

BIRR Year Review 2016

Volume 16



BIRR YEAR REVIEW 2016

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One of our hopes in this magazine is that future generations will, through it, discover aspects of our town and lives that perhaps would otherwise have been lost. At the same time the magazine reflects back to you all that is happening in our locality in our present day, particularly through our Clubs and Societies annual reports.

As a friend put it to me, after counting something close to 100 clubs and societies in the book, said, "Well, I'll never again complain on a wet November night that there is nothing to do in Birr!"

Those clubs and societies are the thread holding together the fabric of our town and society and, diverse though they are, they all have one common factor; the presence of dedicated and committed individuals who are the lifeblood of any thriving group.

Birr Review committee is no different, and this magazine, painstakingly compiled by our enthusiastic and dedicated team, is our annual report to you.

We hope you enjoy it.

Richard Kennedy
Editor



I would like to welcome you to the 2016 edition of Birr Yearl Review.

Birr Lions Club is proud and delighted to be involved with this long running publication. I know the people of Birr eagerly anticipate when it arrives in the shops to read and send copies to friends and family all over the world.

I would like to thank the businesses, societies and clubs, of Birr and surrounding area for their generous support with advertising who year after year never fail to respond.

None of this could be done without our hard working committee led by editor Richard Kennedy, Emer Dolphin-Murray and Janine Wilson. Thank you to them and the rest of the hard working team for their tireless work getting the book out.

All proceeds from the book will go towards our projects for the coming year.

Finally I would like to thank the people of Birr for their continuous support and hope you enjoy the 2016 edition.

Fred Boulton.
President of Birr Lions Club.

Sad loss of Review members

The Birr Review committee were deeply saddened by the untimely death of our colleague Liz Kennedy. Her death after a short illness was a great shock to the entire group. A stalwart of many organisations in the town over the years, Liz was a valued member of the Birr Review group. Involvement in the production of our annual review enabled her to promote the positive aspects of our town and her deep love of Birr was a motivating factor in everything Liz did.

Liz had a great knowledge of Birr people and organisations. When we struggled for a contact in a local group, she invariably knew who to go to and when she undertook a task it was a guarantee that it would be completed quickly and efficiently. Though we will miss her organisational skills, it is undoubtedly her good humour and quick wit that will be most lamented. On so many occasions over the years her no nonsense attitude was a guiding light in the deliberations of our group. While we greatly mourn the loss of Liz it is of course only a fraction of that felt by her family and we extend our deepest sympathy to her family.

We have also just heard of the death of Sr. Roberta, another loyal and dedicated member of our committee. Sr. Roberta was a member of our group from it's inception in 2001 and was a key link between the Review and many organisations in our town. Like Liz, Sr. Roberta had a mischievous sense of humour and added greatly to the convivial bond between all our members. We will greatly miss her valued input.

May they rest in peace.



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BIRR YEAR IN REVIEW 2015-2016

NOVEMBER 2015

Birr Chamber of Commerce welcomed the announcement that €21,000 had been made available by Birr Municipal Council for the Birr Christmas Lights.

The monthly meeting of the Birr Municipal District Council was told that visitor numbers to Birr Castle had reached their highest figure since the start of the recession in 2008.

St. Brendan's Church of Ireland held its monthly Family Service including the popular 'Perplex the Preacher'.

A Remembrance Ceremony was held in St. Brendan's R.C. Church on 14th November to remember officers and men of the Leinster Regiment that were stationed in Crinkill Barracks.

Birr 20:20 held a Youth Expo in the Marian Hall to showcase to the young people of Birr what amenities, clubs and societies that are available to them.

It was announced that the Birr to Cadamstown route was to be included in the Winter Maintenance Plan by the roads authority.

The Friends of Birr Community Nursing held a very successful, fund-raising Sale of Work.

Birr Theatre and Arts Centre hosted the premiere of a new work composed by John Buckley.

Birr Community School presented 'Joseph and His Amazing Technicolour Dreamcoat' for the annual school musical.

Austrian composer and flautist, Karen Leitner, launched her new CD 'Firemagic' in the Tin Jug Studio on 27th November.

A new Dental Care Clinic was opened on Wilmer Road by Dr. Jamie Cummins.

There was shock and sadness in Birr's soccer community when the death of local footballer and referee Sean 'Ski' Lowry was announced.

Rumours that the free car-park on Wilmer Road was to become paid-parking was quashed by a local authority official.

Birr Stage Guild featured on an AIMS (Association of Irish Musical Societies) charity CD.

Tennis coach, Kieran Galvin, visited Mercy P.S. and Second Class got the chance to take part in his coaching session. They learned some of the basic skills of playing tennis.

The NCBI charity held a fundraising table quiz in Kelly's of the Green.

Karen Butler from Birr was awarded a JP McManus All-Ireland Scholarship towards Third Level education at a ceremony in University of Limerick.

The inaugural 'Pink Sunday' ladies lunch held in the County Arms Hotel raised €10,000 for Breast Cancer Research.

The annual Commemoration of the Manchester Martyrs was held on the 22nd November.

Carrig N.S. won an award for their film, 'Kate's Ghost', at the Beijing Film Festival. The film was based on Catherine Mahon, the first principal of Carrig N.S. and the first female president of the I.N.T.O.

DECEMBER

An art exhibition in aid of Cancer Research was held in the County Arms Hotel featuring work of local artists, including Mona Collins.

Birr Stage Guild presented "The Magic of Christmas" to a packed Birr Theatre and Arts Centre.

Mundy performed in the "De-lights of Christmas" in aid of the Birr Christmas lights fund.

The Birr Sisters of Mercy celebrated 175 since the arrival of Mother Catherine McAuley to Birr to set up a new convent.

A Eucharistic celebration of Thanksgiving was held in St. Brendan's R. C. church followed by a wreath laying ceremony and blessing in the Convent cemetery at the rear of the church. A reception was held in the Mercy P.S.

The 10th Annual Goal Mile took place on Christmas Day.

The newly formed Carrig, Riverstown and Killeen Drama Group presented "Too Close to Home" to a packed hall on both 2th and 5th of December. The play, written by James Keary, was directed by Brendan Hanamy and featured a wealth of local amateur dramatic talent.

Local man, Sean Hogan, launched his debut, graphic novel, "Rabbit and Paul". This is an illustrated story of Paul who gets lost in a small town and accidentally buys a 6 foot tall, anthropomorphic rabbit and follows their mad capers.

Santa Claus switched on the Christmas Lights and the first Birr Santa Train was seen driving through the town much to the delight of young and old alike.

Birr man, Simon Hogan, won €26,000 including a holiday on the National Lottery Winning Streak game show on RTE. Birr Year Review 2015 was launched in Dooly's Hotel.

Fianna Fáil leader, Michael Martin made a quick canvass stop in Birr ahead of the General Election.

Jigsaw Offaly in association with Offaly Youth Theatre presented "Write Your Mind", a play about youth mental health in Birr Theatre and Arts Centre.

Peter Fox's Pharmacy on O'Connell Street in Birr celebrated 21 years in business.

A Johnny Kennedy Memorial Christmas craft fair, market and funday was held in the Marian Hall in memory of local man, Johnny Kennedy who died earlier in the year. Monies raised went to charity.

Local girl, Dana Donnelly from the band "I'm Your Vinyl" visited Mercy P.S.

The local clergy were delighted with the large congregations for each of the Christmas celebrations including a wonderful Carol Service.

BIRR Year Review 2016**JANUARY 2016**

Purcell Auctioneers in Green Street featured on the BBC's 'Antiques Road Trip' when the programme aired in January. It was announced that Applied Concepts, a sandblasting equipment company based in Kinnitty was taking over the long-empty Kor-rec Type building in Syngfield.

Birr RFC claimed the Rugby Midland League Bowl title in Mullingar with victory over Midland Warriors on a scoreline of 22-14.

St. Brendan's Community School held their open evening for prospective students and parents.

Local woman, Teresa Ryan-Feehan declared her intention to run as an Independent candidate in the General election. Birr Castle Gardens & Science Centre won first place Regional Winner in the 2015 International Best Brochure competition awarded by the International Associate of Professional Brochure Distributors.

Master fiddler, Kevin Burke, hosted a workshop suitable for intermediate players. This included a practical demonstration on fiddle techniques, rhythms and ornamentation.

Peter Fox Total Healthcare pharmacy in Birr offered a free weigh-in as part of RTE's Operation Transformation's Million Pound Challenge. Meanwhile the Operation Transformation Walk began on the 4th January and continued each Monday during the course of the show.

Science Foundation Ireland announced that €1.4 million was being granted to create an I-LOFAR station (radio telescope) in the grounds of Birr Castle.

Ten sixth class students from St. Brendan's Boys P.S. and Mercy P.S. were matched with a transition year student in St. Brendan's Community School in a 'Let's Read Pal' project hosted by Birr Library.

A 'Right to Water' protest was held in Birr in January as part of a nationwide protest against water charges.

Annie Nichol, Aloise Murray and Jessica Fitzgerald, students from St. Brendan's Community School received a 'highly commended' award at the BT Young Scientist Exhibition in Dublin for their project on 'Outdoor Retro-Reflective Christmas Decorations'.

Hollywoods Garage, owned by Leigh and Sabrina Hollywood celebrated 10 years in business.

A raw sewage pollution problem in the Little Brosna in Riverstown was cleaned up after residents complained. The treatment plant had been submerged by flooding on the river and this caused the problem.

The Midland Tribune who sponsored the local Christmas Shop Window display competition presented the awards to winners.

A new trio curated by Music Network: Hothouse Flower Liam Ó Maonlaí, irrepressible virtuoso Tim Edey and the legendary Kevin Burke played in Birr Theatre and Arts Centre.

FEBRUARY

For the first time since the club began over one hundred years ago a girl's Under-18 and Under-15 side ran out onto the pitch in Birr Rugby Club to play their first match – a historic day for the Birr Woman RFC. Both opening tries were scored by both Birr Captains, Clodagh Hanniffy and Grainne Heagney.

Grant Engineering announced a €7 million expansion and 50 jobs. The founder and Managing Director of the Company Stephen Grant told the Taoiseach, Enda Kenny, that the Company has continued to grow and expand into new markets and to develop new products.

Birr Senior Golfers turned out in force to honour the late John Gilmartin who did so much to promote and develop Thursday Seniors Golf.

Operation Transformation 5 km walk/run was held in Birr in association with Sport Ireland the local Sports Partnership, Birr Leisure Centre and Birr Athletic Club.

Birr Municipal District made a submission to the Department of the Environment for €1,465,365 for flooding relief work in the area.

It was announced that a number of improvement works were to be carried out in the Birr Area including a pedestrian/cyclist route beside the bridge on Bridge Street, improvement works on Mill Street and upgrading works to improve the visual appearance of Wilmer Road Car Park and a full footpath through the site from Wilmer Road to Mill Street.

The traffic flow on Moorpark Street, Birr was restored to its former direction, i.e from High Street towards Tesco to the N52 following a petition by the residents of the street.

Birr Mercy P.S. launched the start of their Green School's Campaign. The logo for the campaign is – NCT – No car Tuesdays. There was almost 100% participation as teachers and children all walked to school. The aim is to reduce the number of cars driving to school each morning and to get more active.

Repair work on the roof of the beautiful John's Hall commenced. This is a detached single storey, temple fronted neo classical commemorative hall which was built in 1833.

It was announced that there were exciting plans afoot to create an animation film and television studio in Birr which will provide illustration, design, film and TV services.

Marcella Corcoran Kennedy, T.D. launched her general election campaign in Dooley's Hotel, Birr.

Birr archaeologist, Camin O'Brien, gave an enthralling presentation on neighbouring Kilcolman Parish at the Birr Historical Society gathering.

MARCH

Purcell Auctioneers held an auction which included 16 Eyre Family Portraits which fetched a total of €18,790.

St. Brendan's Boys P.S. held a school pageant to celebrate 2016 with 120 boys taking part. They took the audience on a journey from the Cave Men to Vikings/Normans/Peal Laws/Famine/1916 Rising and beyond to 2016.

Mercy P.S. was delighted to welcome successful boxer, Bernard Dunne, to the School. Bernard is a spokesperson for Camambola, the company that supply the lunches to all the girls in the school.

St Brendan's Community School Under-14 Boys Badminton Team which represented Offaly Post Primary Schools won the Leinster Division "C" title and St. Brendan's Under-16 girls were winners of Division 3 Leinster. The girls were Sarah Pingree, Allie Harding, Caoimhe Kearns and Claire Hogan.

Birr Wilmer Tennis Club held an open day to show people what the club had to offer. The Club showcased its fantastic facilities having upgraded its courts and floodlights.

The Minister of State for Tourism & Sport Michael Ring, T.D. has announced funding of €67,000 to the Irish Game & Country Fair in Birr by Fáilte Ireland.

The Birr Scouts Investiture of the 16 cubs and 12 scouts took place. The cub and scout of the year were announced. Cub – Brody Larkin. Scout – Leon Hogan.

The Irish Fashion Innovation Awards featured a wide variety of up and coming talent and local milliner, Birr's Elaine Keogh was crowned "Millinery Designer of the Year".

Townsend House Tapas and Wine Bar was the Leinster Winner of the Best Wine Experience at the recent Restaurant Association of Ireland awards.

There was great excitement in Birr when Audience Award Winner at the 2015 Offline Film Festival, Ben Cleary's film "Stutter" went on to win an Academy Award for best live Action Short at the Oscars.

There has been a mixed reaction from locals on the recently installed furniture and lights in Emmet Square – sculptural balls and stone benches with blue lighting – some people felt that the furniture is not in keeping with the town's character.

After a nine year absence, league hurling returned to Birr in the form of Offaly .v. Kerry. Offaly fell to Kerry by 2.18 to 2.17. A large crowd witnessed the defeat.

Local lad, Jack Regan, was selected for the Ireland Under-19 rugby squad. Mikey Milne was selected for the Ireland Under-18 squad for the Five Nations Rugby Festival.

APRIL

Birr GAA Club sought public support for the club's biggest fund raising event in almost 20 years to raise funds towards ongoing redevelopment of St Brendan's Park, Birr which is considered by many to be the traditional home for hurling matches.

Birr Athletic Club proudly hosted a memorial 5k fun run in memory of club member and friend, Sean Lowry, with over 200 runners/walkers taking part. The club also extended its warmest congratulations to its Club Secretary, Andy Masterson on his County Medal which was presented to him by former Olympic medallist John Treacy.

It was with great pride over Easter Weekend 2016 that the National Flag of Ireland, a symbol of peace and reconciliation, was flown in splendid isolation above Birr Castle. The flag had been raised above the Castle on three previous occasions for Presidential visits, it was alongside the Presidential flag each time. However on this historical occasion the National Flag alone was raised in commemoration of 1916.

Birr PGA Golf Teaching professional, Bobby King, made a valiant attempt to break the world record for the most golf holes played in 12 hours. Bobby unfortunately came up six holes short of the record of 221 holes.

It was stated at the meeting of the Birr Municipal District that five tenants are facing eviction in a housing estate – not that they have fallen into arrears with their payments but because the Receiver is seeking a different use for the houses.

Birr Municipal District Council unveiled a plaque to commemorate the arrival of the Mercy Sisters to Birr on the 27 December, 1840, celebrating 175 years of community service. The plaque is on the wall of the old Mercy Convent, now the Civic Offices.

As one of the main musical celebrations of the bicentenary of St. Brendan's Church of Ireland, Birr Choral Society and friends performed a Ruth Beasley and Audrey Frances Cantata "Holy Spirit, Breath of God" and the cantata was performed to honour the memory of Fr. Tony Cahir as a mark of affection and respect for his memory.

Biorra Le Gailge commemorated the Easter Rising at Birr Post Office and Mary Bulfin, a descendant of Eamon Bulfin raised the flag.

Stephen Callaghan addressed Birr Historical Society about the subject of the old St. Brendan's Church and graveyard on Castle Street, Birr which is an ancient site of many thousands of unmarked graves in the intriguing talk which raised many fascinating points.

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MAY

The soft backed edition of an acclaimed book about Birr Castle, was launched in the RDS Library, Dublin. The book features a series of essays written by a range of people about the people who were part of the Castle's 19th Century story.

Respite Care services in Birr Community Nursing Unit have been suspended due to staff shortages, the HSE confirmed. They are currently recruiting and hope to have new staff in place by August and resume the services.

A second 1916 Garden of Remembrance in Offaly was officially unveiled in Birr's Mill Island in an emotional ceremony. Members of the Defence Forces raised the flag and read the 1916 Proclamation. The Offaly County Council choir sang 'The Foggy Dew' and a lament was played on the bagpipes.

Birr Municipal District Council have been debating plans for the realignment of Wilmer Road with the Area Engineer, who outlined that narrowing of roads is now frequently recommended in road engineering papers. Confusion and chaos appears to be the result with Mass going 'illegal parking' adding to the problem. A full review is to take place.

Renowned chef, Nevin Maguire, presented a cookery demonstration in the County Arms Hotel, an event organised by Carrig N.S. Parents Association.

An Taoiseach, Enda Kenny, announced Marcella Corcoran Kennedy as Minister of State for Health Promotion as part of the new Governments cabinet.

Birr 20/20, a community group has come up with a plan to transform the former Courthouse building into a special area for active, educational and social activities beneficial to the whole community. Currently the proposed name of the centre would be Birr Creative Hub, but this could also change as the ideas and plans for the building evolve.

Birr's Red Cross celebrated 20 years of serving the Community, there are currently 14 people involved in the Birr branch, all giving their time voluntarily in the service of the community.

The An Post sponsored Cycle Race of Ireland (RAS) sped through the town of Birr, with some of Ireland's top cyclists along with international visitors vying for top spot in the gruelling 8 day stage race around Ireland.

Peter Fox Pharmacy presented Birr Community Games with a First Aid Kit.

Noynini Beaga playschool welcomed Garda Grace who told them about remaining safe.

Both Birr Chamber of Commerce and the Birr Cumman of Fianna Fail held their AGMs on May 5th.

Local artist and crafter maker, George Dempsey Flanagan, appealed for crowd-funding to help him publish his second book, "The Adventures of Swimsy the Goldfish in Origami Wonderland".

JUNE

Birr woman, Mary Lyndon, received an Honorary Lifetime Membership of the teacher's Union ASTI for her exceptional service to the Union

Birr Gardaí discovered over €15,000 worth of drugs in a field on the Tullamore Road in Birr as part of an ongoing investigation into the supply and sale of illegal drugs in the area.

CSO figures show an increase in employment in the Midlands Area of approximately 3,000 new jobs. Unemployment in the area has dropped by 5.6% from the corresponding data of 2015

National Bike Week was celebrated in Birr with Wolfrap cycling Club organising a six week 'couch to 60K' training programme to culminate in the annual Billy Butler Memorial Cycle on Sunday 24th July.

The launch of 'Park and Stride', a new initiative as part of the 'Active Travel Town' programme took place in Birr. The programme seeks to encourage people to become more active by various methods; leave their cars and walk, carpooling, walk to school, cycle paths, and as part of this programme a large investment in pedestrian routes including a new pedestrian bridge at Bridge Street is taking place in Birr

The long awaited 'West End Battle of the Musicals' event organised by and for Birr GAA finally took place. After weeks of preparation and rehearsal the teams finally took to the stage with their productions under the following names: We Will Rock You, Saturday Night Fever, Motown, Hairspray, Mamma Mia, The Commitments and Back to the Eighties. The County Arms Hotel was packed for the event. It was a wonderful night of music and laughs, and a fantastic fundraiser for the club.

Birr Community Nursing Unit suffered the closure of seven respite beds for lack of funding for extra staff in the unit.

Birr Theatre & Arts Centre screened its first film for the newly formed Birr Youth Cinema Club (for 15-17 yr olds)

A large forestry truck shed its load of logs in an accident at the Tesco roundabout in Birr. Despite the obvious dangers of such an incident at this busy junction, Gardaí were happy to report there were no injuries to any of the public or other motorists.

Birr's Chamber of Commerce announced Jason Farrell as their new President. At his accepting his chain of office event Jason encouraged more business to get involved in the organisation, to improve its effectiveness and promote more business for the town.

Birr Social Club held their Golf Classic on June 18th.

BIRR Year Review 2016**JULY**

The Birr 'Famous & Notable' (FAN) trail was officially opened and launched by Mr. Des Keogh, actor and radio personality. The trail commemorates 25 remarkable people and places from Birr's history. Each of the 25 stops is marked with a blue and white plaque.

Birr's Gaelscoil na Laochra had to seek new accommodation when the old St Johns School on Wilmer Road was found to be unsuitable for the purpose of a modern school without extensive refurbishment.

The HSE has confirmed it has no plans to close Birr Community Nursing Unit following a public meeting organised by Birr 20/20 committee.

The 48th Annual Birr Vintage Week was officially launched by Minister of State, Marcella Corcoran Kennedy.

Golfer, Bobby King, from Birr Golf Club broke the world record for 'most holes of golf played on foot in 12 hours'. After extensive training Bobby completed the world record in Roscrea golf club, breaking the previous record of 221 holes to reach a staggering 234, and raising funds for local organisations at the same time.

Grant Engineering won the Midlands Outstanding Business Award.

National Bike Week saw hundreds of participants, young and old, take to their bikes in Birr and surrounding areas.

Irish Water was granted permission to upgrade Birr Water Supply Scheme, with the work to include a new pump house building.

Birr Tidy Towns launched this year's efforts with awards available for many new categories.

Birr based company, EJ, have designed and produced a range of commemorative manhole covers to mark the 1916 rising.

Birr Municipal District councillors decided to 'restore' Wilmer road to its original design, after an experimental 'Smarter Travel' design was found to be "badly conceived". Birr hosted Space Camp 2016, a camp for science enthusiasts and young scientists with the wonderful world of maths, astronomy, physics, chemistry and rocketry explored.

Birr's Wilmer Tennis Club saw a record entry for their Open Week with over 120 matches played during the week.

Cemetery masses were celebrated in both Carrig and Clonohill.

A childrens playwriting workshop took place in Birr Library. Janet White-Spinner held a very successful "Open House" in her home in Church Street to raise funds for the Camcor Warriors, the junior participants in the Special Olympics.

St. Brendan's Community school received planning permission for a three classroom extension.

AUGUST

The Vintage Week festival kicked off with a fine parade through the town of Birr and with the usual spectacular floats and the displays. A nice feature of this year's parade was the flyover by several light aircraft from the local flying club who flew low over Emmet Square. The festival, which has been running since 1968, is still as successful as ever.

It was reported that Birr Castle obtained a grant of €5,000 from the Irish Georgian Society to help carry out repairs to the roof and the parapet walls of the castle.

Birr Flower Festival took place at the beginning of August and was universally acclaimed to be a most notable success. The festival which garnered support from all sections of our community added a wonderful dash of colour to our town while at the same time celebrating the history of our town.

Another aspect of our local history was reflected in the new book by local historian, Margaret Hogan, which traces the origins and early history of Oxmantown Hall, now the Birr Theatre and Arts Centre.

A new school of dancing opened in the Birr Technology Centre on Brendan Street. It is known as the Callanan School of Irish dancing.

The Birr Historical Society held its Heritage Week walk entitled from "Square to Square and beyond" and this was led by Brian Kennedy and Jimmy Shortt.

The leaving certificate results came out for the local schools at the end of August and the principals were reported to be delighted with the results. The principal of Birr Community School, Ms. Ming Loughnane, expressed her pride in the achievements of all of the examination candidates.

Both the Birr game fair and the Black Bull thrashing weekends proved to be very successful local events. It was said that more people than ever attended the game fair. The biggest attraction was, as always, the mediaeval jousting.

Alan Hoare from Crinkill narrowly missed the chaos and violence in Istanbul Airport following an attempted military coup in Turkey. He had just arrived on holiday and found the experience to be very nerve-wracking.

Birr Tidy Towns hosted "Dancing at the Cottages" with music provided by Rock-on Paddy.

Birr Language School completed a successful teenage camp involving both Irish and Spanish students.

Birr Castle hosted a free fun morning which included juicing for children.

Birr dog, 'Masala', owned by Janis Nolan was selected as the Offaly representative in the 'Nose of Tralee' competition, organised by Petsitters Ireland.

SEPTEMBER

Sisters, Catherine Walsh and Esther Mackay set off for Portugal to do a 160 km walk from Lisbon to Fatima to fund-raise for Cystic Fibrosis.

A 1950's style telephone booth was positioned in Market Square as part of Culture Night. It caused a lot of bemusement and double takes from passers by. The inside of the booth was decorated by local artists.

Birr student, Luke Fox, was awarded a Naughton scholarship, worth €20,000 towards his third level studies in the area of science, engineering and technology.

The Killaloe Diocese Justice and Peace committee presented a talk on "Justice: how justice as an idea has developed through the Bible" in the Conference Room at the rear of St. Brendan's R.C. church.

A plaque to Eamon Bulfin was unveiled at a Family Exhibition launch in Tullamore as a part of the Offaly 1916/2016 commemoration programme.

The increasingly popular Offline film Festival was officially launched at the Chestnut Birr. The festival director was delighted to inform those in attendance that the festival continues to go from strength to strength and this year they have received hundreds of short film submissions from all over the world.

Paralympic swimmer, Ellen Keane from Dublin who brought home a bronze medal from the Olympics in Rio has roots in Birr, her father Eddie having been born in Birr.

A wreath laying ceremony took place in Crinkill in memory of the Leinster Regiment and afterwards those present moved to the military cemetery to pay their respects at the Boer War memorial.

In sport, Birr unfortunately lost to Shinrone in the Camogie championship senior semi-final.

At the ploughing Championships Birr Lions Club were part of a significant volunteering testing for diabetes with thousands of people availing of the facility.

The children from Oxmantown N.S. raised €2,200 for the Kids4Peace project in Jerusalem.

An Annual Tea Day was held in Costcutters, Townsend Street in aid of Crumlin Children's Hospital.

Smith & O'Mahony opticians offered free Aged-Related Macular Degeneration (AMD) eye tests to people aged 50 and over during the month of September.

Paddy McDonnell, a senior lifeguard in Birr Leisure handed over €1,000 to MS Ireland following a marathon swim in the River Shannon.

Birr GAA's golf outing for the Peter Pardy Cup took place on 16th September.

CRC Gaels Under-14 team travelled to Kilkenny to play James Stephens Club in a challenge match and ran out comfortable winners with a scoreline of 6-12 to 1-14.

OCTOBER

The results of the National Tidy Towns Competition were announced and there was good news all around for tidy towns groups in the area. Birr Tidy Towns were named national overall winners of the "Let's get buzzing- Local Authority pollinator award" in the small town category.

Grant Engineering launched two new innovative heating systems on the market, both of which have received significant acclaim. This development has resulted in a further expansion in the company's manufacturing facility in Crinkill.

Local businessman, John Gleeson, of Green Street, announced his retirement from his successful ironworks business after a working life of 64 years.

St. Brendan's P.S. held a Superhero Day to show their support for Tommy Shaw, a pupil in Junior Infants who is suffering from a rare form of cancer. Tommy arrived to school on one of his big loves, a tractor, with a Garda escort.

The 20:20 group called for more members to join its ranks. Audrey Kennedy from Riverview Resources, Birr, told the October meeting of Birr 20/20 that locals, including members of Birr Tidy Towns, have been involved in the creation of a Sensory Garden and it's been a very positive experience for everyone involved. When completed the garden will provide a safe, relaxing place to visit for both disabled and non-disabled people.

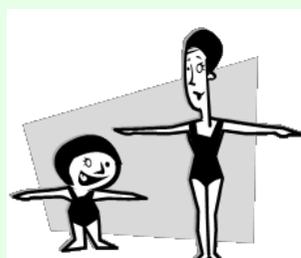
In sport, in the senior hurling championship semi-final Birr quite convincingly beat Kinnitty, but were unfortunately unable to contain St Rynaghs in the final. The final was played in O'Connor Park, Tullamore in front of 6,675 spectators. The final score line was St. Rynagh's 2-16 Birr 1-15.

It was reported that work had started on the Irish radio telescope in Birr Castle and that this presents the prospect of the creation of more jobs in Birr with the added bonus of a much enhanced broadband service for the town. Following completion of the ground works, testing of equipment will then take place. It is planned that the telescope will be monitoring solar bursts, (which are also responsible for the aurora borealis) and will also be engaged in the search for planets outside our solar system. Birr Castle announced an ambitious plan to create, through public participation, the largest forest grove of giant redwoods outside of California, within the historic gardens of Birr Castle.

THE acclaimed, award-winning documentary 'Against the Odds Racing with Gordon Lord Byron' was screened during the Birr OFFline Film Festival.

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Mr. Nicholas Lalor MISC P, MSC P Chartered Physiotherapist will be in attendance at the Leisure Centre by appointment only on 087 9170080.



Riverstown Bridge built c.1800.

Riverstown is a special place to me, as it is the ancestral home of generations of the Kennedy family. I have many happy childhood memories of accompanying my father to the family workshop and Riverstown was a central part of my youth.

The village of Riverstown begins when we cross the bridge from Ballindarra Co. Offaly into Co. Tipperary. It lies in the old medieval parish of Lockeen. This Roman Catholic parish is united with Birr for over 300 years. In the registration of catholic priests of 1704 Fr. James Shaughnessy is listed as P.P. of Birr, Lockeen and Kilcolman. The Church of Ireland administered the Parish of Lockeen until it united with Birr in the 1950's. Riverstown owes its existence to two factors. Firstly Abbot Loughnane, an Augustinian friar came from Lorrha and established his monastery at Riverstown, in medieval times. This monastery lay to the rear of the present Riverstown House. Ballyloughnane, Riverstown's Irish name comes from him. Secondly it was a crossing point on the Little Brosna River. The ford of the head above Crow Island, is according to T.L. Cooke a reputed site of a battle. The fact that it is a ford suggests it was a river crossing. The current five span bridge, so much part of the village's being, dates from 1800. Interestingly on the 1838 Ordinance Survey Map the river was much wider and formed a mill pond for the flour mill, whose ruins are still partly visible. Interestingly, the river still floods into this original basin. In the early 19th Century there was a Malt Mill on the other side of the river. At this time the river was navigable and a wharf existed up river from the village, where the outlet of Toberkeen Well enters the Brosna.

The so-called 'Stolen Birr-Portumna Railway', once crossed the river two fields from the bridge and one of its bridges is still visible on the Carrig road.

The four terraced houses on the left of the street were originally eight houses built for the mill workers by the Hackett family around 1800. The last house was the Post Office before it crossed the bridge around 1910, when Elizabeth Ferns became postmistress. She was succeeded by her daughter Julia O'Meara, who died in the late 1970's. The Post Office then returned to the Tipperary side of the bridge and Patsy Hourigan was post mistress until her retirement, when the business transferred to Birr.

Behind these houses was the site of Riverstown School built

Riverstown- Ballyloughnane

by Brian T. Kennedy

in 1834. By the 1930's the school had 75 pupils and Nan Donoghue (who ruled with an iron rod, by all accounts) was principal, Addie Murphy assisted her. Tom O'Donnell replaced her as principal in the late 1930's and moved with the school to Killeen, in 1939. There was only one room in the school and the pupils brought a sod of turf each day for the two open fires. The teacher's desks were across the fires and the pupils got little heat. They commenced building Killeen School in 1938, on a site given by the Earl of Rosse. The new school could not be built in Riverstown due to the proximity of the Brother's and Convent Schools.

Riverstown House, on the left as you cross the bridge was owned in succession by Harrisons, Lord Dunalley and the Hackett family. The latter are most associated with the house. In his history 'The Picture of Parsonstown....' written in 1826, Cooke tells us 'Riverstown is the seat of Simpson Hackett; the house has been largely rebuilt, and possesses the advantage of an excellent garden'. A typical Georgian country house it is perfectly symmetrical at the front. The kitchens and a back extension were added in 1901. The walls of the once formal gardens still exist to the rear.

The Hackett's of Moor's Park, (County Arms Hotel) and Riverstown, were a junior branch of the Hackett family of Gambonstown, Fethard, Co. Tipperary. They also owned Norwood House, Lisbonny, Nenagh and Roden House, Rathcabbin. They were a wealthy family and had a large distillery business in Birr. While Simpson Hackett (1763-1848) was a banker. In the 1870s Simpson Hackett of Moor's Park, Birr owned 1,789 acres in Co. Tipperary and 1,441 acres in Co. Offaly. Lt. Colonel [Thomas Bernard] Hackett of Riverstown owned 1,279 acres in county Tipperary.

The same Thomas Bernard Hackett was probably the most famous member of a distinguished military family. Born in Riverstown on 15 June 1836, he was awarded the Victoria



Lt Col. Thomas Bernard Hackett VC

Cross, for daring gallantry at Secundra Bagh, Lucknow, India, on the 18th November 1857. Thomas returned to Riverstown and married Josephine Marshall, daughter of Rev. Joseph Marshall and Jane Bernard-Shaw, of Barrone Court, on 9 July 1876. He died in an unfortunate shooting accident, while hunting partridge at Arrabeg, Carrig, on 5 October 1880, aged 44. He is buried in Lockeen Church Yard, the resting place of many of his family. The sanctuary window in Lockeen

Church is dedicated to his memory and this church was refurbished as a memorial to his widow in 1910.

My grandfather, Tom Kennedy, was born in a farm house in Cornhill in 1887. In 1919 he established his building contracting and undertaking business in a thatched premises, in Riverstown, ever after known as 'Kennedy's Workshop'. In 1920 a passing Black and Tan convoy fired shots at a man thatching this roof. It was galvanised by the 1932 Eucharistic Congress photos of the village.

Prior to this in the 1901 Census William, Patrick and Wm. Jnr. Nevin had a forge there. By 1911 Patrick & Bridget Carroll had taken over the forge, John Spellman was their apprentice. They lived in the section that was the workshop. It was here that the Carrig and Riverstown Club was formed in 1933. The building was often used to hold meetings and also stored the drums and instruments from the old Riverstown Band. These were later acquired by Dean Ryan for the C.Y.M.S. Band.

There were two public-houses in the village (today owned by Behan's and Gleeson's). Behan's was called 'The Midland Bar', as it was owned by the Midland Mineral Water Co. Gleeson's was owned by P. & H. Egan, of Tullamore. Both were run by a succession of managers in the mid-20th century, until eventually sold into private ownership.

The house currently owned by Seamus and Sarah King was once Riverstown R.I.C. Barracks. 1901 five RIC men and the Vincent family were present in the barracks on census night. We only get initials of the Policemen but learn they came from Counties Derry, Laois, Wicklow and Armagh. By 1911

the Barracks had closed and retired Sergeant Thomas Lucas Vincent, a Derry man, his wife and 10 children were living there. Around 1941, they sold the house and farm to Andrew and Babe Hardiman who ran a successful dairy there for many years.

Once a large stone existed outside the gate of the former barracks and it was the meeting place of the village on summer evenings.

At the top of the village nestled between the Carrig and Killeen roads is Castle View, the former home of the Carroll family. Now sadly neglected this once handsome Georgian house was the Rectory for Dorrha (Palace) Church of Ireland. The last rector to live there was Rev. William Richardson. Following his wife's death he lived on there with his daughter Martha until his death in 1929. He is buried in Clonoghil Cemetery. The house was then owned by the Hodgins family and subsequently by Carroll's.

In the field to the rear of the house is the Farmleigh Estate. A victim of the 2008 economic downturn; the estate was never completed to the original plans. Prior to this recent phase of building the field contained a long shed, once the site of 'St. Brendan's Poultry Farm'. It also contained 'Carroll's Pond' a natural turlough where the village children skated in frosty weather. Unfortunately, this was a victim to progress and filled in with rubble from the building site.

Up to 1954 the village had no electricity despite being so close to Birr. Their only source of water was the blue and gold painted pump in the centre of the village. In the 1970's piped water was installed from Toberkeen Well. Due to pollution this once pristine source of water is no longer drinkable and in recent years Riverstown was joined to the Birr water supply.

For many years now the village has had a keen interest in the Tidy Villages Competition. Hourigan's Post Office won tidiest Post Office in Ireland in 1984. Now like so many rural villages Riverstown has suffered an economic decline. Small shops unable to compete with large multiples have long since closed and there is no shop left in the village. The only business existing is a single pub, a huge change from 30 years ago. However, the tidy village group are still active and show a pride in their area.

Riverstown is a special place full of history. The next time you are passing through why not stop and enjoy the tranquillity of the riverside adjoining the Little-Brosna River.



Riverstown House Home of Thomas Bernard Hackett VC (1836-1880)



Riverstown Flour Mill destroyed by fire in 1920

Peter Dooley

Making His Mark With Leinster Rugby

by John O'Callaghan



The popularity of the game of rugby has grown immensely over the last decade and a half, thanks in a large part to the success of the Leinster and Munster teams in European competition, and last year Connacht in the Pro12 league. It is particularly noticeable outside the big urban centres, and more players from these areas are now breaking into the top teams.

One such player is Birr's Peter Dooley, who is now in his fourth year with Leinster Rugby. The loose head prop has become a more regular feature of the match day squad in the last two years as he continues to progress with the province. The 22 year old played with Ireland at under 18 and under 20 level and he said his number one aim is to play for the Irish senior team.

Rugby is nothing new in the Dooley household. Peter's Dad, Gerry, hails from Roscrea and he played with and later coached the local club there for many years, so it was probably only natural that Peter would pick up on his love for the game.

Peter himself began playing when he was about seven. David Baker was the under 8 coach at the time and he encouraged Peter to play. His Dad got involved with David in the management of the teams and over the next 10 years they enjoyed great success. They won two All-Ireland U-11 Community Games titles, two Leinster Leagues and an amazing 10 Midland League titles.

Peter played with Birr up to under 17 level. The following year neither Birr nor Roscrea had enough numbers to form a team of their own, so they joined together as the R & B Rebels and Peter played one season with them. They got to the Leinster League final but unfortunately were beaten in that final.

Growing up Peter played other sports as well and was a talented hurler. He won a county under 12 medal with Birr, scoring two goals in the final at St Brendan's Park against St Rynagh's in a game played as a curtain raiser to the county senior final. Peter featured at under 16 level with Offaly and played up to minor level with Birr but rugby was taking over at that stage and he couldn't keep them all up and concentrated on rugby from there on, a decision which has

been justified in the years since.

Rugby had begun to take precedence as Peter gained more recognition beyond the confines of Birr and the Midlands. At under 16 level he moved into the Midland set up. Leinster was divided into five areas and they play for the Shane Horgan Cup and the Leinster team is picked after that. He made the Leinster team and they won the interprovincial title and following that he went on to play with the Leinster under 18s for two years and also progressed to play with the Irish Under 18s.

The progression of players from the provinces through the Youths system has increased in recent years. Traditionally players went through the big rugby playing schools but the youths system is unearthing more players and the likes of Sean O'Brien, Tadhg Furlong, Adam Byrne, Tom Daly and Peter have come through that way in recent times and that is giving more encouragement to players playing club rugby throughout the province.

Peter said he hopes that his progress has shown young local players that there is a pathway to further progress. Shane Delahunt was an Irish under 20 colleague of Peter's and is currently on the books at Connacht while in recent years other young Birr players have got provincial and international recognition, including Michael Milne and Jack Regan.

He said he doesn't get down to Birr as often as he would like, but has been down some weekends and to see the number of young children playing is great. 'I would like to think I can influence more to play the game. I looked at players playing for Leinster when I was growing up and I ended up playing alongside some of them.'

Peter played at number 8 throughout his underage career and it was only when he was 17 or 18 that it was suggested he switch to prop. Former Irish coach Gerry Murphy was involved with Leinster youths at the time and asked Peter would he contemplate the switch. Initially Peter didn't want to make the change but decided to give it a go. It was a big change but he said luckily he was young and had time to change and said his build also helped.

Peter enjoyed two fruitful years with the Irish under 20

team. Peter was playing his club rugby with Lansdowne at that time and his club coach Mike Ruddock was also coach of the Irish U-20s. Peter was only called into the squad three weeks before the 2013 Six Nations started. He didn't start the first game in Wales but was brought on at half time and retained his place thereafter. He went to the World Cup in France that Summer and said it was a great experience to line up against the likes of New Zealand, Fiji and Australia. The second year he was involved, the World Cup was in New Zealand and he said that was a trip which he will always remember. He said the trip showed him how much New Zealanders love rugby. Ireland reached the semi-finals, losing out to England, but ended up playing New Zealand in the 3rd/4th place play off at Eden Park in Auckland. Peter said playing in that arena and facing the New Zealand haka is something that will live with you forever.

At that time Ireland played their home U-20 games in Athlone and many locals went and watched Peter and his Irish colleagues. He said it was great for him to play for his country so close to home. He recalled a victory over England when Ireland scored a late try and Tom Daly converted to seal the win and said to beat England like that so close to home, in front of many Birr fans, was unreal.

Playing at under 20 level, you are involved in the club academy which Peter said is gruelling training from Monday to Friday and a match at the weekend but he said it sorts players between those who are ready to progress further or not. He felt the structure benefitted him as he would only have been going to the gym about twice a week prior to that but was going 4-5 days a week under this structure and he believes it helped him develop.

As a result of his progress he earned a three year Academy contract with Leinster and began that July after coming back from the U-20 World Cup in France.

In his first year, he said he was not involved with the senior team but said they trained a few times with the seniors and said it was great to be able to train with the likes of Brian O'Driscoll.

From the second year on he was involved more with the seniors and at Halloween 2014 got his first Leinster cap against Edinburgh and has gone on to represent the province many more times since. This Summer Peter earned his first senior contract with the province.

While in the Leinster Academy he played club rugby with Lansdowne at U-20 and senior level and they won the All-Ireland League twice in three years.

It hasn't all been rugby for Peter as he has been combining playing with studying. He successfully completed his BA in Geography and English at UCD. He took a year out last year but has gone back to do his Masters this year in Marketing and Information Systems at Dublin Business School. He feels the study is important as it helps to give you a break from rugby, which he feels is important, and you also have to prepare for the future.

A typical week for Peter and his colleagues involves intensive sessions on Mondays and Tuesdays with gym sessions, video reviews, squad meetings and pitch sessions. The players would get Wednesday off and on Thursday they would have a quick gym session and a pitch session. On Fridays they would have the Captain's Run and if they are playing away would fly out that day. They would usually fly home the day of a game and have Sunday to rest and recover.

This Summer former World Cup winning coach with New Zealand Graham Henry was involved in some pre-season work with Leinster. Peter said to have a man of his knowledge around and to be able to pick his brains was brilliant for the team. 'He was only around for two weeks but he made a lot of improvements in players and we got to know a lot more,' Peter said.

Early in the season former England coach Stuart Lancaster also joined Leo Cullen's backroom staff. 'The tempo has gone up, he's a world class coach and he is bringing us to a new level,' Peter added.

'My number one ambition is to play for Ireland,' says Peter but he acknowledges that is a tough ask as two Leinster colleagues are ahead of him in the queue. 'I'm training with Cian Healy and Jack McGrath and learning from them every day. People might wonder why you don't move away but if you are learning from these players every day, it is a great opportunity and I'm happy doing that.'

