time Kitchen, Old Fashioned Pub, Old Forge, etc. I could fill six pages of the items on display. We were all transported back in time as we could identify with most of what was on show. Unfortunately, due to the time we had available to us, we just scratched the surface of what was there. A return visit is definitely high on our



Pictured on our outing to Cork

"to do" list.

We held our annual Mass and social evening on Thursday 28th November. We are eagerly looking forward to 2013. One or two events are well into the planning stage. New members are always welcome to join us.



Meet members of the committee

left to right: John Woods, treasurer, Margaret Guilfoyle, chairperson, Mary Taylor, secretary.

## BIRR TOWN COUNCIL JOINT POLICING COMMITTEE

The Joint Policing Committee (JPC) Initiative is supported by both the Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform, as well as the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government.

The main aim of the Joint Policing Committees is to provide a forum where a local authority and the senior Garda officers responsible for the policing of that area, with the participation of the Oireachtas members and local community interests, can consult, discuss and make recommendations on matters affecting the policing of the area.

The following is a breakdown of the representation on the Committee which was set out in the guidelines issued by the Ministers :-

- 9 Elected Members of Birr Town Council.
- Oireachtas Representative, Deputy Marcella Corcoran Kennedy.
- Birr Town Manager and Town Clerk and other senior staff as required.
- Garda Superintendent, Birr Garda Officers.
- 3 community and voluntary representatives (Messrs. B. Harte and C. Carter & Ms. G. Hynes).

The JPC is chaired by Cllr. Denis Tierney and meets on a quarterly basis to discuss issues of mutual concern.

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## BIRR LIONS CLUB

Birr Lions Club maintains its commitment to the aged, the underprivileged and the youth of the area by raising funds from the annual Christmas Fast, church gate collection, table quiz, Birr Annual Review magazine and country fair collection.

These funds are then distributed to various clubs and beneficiaries include St. Vincent de Paul, Simon Community, Lions Sight Savers, Birr Active Retirement, Barnardos, Birr Theatre and Arts Centre, Neighbourhood Watch, ASSIST (Suicide watch) and the Banagher Sub-Aqua team, to name just a few.

The club also organise an annual party for all senior citizens in the day-care centre, which always proves to be a great success. We also give a helping hand to the Birr Vintage Week committee in collecting at the now famous Camcor Capers night during the festival week. Lastly, we would like to take this opportunity to thank you. Your generosity is most sincerely appreciated.



**Last year's President of the Birr Lions Club, Brian Hogan (right), hands over the chain of office to incoming President, Paul Lynch.**



Riverview Resources, which is part of St. Anne's Services in Roscrea, provides numerous services for people with intellectual disabilities. These services include Supported

Employment, Education and Leisure activities. There are currently 16 people availing of these services in the Birr area. Riverview Resources is located in Ely House overlooking Camcor Park. A computer room, kitchen area, therapy room, crafts room and an active retirement area are just a few of the facilities available on-site in Riverview.

The growing popularity of the crafts that are produced in Riverview are a testament to the quality, design and craftsmanship that is at Riverview. These handmade products include the ever

popular Slate Design, Cards, Fascinators, Jewellery and many more. All the craft products are for sale and make ideal gifts for weddings and loved ones, in turn providing

essential business skills and wages to the service users in Riverview.

Recently the service users have started to make fire bricks from recycled newspapers and this is proving to be a highly successful enterprise as word spreads about their effectiveness.

Community participation is one of our main objectives in Riverview and activities in the town such as the gym, swimming pool, Tidy Towns, coffee mornings, etc. are utilised to the full. We are also very fortunate here in Birr that a number of our Service Users at Riverview Resources are employed by local business people through our Supported Employment programme.

Visitors are always welcome to view our Craft Products which are on sale in the reception area. Commissions are welcome for the Slate Design. Opening Hours are Monday – Thursday 9-5 and Friday 9-4.



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Tuesday 11<sup>th</sup> – Saturday 16<sup>th</sup>  
December

**'Oliver'**  
the Musical  
Tuesday 16<sup>th</sup> – Saturday 20<sup>th</sup>  
April 2013



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## **CODERDOJO COMES TO BIRR**



**Dr. Vincent Cunnane, CEO, Shannon Development; Ciaran Cannon, TD, Minister of State at the Dept. of Education and Skills; Offaly CEB CEO Sean Ryan; with triplets Charlie, Lucy and George Donnery and triplets Luke, Daragh and Sam Morris at the Birr CoderDojo launch.**

The not-for-profit computer coding camp, supported by Shannon Development and Offaly County Enterprise Board was officially launched on Wednesday, 19<sup>th</sup> September, by Ciaran Cannon T.D., Minister of State at the Dept. of Education and Skills, and Coder Dojo co-founders Bill Liao and James Whelton.



**Annabel Haslam launches her rocket under the watchful eye of Colin Fitzsimons.**

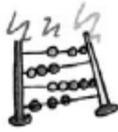
CoderDojo, the worldwide phenomenon that originated in a Cork secondary school, has arrived in Birr, hosted by Shannon Development in Birr Technology Centre. CoderDojo is a not-for-profit organisation that encourages young people to learn how to code, develop websites, Smartphone apps, computer programs, computer games and more. Dojos are set up, run by and taught by volunteers. Dojos organise tours of technology companies, bring in guest speakers and organise events. In addition to learning to code, members meet like-minded people, show off what they've been working on and so on. CoderDojo makes developing and learning to code a fun, sociable and positive experience. It also puts a strong emphasis on open source and free software and has a strong network of members and volunteers globally. If you want to get involved with CoderDojo in Birr, please email [BirrCoderDojo@gmail.com](mailto:BirrCoderDojo@gmail.com).

CoderDojo Birr also held a rocketry workshop in September. The event was organised with the support of the Irish Rocketry Society and involved a 3-hour rocket-building workshop, followed by flying each rocket. The children built starter rockets, found out about launching rockets, the International Space Station and the costs of getting into space! The aim is to encourage the creativity of young people, primarily through coding and other engaging ways. While the building of the rockets was lots of fun, the launching was truly exciting. In the wonderful surroundings of Birr Castle, the many and varied rockets were blasted into the air under the watchful eyes and careful direction of Colin Fitzsimons from the Irish Rocketry Society.



### **Blast From The Past in the Tennis World**

Back Row (L to R): Sean Harraghy, Dermot Horan, Michael Kearns, Marie Kearns, Jimmy Lucey, John Joe Sheeran, Pat O'Gorman  
 Front Row: Una O'Gorman, Rose Harraghy, Dolores Molloy, Fidelma Brown, Joanne Loughnane, Liz Hunt, Ita Cavanagh



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## EXCITING YEAR AT BIRR THEATRE & ARTS CENTRE

2012 was another hugely successful year for Birr Theatre & Arts Centre, and the great attendance figures bear testament to its wide and varied programme of events.

There was no shortage of professional theatre throughout the year, with local and national companies treading the boards. Amongst these were performances from Banagher Drama Group, Jasango Theatre, PwC Players and Des Keogh (*left*) in John B Keane's *The Love Hungry Farmer*. Birr Stage Guild, as always, made a huge contribution throughout the year and one of the undoubted



highlights was *Fishamble: The New Play Company's* production of *Silent* with Pat Kinnevene, which has since gone on international tour.

Music lovers were well catered for, with performances for all tastes; local musician Pete Kennedy (*below left*), fresh from his success at the British Country Music Awards and the cream of Irish talent represented by The Furey's and Davey Arthur, Liam Lawton, Declan Sinnott, The Walls and Frankie Gavin and De Dannan, to name but a few. Opera and classical lovers enjoyed John Molloy (*pictured right*) and Anthony Kearns, Ivan Ilic, the Irish Chamber Orchestra and the indomitable Vladimir Jablovkov's *Classical Twist*, whilst Birr Comhaltas presented a number of concerts.

Legitimate Bodies Dance Company increased its local and national profile with a series of classes and performances, as well as celebrating its 5<sup>th</sup> Birthday. You(th) Share 2012 has become a highlight for young dance performers from across Ireland, EDge (London School of Contemporary Dance programme) thrilled its audience whilst I.F.O.N.L.Y Dance Festival rounded off the year in style. *Second Hand Landscapes* had its National Premiere to great acclaim and went on to tour around Ireland.



Birr Film Club continues to go from strength to strength, showcasing 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 2013 event. Birr Theatre & Arts Centre was once again very successfully involved in nationwide events; Bealtaine

Festival, Culture Night 2012, National Day of Drawing and National Music Day.

Birr Theatre & Arts Centre's visual arts programme showcased many artists from around Ireland, including Willie Redmond and Emma Barone (*see bottom right for art work by Emma*), with students from St. Brendan's Community School also showcasing their talents.

Birr Photography Group's *Reflections of Birr* received great praise as did *The Illustrators* – an exhibition of contemporary children's book illustrations curated by world renowned Julia Donaldson. *Keeping It In The Family* (*right*) highlighted the exceptional artistic talent and diversity of Offaly artists; the only criteria was that they all had to be directly related to each other or married! The 5<sup>th</sup> annual Common



Ground (an exhibition of artists from the Midlands) added to the growing reputation of Birr Theatre & Arts Centre as a centre for visual arts.

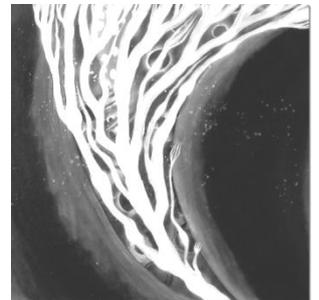
Hullabaloo! – the 6<sup>th</sup> Annual Offaly's Children's Arts Festival - provided fantastic entertainment simultaneously in Birr and Clara during the October mid-term with highly entertaining sessions in dance, art, crafts and storytelling and a number of live performances. The Festival is coordinated by Offaly County Council Arts Office and Birr Theatre & Arts Centre with Offaly Library Services and Clara Family Resource Centre and supported by Offaly Local

Development Company.

Birr Theatre & Arts Centre strongly encourages young artists of the future and they had great scope to explore their potential with a range of workshops and courses. These included *Star Camp 2012*, *Hop Up!!*, *School of Rock* and the *Samuel Beckett Acting Masterclass*.

There was no shortage also of comedy, with Neil Delamere, Conal Gallen, Pat Shortt, *One Man Star Wars™ Trilogy*, *The Nuala's*, along with two One-Act Plays during Birr Vintage Week & Arts Festival; *The Candidate* and *A Lady of Letters* ensuring 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 2013 and to welcoming you to this top-class venue for more fantastic entertainment!



## IS FÉIDIR LINN

*Reporting on the past year with Birr's 'little 'Gaeltacht'*

Dia dhaoibh a chairde! Greetings from Biorra le Gaeilge. We are happy to report another busy year. Since our foundation and first meeting in winter 2010 and launch in March 2011, the fledgling Irish language group has gone from strength-to-strength. The monthly Ciorcail Comhra (second Wednesday of the month at 8.30pm in Craughwell's Pub, Castle Street) has a good mix of Gaeilgeoirí at all levels.

Noíníní Beaga Naíonra, Little Daisies Playschool as Gaeilge, has been increasing in numbers with great attendance at both the morning and afternoon classes. This August, in Birr Vintage Week & Arts Festival, Laura and some parents made delightful banners and dressed up their children to take part in the parade. The naíonra will be relocating from Green Street to larger premises in Syngfield, shortly.

Stella Thompson's winter adult language classes, catering for both beginners and improvers, kicked off again in October. The classes are delivered with the grateful assistance of County Offaly VEC Adult Education Services.

The Campa Samraidh, also in its second year, was run in conjunction with Ógras, at St. Brendan's National School from the 2<sup>nd</sup> - 13<sup>th</sup> July and from the 16<sup>th</sup> - 20<sup>th</sup> July at the Community School. Many thanks to the principals of each school, Niall Crofton and Ming Loughnane, and to the staff, who worked hard to make us feel so welcome.

A sub-committee of the Biorra le Gaeilge coiste and co-helpers is currently networking with groups and agencies at home and abroad to set up 'Portach', an international summer school for adults of all ages wishing to learn Irish. Complimentary to 'The Gathering' next year, we hope to encourage those living abroad to stay in Birr for a week, or two. Morning classes in an informal and light-hearted atmosphere, hearing, speaking, learning Irish will be followed by sightseeing tours with bi-lingual guides to historic sites. Many other cultural experiences will be included, from learning to play hurling to basic lessons in the tin whistle and bodhrán, art classes, theatre and, of course, enjoying nights out dancing, storytelling and listening to traditional music, etc. All with Irish.

Regular columns in the local paper, to appear monthly from the New Year, are being planned, sourced and written by a range of interesting writers. These will be as Gaeilge with an English translation (or vice versa!) and on any topic of local, cultural, literary diversity.

During Seachtain na Gaeilge, and for around eight years now, there has been an annual Irish Language Short Films night, 'Oíche Gearrscannáin', at Tin Jug Studio on Brendan Street. This event continues successfully, thanks to Tadhg O'Cruadhlaioich from Rathangan, (who is also a regular to Birr for céilí nights). After the screenings this year there was a special night of the Ciorcail Comhrá, and great music, with special thanks to Comhaltas.



Great praise to The Organic Store for the name tags as Gaeilge on their fresh vegetables during Seachtain na Gaeilge and thanks to Carolina Gustavsson from Sweden who works there! Warm thanks to the businesses on Main Street who put up our poster encouraging customers to use some Irish phrases.

Le do thoil; please keep in touch with us through our Facebook page and Website!

- If you'd like to help promote Irish through your business, and thus promote your business through Biorra le Gaeilge, please contact us.
- If you'd like to plan an event or gathering – however small – during Seachtain na Gaeilge, or at any time, please contact one of us!
- Interested in taking part in our Beir Bua le Biorra talent competition at Birr Theatre? It's aimed at secondary school children, promoting the language through the mediums of dance, song, poetry, prose and music.
- Interested in being involved with education for your children through Irish?
- Willing and able to help the committee and with the organisation of events, secretarial work, etc.? Please call us!

Stella ni Mhaile Thompson

– Irish Classes, tuition, etc: 085 711 2211

Rosalind Fanning

– about articles, art, film nights, etc: 087 668 1783

Denis Kelly

– about the international summer school: 05791 51397

Eilís Hartigan

– about enrolment in the naíonra: 087 7678130

*Coiste Members:*

*Cllr. John Carroll, Chairman*

*Denis Kelly, Stella Thompson, Rosalind Fanning, Brian Carroll, Antoinette Fahy, Maire ni Chofaidh.*

[www.birrtidytowns.com](http://www.birrtidytowns.com)

## BIRR TIDY TOWNS

[www.facebook.com/birrtidytowns](http://www.facebook.com/birrtidytowns)

Birr Tidy Towns was established in the late 1950's and has entered the competition for many years. A new committee was established in January 2012 and Birr Tidy Towns has helped in the rejuvenation of Birr over the past year and their projects have been a huge success.



Offaly County Council Community and Enterprise Section made a great contribution to Birr Tidy Towns. In conjunction with Birr Tidy Towns, they arranged with Westport Tidy Towns to come to Birr to relay to the large gathering, who attended a public meeting in Dooley's Hotel, the background to their many National Tidy Towns Awards. It was very refreshing and very informative on how Birr could improve their points. Westport had a full-time architect working with their Tidy Towns Committee, in conjunction with the local Council and outdoor staff employees, and also the business people of the town. Collective involvement brings success. Prior to the meeting, they had a walk around the town with the Birr Tidy Towns Committee. They outlined a number of black spots which required upgrading and painting, also having shop signage names painted. Plastic signs were not appropriate for a Heritage Town. On the positive side the advantages Birr Town had, which superseded Westport were the river, parks, Oxmantown Mall, John's Mall and the many Georgian buildings, including Emmet Square most notably The Column in the Square itself, The Castle, The Civic Offices and the Churches. On the whole, their visit was very informative.



**Before**



**After**

In the aftermath of their visit, Birr Tidy Towns undertook a number of changes to improve on their points through the National Tidy Towns competition. Firstly, a website was designed both to highlight Birr and Birr Tidy Towns efforts in improving the town. Also, Birr Tidy Towns Facebook page was set up as a community page to give the people of Birr, both near and far, the opportunity to have their say about what they want in Birr and to promote their businesses and community gatherings. Both projects have been very successful. Mrs. Pauline Sharp co-ordinates both sites for Birr Tidy Towns. If you have any enquiries about either site you can contact her by email [birrtidytowns@hotmail.com](mailto:birrtidytowns@hotmail.com), by phone 089-4562484 or through either site.

The Birr Tidy Towns committee took a tour of Birr to look at the areas that needed upgrading, resulting in an increase

of 13 marks, bringing our score to 266. The 12 members worked very hard for over 8 months, cleaning, painting, repairing walls, enhancing 2 shop fronts, planting flower beds and hanging baskets.

Birr Tidy Towns ran a competition, in conjunction with Birr Credit Union, for Birr's Best Kept Estates. This was a great success. 19 estates entered this year. A wonderful presentation night was had by the large crowd who attended. Congratulations to the winners of each category and to Cllr. Bernadette Fanneran and Mrs. Pauline Sharp, who organised a most entertaining evening with the help of the County Arms Hotel, who provided Birr Tidy Towns and their guests with a buffet and drinks for the night. Also, we would like to give a big thank you to Edel O'Brien in the Offaly County Council for her hard work through the year and to the many others who contributed to us also.

A big thanks to Birr Credit Union Officers and Committee for their generous contribution of €3,000 for the Best Kept Estates Competition 2012. We would also like to thank Birr Town Council for their financial funding and to everyone who supported the fund-raising events. Thanks to Kelly's Pub, Green Street, for their premises for the table quizzes, to John Gleeson, who generously gave the Trailer-Water Tank and to our Treasurer, Bernadette Fanneran, and PRO, Pauline Sharp, who organised the fund-raising events for 2012. A special thanks to Liam Moran and the FÁS workers, to the 4 TÚS workers, Birr Chamber of Commerce, Birr Town Council, Offaly County Council, The Tidy Towns Committee, who are pictured below. A special thanks to Tom King for the work he carried out on the Doolin's Arcade (see photos on left).

**Keep Birr Tidy by supporting Birr Tidy Towns.**



**Back Row (L to R): Pauline Sharp (PRO), Tommy Moody, Mary Lawlor, Liam Dumbleton, Nancy Moody, Dymphna Mackintosh, Ann Finnane, Fiona Devery, Bernadette Fanneran (Treasurer), Tom King, Kathleen Russell, Tony McLoughlin (Chairperson), Jean Donoghue.**

**Front Row: David and Zowie Sharp, Harry and Emma Dumbleton, Evan Brady, Alex Brady**

**Missing from the photo are Martina and Kenny Cooke**

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## OFFALY YOUTH THEATRE - BIRR

Following on from its very successful Official Launch at Birr Theatre & Arts Centre during April this year, Offaly Youth Theatre continues to go from strength to strength. One of the highlights of this year was the National Festival of Youth Theatres, which took place in Kilkenny during the summer and gave members of Offaly Youth Theatre the opportunity to meet and interact with other Youth Theatres from across the country. Other events which members got to attend included the Samuel Beckett Acting Masterclass and Bo Leitch's Writing Workshop.

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.

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, with each term lasting 10 weeks, 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 13 and 20, these fun weekly workshops are developing participants acting abilities in innovative ways through great activities, games and processes. Workshops in Birr are held on a Friday evening from 7.30pm to 9.00pm.

This project is facilitated by committed local theatre professionals, Macdara Deery, Angela Ryan and Anne Moloney, 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 Janine on (087) 2071258 for further information.



Members from Offaly Youth Theatre who took part in the Official Launch celebrations at Birr Theatre & Arts Centre on the 15th April 2012 along with facilitators Macdara Deery, Angela Ryan and Anne Clarke.

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## 44<sup>TH</sup> ANNUAL BIRR VINTAGE WEEK & ARTS FESTIVAL



Friday 3<sup>rd</sup> August saw Birr turning back time as the 44<sup>th</sup> 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 was opened by his Excellency, Mr. Bruce Davis, Australian Ambassador to Ireland, who spoke of the long-standing relationship between Ireland and Australia. The thousands of people who thronged the streets of the town enjoyed the displays of marching bands, floats, vintage cars, tractors, bicycles and machinery, along with the street theatre performers who also entertained after the Parade adding to the festive atmosphere.

The Vintage Sunday Festival Mass celebrated the community's activities during the week with choirs of the parish and instrumental music. The Ormond Flying Club provided a fantastic display of aircraft and entertainment at their 40<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Celebrations Spectacular Air Show. The Artisan and Craft Market in Emmet Square drew great crowds to the town centre, with its large range of stalls and fantastic variety of sights and aromas, whilst Richard Haslam's Flowers – Vintage Style rounded off the opening weekend in a beautiful fashion.



The J.J. Kinahan Criterium Cycle Race

The Festival Committee was delighted to have such a great turnout at the Pavement Art Competition and the Children's Treasure Hunt, with favourable weather conditions adding to the enjoyment of the participants. Sporting enthusiasts' highlights included Vintage Tennis, Under-12 Penalty Shoot Out, Skydiving, Golfing at the Glens along with the J.J Kinahan Criterium Cycle Race, which saw cyclists achieving speeds of up to 60kph to the great awe and delight of the spectators. The Donkey Derby was once again a huge family favourite and the lively music provided by Big Generator 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.



Music lovers were spoilt for choice; Birr Theatre & Arts Centre hosted the School of Rock Gig, The Walls and the beautiful *Duo Vocis* (pictured above) with Sean Costello and Frank Naughton. Birr Comhaltas held a great Trad Music Session and aspiring musicians of the future competed in the Mick Egan Busking Competition on the streets of Birr. Nightly entertainment in local pubs included live music, candlelit nights and inter-pub competitions, which all added to the atmosphere of the Festival Week.

This year's Visual Arts Trail 2012 featured over 50 visiting and local artists showcasing work in all media, in pop-up shops and studios across the town. Photographic Portraits by Mark Henderson, Origami Workshops for all ages, the Art Exhibitions Escorted Walk and artists talk, and the Darklight Film screenings were all great additions to this year's Arts Programme. TNT Theatre's production of *King Lear*, played out against the background of Birr Castle was an amazing spectacle and the lunchtime play's; *The Candidate* and *A Lady of Letters* at Birr Theatre & Arts Centre provided much hilarity.





The Walls - Joe & Steve

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

With annual favourites, new events, vintage flavour and modern entertainment, the 44<sup>th</sup> 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 earlier August dates proved massively popular with visitors, who came in larger numbers than before, and have encouraged similar dates for 2013. 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 Arts Council, Offaly County Council Arts Office, Birr Town Council, Offaly Local Development Company, Shannon Development, Birr Chamber of Commerce, Birr Garda Síochána, 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.

Planning is already underway for next year's Birr Vintage Week & Arts Festival, which runs from Friday 2<sup>nd</sup> – Friday 9<sup>th</sup> August 2013. As 2013 is also the year of The Gathering, the Festival Committee are working towards holding events to tie-in with this national tourism event. If you would like to become involved in any aspect of next year's 45<sup>th</sup> Vintage Week celebrations, contact any member of the Organising Committee and keep up to date with developments on Facebook.



## BIRR COMHALTAS ACTIVITIES 2012

Once again the members of Birr Comhaltas are pleased to be in a position to make a contribution to the current edition of the Birr Review. The branch has been promoting Irish Music, Song and Dance in Birr and the surrounding area for over half a century. During that time, traditional music has gone from strength to strength nationally and internationally, and the branch is pleased to have played its role in that development.

During the past year, all the headline activities undertaken by the branch continued successfully. The annual concert was moved this year to a new spring date and this proved very successful. A large crowd enjoyed an excellent night's entertainment, contributed to by a combination of visiting and local artists in the splendid setting of the Birr Theatre and Arts Centre.

The highlight of the year for set dancing fans was the annual Set Dancing Festival, held over the June Bank Holiday weekend, which attracted visitors from all over Ireland, as well as some from overseas. Set dancing is not confined to just one week-end in the year as there are classes held throughout the winter months in The Marian Hall and beginners are always welcome.

Two new events were added to the Comhaltas calendar at national level this year and the branch participated in both.

National Music Day was celebrated on 21<sup>st</sup> June and the members had planned an outdoor event but the weather dictated otherwise and the activities were transferred to The Marian Hall, where a very enjoyable session of music and song was held. This year, the 21<sup>st</sup> of September was designated as National Culture night and the branch celebrated with an informal evening of music song and dance in the Birr Theatre. Amongst the fund-raising events was the annual "Trad for Trocaire" by which Comhaltas branches nationally stage fund-raising events in support of the Third World, and again Birr was able to make its contribution. The group now holds a monthly music session in Craughwells on the first Friday of each month.