Peter is sharing a house with fellow Leinster players Josh Van Der Flier, Adam Byrne and Tom Daly and he said living together as a group helps them drive each other on. Peter says that when he saw Josh playing for Ireland last year, he was thinking 'I want to be there with him, that's the ultimate aim.'

We spoke in early October, in the week before Leinster played Munster in the Pro12 and followed up with their first two European Champions Cup games against Castres and Montpellier. He said you could see things picking up a notch in the run in to these games and said the competition for places was hectic.

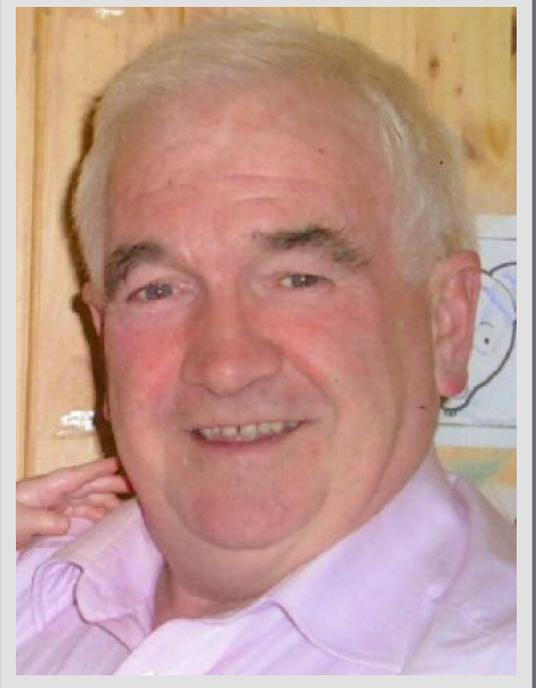
Following on from that, the November Internationals take place and with so many Leinster players away on Irish duty, Peter said it is an opportunity for players like him to make their mark in the Pro12. Last year they got their opportunity during the World Cup and later the Six Nations and he said it is a chance to get game time but he said it is also a chance to establish yourself and make a mark so that you just don't hand the jersey back when the international players return for duty.

Looking to the future Peter said that as the 'ambitious person I am, I'm looking to the World Cup in 2019 and playing for Ireland would be the number one ambition. You set your goals each year. A few years ago the dream would have been to play for Leinster and now that I have done that, I have to strive for as high as possible, that would be special.'



A SUNDAY WITH ROY, HOP-ALONG, CISCO, DAVY & ROBIN

by Tommy Spillane.



In Maths language my Mondays + Tuesdays + Wednesdays + Thursdays + Fridays = Fear, Pain and Confusion for me as a nine year old boy when I attended primary school. Saturday + Sunday = Fun and adventure that brought me into a magical world of imagination. At that time in my life I never realised that the way I felt when I opened my eyes on Saturday and Sunday mornings was the way I should have felt on every other morning. The result of my school days was that I functioned in an imaginative world for years where I found safety. It was whenever I left my imaginative world that I was not capable of functioning on my own.

On Saturday and Sunday I lived in a world of magic. It was from reading my comics was where I first saw and met my new friends Roy, Hop-along and Cisco. George Hehir had told me that they're were called stars. The only stars I had ever seen before were in the sky at night. We did have a picture of Pope Pious on the mantle piece at home, I suppose he would have been a star. John F. Kennedy the American President had not got on to our mantle piece in our house at that time. At night I would dream that some day I would see and talk to my new friends.

It was from listening to our Bush radio on Saturday morning that I met two men that were to become my heroes, Davy Crockett and Robin Hood and most of my imaginary time was spent divided between the American wild west and Sherwood Forest in Nottingham, England.

One of my heroes Davy, was born on a mountain top in Tennessee and he had even killed a bear when he was only three. His final days of heroism were when he fought at the battle of the Alamo. My other hero's name was Robin Hood, he and his band of Merry Men stood against a villain, the Sheriff of Nottingham. I would go to bed at night and dream that some day I would get to the American Wild West and on my way back home to Birr I would venture over to Sherwood Forest. Recently I had my dream come true.

You can imagine how I felt at the age of nine when my father brought me to the cinema in Brendan Street to see a boy that lived in the Wild West, his name was Shane. The story of that boy's life was sad but it was made better by a cowboy who helped out his family. That night after my father had

brought me to the cinema I decided I was going to be a cowboy and clean up the wild west. After a couple of more visits with my father to see my cowboy friends, I was allowed to go to see them on my own. To be allowed to go to the cinema on a Sunday afternoon on my own was just an incredible feeling for me.

After my mother's lovely Sunday dinner, covered in her special gravy and sometimes a bowl of jelly and custard I would saddle up my imaginary horse and ride down High Street hill to the cinema to meet my friends, the stars. But before I could get in to see my friends I needed to have four pence, that was the price of the ticket but that was the best spent money of the week, though it took a lot of planing and doing odd jobs to come by that four pence.

While I waited for the cinema doors to open I would read the posters that were in the shop window. I would know then when my heroes were coming back again. I would buy my ticket at the ticket box which was at the front entrance. The cinema was divided into two sections, the down stairs and the upstairs or sometimes known as the balcony. I would always go to the down stairs. In the downstairs of the cinema they was a secret agreement that could not be broken, the High Street boys sat at the right hand side and the Pound Street boys sat at the left hand side of the cinema. The upstairs was where the projector was. I had heard that the seats were lovely and soft in the balcony. There was also a sweet shop opposite the ticket box but I could not afford to buy sweets or ice cream. I would notice that it was only the people that were going up to the balcony that could afford to buy sweets and ice cream. Not to be able to buy sweets or ice cream did not matter to me once I saw my hero that day.

When I would be going in to take my seat I would always look up at the balcony, it seemed so big and very posh looking. I never did mind sitting in the down stairs because I would be nearer to my heroes on the screen. And being so close to my heroes they would hear me when I would shout at them and tell them when they were in trouble. Only for me looking out for Roy and Cisco and Hopalong they would have got shot on many Sunday afternoons. I would yell to

them, "The Indians are behind you" then they would be able to take for cover. I also saved Robin Hood more than once from the clutches of the Sheriff of Nottingham, while he was looking into Maid Marian's eyes.

On one Sunday afternoon I tried to get into the cinema without having to pay. I had to wait till the lights went out. I then opened the door very slowly and I lay on my stomach and crawled under the seats. Mr. Fitzgerald was the attendant or as we used to call him, "the man on the door," and if he shone the torch on me as I was crawling under the seats then it was the end of my Sunday at the cinema and I would be put out. That would be a very embarrassing thing to happen and it would be the talk of the town for at least the next day.

When I crawled past the first two rows of seats and was not caught I was then sure that I was in for free. The next thing I had to make sure was that I came up on the proper side. If by a mistake I came up on the Pound Street side then it would have been better if I had bought my ticket. The Pound Street boys would have looked on me as an invader. Lucky for me that day I came up on the High Street side. I never tried to get into the cinema that way again it was not worth it.

When the film was over and it was time for my heroes to leave me, they would wave goodbye to me as they rode away into the sunset on their horses. I would then wait impatiently as Mr Fitzgerald opened the side door. Once the door was opened I would rush out and I would ride away on my horse down Brendan street and shoot at the Pound Street boys as I rode by. I then would ride over the bridge at Mrs Flanagan's shop and check to see if there were any Indians in Cavanagh's foundry and gallop up the hill and tie up my horse to the railings of my house in High Street.

Whenever Robin Hood was in a battle with the Sheriff of Nottingham in Sherwood Forest I would leave the cinema and gallop down Castle Street and pull up my horse at the castle gate. My mission that evening would be to rescue Maid Marian from the Sheriff of Rosse. As I would be about to throw my rope over the castle wall and pull myself up to rescue Maid Marian, a thought would enter my head, my mother's spotted dick cake. As it was Sunday evening she always baked a spotted dick cake for the tea. It is a currant cake and you put creamy butter on it. I could eat it all in one go. I had never heard of calories or cholesterol then and if I did I would not have taken much notice of them anyway. I had to make a quick decision, either I saved Maid Marian from the Sheriff or I went home quickly before my brother Martin and my sisters Marie and Margaret had most of the cake eaten. It did not take me long to make my mind up. Please forgive me Maid Marian but I promise you that I will save you the next time.

I often wished Robin Hood would rescue me from my school and bring me and my mother and father and brother and sisters to Sherwood Forest where we would live happy ever after. Years later I did get to go up on the balcony in the cinema with the girl that I would eventually marry and yes the seats were softer. I even bought her a bottle of orange and a bar of chocolate but to do all that I had to borrow money from Jim Walsh in Loughnanes from my next weeks wages but it was worth it. I cannot remember the film.

You might say I had an imagination but I was happy on a Sunday before Monday morning would arrive bringing with it another day of confusion, leaving a home of love to enter a classroom of fear, it was far too much for me as a child to understand.

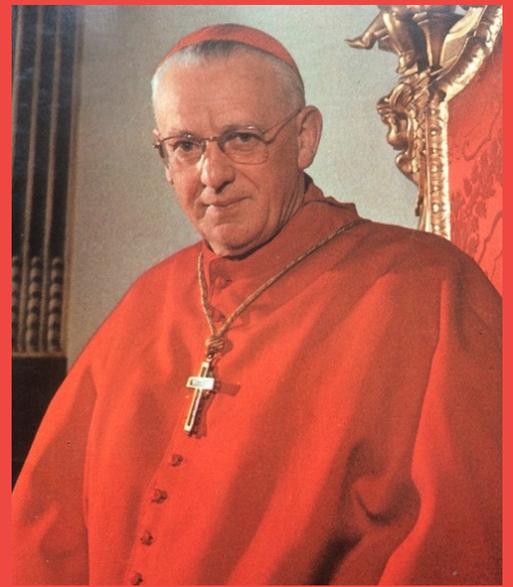
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Cardinal Heenan visit to Birr, 1965

by Margaret Hogan & John Molloy



"The long column of acolytes in their red sashes and white surplices over black soutanes marched slowly on the centre of the road, followed by the clergy in their ceremonial robes of white, purple and crimson, the whole moving like a stream between two banks of neatly attired boys and girls waving gaily coloured flags ... the green, blues and greys of the uniformed Guards of Honour ..."

This was how the Offaly Independent described the colourful scene at Wilmer Road, Birr on Sunday 22 August 1965, as the procession made its way to St Brendan's Roman Catholic Church where a liturgical celebration was about to honour John Cardinal Heenan, Archbishop of Westminster on the occasion of his first visit to his relatives and to the native area of his parents since being raised to the College of Cardinals.

There was sound as well as colour, according to the Midland Tribune:

"Army buglers and drummers of the 3rd Brigade sounded the General Salute. The smartly turned out FCA Military Guard of Honour drawn from the 12th (Birr) Field Battery drew to attention ... the Cardinal inspected their ranks with their commander, Commandant WF Milne."

Birr Civil Defence commanded by William Hogan, Gardaí by Supt. R.T. Grant and Sgt S.T. Gormley and Birr Order of Malta also took part in the colourful pageantry. The choir sang 'Ecce sacerdos' with Annie Noonan at the organ.

John Cardinal Heenan was the son of James Carmel Heenan and Anne Pilkington from Clareen who emigrated to England and settled in Ilford, Essex. James became a civil servant in the Patent Office and John, the youngest of their four children, was born in 1905.

The Pilkington families of High St. and those of O'Connell Street were Cardinal Heenan's closest relatives in the Birr area. In Clareen his closest relatives were the family of his first cousin John Heenan, namely Mrs Mary Matheson (Co. Down), Mrs Nan Downey (Dromoyle), Mrs Sarah Dowling (Rathbeg) and John Heenan who still resides in Clareen. In fact John still possesses Cardinal Heenan's scarlet sash.

After Mass in Birr, the Cardinal was greeted by Mother Genevieve and the congregation of the Convent of Mercy where he made a special point of visiting his dear friend, Sister Monica who was indisposed. Later he drove out to Walsh Park to visit his cousins Mr and Mrs Young and family,

then back to Birr for a civic reception on the steps of the parochial house where Jim Dooley, Chairman of Birr UDC presented an illuminated address of welcome watched by a large crowd. Alongside Cardinal Heenan on the steps were his brother Fr. Frank Heenan, his nephew Fr. Michael Reynolds, Bishop Rodgers, Monsignor M. Quinn, Rev Chancellor FR Bourke, Rector of St Brendan's Church of Ireland, Rev JB Jennings, Methodist Minister and Edward L. Madden, Vice-Chairman, Birr UDC.

A liturgical celebration greeted Cardinal Heenan in Clareen where he celebrated Mass in memory of his late parents, James and Anne, in their native church. In attendance also were Most Rev Dr Peter Birch, Bishop of Ossory and Very Rev D. Carroll, Adm. The parishoners turned out in their hundreds and a guard of honour of the schoolchildren under Frank McNamara, N.T., school principal, lined the approach to the church waving flags and expressing greetings.

Later he visited the Pilkington family home at Bell Hill where his cousin Danny Pilkington still resided. There he met his cousins Danny and Danny's sisters Mrs Maureen Weir and Mrs Sally Grogan and other friends and relations. He then visited the nearby Heenan household, where he was greeted by his paternal cousins Mr and Mrs John Heenan and their family. He visited the home of Mr and Mrs Joe Mooney and family who were also related. The visit to Clareen concluded with a luncheon reception at the parochial house.

On the occasion of this visit to Ireland, the Cardinal performed two other ceremonies, travelling to Howth to perform the marriage ceremony of his cousin Carmel Anderson and to Banagher to christen John Nallen, son of his cousin Eileen Nallen and her husband Thomas.

In his homilies at Birr and Clareen, he dwelt especially on the topic of emigration from Ireland to the UK.

"You would sometimes think to read reports in the newspapers that the Irish when they go abroad all too soon forget the principles by which they were reared and the faith which gave them light, but in my experience the reverse is true ... Don't believe those who tell you that you should be ashamed of your sons and daughters who have crossed the water; on the contrary you have every reason to be proud of them"

The Second Vatican Council (also called the Ecumenical Council) was still in session, the Cardinal was deeply involved

and he asked the people of Clareen and Birr to pray that it would bring to the Church the blessings which 'the Vicar of Christ expected'. As leader of the Catholic Church in England, he would experience many controversies, pressures and onerous responsibilities during the next ten years. .

As a young man, Cardinal Heenan had studied in Ushaw near Durham and in Rome, was ordained priest in 1930 and served in East London during the war years. Many idealistic intellectuals were attracted to communism in the 1930s and he undertook a daring visit to Stalin's Soviet Union in 1936 to study living conditions under a Marxist-Leninist communist regime. Posing as a psychology lecturer and with an altered passport to conceal his priesthood, he made contacts in psychology circles, risky visits to underground religious groups and on his return lectured about his experiences at a conference in the Albert Hall, London. His literary, oratorical and spiritual qualities found expression in his homilies and writings. He became a national figure in the UK, speaking on radio and appearing on television in debates with Malcolm Muggeridge, editor of Punch and in interviews with the presenter Robin Day. Easy, comfortable and informal in front of the cameras, he was adept, skilful and outspoken, sometimes misquoted and misunderstood but extremely effective. Amongst his topics were religious controversies and immigration from the former colonies to the UK. He was appointed Bishop of Leeds in 1951 and six years later Archbishop of Liverpool where he initiated the

construction of the much admired Liverpool Catholic Cathedral in a modern style. He became Archbishop of Westminster in 1963, Cardinal in February 1965 and just a few months later he visited Clareen and Birr.

Cardinal Heenan published two very influential autobiographical books, *Not the Whole Truth* (1971) and *A Crown of Thorns* (1974).

His older brother, Fr Frank Heenan died in 1967 and his remains were interred in Clareen Cemetery at his own request. His funeral was the occasion of Cardinal Heenan's last visit to this area. Both Fr Frank and their nephew Fr Michael Reynolds ministered in England and were regular visitors to Birr and Clareen.

Cardinal Heenan suffered a serious illness in 1967 and for the next six years endured much ill health, including heart attacks in 1973 and 1974 and he died on 7 November 1975 aged 70. By his own wish he was buried, not in the crypt of Westminster Cathedral, but under the twelfth Station of the Cross: 'Jesus Dies on the Cross'.

The Pilkington families of Birr and the Heenan family of Clareen can be justifiably proud of the achievements of their renowned relative who never forgot his roots.

Acknowledgements to Midland Tribune, Offaly Independent, Cardinal Heenan's writings, James Hagerty, Cardinal John Carmel Heenan: Priest of the People, Prince of the Church (2012), John Heenan, Eileen Nallen, Mary Pilkington, Annie Pilkington.

BIRR GIRL, AOIFE GUINAN WINS NATIONAL GUIDE AWARD

The inaugural National Guide Awards were held on Saturday 22nd October, at the Hogan Stand Conference Centre in Croke Park, and Slieve Bloom Guide Unit were very proud to have one of their own guides involved in this prestigious ceremony. Aoife Guinan, from Birr, was one of 68 guides throughout Ireland to be awarded the highest award in Guiding. The National Guide Award, previously known as the Gold Award, is presented to Guides who have achieved numerous interest badges in various areas, completed outdoor challenges, competed in team events, community service and learned numerous lifeskills. Among the badges Aoife has earned are: Car Care, Disability Awareness, Care of the Elderly, Campers Way Gold, Silver and Bronze, Skin care, Pet care, Writer, Book Lover, Chocolate, Arts Appreciation, Trail Blazer, Innovator, just to name a few.

The National Guide Award Pin and Certificate were presented to the Guides individually by Irish Girl Guide President Maureen Dillon and Chief Commissioner Helen Concannon. There was also a presentation of the National Flag, by a member of the Defence Forces as part of the 1916 Centenary celebrations and a short re-enactment of the women's role in the Rising by members of a local Dublin group.

Aoife, who is 14, has been a member of Irish Girl Guides since

she was 5, starting first in Ladybirds, moving on to Brownies and finally on to Girl Guides. She will now undertake all the challenges of Senior Branch and start a whole new set of adventures. Aoife's sister, Aisling was the first Girl Guide in Birr to receive the Gold Award for Guiding. Aoife is now looking forward to IGGNITE 2017, an international guide camp being held at Rockwell College next summer.



Aoife with parents Larry and Fiona at Croke Park

From Belarus to Sydney via Birr

by *Natasha Chepelvich*



“Tash, you can come home any time you like, but you will never have a second chance to stay in Ireland again” - Mum’s words that have helped me make big decisions.

The Chernobyl accident is the most serious accident in the history of the nuclear industry. Indeed, the explosion that occurred on 26 April 1986 in the city of Pripyat in one of the reactors of the nuclear power plant led to huge amounts of radioactive materials being released into the environment and a radioactive cloud spreading over much of Europe. The greatest contamination occurred around the reactor in areas that are now part of Belarus, Russia, and Ukraine. There is no doubt that the state of health of the people in the contaminated territories is extremely poor since the explosion. But a number of other causes are cited besides the radiation: poverty, poor diet and living conditions.

In or around the summer of 1998, I came to Ireland as part of the Children of Chernobyl charity. For six years following my first visit I returned once or occasionally twice a year for a period of a month to the same Irish family - Sean and Dee Hanniffy. These monthly retreats from the contamination of Belarus had a strong positive effect on my health which was poor at that time. Dee and Sean sought assistance from their friends in the local community and procured access to medical and dental services for me as a young girl. Between these periodic visits to Ireland, I kept in constant contact with Sean and Dee through regular phone calls and letters. I will never forget my first day in Ireland, standing in Hanniffys’ kitchen and couldn’t get my eyes off the bowl of fruit. We didn’t have much when we were kids, so it was a big thing for me.

In the earlier visits to Ireland, I had very little English. With every holiday, my English was improving but it was more and more difficult saying goodbyes to Hanniffys and their family and friends. In 2004, when I was 16 years old, Sean and Dee gave me an opportunity to come and live with their family for six months and attend the local St. Brendans Community School to learn some English. My parents were very happy to agree to this and trusted that I would be cared for - which of course they did and continue to do. It was a big decision for my parents as they hadn’t met the Hanniffys at that stage. Although it was a very big decision for a 16 year old to make, I decided it was something I would greatly benefit from. So it began! There were of course lonely days along the way and I faced difficult language obstacles in starting school in Ireland. But it was not all bad - I made great friends and really enjoyed a different experience in my life. I completed my Leaving Certificate in 2008. During this time, my parents and sister came for a holiday and experienced how my life with Hanniffys was; staying in Sean and Dee’s home they had a sense of family life with them and could clearly see that I was part of Hanniffys’ family. Sean and Dee’s sons also treat me like a sister.

Shortly after I started school in 2004, I got a part time job in a local newsagent “Square News” and I continued working there for nearly nine years. The owners Mike Lyons and his

wife Edel were like my third family.

After spending four enjoyable years studying in Dublin City University I left with an honours degree in Accounting and Finance and lots of new friends.

Since I finished college, I have been working for an Insurance Broker – specialising in the area of Life and Pensions. I became a fully Qualified Financial Adviser at the start of this year and got involved with the local community - at the end of last year I was asked to join the Board of Directors of Birr Credit Union.

I return home to Belarus every year, although lonely leaving my family and friends I always return knowing that I have a much better future ahead than my childhood friends have in Belarus. As a country Belarus is still a bit behind, there are not many job opportunities or things to do for young people. Every year I notice that cost of living is getting more expensive while salaries are staying the same. The young people are trying to explore the possibility of traveling to other countries, but it is very difficult for them to access visas. I still get involved with the Children of Chernobyl organisation and when I return to Belarus I visit the same orphanage. The hardest part of my visits is when the young kids (age 2-5) ask: “Mum, when are you bringing us home?”. Until 2013 my travel options were limited as Belarus is a non EU country - I couldn’t visit a lot of places. In September 2013 I received my Irish citizenship and in the last three years I have made trips to several countries.

I recently found out that when I was nine years old, I had an opportunity go to Spain as part of the Chernobyl Children travel. My parents wouldn’t let me as I was too young. In April 1998 my Granddad passed away and a few weeks after, my mum had a dream about my granddad telling her to let me go this time. My parents were confused next morning until a school principal came in to see my mum at work and she advised that I had an opportunity go to Ireland for a check up. On a regular basis I have been asked “Why Ireland?!” – well everything happens for a reason, what is meant to be will always find a way.

At the moment I can’t see myself going back to Belarus, I would prefer to climb the ladder in my career, but things might change in the future. It has been an exciting journey over the last 18 years, but without the support of my families, friends and local community I would not be where I am today.

In August of this year I took the plunge. I gave up my good job and said ‘au revoir’ to my Irish family and friends to do some travelling and see the world. So for now I’m singing off from Sydney, Australia.

Onwards and upwards

Sisters of Celebrate 175



Srs. Kathleen Minogue and Joan Carroll unveil a plaque in Birr Civic Offices, formerly the convent, to commemorate 175 years of Mercy Sisters in Birr.

On the 27th December 2015 the Sisters of Mercy celebrated the 175th Anniversary of their coming to Birr on the same date in 1840. The Sisters of Mercy had been founded in 1831 by Catherine McAuley, a Dublin heiress, to alleviate the plight of that city's poor. Catherine had been born in 1778 to James and Eleanor McAuley. James was a charitable prosperous businessman but in poor health and he died in 1783. Sadly Eleanor did not long survive her husband and the McAuley children Catherine, James and Mary were cared for by Eleanor's relatives the Conways. Later Catherine went to live with an Armstrong family and finally in her early twenties she became a housekeeper/manager to William and Catherine Callaghan, a wealthy couple who lived in Coolock, Dublin. Here she began to care for the poor in the area. When the Callaghans died, Catherine inherited Coolock House and a large fortune. She used this considerable fortune to build a House of Mercy in Baggot Street where lay-women committed themselves to attend to the needs of the city's poor. However this way of life was not in keeping with the ideas of the Archbishop of Dublin, Dr. Murray, and Catherine and her companions were asked to take religious vows and wear a religious habit. Consequently Catherine and two others entered the Novitiate of the Presentation Sisters in Georges Hill and when they took vows on December 12th 1831 the Congregation of the Sisters of Mercy was founded.

Ireland at that time had many areas of destitution and soon other cities and towns sought the help of the "walking nuns" as the Sisters were called. Birr in the 1830's was a turbulent place, not least because of the conflict between the Crottyites, followers of two dissident priests, and the Catholic clergy in the parish. The Apostle of Temperance, Fr. Theobald Matthew, advised the Parish Priest, Fr. John Spain, to invite Catherine McAuley's Sisters to come and help heal the schism in the Parish. Catherine's response to his invitation was positive and on the 26th December 1840 she and four sisters set out in winter weather to travel by barge down the Grand Canal and establish her last and "pet" Irish foundation in Birr. They spent the night in Tullamore and travelled by coach next morning to Eglisk where Fr. Murtagh, Catherine's friend, provided, we are told, teetotal refreshments and were met by Fr. Spain and John Egan's dray and escorted to Birr. Fr. Spain had engaged "a fine old house delightfully situated with fields and garden all around"

adjacent to the Church and on St. John's Day 27th December 1840 their mission began.

Due to the Sisters efforts the bitterness of the Crotty schism soon faded and the Crottyites were reconciled with the Catholic Church. Visitation of the poor and the sick was undertaken and a school for girls was established. In July 1841 a total of 450 girls attended the school. Soon bigger premises had to be found and in 1846 a Convent Committee was founded to raise funds for a new building. These were the Great Famine years and so many sought employment that the northern and eastern sections of the Convent were ready for occupation in September 1847. The renowned A.W. Pugin, who designed Maynooth College, was architect. In 1851 a southern wing consisting of Chapel and classrooms was added. Finally in 1856 the eastern wing was built and the Gothic style Convent was completed. Catherine McAuley died in 1841 and the administration of the Convent was continued by elected superiors. By 1844 nine postulants had joined the Community, the first of whom was Susan Egan, later Mother Mary Vincent, a daughter of John Egan, who was a prominent businessman in the town and a generous benefactor of the Sisters of Mercy. A Birmingham lady, Anastasia Beckett, who was later to play an important role in the Birr Convent history, was among the nine. The school which had temporary accommodation in a house on the Mall returned when the classrooms were built. By the 1870's space was again a problem. The old convent and school were refurbished, extended and reopened in 1877. In the meantime Sisters were sent to Kinsale to study the administration of National Schools and to learn muslin embroidery and lace making. These skills were passed on to many of the pupils. The school was staffed by Sisters and their lay colleagues until the last Sister retired in 2009. Mercy Primary School is now in Parish management.

In 1863 Sr Anastasia Beckett opened a small orphanage in Nazareth House on Wilmer Road, This house was part of the dowry of Mary Agnes Egan, sister of Susan Egan and another daughter of John Egan. In 1865 when this house became too small a building designed by A.W. Pugin's son-in-law Mr. Ashlin, was constructed. The Sisters maintained the Orphanage from their own funds until it became an Industrial School in 1870 and a grant of 7 shillings per child, per week was paid. The school closed in 1963 when units of small family groups were considered more suitable.

Mercy Years in Birr

by *Sr. Kathleen Minogue RSM*

Following the success of the Sister's work in Birr other towns in the Diocese of Killaloe requested foundations. Not all requests could be met but four foundations were made from Birr. Nenagh, Co. Tipperary was founded in 1854, Kilrush, Co. Clare in 1855, Tulla, Co. Clare in 1883 and Borrisokane, Co. Tipperary in 1888. With the exception of Kilrush which was considered too far away, the foundations remained affiliated to the Mother House in Birr. In the second half of the twentieth century foundations were again requested and this time the Sisters went to the USA to Biloxi, Mississippi in 1958 and to Gulfport in 1963. In both cities the Sisters taught in Parish Grade Schools and undertook Pastoral work. Due to many reaching retirement age the last Sisters withdrew from these Parishes in 2014.

At the request of John Corcoran, a Poor Law guardian, in June 1881 three Sisters took up duty in Birr Workhouse, having first visited Cashel and Thurles where they were initiated into the duties required of them in a Union Hospital. The Birr Sisters' annals record that the Sisters brought the consolations of religion, order and cleanliness to the patients. The diet was improved so much so that one old lady on receiving a boiled egg for breakfast is reputed to have exclaimed in surprise "Did the wan die that that was biled for?" The workhouse closed in 1921 and the occupants were transferred to Tullamore.

1939 saw the opening of St. John's Secondary School in the southern wing of the convent. On the opening day 36 pupils enrolled. With numbers growing during the next two decades the space became inadequate and when the Industrial School closed in 1963 the premises were refurbished and the Secondary school moved into the newly adapted classrooms. Educational policies however were changing and amalgamated schools were considered better able to provide a wider range of subjects and equipment. Accordingly in January 1980 with the consent of all concerned St. John's Secondary School, the Vocational School and the Presentation Brothers' Secondary School merged to form St. Brendan's Community School.

175 years have passed since Catherine McAuley's Sisters came to Birr to minister to the needs of its people. Since then many changes have influenced the religious way of life especially in the wake of the Second Vatican Council. Apostolates diversified to include St. John's Day Care Centre and the Pastoral Centre in Nazareth House. Sisters from St.



Srs. Joan Carroll, Brenda Dolphin & Ellen Seery
at the celebration of 175 years of Mercy Sisters in Birr.
All three also attended St John's Secondary School.

John's Convent went to live in McAuley Drive, Birr. Sisters went as missionaries to Paraibu in Brazil. Two new houses were opened in Nuu and Nguutani in Kenya in Africa. The three independent units of Sisters of Mercy in the Diocese of Killaloe, Birr, Ennis and Kilrush amalgamated in 1972. This was followed in 1994 by a union of all Sisters of Mercy in Ireland, Africa, South Africa and Brazil. Birr is now part of the South Central Province of the Congregation of the Sisters of Mercy.

Numbers were falling in St. John's Convent and in 1996 the community moved to a purpose built house in Riverside, Birr. The cut stone built Convent, the gardens and the lands in Scurragh were purchased by Offaly Co. Council. The Midland Health Board, as it was then known, acquired the Orphanage building. The Sisters are now living in semi-retirement but the legacy of education and of service inherited from Catherine McAuley is still enjoyed by the Birr people and the fruits of her last foundation in Ireland are still apparent in the ethos of the town.

A Walking Light

by *Jack Ryan*

There was darkness
Poverty and illiteracy reigned
When out of the night
Emerged a walking light
Catherine McAuley
And a new day dawned
Over Brendan's Biorra
For she had prayed
And her faith
Had touched him
The Christ Child,
175 yesteryears.

This poem was written by Jack Ryan, Emmet Street to celebrate 175 years since the founding of the Mercy Sisters convent in Birr by Mother Catherine McAuley.



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AN ORIENTAL HONEYMOON

by *Brenda Heaslip*

In July 2016, my husband Jonny and I returned to Birr from a two year trip away. We had packed in more adventures and experienced more countries in those two years than we could ever have imagined.

After marrying in April 2014, we knew that we wanted to make our honeymoon as lengthy a backpacking trip as we possibly could. We spent the few months after our wedding doing a bit of research by talking to friends who had travelled and following some online bloggers, and then, with some loose plans, we took the leap.

Starting out we flew to Kuala Lumpur in July 2014 with nothing but two backpacks and a very rough plan. This was the perfect introduction to Asia and we were eased into our first week of life on the road. We spent six weeks in peninsular Malaysia travelling up and down the west coast and soaking up the great beaches and rainforests.

Our next move was onwards to Indonesia where we ended up spending two months. This was a good thing as it gave us ample time to properly fall in love with this diverse sprawl of a country. When we first landed in Java, we found it exciting and overwhelming all at once. It took us a couple of weeks to become accustomed to having days where we were the only westerners around and where the locals wanted to have their photo taken with us. We know now that this is a pretty common occurrence in lots of Asian countries, but it was a very new and bizarre idea for us then.

We were lucky to be able to visit two volcanoes on the island of Java and both, in their own way, were pretty stunning. Mount Bromo was our first and then we travelled eastward to the lesser known, Kaweh Ijen. We trekked Ijen at night which meant we were able to see the blue flames that are created through the activity beneath the crater. We watched the sunrise from the top and met many of the Indonesian sulphur miners who spend their days carrying kilos of sulphur, in hand-made baskets, up and down the volcano all day. These men work for just a few dollars a week and their life expectancy is very low due to the toxic fumes they inhale each day and the physical exertion of their work. Meeting them and seeing what they do was a humbling experience. Between the sulphur miners, blue flames, stars and the sunrise, Jonny and I felt extremely grateful for the whole experience and this was a really memorable highlight of our first months travelling.

Next we were on to the island of Bali. This was a really welcome relief after the fifteen hour minibus journeys of Java. We were soon ready for a bit more adventure though and we made our way to a more easterly island called Flores. From Flores we were able to charter a boat to take us to the Komodo islands. We signed in at the National Park and set off with our local guide in search of the komodo dragon, the world's largest lizard. We were lucky enough to see plenty of these impressive creatures in their natural environment with just two locals and a giant stick for protection. After a long trek in blistering heat to see the dragons, we spent a few nights on a remote island sleeping in huts and tents and experiencing some amazing snorkeling during the day.

Next on our route was Malaysian Borneo. Borneo is perfect for more animal spotting and we got to venture into the rainforest to see orangutans in their native habitat. We also did some trekking in Bako National Park which meant that we were able to see the proboscis monkey, wild boars, and macaques amongst other wildlife. On top of that we were able to meet some members of the indigenous tribes, visit their longhouses and see the very eerie cages of skulls that have been kept by the tribal headhunters.

It was time to move on again though and this time we flew to Cambodia. We spent a month here and it was one of our favourites. From the impressive Angkor Temples to the heart-wrenching effects of recent genocide, Cambodia is a country with many layers. The very recent oppression of the Khmer Rouge has haunted the country for decades and reminders of landmines, injury and death are everywhere. In contrast to that is the overall demeanor of the Cambodian people...they are amongst the friendliest people you could encounter and they make you feel like you are visiting a pretty unforgettable place.

It was during our time in Cambodia (October 2014) that I received news that I had acquired a teaching position in an international school in South Korea which was due to start in January. As exciting as this was, we still had Vietnam and Thailand to visit before moving to Korea. We really enjoyed Vietnam and Thailand, but we were certainly a bit distracted by the thought of our impending trip to Korea, a country we didn't know much about.

It was around Christmas by the time we reached the southern islands of Thailand and we spent Christmas Day 2014 on Koh Lanta on a quiet beach with two friends who were holidaying in Thailand. It was great and although not very much like

'Christmas'...it was still a nice time. The day before New Year's Eve, we landed in the city of Ulsan, South Korea. Korea had never been on our itinerary but the job offer was really good and included an apartment and moving costs which was great. We spent New Year's Eve sampling our first Korean BBQ and other Korean food and drink with the school principal (from New Zealand) and his family.

South Korea was very different to the countries we had just visited. We were coming from humid, tropical rainforests to winter in a country with temperatures hovering around zero. Winter in Korea is certainly not as mild as Ireland, but was a welcome relief. We stopped in Bangkok on the way to try and source some suitable clothes...our backpacks full of shorts and flip flops were no good to us. After a few days in Korea, we were off again. Just for four days to finalise visa arrangements in Fukuoka, Japan. This was the first of three trips we would take to Japan. Japan is a stunning country. Fukuoka was a lovely little city filled with polite Japanese taxi drivers in full suits and white gloves, toilets with as many settings and extras as a small car and authentic temples and pagodas dotted around the striking modern buildings. We got our visa paperwork sorted out and left Fukuoka in full agreement that on the next school holidays, we would be returning to Japan.

Back in Korea, we took a few weeks to get used to living on the 'foreigners' compound'. Our apartment was one of many which were occupied by workers from all over the world working for Hyundai. They were all involved in overseeing the shipbuilding projects that were taking place in the nearby shipyard. I was responsible for teaching their children while they lived in Korea for a few years while the project saw completion. Jonny got a job as a football coach with the 'Rising Stars Football Academy' and travelled to nearby cities and international schools to coach, as well as doing some coaching courses.

Korea is a lovely country that doesn't receive many tourists. Probably because it is overshadowed by its much more popular neighbours China and Japan. Many Korean people are fun-loving and like the outdoors...things that are popular are karaoke (nori-bangs), hiking, skiing/snowboarding and eating out. Eating local food is really cheap and it is common to sit around a huge table (sometimes on the floor/shoes off) and enjoy lots of marinated meat, seaweed, rice, kimchi (pickled cabbage), radishes and lettuces. This is nearly always washed down by soju, a local alcohol that is drunk in shots...often many shots. A few weeks after our arrival was 'Seollal' or 'Lunar New Year'. This is the same as the Chinese new year celebrated by the Chinese. We had loads of big celebrations and the Korean staff at school all wore their traditional clothes (Hanbok) and taught us some Korean songs, dances and games.

On our next school holiday we decided to go to Japan again. We flew into Osaka and traveled to Kyoto from there. It was just as enjoyable as the first visit. We even got to see a real-life Geisha just strolling down the street in Kyoto.

For the summer holidays of 2015 we started planning another trip. We started in Singapore and spent a few nights exploring the city. From Singapore we flew to Darwin, Australia and picked up our campervan. We had two weeks to drive from Darwin to Alice Spring and on to Ayer's Rock. It was a great trip. Having our own wheels instead of relying on public transport was very nice. From there we flew to

Colombo, Sri Lanka. We spent 3 weeks travelling around this beautiful country. The weather was amazing for us. We were also lucky to get to do a safari and saw elephants, a leopard, sloth bear, jackals, water buffalo, monkeys and a whole array of colourful birds. Sri Lankans were so welcoming and it was great to see the beautiful landscape of tea plantations and women in colourful saris collecting the leaves.

From Sri Lanka we hopped on a short flight to the Maldives for a few nights and then started to head back to Korea from there. We broke the journey by stopping in Hong Kong for a few nights. We had lots of recommendations of places to see and eat from friends and it really was a perfect end to a fantastic summer.

By the end of August we were back to work in Korea. It was only a few weeks to our first holiday though...this time it was 'Chuseok' the Korean equivalent to Thanksgiving. We enjoyed the short autumn and quick succession into winter, spending the weekends enjoying the Korean walks and hikes or out for food with friends.

Excitement built as Christmas 2015 approached. Although not a huge deal to Koreans, it has gained some popularity over recent years as western influences become more predominant. But what we were really excited about was our trip home. We had two weeks back in Ireland to see family and friends after a year and a half away.

In February of this year, we went to Pyeongchang near Seoul for some skiing and to visit an ice sculpture festival. We had a great few days and we got to see some of the sights for the winter Olympics due to take place in 2018.

Our last trip before our return to Ireland took place in March. We had to take one last trip to Japan. This time, Tokyo and Lake Kawaguchiko to see the famous Mount Fuji. Tokyo was a crazy mix of ancient temples, electric signs and shimmering skyscrapers. There is no doubting that you are in Japan and flashing neon signs and manga-inspired advertising don't let you forget. The trip to the lake at the foot of Mount Fuji was in stark contrast to the city. We stayed in traditional ryokan accommodation which involved sleeping and eating on the floor and using the public baths. All part of the experience!

From Tokyo we flew to Taiwan. We spent a few nights there and found it a lot like Hong Kong, albeit a little cheaper. From there we flew to Beijing. This was our first time on mainland China and it was a lot different to Hong Kong or Taiwan. Great to experience it and the part of the Great Wall that we hiked was truly amazing.

Back in Korea, we spent our last few months enjoying the onset of the summer temperatures. Work was winding down and eating outside and barbecuing became the norm for the weekends. There were lots of goodbyes and we weren't the only ones moving on. Many of our friends were like family during our time there...which I think is probably common in expat communities. We left Korea so happy with the experiences we had and the friends we had made, both there and on our travels, but mostly proud of the challenges we had met and overcome throughout the whole experience.

Brenda Heaslip (nee Stephens) grew up in Birr attending Mercy P.S. and then St Brendan's Community School. She is now a primary school teacher who is living in Birr and working in St. Philomena's N.S. in Tullamore.

The Sheeran Family

by John Molloy
& Bernard McGurk

Sporting Heroes

Those acquainted with the Sheeran family of Birr know them as an unassuming and modest hardworking family. For those less familiar with them it is a revelation to discover that behind that humble and modest nature lies a family history of talent and achievement which is a credit not only to themselves, but also to the town of Birr.

In common with very many families, service in the military plays a significant part in the narrative of their past, and here the Sheeran family can be proud of their own unique place in the annals of military history. This particular story begins in the 1890's in Mount St. Joseph's College, Roscrea when a student from Thurles decided to abandon his studies and enlist in the British army in Crinkle Barracks. The student's name was Patrick Joseph Ahern and having enlisted in the army he fought in the Boer War, 1899-1902, where he was made a corporal at the young age of 16 or 17. On his return to Ireland he married, in about 1912, Mary-Ellen Dunne from Birr, and they had three children, Bridget, Gertie and Patrick Joseph.

In the First World War Patrick was sent Turkey to fight in the disastrous Gallipoli campaign in 1915. Having survived that he was then posted to France where he served in the battle of the Somme. At that stage he was a Sergeant-Major in the 7th battalion of the Leinster Regiment and he was stationed in the front line. On that front line, on the 9th of September 1916, his commanding officer was killed in action and, on the battlefield, Patrick was promoted to the rank of Captain. Sadly he died later the same day, and his body was never found. His memory is commemorated on the Thiepval Memorial to the Missing in northern France. He has the distinction of being the only Irishman ever to be commissioned on the field of battle.

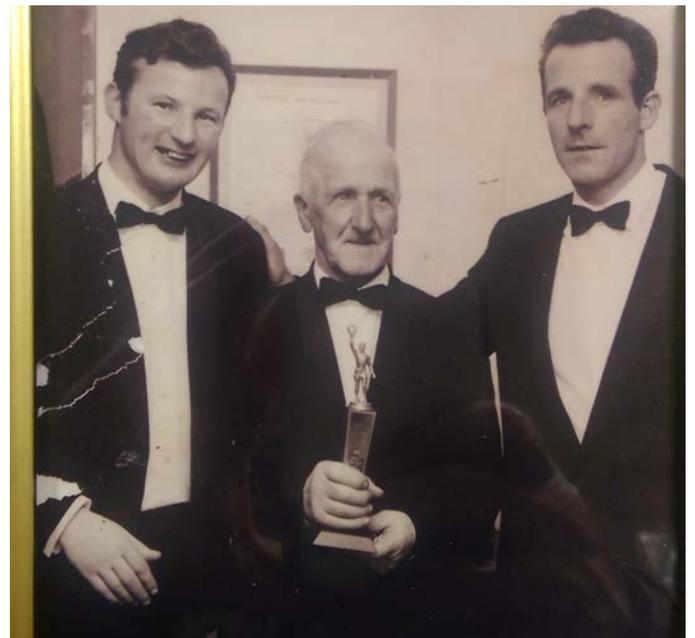
Of his children Patrick Joseph died at the young age of 18 years. His daughter Bridget married Tom Sheeran from Ballycommon, Tullamore.