The Irish Language group, "Biorra le Gaeilge", which works under the patronage of the branch is doing excellent work in promoting the language locally with its Naoínra pre-school, Irish classes for adults and a monthly Oiche Chaidrimh.

A weekly music class is held in The Marian Hall each Monday but the organisers are disappointed that more parents in the area are not availing of this excellent educational amenity for their children. Further information on this and other local Comhaltas activities is available from Branch Secretary, Donal Morrissey, 087 9347968.

## CARRIG TIDY TOWNS

The Carrig Tidy Towns Association has made some good progress during the year. The greens on both sides of the village are looking well and neatly mowed by Joe Ryan on the Ballingarry side and the local residents on the Birr side. The beech hedging that was planted will look very well in the coming years.

The river on both sides of the bridge has been cleaned up thanks to Liam Moran and his FÁS Team. Thanks also to Seamus O'Sullivan of the North Tipperary Leader Group and to Michael Naylor who spends two and a half days working in the village and has made great improvements in the area. Mrs. White's garden is a centre piece of the

village and has to be commended.

We plan to prepare flower beds and plant shrubs in readiness for the 2013 Tidy Towns competition. Our association has received great support from local groups including Carrig N.S., the GAA, Community Hall and the Church. We thank them and all the local community who supported our fund-raising efforts during the year.

The protection of wild life is a must for every Tidy Towns group and Carrig will not be lacking in this regard. We aim to take part in the 2013 Tidy Towns Competition and to achieve a good mark. We know that this not going to be easy but we are committed to giving it our best shot.

## BIRR CHAMBER OF COMMERCE

### *A letter from the President*

Birr Chamber of Commerce is working to promote existing and new businesses in Birr and encourage a healthy economy in our town.

2012 was a very successful year. The erection of Birr Street Names throughout the town was completed in January. The bi-lingual format of the signs was received with great approval from Birr people. The Chamber would like to thank Offaly Local Development Company for 75% funding towards the signs, Birr Town Council for bearing the cost of erecting the signs and the residents for allowing the signs to be put on their premises.

We held our A.G.M. on March 8<sup>th</sup> 2012 and I was re-elected as president for a third term, with Joe Dunne as vice-president, Michelle O'Meara as secretary and David O'Meara as treasurer.

The Chamber wrote to Dulux Paints Ireland to look for assistance with a colour scheme for the town. This initiative was met with great support from Dulux. They sent a sales representative, Mr. David Larkin, to meet with myself. Dulux were delighted to offer the free services of a colour consultant, Ms. Kathy Bracken, to devise a colour scheme for Birr town centre. She suggested colour schemes for over 80 premises from Emmet Street through to Market Square. W. K. Fayle's was chosen by Dulux to be the main agent for the paint at a discount price. The Chamber held a public meeting in the County Arms Hotel and explained the scheme to the large attendance. Over 30 businesses painted their premises over the following two months. This initiative was a great success.

In May, the Chamber met with Sean Ryan, from the Offaly County Enterprise Board and set up a retail training programme to assist Birr retailers. The programme took place over five evenings with retailers having the opportunity to learn about marketing, sales, customer services, financial data, Facebook and social media.

Our next big project was the brainchild of Brian Whelahan, the 'Festival of Finals'. This event commemorated the first All-Ireland Final that took place in Birr 125 years ago. In July, Birr welcomed seven other clubs to the town including Meelick/Eyrecourt (Galway), Loughiel (Antrim), Tullaroan (Kilkenny), Smith O'Briens (Clare), Shelmaliers (Wexford), Lucan (Dublin) and Coolderry (Offaly). Both Senior and Under-14 teams took part over two days with Loughiel winning the final on Sunday over Coolderry. A great event was had by all and a bigger event is planned for July 2013, the year of 'The Gathering'. Thanks to Offaly Local Development Company for funding this event.

The Annual Fashion Show, 'Light up the Night', was held in November. It was a great night with exhibitors in the foyer and a marvellous display of colour from the town's ladies and menswear boutiques. It was a very successful night to raise much-needed funds for the town's Christmas lights.

The Chamber of Commerce sees how businesses in Birr are finding it difficult to trade in the current economic climate. We are asking you to 'Shop Local' and keep our community vibrant and successful.

I would like to thank all our businesses for their generous financial contributions throughout the year. This is greatly appreciated. I would also like to thank our committee and would encourage new members to attend. Meetings are held on the second Thursday of each month at 9.00 p.m. in the County Arms Hotel.

Yours sincerely,  
Martin Kearns.



## **ST. BRENDAN'S ENVIRONMENTAL GROUP CE SCHEME**

Congratulations to all in St. Brendan's Environmental Group CE scheme for the great work they carried out in the town during the year. This group's contribution to enhancing the appearance of Birr is very much appreciated. Below are before and after pictures of works carried out on a flower bed on the Banagher Road and on some railings on Wilmer Road.



**BEFORE**



**AFTER**



**BEFORE**



**AFTER**

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## LIFE AT ST. CRONAN'S, SYNGEFIELD, BIRR

*Compiled by the service users.*



We are a group of Service users who attend St. Cronan's services in Birr. The house we attend is located in Syngefield. We all arrive each morning between 9 and 9.30 am and then our day commences.

Some of our activities take place in the house and for some we go out into the community. We enjoy cooking and baking in our weekly cookery class. We take part in home management and practice laundry skills. Some of us do woodwork and have completed many projects in the past and we continue to work on new projects. In the garden we grow seasonal vegetables such as potatoes, onions and tomatoes.

Many of us have achieved or are working on our FETAC certification in different subjects such as Cookery, Computers, Digital Photography, etc.

We are constantly learning new skills such as embroidery, knitting, painting, card-making, clay modelling, jewellery making and decoupage. These skills are put to use to make gifts for special occasions and seasonal projects such as Christmas Card Making, etc.

At St. Cronan's we like to keep active and we engage in many exercise activities based in the community. We use many of the local amenities every day. This includes visiting the Birr Leisure Centre for Aqua Aerobics, swimming and

gym every week. We are very lucky to have use of Crinkill Ball Alley where we practice Boccia, do light exercises and attend a Health and Well-Being Class every Wednesday. On Wednesday morning some of us attend Weight Watchers in Dooly's Hotel where we meet other people in the community.

This year we became involved with the local Tidy Towns and we help out every week to keep Birr tidy by picking up litter beside the skate park across from Tesco. We have helped keep the flower bed tidy at the Crescent, Birr. Some of us also volunteer at the local church where we help out with folding leaflets and cleaning.

On a Thursday afternoon we attend the local library where we are involved in the Film Club. This is very enjoyable as we get to watch many different films chosen by ourselves. On Fridays we go out for lunch at a restaurant of choice in Birr town.

November was a very busy month for us here at Syngefield, some of the photographs we took during our digital photography class were exhibited in Birr Theatre and Arts Centre. Another project we took part in during November was 'The Christmas Shoebox Appeal'. We filled up shoeboxes of presents for the children in 3<sup>rd</sup> world countries who are less fortunate than ourselves.



**Ann Hogan (centre) from Hillside, Birr with two fellow pilgrims on the Camino de Santiago. Ann spent part of her summer holidays walking the pilgrim path in northern Spain.**

## **PUZZLE PAGE ANSWERS**

### **IDENTIFY THE FACES – HOW MANY DID YOU GET RIGHT?**

- |                   |                   |                  |                      |
|-------------------|-------------------|------------------|----------------------|
| 1. Niall O'Brien  | 2. Pauline Powell | 3. Benny Hayes   | 4. Seamie Brien      |
| 5. Willie Burns   | 6. Tony Hayden    | 7. Tony Fanneran | 8. Christina O'Meara |
| 9. Eugene Carroll | 10. Brian Kenny   | 11. Gerry Dolan  | 12. Jim Phelan       |

### **DID YOU KNOW ANSWERS**

1. The 'Green Plot' was the name given to the area we now call 'The Chains'.
2. The two trees that are planted in 'The Chains' were the gift of the 6<sup>th</sup> Earl of Rosse, brought from the Holy Land and planted in the Holy Year, 1950 and were blessed by Dean Quinn.
3. It was named Tolar and was erected in memory of Tolar Garvey who lived in Tullynisk House.
4. It was named St. Michael by Bishop McRedmond after the patron saint of the then parish priest Dean Michael Bugler who is buried in the church.
5. The two lamps on the pillars of the entrance to St. Brendan's R.C. church were erected by Violet Doolin in memory of her parents Kieran and Josephine.
6. The stone of the old Crinkill Barracks Church was partially used to build the Abbey's spire.
7. The Hippodrome was located at back of where Hedgerows is now and was run by P.L. Dolan.
8. The chain of office worn by the Chairperson of Birr Town Council was donated by Kevin Purcell and the first person to wear it was John D. Rock.
9. The Shamrock Hotel was located at No. 1 John's Mall (where Dentist Hoare used to practice).
10. The old Wilmer Tennis Club was located in Hospital Lane where Ely House is now built.

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## **CRINKILL GAA CLUB**

Crinkill GAA club which was reformed in 1981 had a reasonably successful 2012. In 2011 the club's progress was followed by the John Murray Show on R.T.E and had the honour of receiving a coaching session from Cyril Farrell. It was a very satisfying experience for everyone involved. This year the team commenced training in January under the management team of Martin McCarthy and Alan Corboy assisted by Bobby Corboy, Robert Parkinson and Des O'Brien. We competed well in the Division Two and Division Four Hurling Leagues and also in the Intermediate and Junior Championships.

In the Intermediate championship, we were narrowly defeated by Birr, Carrig and St. Rynagh's in the group stages. Thanks to the management and players who put in such a great effort during the year.

In underage competitions, we again joined forces with Carrig and Riverstown as CRC Gaels. We were competitive in all grades from Under-10 through to Minor level. We were victorious in the Under-12 competition and Under-12 Colin Dunne Shield. We also reached the semi-final of the Under-16 competition.

The club lottery continues to be our main source of income. This year we had three jackpot winners - Frances Hogan, Green Street Birr, Declan Loughnane, Whiteford, Crinkill and Concepta Cooke, Grove Street, Crinkill. Thanks to all those who supported the club throughout the year. The club wishes to extend sympathies to the families of those who passed away in the Crinkill area. We look forward to 2013 with renewed optimism.



**Crinkill GAA hurlers during the visit of John Murray and Cyril Farrell**

Back Row (Left to Right): Gerry Maughan, Bobby Corboy, Martin McCarthy, Robert Parkinson (hidden), Ian Hoare, Cyril Farrell, Richie Brereton, Eoin Cleary, Thomas Bailey, Noel Carroll, Colm Cahill, Brian Scully, Mark Corboy, Jody Milne, Stephen O'Leary, Eimhin Milne, Darragh Corboy, Declan Cooke, Declan Ward, Philip Corboy, Alan Corboy, Damien Lawlor, Des O'Brien.  
 Front Row: Jason Maughan, Cronan Kennedy, David McEvoy, John Tooher, John Murray, Damien Deegan, James Harnett, John Ryan, Steven Mahon, Simon Loughnane, Martin Bennett, Stephen Kennedy, Adrian Hoare.



**Casual Staff in the County Arms Hotel in 1967**

**Back Row (Left to Right):  
 Mary Ryan, Sheila O'Callaghan.  
 Middle Row: Maureen Plunkett,  
 Margaret Shortt  
 Front Row: Joe Hynes, Nancy McIntyre**



**Getting ready for the Vintage Parade are Terry Scully (left) and Joe Burke.**

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## BIRR RUGBY CLUB

**Birr Mini-Rugby** includes boys and girls from as young as 5 years of age to the ripe old age of 11. Under the watchful eye of experienced coach, Frank Higgins, a new crop of coaches started coaching the younger teams. They include David Grant, Brian Kenny and John Kerin. Under 8's to Under 12's are coached by Eamonn O'Meara, Robert Alexander, Catherine Barry, Willie Burns, Richard Dolan, Garth Williams, Cathal Miller, Adrian Egan, Tony Morris, Stephen Finneran, Mark Carry, Brian Hogan and the aforementioned Frank Higgins, with approximately 100 players turning out for the club.

Huge thanks to the parents for assisting in the many less 'glamorous' roles, from first-aid to car-parking, to sandwich making, jersey washing and the most demanding...taxi drivers! You literally are the wheels that keep this machine rolling.