Tom Sheeran was 22 years her senior, and he, like Bridget's father, had also served in the British army. He had been in the Connaught Rangers, and when, following the involvement of the Rangers in the mutiny in India, the regiment was disbanded, Tom returned to Ireland and joined the Free State Army.

Having served his time in the army he returned to Birr where he met and married the 18 year old Bridget Ahern. Tom was involved in various enterprises in order to provide a livelihood for his family: he was one of the first people in Birr to run a hackney car; he worked in Bord Na Mona, he worked in D.E. William's Malt house; and he and his wife Bridget ran a second-hand clothes shop in their house in William Street. Bridget, by all accounts, seems to have been the boss, and was a woman of great foresight, strength and

determination. Unusually for a woman in those days, it was she who went to the Bank and negotiated the money to buy the lands in Scurragh, land which was formerly owned by the Oakley family. From there further lands were bought and this in turn provided a farming livelihood for this hardworking family.

Tom and Bridget had nine children: John-Joe, Phyllis, Thomas, Dinny, Bernie and Pat (twins), Marie, and Eamon (Ned) and Linda (twins).



Patrick Fitzgerald, married to Linda, Tom Sheeran and Pat Sheeran (handballer).

The location of the house in William St. was a significant factor in the development of the sporting prowess of the Sheeran children. The extensive Castle wall across the road for the house provided an immediate and very accessible training ground and as the lads got older they had, right next door, the CYMS hall. This was a 3-storey building which housed card-rooms, table-tennis tables and an open handball alley. There was also a tin shed with snooker tables. These facilities helped foster an interest in and love of sport.

A list of sporting achievements by the brothers would run to many pages. A room in the house contains a number of glass cases and cabinets with medals, trophies and cups from all over the midlands and beyond, including All-Ireland, Leinster and Offaly championship awards.

Some highlights from the careers of the Sheeran brothers deserve a mention. Pat was a national icon in handball



circles. Next to work, he loved the game. He played with Paddy Murray, Des Dillon, Mick Kenneally, Bobby Winters, Jim Hickey, Tony McLoughlin, Johnny Murray and Paddy Conroy and was blessed with a great left and right hand. He made the game look easy. When the new ball alley was opened in the Fair Green in 1955 Pat and his partner Jody Coughlan were defeated by Tom McGarry and M. Mullins of Limerick in the All-Ireland Minor final. Pat defeated the world champion, Joey Maher, in the final of the Leinster Senior Softball. Joey won his world title when he represented Canada in 1967 in Toronto. When the world championship of the 40 x 20 court was staged in Ireland, in Croke Park in 1970, the logo on the official shirt had an image of the ideal stance a player should have and it is said

this image was actually that of Pat. He played at the opening of the Glass Court in Croke Park in 1969 in an exhibition match against Jim Doyle of Dublin. Pat was the Offaly Sports Star of the Year for 1962, 1963 and 1964.

Pat's older brother John-Joe (pictured left) was a distinguished tennis player. In the 1960's he went to work in England and, somewhat unusually for the emigrant Irish in England, he was a very well regarded and welcome member of his local tennis club there. His skill as a tennis player may have partly accounted for this, but there was also his engaging and good natured personality, traits which endeared him to all who met him. In Birr he worked in Birr Shoes Ltd., then Birr Moquette factory and also in the Peerage Brass factory, He was a Founder member and mainstay in the Wilmer Tennis Club both before and after his years in England in the 60's. He coached Michael Daly and many others in the Club. Many will remember John-Joe and his sister Bernie as a formidable mixed doubles partnership in local tournaments. Both he and Pat were fine table tennis players and with Tony McLoughlin and Geoff Oakley won the Laois-Offaly Table Tennis League in the mid 60's. John-Joe once played against Tommy Caffrey, the renowned international table-tennis player, in which he actually won a game.

Eamon, known as Ned, was also a fine handballer in addition to being very good runner who won Offaly championships in the 10,000 metres cross-country and other track events in his career. He still plays handball in the Crinkle alley.

John-Joe, Marie, Pat and Dinny have sadly passed away, but Thomas, Bernie and Eamon continue to reside in William Street. Phyllis, who is married to Paddy Hamilton, lives in Westgate. Linda, whose beloved husband, Patrick Fitzgerald died recently, lives in Hillside in Birr.

All in all, an outstanding sporting and industrious family, and one that the town can be proud of.



Participants in the Trench Trust Organ Course held in St. Brendan's Church of Ireland, Birr.

Back Row (L to R): John Burke, Jordan Lewis, Arthur Guest, Colin Nicholls (tutor).

Front row Clare Anne Kearns, Betty Powell, Rena Haverty and Elizabeth Guest.

Missing from photograph is Deirdre Dixon.

Photo by Angela Nicholls



48TH ANNUAL
**BIRR
VINTAGE
WEEK**

and
Arts Festival

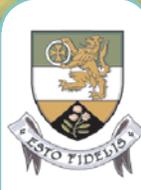
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To all our Sponsors and Patrons;
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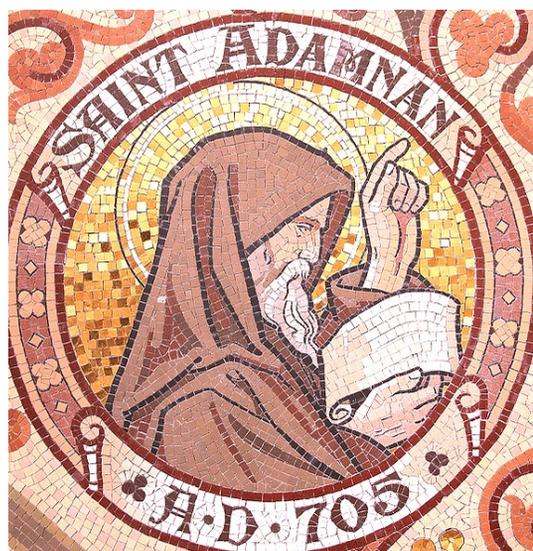
A WEEK IN MAY

by Jim Houlihan

Birr has an unusually long recorded history. The annals tell us that Brendan of Birra died in 565 A.D. and it is thought that he founded his monastery here around the middle of that century. It is mentioned in the historical records quite regularly over the centuries, whether in the context of the death of an abbot, a battle, a Viking raid or an important meeting or synod. Particularly in the early Christian period, it featured in Irish affairs to a much greater extent than it did in later years or, indeed, than it does now. It is reasonable to conclude that Birr has been continuously occupied, to a lesser or greater extent, since its foundation in the mid-sixth century. Few other towns in Ireland can make such a claim. What happened here very many years ago is no less real, than what happened last year or ten years ago or a hundred years ago and all happened in the spaces now occupied by Main St., O'Connell St., Church St. and the other squares and streets of our town. In all that time, what was the finest occasion, the greatest, the most momentous, dramatic and famed? Readers will have their own views, but, for me, one stands out above all others.

It happened, over a week or so, in the late Spring or early Summer, probably during May, in the year 697 A.D. For that week Birr was the epicentre of the Irish world and this at a time when Ireland itself was a beacon of learning and civilization in the Christian West where the nobility of Europe sent their sons to be educated in the scriptures (the ultimate source of all knowledge similar to the higher sciences and advanced computer studies today) and to sit at the feet of Latin scholars who were unequalled anywhere, except Spain. An all Ireland meeting had been summoned by Adomnán, abbot of Iona and head of the monastic federation founded by St Columille. He has been described by modern scholars as one of the leading churchmen in Ireland and Britain in the first thousand years of the Christian era and, in the reception of his writings and their enduring quality, approaching the authority of a Father of the Church. Birr had seen nothing like that great gathering before and there has been nothing like it since in terms of the fame, importance, power, prestige and numbers of those attending. It is probably unequalled anywhere else in Ireland in the first millennium A.D. We know all this because we have, preserved in our sources, quite remarkably and uniquely, a list of names of those who came to Birr and partook in the meeting here over thirteen hundred years ago. Before taking a look at that list it might be interesting to consider why Adomnán decided on Birr as the location for his meeting.

Apart from the geographical location of Birr close to the centre of the island of Ireland, which, today, still makes it a suitable venue for all Ireland meetings, it was its political location that made it an obvious choice. By the end of the seventh century a system of border monasteries had materialized on either side of the border between the Southern Uí Néill territory of Fir Chell and Munster. On the northern side were Durrow, Gallen, Rahan and Lynally



amongst others. To the south were, for instance, Terryglass, Lorrha, Kinnitty, Clonfertmulloe and Roscrea. Birr was on the border and was so marginal that some historians put it in Munster and others in Fir Chell. To the east also, Birr was in close proximity to Osraige (Ossary), its border monastery of Seirkieran lying a mere six kilometres distant and the Leinster monastery of Killeigh within an easy day's journey on horseback. To the west were found the important monasteries of Clonmacnoise and Clonfert, with the Connacht Uí Maine territory, lying on the east bank of the Shannon and controlling the first crossing points by foot above Killaloe (now approximating the modern parish of Lusmagh), also only six kilometres from Birr. This border location is today reflected in current diocesan boundaries with Birr in Killaloe, in the ecclesiastical province of Cashel, Clareen in Ossary in the ecclesiastical province of Dublin, Lusmagh in Clonfert in the province of Tuam and the border of the diocese of Meath and the ecclesiastical province of Armagh being the small stream on the northern side of Birr's Lidl premises. This uniquely central location meant that many travelling to the meeting could lodge in a friendly monastery on their journey within a day of Birr. What is more important, however, is that the extent to which the leaders attending were required to leave their own territories and penetrate into another territory, was minimised. Meetings on the boundary suggest equality while those within one territory suggest the superiority of the ruler of that region. By choosing Birr Adomnán was being diplomatic to the maximum possible extent and that would have been recognised by all concerned. In fact Birr was again an important meeting place one hundred and thirty years later when it hosted a *rígdál* between the king of Tara and the king of Munster in 827.

So who was here in May 697? Scholars have established that the list of names, preserved in our sources, is contemporary with that date although the titles were added later and some are not correct for 697 but were correct for a later date.

There are forty ecclesiastics listed including the abbots and/or bishops of all the most important religious foundations in Ireland. Heading the list is Fland of Febail sage-bishop of Armagh. Those that follow include the abbots of Emlý, Bangor, Clonmacnoise, Lismore, Birr, Lorrha, Cloyne, Kildare, Terryglass, Derry, Clonfertmoloe, Leighlinbridge, Balla, Ferns, Lusk, Clonard, Sletty and Clonfert. There are three bishops from northern Britain (Scotland) and an English bishop living in Ireland. At that time these were important personages, conscious of their dignity and prestige and they would have been attended by sizeable retinues. But it is the list of fifty-one lay leaders that, today, captures our imagination. First and foremost was Loingsech mac Óengusa king of Ireland. He is described as king of Ireland in the list and is one of the few kings of Tara so described in the annals. His appearance in Birr, in the centre of Ireland and at the head of all the rulers of Ireland was hugely symbolic. His name is followed by the names of his northern sub-kings. Then comes Eterscéil mac Maíle Tuile king of Munster, with the kings of West Munster, Osraige, the Déise, South Munster and other southern kings following. Béc Bóirche king of the Ulaid was here as was Cellach mac Gerthide king of the two Leinsters. The elderly Cellach mac Ragallaig king of Connacht attended, the same Cellach who defeated and killed Loingsech, king of Ireland, and his three sons and two other attendees, at the battle of Corann seven years later. Legend has it that the old man's bones could be heard to creak on the battlefield as he dismounted from his chariot. All of these and the many more listed, with their extensive retinues, took up residence here that week in May 697. Birr was a substantial monastic foundation which would have been in the nature of an urban settlement, sometimes referred to as a civitas, comprising of a church and separate dwellings and work-places. Apart from the monks the settlement would be home for a large number of laymen and their wives and families. The buildings in 697 would all have been of wood and be centred round the church and the entire would have been surrounded by a defensive mound and/or ditch. In all probability the church was located where the ruined pre-reformation church is today and it is reasonable to speculate that the northern gate of the settlement would have been situated at the entrance to O'Connell St. from Emmet Square and the southern gate in the vicinity of Market Square. It is likely that the most important leaders, ecclesiastical and lay, would have been accommodated within the monastic town but many of them with their entourages would take up lodging in tents and temporary dwellings. These would have spilled out into what are now, the streets and roads a little distance from the centre of the town. The majority of attendees were proud and haughty men, many fierce and mighty warriors. None would want to be outshone by ancient adversaries, particularly in the eyes of their followers or client rulers. It is worth imagining the arrival of the King of Ireland as he and his attendants appeared over the brow of the hill that is now Emmet St. to look upon the monastery that, as the preface to our source says, lay 'on the plain of Birr at the confines of the Uí Néill and Munster', or to ponder on the Munster men setting up camp on the hill overlooking the old monastic town - then one hundred and fifty years in existence - the hill now comprising High St. All of these were summoned to Birr to join in the enactment

of a law and to guarantee its implementation, which was to be binding over all of Ireland and those parts of northern Britain over which the Irish had influence. The text of the law itself states, 'At Birr this enactment has been enjoined upon the men of Ireland and Britain'. Irish kings ruled that part of western Scotland known as Scottish Dál Riata and the presence of their king in Birr (no. 85 on the list) attests to the serious intent of the law. Also present was Bruide mac Derilei, king of the Picts, the people who inhabited much of the rest of Scotland. Bearing in mind that all these notable people came to Birr and joined together to make a law which was, by the consent of all and on the authority of the king of Ireland, to bind them and their successors, at a time when Ireland was at its most influential in the affairs of the West, it might be sufficient for me to rest my case for May 697 as the greatest occasion in the history of Birr. However it is the nature of the law, its intent, objectives, content and the ideals that inspired it, that make that week in our history, above all other considerations, quite exceptional. The law is called Lex Innocentium or the Law of the Innocents in the annals. Adomnán recognised that there was a category of person in society, at his time, and at all times in history, that was separate or different because they did not bear arms and that, therefore, they should have special protection under the law. Today we call them non-combatants. In Birr, Adomnán defined them for the purposes of his law, as clerics and those under the protection of the church, women and children.

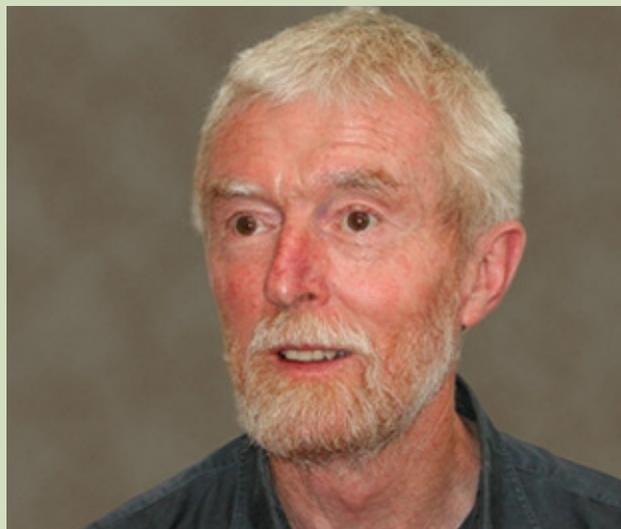
The law, in its core provisions, proscribes the killing or injuring of these innocents, stipulates penalties, provides for the collection of fines and appoints special judges to adjudicate on cases. Within a short time after 697, the protection of clergy was taken over by Armagh and Adomnán's law, also known as Cáin Adomnán, came to be regarded as a law for the protection of women primarily, particularly stiff penalties for their protection having been provided in the law. This was the first law in the western world for the protection of non-combatants. Nothing like it emerged until the Peace of God movement in tenth-century France and it was not until the Geneva Conventions in 1949 that comprehensive legislation for the protection of non-combatants was enacted. Our law is known to relatively few historians and does not feature in histories of warfare and of the laws of war. It is, however, as relevant today as it was in 697 as the horrors of Aleppo so painfully remind us. While the events of that remarkable week in May and those who participated in it have come and gone, the law they enacted is their legacy and remains a very major part of our heritage and, indeed, our responsibility. I rest my case now.

The next time you are rushing past the old church, pause, pause and think of those who strode the same space thirteen centuries ago and particularly of Adomnán, that abbot of Iona who came there and gave us all a law for the protection of the weak, to serve as an inspiration for fair minded people down through the ages and, if you feel that it is all too long ago, remember- 'Everything belongs to the past, even what is happening now'.

Jim Houlihan is a retired Birr solicitor and former state solicitor for County Offaly. He holds an M.A. in early Irish history and is presently completing his PhD. thesis on the Law of the Innocents in UCD.

Growing Up In Birr: Nature On Our Doorstep

by John Feehan



I was born at the very edge of the Camcor beside the bridge in Newbridge Street, with the sound of the river in my ears for the first four years because the water was just five steps from the back door. My earliest nature memory – or at least the one that stands out for me now – is of a hedgebank on the edge of Odlums’ field aflame with constellations of celandines in April, although 60 years ago I had no name to call them by, and there was nobody to ask. In the 1950s we spent all our leisure time in the fields; strangely, I have no recollection of ever doing homework. The greatest thrill of a walk in the fields beside the river was just seeing a heron or a kingfisher or a dipper, or in the woods a jay or a red squirrel. We were the last generation to consider collecting birds’ eggs as legitimate a childhood occupation as collecting stamps, and we took risks to get them. I pale to think my own children might ever have taken such risks at that age – or any age. No tree was considered unclimbable.

In the 1950s, so much a part of experience was the corncrake it seemed there was a pair in every other field. On summer nights its call came from the fields behind Sandymount Hill through the open windows of our home in Newbridge Street. All the magic of childhood in June was condensed in that call. You could never sneak up on them, but as 10-year olds we developed a technique of running quickly towards them, and twice we found nests.

In the 1960s we used to cut turf in Clonoghill bog, where the most haunting sound at the end of the day was the never-to-be-forgotten churring song of the nightjar. You saw the bird less often, and seldom as more than a flicker of wings close to the ground where it hawked for early moths in the gathering dark. The bog itself at that time seemed to our young eyes to go on forever. At its heart was the little lake of Lough Nacree, which we explored from time to time: a place remote and marvellous and wild where I saw my first dragonflies.

It is no gilded memory that the rivers of Offaly were full of fish 50 or 60 years ago, for with the decline in water quality went a decline in the invertebrate creatures upon which they feed, and in the general quality of their habitat. I remember how we used to stop off at the Chapel bridge in Birr on our way to school in the 1950s to watch the croneen leaping the weir in great numbers when the Camcor was in flood. I have a particularly clear memory of old Dinny MacNamara the coachbuilder, who lived in the long demolished gate lodge of Elmgrove and fished only when

there was a flood, always on the same spot on the river just above the old distillery; I can still see his catch of fine fish laid out in a long line on the grass beside him.

For as far back as I can remember I have been fascinated by geology, and I can still remember the first stones that caught my attention: shiny pebbles in the sandpit on Sandymount Hill, but nobody could enlighten me as to what they were. What I was told was that all that sand and gravel in the sandpit – and indeed in all the sandpits of the world – had been washed up there by the waters of the Great Flood in the time of Noah, in 2348 B.C. – which was awe-inspiring enough – but nothing compared to the story of what really happened, and which you can read in every sandpit in Offaly: the story of an advancing ice sheet, the last of a whole succession of glaciers that had swept across the Midlands: once upon a time indeed, not in 2348 B.C. but 15,000 years ago. And my shiny stones were pebbles of granite and syenite carried in the grip of a mile-high glacier all the way from Connemara to my Birr doorstep, that left all that sand and stuff behind as it melted, for us to build our houses with. It is forty years since the corncrake nested in fields around Birr, and more than fifty since the last nightjar haunted the fringes of Clonoghill. I hear the bird when I listen now as a never forgotten echo in my memory, a memory that is almost as clear as sound to me. We failed to realise what was happening. We could have done had we paid closer attention, and in the 50 years since we have gradually come to understand the unintended and unforeseen effects of our actions and begun to adapt our ways and practices to stop the decline in aquatic biodiversity and to restore where we can what we have lost.

Over the same fifty years life has improved in terms of our material welfare beyond anything we could have dreamed half a century ago. The loss of wild places and the plants and animals that live in them is directly linked with that transformation: but with greater concern and foresight on our part could have been prevented or mitigated. It is a loss that weighs heavily against purely material gain in the balance sheet of community enrichment.

Back in the 1950s many of us who managed to stay here after our school years either worked for Bord na Móna or were kept in a job by Bord na Móna, and many of us cut and saved our own turf. We could scarcely imagine that in our lifetime there would be no more turf to cut. The bog seemed to go on forever. And there was no words for biodiversity or multifunctionality – or even the concepts they represented:

except when words had to be found for the remembered lost comfort of them from the places of exile to which so many had to emigrate: London or New York or Luton or wherever – and they might be symbolised in the memory of skylark or furze, or the smell of turf smoke.

Today, biodiversity is not only part of our vocabulary, but embedded in our concerns, alongside jobs and health and schools. Gradually and steadily over the last 30 years, appreciation of the importance of nature in our lives has become embedded in the agenda of the wider community to a much greater extent. As a result of this new perspective nature is gradually recovering ground or gaining new ground in Offaly.

Above other species of birds perhaps, the dipper has lived in my spirit for seventy years. It nested under the bridge over the river that flowed beside the house in which I was born, and perhaps its call was part of the song of the river that

bore me to sleep as a child. The dipper is as frequent as ever it was, reflecting the recovery of aquatic biodiversity so essential to the food chain on which the croneen depend. In the fields behind our house in Syngefield, the wood in which I saw my first owl and the sandpit where I found my first bee orchids were bulldozed for grass in the 1960s. Today there are 30 hectares of new forest, oak and ash where bullocks grazed 20 years ago, and we have had the bittersweet joy of seeing the jay, a bird rarely glimpsed on my childhood walks, become a nuisance in the months before the acorns ripen. Red squirrels, absent for thirty years, have returned. On the cutaway bog that remains when the great machines of Bord na Móna fall silent, an area of new wilderness is growing: a mosaic of woodland and marsh, species-diverse marshland and fen. I listen in June on the margins of the new bogland wilderness for the call of the returning nightjar. The corncrake may take longer.

DID YOU KNOW.....

by Jack Ryan

At a meeting held in Dooly's Hotel, Birr on the 17th October 1896 with the right Hon. The Earl of Rosse in the chair, the little Brosna and Camcor Fishery Association was formed. The President was The Right Hon. Earl of Rosse and Secretary Lt. Colonel A. Ruttledge. It was agreed that funds were required to employ keepers. Later, when fundraising for the Association, Colonel Ruttledge went into a shop and asked for the proprietor. The shop assistant replied that he was not in but could he be given any message. The message was "Ask him if he got the circular about the association". The assistant said the proprietor had got the circular and added "but I think that he will not give anything as he would not like to interfere with home industry". The Colonel asked "what industry?", "Oh! I understand Sir, about 50 families live on the fish taken out of the river".

Col. Ruttledge reporting to the association in 1900 said the man who gave them most trouble has gone away with two of his companions after handing over to him his large net. He said he knew that we had cases against him, he could no longer go on, that he was 'beat' and meant to clear out altogether and never put a foot in the river again; he had enough of it, in fact [taking off his cap to show that his hair was turning grey though quite a young man] that he was getting old before his time. He said that when we had not got him in Tullamore jail he was most time on the river and spent what he made on drink to keep life in him as he had no change of clothes. "When he came to me he had only rags on his back".

In 1908 Col. Ruttledge received a letter from a William Lewis of High Street. 'Sir I am about to leave Birr forever and I respectfully beg of you to give me the price of a passage to Scotland. I am prepared to give up my colours for fly tying. I have no nets or other appliances for poaching. When it can be taken that my absence from Birr will greatly help the work of which you are secretary. I confidently appeal to your honour as a gentleman to give me something before going away. With the greatest respect your very humble servant William Lewis.'



INNOCENT IN 1916

THE DEATH OF PETER FAHEY

by his nephew, Tom Fahey

It is said that ‘sometimes your whole life could change for being in the wrong place at the wrong time’. Tragically, this can be said of Peter Fahey, in his home at Usher’s Island, Dublin City on the 25th day of April 1916.

Peter Fahey was born in Birr in 1893, the fifth child in a family of ten born to Patrick (Paddy) and Ellen Fahey. Peter’s other brothers were Patrick, Joseph, Christopher (Christie), Gregory, Tom, and Brendan who died in 1907 aged just seven years. His sisters were Alice, Esther, Mary-Anne and Bridget. The family then lived at Number 9, Chapel Lane as recorded in the 1901 census of Ireland. The family were recorded in the census of 1911 as living at Number 14, Mill Street.



Peter’s Father, Paddy, is also recorded as a Bootmaker, living in William Street, Parsonstown on Page 186 of John Wright’s book “Offaly, One Hundred years Ago”, first published in 1890, and republished by Esker Press in 1989. Peter’s Grandfather was also a bootmaker,

and his brothers Paddy and Joe went into the boot making business too. Paddy spent all his working life with Birr Shoes and with T. Keele & Sons, later John Lyndon’s Shoe Shop. Joe spent his working life with Birr Shoes and later as a Boot and Shoe Repairer in Connaught Street, in the site now occupied by The Barber Shop. His brother Tom later followed Peter into the Tailoring business. Tom spent all his working life with James Mulrooney & Son, Men’s Drapery, in the site now occupied by John Reidy Solicitors.

Peter’s father was a renowned gardener in the town at this time. Peter’s niece, Mrs. Elizabeth Brookes (nee Hackett) who is currently a ninety six year old resident of Birr Community Nursing Unit, recalls, “Grandfather was probably the best gardener in town at the time. He was very proud of it. He had loads of fruit and vegetables plus some flowers growing in his garden at the back of his house in Chapel Lane. I can still see him hanging up the onions in the back kitchen. He was very strict about who went into his garden, standing there in his swallow-tail coat. I had to ask



permission to go into it to pick some flowers. If it was getting late he would say very sternly to me, once I got some flowers, “Young lady, it’s not right that you be out late, so its time you were getting home, so go home this instant”. I would reply “Yes Grandfather, and ran home as fast as I could. He gained all his experience about gardening from working and looking after the garden at the back of the nun’s garden, you know”

Peter’s mother, Ellen, was a very pious, soft spoken woman. My father, Paddy, said that Peter and Joe were probably the two men who were most like her in demeanour. Peter’s mother was a Connors who hailed from Kilcolman direction and Peter’s grandmother was a Grimes, from Kinnitty. (Some people may recall Andy Grimes, who had a grocer’s shop in Kinnitty back in the late seventies).

Peter’s brothers and sisters were not only fond of music but were themselves excellent musicians. My father Paddy, played the trumpet, flute, cornet and violin with Birr C.Y.M.S. Band. Joe played the banjo and violin, Tom the drums, Christopher the tuba. Alice and Esther played the piano and sang. Peter’s brothers and sisters often played in the Oxmantown Hall at the ‘dances’. They would also travel on their bicycles to neighbouring halls and parishes to play their music. My father often recalled that they thought nothing of cycling as far away as Templemore. Both musicians and dancers wore formal dress then he said, tails and white gloves for the men, dresses and gloves for the ladies.

Peter Fahey married Catherine Seagrave in 1915. Catherine was eight months pregnant with their first child at the time



Peter Fahey's name is included on the 1916 Easter Rising Memorial Wall in Glasnevin Cemetery. Note 'e' is omitted from Fah y.

of his death in 1916. He was just twenty-three years old when he lost his life, hit by a stray bullet that came through the window of his home piercing his jaw. My Father's account of what happened is that Peter had just finished reciting the rosary in his home, at Ushers Island, Dublin, when he was struck down and died on his way to the hospital. Peter was a civilian casualty of the 1916 Easter Rising that began on Monday, April 24th. Ironically at the time of his death he was employed as a Tailor at the Junior Army and Navy Stores, he too was contributing to the War effort.

The job of identifying Peter's body fell to his brother Joe, as his other brothers Patrick, Christopher and Gregory were away fighting in France at the time. Poignantly, Joe was only sixteen years old when he was tasked with identifying Peter's body. Later Joe was to recall, "That ghastly task that day was the day I grew up".

Indeed, I often think, that Peter's parents, must have felt that God had played a cruel joke on them, when Peter died in Dublin. With Paddy Junior, Christopher and Gregory away on the Western Front, their anxiety would have been centred around their sons who were away at war and not on the civilian son, Peter, living and working at home in Dublin. The Greek Historian wrote, "In times of peace sons bury their fathers, but in times of war, fathers bury their sons", and for Patrick it was the son who stayed at home from the war that he buried.

After Peter's death his wife gave birth to a son who was named Peter Pierce Fahey. Peter Pierce Fahey married Marion P. Harwood in Dublin in 1941. They had three children, Muriel born in 1944, Desmond born in 1948, and Peter Noel born in 1949.

Peter's brothers served in the Leinster Regiment in France. Patrick held the rank of Sergeant, Christopher and Gregory the rank of Private. They did return home but bearing the scars from war. Paddy was wounded in the stomach and left leg and was transferred back to Kidderminster, near Wolverhampton, in England for recuperation. It was there that Patrick met his first wife, Mary Alcock, from Nottingham fondly called Queenie, who was a nurse at the hospital where he was recuperating. As his wedding photo attests he married while still in the army, he was discharged from the

army on November 21st 1917. Mary died in 1950, they had no children. (My brother, Pat and I are his children from his marriage to Ellen Griffin).

Peter's brother Christopher returned unscathed physically from WW1. He left the Leinster Regiment, travelled abroad and joined the Canadian Army. He later deserted the Canadian Army in order to marry and crossed the border into the USA. Christopher was to outlive his wife, and two more wives before his death in his late eighties. It was because of his fear of being deported and returned to the Canadian Army that he changed his surname to Fay, and he settled in Bay City, Texas where he lived as Christopher Fay for the rest of his life. Fifty-two years were to pass before he returned in the late 1970s to Ireland for a last visit to his native country.

Peter's brother Gregory suffered from 'Shell- Shock' when he returned from the War. This was not recognised as a medical condition until 1919. My father recalled that he had fits of rage and often jumped out of bed at night and hid under it believing that the bombs and bullets were flying over his head.

He was lucky that he was not shot for disobedience or desertion while serving which was the case with so many other traumatised soldiers. However, the remainder of his life became a living hell from which he never recovered and he too was lost to his parents.

Ode to Innocence

At twenty-three the world is my oyster
 A beautiful wife, about to give me a youngster
 No wars on my horizon, to temper my joy
 But fate intervened and dealt a cruel ploy
 One shot on a day in April nineteen sixteen
 The Innocent, muffled
 gone what would have been
 A wife, a family, a future babe left to grieve
 The gift of my life taken - disbelief!

TF 22/9/16



Wedding Day of Mary (Queenie) Alcock and Paddy Fahey 1916-17



Seanie Porter Machine Man

by Michael Donegan

Seanie Porter was born in 'Birr View Lodge' just beside the Airfield on the Roscrea Road, Birr in 1957 and has lived there all his life. He is one of nine children - five boys and four girls. He remembers his parents as hardworking people who struggled to put food on the table and provide for their children. They had a small piece of ground around the house and kept a cow to provide milk for the table. His father could be a hard taskmaster who laid out work to be done when he was not there and took no excuses if it wasn't completed by his return. He worked in Bord na Mona and was known as 'a clever man with his hands' and often fixed clocks in his spare time. Even as a small boy of four or five, Seanie can remember helping him when he worked on small machines or repaired things like motor bike engines. He could quickly pick out the correct spring or tiny cogwheel from all the bits spread on the kitchen table to hand to his father. He often wonders was that where he got his fascination with discovering how things worked. It definitely wasn't at the local school in Crinkill in any case. Seanie hated school. He still remembers the awfulness of being made to stand facing the wall and the cruel beatings from the teacher because he couldn't make out the letters on the board or remember some series of facts or figures. School was a nightmare from which he mitched and escaped at every opportunity. He often took to the fields around Crinkill with his friends, Joe Milne, Christy Parsons and Morgan Feenane or spent his day climbing the nearby water tower rather than suffer the cruel torture chamber of the classroom. He eventually escaped its clutches for good at the age of fourteen. He was completely illiterate and struggles with reading and writing to this very day. It was only years later that he discovered that he suffered from a learning difficulty, which nobody had bothered to diagnose, now commonly known as Dyslexia.

Seanie had an older brother called Donie who worked in the local Moquette Factory in Syngfield. Moquette was a hardwearing, high quality material used in the covering of aircraft and bus seats. At the tender age of fourteen he got a job there. His work was that of an unskilled operative carrying and tidying and doing the routine labouring of the factory floor. Central to the work of the factory were the huge looms which produced the bolts of material. He quickly developed a fascination with the looms and how they worked. While others saw them simply as pieces of functional machinery Seanie was enthralled by the spinning spools, the crisscrossing lines of thread, the constant accurate and precise functioning of levers and cogs and

shuttles, the rolls of cloth coming from the looms as if by magic, the chaotic confusion of noise and movement. With so many moving parts, maintenance and repair was very important. Michael Loughnane was the foreman and he soon realised Seanie's mechanical ability and skill could be put to good use in the maintenance and servicing of the looms. Seanie rose to the task and became the factory expert when there was a problem to be solved or a machine to be repaired. There was a well-stocked workshop and he was in his element among the lathes and pillar drills and welders. He worked there for another fourteen years. Another of Seanie's brothers, Tom was working for a big timber company called Glennons. The work involved felling trees and dragging them out of the woods so that a big lorry could collect them to bring to the sawmill. It was tough and dangerous work operating a chainsaw all day long. First the trees had to be knocked and stripped of their branches and then an old T.V.O. tractor was used to pull the trunks out to the roadside. They were paid by the tonnage of timber they pulled out so breaks were short and the hours were long. By this time Seanie had acquired an old B.S.A. Bantam motorcycle for going to work. He had also acquired a strong taste for alcohol. The bike wasn't in a very roadworthy condition but it got him around. He remembers an incident when he was going to a carnival in Clononey Castle and he was following a car closely because his headlamp wasn't working and he could only see the road with the help of the car's headlights ahead. The car slowed suddenly and Seanie hit the back of it. He was sent flying up in the air and landed across the ditch in a field. On another occasion he crashed his car into an E.S.B. pole and broke it in two, plunging the nearby pub in Riverstown into darkness. That incident brought him into close quarters with the law. He wisely decided that drink would only bring him more trouble if he continued on that path and he never ever drank again. By now, word had got out that Seanie Porter was a clever man with mechanical things. People began to bring him jobs to do on their cars. He loved the challenge of solving problems and the trickier the better. Nothing fazed him. He even taught himself how to smelt metal. He built a smelter from an old pipe and some firebricks. He got the special moulding sand in Cavanagh's Foundry and learned how to make properly scaled moulds with accuracy and precision. On one occasion he even made two aluminium pistons for a jeep. He melted down some old broken pistons for the metal and made a timber mould. The jeep is still running perfectly. Seanie has an enquiring mind and was always interested in

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Seanie working at his pillar drill.

how things worked. Growing up he had seen the planes coming and going to Birr Airfield. He loved watching the parachutists sailing slowly towards the ground as they practised their jumps on weekend afternoons. Not happy to just watch he once decided to make up his own parachute and give it a go. He was only about ten or eleven years of age. He made up a harness and cut out a parachute from a big sheet of strong plastic. Then he fearlessly climbed up a very tall tree near his house and waited till the wind caught his chute to jump off. The parachute worked although he hit the ground fairly hard. He was lucky the harness held together.

Now Seanie is a very busy man. He has his own workshop on the Roscrea Road. He calls it 'Birr Farm Workshop'. It is full of the most fantastic machines he has built from scratch himself. He built a huge and very powerful pillar drill which has the power to punch a two inch hole in a heavy metal sheet. Central to the giant machine is a gearbox pulled from an old bus engine. The drill workings can also run a heavy duty metal press and a powerful hydraulic pump. He cast all the pulley wheels for the machine himself. A lot of Seanie's work involves travelling to farms and isolated areas to carry out repairs to sheds or farm machinery. Obviously sourcing power to run welders or compressors is a big problem in such places so he decided to build his own mobile generator and compressor from a V.W. 1.9 L engine. Now he can pull this powerful piece of machinery behind his van to any location where it is needed. Another invention he has constructed is a fully working automatic loom (pictured above right) similar to what he would have used in the Moquette factory all those years ago. It can weave about 500 threads simultaneously to make tweed. He has been sourcing suitable yarn for it wherever he can get it. He also built a giant 'Forwarder'. This is a heavy duty machine which can travel in both directions and carry heavy tree-trunks



over rough ground in woodland. Just recently he has built a windmill (pictured below) to produce compressed air which he stores in a compressor tank to power his tools in his workshop. He recently invested €3,500 in a diagnostic computer for cars. Not bad for a man who once did lonely sentry duty in the corner of a schoolroom all those years ago!

His real love is inventing but he is so busy with work demands that he doesn't have enough time to devote to it. He has a few simple rules which he follows. First work it out in your head and then draw it on paper. Then put the solution into action. For a man who is dyslexic and has great difficulty with reading and writing he is an excellent artist and can draw and design brilliantly. He is completely self-taught and has learned by a process of trial and error. He believes strongly that 'you have to know how a thing works before you can fix it' and he also believes that artists and inventors are born, not made.

Seanie Porter is an independent man who lives his life on his own terms. He has no interest in women or marriage - at this stage of his life anyway. It has been a long journey since those harsh school days with their horrible beatings and labelling as a dunce but he has survived. More than that, he has come to realise that a person's belief in himself is more important than all the educational theories and narrow values of a system which fails to recognise the genius in everyone.



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1980 Grant Hydrograte Triple Pass Boiler

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1981 Grant Mk2 Hydro Stove

1983



1983/84 Easyclean Back Boiler

1985



1983/84 Triple Pass Oil Boiler

1986

1995

1994

1994 Launch of the swimming pool boiler.

1993

1992

1992 Additional 10,000 sq ft added to factory.

1991



1990/91 Gas Boiler

1990

1989

1988

1987 First Slimline Boiler

1987



1996

1997

1996 Grant UK set up with 34,000 sq ft offices & warehouse in Wiltshire – 50% of the UK boiler market.

1998

1998 Additional 15,000 sq ft added along with a powder coating plant.

1999

2000 Two new CNC punching machines purchased.

2000



2001 Vortex condensing range of oil boilers launched in the UK and Ireland.

2001

2002

2002 Extension to the offices completed

2003

2004

2004 First lasering machine purchased.

2014

2013

2012

2012 The journey of LEAN manufacturing started.

2011



2011 Spira Condensing Wood Pellet Boiler launched and first Spira boilers installed.

2010

2009

2008

2008 Range of solar thermal products launched in Ireland and the UK.



2008 Stephen Grant - Winner 2008 Ernst & Young Entrepreneur of the Year Award

2007

2006

2006 First robotic welding plant purchased. Third lasering machine purchased.

2005



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THE FAMOUS & NOTABLES OF BIRR TRAIL – THE BEGINNINGS.

By Rosalind Fanning, with Jackie Lynch.

On the 29th June 2016, a new town trail was launched by the renowned actor Des Keogh, at John's Hall. This event was the culmination of a four-year, creative collaboration between two artists, Rosalind Fanning and Jackie Lynch.

Could it be as long as twenty years ago? I was invited to be a part of a committee which had been set up, dedicating itself to a general betterment in Birr's built heritage and thus to the benefit of the town. Ideas were sought and my 'big one' was that it could fit in well with this heritage town to have elegant circular plaques (such as I had seen in great cities and towns abroad) on a number of our own fine buildings, thus noting their historical significance for visitors. The town itself has had a long, fascinating and diverse history but at that stage - as a relative 'blow-in' - I had no idea just how many remarkable people, let alone events were associated with Birr too. Though there was little interest in my suggestion at that meeting, a few years later, like a hound with a marrowbone I wrote one of my long letters - this one to the Urban District Council. No response. When my husband and I had moved to Brendan Street in 1999, it had been such a surprise to be told that a previous generation of his family had once lived in our new home. After one of his poetry readings, in Banagher, Derek and I met and were later invited to dinner by the very grand and gracious Professor Lorna Reynolds, his father's cousin and godmother, who had lived there for a number of years as a child with her siblings and grandparents. Her niece, Claudia and I became warm friends. Only a few years went by before so very sadly, both had passed and were buried in Clonoghill. In time I thought again of elegant plaques for Birr and had decided that perhaps if I simply painted one for our home, commemorating the illustrious professor (rather than the illustrious young archeologist who was still thriving) the idea would catch on around town. Having asked a cabinetmaker for a price on making a well-turned circular board, one day, I noticed a perfectly-proportioned, nicely-finished bread board in Fayles Hardware. Yes, one of those would do very nicely for my hand-painted, arty-efforts! Somehow, I never got around to doing it. When, four ago, the Westport town engineer and their Tidy Towns committee had been invited to Birr to give a presentation of their own successful efforts, attendees were invited by Offaly's Heritage Officer, Amanda Pedlow and the Chief County Architect, Rachel McKenna to sign up for the new Tidy Towns sub-committees: I chose to put my name to Built Heritage and Natural Heritage. At the second 'what are we going to do?' meeting, the four chaps and Rachel all liked that long-held idea of having plaques made, and suggested I carry on with it. On my own this felt a little daunting. So, as Jackie Lynch a Birr native and I had already had lots of enthusiastic chats about Birr beautifications and artsy things for visitors to see, I asked Rachel if it would be alright if I asked Jackie to join me on



Jackie Lynch, left, with actor Des Keogh and Rosalind Fanning at the launch of the Famous & Notables Trail.

the committee and follow this quest. That was really the birth of not just a 'good idea' but an exceptional and enjoyable, creative collaboration between two artists: two women who have not only discovered more of what they have in common (both of us having lived abroad) but an ease and companionship in our way of thinking, and an ever-filling font of creative ideas for this beloved place of our dwelling. Without our partnering - that is in all honesty, without Jackie - Birr might have only one, decoratively painted bread board. (Albeit to commemorate one highly notable female professor and author who, at the age of eighty, added a cookery book to her long list of academic and poetic works, as well as being a champion of Irish women's rights.)

When we began by making our presentations to find backing and funding, it was never just about getting up a number of pretty circles with names and dates; ours was a several-fold concept for boosting tourism to places beyond the castle walls.

From the start, our reasoning was to encourage more visitors to stay longer in town. Our project, which we planned, plotted and sometimes slaved over, had been undertaken between our other work and home commitments. It has been a process: a dialogue firstly between us and then with the fine people of the town. We patiently gathered information from locals, books, newspapers etc. as this project was never intended to be 'imposed' on the people of Birr. Our lengthy discussions have resulted in the 25 names and locations, each one chosen not only on individual merit but also in relation to the trail as a whole. We started this organic process with articles in the "Midland Tribune" and by putting a suggestion box in the library.