In April 2012, after many months of planning and fund-raising, Birr RFC's Under-11 and Under-12 squads embarked on a tour of Wales, accompanied by coaches,

parents and supporters. Based in Cardiff, yet hosted by Blackwood in the Valleys and Narberth in "Scarlets" country, this proved to be a very enjoyable and successful trip. Playing 15-man rugby for the first time in their young careers, the Birr teams proved themselves more than a match for their Welsh counterparts, playing 8 matches over the course of what was a hectic weekend.

As well as the matches, the travelling party, which numbered 73 in total, took in a tour of the Millennium Stadium, attended an Ospreys v Cardiff Blues Rabodirect Pro12 game in Cardiff City Stadium, had an evening of bowling, and were lucky enough to find themselves in the host hotel for the Miss Wales contest, an unexpected bonus organised by the ever-thoughtful Eamonn O'Meara. Throughout the tour, all players behaved with dignity and respect towards their hosts and opponents, both on and off the field, and brought great credit to themselves and their club. Many thanks to all who helped fund-raise and organise what was an unforgettable weekend.



**Under-11 and Under-12 Trip To Wales**

*Back Row (L to R): Eoin Stapleton, Richard Alexander, Conor O'Meara, Michael Hand, Cian O'Connor, Cathal Burke, Michael Fitzgerald, Peader Robinson, Ronan Loughnane, Shane Mann, Jack Kennedy, Doireann Errity, Luke Barry, Dylan Hanniffy, Brendan Hoctor, Eoin Maher, Laura Sampson*

*Front Row: Mark O'Brien, James Tooher, Leon Hogan, Darragh Middleton, Dylan Murdock, Paul Stokes, Kieran Riley, Colin Dooley, Mathew Molloy, James Dooley, Noel Monaghan, Barry Kearns, Pdraig Watkins, Kevin Hennon*

**Birr Rugby Youths Section**, as with the club in general, has enjoyed a very successful year. Our Under-13 squad, under the direction of Gerry Dooley, Tony Murphy and Brian Hogan, made great strides in both League and Cup competitions, reaching the league final, defeated by an excellent Kilkenny side by a narrow margin, and were undefeated in winning the Midland league. Our Under-15 squad also had a great season. Following a heavy defeat in their opening game, they improved in leaps and bounds as the year progressed, a highlight being beaten by Boyne by only two points in a riveting encounter. They also reached a Cup quarter-final. Well done to Milo O'Meara and Alan Purcell for all their work with this bunch of players.

Our Under-17 panel, coached by John Heffernan, Damian Lynch and Christy Hogan had a super season, reaching a league semi-final, where they were beaten by Roscrea and they also enjoyed an excellent run in the Cup. They played

some fantastic rugby during the season and we were very unlucky not to win any silverware.

Our Under-19's joined with Roscrea and had an extremely successful run through the season. The players and mentors gelled extremely well as the R & B Rebels and these lads were very unlucky to end their season without silverware. The combination provides players an opportunity to play at a premier level where, otherwise, we wouldn't have sufficient players to field a team. Well done to Martin Hogan, who put a lot of effort into their group during the season, helping them to reach a premier league final.

We would like to thank all the club's coaches and players for all their co-operation during the year. To our referees, a big thank you for being there for us and willing to turn out when required. We are very lucky to have a number of qualified and able coaches and, hopefully, more people



### Under 13 Team with coaches

Back Row (L to R): Tony Murphy, Desmond Corcoran, Dylan Watkins, Oisín Hickey, Conor Fahy-Davis, Rós Connaughton, Jack Pardy, Philip Gee, Shane Hogan, Oisín Murphy, Callum Dempsey, Gerry Dooley  
 Front Row: Tomás Kennedy, Conor Guilfoyle, Paul Ryan, Mark Dunne, Sam Baker, Conor Meaney, Shane Daly, Conor O'Sullivan, Paul Donoghue. Missing is Michael Milne.

might consider taking up refereeing going forward. A big thank you to Paul Kelly, who is always there to advise and help, and to Brian Hogan for all his help and assistance during the year. Thanks also to our parents who help out in so many ways – providing transport, food, help with blitzes, etc. We hope to see more people becoming involved in the Club this season. All help and assistance will be gratefully received.

We are very fortunate to have very strong numbers playing rugby again this season. Obviously, as numbers continue to grow, we require more help with coaching and looking

after teams so, if anyone is interested in or available to help out in any way, please let us know. During the year, presentations were made to Peter Dooley (*pictured on the left*) for being selected on Leinster and Irish Youths and Shane Delahunt (*pictured on the right*) for his selection on the Leinster and Irish Schoolboys side, a fantastic achievement for both. We wish them all the best in the future.



Back Row (L to R) - Luigi Asconi, , Garech Doorley, Willie Burns, Harry Burns, Jonny Heaslip, Stephen Dooly, Chris Molloy, David Niland, William Hernan, Arthur Houlihan, Philip Haslam, Stephen Molloy, Stephen Niland, Peter Swanepoel.  
 Front Row - Danny Troy, Alan Guinan, Dermot Kennedy, Danny Shortt, Paddy Donoghue, Michael Hernan, Jordan Culbert, Eoin O'Shea, Shane Broderick, Bruce Allsop.

**Birr RFC Senior team** were competitive in both the Midland League and the Leinster League. Coach Gordon Rowe returned for a second season and Alan Guinan took over as Captain. Birr were fortunate in so far as they had the most of the same team from last year. Coach Rowe was hoping to build on the progress made in his previous season and this was evident from the start, with Birr securing a few good home wins to leave them only a couple of points off the top of the league. One memorable game involved a nil-all home draw against table toppers Arklow, with former international Shane Byrne, who was playing for Arklow, commenting that it was the only game he ever played in following a long and illustrious career which had ended scoreless. Unfortunately for Birr, their away record was patchy at best and this meant they could not move up the table to secure a promotion playoff.

During the year, the club was consistently able to field a first and seconds team. Birr were entered in the Towns Seconds Cup and were unlucky to draw Tullamore away in

early February. Following a momentous game, Tullamore secured a late victory after extra time but the Birr lads had a new-found confidence in which to compete in the Towns Plate. Following victories over Midland Warriors and a replay against Roscrea, Birr had to travel to Clondalkin to take on the home side in the final. The Birr first 15 secured a famous victory by 25 points to 8 to end an incredibly long season. This was Birr's first Leinster title in a number of years and the celebrations were duly deserved. During the year, Birr were generously sponsored new jerseys by Cosy Home Insulations. The Club also ran a very successful sevens tournament. It had been some twenty years since the club ran this competition and it hoped to maintain this annual event for the forthcoming year.

The club and players would like to extend their thanks to coach Gordon Rowe, who stepped down after the season along with assistant manager Peter Conway, who was a constant throughout the season.

## BIRR COMMUNITY GAMES

2012 was another successful year for Birr Community Games. Several hundred children participated in events ranging from Model-making to Tag-rugby. Undoubtedly,



one of the main highlights of the year was that of Birr native, Alex Smith (*left*), winning a national silver medal, in the Boys Under-12 Model-Making competition. This was a great achievement for first-timer Alex. He put a lot of planning into the creation of his piece and his effort was rewarded. Praise must go to his 5<sup>th</sup> class teacher, Ms. Tooher, for encouraging her class to enter at local level, and to his parents for their encouragement. Well done

Alex! Congratulations to all the children who also reached the national finals in Athlone: Alex Byrne, Nicholas Turtak, Avril Fleury (*Model-Making*), Ciaran Abbott and Ciara Murray (*Art*).

Birr entered two Tag-Rugby teams this year, at Under-11 and Under-14 age-groups. Both teams were made up of a young panel, so hopefully they will return next year with more experience. Thanks to the coaches Eamonn O'Meara and Catherine Barry.

It was also great to see Birr competing in the boys Under-12 soccer competition after an absence of a few years. Thanks to their coaches and manager, John Bergin.

Well done to all the children who reached the national swimming finals in Athlone. This is a great achievement as the standard is so high. Congratulations to Edel Daly, Margaret Daly, Doireann Errity, Kieran Riley, Michael Carroll, Liam Pingree, Sinead Bergin, Sarah Pingree, Laoise Murray, Jack Carroll, Michael Carroll and William Dwyer. The interest in swimming has grown in recent years and many thanks to the staff at Birr Leisure Centre for providing such great facilities and encouraging the children. A special thanks is given to Paddy McDonnell for doing such great work in the swim-club.

The Birr mini-rugby team had a tough draw in the semi-final against Killeigh. Unfortunately, Killeigh knocked out Birr on a score of 3-2. Thanks to all their coaches and to Willie Burns, the team manager.

Our Under-14 camogie team came up against a strong team from Shinrone-Coolderry in the county final. The girls gave it their all but the opposition was too strong on the day. The girls were rewarded with silver medals for their efforts. Thanks to their coaches Gail Spain, Michael Lyons and Deirdre Cahill.

Due to the interest of Tony Morris and Frank Higgins, an Under-10 mixed Gaelic football team entered the competition for the first time. Many were playing the

game for the first time and hopefully they will keep going. The lack of sunny weather did hinder our athletics occasionally, but turnout was usually high at training. The rain did dampen the local sports day but didn't dampen spirits. Well done to all who made it to the county finals in Tullamore and to those who made national finals, especially Hannah Riley, Caoimhe Kearns and Andrea Cooke. Thanks to all who helped at the sports day and at training throughout the year.

Unfortunately, the Under-11 hurling team was narrowly defeated by Kilcormac/Killoughey, after extra-time in the quarter-finals. Thanks to all their coaches and their team manager, Donal Franks.



**Under-15 Community Games Handball Team who won bronze in the National Finals - Erin O'Meara, Saoirse Hart, Bronagh Byrne, Andrea Cooke, Clodagh Hanniffy.**

Certainly another highlight for 2012 was the girls Under-15 handball team, who won a national bronze medal. Handball is thriving in Birr at the moment and the facilities in Crinkill are a credit to the club. Birr won all four county titles and the teams progressed to the Leinster finals in Carlow. Unfortunately three teams were knocked out in the semi-finals. Well done to the players Sian Cooke, Ciara Murtagh, Roisin Byrne, Shannon Byrne, Ellen Regan and Niamh Ryan, Andrea Cooke, Erin O'Meara, Clodagh Hanniffy, Bronagh Byrne, Saoirse Hart, Jack Nolan, Barry Smith, Finn Dempsey, D. J. Cooke, Shane Murtagh, Rhodán Dempsey, Conor Smith, Dylan Quegan, Raymond Nolan and Aaron Blake. The girl's Under-15 team played a tightly-contested game against the Aran Islands, and were unlucky not to clinch a silver medal. Thanks to all their coaches and their manager, Kevin Cooke.

Thanks to the committee: John Gleeson, Margaret Irwin, Valerie Reynolds, Noel Coughlan, Catherine Barry, Tony Murphy and Frank Higgins for their hard work. Thanks to those who supported us financially during the year. If you would like to get involved, please contact any member of the committee.

## **BIRR TOWN FOOTBALL CLUB**

Within the last twelve months there were some great strides undertaken by the Club, both on and off the pitch. On the playing side, there was another great year of football activity from September to May. During that time the club has gone from strength to strength with our schoolboy/girl section. Trophies were won and lost amid cheers and tears but the enjoyment levels soared with the increase of teams that represented the club with both pride and dedication. We now provide football every Saturday for over 240 children. Boy's teams aged 8 to 18 were catered for and in the Girls section 3 teams; Under-11, Under-12 and Under-14 were playing regularly. Pride of place from this section must go to the Under-15, team under the supervision of Shane Corboy and Gary Cahill, who won their league title after a thrilling play-off with near neighbours, Tullamore Town. Then, for good measure, they also won the Cup against the same opposition to complete the double. Not to be outdone, the Under-11 Girls also made an appearance in their cup final but alas it was to end in heartbreak as they did not win on the day. Other teams to win trophies on that Super Saturday of finals were the Under-12 Boys Team, managed by Liam Maloney, and the Under-10 Boys, managed by Liam Butler. The Under-14 girls also claimed their shield Final win over two legs to ensure that our awards night in November was awash with medals. While other teams did not win any silverware they played and represented the Club with distinction for the whole season and there is always the promise of better things when the new season begins. At senior level, the news was not as good as we would have liked, with the First team going through the heartbreak of relegation. This seems to be having a good effect on them as they have re-grouped and made an impressive start to the new season. The Reserves were unlucky to lose a cup final on penalties but, with a lot of young legs adding to the experienced old foxes, they too are going as well as can be expected in their division. The 17s had another good year but had to settle for an empty cupboard. The return of the Ladies senior team was a major boost to the club and many of the previous season's successful Under-16 Girls team made the step-up with them and they were triumphant at the end of the season winning their Shield competition. It was probably off the playing field that the most significant developments occurred. Last December, the club had the honour of being named F.A.I./AVIVA Club of the month. This was a huge honour for us as our parent body had recognised the huge amount of work we had put into running our club. Along with 7 other clubs who were winners from different months, we would now go forward to have a chance of being named Club of the Year at the annual F.A.I. A.G.M. and Festival of Football week during

July in Donegal. On a cold Friday evening in March, hundreds of children, their parents, honoured guests and supporters gathered at Frank O'Connell Park to pitch our bid to win this competition in front of the Setanta Sports cameras. The presentation was broadcast on Setanta Sports and the big screen at the Aviva Stadium during the Bosnia v Ireland game. Unfortunately, while we had a very strong bid and an impressive show, we fell short and it was Macroom in Cork who were named Club of the Year.

The most important development to occur during last year was the purchase of 4½ acres of land adjacent to our club grounds. Thanks to Mr. Michael Loughnane, who was very generous with the cost of this land. The two pitches we use have been under tremendous strain due to the amount of teams that play on them weekly. This new venture will take the pressure off them when we get it up and running. Just this summer we had to shut both pitches to carry out vital maintenance work to get them ready for the new season. Thanks to Birr Rugby Club for the use of their grounds in July. That allowed us to host the F.A.I. Summer soccer camp while this work was on-going. We will start fund-raising soon to kick-start work on the new pitches.

We also hosted The Liverpool Legends game in April. This was a major fund-raiser for some of the local schools and we were only delighted to provide our facilities free of charge for the day. We also hosted a huge table quiz on the night in the County Arms Hotel. The day was fun-packed and it was a joy to see legends of yesterday still able to show some of the players of today their skill and ability. We also hosted a number of table quizzes during the winter months in conjunction with Kelly's of the Green for a number of local clubs, associations and charities.

All in all it was another jam packed year for one of the most progressive clubs in the town. As the numbers of teams grow we need more managers and coaches to help us continue to meet our goals. A commitment of just a few hours a week is all it would take but the rewards could be and are huge as you see the joy on a young child's face as they run around the pitch. Thanks to any new manager who has joined this year, you are making a difference and your contribution is huge and really appreciated.

Finally, no club can survive without the help and support from their community. To everybody who has done anything to support us and encourage us during the past year, we thank you most sincerely. The smallest thing you do for us means a lot, be it supporting our lotto, driving to matches with kids, supporting our fund-raisers or just helping out around the clubhouse on match days. This is what a club is about. We wish you all the best for the coming year in everything you undertake. It's your club, we're proud of it, we hope you are too.

## CRC GAELS

2012 proved to be a very entertaining year for CRC at underage level. Under-6s and Under-8s, coached by Martin O'Brien, John Bergin, Michael Larkin and Clement King, were involved in regular training and a series of blitz days, as part of a new GAA development structure. The season started with the first event played on 16<sup>th</sup> April in Lusmagh and finished in September with a final blitz day held in Birr. The young players got great enjoyment from this seasons hurling and a lot of talented youngsters are emerging for the future.

Under-10s and Under-12s were coached by Denis Hoctor, Martin O'Brien, Brendan Hutchinson, Adrian Egan and Donie Corrigan. Their season started in April with a series of non-competitive games, again as part of a new GAA development structure. Their season ended in September with an Under-10s county blitz held in Birr and an Under-12 final game in Banagher.

CRC hosted an Under-10s tournament in October and invited Kinnitty, Lorrha and Toomevara. CRC hurled extremely well throughout the afternoon, winning all their games and played Toomevara in the final and won out the tournament. The winning prize was a shield sponsored by John Reedy, Solicitor.

One of the highlights of the year was to be invited into

Birr to compete in the Billy Nevin cup. This was a fiercely contested game with both sides showing excellent talent, and Birr were the deserving victors on the day.

Under-14s entered into the "A" championship this year, coached by Pat Kelly, Mick Collins, Paul King and Greg Hanlon.

In the Under-14 Féile blitz, CRC was grouped with Coolderry, Shinrone and Ballyskenagh/Killavilla. Coolderry won out this group. In the Under-14 'A' championship CRC enjoyed some very good competitive games and gained excellent experience playing in the 'A' division.

A Catch and Strike tournament was also held for Under-13s this year, with CRC reaching the semi-final beating Ballinamere/Durrow. In the final CRC played Ferbane/Belmont with CRC the worthy winners on the day, to end a busy year.

Under-16s this year were coached by John Harding, Declan Fitzgerald, Eamon Maher and Brendan Hutchinson. They showed some great strength and determination throughout the seasons hurling, reaching the semi-final stage, but Shamrocks proved too strong on the day.

CRC Gaels ended this year with some very positive results that will help the club to improve and grow for many years to come.



**Under-13 Winners of the Lift and Strike Competition**

Back Row (L to R): Greg Hanlon, Denis Hoctor, Pat Kelly, Paul King  
 Middle Row: Mark O'Brien, Ryan Hogan, Reece Culbert, Rós Connaughton, Joe Kelly, Adam Kelly, Jordan Beswick, Bernie Ward, Jimmy Cooke, Callum Dempsey,  
 Front Row: Brendan Hutchinson, Brendan Hoctor, Michael Fitzgerald, Aidan King (captain), Joseph Hoctor, Lee Hogan, Cathal Hanlon, Michael Egan, James Harding, Dylan Hogan



**Winners of the Under-10 Blitz that was held in Carrig.**

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## THE LITTLE BROSNA AND CAMCOR FISHING CLUB

Rain, rain go to Spain, never show your face again! Not wishing to inflict our bad weather on the Spaniards, I'm sorry to say that, overall throughout the season, the fishing was as bad as our awful weather. Very high water, pretty much all season, meant that night fishing was poor and most of any fish caught was caught in the red water during the daylight hours. Despite this, it is reported that some very big Croneen were, nonetheless, caught with the usual 'monsters' managing to slip away.

Once again a lot of very worthwhile work has been done by the Club over the last year, including bank clearing and the cleaning up of debris at the Chapel Bridge. Thanks are offered to Birr Town Council for their assistance in the disposal of same.

Some of our members attended information workshops on in-stream work, which the Club in turn can safely undertake on the river. Pollution awareness and stock inspection teams continue to vigilantly police the river, day and night and we gratefully extend our thanks to these volunteers. As always, thanks is extended to Pat McDonnell and Adrian Duffy (IFI) for their hard work in

this regard also.

In conjunction with the IFI, our Club once again held a Fishing Awareness day during the summer. Happily, it was a great success and we thank all those involved in making it so. It's great to see an on-going interest in the sport.

The IFI and the ESB are involved in a major works project on the river at Breaghmore. Once completed, this work will enhance the area enormously. It is great to see their on-going commitment to the catchment and it is very much appreciated by the Club.

The Club was the happy recipient of a generous and much appreciated grant from the Salmon Conservation Fund. To all those involved in securing this much needed funding we extend our thanks and to Seamus Pierce and the team at Bank of Ireland for all their assistance, our grateful thanks also.

Last but by no means least, we offer a very special word of thanks to our Club chairman and secretary. This dynamic duo do tireless work on behalf of the Club and it is very much appreciated by all.



Works carried out at Breaghmore

### 1st Vintage Week

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Back Row: Liam Cooke, Brendan Brady, Pat & Pat (Musicians), John Kinsella

Front Row: Pearl Parsons, Olive Fanneran, Seamie Brien



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## CRINKILL HANDBALL CLUB



Another year has quickly passed and, yet again, the club had a very successful year. What was more notable this year was the level of success achieved by the female members of the club. A sport that was once played entirely by men

has now become a very popular game among females, nationally. Our club has experienced this trend first hand and now our female competitors outnumber their male counterparts in many grades.

One such grade is at Under 15, where girls outnumber the boys two to one. Our girls' team excelled themselves to reach the Community Games finals in Athlone, where they came away with a bronze medal. The team members were: Clodagh Hanniffy, Erin O'Meara, Bronagh Byrne, Andrea Cooke and Saoirse Hart, most of whom went on to play in the Leinster 40x20 and 60x30 championships. Some of them made it as far as the semi-final stages but were unlucky not to progress. One of our younger and very promising players is Sian Cooke (*pictured above left*). She made it to the final of the Leinster 60x30 Girls Under-12 singles. Although she was defeated on the day she has a very bright future ahead of her.



**Leinster 40x20 C Championships.**  
**Jordan Hart U-15 R-Up, Finn Dempsey U-12 Winner, Aaron Blake U-14 R-Up**

Our juvenile boys weren't without their success during the year either. Finn Dempsey captured the first Leinster medal of the season in the 40x20 boys Under-12 Singles and, on the same day, Jordan Hart and Aaron Blake both came away with silver medals in the Under-15 and 14 Singles, respectively.

This year we had three Féile na nGael teams take part in the national finals, two boys teams and one girls team. Our second boys' team, consisting of Barry Smith, Rhodán Dempsey, Shane Murtagh, Finn Dempsey, D.J. Cooke and Jack O'Brien did themselves proud by finishing joint second in the group stages of their division. The girls' team, consisting of, Bronagh Byrne, Saoirse Hart, Sian Cooke, Ciara Murtagh, Niamh Ryan, Ellen Regan, Shannon Byrne and Róisín Byrne played some outstanding handball over the course of the two days and were unfortunate not to be in reckoning at the end. These young girls are ones



**The Boys and Girls from Crinkill Handball Club who represented their club in the Féile na nGael.**

to watch for the future and, no doubt, will soon bring honours back to their club. Our first boys' team, of whom much was expected, did not disappoint as they reached the final of the Division 5 competition. Mallow of Cork denied them All-Ireland gold when they defeated them by a mere six points. The team included Conor Smith, Dylan Quegan, Raymond Nolan, Keelan O'Brien, Aaron Blake and David Mullins. The Crinkill club was also awarded "Best Presented Visiting Team" at the parade in Dublin, a significant achievement by any standard.

As the summer wore on (and the weather got worse) more honours were achieved. In the 60x30 Leinster championship, Conor Smith won a well-deserved Leinster title in the Boy's Under-14 Singles. Jordan Hart would see that gold medal elude him yet again, as he took second place in the Under-15 Singles. DJ Cooke reached his first Leinster final in Under-13 Singles but, unfortunately, luck wasn't with him.

The future of handball in Crinkill appears to be very secure. With so many boys and girls now playing the game and being so successful. However, it must be remembered that the strength in any club lies in the total membership that they have and not how many medals they win.

Again this year, our adult players had their fair share of success. Our first outing was in the Leinster 40x20 Junior Inter-club event. We took on provincial favourites Leixlip in the final but were denied the Leinster crown. The team on that occasion was Michéal O'Brien, Kevin Cooke, Sean Ryan, Noel O'Brien and John Mullins.

As the saying goes, "every dog will have its day"; and that certainly proved true in the 60x30 Junior 'B' Inter-club Championship. With a team consisting of Sean Ryan, John Mullins, Noel O'Brien, Kevin and Declan Cooke, they bridged a 27-year gap to win the club All-Ireland title. In the Leinster 40x20 championship, Billy Mullins won another Emerald Masters 'A' title. Billy was pitted against the favourite, Tom O'Brien, in the All-Ireland semi-final but had to concede the match in the opening game due to



**Crinkill Junior B 60x30 All Ireland Club Champions 2012.**  
**Front Row (L to R): Noel O'Brien, John Mullins, Sean Ryan.**  
**Back Row: Declan Cooke, Kevin Cooke.**

injury. In the doubles of the same grade, Billy partnered Jim Guilfoyle. This duo was taking part in their fifth consecutive Leinster final, having won the previous four. They also won the All-Ireland title on these four occasions also. Lady luck wasn't with the lads this time round however, as they were defeated by Kilkenny.

Another player who performed well in the Leinster championship this year was Sean Ryan. Sean, being very much the underdog in the Masters 'B' gained a well-deserved Leinster title when he defeated the much-fancied, Christy Donnelly of Dublin in a three-game encounter. He went on to play Cork's John Kiersey in the

All-Ireland semi-final but things didn't go his way this time around as he was defeated in two straight games.