We tried to get funding from a number of sources, to no avail – either their budgets were slashed, spent, or their remits were shifting. The first great bit of luck was after our

duet of a presentation to the Birr Urban District Council members. To our surprise, the wonderful councillors gave us a very warm ovation, then one of the longest serving, Michael Campbell suggested there may be some leftover funds which might be given to support our worthwhile project. All were supportive and complimentary. Later, they did indeed back our project with a grant of €4,000. Then we made overtures to Offaly Local Development Company. However, as individuals (not a community group) we needed to be under the wing of a suitable applicant. Having been turned away by one, we approached the Birr Chapter of the Irish Georgian Society. Under the chairmanship of John Joyce, the committee agreed to be the formal applicants for a substantial grant application. The funding we hoped for was to have included a specially designed App, and a unique family-orientated, fan-design brochure – almost a book. Having been helped successfully through the first stages of the process for funding, we waited and they waited. Finally, upon approaching the Department, the chairman of the OLDC was told, 'There will be no more funding.' We were then one of three good projects turned down.

However, we never gave up and held onto our pre-conceived 'Plan B', and Plan B is why Birr has 25 beautiful, custom-designed and coloured blue and white plaques. The cost of twenty being paid for by the outgoing Birr Town Council and the balance for the cost five of them coming from the Irish Georgian Society.

In case anyone's wondering, 'why blue?' It was never a foreigner's dictat: this is our blue, chosen with the IGS committee but also after we considered other colours too. Yet blue prevailed as it is highly suitable for our heritage town and importantly, stood out on all painted wall colours and on structures of all periods. It is elegant and is timeless. Blue has long been associated with Ireland, even though blue and white plaques are in other great towns and cities abroad and this country. The fanlight logo, and the use of Irish are also unique to Birr.

As for the brochures for the guide to the "FAN Trail", after receiving our long letter, the marvelous Birr Lions Club offered their support in part-funding. The balance for the costs of design and printing is coming through the County Council's Community Fund, (via the Georgian Society) and more recently Mid-Ireland Tourism has kindly backed us with the final and third contribution. The first editions of the A2-sized were distributed to the Tourist Office, Library,

Castle reception and other points around town. There are now very few left, so we have been seeking a noble financial supporter in tourism, to fund updated reprints.

We are so very grateful to each of those who have been supportive and encouraging throughout, particularly the householders who trusted us and wanted to be part of enhancing the lovely town we live in and the locals who took the time to tell us about famous and notables of Birr. This trail could not have happened without them. There have been some hefty hurdles to get over on the way. For those who didn't know before, about the long list of Birr famous notables (alive or deceased), all can now boast about our remarkable people, past and present!

Every single penny of all the funding has gone to the cost of the plaques and the informative brochures. None of our own expenses or costs have been covered, taken nor indeed expected by us. Our work is not finished but in the meantime while we stop to catch our breath, we hope many will have picked up a copy of the trail guide and will carry on enjoying the tour. Please spread the word; 'Like' our Facebook page and look out for occasional updates, photos, and assorted new information (when we and fellow admins have time.) Feel free to contribute any information you might like to share about your own remarkable family: share the stories of your own homes and who has lived or stayed there, engaging with tourists in town (when the ambassadorial opportunity arises.) Talking about and remembering those former residents (and their connections to more remarkable people) from this jewel of a town, in the very heart of our lovely country, keeps them 'living'.

ADDENDUM

Obviously, we have plans to aid the marketing of the trail but in all our lengthy chats, many other ideas have come to us to help tourism in Birr. These have included scale models for the Workhouse and Crinkle Barracks so that visitors could view how they were in the past and learn about these important sites, of which there is little left to see – a location for these and an exhibition space is needed. We had had our eyes on a building we would still love to see restored and set up as a town museum on the social, commercial, religious and family histories – our stories – for we are keenly aware that the town itself no longer has a museum. There are plenty more ideas but we are at a stage where we need some rest from it all, and time for other art-projects.

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Deciding to take a career break from work was both exhilarating and terrifying. On the week that I was due back in school, my brothers Barry and Conor had signed me up for the inaugural 1,000km cycle along the spectacular Wild Atlantic Way, all in an effort to raise funds for the CROSS Cancer Research national charity based in Trinity College and St. James' Hospital, Dublin. This was a wonderful and somewhat numbing experience. At times it was a struggle to reach the top of the picturesque Maam Hills or succeed at the Cahra Pass, but the encouragement from fellow cyclists was immense. One of those special people was Kerryman, Fionnbar Walsh. We shared many an energy bar, juice, joke and cry together over the week. On reaching our mountain at the end of the gruelling 1,000km Fionnbar recited an extract written by his beloved son, Donal, who had battled with cancer on 3 separate occasions in his short yet powerful life and sadly passed away at the tender age of 16. I felt hugely honoured to be in Fionnbar's company sharing this moment with a select few of us. Donal's message also left me with a strong sense of #LiveLife.

Shortly after our mammoth cycle, I began to think about travel, and where in the world next. Of all the places in the world to visit, South America won out, primarily because I've wanted to hike the Inca Trail since I studied about the Incas and Aztecs in history class. Several friends and family have visited Machu Picchu in one form or another. I was eager to hike over the 4 days to get to Machu Picchu, rather than taking the scenic train journey available to people with a limited time schedule. The difficulty lay with securing a coveted visa for the 4 day hike.

Upon my arrival in Lima airport, I was reminded of the "Peru 2" and subsequently expected high levels of security. I must admit I was slightly disappointed that I didn't experience that Bridget Jones moment of panic, being surrounded by one too many sniffer dogs in the airport – after all, I was the perfect candidate to smuggle something in my over-sized rucksack! Thankfully my text home did not require my family to tune into the Six One news. My first impressions arriving from busy, bustling Rio to Lima were that of a quiet, quaint little place. While the reformed drug mule Michaela enjoyed all the comforts of house arrest in her apartment situated in the salubrious suburb of Mira Flores, I was living it up at a budget hostel in

nearby, and less extravagantly priced Baranca. Lima, as with all South American cities, is steeped in history and offers an array of informative museums along with uniquely crafted churches and cathedrals throughout.

Trekking to Machu Picchu requires the body to acclimatise to high altitudes. We spent a few days doing so in Cusco, before our journey to the small village of Agua Calientes. There are thousands of kilometres of Inca trails throughout Peru, Bolivia and Ecuador and locals are immensely proud to share their heritage and customs with the hundreds of "gringos" who pass through their villages daily. I sampled some local brew and the delicacy of roasted guinea pig while in Agua Calientes. I figured with a 4 day hike on the horizon, the roast sounded better than the raw fish dish known as ceviche. My time spent in this little village was fantastic. I was as excited as a child on Christmas Eve – totally consumed by the 44km challenge that lay ahead. Our group was a mixture of Canadians, Australians, British, Americans, Germans and me being the token Irish. Well, they needed

someone to sing a few tunes along the dusty path! I don't know if it was because of the 1916 centenary celebrations taking place at home, but I held a heightened sense of strong Irish pride throughout my time away. I often found myself having to explain that I was not from the United Kingdom, I didn't have a vote in Brexit and my native language was Gaelic. Whenever I wore my green jersey, or others would spot the pale skin, light hair/blue eyes combo, locals would be fascinated to talk to me and hear about our little island of Ireland. Probably for these same reasons, my guide spent lots of time throughout our trek chatting to me about life at home, the landscape, our culture and the hopes for future prosperity. He enjoyed the Irish humour. Maybe he simply enjoyed swigging from the small bottle of Tullamore Dew 'uisce beatha' that I had secretly packed in my rucksack, strictly for medicinal purposes! One

way or another, Jeiko took me under his wing and encouraged me every step of the way, in a similar fashion to my friend Fionnbar during our cycle.

Sleeping under a blanket of bright stars, bathing in the local Lulluchayoc River and spending our days free from wifi and all other outside world disturbances was incredibly

YOU ONLY LIVE ONCE

by Sarah Gene Loughnane



liberating. We were given an opportunity to appreciate how lucky and healthy we were to be in a position to climb to Machu Picchu. This wasn't just a matter of ticking off a 'Wonder of the World', personally it was a lot more profound. Donal's words played over and over in my head while we were travelling along the rugged path. Our second day of the trek proved the penultimate challenge as we climbed to reach the notorious "Dead Woman's Pass" soaring 4,200m above. Many of the group were quite emotional on this leg of the trek, as we made our offerings from the summit to Pachamama (Mother Earth). This was a chance for us to stop and take stock of our achievement thus far and think of our loved ones at home. I suppose each of us had different motivations for undertaking this trek and our guide made a point of inviting us to give thanks for our friends and families at home. Peruvians deeply worship Mother Earth, primarily, and are hugely devoted to family and all it encompasses.

Throughout the trek we had the opportunity to sit, stand or stumble across some rare and truly magnificent scenery. I particularly enjoyed finding rare types of orchids dotted along our path, as these beautiful flowers instantly reminded me of my mum and aunty at home, who are both so talented when it comes to caring for and arranging these flowers. Descending a superbly designed stone staircase to the valley of Sayacmara, I found myself in the cloud forest taking in the views of several impressive peaks including Salkantay standing tall at 6,180m. I fell to the ground, delighted with the few minutes respite from trudging through the valleys under the heat of the midday sun, desperately trying not to focus on the blisters on my feet. In my head, I was composing a strongly worded email to the guy who had sold me the blister-free hiking socks! At the same time, the majority of my group were busy taming llamas for an obligatory selfie. I found my mind drifting back to Donal's words and his simple message of #LiveLife. There I was,

looking out over this huge expanse, without a care. I was literally on top of the world! My friend noticed me and decided it would be nice to take a snap. Little did she know that I was talking to the young hero on my jersey, and thanking him for the kick in the ass his words spurred in me months earlier, to undertake this lifelong ambition of getting to the Lost City of the Incas. This trip to Machu Picchu was one of a long list of highlights from my South American adventures. I'm already looking forward to dusting off the hiking boots and exploring many more new and exciting cultures and countries, safe in the knowledge that we are blessed with guardian angels like Donal Walsh, who "has climbed God's mountain and is at the top looking down".



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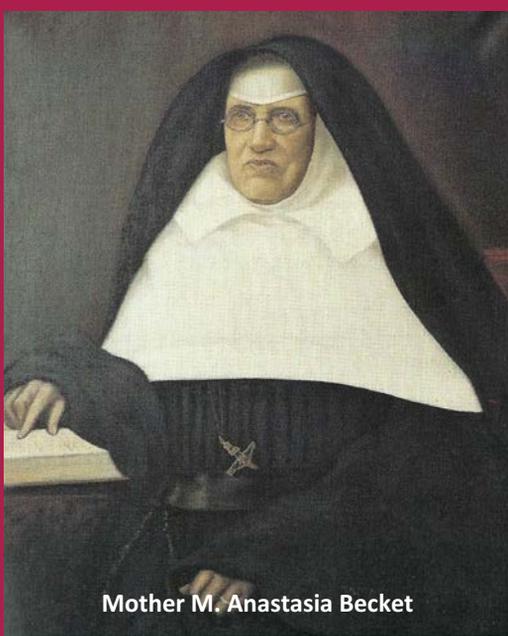


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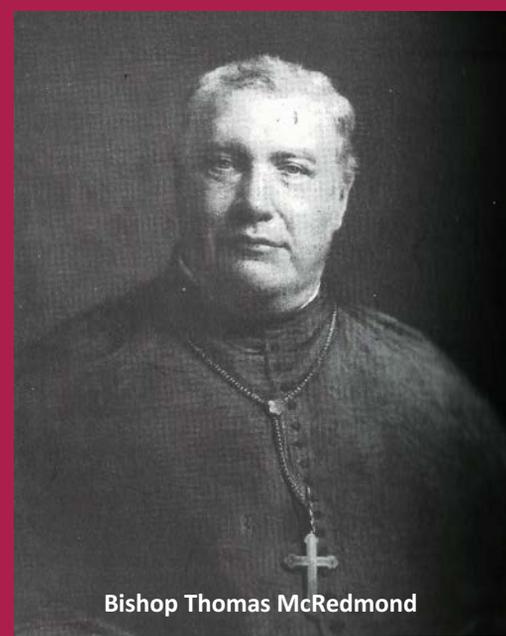
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Mother M. Anastasia Becket

A Nun, A Bishop and a Royal Connection



Bishop Thomas McRedmond

By Brian T. Kennedy

A bishop who died in 1904 and a nun who died in 1905 are among the most famous religious characters connected with Birr in the latter half of the 19th century. They were Mother M. Anastasia Beckett (1814-1905) and Bishop Thomas McRedmond (1835-1904). Mother Anastasia was born in England but made Birr her home for the last 63 years of her long life. Dr. Thomas McRedmond was born in Birr Parish and is the only parishioner to become Bishop of Killaloe, since the ending of the Penal Laws.

Mother Anastasia's (Marianne Beckett as she was known prior to religious profession) early life certainly never indicated she would become a Mercy Sister, in Birr. Born Marianne Beckett on 3 September 1814 in Enville Hall, Staffordshire, she was reputedly descended from the famous English Saint Thomas Á Beckett. Her father was estate agent to the Earl of Stamford and her early life was a privileged one. Marianne was highly educated for a young lady of her day and became accomplished in music, art, poetry, also speaking French and Italian.

Following her parents' deaths, within a short time of each other, Marianne began to question her Anglican faith. It was at this time she met Rev. George Spencer or Father Ignatius of St Paul, as he was known in religious life.

Born as Hon. George Spencer in 1799 he was a son of the 2nd Earl Spencer. He converted from Anglicanism to the Roman Catholic Church in 1830 and entered the Passionist Order in 1847. Fr. Ignatius spent his life working for the conversion of England to the Catholic faith. As his name suggests he was a member of Princess Diana's family and brings the royal connection to this story. He also visited Birr where he preached a number of successful missions.

Under the spiritual guidance of Rev. George Spencer, Marianne Beckett was drawn closer to the Roman Catholic Church and decided to convert to Catholicism. On a visit to him at Oscott she met the celebrated architect Augustus Welby Pugin, a famous Roman Catholic convert.

Later she sent the plans for the proposed Birr Convent to her friend A.W. Pugin. He stated he was not satisfied with the plans and was requested to draw a new design. This he did and it is due to Mother Anastasia that we today have the beautiful Pugin designed Civic Buildings and Town Library. Marianne was drawn to religious life and offered herself as

a candidate for Catherine McAuley's Mercy Order. This was after she heard of their proposed foundation of a convent in Birmingham. Along with five English postulants Marianne entered Baggot St. Convent, Dublin in the spring of 1840. Mother McAuley later referred to her as 'very gentle and all that is desirable'.

In Feb 1842 Marianne entered the convent in Birr. On 16 Aug 1842 she was received in St. Brendan's Church, Birr and became Sr. M. Anastasia. Her talents were realised by the community and she was superior in Birr for a total of 37 years. In fact letters exist in Roman archives showing how Birr petitioned Rome for Mother Anastasia to be renewed as superior, way beyond the recommended term of service in Canon Law.

It is relevant that in recent research of the 'Kirby Papers' in Rome (Kirby was Rector of the Irish College) Clareen native Kieran Troy uncovered an interesting insight into Mother Anastasia. In a letter written on 1 January 1891 by Sr. Mary A. Beckett, Birr, she thanked Rev Kirby for a painting of Our Lady of Mercy, which she had framed in Dublin and in her own words 'erected in our own chapel in time for St. John's Day, our Golden Jubilee, with a brass plate underneath of the Indulgence granted'. She asks him for the cost of painting. Ever independent Mother Anastasia clearly wanted to pay the cost of the painting, she was glad just to receive the indulgence that accompanied it.

Mother Anastasia died on Passion Sunday 9 April 1905 and is buried in Birr Convent Cemetery. She was in her 91st Year and 61st year of religious life. A nice detail that shows the gentle side of this academic woman is the fact that Mother Anastasia was a great lover of animals and 2 cats accompanied her everywhere, in later life.

In an extraordinary life a woman born into luxury, changed her religion and guided Birr Convent of Mercy through the first six decades of its life.

Just a few years after Bishop Patrick Kennedy was consecrated Bishop in St. Brendan's Church, on 17 January 1836, Thomas John McRedmond future Bishop of Killaloe, was born in Birr Parish. His birth on 1 July 1838, was to Bridget and John McRedmond of Barrack St., Crinkill. Thomas's mother married three times, firstly to James Carney, then to John McRedmond and finally to Joseph McGarry. There were seven children born between the three

marital unions. His mother died in 1860 and is buried in Seir Kieran Graveyard.

In 1852 he began his priestly studies in Paris, transferring to Maynooth in 1854. An accomplished academic he took post graduate studies in the Dunboyne Establishment in Maynooth. Following ordination in 1860 he served as curate briefly in Bournea and Toomevara. In 1861 he became curate in Nenagh and was also secretary to Bishop Flannery. Fr. McRedmond's next appointment was in 1866 as President of the newly formed St. Flannan's Diocesan College at Bindon St, Ennis. As early as 1871 on the death of Coadjutor Bishop Power, Fr McRedmond was named by the diocesan priests as their first choice to succeed him. He was not successful due to his relative youth.

In 1874 he left St. Flannan's having established it on a firm footing and became P.P. of Killaloe and Vicar General of the Diocese. Again in 1889, the priests sent his name to Rome as their first choice as coadjutor Bishop of Killaloe. On this occasion he was successful. Then on the death of Bishop Flannery in 1891 he automatically succeeded him as Bishop. Choosing to live at Ashline, Ennis, Bishop McRedmond made Ennis Parish Church his cathedral and it has remained the

diocesan cathedral to this day. This was a change to previous moves to make Nenagh the cathedral of the Diocese.

His principle interests were in the building and renovating of churches, schools and convents. This is not surprising as his term as bishop coincided with a renewed prosperity among the R.C. middle-classes and a major resurgence of church building in Ireland. Patrick Pearse's father Henry came to Ireland as a monumental sculptor in response to this boom in church work. Unlike many clergy of the time he avoided politics and vexed questions of the day like 'The Land League'.

On a visit to Birr in 1890 he named St. Brendan's Church bell 'St. Michael', after the patron saint of P.P. Dean Michael Bugler. In 1902 he consecrated the Priests' Cemetery in the grounds of St. Brendan's.

Shortly before his death in 1904 Bishop McRedmond restored the Cathedral Chapter of Killaloe, which had lapsed over 300 years previously. He died on 5 April 1904 and is buried in the Cathedral of Ss. Peter and Paul, Ennis.

Thus less than one year separates the deaths of two people we can be proud to remember as citizens of Birr.



Congratulations to John Stevenson from Birr who was a silver medal winner in the 100m breaststroke in a time of 1:20:42 at the All-Ireland Under14/15 Swimming Gala in University of Limerick.



Two New York girls, with Birr connections, travelled to Killarney to play with the New York Under-14 Gaelic football team in Féile in June 2016. On the left is Roisin Smith, daughter of Marie Hogan, originally from the Golfinks and on the right is Sorcha Hayes, daughter of Stan Hayes (pictured with the girls) originally from High Street. Both families travelled over to support the girls in Féile and great time was had by all.

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The theme this year was "Let's Celebrate" – Commemorating, in flowers, 200 years of St. Brendan's Church of Ireland, and its role in the community of Birr in the intervening years. Richard Haslam, the designer of the two previous festivals, in 2009 and 2011, was joined this year by Ethel Mitchell (Moate). Richard's reputation goes before him, he has built a huge following for his floristry and floral art hobby classes, and is held in high esteem as a wedding florist, both locally, nationally and internationally. Trained in the Botanic gardens, Dublin, he followed this by floristry training in Dublin and Paris. He is a Chelsea Gold medal winner and has held workshops and international demonstrations in places as far afield as Russia, Japan and South Africa. This year he was joined by Ethel Mitchell, Florist and Demonstrator, from Castle Flowers, Moate.

Planning began as early as the Spring of the year. All the work on the arrangements was done by local people. Once the theme was decided upon, each arrangement had its own title, to tie in with the Church and commemorate its role in the community.

The Church itself was represented by arrangements

to commemorate events from the past. The Entrance and Porch area were resplendent with floral arrangements set on various modes of transport from the years before the arrival of motorised transport – bicycles, carts and carriages. The main Aisle was a path of roses, the sign of continuity, of happiness and love, of sadness and remembrance in all eras. Arrangements were also created to commemorate Christenings and Marriages as well as all the parishioners who have passed away over the last 200 years

Events from the history of the Church were represented - The Adelaide Hospital Service, an annual event held in Birr when the nurses wore their distinctive uniform; St Brendan's Church Mother's Union; Annual Garden Fete; and the Visit of Princess Margaret to Birr in 1961, when she and Lord Snowdon attended morning service in the church.

Features of the town of Birr were also reflected in floral arrangements - Birr Railway Station, a hub of activity with passengers and goods arriving to and leaving the town; Crinkle Barracks, Depot of The Leinster Regiment until 1921 and instrumental in building Birr into a prosperous town; Birr Convent 1847-1996,



The Flower Arranging Team
 Back Row (L to R): Muriel McDonnell, Maureen Hayes, Mary O'Connor, Ruth Haslam, Elizabeth Guest, Susan Jackson, Barbara Coakley, Dorothy Smith, Joe Bergin.
 Middle Row: Sarah Carr, Sheila McDermott, Marian Kearney
 Front Row: Ethel Mitchell, Helen Whyte, Richard Haslam, Kay Eades, Patt Grogan, Mary Fogarty.



designed by Pugin, now Birr Library; Birr Theatre & Arts Centre, a beautiful mock Tudor building, once a Church of Ireland Hall and former dance hall, now transformed into a vibrant theatre and arts centre, and the Underground Tunnel, built by Welsh Miners C.1907, as part of the first Birr sewage system, stretching from the existing Marian Hall to the Oxmantown School, and since incorporated into the new system.

The festival was officially opened on Friday with an evening of word and music inspired by the floral arrangements. Beginning at 7.30, and including a Cheese and Wine Reception, this was an evening of delight, pleasing all the senses. The music was supplied by Birr Choral Society who led the gathered congregation in hymns, and enchanted the audience with two choral renditions – ‘A place called home’, words and arrangement by Michael Joncas, music by Jean Sibelius, and ‘Chantez Alleluia!’, words and music by Dave and Jean Perry.

Brian Kennedy was narrator for the evening, with wonderful snippets of information on the history of the Church of Ireland in Birr, the 200 years of business and industry in the town,

and the interesting story of the first motoring fatality in Birr, when in August 1869 Mary Ward was thrown from a steam carriage built by her Parsons’ cousins as it rounded the corner into Emmet St., unfortunately resulting in her death and making her the first fatality from a mechanised vehicle.

The aim of the Flower festival was, as always, to raise money to help others, and this year’s main beneficiary was Dóchas, Offaly Cancer Support Group. Ms. Mary Cowen spoke about the work of Dóchas, and its appreciation of the efforts of the Flower Festival to increase the always-needed funds.

Following an Ecumenical Blessing, Richard Haslam introduced the arrangements to the audience and invited all to view and enjoy the flower festival, while sipping a glass of wine! All through the weekend there was a strong and steady flow of people visiting the festival. Gasps of delights and amazement were heard as the visitors appreciated the wonderful floral artistry on view – truly a delight for the eyes and the senses. Visitors were then invited to enjoy a cup of tea and some cake across the road in the Church of Ireland Hall, also known as the Country Market. The kettle was

never off the boil and the conversations were plentiful.

Throughout the days, as an added bonus for the attendees of the festival, there were flower arranging demonstrations, free gratis, in the tea rooms. Here Richard demonstrated his art, completing 3 arrangements during each demonstration. Richard’s style is perfectly suited to this audience and setting – informal and fun. He chatted away whilst working, sharing snippets of information about the flowers and foliage he was using, as well as many gardening tips.

Many people were involved in the creation of this wonderful event. The flower team was made up of mostly local people who have an interest and expertise in flower arranging. But there were many others in the background, including the ladies who looked after the refreshments, the stewards in the church throughout the festival, the ticket sellers, the music makers and the many other silent helpers who are needed to set up such a display of floristry. The event would never have happened without the support of the sponsors who gave so generously.

by Mary Larkin

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But, what do you do for a living?

By Garret Barry



Early on Monday morning, on my way from Birr to Castlebar, late for my first lesson, I had the pedal a little too close to the metal coming into Ballinasloe. I spotted the dreaded combination of white car and ‘man with blue uniform’ but it was too late. I knew I was getting a ticket! When I came to a halt, the usual questions ensued. It was the follow up question after when I told him I was going to Castlebar to give some tennis lessons that made me smile. ‘You’re doing what?’, he asked, followed with, ‘But what do you do for a living?’!

My fascination with tennis started when I was about eight! I remember attending a tennis lesson in the Ormond Tennis Club with a friend of mine who had signed up for lessons with a new local coach, Michael Daly. I was brought along as I was in my friend’s house for the day and I instantly loved the game. I found out everything I could about tennis as soon as I could, who in my family played, who had a racket etc. Some weeks later, my uncle Des told me he would buy me a racket if I could hit one hundred shots in a row against the wall at the back of my grandparents’ house in Townsend Street. That same afternoon we walked into ‘A Sportsmans Dream’ where he bought me my first tennis racket.

Having played all of the local tournaments such as Nenagh, Tullamore and Birr, I was asked to go to a Leinster trial in Mullingar. There, a coach named Declan Donnellan put me forward for Leinster Squads. Every Sunday morning from when I was ten, dad and I made the two and a half hour journey to Kiltiernan Tennis and Ski centre outside Dublin. This is where I began to blossom as a player and learned that I was well able to mix it with the best in the country. I’d say people thought dad was mad bringing me up to Dublin every weekend but if he had decided not to make the sacrifice (after many late Saturday nights playing music) I may not be writing this!

I began playing National level tournaments when I was in my first year at Under-12. Mummy’s brother, Tony, lived in Mullingar so I went there a lot of weekends to practice as the standard was very high at the time. Mullingar was my first big win. I won the Under-12 boys singles when I was Under-11. I went on that year to reach the semi-final of the Irish Junior Open. The following year I started out the year as the No. 1 Under-12 boy in Ireland.

I continued as a top Under-12 reaching the Irish Open semi-

final for a second year. I then represented Leinster at Under-14 Interprovincial level. However, as the years were moving on, I was struggling to keep up with the guys who were playing so much more than me. I eventually pulled back on my tennis when I was about fifteen or sixteen. When asked about my junior tennis, I generally say that I peaked when I was eleven!

After my Leaving Cert, I spotted an advertisement for a tennis coaching PLC in Dun Laoire. I really enjoyed the course and I qualified as a Level 1 coach in 1994. Due to this, I had been earning a few quid at weekends, coaching for a friend of mine, Garry Cahill, in places like Kells and Cavan. This kept me going through my first year of college in Waterford. Fast forward to 1997 when I am now 20. Woofy Clarke and I are making plans for the summer to visit the United States. Woofy’s brother, Ronan had lived in Boston for years and I had been in contact with their cousin Michael Daly on a number of occasions about possibly working with him for a summer as a tennis coach. Plans were made and off we went. We stayed with Ronan and Michael in Ronan’s house in Hull.

From day one, Mike (as he was known in Boston) and I really connected. He was a tennis nerd and I guess it takes one to know one. I had come to the right place. Mike was a performance coach. He only worked with the best players. They came from all over Massachusetts to avail of his tuition. Mike was widely acknowledged as one of the premier tennis coaches in the New England region and was beginning to get a National profile. His attention to detail and work ethic with his players was second to none. I had found my calling, I not only wanted to be a tennis coach, but I wanted to work with performance players.

I learned more about working with performance tennis players that summer than any coaching course could ever teach me. To this day, I use a lot of Mike’s methodology in my own coaching. Personally, I would love to be able to tell him how much he inspired me as a coach but Mike sadly passed away in 2010. Professionally, I miss his insight, creativity and willingness to go against the norm. He is a huge loss to the tennis community and will never be forgotten.

My Castlebar journey started in 1998. I had played in Castlebar’s August Weekend tennis tournament in 1997 and

was approached by one of the members about doing some weekend coaching in the club. I was sceptical at first but I eventually agreed to give it a try. I started off coaching for a full day every Saturday, which developed into Saturday and Sunday. It soon became obvious to me that there was the potential for a full time job in tennis coaching and I decided to give it a go.

I took up the post of 'Club Coach' in Castlebar TC in October 1998. For the next six years or so, I built up my hours and reputation as a tennis coach but primarily as a performance tennis coach. In other words, I worked every hour I could get, but my passion was always working with the tournament players.

I was lucky to start my career with some very talented players. I coached my first National Champion in 2001 when Warren Atkins from Castlebar won the Under-14 boys singles (he beat the then Irish No. 1 James McGee in the final). In approximately 2003, I began working for Tennis Ireland as a Development Officer for Connacht where I was contracted to work with the best players in the Connacht clubs. Over the years this role changed into a primarily club and grassroots development role.

While doing this job, I continued to have success with the players with whom I worked. In 2004, I was picked as non-playing captain for the Irish Under-18 team in the 4 Nations. Jamie Murray, currently the No. 1 doubles player in the world (and of course Andy's brother) played on the Scottish team that year. I continued to captain the Irish Under-18 team for a further nine years. I also continued to play competitively for Connacht at senior Interprovincial level. I have now represented Connacht for seventeen of the last eighteen years. In 2010, I represented Ireland in the Over-35's 4 Nations. Personally this was my best achievement as a player.

Castlebar Tennis Club has always been a very forward

looking club. When we relocated from the centre of the town to our state of the art venue adjacent to the Castlebar ring road in 2009, the other Connacht clubs supported us as the 'Connacht Regional Centre'. Then, in October 2014 the club took the ultimate plunge when the first Airhall in the west of Ireland was erected over 4 of our courts. This is the Holy Grail for me as a tennis coach (particularly in the Wild West.) and certainly has made my life much easier.

Having worked as Head Performance Coach for Connacht Tennis for approximately twelve years, I interviewed for my new position in January of this year. On the 8th of February, I was appointed as National Performance Development Co-ordinator for Tennis Ireland. This role brings me to the 4 provinces twice each term. My remit is to help the Performance Development Officers understand the norms of National and International players in the different age groups and develop plans to help the provinces identify talent and improve their performance programmes.

I believe that I am very fortunate to be working in an industry that I have a passion for. I have learned from some of the best coaches nationally and internationally and I continue to learn on a daily basis from the players and coaches that I currently work with.

I am very lucky to have a beautiful, supportive wife, Vivian along with two happy and healthy children, Anna and Oisín. My parents Gene and Treasa are also in good health and long may it last. Obviously, dealing with the death of my sister, Sarah, who I was very close to, has been extremely hard to take and I miss her every day but I find great strength in her memory.

Tennis has brought me from Birr to Boston and many places in between and yes, I teach tennis for a living. As a good friend of mine, Seamus King from Castlebar keeps telling me: 'Get on with your short life' and my goal every day is to adhere to this.

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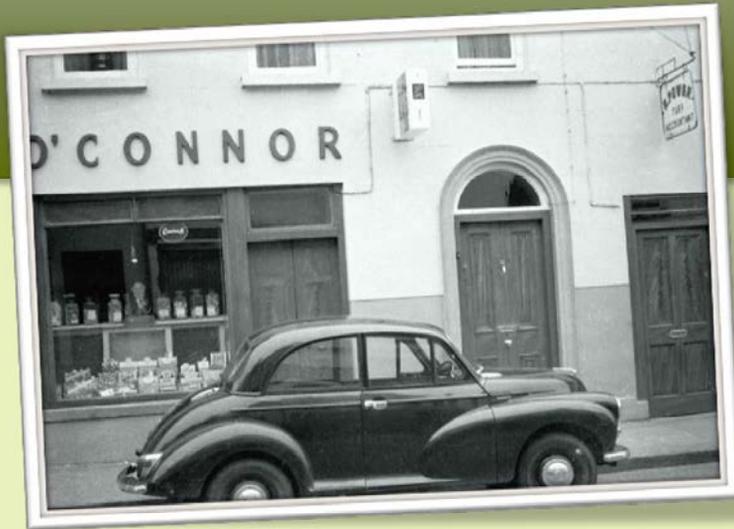
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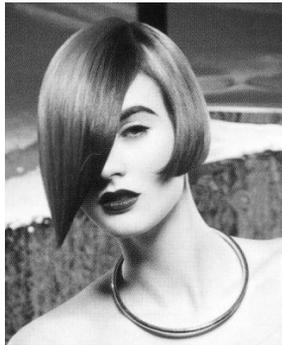
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The Little Bishop

The life of Bishop Michael Cox.

by Richard Kennedy

Michael was born in James Street in Mitchelstown, Co. Cork, and because of very particular circumstances surrounding his birth, which we will come to, he has a very particular fondness and an almost spiritual attachment to the house of his birth. In that, and other significant events in his life he has a strong and compelling sense of time and occasion.

On both sides of his family there were strong military connections. His father and paternal grandfather served in the army, his grandfather serving with the Leinster regiment in the First World War, and latterly attached to Crinkle barracks until it was burned. His grandmother Mary Kirby was the daughter of Col. Henry John Kirby from Yorkshire who had spent much of his career stationed in India. The colonel was then transferred to Victoria barracks in Cork, and it was here that his grandmother was born.

There is a family story of an unusual twist about the time Michael's grandfather saved De Valera, Michael Collins and Harry Boland from capture by the Black and Tans. He was on point duty with a soldier from Crinkill barracks at the bridge in Riverstown when a car approached carrying the three gentlemen. He knew who they were, and said to his colleague, "Let these people pass, we fought in the war for the rights of small nations", and thus reprieved the car sped off in the direction of Nenagh.

In hot pursuit was a lorry laden with Black and Tans which appeared at the checkpoint moments later and their pursuit was urgently and helpfully directed in the opposite direction. When Michael's father joined the army he was initially posted to Kilworth camp and it was in Cork that he met, and subsequently married, Mary Frances O' Connor. Michael, the second of a large family, was born in their house at James Street, Mitchelstown "on the third stroke of the bell at 3 a.m. on 2nd. March 1945".

The family came to live in High Street, in Birr, and it was in Birr that Michael completed most of his schooling. At the age of 14 Michael left school and ventured out into the world. With limited family means, as he says "I wasn't the son of a shopkeeper" further education was not an option. His first job was in Paddy Murray's sawmill in Moorpark Street. For a small lad it was hard work, but, as he says of himself, "I may have been a small fellow, but I was willing". He moved on from there to Johnny Murray, (a brother of



Bishop Michael with Sinead O'Connor

Paddy) who was the Manager of Lipton's shop at the corner of Market Square. There he worked as the messenger boy until an opportunity came up to serve as an apprentice with Joe Fahy, the cobbler, in Connaught Street.

While he enjoyed his time with Joe Fahy, he was always conscious that the army background was a big part of his life and he had an urge to try it, if only for the opportunities it might present to him. So, at the age of 16, (while declaring on his application form that he was older) he signed up for the Irish army and, with the blessing of his parents, he was sworn in as a soldier "at 11 o'clock on 25 March 1961". His initial

training was in Clonmel and from there he went to Collins Barracks in Cork (where his grandmother had been born), and it was here that he first began his training in radio.

He took easily and naturally to radio training and his talent was obviously spotted since he was offered the chance to take further training in Baldonnel Airfield. He jumped at this chance and soon he was thriving in an environment which gave him more and more responsibilities. These responsibilities were not insignificant bearing in mind that radio technology and the skills of the radio operators were heavily relied upon by the air force for both navigation and communication.

When his training was finished he was transferred to Galway for a short time and then went back to Custume Barracks in Athlone. Then, at the start of "The troubles" he was sent to the border areas because of his skills and expertise with radio and communications.

At that point misfortune struck and he was involved in a serious accident, which left him unfit for his work in the army and he was honourably discharged in 1973 on a disability pension. Since he was only aged 28 at the time he became known as "the baby pensioner".

Though he was temporarily down, he wasn't out, and after some recuperation, living with his grandmother in Grove Street, Crinkill, he began to look to see what careers were available to him. He had learned in the army that if he wanted to get ahead all he had to show was a willingness to learn, and the opportunities would come.

His assessment proved correct and he signed up for a machine milling course with ANCO, (the forerunner of FAS). The course was based in Shannon Co. Clare and here again his willingness was recognised. One day his instructor approached him and suggested that he could be suitable for

a stint in Germany learning about machine engineering. The course would also involve a significant amount of school learning.

He took it without hesitation and soon himself and a number of other selected trainees from Ireland landed in Koblenz in West Germany. He thoroughly enjoyed the experience and, as well as learning to play the Zither, became fluent in German in the process. After two years it was time to return home and since there was no work he set up shop in Crinkill repairing electrical goods.

However, he knew this type of life wasn't for him. Since he was a child he had felt that he had a destiny, and this was nurtured

over the years by his mother. She had often told him of the prediction of the midwife at his birth that, since he was born with a lucky caul, he would become a priest.

If fact he had enquired about joining the priesthood but felt that obstacles were being placed in his way. Now he heard about a Tridentine Order in Spain and he resolved to find out more. He made the journey and that step changed the course of the rest of his life.

In Spain he met with groups of traditionalists who advocated, amongst other things, a return to what was known as the Tridentine Mass. This was the old Latin Mass rite which had been decreed as being the official Mass by Pope Pius V at the Council of Trent in 1570 (hence Tridentine). That had been largely replaced by the new form of Mass, Novus Ordo, in 1969, after the Second Vatican Council.



After some time in Spain, Michael and others became disillusioned with some aspects of the church there and they decamped and as a group resolved to go to Switzerland. On route, the group formed and inaugurated a new Order, called the Order of the Mother of God, Mater Dei. Then, on their journey, in the Swiss town of Bourg-Saint-Pierre, "at twelve o'clock noon on the 1st May 1978", Michael Cox was formally ordained a priest.

Shortly afterwards he returned to Ireland and he went straight into what he saw as his Ministry, helping the poor, visiting the sick and those in prison, interceding where he could to help people get housing, even healing. On top of that he had to earn a livelihood and after a

couple of varied jobs managed to get a position with the Harbour police in Dun Laoghaire. Then on 27th of April 1982 Bishop Ciaran Broadberry, from Dublin, consecrated him a bishop.

As a priest and Bishop Michael has led a fascinating and colourful life. He has always been prepared to meet controversy head on even though the strain and toll from his dedication has seen him hospitalised on a number of occasions. He has had his skirmishes with RTE, notably with Gay Byrne and the late Gerry Ryan, mainly over what he saw as their disrespectful attitude towards the church, though he says that he later became friendly with Gerry and they put their differences aside.

While he sees himself as a staunch upholder of what he regards as the basic faith and ethos of the church, it was his unfortunate experience that that support wasn't always

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reciprocated, and the occasion of the death of his mother was one particularly upsetting example of that.

His mother, to whom he was very deeply attached, died in 1988. On the evening of her removal to the church in Birr, Michael, with the rest of the family were preparing to enter the church when his father took him aside and told him that there was a request from the then Parish Priest that Michael should not enter the church unless he was prepared to remove his collar and crucifix.

The idea that he could not attend his mother's funeral unless he compromised his deeply held beliefs was shocking and upsetting to him. He felt that his mother would not want him to deny his own faith and he refused to comply. He went to his car outside the church and sat there until the ceremony was over and then went home with his family. On the following morning, at the funeral Mass, the restriction was again applied, and it was made clear that it also extended to attendance at the graveyard for the burial.

To avoid conflict Michael stayed out of the church, but while the funeral Mass was in progress he went to Clonohill cemetery and consecrated his mother's open grave. He then returned to his house in Dublin, and there, with only his two dogs for company, celebrated a Tridentine Mass for his mother, on the loneliest day of his life.

Thankfully that was the only time in his life that he had to suffer such a rejection from his local church, and on the death of his father in 2002 he was welcomed into the church by Fr. Tony Cahir. This welcome frequently extended to Tony inviting Michael to participate in some ceremonies, such as baptisms, if it was the wish of the family. Another friend was Bishop Willie Walsh who always had a welcome for him. That friendship and relationship goes back many years to another very different, and brief, chapter in Michael's life.

Back in 1971, while still in the army, Michael married. It was a short-lived affair and the two parted after a few months. In due course Michael sought an annulment and it was Willie Walsh, before he became a bishop, who handled this process on behalf of Michael, with sensitivity and understanding.

In another, much later, chapter in his life, Michael, on his return to Birr from Dublin, and with the help of friends and neighbours, set up his own church at Cree. This had originally been an old Church of Ireland chapel and he set about converting it to suits his needs. It was also about this time that he consecrated the Northern Ireland cleric Pat Buckley as a bishop.

While that consecration generated its fair share of publicity, it was nothing compared to the storm of controversy to come when, in the following year, he ordained the singer Sinead O'Connor as a Priestess, and she took the name Mother Bernadette Mary. If he wanted publicity he certainly got it, but with it came abuse and condemnation.

His answer to this controversy is that, apart from the fact that he knows Sinead to be a wonderful person, nowhere is it written in the Sacred Scriptures that a woman cannot be a priest. A woman receives all of the same sacraments as a man, and cannot be a second class citizen in the church.

Turning to another chapter in Michael's life there is evident the zeal with which he performed his crusading duties. Partly as an awareness of the isolation of our island and coastal communities, and his wish to minister to them, and partly as a response to the so-called "Women on Waves", he bought and outfitted a 60 ft. trawler, which, with a touch of



Michael, at home in Shinrone.

humour, he named "The Little Bishop".

The Women on Waves was a ship named the Aurora from the Netherlands which was designed to facilitate family planning and abortion and it was, with its own missionary zeal, setting sail for Ireland. The plan was for the Little Bishop to block the approach of the Aurora into Cork harbour. However, as it turned out, for logistical reasons, the Little Bishop didn't get to confront the Aurora.

Michael subsequently sold that boat and outfitted another much larger trawler as a floating chapel. This he called the Patriarch. Unfortunately on its voyage from Fenit Harbour to Blacksod Bay a fire broke out in the engine room, and Michael, who was driving to Mayo to rendezvous with the boat, had to give the order to abandon ship. The crew was rescued but unfortunately the boat sank off Slyne head.

Over the years there have been other ventures and controversies, such as pay-by-call confessions, exorcisms, divine healings and weddings. It is the latter which have perhaps caused him most grief, with allegations that marriages conducted by him are "Sham marriages". He counters this with the (accurate) assertion that Article 44 of our Constitution in effect guarantees equal status to all religions. This gives his religion equal legal status with any and every other religion in the country.

The place of his birth, his connection with his mother and his spiritual vocation are all fundamentally important to him. Some years ago, when passing through Mitchelstown he called to the house where he was born, and was welcomed into the house by the current owner. She quite happily allowed him to pray, on his bare knees on the bare floorboards of the room where his mother gave birth to him and this he found to be an intensely moving spiritual experience.

Looking back on this very full journey through life Bishop Michael is thankful for the wealth of experience it has been his privilege to have. His one constant companion since he was a youngster has been his love of music and his love of playing music and in times of stress and difficulty this is a source of comfort to him. In recent years he has suffered a certain amount of ill health but he retains his optimism and his positive outlook on life. He acknowledges that there have been controversies and that many have disagreed with his beliefs, but he sees the good he has done, and in that, he has no regrets.