Our women players continue to progress year-on-year and this season had notable success in the 60x30 championships. Shauna Carroll played Amanda Kelly of Wexford in the Leinster final of the Junior 'B' singles. Though she gave it her all, it wasn't to be her day. In the doubles of the same grade, Shauna partnered Serena Dempsey and also made it to the Leinster Final where they faced a strong Kilkenny duo. They gave a mighty display but had to settle for silver. Christina Donoghue (pictured above right) entered the history books by being the first lady from Offaly to win a National title. Christina, who began playing the game only two years ago, seized her first title by defeating Collette Connaughton of Galway in the Ladies 40x20 Challenger. The club was well represented in this competition, with three of our players making in the semi-finals, Theresa Ryan and Serena Dempsey being the other two. This is a fantastic achievement for the club and also for the players involved; no doubt these players will attain even greater glory in the not too distant future.



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## BIRR CAMOGIE CLUB

2012 was a year that could be described as relatively quiet for Birr Camogie club in terms of silverware achieved. Despite this fact however, much progress was made throughout the year which should indeed bode well for the club in future and in the long run, could count for more than any trophy on a shelf.

As always, the underage numbers in the club continue to grow and it was good to see so many girls involved and enjoying themselves in the various competitions. With teams entered in the Under-10, 12, 14, 16, Minor and Senior competitions, there was much to look forward to throughout the year. Our youngest group took part in a number of blitzes during the summer and provided much delight by winning the Under-10 'B' final in Lusmagh against the home team. Our Under-12's also reached the ultimate game in their championship but were unlucky to be beaten by Kilcormac at the final stage. In the Under-14 and 16 championships, our girls lost out at the semi-final stage but, despite this, huge talent was evident within these teams and will be of huge benefit to the club in the years to come. Finally, the Minor team will compete in the 'B' semi-final this year having lost so many of last year's victorious team but again, they can boast some of the finest talents in the county at their age group.

Our senior team had a year of mixed fortunes. We entered the Leinster League competition which provided great experience and tough matches during the first part of the year. Unfortunately, having won all our opening matches, the semi-final was not played, as championship matters took over. In this competition, we displayed much improvement from last year, with a number of our younger

girls adding a fresh impetus to the panel. We were unfortunate to miss out on a final spot, losing to Drumcullen by the minimum margin in a semi-final replay in devastating fashion. The experience of the year and the new blood of so many players will stand to what is still a very young team.

The club was very proudly represented on the county scene again this year and contributed a lot to the success of the various teams. Mariesa Cleary, Sarah Harding and Aoihe Whelahan were involved with Offaly Under14s, while Deirdre Cashen, Ciara Ryan, Mairéad Jennings, Sarah Lyons and Dawn Whelahan all played a part in the highly successful Offaly Under-16 squad. This group of girls won the All-Ireland 'B' championship and narrowly lost out to Kilkenny in the Leinster 'A' final. Ciara, Sarah, Deirdre and Eimear Mooney were involved with the Minor Offaly team, while Claire Ryan, Caroline Soupe and Rebecca Hocht donned the green, white and gold for the Junior team which reached the All-Ireland semi-final. We had a record number of girls involved with the Senior Offaly team who did so well, reaching the All-Ireland semi-final in their second year at the grade, with Arlene Watkins, Sheila Sullivan, Oragh Kirwan, Katie Bergin, Shauna Carroll and Eimear Mooney the Birr club members. Finally, the club received further recognition when Arlene and Sheila were nominated for Senior Camogie All-Stars, with Sheila receiving the left corner back spot on the All-Star Team.

All in all, the future is to be looked forward to for the Birr Camogie Club and the good work being done behind the scenes will surely soon be translated to further victory on the field. 2013 indeed looks bright for the club!



**Birr Senior Camogie Team**

Back Row (Left to Right): Audrey Kennedy, Julie Stephens, Rebecca Hocht, Oragh Kirwan, Sheila Sullivan, Jane McCarthy, Katie Dooley, Eimear Mooney, Ciara Ryan, Deirdre Cashen, Dawn Whelahan, Angela Ryan, Kiera Dooley.  
Front Row: Danielle Ryan, Caroline Soupe, Arlene Watkins, Katie Bergin, Mairéad Dooley, Emily Quinlan, Claire Ryan, Gillian Molloy, Shauna Carroll.

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## **WILMER TENNIS CLUB**

The Wilmer Tennis Club has enjoyed another very active and successful year. The club picked up another Midland League title while the club's major events all attracted big entries and were run very successfully. There was huge activity on the courts throughout the last 12 months and members, old and new, enjoyed a very productive year of action.

The Wilmer had another good year in the Midland League as the club's Division 5 team won their title in Nenagh. The Wilmer team defeated Puckane in the final, gaining revenge for an earlier setback to the same team in the group stages. The members of the team were Paula Quinlan, Pauline Walsh, Lisa Pardy and Trish Talbot. This team won Division 6 last year and has now won Division 5 at the first time of asking. Congratulations to them and well done.

At the time of writing the Division 1 team were still very much in contention for the top division title while the club was also well represented in Divisions 2, 3 and 4 with a number of those teams also reaching the knock out stages.

A new feature this year was a Barbecue on the Friday night, which proved to be very popular and thanks to everyone who helped organise this and also the sponsors of the burgers and buns, Kieran Campbell and Karen Smith respectively.



**Winners and runners up in the Mixed Doubles**  
**Back Row (L to R): Jim Bob O'Donoghue, Joanne Kenny, Chris Collins, Alan McGahey, Brian McGahey.**  
**Front Row: Karen Smith, Csilla Varga, Julien Kennedy (Club President), Martina Morris, Emma Mulqueen.**



**Pictured are prizewinners in the Singles competitions at the Senior Open Week at the Wilmer Tennis Club (l. to r.)**  
**Michael Costello, Chris Collins, Julien Kennedy (Club President), Leisa Fitzgerald, David O'Meara.**

The annual Senior Open Week at the Wilmer Tennis Club proved to be another very successful event. There was strong support from many of the surrounding clubs, including Nenagh, Puckane, Roscrea, Templemore, Abbeyleix and Athlone and fortunately the weather was kind there was only one night when the rains came down. The host club had a very successful week and was represented in seven of the 10 finals, winning six of them. Chris Collins won the Men's 'A' Singles, defeating Michael Costello in an all Wilmer Final, while David O'Meara picked up Men's 'B' Singles title, a new event this year to cater for the big entry at singles level. John Lynch and John O'Callaghan won the Men's 'B' Doubles while Csilla Varga teamed up with Jean Canning to collect the Ladies 'A' Doubles. Chris Collins & Csilla Varga won the Open Mixed Doubles beating Brian Mullins & Joanne Kenny in another all Wilmer final, while Jim Bob O'Donoghue and Karen Smith won the Handicapped Mixed Doubles 'A'.

At the presentation on the finals night Chairman Dermot Horan thanked all those who sponsored the event as well as thanking the organisers, Pat O'Gorman and Eddie Hogan, and those who supported the Open Week. Among the sponsors this year were AIB, Barber's Jewellers, Emporium at the Stables, Dooly's Hotel, Grant Engineering, Hedgegrows, Sportswear Direct and special thanks to all of them for their generosity.

Thanks were also extended to everyone else who helped out during the week, making teas and sandwiches for the visitors, tidying up and helping ensure the event ran smoothly.

There was a terrific array of prizes on display at the presentation night and Club President, Julien Kennedy, presented the prizes to the winners and runners up.

A new event on the club calendar this year was the Mixed Classic which proved to be very successful. Sixty players took part in the tournament, which culminated in the three finals in June. In the Division 1 final Brian Mullins and Joanne Kenny defeated Chris Collins and Paula Quinlan in a good quality final. The Division 2 was the closest contest of all with just one game separating the finalists at the finish with John O'Callaghan and Mary Horan just getting the better of Pdraig Clancy and Amanda Kenny. The Division 3 final was won by David Baker and Teresa Wynne, who got the better of Willie Burns and Pauline Walsh. The prizes were presented by Club Chairman Dermot Horan in the clubhouse afterwards and he thanked J.P. Savy for his great work in organising the event. Proceeds were divided between the St Vincent de Paul Society and Birr Lions Club.



**Pictured following the prize giving for the men's doubles events during Senior Open Week.**

**Back Row (L to R): Alan McGahey & Nicholas Flannery, Kieran McSherry & Aidan Delaney**

**Front Row: John O'Callaghan & John Lynch, Julien Kennedy (Club President), Frank O'Keeffe & Conor Fahy.**

The annual John Joe Sheeran tournament attracted a great entry and tennis went on until after midnight. The winners were Paula Quinlan and Christine Bruce, while the runners up were Chris Collins and Carmel Kehoe. Thanks to everyone who supported the event and to Eddie Hogan who organised it. Thanks also to Betty Hogan of The Barber Shop who sponsored the prizes on the night.

The Vintage Tennis tournament continues to be a very popular event and members show great enthusiasm in dressing up in vintage gear for the event. Thanks to Ann O'Meara, who judges the best-dressed competition and sponsors the prize for the best-dressed lady every year. This year, Patricia Molloy won the prize for the best-dressed lady, while Dermot Horan won the prize for the best-dressed man. The club also entered a float in the Vintage parade, which is always a very enjoyable occasion. There was great activity at the club throughout last winter, principally thanks to the winter tennis rota organised by Peter Eastwood. Right through the winter

months in December, January and February, there were regularly up to 20 people a night playing and the benefits of that activity were seen throughout the year. The Spring League saw an increase of over 50% in entries over the previous year, thanks mainly to the winter tennis and the club plans to organise a similar programme this year.

There was plenty of activity at under-age level as well this year. The club organised supervised tennis during the summer months to ensure that all the youngsters got plenty of activity. There was huge interest in the annual Parks Tennis Summer Camp, with over 100 enrolled for that week, while the club also organised Saturday morning coaching for the younger members, which they hope to restart again in the early summer. Some of the underage players also travelled to take part in open weeks and enjoyed a measure of success.

All in all it has been a very busy year for the club and everyone looks forward to an equally active and successful year in the months ahead.



**Prizewinners in the Ladies doubles events during Senior Open Week. Front (l. to r.) Jean Canning & Csilla Varga, Emma Mulqueen, Kathleen Parady. Back. Dermot Horan (Club Chairman), Julien Kennedy (Club President).**



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## ST. CILLIAN'S CAMOGIE CLUB



**St. Cillian's Under-16A team that won their first Under-16A county title this summer beating Tullamore in the final.**

Back Row (L to R) : S. Killeen, A. Freeman, N. Killeen, R. Dolan, R. Brennan, N. Collins, A. Brennan, K. Harding, C. Fitzgerald, S. Maher, E. Kelly, E. Harding, C. Costello, L. Maher, N. Cleary, A. Ryan

Front Row: E. Cashen, C. Cavanagh, C. Brennan, M. King, A. Plunkett, L. Hogan, S. Ryan, C. Hctor, E. O'Brien, L. Hctor, O. Plunkett

2012 was a busy year for the club, catering for seven teams, from Under-8 through to Minor level. Our Under-8 and Under-10 teams played in the 'Go Games' blitz with Shinrone, Drumcullen and Birr in their group and finished the year by competing in the league in which they performed very well. Our Under-12 team also took part in the 'Go-Games' blitz with Birr, Shinrone and Naomh Bríd in their group. They also took part in the league. They lost by a point in a replay of the semi-final against Tullamore.

The Under-14 squad started back training early in the run up to the Féile county competition. They beat St. Rynagh's in the final earning the right to take part in their 4<sup>th</sup> All-Ireland Féile in a row. Our host club was Faughs in Dublin. St. Cillian's finished top of their group and were beaten by De La Salle, Waterford by one point in the semi-final This panel also reached the County final against St. Rynagh's but this time they lost by one point.

The Under-16 girls travelled to Carlow to take part in a two-day Celtic Cup competition and beat Tullamore in the final. It was then into the county championship where they once again beat Tullamore to take home the trophy. We were joined by 6 girls from Naomh Bríd to form a minor team who were beaten by Shinrone in the 'A' semi-final after beating Birr in the first round.

Six club members were on the panel of the Offaly All-Ireland Under-16 'B' winning team. This Offaly Under-16 panel can look back on the year with great pride and satisfaction. The girls commenced training in November 2011 and together with their management team set their sights on winning the All-Ireland 'B' title. Offaly progressed through the group stage of the Championship unbeaten, recording good wins against Galway B, Dublin B, Down and Derry. They played Antrim in the semi-final and emerged victorious on a score line of 4-11 to 0-6. The All-Ireland Final took place in Ashbourne on the 26th August and Offaly's opponents were Derry. This was a tough game but Offaly's superior skill told in the second half and pulled away to win on a score line of 5-10 to 2-6. The St. Cillian's representatives were Cailin Fitzgerald, Rachel Brennan, Aisling Brennan, Laura Hogan, Siobhan Killeen and Katie Harding. Denis Hctor and Declan Fitzgerald were also members of the management team.

Many of the girls in the club also played with their school teams, Killeen N.S., Carrig N. S., Borrisokane Community College and of course with St. Brendan's Community School who, under captain Cailin Fitzgerald, won their first ever Leinster 'A' Championship title.

### St. Brendan's Community School Leinster Champions Division 2 2012

Back Row (L to R): C. McCormack (Naomh Bríd), A. Brennan (St. Cillian's), C. Fitzgerald (St. Cillian's), S. Harding (Birr), A. Freeman (St. Cillian's), A. McAuliffe (Birr), A. Lyons (Birr), S. Stringer (Shinrone).

Front Row: E. Cashen (St. Cillian's), T. Hegarty (Birr), S. Ryan (St. Cillian's), A. Gilligan (Birr), G. Teehan (Naomh Bríd), R. Carroll (Kinnitty).





**St. Cillian's Féile Team 2012.**

Back Row (L to R): John Harding, S. Ryan, C. Costello, M. King, L. Hoctor, N. Killeen, E. Cleary, A. Freeman, R. Dolan, A. Brennan, E. Cashen, E. Harding, E. Hogan, Paul Ryan.

Middle Row: Margaret Ryan, A. Cogavin, S. Pingree, O. Plunkett, O. Killeen, D. Hanamy, M. Maher, N. Mullarkey, N. Dolan, B. Ryan.

Front Row: K. Corrigan, S. Bergin, A. Hoctor, C. Fogarty, R. O'Sullivan, L. Sampson, C. Brennan.



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## BIRR GOLF CLUB



**Duggan Cup 2012 Winners**  
 Back Row (L to R):  
 Tony McCormack,  
 John Murphy, Brian Guinan,  
 PJ Lowry, Pat Molloy,  
 Tom Wright, Joe Slevin.  
 Front Row: John Cunniffe,  
 John Kelly, Captain Seamus  
 Breen, President Sean Moylan,  
 Pat Doyle, Tony McTague,  
 Pat Madden.

The AGM of the Club was held in early December, 2011. Outgoing Chairman Joe Slevin and Vice Chair Rita Delaney welcomed all, especially incoming Captains Seamus Breen and Vera Smyth and Presidents Sean Moylan and Mary Grennan. The new vice-captains were Susan Reidy and John Irwin. Joe thanked, in particular, all members who had supported events and competitions during the year. He praised especially, the course staff who, despite severe weather conditions did a marvellous job. He thanked the bar, house and office staff for their dedicated and efficient work. He paid special tribute to David McDowell who keeps finances in order. Hon. Tres. David McDowell stated that, despite all the economic difficulties, we had managed to keep our budget under control. Cutbacks have been made in every area and he was glad to record that our members have a good grasp of affairs and are not making unreasonable demands on the Club. He proposed that we introduce a Distance Membership for men and women who live over 80km from the Club. A distance member shall not be eligible to win the Presidents' or Captains' prizes and shall not be entitled to attend or vote at any meeting convened within the Club rules.

A large turn-out of members attended the traditional Drive-in in February. A tree was planted on the 18<sup>th</sup> green in memory of all members who have passed away.

Lady Captain's prize was held in July, with Ena Guilfoyle the popular winner. In August, Seamus Breen's prize was won by Dick Johnston, a dedicated golfer who supports all events in the Club. The Captain's Prize was sponsored by John Hassett of Topline, Crinkill and Banagher. Presidents Mary and Sean had very successful days. Mary's prize was won by Caroline McCarthy and was sponsored by AIB and John and Mary Grennan. Sean's was won by Michael Yates and was sponsored by Premier Insulations.

As usual, Birr entered most competitions and had our most successful year in a long time. Our South Leinsters, under

manager, Eddie Nevin, reached the finals and were pipped at the post by Carlow. Our Duggan Cup team, under John Kelly and Brian Guinan, brought home the pennant with an impressive win over Edenderry. The Offaly Inter Club team, under managers Michael Ashe and John O'Meara, won the very attractive Loughnane Trophy in September. The team was Michael Kilcommins, Matt Dudley, Billy Donlon, Seamas Coakley, Pat Maher, Thady Clancy, Declan Gath and Christy McGarry.

In October, the Club hosted the Glens Trophy national competition. A huge effort was made by the ladies committee to ensure that this day would be one of the best days of the year, with over 30 teams from across the country taking part. The winners were Limerick and the runners-up were Roscommon and East Clare. Peter Fox Pharmacy again sponsored the event and the winners were presented with the trophy by Mona Collins.

Congratulations to our Juniors (boys and girls) who turned out in force during the year and especially at the Super Valu sponsored competitions held over Easter. The adult members who ran the competitions were very pleased with the standard of golf and are certain that our juniors will get great enjoyment from the game of golf and will no doubt master the niceties of the game very quickly. The captains were Amy Spain for the girls while Kenneth Rice led the boys.

We congratulate the winners of the various trophies during the year: Club Champion: Billy Donlon. Hackett Cup: Eddie Nevin. Intermediate Scratch Cup: Ger Claffey. Club Tankard: Frank Lennon. Members prize: Michael Stephens. Bennett Cup: Seamus Breen. Dooley Cup: Tom Hogan. Golfer of the Year: Matt Dudley.

Incoming officers, Captains Sue Reidy and John Irwin with Presidents Dick Johnston and Bernie Meagher, will have the honour of leading the Club during 2013. We wish them every success.

## **WOLFTRAP CYCLING CLUB**

2012 was a very busy year for the Wolftrap Cycling Club. The club has its largest membership this year, with an active cycling membership of seventy cyclists. Most of the members are recreational cyclists. A small number of club members also participate in racing. Cyclists are a familiar sight at Horan's shop on Sunday mornings. From spring to late summer, the cyclists meet at 9.00 a.m. to go for a 'spin'. During the remainder of the year, the Sunday morning cycle begins at 10.00 a.m. The Sunday cycle involves two groups, the stronger cyclists and the more leisurely cyclists. In summer, cyclists also assemble at Horan's on Tuesday and Thursday evenings at 7.00 p.m. National bike week was in June and the club organised a family cycle on Sunday 17<sup>th</sup>, which was blessed with one of the rare sunny days this summer! On the 29<sup>th</sup> of July we had the largest entry of 115 cyclists for the annual Billy Butler Cycle.

This year many Wolftrap cyclists participated in cycles around the country, including Sligo, The Burren, Co. Clare, and The Sean Kelly Tour of Waterford. The Ring of Kerry has become a favourite event in recent years, with over 8,500 cyclists taking part this year. Club members also cycle in events organised by other midland clubs in Athlone, Mullingar, Tullamore and Upperchurch, Co. Tipperary. The Wolftrap cyclists, who race, mainly compete in the Midland League. Two Midland League events were hosted by the club this summer. One event was a road race and the other a time trial. Both events started in Syngfield, continuing

for a number of laps following a circuit via Clareen to finish back at Syngfield.



For the third year, the Wolftrap Club hosted and organised the J.J. Kinahan Criterium or street race during Vintage Week. This race attracted the biggest entry this year. Weather conditions were ideal for this event. Cyclists entered from many parts of the country, extending from Dublin to Galway. This event requires exhaustive preparation involving many groups including the club members, the Vintage Week Committee, the Gardaí, the town council and residents along the race route.

Cycling has become one of the fastest-growing leisurely activities throughout the country and the Wolftrap Cycling Club welcomes new members to share our enjoyment. Details and photographs of the Clubs activities can be accessed at [www.wolftrapcc.eu/](http://www.wolftrapcc.eu/)

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## **CARRIG & RIVERSTOWN GAA CLUB**

This was a year of mixed fortunes for the Carrig & Riverstown senior hurling teams. It saw the Intermediates and Juniors reaching the final stages in two of the competitions they were involved in; the Division 4 league final and the Intermediate Championship quarter-finals. Unfortunately, despite good form in getting towards the end of these campaigns, they were unable to turn them into silverware. Whilst the Intermediate championship did not go as well as planned, they performed well in the league competitions and would feel confident heading into next year.

The early year form was good and the club played in the Division 1 League after being promoted from Division 2 last year. Even though they did not get the results they wanted they gave a good account of themselves and would feel that playing at this higher level will have benefited them this year. Meanwhile the Division 4 team showed that they were serious contenders, reaching the semi-final after winning out their group. They played well in their semi-

final, beating Killurin by four points. They went on to play Kinnitty in the final in Birr and unfortunately were unable to get over the line against a strong Kinnitty 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 Birr, but a narrow loss to Killurin halted the progress and this put a bit of unwanted pressure on the team as they needed to win at least one of their remaining two games. Further pressure was put on them as they lost to St. Rynagh's in Lusmagh after a very below par performance. The last game in the group was a must win against Crinkill and this they did with a narrow two point win. The team had done enough to qualify for the quarter-final but unfortunately, lost to a strong Coolderry side that in turn went out in the next round. It was a disappointing end to the year but no doubt they will have gained a lot of valuable experience to bring to next year's campaign.

## SOUTH OFFALY SPECIAL OLYMPICS

South Offaly Special Olympics Club, which was founded in 2006 now has 28 members, 13 volunteers and also some general volunteers. We take part in three sports at our club. Basketball is held in Cloghan Hall every second Monday night from 7-8 p.m.. Swimming is held in Birr Leisure Centre every second Wednesday night from 7-8 p.m. Bowling is held in Jumping Jacks in Tullamore once a month, again on a Wednesday from 7-8 p.m. 17 athletes from the club will

compete on Bowling competitions in Carlow in February 2013 whilst 7 athletes will compete in Swimming competitions in the Curragh in April 2013. We are very hopeful that our athletes will qualify to compete in the All-Ireland competitions in 2014. We would like to thank all our sponsors and volunteers for their continued support to our club.



**Members of the South Offaly Special Olympics Club**

Left to right: David Fitzpatrick, Justin O’Gorman, Anthony Flynn, Sandra Edge, Mark Saddler, Paul Lantry, David Radcliffe, Marian Horan, Linda Dolan (behind), Tony O’Shaughnessy, Elaine Rooney, John Claffey, Shona Egan, Matthew Clifford, David O’Shaughnessy, Regina Blake, Edel Fogarty, Kieran Shiels, June Stanley, Alison Rock, Luke Alexabder, Damien Breslin, Barry Hogan, Jeremy Alexander, Brendan Dolan, Sean Smyth, Paul Irwin, John Dunican, Michael Power

## CAMCOR WARRIORS



**Camcor Warriors**

Left to Right: Conor Dwyer, Isobel Dempsey, Dillon Dwyer, Robert Reid, Tara Kenny

Camcor Warriors Special Olympics Club is open to young children with an intellectual disability within the local area and our aim is to help these children realise their potential and qualify for the Special Olympics World Games in 2015. Many of our athletes have achieved success at Leinster level and we are thrilled that, this year, they will be competing nationally for the first time.

Our club would not exist if it was not for the generous donations from the community, which enables our club to sustain the training and equipment needed to give our young athletes every opportunity to succeed. All new members and volunteers are most welcome. Please contact Susanne on 086 827 3639 should you have any queries.

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## **BIRR SOCIAL CLUB**

Once again this year we had great support for our various competitions. Our Open Darts competition was won by Martin Lyons' team from Banagher. The Town Section was won by the team from the Cherry Tree. On the snooker front, Richie Donnelly won the Scratch Cup, beating Barry Kennedy 3-2. Richie also went on to win the Ned Farrell Trophy off a handicap of -37, beating Brian Guinan 2-0 in the final. Conor Nolan won the Summer Handicap tournament, beating Darren Sullivan 2-1. Barry Carroll won

the Spring Handicap tournament, beating John Corrigan 2-0 in the final. We ran a very successful Quiz Night in Nolan's pub in aid of the Club Development Fund. This was won by Adrian Shine's Emma's Café team. The proceeds from the Scratch Cup were donated to Millie Corrigan to help fund her need for Brittle Bones treatment. This treatment can only be done in England and is very costly and we were only too glad to make a small donation.