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Celebrating 200 Years from the 1821 Census

By Tom Cleary (formerly of Castle St. Birr)

Preparing last year's piece on 200 years of butchers in Birr I looked to the 1821 Census for which the complete Birr records survive intact. Birr is unique in this regard when so many records were lost in the Four Courts Fire of 1922. Some fragments of the 1821 papers from around the country survive – the best being Kilmore in Cavan but nothing matches Birr's records. That prompted me to look again at the Birr of 200 years ago; what kind of a town was it, who lived here, what were the trades and businesses. And, how do they connect with the town of today.

It might inspire readers to look into their own connections back to 1821. The 1821 Birr records are on-line at <http://www.census.nationalarchives.ie/pages/1821/> For family history research these papers are most useful in making connections as far back as the mid-1700s - people recorded as 80 years of age in 1821 would have been born about 1740. But the 1821 papers present challenges and frustrations as well. The gap to the next Census for which original records survive is 80 years or 2 – 2.5 generations. So when we find an ancestor in the 1901 census who is 80 years of age, he or she just might have been recorded in the 1821 papers, allowing for the inaccuracies of recording ages (even back then people lied about their age). In my own case great-great grandparents who were born about 1820 were Clearys, Marks, Downeys, (Eden) and Garretts. Simple enough you'd think but when I scroll down through the 1821 records I can see there are many families of those names. The dilemma is "Which is which? We can hazard a guess based on ages or Christian names, on family lore of who lived where, but it's still very much guesswork. It is tantalising to speculate as you read the 1821 Census as to who are the true ancestors, so near and yet so far. So, to all who go searching in the 1821 papers good luck!

One thing to note; in browsing the lists of names in each house you will find obvious duplication of data, e.g. double or treble sets of five similar named residents in every house. This came about when the hand-written names were being transcribed as a way of listing possible alternative readings of the original papers, e.g. in house 85 Moorepark St the names 'Hoare' are also transcribed as 'Hoase'. When you look at the pdf. file of the original document you will see the actual street/house record. And, these are mostly entered in elegant copperplate script, not by the occupier, but by the Census official.

Birr in 1820

There are no surviving newspapers published in Offaly in 1820 (a few fragments of the Parsonstown Gazette in the British Library) so we have to rely on other records to deduce the "economic climate" of the time. John J O'Sullivan opens his life of the an Irish entrepreneur, William T Mulvanny, with the observation "In the early years of the 19th centurydespite the failure of the 1798 Rising there was a

burgeoning, more articulated, more organised move for independence throughout the country, and many within the Ascendancy class began to see Ireland as a separate nation, politically and culturally". In practical terms this meant investment in towns and cities, but sadly not in the Rural economy.

When the Census was being compiled in 1821 Birr town was in a vigorous state of growth and development. It had a population of about 6,000 including 870 recorded in the recently completed Military Barracks in Crinkle. The Census recorded no less than 1571 separate dwellings/houses in the Birr area. But, it would be another 80 years before the town had a piped water supply and public sewers. (Maps of 1830s show an individual "pump" in many back-yards.) The surrounding rural townlands were also heavily populated – Clonoghill townland had 71 houses, Ballindarra 79.

We might draw a loose parallel with the early 2000s. There was lots of work for the stonemasons, carpenters, quarrymen, labourers – The Courthouse had been completed in 1810; St Brendan's Church of Ireland on Oxmantown Mall in 1815, the new Oxmantown Bridge on Wilmer Road in 1817. Hundreds would be employed on big projects - the Castle itself was being remodelled with the main building turned to face the park and the entrance moving from the end of the Green to the newly laid-out Oxmantown Mall. Masons and other trades were also building a new St Brendan's Catholic Church (the foundation stone had been laid in 1817) and the new Methodist Church, completed in 1821. Hundreds more would be engaged in the continuing work on the new Military Barracks in Crinkle. Much of the "Commercial" town was under construction. While the principal streets were laid out as they are today the building of the houses and shops on these streets - Main Street, Connacht St, Castle St etc. was ongoing. The census tells us that most of the houses on these principal streets were 2/3-storey as they remain. Individual owners today will be able to put more specific dates to their own properties. Our old house on Castle Street seems to have been built in the mid to late 1820s as an unusual "kink" in the boundary at the back is clearly visible in the first detailed maps drawn in the late 1830s. Oxmantown Mall (Place) and John's Mall (Place) had been laid out in plots and building had started. There were eight houses finished and occupied on Oxmantown Mall in 1821.

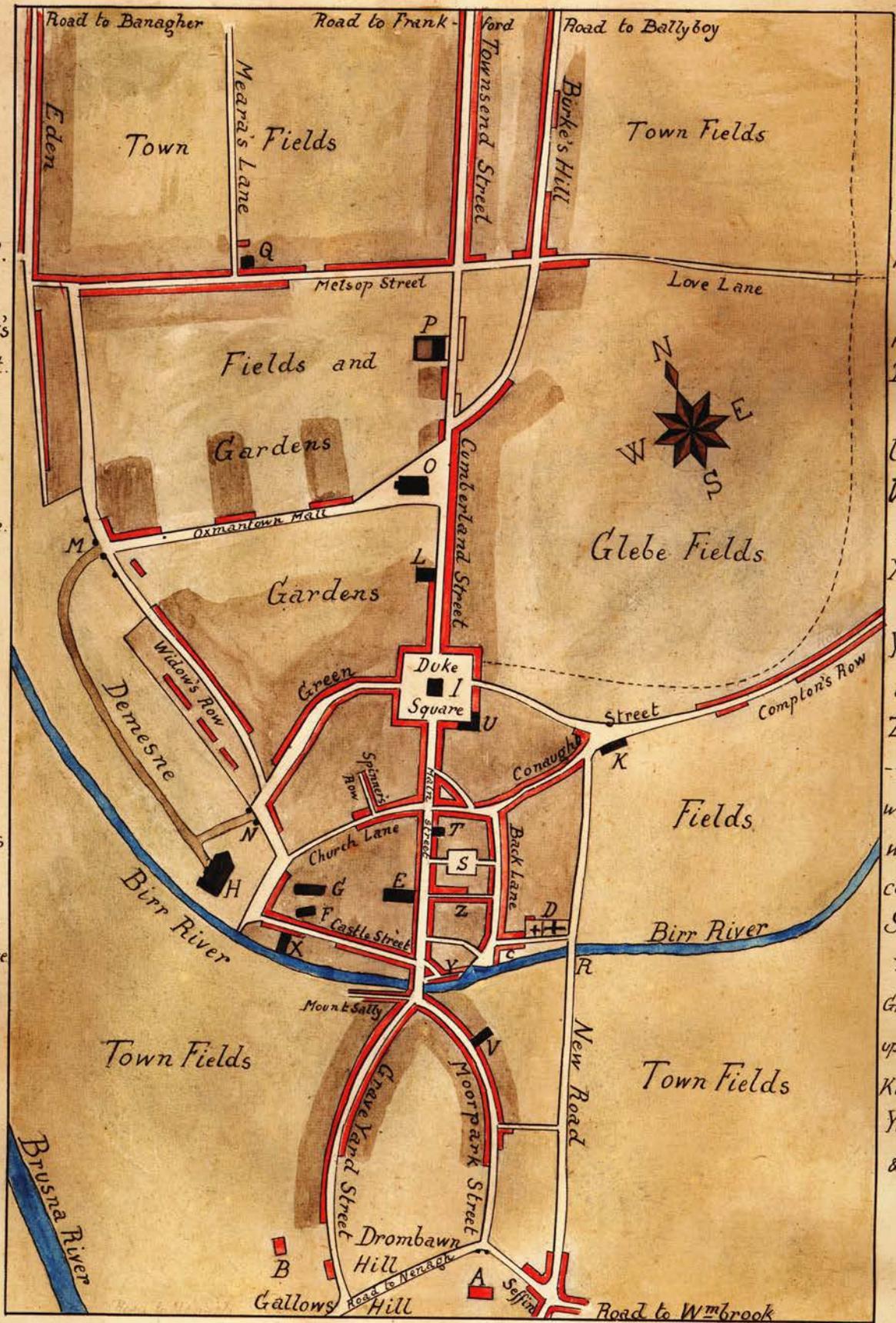
Looking at a Map of Birr from 1822 on the next page ('Reproduced courtesy of the Earl and Countess of Rosse'), we see that the built-up area is roughly bounded by today's Burke's Hill, Townsend Street, Pound Street, Eden, William St, Castle St, High St (old Graveyard St) Moorepark, Seffin, parts of Wilmer Road, John's Mall/Newbridge St, Emmett St. It would be well into the mid-19th Century before these streets were fully filled in close to what we see today.

Reference.

Reference

- A. William Hacket's place at Prospect.
- B. Capt Peek's of Hollypark.
- C. Charity Schools & Mendicity House.
- D. New & Old R.C. Chapel.
- E. Theatre.
- F. Glebe House.
- G. Old Church.
- H. The Castle.
- I. Duke's Pillar.
- K. R.C. Clergyman's House.
- L. Wesley Chapel.
- M. New Castle Entrance
- N. Old ditto ditto
- O. New Church.
- P. Session House and Goal.
- Q. Pound.
- R. Oxmantown Bridge.

- S. Shamble
- T. Coghlan Hotel.
- U. Dooly's Ho
- V. Hacket's Distillery
- X. Robinson Distillery
- Y. Mill Lar & Coate's La
- Z. Burke's L
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- Square.
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- Ground actually
- upon. Brown de
- Kitchen Gard
- Yards, Outth
- &c.
- Thomas L. Cool



The foregoing is a MAP of PARSONSTOWN for the year 1822 .

St Brendan's Church of Ireland had replaced the old St Brendan's, now a ruin on Church Lane and there was a 'chapel' on the site of the new Catholic Church. The new Oxmantown Road (Wilmer and Roscrea Road) connected Connacht St/Duke Square directly with Seffin/Crinkle and the road to Roscrea. Before the opening of this road you reached Seffin through Bridge St. and Moorepark St. Dennison's Lane was the basis of Brendan Street which did not open onto Market Square until the 1890s.

Dooly's Hotel was already in business for 50 years and looked out onto The Duke of Cumberland perched on his column in the Square. On Main Street W K Fayle & Co had just opened (what we now call Fayles' Lane was then Burke's Lane). Coghlan's Hotel – also known as Parson's Inn, (where Frawleys' Store is today) was in operation. There was a theatre opposite Burke's Lane on the Main Street; Robinson's had a distillery on the site of the Malting in Castle Street; Hacketts had another on Moorepark St (de Forges) and other breweries, distilleries and maltings were in operation. The apartments' conversions at Newbridge St and beside the GAA Pitch are also housed in structures that were in business in 1821.

Looking at some individual streets in 1821 we see that Graveyard Street (today's High St) had 124 single-storey houses (the 80 houses today were mostly built in the 1930s). Together with Mount Sally and Post Office lane (the short lane off High St to the old Showgrounds) about 600 people lived here. Moorepark St had 97 dwellings (44 today) and Back Lane 47; Burke's Hill had 50 dwellings; the restored outlines of three houses there give us some idea of what these houses might have been like. Contrast Bridge Street today with 1821 when 44 houses are listed here. Some of these would have been the 2/3-storey houses built on the bridge itself where Flanagans' sold us sweets on our way to school in the 1950s.

Cooke's "History of Birr" has a list of the principal business,



trades, gentlemen and professions in the town in 1822 but this focusses on business premises and does not do justice to the teeming numbers of butchers, bakers, shoemakers, tallow chandlers, comb-makers, weavers, publicans, farmers, coach-drivers, servant-maids, tanners, apprentices, out-servants, wheelrights, pump-borers, ragmen, washerwomen, actresses, gardeners, gunsmiths, teachers and much more. Moorepark Street seemed to be home to a big number of shoe-makers while Graveyard St had a concentration of butchers – about 40. The shoe-makers worked at home but where did all the butchers carry out their trade – either in the common Shambles or slaughtering, cutting and salting pigs for the hundreds of



Remnant of an old house on Fayle's Lane.

ordinary townsfolk who would have kept a pig or two.

Who was who in 1821

Each of the thousands of named residents of Birr in 1821 has a story behind them and I need only take a handful to whet the imagination of readers. Seffin had Dooleys, Kellys, Cosgriff, Hennesseys, Fennells, Carrolls, Fannins, Heenans, Fitzpatricks, Handley, Coonan, On the Main Street, Edward Woods was described as a Guager (an excise man); John Cary a Huxter; James Howe a Horsebreaker; Thomas Marks, a butcher as was William Neaton; Thomas Palmer a Hearth money collector; Thomas Woods a Chandler; James Connolly, an auctioneer, chandler and farmer; James Hackett, a sadler; Catherine McCumley, a confectioner; Fanny Morgan an inn-keeper; Thomas Miller, a shopkeeper, baker and farmer; Laurence Costelloe, a grocer and spirit dealer; the Ryalls were watchmakers; Cunninghams, publicans. Castle St had Flynn's (hatters), Robinsons (distillers) and Simmons, on Bridge St was Hart's Tannery and Nevins, the Cabinet Makers; Elizabeth Power is described as an Old Clothes Woman. Burke's Hill had lots of Masons.

And, some of the old street names are different. Where, today, is Charles St, Davis Close or Laughton's Lane – home of the Armstrong, Quegan, Reddish, Egan, Acres, Flack, Coghlan, White, Buckley, Carter, Keegan, Lewis, Mahan and Sharpe families.

To finish our look back at 1821 why not take a walk into, say, Fayle's Lane and imagine who might have lived in the houses, traces of which remain. Was it Thomas Greelisk, the tailor and his wife Mary; or Edward Finnegan, 42, a wheelright, his wife, Bridget and their

five children. Was it William McGuire, the shoemaker, with Mary and three children; or Bryan Rourke, the ragman, and Mary; Might it be John Watkins, the brogue maker, with Judith and their two daughters, Judith and Catherine.

When I first looked at this Census in the National Archives about 10 years ago I was able to peruse the actual paper forms. But for conservation purposes the records are now microfilmed and digitised. There are micro-film copies in the Birr Library.

Additional Sources: The "Atlas of Birr" by John Feehan and Alison Rosse is a useful companion to looking at the 1821 Census for Birr.

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THE WEST END BATTLE OF THE MUSICALS

BIRR GAA CLUB'S FUNDRAISING EXTRAVAGANZA

by Michael Verney

Friday June 10 will go down as one of the most successful nights in the history of Birr GAA club. Unlike our other triumphs, including four All-Ireland club hurling titles, this was achieved far away from the playing fields.

At the outset of the year it was decided that a sizeable fundraiser was needed to aid the completion of renovation works in St Brendan's Park and ensure that the club's financial future would be safely secured.

Numerous ideas were thrown around during the initial brainstorming session and it was clear with the personnel leading the drive that The West End Battle of the Musicals was never going to be an ordinary fundraiser.

During the launch night on April 1 it was clear that this event was going to transcend the GAA. With a gathering of energetic and fun-loving people from a variety of backgrounds with a range of different interests, it was an all-encompassing community project.

The concept of enjoyment and interaction underpinned the whole programme from the beginning and everyone left the County Arms Hotel that night (and some early in the morning) buzzing in anticipation.

Much like the GAA, music has an ability to bring people together and it was clear from the whisperings leaking from rehearsals that something special was brewing. Local legends like Brian Whelahan and Conor McGlone were leading by example and the moves of Saturday Night Fever, Mamma Mia, We Will Rock You and Grease were impressing all behind closed doors. With a hard-working West End committee publicising the event months in advance, the date had been earmarked in everyone's diary from a long way out and tickets were selling like hot cakes. Everybody wanted to go, everyone wanted to play some part.

It's fair to say that even in our wildest dreams no one could have anticipated the success of the night. With personnel assigned to different duties, every base was covered and there was a sense that all in attendance were part of history. People streamed through the doors hours in advance jamming the County Arms ballroom with standing room only by the time the curtain was finally raised. And before a song was sung it was a resounding success.

But when it was time for 'lights, camera, action' that was when the real magic happened. Person after person, song after song, act after act left the crowd (ranging from ages 9 to 90) screaming for more.

All the razzmatazz of London's Broadway was transported to the Midlands and with the incredible support of businesses from Birr and the surrounding hinterland, it was a knock-out success. Months of toil behind the scenes reaped huge dividends. Musical director Enda O'Connor and his choreographers had the teams moving and singing in perfect sync while special guest judges Paul Norton, X-Factor's Joe McCall, Will O'Callaghan, Claire O'Donovan and Daithi Regan provided excellent insight and analysis on each act. MC and comedian Frank Forde kept the crowd entertained throughout but it was the overall winners – The Commitments led by Dave Coffey and Johnny Pilkington – who nearly tore the house down and brought the crowd to their feet.

It's brilliant that everyone bought into the show with such enthusiasm. It is with such spirit, support and friendship that we aim to restore our great club to the pinnacle within the county once again. Birr GAA club chairman Willie Rigney echoed those sentiments: "It was a novel ideal that spread the net a lot wider than just raising funds. This project encompassed the whole community and was not all monetary," Mr Rigney said. "It was just as important to raise goodwill and comradeship and make the club functional again. The club needed to be more proactive off the field as well as on it." From talking to many of the participants, Mr Rigney believes the benefits to the participants are ten-fold. "They could never have envisaged having the confidence to get up on stage in front of everyone and perform, this broke new ground for many people and helped them break personal boundaries".

"Friendships were made that will go far beyond The West End and it widened their interests and enthused them to get more involved in similar projects in the future."

Mr Rigney paid tribute to the support of the local business people, which "blew us away" and without whom none of this would have been possible, and spoke of how the €43,000 profit will be wisely invested and "utilised for club development in the coming years".

On a night when Birr GAA provided a celebration through song and dance it would be impossible not to mention the late Liz Kennedy, who served so many hardworking and passionate years with (amongst many other local organisations) both Birr Stage Guild and Birr GAA. We hope you enjoyed the show.

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GOING TO THE FRINGE...

NO NOT THE HAIRSTYLE

by Ann Hogan



Growing up in Birr, I was lucky enough to attend drama classes with Aileen Carville and can claim the honour of being Deirdre Hanniffy's first ever singing pupil back in 1990. Deirdre had the unenviable task of instilling discipline for practising scales and songs during some turbulent teenage years, even requiring me to dress for concerts and competitions, no mean feat!

From Feis Ceoil to concerts in the Theatre and on to study music in UCC, I was so lucky to have received that foundation in Birr. I loved every aspect of stage and remember being mesmerized watching John Boland and Brid O'Connell in rehearsal for John B. Keane's *Year of the Hiker* in the County Arms and of course watching my father, Tony, in "A Funny thing happened on the way to the Forum".

Having returned to teaching after living in Manchester and studying voice in the Royal Northern College, I realised I wanted to get more into the acting, and so I joined a group that one way or another led me to the Edinburgh Fringe this year.

The Edinburgh Festival Fringe is the largest Arts Festival in the world and takes place every August for three weeks in Scotland's capital city. A staggering 2,475,143 tickets were sold for its 3,269 shows which were spread across 294 venues over this three-week period. Attempts to describe the heightened atmosphere as 'something like Dublin on Paddy's Day without the drunkenness or the parade' just don't quite do it justice - Italia '90 - Féile (I wasn't allowed to go!). Let's just say no amount of tractors in the parade on a Birr Vintage Sunday could rival this!

My route to the Fringe came through working with a group called At Large Theatre based in Dublin. Founded in 2010, At Large specifically focus on producing new writing. The group has a super mix of people and I love the idea of supporting and being part of new work. At Large had previously taken one show across the water in 2012. This time however, the plan was to bring seventeen actors and three new Irish short plays - no mean feat!

Things began well over a year ago with a first performance of 'The Meeting' at a showcase in July 2015, the piece then around fifteen minutes long. After rewrites we performed again in March 2016, but now the piece was thirty minutes long. To raise funds we performed one last time in Trinity Players Theatre in August and the piece had by then stretched to forty-five minutes long. It was a real adventure to learn a role that expanded; the downside was that some lines were the same and some had only changed by a word or two, or the line appeared a paragraph later than it had in

its previous incarnation; no fear of complacency setting in. The three At Large plays were all under an hour in length. Our play 'The Meeting', written and directed by Grainne Curistan, was the lightest of the three, described as 'a sharp observational comedy about modern day office life.' Bringing together an ensemble of strong, interesting characters for a hilariously frustrating staff meeting that goes horribly wrong, it was highly relatable to anyone who has ever had to suffer through any kind of arduous never-ending meeting where nothing really gets decided. Of the cast of nine characters, I played without a doubt the most annoying. I was Linda, the office hypochondriac, always out of office, highly paranoid and not shy about describing her latest medical affliction to the other unfortunate members of her team. By our final performance I was quite glad to be saying goodbye, as my fellow cast members were treating me with nothing short of disdain, so convincing had I been in my portrayal - or that's how I liked to look at it. Let's just say we had been living in each other's pockets for sixteen days.

Our venue was the Apex Hotel on Grassmarket, a picturesque area nestled in the old town but just far enough away from the frenetic Royal Mile that you could catch your breath. The Royal Mile, the most historic stretch and the main thoroughfare of Edinburgh's Old Town, runs from the Castle to the Palace of Holyroodhouse, with flyers and sales pitches coming at us from every angle. Painted faces, gospel choirs and Macnas-style puppets were commonplace and the cacophony of equally excited and excitable voices echoed down the cobbled street.

We 'flyered' for our three plays on Grassmarket and at the Mound near the aptly named Half Price Hut, where discounted tickets were sold. Yes, we were decidedly small fish in an extremely large pond and this was the real hard graft! Hoots man! Our spiel: 'New Irish office-style comedy without the Ricky Gervais character.' 'Have you ever had to sit through a meeting Sir? Then this is the play for you!' We flyered in teams: on your days on, you flyered for two hours morning and evening, wearing a delightful bright pink At Large t-shirt, in between dashing off to do your show and trying to catch what other shows were on offer. Every day a different tactic was tried to reel our audience in, get those bums on seats. Erm, Irish charm? I once mistakenly asked an elderly couple were they from Edinburgh, to which one replied, 'Wash yer mouth out, I'm from Glasgow.' Well this put me firmly back in my box and wasn't the first time that people made reference to the fact that Edinburgh isn't

considered truly Scottish by fellow Scots, so Dublin versus the People's Republic of Cork isn't so quintessentially Irish after all.

Our venue was a fifty-seater, fittingly a hotel conference room. Each of the three plays did nine shows in sixteen days. Of those nine shows our smallest audience was fifteen and our largest was forty-eight. I can't describe how satisfying it was to see faces in a crowd that you knew you had personally convinced to come to your show not an hour previously, and then to see those faces smiling coming out, shaking their heads and telling you how it had put a smile on their faces and 'Oh, I've been in meetings with people like you before.' A mixture of pride and total relief.

We didn't make any money but we gained so much. I've hardly mentioned the amazing things I saw, some that I'd prefer to forget and some that will always stay with me: a stand-up comedian called Lolly Adefope who since picked up an award and an amazing Irish play called 'Scorch' which my parents also saw while over from Birr for a particularly exhausting day in Edinburgh. 'Scorch' had previously picked up an Irish Times Theatre Award and then also picked up a Fringe Award. How exciting to have seen and been blown away by that very production.

Unfortunately our play didn't get a review, but we know we were there, At Large were there, and who knows, one day we might get back again.



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A Childhood

on

Rosse Row

by *Liam Hanley*

Perhaps because it is so unusual nowadays, I relish the fact that the house where I was born was the same house where I spent my childhood and grew to be an adult. It was no. 4 Rosse Row, Birr and when I arrived on the 5th December 1955 I was the youngest of three brothers – Donie (RIP) 6th March 2012) and Joe. Coincidentally both Joe and I continue to live in close proximity, Joe in Virginia Co. Cavan and myself in Bailieborough.

My late father Billy was a Coolderry man and my late Mam, Teresa was from Woodfield, in Eglisish Parish. My Dad worked as a sales rep for D.E. Williams Tullamore and was away each day from 8.00 am and not home maybe until 8.00 or 9.00pm. As a result, my mother had the responsibility of looking after us on a day to day basis with Dad doing the fatherly duties at the weekend.

My earliest memory of growing up in Rosse Row was after I started school. I was told that I cried every day my brothers left for school and seemingly when my mother had enough she suggested to one of the Presentation Brothers (probably Br. Gabriel) in the school that if I could go with Joe and Donie to school and sit in for a short while in the “babies” class that I would be crying to come home. Well it turns out that when my mother came to collect me after an hour I cried that I had to leave. It was decided that I should stay and of course I continued at school and subsequently did my Leaving Cert. at 16 years of age in 1972. I got a position in the Civil Service to start in Letterkenny. My parents decided that they were not going to let me go to Letterkenny at 16 years of age so I sat the Leaving Cert again in 1973. I then got a position with Bank of Ireland.

My mother came from a musical family with my uncles Timmy and Tommy very proficient on the button accordion. This love of Irish traditional music was passed to me and when the three of us were sent to Irish dancing classes I was the one who took to it with Donie and Joe deciding that the money our mother gave us would be put to better use in Nugents shop in Green Street.

I started learning Irish dancing when I was 5 years old. I started to win competitions from about 7 years old. At that stage my Uncle Timmy would call in the evening and play for me when practicing in the kitchen. Uncle and nephew got

on great and when I would dance in competitions where Timmy would play he would know exactly the correct tempo and the tunes that I loved. During the summer months Mam and Dad would drive me to Feiseanna in Westmeath, Tipperary, Kilkenny, Dublin, Galway, etc. and of course my home county with Feis Brendain in Birr being one of the major competitions in the country and where Timmy played for me. I used to get a bit of stick from some of the lads at school



as, at that time, boys had to wear kilts. However, when I won the under 12 competition, aged 10 and received the championship cup their attitude changed!

Shortly after that I was selected, with other children from the town and surrounds to appear on television on “School Around the Corner” with Paddy Crosbie (anybody of my vintage and older would remember the program) and I was the one who had to “Caint as Gaeilge” and of course danced and was delighted to receive my first professional fee – a 10 bob note. I also won the bag of sweets!

During my teenage years Irish dancing was very good to me. I was winning cups and medals at Feiseanna and then in 1970/71 Comhaltas Ceolteorai organised sessions in 3 midland hotels in Birr, Nenagh and Athlone. These sessions were made up of musicians, singers and dancers and were geared for the tourist market. This was my second professional gig and I thoroughly enjoyed the experience.

During the summer of 1973 I was selected to take part in a Comhaltas organised television series called “Seisiun”. I took part in three programs and it involved musicians, singers and dancers from the midlands area. The last recording took place on the Saturday before I started work.

I have great memories of growing up in Rosse Row as well as

the enjoyment I got from the dancing. It was a street that had the best neighbours ever. Keys were left in the front doors and as children we could come and go as we pleased. During the school year your playtime started as soon as the homework was done and when any little jobs that Mam lined up for us were finished. It was a time when you were told to "go out and play and don't come back until tea is ready". So play consisted of playing hurling or kicking a football on the street with Hoctor's gate being the goals ! The castle wall was also used to hone your hurling and football skills. There was a little gravel pathway opposite the houses at the base of the castle wall which had a grass verge. There we played marbles or what we termed as "taws". Many hours of competition were passed at that. Of course you had your collection of taws which held your special taw and which you used to beat your opponent and was the one your opponent wanted to get his hands on. Oxmantown Mall or "the mall" as we called it, was another haven of play for us, particularly when the leaves of the chestnut trees would fall and would be gathered to make jumps, throw at each other etc. and then great anticipation of finding the best big shiny chestnut to use playing "conkers". This again caused many hours of stiff competition and the tragedy then if your star conker was demolished by an opponent! A lasting memory for me as a child growing up in Birr was that apart from school most of the time was spent outdoors. From summer to summer there was always something to do. I can honestly say that I remember it as a happy time. GAA played a large part in our family with Dad having played hurling for his club Coolderry and for Offaly. The rivalry between Mam and Dad during the county games was brilliant to witness. I never heard a harsh word between them until maybe when a discussion would start about a close match involving either Coolderry or Drumcullen – then



Tommy Pey by the Hanley fireside.

the pride and passion for the game would rise ! I cannot recall any bad memories of either primary or secondary school. I was able to cycle to primary school and was only a short walk from the college. When Mam died we found that she had stored away old cases with lots of our school books in them as mementos and it was a pleasure to look back through these. It is sad, but a fact of life that the street that I was born in will never be the same but the memories of my parents, my brothers and the great neighbours and friends I grew up with always be there and have been passed to my own children Thomas, Tessa and Danny who sadly never knew their Grandad Billy but thankfully knew and loved their Granny Teresa.



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The Birr Distilling Tradition

by Michael Byrne

Secretary, Offaly Historical and Archaeological Society

Does anyone have a bottle of Birr whiskey now? The destruction of Birr's last distillery in March 1889 was seen as a death blow to the town. The population of Birr in 1841 on the eve of the Famine was 6,336 persons with another 554 in Crinkill. However the next eighty years saw a long period of decline such that over the period 1861 to 1926 the population fell by 44.6 per cent or from 6,146 to 3,402. The decline was exacerbated by the closure of the distillery in 1889, the military barracks in 1921 and in the same year the workhouse (erected c. 1840) was closed and amalgamated with Tullamore.

Birr had strong associations with whiskey distilling from at least the 1800s. Probably, the large military barracks at Crinkill acted as a stimulus to production. In 1818 only two distilleries were operated in County Offaly and both were located in Birr. In competition with Birr was the Birch distillery at Roscrea. One of the Birr distilleries was that of Robert Robinson and was located at Castle Street and formed part of what was until the 1980s Williams Waller Ltd. (formerly Birr Maltings Ltd.), and now partly demolished with the remainder incorporated in The Maltings guest house. The second distillery, established in 1805 by the Hackett family, was located at Elmgrove on the eastern side of the town. A third distillery, described as the 'old distillery' in 1838 was located near what is now the Mill Island Park and part of which is incorporated in the Birr Technology Centre. Thus ample remains of all three distilleries still survive.

Table I: output of Offaly distilleries in 1832 in proof gallons

Distiller	Output	% of national output
Robert Robinson, Birr	70,252	0.759
Michael Hackett, Birr	65,349	0.709
Robert Mitchell, Kilcormac	34,940	0.377
Thomas Manley, Tullamore	29,864	0.322
Kernan Molloy, Banagher	22,439	0.242
Michael Molloy, Tullamore	20,635	0.223
Offaly distillers	243,479	2.632

The Castle Street distillery of Robert Robinson and later Arthur Robinson remained in production until the late 1840s when the latter was declared bankrupt. The Robinson Castle Street distillery would be worth further exploration. An American visitor to Birr in 1844, during the time of the Fr. Mathew Temperance Campaign, saw the sad funeral at 6 a.m. of one of Robinson's boys

The morning was dark; the rain poured fast. At six, a hearse passed, bearing the corpse of the son of a distiller, [probably Robinson of the Castle Street distillery] who fell from his horse, and was killed, when intoxicated. The keeper of the lodgings remarked, that he had seen the father, and twelve sons grown to manhood in church



Castle Street about 1920. One hundred years earlier, for example it was a crowded place with some 32 occupied houses and over 200 people (1821 census). Probably the principal business there was the distillery of Arthur Robinson (later the Woods brewery and in the 1980s the Williams Waller business).

together. Seven of these sons have died by intemperance. Are whiskey-making, whiskey-selling, and whiskey-drinking attended with a blessing? (Asenath Nicholson, Ireland's Welcome to the Stranger; or, Excursions through Ireland in 1844 and 1845, for the purpose of Personally Investigating the Condition of the Poor, London, 1847).

The Hackett distillery at Elmgrove was founded in 1805 by Michael Hackett, passing to his son Richard (husband of Jemima Hackett), after him George Watson and then to the three Wallace brothers, Richard, James and Joseph. It was open nine or ten months of the year and gave employment to about 70 to 80 men. It could produce 30,000 gallons per month.

At the time the whiskey business was in a depressed state due to the success of Mathew's temperance campaign. Hackett's distillery continued in business until the fire in 1889. In the 1860s or 1870s it had been leased to the Wallace brothers and was generally known as Wallace's distillery at the time of the fire. It is likely that the late 1860s and 1870s were good for the Birr distillery and that extensive improvements were made. In the King's County Chronicle for 1875-6 it was noted that

The Proprietors, R. and J. WALLACE, (Late George Watson, Esq., and formerly Richard Hackett, Esq.,) Beg respectfully to inform Wine and Spirit Merchants, Dealers and others that the above old established Distillery having undergone extensive alterations and improvements, is now in full work, and producing a superior quality of whiskey which will be stored in fresh emptied Sherry and other casks. Orders will have prompt attention and the trade liberally dealt with. Birr Distillery, Parsonstown, October, 1875.

The output of the distillery was about 200,000 proof gallons



The Hackett Distillery in Elmgrove as it stands today.

per annum in the mid-1880s and as such was similar to distilleries at Kilbeggan and Tullamore, but much smaller than distilleries in Dublin and Dundalk.

Table 2 The midland distilleries in 1885: output and employment

<i>Distillery</i>	<i>Output (p.g.)</i>	<i>Employment</i>
B. Daly, Tullamore	270,000	100
R. & J. Wallace, Birr	200,000	40
John Locke, Kilbeggan	157,200	70

Soon after Barnard’s visit the Chronicle was able to write in glowing terms:

Undeterred by the prevailing stagnation and discontent that afflicts this cruelly quacked country, the Messrs. Wallace are again showing their large heartedness in this town which owes so much to their enterprise. Their fine old distillery at Elmgrove has been set to work again at the commencement of the season, and we look upon it as a bright omen that the junior brother, Mr Joseph Wallace, who conducts an immense manufactory in Liverpool, has come over temporarily to render assistance. He was present on Tuesday when the large staff of tradesmen and labourers resumed work. And what a cheerful sight was it to see the vitalising spirit that every one threw into the operations. It is no new story that the whiskey made at the Birr Distillery has been steadily gaining favour; so no wonder was it to see large orders arriving on the very first

day of the current season. All who know the Messrs Richard, James, and Joseph Wallace will cordially concur in wishing themselves and their business the largest success, for truly do they richly deserve the fullest measure (KCC, 9 Dec. 1886).

A year later the Chronicle editor, John Wright, was telling his readers that people like the Wallace brothers and the earl of Rosse were a perfect blessing in Birr and that Tullamore people should look to such improvers and less to politics if they wanted to help the starving labourers (KCC, 15 Dec. 1887).

Despite several major fires, at Springfield mills near Birr in 1851, and at Boyne's coach factory in 1888 the Birr town commissioners were reluctant to equip a fire brigade, presumably on the grounds of economy. It was the same in Tullamore where the Goodbody tobacco factory was destroyed in 1886, never to come back. In 1889 the town of Birr was dependent on an old fire engine purchased some forty years earlier, and the army fire engines which had to travel from Crinkill.

When the distillery fire started (March 1889) the hose of the town commissioner's engine was placed in the river, but quickly became useless as the sand in the river bed forced its way into the hose. Despite the work of 100 soldiers, the Scottish Fusiliers, very little of the distillery was saved. It was noted at the time: *'The destruction of the distillery will prove a great loss to all classes in the community. Town and county will suffer by it. A number of workmen have been knocked out of employment, a market for the sale of corn and the purchase of grains, and wash has been closed to the farmers, and the outlay of money consequent upon the influx of country people into town has been lost to the traders of Birr.'* The twelve bonded warehouses, full of whiskey, escaped the disastrous fire. Over the next two years efforts were made to re-establish the distillery but without success. Mrs Jemima Hackett, the owner of the property, was prepared to set up a company with local shareholders, but the invitation to subscribe fell on deaf ears. It was just as well for the prospective shareholders as the distilling industry was in a depressed state in the 1890s and again after 1910 until the 1960s. Over that long period the only prosperous years were those of the two World Wars. As such the account of Alfred Barnard is all the more interesting as he viewed the distillery in 1886 from Barnard, *Whisky Distilleries of the United Kingdom (1887, reprinted 1969)*, pp 419.

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We took Birr, or Parsonstown as it is also called, on our way back to Dublin, and unfortunately were obliged to stay in that town all night. We liked the town well enough, but the hotel we selected was not one of the best, and we have recollections of an uncomfortable night. The distillery, which is near town, was established in the year 1805, and is built of solid limestone. The works are approached from the high road by a carriage drive or avenue, which runs for some distance along the river bank; a handsome stone archway, draped in ivy, gives access to the buildings.

The principal grain warehouses are situated on the opposite bank of the river, in an enclosure, entered by an old-fashioned pair of gates. Here are two granaries of five floors each, which contained 5,000 barrels of grain, and two drying kilns; the sub-ground floors are used as bonded warehouses. The corn is here delivered and weighed before being sent to the various Corn Lofts.

In the distillery buildings there are altogether eight grain lofts, and the mill contains two pairs of stones and a set of malt rollers. The grist loft, which adjoins the mill, is above the mash tun; for supplying hot water there are four coppers. The mash tun is of the ordinary size and description, and near to it are four sets of three-throw pumps. The six washbacks have a capacity of 18,000 gallons each, and the intermediate charger is in the Still room. In the Running Room there are five Receivers and



The 'Old Distillery' is now the Birr Technology Centre.

the Safe. The Wash Charger is fixed on the roof of an annex of the building.

The Still House contains two old Pot Stills, and adjoining there is a Spirit Store. In the yard there are thirteen bonded warehouses, which contained some 3,000 casks. We noticed a capital Cooperage, Stables, Engineers' and -Carpenters' Shops. Forty men are employed upon the premises.

The following is a brief description of the arrangement of the distillery. The centre court is called the Square Yard; the buildings on the north side are devoted to the Back House and Cooling Lofts, as also the mill, worked by a powerful breast water-wheel, which discharges its waters over the cooling pipes, which are laid in the bed of the mill race, and over these pipes is the worm tub, fixed on an elevation of substantial stonework; those on the east, to Still House, Tun Room, Spirit Store, and Racking Room; on the west, Maltings and Kiln, Corn Floors for selected grain, Malting Steeps, and bonded warehouses; on the south side



Apartment living in what was once the principal grain warehouses for the Elmgrove Distillery.

are corn stores and bonded warehouses.

The whisky is produced from pure malt and grain; the annual output is 200,000 gallons, which obtains a ready sale in the principal cities and towns of Ireland and England, and shipments have been made to the colonies.

The three Wallace brothers did not long survive the fire and all three were dead within three years. This included Joseph who had built up a big business in Liverpool. The only surviving brother was John Wallace of Belview, Shinrone. All were buried in 'the new cemetery' at Clonoghill including their sister, Mrs Eades, and her husband. John Wallace had three sons so perhaps there are relatives still about. (KCC, 8 Oct. 1891).

One of those connected with the fire and who survived almost up to the First World War was solicitor Thomas Mitchell of an old Birr legal family. Mitchell knew good whiskey, it would seem, and was instrumental in saving many hundreds of puncheons in the great fire at Birr distillery playing 'a man's part' in helping to extinguish the fire including breaking the sacred Revenue locks to the consternation of the officers of the excise. The fact that it was called Birr whiskey did not trouble Mitchell. At his death his old colleague, John Wright of the Lodges (Freemason and Orange) described him as an evangelical churchman and his politics might be classed as of the Sir Edward Carson type – a resolute believer in a united empire unimpaired by subordinate parliaments. In keeping with such tenets he retained 'Parsonstown' on all his papers' and could not brook the underlying motive for the change of name to 'Birr'. It was for Mitchell the House of Commons ration of whiskey and soda and none of that apple juice nonsense so much beloved of modern devotees of uisce beagh.

If the fire of 1889 had been avoided would Birr distillery have survived after 1920? Probably not. Its inland location and the loss of the barrack not to mention structural changes in the industry and massive increases in excise duty were all negative influences. Yet on the positive side was the well-run Birr Maltings and the long tradition of barley growing and malting in the town. Would a new Birr distillery work? Yes it might. The wonderful Birr distilling and malting buildings still surviving testify to a great distilling tradition. As Jameson, Tullamore DEW and Teeling have shown in the art of whiskey making (and marketing) important ingredients are tradition in the form of history and heritage buildings. Here's to a glass of Birr.

Photos courtesy of Fred Hammond.



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Exploring the Universe from Birr

With Peter T. Gallagher
Professor in Astrophysics, Trinity College Dublin

Ireland has a distinguished tradition in science, producing luminaries such as Boyle, Hamilton, and Fitzgerald. Among the most notable was William Parsons, 3rd Earl of Rosse, who built the Great Telescope in Birr in the 1840s, and which remained the largest telescope in the world until 1917. With his Leviathan, the 3rd Earl made a hugely important astronomical discovery, that gas clouds in space called nebula have spiral arms. He even named one the Whirlpool Galaxy, which is to this day still studied and admired by astronomers across the world.

Nowadays, astronomers study the night sky with telescopes that can see light ranging from gamma-rays to radio waves. Radio telescopes are particularly useful to astronomers as they can see the stars during day and night and see through the clouds – a real advantage for Irish astronomers! Birr's tradition in astronomy and its radio-quiet location in the Midlands make it an ideal location for a radio telescope.

"In order to achieve this we brought together a collaboration of all the universities and a number of institutes of technology in Ireland and Northern Ireland to build a €2 million radio telescope in Birr", according the head of the Irish LOFAR consortium, Professor Peter Gallagher.

This investment will connect Ireland to a €150 million network of radio telescopes called the Low Frequency Array (LOFAR), spread across many northern European nations. All of this has been made possible by the supported of Science Foundation Ireland, university partners, and philanthropists such as Dermot Desmond, Denis O'Brien, Joe Hogan and Stephen Grant.

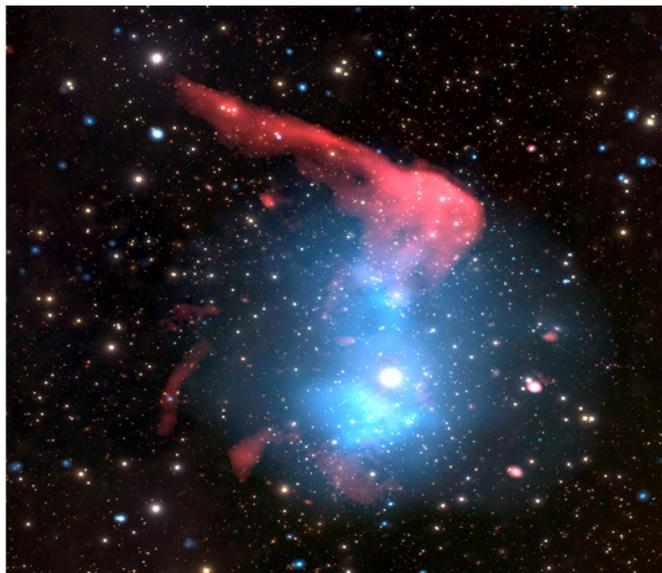
LOFAR will allow astronomers to make images of exploding stars, see galaxies further into the Universe than ever before, find new planets around other stars, and provide a new insight into the workings of our solar system.