**Winners of the Town Section of the Darts Competition in aid of I.H.C.P.T. and Cancer Research**

Back Row (L to R): Willie McKenna, Willie Clancy, Owen Murphy, James Hartnett, Paul Maloney, Ollie Murphy, Dotts Talbot, Frank Gallagher.  
Front Row: Richie Donnelly (Club Chairman), Pops Cotter, Richie Nolan, Aaron Talbot.



**Winner, Conor Nolan, receiving his Snooker trophy from Michael Verney.**



**Larry's Babes - Winners of the 5-man Snooker Tournament in aid of the Birr Community Nursing Unit (Sponsored by Super-Valu, Birr).**

Back Row (L to R): Declan Murray, Shamie Breen, Jim Cashen.  
Front Row: Derek Kelly, Larry Broderick (Captain) Jim Hickey (Super-Valu).  
Missing from the photo was John Reedy.



**Winners of the Open Section of the Darts Competition in aid of I.H.C.P.T. and Cancer Research, sponsored by Brian Whelahan were Martin Lyons' team from Banagher**

Back Row (L to R): Pat Hayes, Fergal Shortt, Andy Keane, Ray Duchie, Billy Keane, Simon Lyons.  
Front Row: Liam Molloy (Captain), Andrew Sullivan (Social Club, standing in for Brian Whelahan).



**Winner Barry Carroll (left) receiving his trophy from Richie Donnelly, Club Chairman.**

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## BIRR GAA CLUB

The main highlight for Birr GAA Club must be the near completion of St. Brendan's Park. The playing surface is complete. The east and north terraces are just finished. It is hoped that, before the middle of 2013, everything will be completed and we will see more games returning to St. Brendan's Park. As in the previous year, St. Brendan's Park was again the host to the TG4 Ladies Football championship and this has given the club a huge profile.

On the hurling side of things, our senior hurlers took part in the Leinster Club League for the first time and were very successful. They won the Division 1 League beating Rathnure of Wexford. All looked positive for the county championship. However, after a very hard fought championship, they were beaten by one point in the semi-

final by the eventual winner Kilcormac/Killoughey.

Laois/Offaly were the hosts of the Under-14 Féile Football competition. The Parish of Birr entered two teams and Birr hosted London and Derry. While we were not successful, both players and all who visited Birr for the weekend really enjoyed themselves.

On the cultural side of the GAA, Birr had a very successful year, with both our Figure dancers and solo singer, Bernadette Spain, reaching the Leinster Final of Senior Scór. On the day, our dancers won and went on to represent us in the All-Ireland in Killarney but were unlucky not to win. A big thank you to everyone involved and we would like to see more people getting involved.



**Birr Senior Hurling Team who took part in the Leinster Club League**

*Back Row (L to R): A. Whelahan, K. Donovan, M. Mulrooney, C. O'Callaghan, B. Harding, B. Whelahan, G. Teehan, M. Cleere, C. Colohan, P. Molloy, E. Hayes, P. Spillane, R. Hanniffy, P. Cleary, M. Verney, P. Ryan, D. Franks, B. Behan, E. O'Meara  
Front Row: J. Kinsella, R. Donnelly, D. Ryan, M. Dwane, C. Mulrooney, M. Mulrooney, C. Egan, D. Hayden, J. McIntyre, S. T. O'Connor, S. Ryan, P. Mullins, K. Murphy, M. Hogan, F. Daly*



**Figure Dancers who represented Birr in the All-Ireland Senior Scór Final**

*Back Row (L to R): E. Teehan, A. Sammon, S. Teehan, F. Ward  
Front Row: N. Murphy, D. Kirwan, L. Kirwan, A. Ryan*

# MAY THEY REST IN PEACE



*Agnes Murphy*



*Josie Spellman*



*Frank Shortt*



*Phyllis Delaney*



*Denis Parkinson*



*Teresa Sharkey*



*Michael Ryan*



*Margaret O'Connor*



*Eddie Coughlan*



*Anne Mulvey*



*Ellen McCarthy*



*Phil McEntaggart*



*Irene O'Neill*

# MAY THEY REST IN PEACE



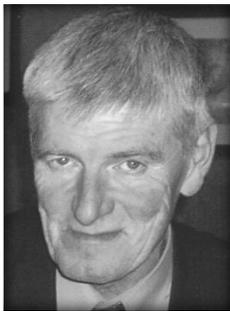
*Hazel Armitage*



*Rowland Armitage*



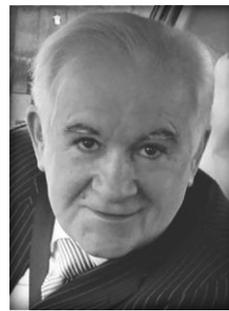
*Evelyn O'Donoghue*



*Patsy Tooher*



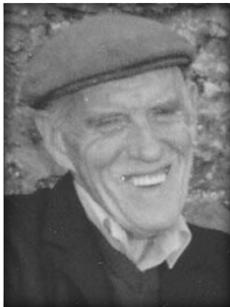
*Moira Ryan*



*John Claffey*



*Katie Ryan*



*Dermot Kelly*



*Margaret McDonagh*



*Michael de Forge*



*Bridie Hartnett*



*Kathleen Dowd*



*Tom O'Meara*



# MAY THEY REST IN PEACE



*Elizabeth Mullins*



*Michael Ryan*



*Jean Larkin*



*Michael O'Dwyer*



*Úna Hoggarth*



*Ben Oakley*



*Anne Calvey*



*Joseph Mulrooney*



*Eileen Whitnall*



*Fred Coughlan*



*Louie Horan*



*Josie Spellman*



*Maura Daly*



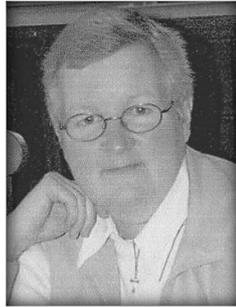
*Monica Boyd*



# MAY THEY REST IN PEACE



*Sarah Barry Turley*



*Pauline Connery*



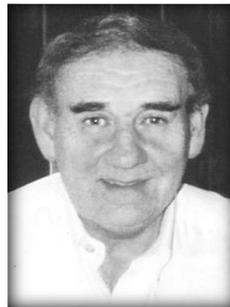
*John Carroll*



*Kitty Egan*



*Sr. Margaret Pepper*



*Michael Donoghue*



*Eileen Cloonan*



*Maura Garahy*



*Julia Coughlan*



*Frank Bradley*



*Carmel Moore*



*Patricia Conboy*

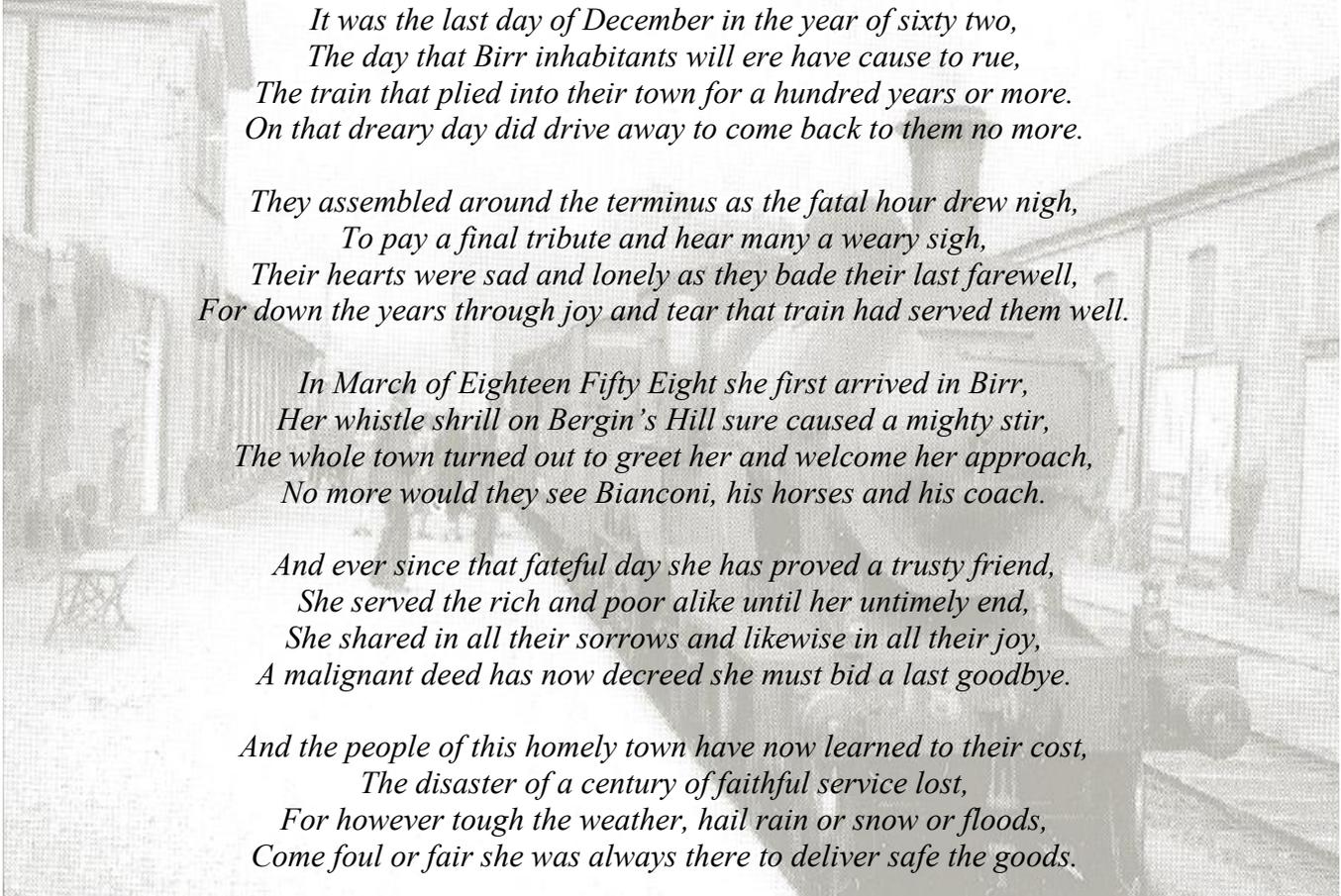


*Cronan O'Brien*



# HER FINAL TRIP

By the late Jim Shortt, Killeen



*It was the last day of December in the year of sixty two,  
The day that Birr inhabitants will ere have cause to rue,  
The train that plied into their town for a hundred years or more.  
On that dreary day did drive away to come back to them no more.*

*They assembled around the terminus as the fatal hour drew nigh,  
To pay a final tribute and hear many a weary sigh,  
Their hearts were sad and lonely as they bade their last farewell,  
For down the years through joy and tear that train had served them well.*

*In March of Eighteen Fifty Eight she first arrived in Birr,  
Her whistle shrill on Bergin's Hill sure caused a mighty stir,  
The whole town turned out to greet her and welcome her approach,  
No more would they see Bianconi, his horses and his coach.*

*And ever since that fateful day she has proved a trusty friend,  
She served the rich and poor alike until her untimely end,  
She shared in all their sorrows and likewise in all their joy,  
A malignant deed has now decreed she must bid a last goodbye.*

*And the people of this homely town have now learned to their cost,  
The disaster of a century of faithful service lost,  
For however tough the weather, hail rain or snow or floods,  
Come foul or fair she was always there to deliver safe the goods.*

*And from every county in the land she brought people of high renown,  
As well as those from o'er the seas to this pleasant midland town,  
She brought them from Philadelphia, from Boston and New York,  
And on more than one occasion she brought Christy Ring from Cork.*

*She brought hurlers from Kilkenny, Wexford, Laoise and Dublin too,  
From Limerick, Clare and Waterford and your Kerryman so true,  
The boys of sweet Tipperary she carried safe and sound,  
On that Easter day to meet Galway for their first All – Ireland crown.*

*On her seats the bould militia sallied forth to fight the Boers,  
And likewise did the Leinsters for Flanders crimson shores,  
In Irelands fight for freedom on yet another day,  
She carried many a soldier of the gallant old I.R.A.*

*But now she is gone forever, no more she will be seen,  
A trundling down by the swallows of Brosna and Boveen,  
No more she will awake the echoes, no more she will cause a stir,  
She has departed on her final trip from the lonesome town of Birr.*