"We will use LOFAR to study solar activity and its impacts on technologies such as GPS, telecommunications, and electrical power grids. It really will give us a new insight into

how the Sun works and how it effects our planet", says Professor Gallagher.

In addition, the Irish LOFAR consortium are now raising funds to build a visitor centre near the radio telescope which will attract tourists and students of all ages, to not only understand Ireland's history of achievement in astronomy, but to learn about the cutting edge of radio astronomy from right here in Birr.

Further details on the Irish LOFAR radio telescope can be found at www.lofar.ie.



Pictured above is cluster of galaxies called the "Toothbrush Galaxy", which glows at radio, X-ray and optical wavelengths. The red cloud at the top of the image was obtained by LOFAR (120-189 MHz), the blue haze was seen by the Chandra X-ray spacecraft, and the optical image was taken from the ground using the Subaru Telescope.



LOFAR stations consist of hundreds of antennas spread across a field about the size of a football field. They pick up radio waves at frequencies from just above and below FM radio at 10-90 MHz and 110-240 MHz. Once the radio waves have been detected, they are sent by fibre optic cables to a supercomputer centre in Holland, where images are created. The image above is of a LOFAR station in the UK.

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La Vie Rurale

From Bulfin Park to Farming in France

by Emily Gardiner



Emily Gardiner (nee Kirwan) is the daughter of Michael and Mai Kirwan, Bulfin Park, Birr. She emigrated to France in 2006 to go farming in the Limousin region.

Having grown up as a townie, first in Templemore, and then in Birr, I never imagined I would become a farmer in rural France. The closest we got to cattle as children was when Dad took us fishing with him down the Brosna or the Shannon; or out in the fields looking for mushrooms in the early mornings when they were in season. Back then, I was even terrified of a small calf.

I left Birr in 1989 when I married Declan Gardiner from Eyrecourt, but continued to work in Birr in LD Intercon / Stieber Cables until 2001. It was great to be able to pop down to Mam's for dinner every day. LD Intercon had only been in Birr for a couple of years when I joined in 1987. I started on the production floor, and thanks to their very good policy of training and internal promotions, I worked my way up to Business Development Manager of the Stieber Cables division. I loved working there and made some great friends that I still keep in touch with. When the factory was closing in 2001, I went to work as a Costing Analyst with Chanelle Pharmaceuticals in Loughrea for the next five years. During this time we had three children, Luke (1993), William (1995) and Laura (1998). We used to go on holidays to France a lot as we loved the country, and the campsites and facilities were great for children. The weather always seemed to be sunny and we drove through a lot of lovely countryside and villages. Declan, who worked as a mechanic/fitter in Galmoy and Lisheen mines had always wanted to be a farmer, not having been brought up on a farm. He had built up a herd of pedigree Limousin cattle having rented a farm in Eyrecourt.

In 2006 we decided we would look at the possibility of buying a farm in France and moving out here. Land in Ireland was far too expensive, around €50k/ha and we could never afford to own our own farm there. Land in France was

a lot cheaper at €3k/ha. We contacted an agent and looked at several farms before deciding on La Forge. In May 2006 we put our house and nine acres up for sale, sold our pedigree herd and in October 2006 we moved into our new home, La Forge. It was hard leaving our families and friends behind.

The biggest challenge we faced was the language. I had Leaving Cert level, which was great for the basics, and I thought the French would have a lot more English but boy, was I wrong! In rural France, they have very little English, and any that do, are very reluctant to speak it. Anything we needed, we had to drive to the place and ask as we hadn't enough French to ring and discuss on the phone. What was also annoying and hard to get used to was the fact that everywhere shut for lunch from 12.00pm to 2pm. We got by with my basic French and a lot of sign language and pictures. The French people are a lot more reserved than the Irish, but they were very helpful to us when we arrived. Having been schooled here, Luke, William and Laura are now all fluent in French.

When we arrived, Laura, then 8 years old, started school in the local Primary school which had three classrooms and sixty-one pupils. She had no French and none of the other pupils, nor her teacher, had any English, but she arrived home announcing she had eight new friends – language is not a barrier in the playground. Luke (then 13) and William (then 11) started together in the College which is in the next town about ten kilometres away and has around two hundred and sixty students. There were six English pupils there. Of course they all hung around together, and the teachers kept splitting them up saying they would never learn French if they stuck together. The Principal told me later that she wasn't sure at the beginning if it would be OK to mix the Irish and English students in case there would be trouble!!

The Education system is very different to Ireland. Although France is a mainly Catholic country, no religion is taught in the public schools. Also, there is no preparing school lunches – the schools provide a 3-course dinner every day at a subsidised cost. There are no school uniforms either. Children attend Maternal school from age two to six, then Primary school to eleven. From eleven to fifteen they attend College at the end of which they do the Brevet (similar to the Junior Cert). The next three years are spent at Lycee, at the end of which they do the BAC (similar to the Leaving

Cert). They have to decide at College which Lycee and type of BAC they want to do as there are various types depending on what career / jobs they want to do. A lot of students from rural areas attending Lycee are boarding, heading off on a Monday morning and returning on Friday evening. The Healthcare system in France is noted as being one of the best in the world and any dealings we have had with the health system while we've been here have been very good and very efficient, with no big delays in treatment. Farmers pay into the MSA (the social insurance system for Agriculture) While it is expensive, you do get good health benefits from it. The cost of visiting a GP is €23 and 70% of this is re-imbursed, as is any medication prescribed by the doctor. Dental treatment, hospital treatment, health treatment in general, are all partially re-imbursed also. The weather here can be very hot in July and August, sometimes up to 40 °C, but can also be very cold in January and February. Our first winter here we had about two feet of snow and temperatures of -18 °C for three weeks. However, every year has been different so we don't know what to expect from year to year. This year we had a very wet spring, and then a drought in summer with no rain for almost three months. There was no grass and we had to feed hay to the cattle in the fields. In 2013 Luke finished Agricultural College and he has joined us on the farm. We formed a partnership and we bought another farm. Between us we keep one hundred and forty suckler cows, milk one hundred and eighty goats and have ninety hectares of tillage. My work is milking and looking after the goats, and also the mountain of paperwork that goes with farming. It is very different to working in an office and having weekends free, but it is also great not to have to travel to work, to be outdoors and to take a break in the



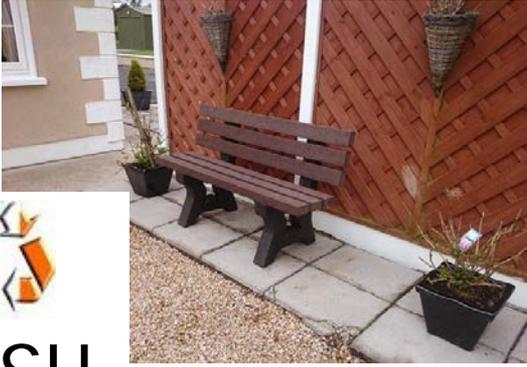
Emily with some of her goats.

afternoon if it gets too hot. William and Laura are both working and living in Clermont Ferrand which is about one and a half hours drive away. Luke plays Gaelic Football with Clermont and just recently they won the European Championship in Maastricht. Coming from Galway, he is only sorry that the nearest hurling team is in Paris! Clermont is also big rugby country and the French have great respect for the Irish rugby team. All in all, France is a good country for farming and outdoor activities. We can go kayaking in the summer and skiing in the winter. The social life is very different to Ireland. Pub life is practically non-existent except in the bigger towns, and even then it is not as we know it. Generally, people meet up socially for dinner and house parties or at local fetes. If only the people here spoke English and had the Irish sense of humour, it would be perfect!

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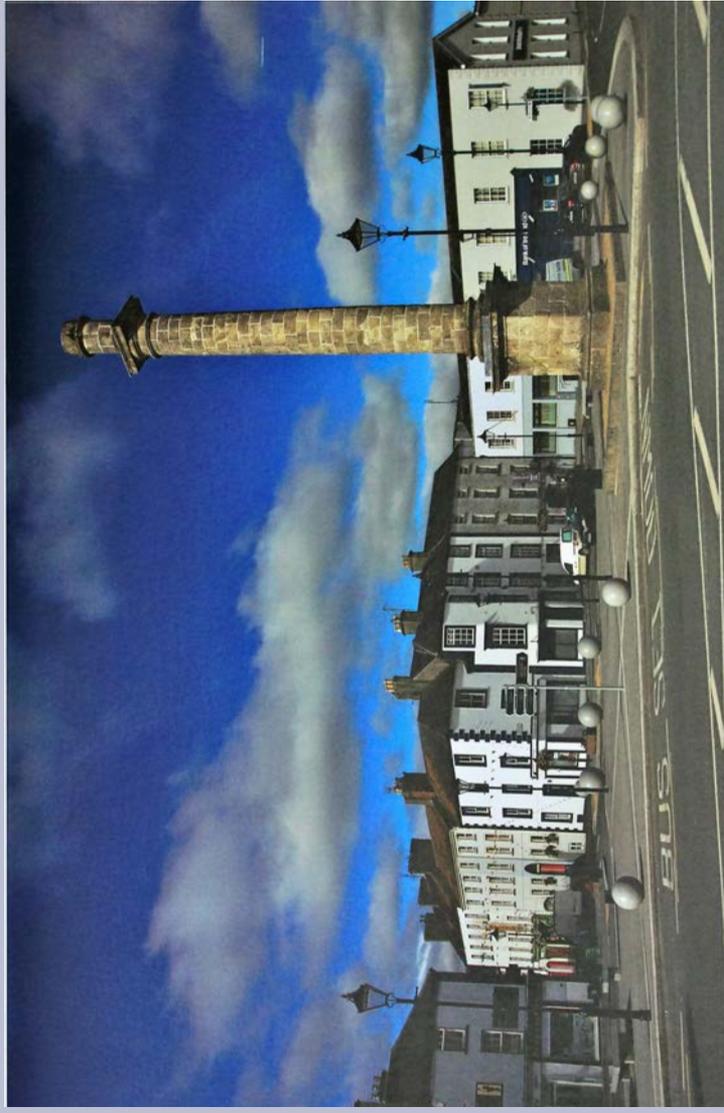
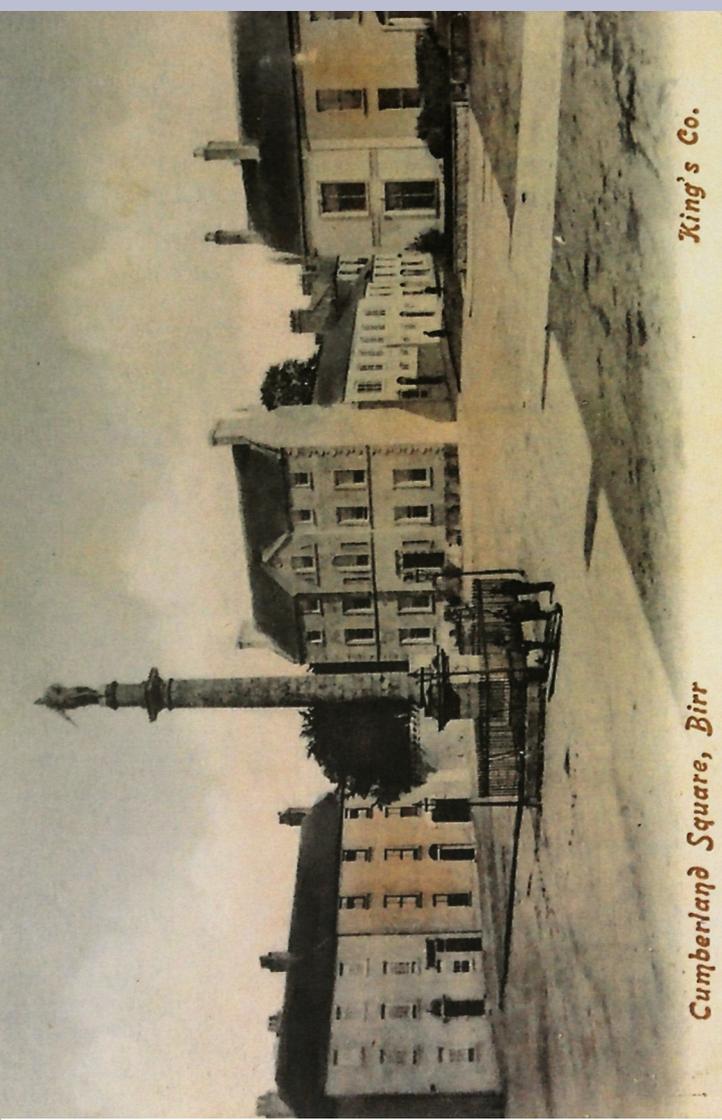

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Kilcormac	5.37	6.07	6.37	7.07	9.13	14.13	9.13 14.13		9.13	14.13	19.13		
Tullamore	5.45	6.00	6.15	6.30	6.45	7.00	7.30	9.35	14.35	9.35	14.35	19.35	
Kilbeggan	5.57	6.12	6.27	6.42	6.57	7.12	7.42	9.47	14.47	9.47	14.47	19.47	
Tyrellspass	6.02	6.17	6.32	6.47	7.02	7.17	7.47	9.52	14.52	9.52	14.57	19.52	
Rochfortbridge	6.07	6.22	6.37	6.52	7.07	7.22	7.52	9.57	14.57	9.57	14.55	19.57	
Milltownpass	6.12	6.27	6.42	6.57	7.12	7.27	7.57	10.02	15.02	10.02	15.02	20.02	
Kinnegad	6.10	6.25	6.40	6.55	7.10	7.25	7.40	8.10	10.15	10.15	15.15	20.15	
Clonard	6.15	6.30	6.45	7.00	7.15	7.30	7.45	8.15	10.20	10.20	15.20	20.20	
Enfield	6.30	6.45	7.00	7.15	7.30	7.45	8.00	8.30	10.30	10.30	15.30	20.30	

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

Extra Service during college term Sundays @ 17.25 departing Birr (serves UCD). Some changes will apply to Bank Holidays

Free travel passes are accepted in the 08:25 ex Portumna & 14:00 ex Birr services Monday to Friday and all weekend services apart from the 17:25 ex Birr Sunday, college term only, service to Dublin

Luggage carried at owners risk **Valid from 01/02/2016 Subject to change without notice**

FROM DUBLIN

<u>Departing from</u>	<u>Monday to Friday</u>								<u>Saturday</u>		<u>Sunday</u>		
Dublin Cathal Brugh Street	18.00								13.00	18.00	15.00	18.00	22.30
Dublin Ha'penny Bridge	16.10	16.30*	16.45	17.05*	17.15	17.30*	17.45	18.15					
Enfield	16.53	17.15	17.25	17.50	17.55	18.10	18.25	18.50	13.45	18.45	15.40	18.40	23.05
Clonard	17.07	17.25	17.40	18.05	18.05	18.25	18.40	19.05	14.00	19.00	15.55	18.55	23.15
Kinnegad	17.14	17.35	17.45	18.10	18.15	18.35	18.45	19.10	14.05	19.05	16.05	19.05	23.20
Milltownpass	17.25	17.45	17.55	18.15	18.25	18.45	18.55	19.20	14.15	19.15	16.15	19.15	23.25
Rochfortbridge	17.30	17.50	18.00	18.20	18.30	18.50	19.00	19.25	14.20	19.20	16.20	19.20	23.30
Tyrellspass	17.35	17.55	18.05	18.25	18.35	18.55	19.05	19.30	14.25	19.25	16.25	19.25	23.35
Kilbeggan	17.40	18.00	18.10	18.30	18.40	19.00	19.10	19.35	14.30	19.30	16.30	19.30	23.40
Tullamore	17.50	18.10	18.20	18.50	18.45	19.10	19.20	19.50	14.45	19.45	16.40	19.45	23.50
Kilcormac	18.15	18.45	19.10	19.45	20.10			15.10	20.10	17.00	20.05	24.15	
Birr	18.35	19.05	19.30	20.05	20.30			15.25	20.30	17.20	20.30	24.30	
Banagher	20.50								20.50				
Portumna	20.55								15.55	20.55	18.00	20.55	

*Bus terminates in Tullamore

Please note it may be necessary from time to time to alter departure times slightly to cater for varying passenger numbers

Extra service on Fridays departing Cathal Brugh Street at 13.00 & from Ha'penny Bridge at 13.10

Some changes apply to Bank Holidays Luggage carried at owners risk

Free travel passes accepted on the 17:15 service from Ha'penny Bridge and 18:00 from Cathal Brugh Street Monday to Friday

Valid from 01/02/2016 Subject to change without notice.

Times are approximate and depend on traffic

NAME THE PLACES

Can you identify the places in the photos below?

Answers on page ????

1 ESTD. 1902

2 DECEMBER 1990

3 1861.

4 1845

5 1820

6 1905

7 1747

8 1943

9 1823

10 ESTD. 1890

11 EST. 1913

12 Estd. 1821

13 1968

14 1894

15 1841

16 1954

17 1817

18 REBUILT. 1855

19 1962

20 1888

21 1995 - 1998 - 2002 - 2003

22 1800 - 1867

23 ROW. 1820

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The Shaughran

In November the Birr Young Men's Society produced *The Shaughran*, a play by the well-known dramatist Dion Boucicault in Oxmantown Hall. The King's County Chronicle praised the excellent dramatic talent that undoubtedly existed in Birr. "The Hall was crowded with an appreciative audience and in this congenial atmosphere the actors felt emboldened to put forth their best endeavours". Among the other Birr actors who took part was Fergus Coady who played the part of *The Shaughran* with 'joyous fun and abandon and who from the moment he arrived on the stage in his variegated garb the audience was convulsed with laughter'. Other locals who played leading roles were, Tom Talbot, Michael Madden, Joseph Bowes, Kathleen Cuddy, William Herson, John Shanahan and Mary Talbot.

Letter from Eamonn Bulfin

In May the Midland Tribune reported that Mrs. Bulfin of Derrinlough received a letter from her son, Eamonn, who was deported after the Rising to a prison in Stafford.

Dearest Mother,

I have at last secured some materials to write to you. I am glad to let you know that I am perfectly alright and not fretting. All I can say is that God has been very good to me. I would like if you would get a Mass said in my name in thanksgiving. I need not tell you how much I feel because you could not know what was happening, but it will all come right with God's help. So now don't worry yourself a bit, as when I get back to help you I will be a bigger and better man, God willing. I never in my life felt so homesick as in first ten days here.

We are allowed an hour and a half exercise each day and I do some in my cell to keep in form. We get a bath every week and a wash daily so we keep clean. I have been well attended to but a change of underclothes, socks and shirt would do splendid with some needles and thread. We do our own washing. Will set up a laundry when I get home. Some great ideas to develop.

Your loving son, Eamonn.

Board of Guardians

At the July meeting of Birr Workhouse Board of Guardians, Dr. Houlihan asked the Guardians to sanction the requisition of a dentist to attend to a patient with bad teeth. The Guardians replied that they would consider the matter when the doctor gave them the patient's name. The doctor gave her name as Margaret Cleary. The guardians noted that the information given was vague as there are lots of Margaret Clearys in the district. It was decided to seek more information.

Dr. Fogarty

Dr. Fogarty, Bishop of Killaloe, preaching in May referred to the Dublin troubles. He said it had been a long time since Ireland had such a great sorrow as she then had; "The Dublin troubles filled the country with grief and he was not going to trouble them with the denunciation of the unhappy young men who were responsible for the awful tragedy. Whatever their faults may be, let God be their merciful judge. This much must be said to their credit that they died bravely and unselfishly for what they believed - foolishly

indeed - was for the cause of Ireland. Let their spirits rest for the present in peace in the silence of eternity. The Government did not mean to be cruel or provocative, but from the very beginning of this lamentable occurrence every step they have taken is calculated to exasperate Irish sentiment most bitterly. Sir Edward Carson has been the root cause of all this trouble. He it was who schooled our unfortunate country into ideas and practices of rebellion." (Mid. Trib.)

Christmas in Birr

In December the King's County Chronicle reported that Christmas Eve had passed quietly in Birr. Business in the shops, despite the scarcity of provisions, was brisk. A large number of Christmas cards were sold and the post office had a busy time sorting parcels and cards. At midnight the town brass band played a hymn at various points with a pleasing and appropriate spirit. Numbers of people waited up to hear the music and to usher in the festival of the Nativity. Christmas Day opened cold but fine. The remnants of the snow of the previous week lent a seasonable aspect to the festival. Towards the afternoon the sun shone for a couple of hours and many people enjoyed a bracing walk in the country.

Christmas in the churches

Although overshadowed by the recent death of Dean Scanlon the services in the Catholic Church were marked by the usual solemnity that ushers in the great feast of the Nativity. The high altar was tastefully decorated and in conjunction with the renovated interior gave a beautiful appearance to the church. In the Church of Ireland the Feast of Christmas was marked by special services and special music. The organ was in the capable hands of Miss Byrne, the talented organist and the Rev. Mr. Patton preached.

Cinema in Birr

King's County Chronicle welcomed the opening of a cinema in Birr in October, stating that a long-felt want in Birr will be provided for within a week when the central and very conveniently situated premises known as 'The Chronicle' will be converted into a cosy and up-to-date Picture Hall. Practically all arrangements had been completed to render the Picture Hall in every way suitable to a popular cinema. Exits have been provided to meet the requirements of the urban authority. Luxurious tip up seats have been procured and a splendid cinema apparatus obtained. The very best pictures available will be screened including films in which the leading artistes of Europe and Transatlantic will figure.

Birr soldiers

During the War both local papers reported on the many locals who had been killed on the battlefield. The papers also welcomed home those on leave and the wounded. Among the many were: Private James Keeffe who was visiting his father Michael of Townsend St., Pte. Joseph Scully, wounded at the Battle of the Somme, was at home with his mother. Pte. John Kenny of the Connaught Rangers was home recovering from shell shock acquired in France. Pte. Thomas Athy, Leinster Regt. was back in Birr recuperating. He was awarded the DCM for bringing ammunition to the Front under heavy fire.

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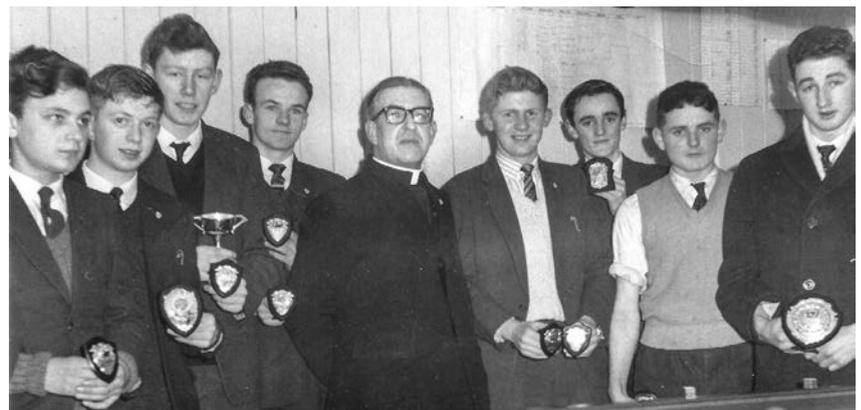
GAELSCOIL NA LAOCHRA



Back Row (L to R): Múinteoir Ailbhe, Henry, Hugo, Jake, Róisín, Tim, Elena, Luke, Charlotte, Muiris, Faye, Múinteoir Áine.
 Middle Row: Fia, Ru-Yun, Max, Eric, Tadgh, Robyn, Elliot, Olivia, Maebh, Freya.
 Front Row: Jamie, Yi-Xuun, Jack, Luke, Emma-Jane, Skye, Eamon, Naomi, Eva.



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Vintage Week.
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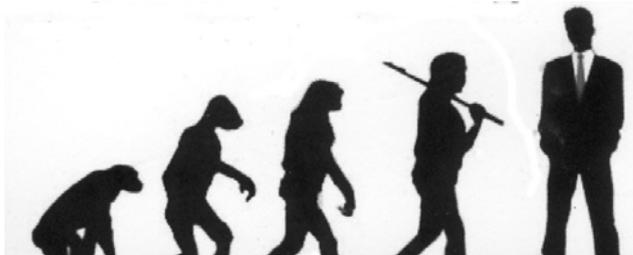
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Middle Row: Rachel Wynne, James Houlihan, Eabha O'Meara, Ryan Higgins, Liepa Marazaitė, Gary Shanahan, Anastasija Vasilevska, Charlie de Forge, Zuzanna Stolowska, Agne Silobrit, Cillian Sammon, Jenne Shobin.

Front Row: Rory Milne, Roisín Loughnane, Piotr Bulak, Orlagh O'Brien, Szymon Rosiak, Anna Slonecka, Mantas Seporaitis, Lucia Vaughan, Gregory Gwizdak, Emma Kelly.



6th Class

Back Row (L to R): Niah Spain, Oisín Cooke, Nicole Maughan, Brody Larkin, Megan Kinsella Bergin, Ella King, Meg Delaney, Simon Feehan, Karolina Rodzon, Alex Kinahan, Ms Callanan –Teacher.

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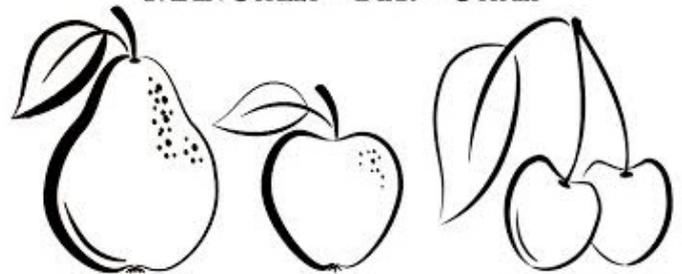
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Middle Row: Cathal Mooney, Michael Conneely, Ronan Molloy, Ciaran Coughlan, Nataniel Szoma, Hughie Doyle, Dylan Kelly.

Front Row: Tommy Shaw, Ethan Killeen, Colm Flanagan, Jack Abbott, Adam Feighery, Aronas Krasickas, Jakub Niesporek.



6th Class

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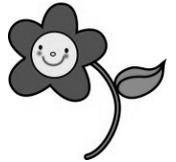
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April 2016 Exhibitors at St. Brendan's C S's art exhibition in Birr Theatre & Arts Centre.

Grace Fanning, Erin O'Meara, Grainne Heagney, Grainne Lyons, Marta Tomaszewska, Ella Feenane, Grainne Moyles, Ella Coughlan, Meg Ryan, Clodagh Hanniffy, Andrea Cooke, Curtis Reynolds-Hensey, Keelan Burke, Cassandra Mahon, Louise Makim, Conor Gath, Laura Maloney, Melissa de Kruiff, Darrell Lally, Doireann Erritty, Ashling Larkin, Sian Cooke, Ryan Lowry, Lauren Doonan, Darren Scully, Emer Troy, Alex Brady, Leah Drought, Tara Fanning, Isabelle Moriarty, Alicja Piotroska, Michael King, Brad Hansbury, Chloe Walsh, Jordan Beswick, Daniel Kilick, Michael Hand, Ciara Murphy, Rachel Mather, Luke Hoffler, Tara Connolly, Emma Mulrooney, Rachel Kealey, Aoibhe Whelahan, Emma Behan, Jack Carroll, Cillian O'Callaghan, Annie Nicholl, Michael Moriarty, Sophie Parkinson, Roisin Smyth, Rebecca McCarthy, Kathrine Revill, Caoimhe Claffey, Niamh Lyons.



Holocaust survivor Tomi Reichental with Aoife Hctor and Naomi Cleare on a recent visit to St. Brendan's.



Maria Babu pictured with Ms M Hyland, Fr. Pat Gilbert (Chaplain) and Ms M Loughnane, Principal. Maria came first in Religion in Ireland, in her Junior Cert exam.



Fred Webb (greatgrandson of Eamon Bulfin who raised the Irish Republic flag over the GPO) raised the National Flag on Proclamation Day.

Paddy Duffy, Cllr John Leahy, Joan Hogan, Sgt. Michael Dardis, Minister of State Marcella Corcoran-Kennedy T.D., Cllr John Clendennen, Fred Webb, Ming Loughnane (Principal), Sr. Marie McNamara, Cllr Peter Ormond, Cllr John Carroll, Carol Nolan T.D., Jimmy Shortt, Fr. Pat Gilbert, Brian Kennedy, Brian Hensey (Deputy-Principal).



Minister of State Deputy Marcella Corcoran-Kennedy TD pictured with Class 3.5. her visit was part of their C.S.P.E. Project

Back Row (L to R): Niall Cunningham, Mark Hogan, Luke Barry, Kevin Hennon-Maher, David Slowikoski, Ben Larkin.

Middle Row: Amy O'Donoghue, Chloe O'Donoghue, Shauna Duffy, Sarah Pingree, Kate Corbett, Elaine Mullins, Jack Malone, Pat Gilligan, Johnny Corboy, Luke Maher.

Front Row: Ciara Murdock, Michelle Carroll, Nikolas Turtak, Marcella Corcoran-Kennedy, Shane Murtagh, Trudy Feenane, Aoife Hctor.

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BIRR METHODIST CHURCH

This has been a year of great interaction between Birr Methodist and Church of Ireland churches. This is very much in keeping with the Covenant between the Methodist Church in Ireland and the Church of Ireland signed in 2002 by former Birr minister and President of the Methodist Church in Ireland, Rev. Winston Graham. This year's bicentenary celebrations in the Church of Ireland have been enjoyed by Methodists. On 3 July the Church of Ireland treated us to a meal in the County Arms to thank us for having them worship with us while their church had been redecorated in preparation for the bicentenary. The highlight was their Flower Festival in the end of July, designed by Richard Haslam from Birr and Ethel Mitchell from Moate. The theme "Let's celebrate" lent itself to a beautiful and most interesting commemoration of 200 years of St. Brendan's Church of Ireland and its role in the community during that time. The varied aspects of social history portrayed included an arrangement by Ruth Haslam, Richard's cousin-in-law. "The Adelaide Hospital Service" was a reminder that once a year Adelaide nurses travelled all the way from Dublin just to worship in the church – or was there a hidden agenda? "Christenings" by Elisabeth Guest included a 100 year-old pram from Birr Castle. Methodists in Birr have continued to be involved in Birr Churches Together ecumenical events, including meetings with Claudia Meium from the Irish School of Ecumenics. She has been facilitating their Lundt project to see how closely the three main churches in Birr can work together. The three participated in a series of Exploration of Scripture in October/November led by local clergy. We were delighted to listen to Archbishop Kieran O'Reilly speaking on "how to

read the Bible". Some of us enjoyed the BCT concert by Lancashire Country/Gospel singer Michael J. Ramplin with Martin Dawson in St. Brendan's Church of Ireland. In September, Birr Methodist welcomed the Methodist Women in Ireland of the Midlands and Southern District to their Autumn Rally. The speaker was Karen Gillespie who had travelled in a Methodist group to mission projects in Southern Africa simply to learn from those they met. Because AIDS has affected a whole generation so much, many children are reared by grandmothers or by older siblings. Carers are supported by the projects. Birr Methodist helped out on the Methodist Church in Ireland stand at the Ploughing Championships in Tullamore in September. In October former minister, Rev. Rosemary Lindsay, was warmly welcomed back to preach at the annual Harvest Thanksgiving. Birr Methodists sympathised with June Eades and her family when her mother, local preacher, Irene Armitage, who was living with her and her family, died suddenly and very peacefully on 5 July.

*Má thugann tú taitneamh don Tiarna,
tabharfaidh Seisean duit mian do chroí.
Take delight in the LORD, and
He will give you the desires of your heart.*

Ps. 37:4

God bless, Clodagh Yambasu (Rev.)



Arthur Guest and family and Rev. Clodagh Yambasu at the Methodist Church in Ireland stand at the National Ploughing Championships, Screggan, Tullamore.



Below left is Elisabeth Guest's flower arrangement on the theme of "Baptism" at the Church of Ireland Flower Festival whilst right is Ruth Haslam's floral arrangement "The Adelaide Hospital Service".



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BIRR CHURCH OF IRELAND

St Brendan's Church of Ireland parish in Birr has been celebrating its Bicentenary in 2016, with a number of events beginning in the spring which will continue into the autumn. One of the highlights so far has been the Cantata, "Holy Spirit, Breath of God" which was performed in the church on the Feast of Pentecost. It was composed by Ruth Beasley, with words compiled and written by her sister, Audrey Francis. The soloists were Yvonne O'Toole, Breffni Fitzpatrick, Derek Fanning, and Jonathan Carter. Rosalind Fanning was the narrator. The Birr Choral Society, directed for the occasion by Thomas Charles Marshall, from St. Ann's Church, Dawson Street, Dublin, did themselves proud, as did the instrumentalists. It was a spiritually uplifting experience which will remain in the minds and hearts of all who attended.

Another highlight of the Bicentenary year has been the magnificent Flower Festival on the August Bank Holiday weekend, with many floral displays surrounding the historical artefacts that told the story of St Brendan's Church and the town of Birr. We are so grateful to Richard Haslam and Ethel Mitchell, who orchestrated the entire festival, along with the many people who contributed individual displays, and helped in so many ways.

On Tuesday, 15th March, George Watkins passed away in his 97th year. George was a longtime resident of Elm Grove Nursing Home in Birr, after many years as manager of Fayle's shop in Birr. The funeral service was held in Birr Church on Wednesday, 16th March with the Archdeacon officiating. The sermon was delivered by Canon Ruth Gill, a longtime friend of George and his late wife, Florrie. George was buried in Clonohill Cemetery, next to Florrie. Sincere condolences to his nephew, Ray Dempsey, and niece, Violet Dreaper, and his family and friends.

Bishop Kenneth Kearon came to Birr for Confirmation on Sunday, 17th April. Candidates from Birr, Clonfert, Shinrone, Roscrea, and Cloughjordan Groups of Parishes were confirmed together in a joyful celebration of the Holy Eucharist, in which the candidates took an active role in leading parts of the service.

On Sunday, 5th June, Anna Lynch was baptized in Birr Church by Canon Ruth Gill. Anna is the daughter of Valerie and Darragh Lynch, and granddaughter of Hilda and Raymond Colbourne. Her Godparents are David Colbourne and Brenda Lynch. Lochlain William Molloy was baptized by Archdeacon Carney on Sunday the 7th of August. Lochlain is the son of Julie Powell and Brendan Molloy, and is baby brother to Charlene and Darcey. We had one wedding this year: On the 5th of August, Heather Hastings (granddaughter of Rhoda Gill) and Colm Blennerhassett were married in Birr Church. Congratulations to all.

The ever-crafty Joan Fairbrother designed and made the



new Mothers' Union Banner for Birr branch. It was unfurled for the first time at the Mothers' Union Diocesan Service on Pentecost, 15th May in Cloughjordan Church.

The annual Birr Summer Fete was held on the 19th June in Oxmantown School. Everyone had a good day in spite of the weather, which could at best be described as a deluge. One of the highlights of the Fete this year was the demonstration of agility competitions by the Revd. Janet White Spinner and her poodles.

Once again Willie and Phyllis Wolfe organised our fundraising dance, which was held in Dooly's Hotel on Thursday, 8th September. It was an enjoyable evening, and over €1,000 was raised for the church repair fund!

On Friday, the 9th of September, the Archdeacon took part in a Memorial Service held on the townland of Ballyeighan, south of Birr, at the site of a cross erected in memory of Captain Lancelot Studholme of the Leinster Regiment, who was killed at the Battle of the Somme exactly 100 years earlier. He died trying to rescue his wounded batman, who had been one of the workers on his estate. He is also commemorated on a plaque in our church in Birr.

On Wednesday, 14th September, Michael J. Ramplin and Martin Dawson returned to Birr for a Country Music Concert, this time held in the Church of Ireland in Birr.

Birr has been a hotbed of ecumenical co-operation for over forty years. This year we put a more formal organisation in place, with the launch of 'Birr Churches Together', an organisation to help us implement the 'Lund Principle' - that we would do everything together except for those things our consciences won't permit. Our co-ordinator is Claudia Meium, who is helping clergy and lay people from all three congregations in Birr to find new ways we can work together for the good of the people in Birr and encourage the positive impact of the Gospel. This new endeavour carries the spirit of ecumenism in Birr a long way forward. Please pray for our parishes as we move into new ways to be the People of God together.

Archdeacon Wayne Carney



One of the magnificent displays at the Flower Festival.



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Christmas and every best
wish for 2017.

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ST. BRENDAN'S PARISH

This has been a busy year for Birr Parish. The year commenced with the Peace Mass, on New Year's Day.

This was preceded by the celebration of Christmas 2015, with capacity congregations at all Masses.

As the year progressed Fr. David Carroll P.P. and Fr. Michael Reddan SVD continued the process of adapting to a two priest parish. This had commenced following a special Pastoral Council meeting in August, of the previous year. As part of this process Joan Hogan was appointed Sacramental Coordinator to assist with the implementation of the Reconciliation, First Communion and Confirmation Programmes.

The Pastoral Council in conjunction with the Diocesan Plan have also explored the possibility of training people for lay led liturgies and lay reception of funerals. The appointment of a funeral team is also under continuing development.

St. Brendan's Parish was lucky to avail of the services of two priests from India, Fr Roque Gonsalves, a Pallotine during July and Fr. Joseph Vellanal, a Carmelite, who will help at weekends for a year. Fr. Colm Mannion O.P. was a welcome visitor to his native parish during the summer and he is wished well in the conclusion of his studies in the USA.



Following over a year and a half without a Bishop parishioners were delighted to hear of the appointment of Fr. Fintan Monaghan, pictured above, of the Tuam Archdiocese, by Pope Francis, on 29th July. Bishop Fintan was born in Tullamore in 1967 and is the first Offaly Bishop of Killaloe, since Birr's Bishop Thomas McRedmond in 1904. He was ordained in 1991 for the Tuam Archdiocese and served 13 years on the teaching staff of Saint Jarlath's College. For the past 10 years the new Bishop was diocesan secretary for the Archdiocese along with being chaplain in Saint Jarlath's. His episcopal ordination was in SS. Peter and Paul's Cathedral, Ennis on Sunday 25th September. We look forward to working closely with Bishop Fintan in the years ahead, as he faces the challenges of today's church.

As a parish we are also grateful to Fr. Des Hillery P.P. Nenagh, who acted as Diocesan Administrator while we awaited the appointment of a new bishop.

During the year Fr. David Carroll P.P. administered the Sacrament of Confirmation at two ceremonies in St. Brendan's Church. There were two First Communions in Birr and one in Carrig. Great credit is due to the teachers of our five parish primary schools and parish programme for the splendid preparation of the candidates in all cases.

On a sad note we experienced an above average number of deaths in the parish this year. Sympathy is expressed to all bereaved. It was decided by a Pastoral Council review to continue celebrating all weekday funeral Masses at 11 am, with the cancellation of the 10 am Mass on the days of funerals. We also remember former curate Fr. John Slattery, pictured right, who passed to eternal life during the year.



With so many old buildings in our care it was essential to carry out extensive remedial work this year. Plastering and pointing work was necessary on the houses in John's Mall, as the wet winter had caused considerable infiltration of dampness in both houses. Work was also required at St. Brendan's Church to remedy water damage to a small section of the ceiling and bell tower. We are grateful for the continued support of our parishioners in harsh financial times.



Renovation work taking place at the Presbytery, John's Mall, during the summer of 2016.

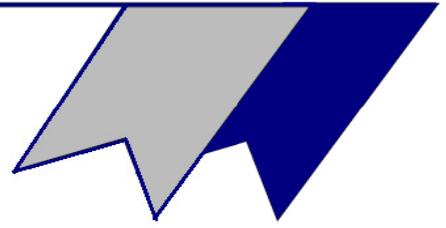
As the year draws to a close we congratulate our Church of Ireland friends on the bicentenary of their church. It was a joy to join their celebrations in 2016.

Next year we hope to celebrate the 200th anniversary of the laying of the foundation stone of our own St. Brendan's Church, on 1st August 2017.

The clergy and parishioners of St. Brendan's Parish send best wishes to all our parishioners wherever in the world they read this report. May 2017 bring peace and good health to all.

Thomas W. Enright

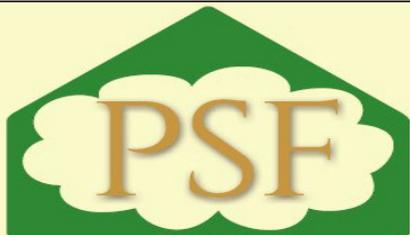
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CELEBRATING 50 YEARS OF MARRIAGE IN 2016



Brendan and Patricia Hogan, Presentation Place,
who were married in St. Rynagh's Church, Banagher
on 11th April 1966.



Brendan & Josie Larkin, Burkes Hill,
who were married in St. Brendan's Church, Birr
on 6th September, 1966.



Padraig & Dina O'Meara, High Street,
who were married in St. Brendan's Church, Birr
on 28th September 1966.

CELEBRATING 65 YEARS OF MARRIAGE IN 2016



John & Connie Gormley, Woodland Park,
who were married in the Church of SS Michael and John,
Lr. Exchange Street, Dublin
on 11th Sept 1951

Congratulations



**Shona Tarrant
& Neil Kennedy**



**Susan Coughlan
& Stephen Shiels**



**Sinead Bruce
& Niall Sullivan**



**Carolann O'Callaghan
& Ronan Farrell**



**Lynn Kirwan
& Shane Noonan**



**Sarai Leith Youngson
& Francis Watkins**



**Claire Ryan
& Kevin Duffy**



**Katie Fanneran
& Eoghan Grogan**



**Tamar Carr-Martindale
& Tristan Dooley**



**Sinead Teehan
& John Cashen**

Weddings 2016



**Sheila Parnell
& Barry Murphy**



**Jamie Dooley
& Mark McCormack**



**Nikola Bracken
& Timothy O'Connor**



**Caoimhe Gibbons
& Conor Gath**



**Deirdre Spain
& Aran Young**



**Angie Mellsoy
& Brian Kearney**



**Veronica O'Sullivan
& Liam Brummell**



**Orla Dalton
& William Dolan**



**Alma Mannion
& Jonathan Barr**



**Caroline Cashen
& Kevin O'Meara**



**Aimee Milne
& Pdraig O'Donovan**

CONGRATULATIONS

TO THESE COUPLES WHO CELEBRATED THEIR

40TH WEDDING ANNIVERSARY



Liz & Bill Scully,
Fortal, Birr



Margaret & Michael Deane,
Killeen, Birr



Pat & Shamie Brien,
Presentation Place, Birr



Cora & Jackie Dunne,
Brosna



Enjoying a boat trip on the River Shannon are

1. Jacinta Mitchell, Judy O'Neill, May Kirwan,
2. Dolores Hegarty, 3. Mary Nolan, Mary Garahy, Cepta Cooke,
4. Dessie McDonagh.

BIRR ACTIVE RETIREMENT GROUP

Our Group celebrated Christmas by having Christmas Dinner in Kelly's Pub which was enjoyed by all.

Our twice monthly meetings resumed again in February 2016. We have a new venue for meetings, Fr. David Carroll P.P. kindly offered us the use of the Conference Room, situated at the rear of St. Brendans R.C. Church.

Two veterans who served in the United Nations for six months in the Congo gave an interesting talk of their experiences. We invited Ban Garda Grace Heffernan to one of our meetings to speak about safety / security in the home and also when out shopping.

Some of our members attended Computer Classes for Basic Computing, e-mail, Internet, etc.

We travelled by coach to Powerscourt House in Wicklow for a day trip and combined a visit to Glendalough on our return journey.

We sadly lost two of our long standing members during the year, Imelda King R.I.P. and Betty O'Dwyer R.I.P.

We also helped Sr. Roberta Delaney celebrate her 86th birthday by presenting her with a beautiful cake.

We arranged a networking get together where we invited Banagher, Clareen, and Lorrha active retirement groups to join us for food, music and dance in Birr Golf Club. Thanks to Nigel Johnson and his staff who kindly prepared the finger food on the night. Entertainment was provided by popular entertainer, "Rock on Paddy". It was a very enjoyable night. We arranged an afternoon outing on the River Shannon to have lunch on board a boat that departed from Portumna This was provided by Joe and Avril O'Keefe. After a couple of hours we alighted in Terryglass where we were driven to O'Keefe's Country House to have a delicious four course home-cooked meal with wine. Our hired coach picked us up and brought us home safely to Birr.

We invite new members to join our group but you must be over fifty.

BIRR BOOK CLUB

In 2016, we have again read a wide variety of books.

One of the highlights was a novel by Anthony Doerr. 'All the Light We Cannot See' is set in Germany and France before and during the Nazi Occupation. It tells the story of a blind French girl and a reluctant German soldier, whose paths collide as both try to survive the devastation of World War II. A compelling and sometimes unbearably sad read, this was popular with all the members.

'The Girl on the Train' by Paula Hawkins received a less enthusiastic response. Set in suburban London, it is a dark, psychological thriller narrated by three women who are implicated in a murder. Although it has garnered huge sales and critical success, the overwhelming reaction from the book club was disappointment. A great idea but after the cracking beginning, a big let down and most couldn't identify or care about the characters or plot.

In June, we tackled 'Middlemarch' by George Eliot. This eight

hundred page classic is a challenging read. Written in 1872, 'Middlemarch' is a study of life among the upper and middle classes of a rural community in England. Although a few were unable to struggle past the early pages, it proved a surprising success with many. 'Extraordinary', 'the best book ever written' and 'a work of genius' were some of the accolades it received. A memorable and outstanding novel. Other titles we read this year included 'The Weird Sisters' by Eleanor Brown, 'I Served the King of England' by Bohumil Hrabal, 'The Miniaturist' by Jessie Burton, 'Lila' by Marilynne Robinson and 'Cutting for Stone' by Abraham Verghese. The book club has now been running for fourteen years. Meetings are informal and sociable and we're always happy to welcome anyone interested in books. Each month, our book choice is posted in the Midland Tribune Birr Notes. Contact number is 086 3629183. We meet on the second Monday of every month.

CONGRATULATIONS TO CARRIG/RIVERSTOWN COMMUNITY HALL CELEBRATING 25 YEARS



Carrig/Riverstown Community Hall Committee - 1991

Front Row: Fr. John Kelly R.I.P., Judy Tobin, Angela English, Johnny Smyth, Margaret O'Brien, Ann McCarthy, Marie Parkes.

Middle row: Tom Egan, Tony Doorley, Carmel Larkin, Mary Keeshan R.I.P., Una Larkin, Mary Delahunty, Eileen Smith, Tom Smith, Tony Dargan.

Back Row: John English, Tom Regan, Martin O'Brien, Brendan Keeshan R.I.P., Pat Connolly, Tom Smyth, Mike King, Jack Kennedy, Brendan Keeshan R.I.P.

In early February 1986 two representatives from every organisation in the Carrig-Riverstown-Killeen area were invited to a meeting in Carrig N.S. Only one topic was on the agenda that night – the feasibility of building a community hall in the parish. Such was the support for building a community hall that night, a public meeting was organised for the 26th February. Tom Egan chaired this meeting and many of those attending volunteered to serve on the committee. Tom was subsequently elected our first chairperson. Thus began four years of work to realise a dream most of us had of building not just a community hall but a community of people in Carrig/Riverstown. For many,

many months we searched for a suitable site to build the hall and eventually chose a site beside Carrig N.S. Canon Shalloo agreed to sell this "Small Field" if we could replace it with a strip similar in size behind the school. Billy Peters who owned the land bordering the school plot agreed to do so. Building and funding the construction of the hall went hand in hand over the next few years. The committee had decided in early 1986 that whatever building work was undertaken it would remain debt free. This promise was adhered to by every committee over the past 25 years.

Last December we celebrated our 25th Anniversary since the opening of the community centre. The celebrations began



At the 25 Year Celebrations are Tom Smyth, Phylis and Noel Byrne.



Celebrating Carrig Community Hall's 25th Anniversary are Bill and Mary Taylor.



Enjoying a night out in Carrig Community Hall are Geoff Harding and Fr. Michael Reddan SVD.

with Social Dancing on Thursday 3rd December. Organised on the first Thursday of every month by Johnny Smyth and Joe Ryan, couples came from far and near to celebrate the 25th Anniversary to the music of Sam O'Doherty from Bansha. They had a record attendance of 130 people on the night. Refreshments were provided by a catering committee who also ran a raffle on the night. This function was a great success.

Our new drama group, "The CRK Drama Group", set up in late September, 2015, played to full houses on Friday and Saturday, 4th and 5th December respectively. Approximately, 430 people attended the production of Jimmy Keary's, 3 act comedy, "To Close to Home".

The Celebration Party

Invitations were sent out to all in the parish who regularly attend this function each year. Past members of the first committees were also invited to celebrate this auspicious occasion with us. Catering was provided by Parker's, Riverstown. Jack Kennedy was given the honour of cutting the 25th Anniversary cake to the acclaim of all present. The anniversary cake was baked by Sinéad Bergin. Music on the night was provided by Joe Cleary (Ballingarry). A monster raffle was held during the break and I think most of those present went home with a prize or two.

This annual card game always attracts a great crowd and this year was no exception. Progressive 25 is now the longest running event in the 25 year history of the hall. This year's card game was run by Tony Doorley, Jack Kennedy, Tim Carey and Michael Bourke. The attendance on this occasion was excellent and way up in the number of tables they get



Michael Deane, Fr. Pat Greed and John O'Brien enjoy a social occasion in Carrig Community Hall.

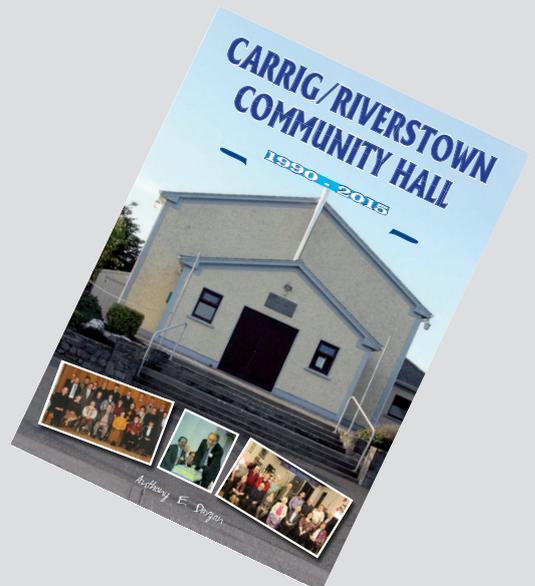


Jack Kennedy cuts the 25th Anniversary cake, watched by Johnny Smyth, Chairperson of the Carrig/Riverstown Hall Committee.

the usual Tuesday nights.

Our anniversary week-end of events was a magnificent success. Approximately 700 people attended the different functions organised by the committee. We are privileged to have this wonderful amenity in our parish. We are thankful for the continued support of the people of Carrig-Riverstown-Killeen and the surrounding areas. The great initiative shown by the committees in the early years has been a wonderful success, in particular, to their great efforts in finding a suitable site for the hall, financing the project and making sure that the committees over the 25 years and indeed the parish did not have a debt to service. We will continue to welcome all organisations, committees and groups to use the facilities over the coming years and hopefully the hall will continue to be a place that the whole community can enjoy coming to and providing all types of educational, cultural and sporting activities for the young and not so young in our parish.

A book on the history of Carrig/Riverstown Community Hall 1990 – 2015 was launched in November 2016.





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BIRR THEATRE & ARTS CENTRE

Can someone please tell us where that year went?

2016 was another thrilling year at Birr Theatre & Arts Centre! Not only did we celebrate 16 years in business but we also had a programme bursting with theatre, music, dance, festivals, art and more.

We kicked the year off in some style with Sharon Shannon, Des Bishop, the trio of Liam O'Maonlaí, Kevin Burke & Tim Edey and stalwarts of the Irish music scene, The Fureys playing to adoring patrons throughout the month of January. Our music offerings spanned from classical to folk this year, from jazz to alternative and everything in between with fabulous Simon & Garfunkel tribute act Bookends, Duke Special, Luka Bloom, Don Baker & Clara Rose, Susannah de Wrixon, new Irish traditional super group Project West, Frankie Gavin & De Dannan, Cathy Davey and one of our favourite performers Vladimir Jablovokov all paying a visit.

One of our biggest events of the year was *The Magic of The Movies* performed by the Irish Chamber Orchestra (ICO) in October. Patrons were treated to a wonderful programme including themes from Schindler's List, The Godfather, Cinema Paradiso, Harry Potter and Umbrellas of Cherbourg. On Valentine's Night, local opera star John Molloy, with special guest Sandra Oman, thrilled a packed house with the



Mundy

specially commissioned show, *Romanza*.

There was also plenty for theatre lovers with *The Matchmaker* starring Jon Kenny and Mary McEvoy selling out in May. Jean Farrell's beloved one-woman show, *The Six Marys*, was back by popular demand in June while fresh from the Dublin stage, *The Poor Little Boy with No Arms*, was definitely food for thought in February. And, after wowing crowds in Birr a few years ago, Callback Theatre were also back with their beautiful show, *Fred & Alice*.

We were also delighted to be part of a number of festivals again in 2016. *Scripts Ireland's Playwriting Festival* saw three specially selected playwrights come to Birr for a week of mentoring with Eugene O'Brien in July. Imelda Carroll, from Wexford, claimed the title of 'Best Play' with her effort, *Tiger*. Other events during the week included the *Waking The Feminists* themed talk, *Changing the Ink* chaired by journalist Mary Kenny, The Literary Loft, pop-up plays and a

children's playwriting workshop.

We were also delighted to host a number of events for the 7th annual OFFline Offaly Film Festival in October while it was a special year for the Hullabaloo! Offaly's Children's Arts Festival as we celebrated 10 years of co-ordinating the event with Offaly County Council.

Birr Vintage Week & Arts Festival was a huge success at the theatre this year with Birr's own Mundy selling out on the opening night while, our lunchtime theatre offering, *Charolais, The Universe from Birr* with Professor Peter Gallagher and Birr Stage Guild's *Sowing The Wind* were all huge hits with audiences.



Sisters of the Rising

In this special centenary year, we also had a packed 1916 Commemoration Programme. It began with the performance of *Sisters of the Rising* by local playwright and actor Christiane O'Mahony in May. Birr Stage Guild's *Sowing The Wind* was also a sell-out while we also hosted one of the key events of the Offaly 2016 programme with the premiere of *Faithful Rising*, the landmark documentary about the man who raised the Irish Republic Flag at the GPO during Easter Week, Éamonn Bulfin. Then, it was the turn of *The Big Fellow*, a play examining the relationship between Michael Collins and his biographer Frank O'Connor, followed in November by *Children of the Revolution*, a special concert featuring descendants of the 1916 rebels which brought the special programme to a wonderful end. We also partnered with Offaly 2016 to produce a booklet, *Drama in Birr: Oxmantown Hall 1889 to 1916*, by Margaret Hogan, recording life onstage and offstage in the town during that fateful period of Irish history.

2016 also saw Phase One of the restoration of the façade of the building with much needed repairs to the window frames, sills and woodwork. Phase Two will get underway in 2017 with continued fundraising. We are incredibly grateful to all those who have donated to date.

Birr Theatre & Arts Centre is a community enterprise by a voluntary committee employing six people. This year intern Connor Keaveney joined the team of Emma Nee Haslam, Mary O'Dwyer, Anne Coughlan, Rebecca Kelly, Fernando Vieira and David Weymes.

The theatre acknowledges the support from its voluntary ushers and front of house team; Offaly County Council, The Arts Council, Pobal Community Service Programme for ongoing funding and you, the audience, for whom the facility exists. We hope you enjoyed the year at Birr Theatre & Arts Centre and look forward to welcoming you soon and showing you to your seat!

BIRR COMHALTAS



Jim O' the Mills and family
at the Comhaltas concert.

Birr Comhaltas has had another busy and successful year with its membership expanding and its calendar of events growing by the year.

In December last we were very glad to accept an invitation to provide music and dance for the D'lights of Birr concert and the contribution made by us was very warmly received. In March we had our annual concert in the Birr Theatre & Arts Centre and with our wonderful guests of Michael O'Raghallaigh and Jim O' the Mills and his family the show was a resounding success and clearly demonstrated the deep well of musical talent which we have in our midst. Other guests at our concert included the latest musical prodigy, Ademar O'Connor from Edenderry who demonstrated his skills on the accordion, fiddle and banjo. We also had our own talented young man in Luke Maher from Clareen, along with many other musicians singers and dancers.

Our music classes are going from strength to strength under the guidance of David Kinsella and as the demand has grown, the number of classes has expanded to meet that demand. Those classes have become very popular and have provided a very unique opportunity for our youth to be taught the skills of Irish traditional music by one of our finest musicians. These classes take place every Wednesday evening at the County Arms hotel, during term time, and any enquiries can be directed to David Kinsella at davidkinsella773@gmail.com or on 087 656 7238

As we have come to expect, a number of our members once again made it to the finals of the All-Ireland Fleadh in Ennis in August. Winners included Roisin Kinsella, Whistle Airs, Under 12 years.

We also congratulate Mick Naylor who made it to the all-Ireland final in the senior Bodhran competition on his first ever time to enter the competition.

In October we had our annual Trad for Trocaire fundraising session and this was kindly hosted by Kelly's pub in Green Street. This is a very worthy cause and is always a highlight of our annual calendar of events. It was a very successful and enjoyable night with the added bonus of raising a substantial sum of money for Trocaire.

Throughout the year we have regular music sessions on the first Friday of each month. These are held in rotation amongst a number of different pubs in town and are a guaranteed night of fun and enjoyment with the finest of traditional music.

The timetable and schedule of these sessions can be found on our website birrcomhaltas.net and also on our Facebook page, Birr Comhaltas. These websites are regularly updated and also provide a very useful resource for all interested in our traditional music and dance.



Music and fun at the session

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Dr. Ian Cubbin, John Hopkins University, Liverpool spoke on Medicines used in Birr Workhouse during Vintage Week. Pictured at the event are Front: Niki Cubbin, Margaret Hogan, Dr. Ian Cubbin, Bridget Barber, Gerry Hoare. Back: Brian Pey, Brian Kennedy, Jimmy Shortt, Paul Barber.



Birr Historical Society held 'Offaly Reflections on 1916' in May. Pictured are Front: Elizabeth Fogarty, Brian Pey, Minister of State Marcella Corcoran-Kennedy T.D. Tom Fahey, Margaret Hogan, Back: Ger Cooke, Kenny Cooke, Brian Kennedy.



Pictured at the talk on Thomas McDonagh to Birr Historical Society, in March are seated (L to R) Maura Brennan, Roisin Brennan, Seamus Kinsella, Luke Maher. Standing are Ann O'Connor, Brian Kennedy May Casey, Jackie Dunne, Willie Loughnane and Margaret Hensey.

BIRR HISTORICAL SOCIETY

The aim of the Society is to promote the town of Birr and its surrounds and to keep alive the strong sense of historical tradition which we have in the area. If you have an interest in local history, and even if you do not, why not come along to some of the meetings and you may be pleasantly surprised.

We moved to a new venue for our meetings last December and would like to acknowledge the Loughnane Family and the staff of The County Arms Hotel for their help and assistance to us which is greatly appreciated. Birr Historical Society meet in the County Arms Hotel on the third Monday of every month from September to May at 8 p.m.

We presented a wide and varied programme of talks during the season. As we moved into 2016 there was a strong emphasis on celebrating the 100th Anniversary of the 1916 Easter Rising.

This process began in October 2015 when President, Brian Kennedy spoke about the "The Century leading up to 1916". The talk officially launched our commemoration of this great historical event.

November brought us Committee member Margaret Hogan who spoke on "1915- The Year that led to 1916". This was a very important year as Margaret explained because it lay between the beginning of World War 1 and the Easter Rising. Both events were to affect Birr and its surrounds in many different ways.

In December, we held our now annual Christmas Dinner which was well attended and enjoyed by all. December also gave us Martin Roberts who confused many people who thought they knew Birr, with his series of aerial photographs. His talk entitled "Birr- A Bird's Eye View" featured pictures taken from the air in both hot air balloons and microlites.

2016 opened with Caiman O'Brien who spoke about "The History of Kilcolman", this talk brought great support from Kilcolman and the wider Coolderry area on the night.

In March, May Casey of Cloughjordan Heritage Centre gave a very informative talk entitled "The 1916 Leader, Thomas McDonagh" During the course of the evening St. Brendan's Community School Traditional Band consisting of Roisin Brennan, Máire Brennan, Luke Maher and Seamus Kinsella played a number of tunes keeping in the theme of the night. February saw Sr. Kathleen Minogue, RSM speak about "The 175th Anniversary of the arrival of the Sisters of Mercy in Birr". Sr. Kathleen spoke about Mother McAuley's arrival to the town, the circumstances surrounding her arrival, the building of the Convent and other events during their 175 years in the town.

During April, Stephen Callaghan gave a very interesting talk on "The Old St. Brendan's Church and Graveyard". He informed the audience on the history of the Church and also

many of the interesting people buried there.

In keeping with the theme of the 1916 celebrations the May meeting covered the topic of "Reflections of Offaly People on the 1916 Rising". Over 100 people attended to hear Michael Hanna speak about letters written by his uncle Wesley Hanna from Limerick. Wesley was in Dublin at the time of the Rising and recalled his experience in vivid detail. Offaly Heritage Officer Amanda Pedlow spoke on the recollections of John Jolly. Margaret Hogan contributed the story of Birr woman Caitlin Kingston-Brugha while Brian Pey covered the history of Eamon Bulfin who rose the flag of the Irish Republic over the G.P.O. Brian Kennedy spoke about John Cooke, a Barrack Warden from Crinkle and civilian casualty of the Rising. Tom Fahey recalled the story of his uncle Peter Fahey (formerly of Mill St. Birr) accidentally shot in Dublin by a stray bullet and finally Elizabeth Fogarty read from the diary of Birr nurse Geraldine Fitzgerald. Once again the St. Brendan's Community School Traditional Band did us the honour of entertaining all on a most enjoyable night.

The May meeting also marked our A.G.M. All executive positions and committee members were re-elected to serve another year in office. Due to the inclement weather in June and July our activities were quiet but August brought us to life again with Vintage Week and Heritage Week occurring in this month.

Our contribution to Vintage Week gave us Dr. Ian Cubbins, of John Hopkins University, Liverpool who spoke to us about the "Study of Cures and Medicines used by Pharmacies and Birr Workhouse"

During National Heritage Week 2016, Brian Kennedy and Jimmy Shortt led a leisurely walk from Emmet Square to Market Square where we reminisced about the history, the shops and the people who lived and worked there, there was a again a wonderful turnout for the event and many people gave their recollections of the area.

Since we established our Facebook page last year it has proven very popular so far. Our Facebook page can be found under Birr Historical Society. Our web page is very accessible and is found at www.birrhistsoc.com. All upcoming events are also circularised on the local papers and we have an e-mail circular for members.

Our membership numbers have again increased on the previous year while our yearly membership contribution still remains the same at only €25 for a family, €15 for an individual and students are free. We ask €3 per talk for non-member so why not come along any night to our meetings where you can learn about your locality and enjoy the chat afterwards.

by Jimmy Shortt

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CAMCOR RIDERS



Camcor Riders at the Allingham Arms in Bundoran this year.

Camcor Riders are a group of biker friends from the Birr and Offaly area who raise money for local charities by holding a Charity Motorcycle Run and raffle each year. To date they have raised more than €70,000 for local causes. Country music star Robert Mizzell, is a member of the Camcor Riders

and rides with the lads regularly. Their great friend Paschal Campbell was one of the founder members and the group were deeply saddened by his passing recently. Thanks to everyone who supports this group since by doing so you help us support worthy local causes.

LEGION OF MARY



Manning the Legion of Mary stand at the Nation Ploughing Championships 2016 in Tullamore are Leo Minnock, Michael Seymour, Maura Wrafter, Fidelama Clavin and Darrell Lally.

BIRR TRAVELLER AND SETTLED PEOPLES' GROUP

Two apparently unconnected items, the mid-term review of traveller accommodation in Co. Offaly and the fire in which 10 Travellers lost their lives on the Glenamuck Road in Carrickmines, have dominated the concerns of the Traveller and Settled People's Group in Birr 2016. Many of our meetings were designed to help us think through the implications of both. We in Birr are exceptionally lucky to have a significant number of Traveller Families in our midst. These families are sufficiently long around Birr to be regarded as part of the natural landscape. The site at Millbrook and the site at Croghan Road are model examples of how a well organised and well maintained Traveller Site can contribute to the general environment. The review of Traveller Accommodation in Offaly includes a Group Housing Scheme for Travellers. It was proposed in 2013 and should be being planned for very shortly. It is the concern of the Birr Traveller and Settled People's Group that that proposed scheme be implemented as soon as possible. The way money becomes available for Traveller housing means that when it is drawn down and a scheme implemented the more general funding becomes available for those remaining on the Housing List. It is a win-win situation for everyone needing accommodation. In addition to supporting this proposal for a Group Housing Scheme we have also supported a request for the upgrade of the accommodation on the Millbrook site to increase the amount of living space. Millbrook Park, in particular, has developed its own mini-environment of beautifully maintained cut-grass, colourful planting and immaculately maintained premises. It earns Tidy Towns prizes and is a delight to visit. Croghan Road was probably too tightly planned to allow for the expansive landscaping of the Millbrook Park site. We live and learn. Let's hope the exercise on the Group Housing Scheme when it comes will take onboard lessons from the past. What happened at Glenamuck was a terrifying lesson in the need for constant vigilance where fire is concerned. After expressing sympathy to the Glenamuck families, the Group

in Birr immediately organised a meeting with the County Fire Officer's Team. It was a most instructive occasion not only for Travellers but also for those of us from the Settled Community who can become careless about our Smoke Alarms, or Fire Extinguishers and our Fire Blankets. It was a most worthwhile meeting and its presentation a model of clarity. It was followed up by the County Council acting on a Government Initiative and having all Traveller Site Accommodation reviewed in respect of Fire Safety Standards on sites. The Report on the situation nationally makes sorry reading. There are fire hazards in many Council provided sites. Some hazards result from deficiencies that are common within both the Settled and the Traveller Communities such as failure to replace Smoke Alarm Batteries. Others are due to the need for extra accommodation as families grow larger and distances between units grow smaller as a consequence. There is much to be done to risk manage fire hazard to an acceptable level of risk. The Birr Traveller and Settled People's Group will play its part in ensuring that there will be no lack of education about what constitutes fire hazard.

On a more cheerful note we record that for the third year running, the Group has made a colourful contribution to Vintage Week and beyond by organising a display of Traveller Art and Craft in the windows of Gerry Dolan's Garage Shop in Main Street. This display around the theme of 'a bicycle built for two' incorporated items from the Art and Craft Classes organised by Rossie and Tina for young people from both sections of our community as well as Craft items contributed by adult Travellers. No prizes so far but watch this space in 2017. To all who helped with this window display and particularly to Gerry Dolan and Brendan Hutchinson, who with his father restored the tandem, we express our very great appreciation.

Salters Sterling,
Chair, Birr Traveller and Settled People's Group

DID YOU KNOW.....

In December 1858 the presentation of the Crimean gun to the inhabitants of the town took place. This was one of the guns taken from the Russians at Sevastopol and was with much ceremony presented to the inhabitants of Birr town by the secretary of State for War. The gun was delivered into the custody of the Town Commissioners for the people of the town but being the wish of the then Earl of Rosse to have the gun at the castle, a majority of the Commissioners agreed. Thomas Lawlor Cooke resigned and said according to eminent authority, the inhabitants of Birr should have access, not as a favour but as a right to visit the gun at the castle.

Accordingly a committee was set up and contacted Lord Rosse who agreed that the public could visit the castle to see the gun at any time. The committee then set up a schedule to visit the gun at various hours. Eventually it was agreed that the gun would be returned to the Birr people where it was available to them at all times at the entrance to the council offices at Johns Mall.

by Jack Ryan





Best of 2015 winner "Bubbles" by Robert Revill



"Crimean Gun" by Terry Smith

BIRR PHOTOGRAPHY CLUB

At the end of 2015, Birr Photography Group entered the inaugural Midlands Photography Group Clubs Competition, held at the Tullamore Court Hotel on 1st November. 5 local photography clubs were involved including: South Kildare Photography Club; Mountrath and District Camera Club; Slieve Bloom Photography Club and Athy Photographic Society. Each club entered 2 panels, 1 colour and 1 black and white, with 8 images in each. Each image was marked on composition, print quality and impact. There was a trophy for the best club panel and each club received a trophy for the best image within their panel. Birr Photography Groups panel came 5th overall with Terry Smith's black and white image of the Crimean Gun outside John's Hall winning the club trophy.

2016 started with the "Best of 2015" club competition. The club competition was well attended, with all members submitting images for consideration. The idea was for everyone to show one image from the last year that they considered to be one of their best. After all the images were viewed, everyone voted for their favourite top 3. The overall winner was awarded to Robert Revill for his street scene of an entertainer in Krakow, Poland, 2nd place went to Terry Smith for a seascape and 3rd place was Paul Barber for a landscape of the lake in Birr Castle.

Several Workshops were held during the year to practice various photographic techniques, including, Refraction, Contour Light Painting and Spirograph Photography. The aim of the workshops were to capture striking images without the need for any fancy equipment or complicated camera techniques to achieve amazing results.

In May members attended a talk by award winning landscape photographer Peter Cox organised by the Midlands Photography Group at The Arts Centre, Athy.

During the 48th Birr Vintage Week and Arts Festival in August, several members had their photographic work accepted in the Open Submission Art Exhibition held at the Birr Technology Centre.

Birr Photography Group, established in November 2008, has regular meetings, talks, discussions and demonstrations on a variety of photographic topics at Craughwell's Pub, Castle Street, Birr every Thursday evening from 8pm. The aim of these events is to help our members take better photographs by improving camera knowledge and technique. Regular Photo Theme Nights throughout the year encouraged members to constantly improve their photographic skills. Typically members had 4 weeks to get out and photograph images on a selected topic, anything from landscapes to portraits. Then all of the images were viewed by the group for discussion. Members gave slideshows of their own work which was of interest to the group. These included travel, wildlife, landscape and close-up photography.

Go online at <http://birrphotogroup.wordpress.com/> for more information on the group.



Club Trophy winner 2015, Terry Smith (right) receiving his Club Trophy 2015 from Paul Whiteley (left) from the Midlands Photography Group.



Terry Smith, Philomena Jordan, Robert Revill and Julien Kennedy from Birr Photography Group (left to right) meet landscape photographer Peter Cox (far right).

BIRR LEISURE CENTRE

We are celebrating 43 years in business this year. What a legacy the original Committee have left this town and the surrounding areas. Over the years many of Birr's finest citizens have given their time on a voluntary basis to sit on the Board of Directors who over the years have improved and developed the facility.

2016 has been another busy year for us, with continued support by the local community as well as schools, clubs and various other organisations.

When making our major investment 10 years ago we provided a gymnasium.

This addition has proved so popular that for a number of years we have had difficulty catering in comfort for the needs of our expanding number of patrons, with space regularly at a premium.

Last year the Board made a decision, in principle, to extend both the Gymnasium and dressing rooms upstairs, and the changing village downstairs. Having put a design team in place, secured planning permission, organised finance we are now going to tender and hope to have a contractor appointed before end of 2016 with the project commencing in early 2017.

The completed project will cost in excess of €200,000 which is a huge vote of confidence by the Board in the facility which provides employment for over 20 local people (full and part-time).

Here at the Leisure Centre we pride ourselves on being very environmentally friendly, with 2 Wood Pellet Boilers, 14 solar panels, a rainwater harvesting system, and a water recycling system. To this end we are very much reducing our carbon footprint.

We are aided by the continued support we receive from the Dept. of Social Protection (Pobal), Offaly County Council and the Midland Tribune.

Activities at the centre include; Public Swim, Child and Adult Swim Lessons, School Swim Lessons, Aquafit, Swim Club, Lifeguard and Swim Teaching Courses, Pilates, Spin, Circuit Training, Parent and Toddler Swim Lessons and our Water Safety Week in July each year.



Booking is essential on 05791 20343 for all Lessons and Classes. Email info@birrleisurecentre.ie Our website is www.birrleisurecentre.ie where our current timetable can be viewed.

The Community Games took place once again this year in the Leisure Centre with children from Birr, Banagher, Kilcormac, Tullamore, Clara and Edenderry taking part.

At the moment the Centre is debt free and through prudent management we hope to remain so. A word of thanks to our manager Marian Carter and all our staff both full-time and part-time.

To our dedicated Board Members, Chairman John Carroll, Vice-Chair Pat Connolly, Secretary Helena Kennedy, Treasurers Cronan Grennan, Charlie Delahunt, Richard Kennedy and Cllr John Leahy representing Offaly County Council.

Looking forward, it is through this good management and hard work on everyone's part that we know we will have a centre that will continue to give the community the facilities it needs and deserves.

Birr Leisure Centre is owned by the Community, run by the Community for the Community.

BIRR NEIGHBOURHOOD WATCH

A Group of Community volunteers set up Birr Neighbourhood Watch under the auspices of An Garda Síochána in 1994. Since then we have been working away providing a service to the people of Birr.

We provide additional security for the elderly in the Birr Urban area, in the form of Pendent Alarms, Security Lighting, Door Locks and Door Chains.

We raise funds through our Church Gate Collection in November, a Bingo Night in the Marian Hall, and an Easter Raffle. Prizes are provided by the local Businesses for our Easter Raffle, for which we are truly grateful.

Our AGM is held in October each year, and a Committee is

elected from people attending, ie Chairperson, Vice Chairperson, Secretary, Treasurer, and PRO.

Neighbourhood Watch is not a vigilante organisation and does not support taking individual action against wrongdoers. All suspicious activity must be reported to an Garda Síochána.

We need to develop a willingness to look out for our neighbours, especially our elderly neighbours. Very largely it is what considerate neighbours have always done.

If you feel you would like to join our group you would be most welcome. The date for our next AGM will be published in the local press, we look forward to seeing you there.

BIRR SCOUTS

Another thrilling year of Scouting in Birr began in September 2015, with the welcoming back of old faces and the addition of enthusiastic new members to the troop. There was a great sense of excitement as our weekly Wednesday night meetings returned with our leaders providing interesting and challenging tasks for us to complete each week. The Venture Scout group, in particular, who built a canoe rack downstairs in the Marian hall were well up for whatever was thrown their way.

Our first trip to the log cabin of the year at Halloween was, as per usual, a great weekend out for all involved. An orienteering course was set during the day for the scouts by the Venturers, and by night-fall we listened to ghost stories told by Jack Ryan. Late into the night, for the occasion that was in it, many well-known songs were even 'murdered' around the campfire!

Many trips to the cabin followed throughout the winter including the all-important annual Christmas Party in December. The Saturday was spent decorating the cabin and getting into the festive spirit by hanging ornaments and tinsel around the cabin and on our erected Christmas tree, as well as singing Christmas songs to get into the festive spirit of the holiday. Of course, what would the Sunday be without a visit from the Jolly Man in red? Santa once again arrived to a chorus of classic Christmas songs, handing out presents and sweets to family and friends, the scouts as well as the Cubs!

We resumed weekly meetings after our Christmas break in enormous anticipation of the coming summer months, knowing well right that it would only lead us into our beloved tenting season. Preparations for Portumna and Annual Camp began soon after, with many long nights spent learning new rope work and pioneering skills, a staple piece of information to any Scout's knowledge! Having taught the new Scouts and reminding ourselves of the intricate skills of erecting a tent, we began to really look forward to the June Bank Holiday weekend where we would set off to Portumna for another magnificent weekend in the forest park.

The 9th of July brought around the start of Annual Camp, where we all jetted off to the glorious Lough Key Forest Park in Boyle, Co. Roscommon for a well organised week packed to the brim with wonderful activities. With a week of mediocre weather, the most famous words around the Scout den in Birr rang in our ears; 'there's no such thing as bad weather... just bad clothing!!!'

Despite the bad weather, we made the most of the week we had, visiting the Arigna Mines and spending a morning surfing. After the surfing on the Wednesday, we climbed Croagh Patrick which was notably one of the best achievements we gained as a group. Whether it was the frustrating but marvellously entertaining Boda Berg, (which we loved so much, we tackled twice!) or braving new heights with the 'Zip It!' skyline walks high up in the trees of Lough Key, undeniably a tremendous week was had by all.

At the end of camp, time came to say goodbye to Boyle but also to three of the longest running members of Scouts, Eoin and Stephen Watkins and Kenny Cooke as it was their last year. Without a doubt, the three will be missed in the coming years, playing card games till all hours, and providing lots of entertainment in the troop.

Scouting in Birr is very much like a tripod, it couldn't stand without the three legs that provide much needed support to keep the troop running. The first of those three legs, of course, are our leaders: Jack, Mary, Padraic, Sean and many more, who give up so much of their spare time throughout the year to run meetings in the Den and without them, Scouts wouldn't exist. The community who have provided much needed funds to the scouts during fundraisers are the second leg of the tripod, and the third being the Parents Committee who run those very important fundraisers and organise many things throughout the year. I would like to extend thanks to all the aforementioned and also to the Marian Hall committee for all their help and support through the years. Let's have another great year!

by Conor Brummell

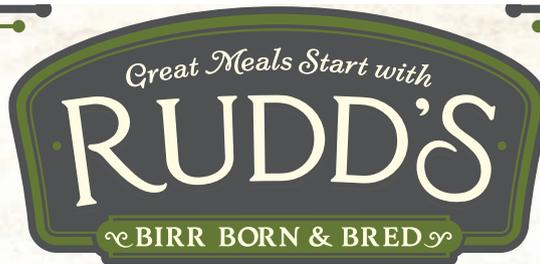


Heading off to Annual Camp.

Back Row (L to R): Rós Connaughton, Stephen Watkins, Leon Hogan, Eoin Watkins, Kenneth Cooke, Colm Hogan, Ben Larkin, Padraic Connaughton.

Middle Row: Mary Hayes, Emma O'Rourke, Róisín O'Connor, Gráine Curley, Luke Sheridan, Aaron Curley, Ben Haslam, Philip Jadownicki, Patrick O'Connor, Moya Larkin, Ronan Loughnane.

Front Row: Jack Ryan, Gillian Crowley, Sarah O'Rourke, Eileen Dermody, Danielle Loughnane, Muireann Dermody.



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Established in 1860

BIRR BRIDGE CLUBS

Our town has been the “home” of Bridge since 1940 when the Birr Bridge Club was founded. The Birr Bridge Club had its home in Birr Golf Club, otherwise known as “The Glenns” before moving to the Kings County and Ormond Club in Emmet Square which now belongs to the Enright family. The Club finally moved to the County Arms Hotel, and after a number of years amalgamated with The “66” Bridge Club which celebrates its Golden Jubilee with lunch in the County Arms Hotel, followed by a game of Bridge on Sunday the 16th October. Those great clubs have given many people much pleasure, and has been the Nursery for some of Ireland’s famous players who have since gone to their eternal reward. We continue to honour the memory of Des Houlihan, one of our international players by competing every year for the Des Houlihan Trophy which was presented by the Birr Bridge Club in recognition of his dedication and sharing his views on the mystery of the Game of Bridge. Birr “66” Bridge Club comes together every Monday night at 7.30pm, from the end of October until the end of April.

Birr also hosts the “Camcor” Bridge Club which meets every Wednesday night at 7.30pm in the County Arms Hotel, and has enjoyed a very successful season. They also commence playing in October, with the season finishing at the end of April. Our town also holds “Morning” Bridge in “The Glenns”, commencing at 10am, and also runs from October to April. Bridge in “The Glenns” has also had a very successful season, and together with the “66” Bridge Club and the “Camcor” Club welcomes new members. Peter O’Meara, from Clonkelly continues to give Bridge lessons right throughout the Bridge season, when he encourages his

students to take the next step by coming along to all or any of our Bridge Clubs in the town. Our good friend – Joe Kerins, otherwise known as “Mr Bridge” himself, together with Peter and many others have shared their time and talents over the years in introducing many of our players to the game of Bridge.

Bridge is the most exciting card game yet invented, that it has the power to transform one’s leisure hours. “Bridge is akin to going through a fog. You don’t know where you are, and you don’t know where you are going, but if you have sufficient patience the mist will clear, and you will step into a new world”. Those are the wise words of one – George Ryan – who spread the Bridge gospel with his Booklet “Some of the Bones”, followed by many other books. Peter O’Meara is the incoming President of the North Midland Region, and we wish him every success during his term in office.

Just as the Birr Review 2016 was going to print the sad death of Joe Kerins was announced. Joe was the “heart and soul” of the Bridge Clubs in Birr and way beyond. Joe shared his time, talent, patience and encouragement in teaching and promoting the game of Bridge far and wide. Joe will be greatly missed by all who had the pleasure of playing with, or defending against him in very many tournaments right across the country, as his final game of Bridge has now been played. We extend our sincere sympathy to his dear wife Mary, his sons Paul and Martin, his daughters Helen and Lisa, together with his family in his home town of Tralee. May his precious soul rest in peace.



Taken at the presentation of the Des Houlihan Memorial Trophy, Mary O’Gorman (President), Desmond Houlihan presenting the trophy in memory of his grandfather Des, to the winners Teresa Fealy, Gay Halvey and Pat Reid.

Name the Places - Answers to Quiz on Page 75.

- | | | |
|----------------------------------|--------------------------------------|------------------------------|
| 1 Haines of Birr | 9 The Chestnut | 17 Oxmantown Bridge |
| 2 Mother Catherine McAuley Stone | 10 R.J. Barber | 18 Oxmantown Bridge |
| 3 St. Brendan’s Market | 11 Wm. Smyth | 19 County Arms Hotel |
| 4 Cumberland Terrace | 12 W.K. Fayle | 20 Hurling Monument at Tesco |
| 5 Methodist Church | 13 John Dwyer | 21 G.A.A. Field |
| 6 Post Office | 14 Manchester Martyrs | 22 Rosse Monument |
| 7 Doolys Hotel | 15 Mercy Primary School | 23 Compton Row |
| 8 Cullinane’s | 16 Mercy Primary School Junior Block | |



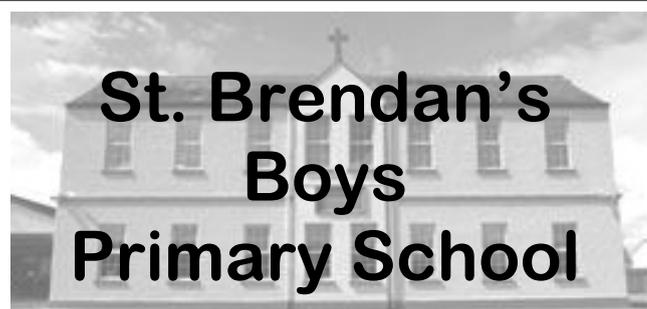
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BIRR LIBRARY

2016 saw Birr Library's 10th year at its location in the former chapel of St. John's Convent on Wilmer Road. As always, it was an eventful year with a wide array of events, activities and initiatives.

Free membership was extended to all library members across the Offaly Libraries network this year giving all our established users and new members the opportunity to borrow books, DVDs, CDs, audiobooks, e-books, e-audiobooks and e-magazines for free as well as gain free access to our Wi-fi in the library. In addition to lending items, we also provided access to local studies materials (including access to a local newspaper archive), Internet access, scanning, printing and wordprocessing facilities via public access computers in the library. There is an exhibition area in the Atrium where library users could come and admire the talent of local artists or possibly even shine a light on their own skills as an artist by booking to exhibit.

As usual, an array of activities and initiatives aimed at our younger readers took place. The Read Anything, Anytime, Anywhere reading challenge for schools took place from January 11th to March 11th. In addition to this, we welcomed many class visits throughout the year. During the Summer holidays, our Summer reading programme for children Summer Stars took place in July and August with over 140 children aged between 2 and 13 signing up and over 50 receiving certificates for completing the programme. Our regular groups continued to meet during the year with the Birr Library Book Club convening regularly throughout the year as well as the Knitting Circle who met weekly for much of the year.

Local and national History were represented in a series of events and talks throughout the year. As part of Offaly Libraries' programme of events to mark 1916, Birr Library played host to a talk by Dr Philip McConway entitled The Offaly Republican Roll of Honour, Exploring Offaly IRA fatalities, 1918-1937. Birr Library participated in Birr Vintage Week and Arts Festival, playing host to a talk by Stephen

Callaghan on Offaly casualties of the Great War during 1916 and a talk by John Goodman organised by Leinster Regiment Ireland entitled The 2nd Leinsters, who they were and what became of them. As part of our Heritage Week programme in August, Stephen Callaghan also provided us with an exhibition Local Heroes - A Photography Exhibition of Images related to Soldiers of the Great War from Birr. During Heritage Week there was also a screening of a documentary about Mary Rosse and Mary Ward entitled Ladies of Science. Completing our Heritage Week line-up was an interactive event hosted by Jude Stynes called Hands on History 1916, which gave the audience a chance to interact with materials from the 1916 period of Irish history.

The exhibition area in the Atrium played host to exhibitions and displays by local artists, historians, photographers and schools. We invite anyone interested in putting on an exhibition of their work in Birr Library to contact us to discuss making a booking. And to anyone visiting us here in the library, it's always worth a look into the Atrium to see what's on! In the library itself, book displays were put on to mark the 200th anniversary of the birth of Charlotte Bronte and the 100th anniversary of the birth of Roald Dahl.

There's something for everyone at Birr Library so why not come along and see what we can do for you.

Library opening hours:

Tues: 9.30am-5.30pm

Wed: 9.30am-8.00pm

Thurs: 9.30am-5.30pm

Fri: 9.30am-5.30pm

Sat: 9.30am-1.00pm (the library closes on the Saturday of a Bank Holiday Weekend)

You can also visit the Offaly Libraries website where you can find out about our services, renew books, look at our online catalogue and more. Visit: www.offaly.ie/libraries

You can phone Birr Library on 057 9124950 or drop us an e-mail at birrlibrary@offalycoco.ie



Students from St. Brendan's Community School who made use of the library facilities during the year.

Back Row (L to R): Richie Camon, Brendan Molloy, Brandon Corboy, Luke Alexander, Finley Wrafter, Luke Guinan, Kevin Agbenisi Cleary, Darragh Coffey, Paul McEvoy, Jordan McKenna, Nikkita Morrissey.

Front Row: Shane Maloney, Jake Touhey, Dylan Hehir, Jeffrey Hehir, Niall Bradley, Dylan Murdock, Abby Woods, Naomi Kelly, Keisha Byrne.

KNITTING AND CROCHET CIRCLE



Members of Birr Knitting and Crochet Circle with some of the lovely work produced.

Back Row (L to R): Joanne Loughnane, Mary O'Connor, Patt Grogan, Sally Nugent, Bridget Barber, Jennifer Coghlan.

Front Row: Therese Kennedy, Catherine Hough, Norrie O'Callaghan, Angela Begley.

Missing from photograph is Mary Kinsella (group co-ordinator).

Photograph by Paul Barber

Last year the Knitting and Crochet group worked on a very successful project, making hats, scarves, snoods and gloves for the homeless. With this project in mind again this year, sessions resumed early in September.

The group meets to knit and crochet all types of garments

for their families and friends.

Meetings take place in the Birr Library on Wednesday evenings from 5.30 p.m.-7.30p.m. Members share ideas and expertise and give encouragement to new members.

New members always welcome.

BIRR APOSTOLIC GROUP

During 2016 it has taken a great effort on the part of our members to keep up the high standard of work due to a reduction in the numbers of members and workers. We held our display day in April of work done during the year. We had a successful raffle on the day, supported by parishioners and visiting ladies from other branches. In August we held our Annual Church Gate collection. It was greatly supported and we are grateful for all the help. Our members are Sr. Roberta, Catherine Murphy, Mary Nolan, Dolores Hegarty, Kathleen Ryan, Mary Wynn, Bernie Kirwan and our helpers are Teresa Donegan, Mary O'Connor Bernie Bolger, Kathleen Bass, Mary Kelly and Margaret Murphy.

BIRR ART GROUP

Birr Art Group consists of approximately 18 members coming from a rich variety of backgrounds and ages. Each artist is established in his/ her medium and many have been painting for years. The group meet every Tuesday at the Birr Community Resource centre for 3 hours of creative activity. There is a great spirit of exchange and banter with music and refreshments. The group facilitator Kathleen Gormley is on hand to guide, advise and discuss works in progress. Art exhibitions play a large role as well as visits to museums and galleries and occasional Pleine Air sketching and painting.

For further information contact Kathleen 0876819990



Sowing the Wind
Michael Campbell & Ensemble



Sowing the Wind - The Ensemble

BIRR STAGE GUILD

It's that time of year again that we take some time to look back at everything that happened over the last twelve months. In September 2015 rehearsals got underway for the autumn play, Bernard Farrells comedy 'Bookworms' which was staged in November and directed by Anne Clarke. September also saw the start of 10 weekly sessions of Dance for Fun & Fitness with dancer/choreographer Kevin Murphy from Dublin. Working through dance styles from various musicals, this is proving to be a very popular and enjoyable event for BSG members and friends.

The October Bank Holiday has become synonymous with the Birr One Act Drama Festival with groups travelling from Mayo, Wexford, Cork, Kildare, Wicklow, Offaly and Tipperary this year. BSG also offered valuable theatre workshops with the festival Adjudicator, which this year was professional actor/director Mr. Alan Hurley well known from RTE's soap Fair City. These workshops were open to all local and visiting drama groups and youth groups. The workshops were hugely enjoyed by all whom attended.

In December we saw the return of one of BSG's most popular and sell out performances 'The Magic of Christmas'. Four years since last presenting this Christmas entertainment, which brings new and old seasonal songs and stories from chorus, soloists and special guests. As always, carefully devised and produced by our Musical Director Enda O'Connor with the assistance of Tommy Lyndon's creativity in choosing some fabulous stories and poems.

With 2016 being the commemorative year of the 1916 Rising, Birr Stage Guild felt it was important to acknowledge this anniversary through one of our productions. Thankfully the amazing and talented Michael Donegan devised and directed a 1916 commemorative piece entitled 'Sowing the Wind', with Enda O'Connor as musical director. This fabulous production was well received by Full Houses on both nights. Due to popular demand we decided to re stage this production for a further two nights, during Birr Vintage Week & Arts Festival. Again, this amazing production was well received by full houses.

In May we hosted Birr Stage Guilds Annual Golf Classic at Birr Golf Club, another huge success. We would like to take this opportunity again to thank all our tee box sponsors and those who entered teams, as without you, our work and productions that we stage would not be possible.

Sadly this year we mourned the loss of several stage guild members, Sheila O'Callaghan, Betty O'Dwyer, Liz Kennedy and Gerri Hynes, you are forever in our hearts and minds. Birr Stage Guild welcomes new and old members to join both on and off stage. There is a much needed new generation out there with new ideas and new talents and we welcome each and every one of you. Find Birr Stage Guild on www.birrstageguild.com or on Facebook. We would like to thank our patrons, sponsors, audience members and all those who supported us in 2016.... Here's to another successful year in 2017.



Birr Stage Guild's Sowing the Wind.

Front Row: Noeleen Harding, Michael Donegan, Patricia Rowland.
Back Row: Mary Lyndon, Kevin Murphy.



Sowing the Wind.

Front Row: Laura Pilkington & Darren Madden.
Back Row includes Mary Lyndon, Patricia Rowland,
Kevin Murphy and Miriam Leaver.

BIRR LIONS CLUB

The members of Birr Lions Club would like to express their heartfelt thanks to all those who supported their endeavours throughout the past year and the club is delighted to report again on what was a busy and productive 2016. Garech Doorley assumed the role of club President for the year and under the stewardship of Garech, Secretary Ray Leonard and Treasurer George Manzor, the club continued raising funds through such sources as the Birr Year Review magazine, table quiz, Christmas Fast and church gate collection. Monies donated were then allocated amongst organisations and deserving causes in the local district as the club maintained its proud tradition of supporting the elderly, the youth and the under-privileged under their motto "caring for people". It is not an easy task to list all beneficiaries of Lions funding

during the year but the following summary gives a flavour of the diverse and worthy recipients: St Vincent de Paul, Birr Tidy Towns, Birr Vintage Week, Tesco Food Appeal, Message in A Bottle, GOAL, SPOT Youth Café, Birr Christmas Lights Group, Simon Community, All Ireland Scór na nÓg, St. Brendan's Boys P.P. 1916 Play, Birr Youths RFC, Trench Trust award, Old Folks Party, Diabetes Screening at Ploughing Championship, Carers Association, Birr GAA Battle of the Musicals, Birr Theatre Special Needs Summer Camp & Hullabaloo Children's Arts Festival, St Brendan's Church Flower Festival and OFFline Film Festival. In conclusion and on behalf of all its members, Birr Lions Club would like to wish everyone a merry Christmas and happy new year.



40/40

Ronan O'Hare, left, 40 minutes into his first Lions club meeting, whilst his father John received a certificate for 40 years to the Lions Club by District Governor, Paul Alan.

RESPOND! SUPPORT CHESTERFIELD COMMUNITY Preschool

Respond! Housing Association is one of Ireland's leading housing association and has provided more than 5,500 units of accommodation nationwide. The housing charity seeks to create a future for people by alleviating poverty and creating vibrant, socially integrated communities. See www.respond.ie

Respond! Support provide community education, childcare services, family support services, day care services for older people, and supported emergency accommodation for families in crisis. See: www.respondsupport.ie

Chesterfield Community Preschool had a very successful year 2015/2016. The curriculum for this Preschool adheres fully to Aistear and Siolta programmes, where children participate in and experience a variety of activities each day to help promote all areas of their development. Some of the activities available for the children include; arts and crafts, make and do, cooking, messy play, free play, outdoor play,

sand and water play.

Respond! Support aims to provide accessible, affordable and quality childcare services. Respond! Support Preschool located at Chesterfield Childcare provides two main Government schemes; the Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE Free Preschool Year) and the Community Childcare Subvention Scheme (CCS). All schemes are administered by the Department of Children and Youth Affairs, working with Pobal and County Childcare Committees.

We have three FETAC accredited childcare professionals at Respond! Support Chesterfield Preschool. They are Catherine Ferncombe, Childcare Leader, Kathleen Gallagher and Bridget Lynskey, Childcare Assistants.

For any enquiries regarding Chesterfield Preschool places please call: 057 91 22289.



Friends and members of Birr Mental Health Association who took part in the VHI Ladies Mini Marathon in June.

BIRR MENTAL HEALTH ASSOCIATION

Birr Mental Health Association aim to promote a positive awareness to mental health and encourage community understanding and acceptance of mental illness.

As always, Birr Mental Health Association had a very busy 2016. As in the past we supported people with mental health difficulties during the year. We sponsored the annual holiday to Galway, where service users had a relaxing stay at the Menlo Park hotel and this year we visited the Aran Islands and Kinvara castle outside Oranmore. Our members along with clients attending Community Mental Health Centre were also given the opportunity to enjoy some day trips to Knock, Longford Cathedral, Shopping Trips, Cinema and Birr Theatre.

This year we supported individuals to access educational opportunities i.e. Diploma in community Mental Health and VETAC level 5 Healthcare Course. We continue to strive to educate people on positive mental health and one of our volunteers Veronica, spoke to the Moneygall Ramblers Club on this matter.

Friends and members of Birr Mental Health Association took part in the VHI Ladies Mini Marathon and successfully raised funds to support many of our projects run by the Birr Community Mental Health Centre.

We would like to take this opportunity to thank all those involved in fundraising for Birr Mental Health Association throughout the year. We were grateful to be involved in Bobby King's Record Breaking Golf Challenge in June 2016. We would like to assure the public that all funds raised go back to our local community.

We continue to support the Kismet group to hold their weekly music therapy group in the Community Mental Health Centre.

To celebrate World Mental Health Day, a local physical therapist kindly volunteered her services for massage and Reflexology to promote wellness.

It is important that we educate our young people on the importance of mental health awareness, introduce a culture of understanding, and teach young people to build emotional intelligence and resilience.

Again, this year we have Christmas Cards for sale from the Community Mental Health Centre, Wilmer Road or from any member of the Birr Mental Health Association. These are hand painted scenes by Frank Gallagher, a local artist, who previously showed his work in our art exhibition.

We support deserving cases locally by providing hampers at Christmas, fuel vouchers and other appropriate ways.

Once again, we complete our year as always with the annual Christmas party in Dooly's which is a fantastic festive night of fun and dance for everyone involved.

Here are a few tips for good mental health:

- Take time to yourself.
- Accept who you are.
- Set realistic goals and keep things in perspective.
- Spend time with people who make you feel good.
- Talk about your feelings.
- Ask for help when you need it.
- Maintain a healthy diet.
- Be active every day in as many ways as you can.
- Avoid binge drinking.
- Dare to dream.

For further information you may contact us by phoning 05791 20540/ 05791 20576 or call to CMHC, Wilmer Rd., Birr. Our meetings take place on 2nd Tuesday of each month at 8pm in above centre. New members always welcome.



Birr Mental Health Association was delighted to be associated with Bobby King's Golf Challenge on June 16



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Some members of Crinkill Tidy Villages Committee.

Front Row (Lto R): Celine Donoghue, Christina Donoghue, Michael Deegan (chairman), Bernie Grennan, Frances Kawala.
 Back Row: Des Connole, Brendan Cooke, Sean Maher, Des O'Brien, John Johnston, Hugh Bracken.

CRINKILL TIDY VILLAGES

The village continues to progress in the Tidy Towns Competition. In 2016 the judge gave a very positive report and awarded an extra 4 marks to bring our total to 288. The committee worked hard to keep grass and litter under control, planted flowers and cleaned and painted street furniture.

Our committee organised a fun night during Birr Vintage Week. The Wheelchair Race generated great rivalry among the competing teams and the great Crinkill Ball Race brought crowds to the streets and generated much needed funds for the Tidy Villages Association. Many thanks to all the residents who were very willing and generous in their

support.

Sadly, Crinkill Tidy Villages lost one of its founding members with the death of Sean Cooke in November 2015. Sean was a committed and positive force in our organisation. He loved Crinkill and gave endless hours of his time to improve the place he lived in. Sean could be seen regularly working on the streets and in the old Military Cemetery and he was always first to turn up for our weekly work nights. He was a great motivator and very proud of the progress made since Crinkill Tidy Villages was revitalised in the millennium year. He embodied the true meaning of community spirit.

SOCIETY OF ST. VINCENT DE PAUL - 91 YEARS IN BIRR

The Society of St Vincent de Paul was established in Birr in 1925. The Society itself was formed in Paris in 1833 by a 20 year old student called Frederic Ozanam.

We have a very dedicated group of trained, unpaid volunteers, some of whom have been with the Society for over 50 years. These wonderful men and women work with the people of Birr and the surrounding areas including Kinnitty, Clareen, Crinkill, and Riverstown.

We operate a clothes shop and furniture store, we are open Tuesday –Friday 10.30-4.00 including lunch-time. The shop is situated off Wilmer Road, opposite the playground. The income derived from the shop and furniture store is used to buy food vouchers, fuel, and support education from primary level up to third level. We also have our Annual Church Gate Collection, Bingo Raffle, Lions Club Food Appeal, Annual Golf Classic.

We would like to thank the general public, who donate

clothing, furniture, etc., for our shop as without these donations we could not operate the shop.

We also collect Food from Tesco every evening. This is done through Foodcloud, a charitable food project. We are also involved with a charitable food initiative called BIA Foods .

A big Thank you to the Priests of the Parish, Tesco, Rudds Meats, Marian Hall Committee, Hanlons Butchers, Cullinanes Butchers, Paul Boyd, Emmas Café, Declan Milne, Birr Lions Club, Sé Pardy (Golf Classic), Corrib Oil, pupils and staff of St. Brendan's Boys P.S. and St Brendans Community School for their fundraising at Christmas. Thank you to everyone who donates money at Christmas and throughout the year, it is very much appreciated and we are very humbled by your generosity.

Without all this support we would not be able to reach out and help people who through no fault of their own occasionally find themselves in difficulty.

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Barry Hogan, Anthony Flynn, Enda Moran and Noel Bentley all ready for work on the Birr Tidy Towns Project.



Christopher Ryan being awarded a certificate after completing his First Responder course.



Enda Moran busy at work as part of the Birr Tidy Towns project.

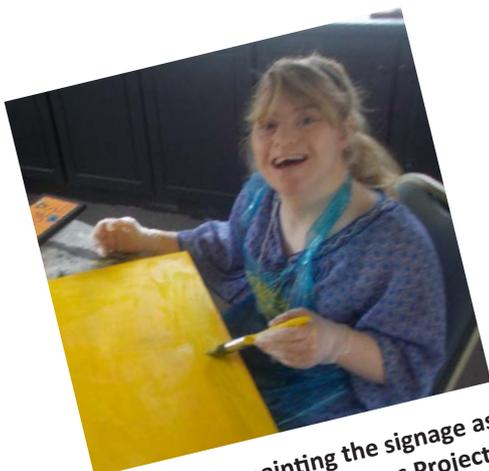
Riverview Resources is a well-established day service, serving the needs of adults with an intellectual disability. This service opened in 2001 and is located in Ely House, John's Terrace, and Birr. It is run by the Daughters of Charity Disability Services. The core values of this service include respect for all persons, collaborative justice, creativity and value of service. All of these values inform the daily programmes carried out within Riverview Resources. Our aim within this service is to enable, empower and encourage each of the service users towards self-advocacy. Through this process, their needs, wishes and hopes for the future become known and inform future plans. Riverview Resources offers a broad range of programmes each weekday. These programmes are both educational and social, each of the service users are supported and encouraged to use and share their talents and gifts daily. This in turn supports and enhances existing skills and encourages the development of new skills. Pride in their work along with the satisfaction of seeing many of their craft items offered for sale locally have allowed our service users know that they are valued members of the Birr town community. As active citizens within their community here in Birr, this past year has seen more collaborative work between Riverview Resources and Birr Scouting Group, The Tidy Towns Committee, The Lions Club, The Credit Union and many more. We look forward to continuing and developing further, our involvement within this vibrant community.

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Noel Bentley selling the produce made in Riverview Resources.



Edel Fogarty painting the signage as part of the Birr Tidy Towns Project.



Team from Riverview Resources winning the Boccia league.

Birr Vintage Week



Friday 29th July saw Birr turning back time as the 48th Annual Birr Vintage Week & Arts Festival began. One of Ireland's longest running and most successful festivals, this year's programme featured over 200 events for all ages and entertained a wide audience with its dynamic range of vintage and modern experiences in the town's unique surroundings.

The Arts have played a central role since the Festival began in 1968 and this year's offering was no exception. The exciting Visual Arts Trail featured an extravaganza of talent from over one hundred visiting and local artists who showcased work in all media, along with exhibitions and lots of artistic surprises in pop-up studios which transformed previously vacant spaces into creative hubs across the town. A range of master classes and arts and crafts workshops took place with all the participants in agreement that the standard and range of work on show was second to none – the future of the Arts in Birr is certainly assured.

Festival highlights included the Vintage Parade which entertained thousands of people who thronged the streets of the town and enjoyed the displays of marching bands, floats, vintage cars, tractors, bicycles and machinery along with the street theatre performers who also performed afterwards, adding to the festive atmosphere. The Flower Festival's exquisite displays were a visual treat, Ormond Flying Club's annual Fly-In provided a breathtaking display of vintage and modern aircraft and entertainment despite the inclement weather conditions and the Artisan and Craft Market drew great crowds to its new venue on Green Street with its large range of stalls and fantastic variety of sights and aromas. There were huge turn-outs at both the Pavement Art Competition and the Children's Treasure Hunt and the lively music provided by Transmitter 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 and local man Mundy along with a lunchtime performance of Vintage Classics and The Spackling Band who rounded off the Week while record numbers of aspiring musicians competed in the Mick Egan Busking Competition on the streets of Birr. Nightly entertainment in local pubs included live music, candlelit nights and



Yoga for Children was one of the new events in this year's Festival Programme.



Tug-of-War for both mens and

& Arts Festival

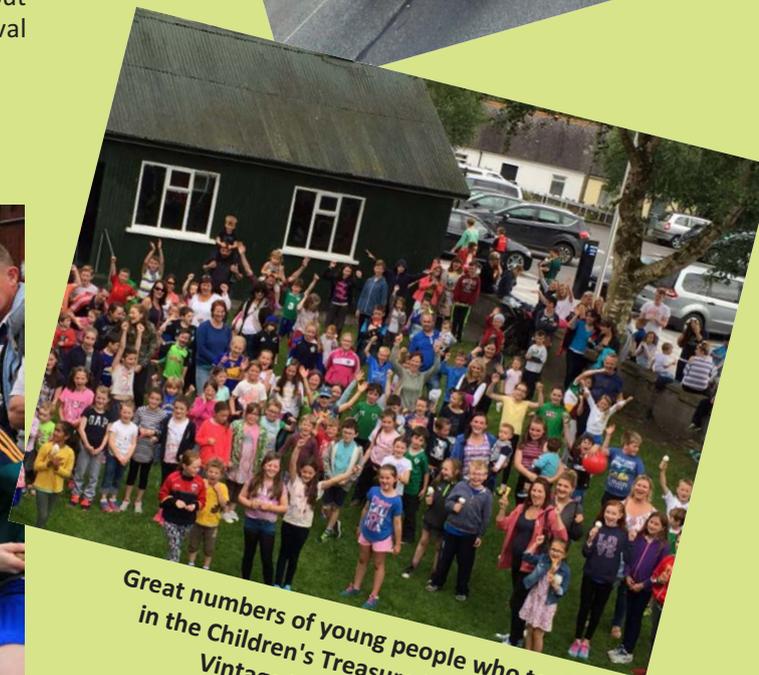
inter-pub competitions which all added to the atmosphere of the Festival Week.

Other Festival highlights included lunchtime entertainment with *Charolais*, the Antique & Fine Art Fair's wonderful array of goods on show and for sale which delighted its great numbers of visitors, the Connaught Street Capers, Redmond's Walking Photographic Quiz and Birr Stage Guild's *Sowing the Wind*, which played to packed houses for two nights.

The Festival prides itself on its unique blend of annual favourites, new events, vintage flavour and modern entertainment and certainly this year proved to be an exciting and vibrant week which celebrated Birr's remarkable heritage and culture and inspired participation and enjoyment in everyone who made the effort to come out and sample the events.

The importance of sponsorship, organisation and manpower has greatly increased as the Festival has expanded. Local support and participation is the key to its continued success and the Organising Committee would like to express its thanks to all those who supported it; Funders Offaly County Council through the Arts Office, Birr Municipal District and the Community Tourism Diaspora Fund; Diamond Sponsor Birr Lions Club; Platinum Sponsors The Earl and Countess of Rosse and Spinners on Castle Street; 18 Pub Sponsors, 7 Gold Sponsors, 12 Silver Sponsors and 84 Bronze Sponsors for their generous financial contributions. Thanks are also due to Offaly County Council, Birr Municipal District, Birr Garda Síochána, Birr Fire Brigade, Central Fire Station (Tullamore), Civil Defence, Marian Hall Committee, Birr Community Responder Group, Order of Malta, Birr & District Motor Club, Birr Lions Club, Birr Chamber of Commerce, Birr Tidy Towns, Dooly's Hotel, all the clubs, societies and venue owners who hosted numerous events; and to all the groups and individuals for their vital volunteering spirit and enthusiasm both before and during the Festival.

Plans are already underway for the 2017 Birr Vintage Week & Arts Festival. If you would like to become involved in any aspect of it please contact any member of the Organising Committee, check out www.birr.vintageweek.com and keep up to date with Festival developments on Facebook.



Great numbers of young people who took part in the Children's Treasure Hunt during Birr Vintage Week & Arts Festival.



womens teams proved a great attraction.



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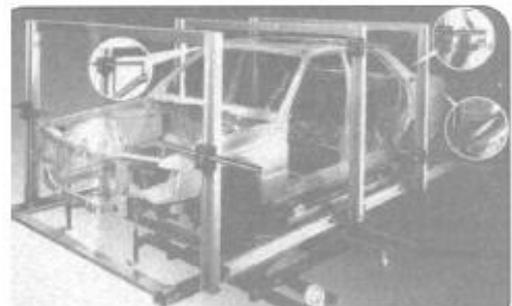
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1916 Commemorative Plaque and broadleaf trees that were planted in honour of the seven signatories of the Proclamation.

CARRIG TIDY VILLAGES

In 2016 the Tidy Town Committed actively worked on two new projects to enhance the environment of the village. With the hundredth anniversary of 1916 approaching the Committed undertook a commemoration project. This involved the planting of seven broadleaf trees each one representing each of the seven signatories to the Proclamation and a commemorative stone plaque. This was a cross community project with support from a wide range of community groups each sponsoring one of the trees. On Easter Sunday morning the plaque was unveiled, the national flag was raised and the Constitution read by local residents. The event attracted a large attendance of all age groups.

The second project was the enhancement of the wildlife area on the Bog Road adjacent to the old R.I.C Barricks. A 'Wildlife Hotel' was erected in July from recycled materials.

This will hopefully add to the biodiversity of the area by providing shelter for various species during the winter months.

The Committee would like to thank the local Community for their financial support especially the support of the fundraising dance held in June. The Committee is grateful for the support from the entire village community for its input into the appearance of the village. A debt of gratitude is also due to the Community worker Martin who contributes greatly to maintaining the appearance and tidiness of the village.

Gratitude is also due to Tipperary County Council for their ongoing support and financial assistance.

2016 saw a further increase in the points awarded to Carrig in the National Tidy Towns Competition.

BIRR COMMUNITY RESOURCE CENTRE

Birr Community Resource Centre, situated in the car park at Costcutter's, Unit 1, Glebe Street, Birr, is a non profit making community facility. We provide a meeting space for groups from the town and surrounding areas. People can also avail of classes that are facilitated on a regular basis.

We are home to Babòg Parent and Toddler group who meet every Tuesday from 9.45 to 12.00, all welcome, Art classes with Tatiana, Art Classes with Kathleen Gormley and a number of other groups.

The Centre has a spacious hall with a kitchen which makes it ideal for children's parties and other events or meetings at a special rate. Birr Community Resource Centre was set up in 2002 and since then has gone from strength to strength. For more information please contact Louise in our office on email cbirresource@yahoo.ie, telephone 057 21912 or 087 7734219 or you can also find us on Facebook.



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The Crinkill Active Retirement Group relaxing after a game of Boccia in the Handball Alley, Crinkill.
 (L to R): Ellie Hoctor, Bid Ryan, Cepta Cooke, Connie Carter, Nancy Buckley, Elizabeth Fogarty, and Maura Guilfoyle.
 Missing from the picture is Frances Kawala.

CRINKILL ACTIVE RETIREMENT GROUP

The Crinkill Active Retirement Group is growing and we always welcome new members! The greatly improved access in the Handball Alley is wonderful for our main activity - Boccia, and we're now gearing up for the next

round of competitions with other local teams. Our practice sessions are on Wednesdays at 12, (after which we have tea and a chat!) and Fridays at 11 - all in the Ball Alley. Contact Frances Kawala 086 126 1887 for further details.

THE LEINSTERS MARCH

BACK TO LIFE IN BIRR

The year 2016 has been a year of commemoration and remembrance of the Centenary of the Easter Rising and also of the thousands of Irish who died at the battle of the Somme during the First World War. Also 100 years ago, barracked behind stout walls in Crinkle, was an Irish Infantry Regiment called the Leinsters. This is the informal name given to the Prince of Wales Leinster Regiment and Royal Canadians formed in 1881. Over the years of their existence, the Leinsters have much to remember and commemorate.

- * They lost 19,080 men in battle,
- * many thousands of their ranks suffered injuries,
- * Members of the regiment earned 4 Victoria Crosses
- * In addition members of the regiment won 32 battle honours which are commemorated by a stained glass window in St. Brendan's R.C. Church in 1964 (pictured right).

The Leinster Regiment Association is now taking steps to establish a 'museum' in Birr where the soldiers' family members, grandchildren and great-grandchildren can have the bravery of their forefathers recognised. It is also our belief such a facility will prove to be of great interest to both military and ancestry enthusiasts worldwide.

To this end, Birr Library has generously offered to display memorabilia such as letters, documents, medals, uniforms etc., that we are asking the relatives of Leinster soldiers to 'loan' to the library.

We, the Leinster Regiment Association members, are grateful to the Offaly Library Services for the manner in which they have embraced and supported this project. In particular, we thank Mary Stuart (Head of Libraries), Catherine Feighery, Joe Kinane, Martina Needham, Julie McGuirk who are co-ordinating events.



By Tony Hayden



Cleanup Time



Bar-b-que Time

RIVERSTOWN TIDY TOWNS

Riverstown Tidy Towns relaunched and held its first meeting in October 2015. Our first event was the lighting of the Christmas Tree with a special guest appearance on 6th December, 2015. This was a great success. Through the Spring and Summer of 2016 various village clean ups were organised with painting, planting, weeding, strimming, litter control etc, taking place. The overall look of the village improved with colourful floral displays, brightly painted bird boxes and a hive of activity with young and old involved. A 'Duck Race' fundraiser was held on 24th September 2016

which was a great success.

As the dark nights approached, tidy towns came to its natural end for 2016. However from April 2017, work will recommence every Tuesday and Thursday evening. All are welcome to help keep our village tidy, meet old friends and perhaps make some new friends along the way. The social side to our village and keeping our community spirit alive is as important as the aesthetics of our village. If you would like any further information contact Valerie O'Rourke, Chairperson, Riverstown Tidy Towns.



Offaly Cancer Support Group

*When dealing with a huge challenge,
give yourself a little boost*

Dóchas Offaly Cancer Support Group was founded in 1999 by the late Ann Fox. Dóchas is a registered charity offering professional support to cancer patients, their carers and their families. Dóchas is designed to support you and your loved ones as you deal with the presence of cancer in your life. For over 16 years, we've helped many people throughout the Midlands and beyond. We want to help you and your family come to terms with your illness at your own pace. Dóchas believes people can regain some control back in their life during this extremely difficult and draining time. Our aim is to provide the highest quality holistic cancer support services that will nurture your physical, mental, spiritual and emotional well-being. These treatments are now regarded as part of standard support for patients with cancer. We offer a range of therapies including Acupuncture, Reflexology and Manual Lymph Drainage. We also run classes on health and nutrition, art therapy and Pilates. We have two fully trained volunteers on the floor every day so drop in for a chat and find out what therapy we can offer you.

DÓCHAS OFFALY CANCER SUPPORT GROUP

We are based in Tullamore and we also have an outreach centre in Market Square, Birr every Tuesday 11am – 3pm. This is a drop in centre where you can come in for a chat and meet our volunteers. We also offer some complementary therapies. Our service is 100% confidential and client care remains our main focus.

The Birr Outreach Centre has raised much needed funds for Dóchas including sponsored walks/runs, from local businesses, coin box collection, afternoon teas and we also receive donations from clients. Your donation is very much appreciated as these much needed services are solely provided through fundraising activities.

Our services complement primary medical care, and there are lots of opportunities to meet other people going about their daily lives while undertaking this huge challenge.

So, whether you've been recently diagnosed, or cancer is affecting your family's life on a daily basis, call in to us for a chat and a cuppa. Genuine support is closer than you think. Contact our Tullamore Centre Monday – Thursday 10am - 1pm. Phone: 057 9328268.

Birr Outreach Centre is open Tuesday 11am - 3pm.
Phone: 087 2777728

E-mail: info@dochasoffaly.ie Web: www.dochasoffaly.ie

SOCIAL DANCING IN CARRIG

All roads lead to Carrig on the first Thursday of every month for Social Dancing in the Carrig and Riverstown Community Hall. The dancing started here about ten years ago and it has become part of a large number of venues that run dancing in their communities throughout the Midlands.

The hall committee organise the running of the dancing and the bands are booked a year in advance. Admission is €8. Dancing is from 9.30pm to 12.30am with a break for tea and refreshments at 11.00pm, prepared and served by the catering committee. Eighty to ninety people are usually in attendance, coming from a radius of twenty to thirty miles, and many travel to the other venues in the Midlands.

Willy Wolfe from Birr has played a major role in developing and supporting the dancing. As well as compiling leaflets with information about what is happening at all the venues,

he also runs dance classes and organises other events like social dancing breaks in Ennis, Gorey, Kilkenny and Carlow. The other venues where social dancing is organised are Aghancon [4th Wednesday], Cloughjordan [2nd Tuesday], Drombane [1st & 3rd Friday], Killimor [last Thursday], Ballingarry [2nd Saturday], Shinrone [3rd Saturday], Lorrha [every Friday], Killesmestia [3rd Friday], Mountmellick [last Saturday], Camross [1st Saturday], Rath [3rd Thursday], Scout Hall Nenagh [one Sunday a month].

Social dancing is a great source of entertainment and an opportunity for people to meet in a friendly environment. As well as providing a focal point for people in a community to meet, the dances also generate revenue that helps with the upkeep and overheads of the community hall.



Enjoying the dancing in Carrig Hall are from left to right, Sylvia Donaldson & Liam Grennan, Joe Ryan & Michelle Keane, Johnny Smyth & Anne O'Brien.



St. John's Secondary School - First years 1968 Science & Domestic

Back Row (L to R): M. Brennan, A. Lantry, C. Grant, P. Dillon, M. Hogan, A. Corboy, M. Pey, A. Cahill, A. Farrar

3rd Row: M. Riordan, K. Bergin, M. Rigney, C. Quinlan, P. Scully, I. Gill, H. McBryde, P. Horan, M. O'Hanrahan, M. Jennings, M. Hynes, C. O'Meara, B. Milne, A. Cordial, V. Mooney, V. Murphy, M. O'Reilly, K. Camon.

2nd Row: M. Kearns, M. O'Regan, E. Cashen, M. Bergin, L. Mellsop, D. McWatters, M. Short, C. Treacy, E. Hanniffy, M. Cahalan, G. Treacy, A. McMenimen, M. Dwane, M. Kennedy.

Front Row: C. Brady, E. Landy, P. Connery, M. Drum, M. Costello, E. Vaughan, M. Egan, C. King, M. Teehan, A. Brophy, A. Parkinson, P. Loughnane, (Head girl of science) M. Whealan.

Missing: R. Feehan, S. O'Meara, M. Doorley, C. Kelly, and F. Nevin.

IRISH GEORGIAN SOCIETY - BIRR/MIDLANDS CHAPTER



A group of Birr/Midlands Chapter members visiting Portumna Castle on 2 July.

Included are Lord Rosse (Chapter Head) Lady Rosse with Committee members including Mary Browne, Oliver Choisel, Derek Coulter, Clodagh Dowley Elizabeth Fogarty (hon secretary), Mary Graham, Skip Heinecke, Margaret Hogan, John Joyce (Chair) and Vera O'Meara.

The main project for 2015/2016 was to support and develop the FAN trail - the famous and notables of Birr. This culminated in the launch of 25 plaques at an event in Birr on 29 June 2016 with guest of honour, actor and Birr native, Des Keogh. The FAN tourist trail will enhance the experience of visitors to the town. Without the work and dedication of Rosalind Fanning and Jackie Lynch, this initiative would never have taken off and the Birr and Midlands Chapter of the IGS remain in their debt.

Another on-going project is the repatriation of the Eyrecourt Staircase which once was a main feature of Eyrecourt House, now derelict, and which had been built in the 1660's. The staircase was bought by Randolph Hearst in the 1920's destined for the Hearst mansion in California but subsequently donated to the Detroit Institute of Arts where it remains in storage. The Chapter will continue to raise this issue, which will be long-running, with important actors.

Change of Secretary : After serving for 23 years as Secretary to the Chapter, Clodagh Dowley tendered her resignation. The Committee regretfully accepted and thanked her

sincerely for her sterling service to the Chapter. In January a new secretary, Elizabeth Fogarty, was appointed.

The Chapter took part in a number of events during the Summer of 2016. On 18 June we were delighted to welcome a group of visitors from the Cork Chapter who were treated to tours of the Castle, the Castle gardens and the town. The IGS summer garden party took place on 25 June at Abbyleix House attended by most of the Committee. On 2 July a very enjoyable excursion to East Galway, was organised by Treasurer Gerry Browne. Visits to Portumna Castle and Workhouse, Oranmore Castle courtesy of Leonie Leslie and Yeats' Castle at Tour Ballyea were included in the programme.

On 1 August, as IGS contribution to Birr Vintage Week & Arts Festival – a tour of the FAN (famous and notables) trail took place, animated by Rosalind Fanning, FAN organiser, and John Joyce, Chair, Birr/Midlands Chapter.

The Irish Georgian Society always welcomes new members. Visit IGS Headquarters' website at <http://www.igs.ie/>

ST. BRENDAN'S ENVIRONMENTAL GROUP

St. Brendan's Environmental Group is the local Community Employment Group working with Community groups in Birr and surrounding areas. It was founded in 1993.

Work carried out by the group includes general maintenance, wall building, tiling, green area maintenance, weed control, maintaining and watering of flower beds and hanging baskets during the summer and autumn.

Community employment gives an opportunity for persons on DSP payments to get back into the workforce and gain access to further training.

The group also have a number of participants working in office administration, public information provision and receptionist positions.

Participants employed on a CE scheme have the opportunity to take part in training courses which are varied, from basic FETAC Level 3 to HETAC Level 6 or higher.

These courses decided upon are individual to each learner

following discussions with the scheme supervisor.

None of this would be possible without the dedication of the voluntary directors, the scheme supervisor, and the very good people working on the scheme.

Some of the groups currently included under the umbrella of the scheme include, sports clubs e.g. Birr Town Soccer Club, Wilmer Tennis Club, Carrig and Riverstown GAA Club, Birr GAA Club, Birr SK8 Park and Birr Rugby Club.

Other organisations include Carrig Community Hall and Tidy Towns, Clareen Parish, St. Brendan's Church of Ireland, Birr Community Resource Centre, Marian Hall, Birr Tidy Towns, St. Brendan's R.C. Church. Currently there are 23 participants on the scheme.

Any voluntary organisation wishing to become a member of the group can make contact on 087 2713766. Participant positions are advertised on the Intreo website on Jobs Ireland.

OFFLINE FILM FESTIVAL

For five days every October, Birr becomes a miniature Berlin. Film directors, producers, writers, actors – and most importantly an audience – come from all over the world, and converge upon the town for the OFFline Film Festival. Now in its seventh consecutive year, OFFline has grown into one of the most coveted film festival experiences on the circuit, for both filmmakers and audience alike. And that's not just because the film crowd like the craic in Birr...

It's because OFFline is a film festival with a serious difference. When you go to a regular film festival, you don't ever get close to the stars. At OFFline, there's a fair chance you might sup a pint with your favourite film-star in the pub after the screening!

This year was no exception. In a spectacular coup, OFFline managed to secure a screening of Pat Shortt's new film *The Flag*, a day before the official release in cinemas across Ireland! A huge crowd arrived in Birr Theatre & Arts Centre to watch latest film from the writer/director team behind *Pure Mule and Eden*, and also features Ruth Bradley and Brian Gleeson, who both starred in *Rebellion*, and RTE's international hit crime drama *Love/Hate*.

Another homemade highlight was the documentary *Bobby Sands: 66 Days*, which played to a packed theatre. The film is a portrait of the Irish Republican martyr's 66-day hunger strike, which turned the boy from Belfast into an international icon.

But it wasn't just Irish films on show – quite the opposite. The shorts selection was a mind-blowing collection of the best short films being produced around the world in the past year – particular highlights was Austrian film *Progressive Seduction*, and quirky New York comedy *Dad*.

But perhaps the most thrillingly unique aspect to OFFline is the 57-hour film-making challenge, which is exactly what it says on the tin. Filmmakers come to Birr with nothing except an idea and energy, and leave Birr with a finished film and a desire for a few days sleep, and possibly a healthy hangover.

And it's all to play for – each year of OFFline, the winning 57-hour film gets a slot in the 2017 Galway Film Fleadh! The energy required to cast, shoot, edit, and ultimately screen the 57-hour film is phenomenal – and contagious!

Another innovative hit this year was the Sensory Screening, for children with sensory issues, in Offaly School of Special Education.

As always, the wrap party in Spinners was a massive hit with the filmmakers and the audience, which went on into the wee hours, and no doubt left a few sore heads for the Sunday morning brunch, in Dooley's Hotel! Armed to the teeth with sausages and rashers, participants were treated to a professional audio workshop.

After the workshop, filmmakers and fans alike make their way back up to the Theatre, for the awards ceremony – which threw up a few surprises, as always!

As the five days of 2016 OFFline came to a close, the recurring mantra being excitedly recited by filmmakers and audience alike was – "we'll be back next year!"





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BIRR MILITARY HISTORY SOCIETY

This being an important anniversary year it was decided to stay in Ireland and visit as many sites as possible with Spring and Autumn trips to Dublin and Cork to take advantage of the many commemorative events that were scheduled to take place.

We started the year with our annual dinner in March at which we took a moment to remember our long standing friend and member Martin Hynes who had passed away and who contributed so much to the enjoyment of our trips. We all recall Martin filming our trips and, when abroad, collecting seeds and cuttings, wrapping them in damp tissues and smuggling them back to be propagated in Birr.

Dublin

We spent the first afternoon in Glasnevin Cemetery, known as the dead centre of Dublin, where an actor re-created Pádraig Pearse's oration over the grave of O'Donovan Rossa. Our guide then took us to the National Patriot Graves, the Republican Plot, Daniel O'Connell's crypt, where they are re-installing the spiral staircase within the round tower, Michael Collins' grave plus a host of other graves that had their own very interesting stories.

Poor weather the next day determined that we visit the National Museum at Collins Barracks which contains over 150,000 artefacts covering the political, military and social history of Ireland. In "The Way We Were" gallery is a pair of lady's shoes with the maker's label which reads 'Mary Walsh, Ladies Boot and Shoe Maker, Parsonstown.' Presumably Mary was a professional shoe maker around 1830.

The next day was spent visiting the GPO which houses an excellent museum and runs a most interesting film which combines computer generated overhead maps and layouts of the main battle sites in the city with filmed action depicting the main characters and leaders of the rising within the GPO. Later we visited Kilmainham Gaol for a guided tour and then visited the Custom House, one of Gandon's most impressive and best known buildings in Ireland.

We also fitted in visits to the Guinness Storehouse and the Jameson Distillery which, apart from providing much appreciated liquid refreshment, are some of the most informative and interesting tours available in Dublin.

Cork

In September we were in Cork and started by taking the ferry from Cobh to Spike Island which has a very interesting and varied history as an island home, a convict prison, a military fortress and latterly a place of confinement for joy riders. Cork Harbour is the second largest natural harbour in the world, second only to Sydney Harbour and Spike Island was ideally sited at the narrow entrance to the harbour for the gun emplacements which protected the fleets which had been moved there from Kinsale Harbour. On returning from Spike Island we spent time in the Cobh Heritage Centre which covers the story of Queenstown, the history of Famine and Emigration, a reconstruction of famine ships and of course much material relating to the Titanic and Lusitania. A statue of Annie Moore, the first ever emigrant to be processed in Ellis Island when it opened in 1892, stands at Ellis Island and also outside the centre.

The following day we drove to Kinsale and visited Charles Fort. We were blessed with terrific weather which was ideal for this outdoor site. Like Cork Harbour, Kinsale Harbour was protected on its approaches by two forts, Charles Fort and James Fort on either side of the entry to protect the fleet as it lay at anchor.

We drove out to the Old Head of Kinsale but were unable to even walk out to the head as it is now a privately owned golf course and visitors are vigorously denied entry by security guards.

On the final day of our trip we drove to Crosshaven to visit Camden Fort Meagher which is recognised as "One of the finest remaining examples of a classical Coastal Artillery Fort in the World". It is a massive installation, 65% of which is underground and whose guns, like those of Spike Island covered the approaches to Cork Harbour. Our visit coincided with a commemorative service for soldiers who died in the First World War and we were given a private tour of many areas not normally open to the public.

Although we did not go abroad this year, one of our members, Ger O'Meara, did attend celebrations on the Somme where he joined the centenary commemoration of the battles at Ginchy and Guillemont where the Leinster Regiment won battle honours.

After the success of these trips we are eagerly looking forward to next year's trip.



Members of Birr Military History Society on their recent visit to Charles Fort in Cork.

(L to R): Joe Breen, Martin Horan, Derek Coulter, Billy Gleeson, Val Johnson, Oliver Craughwell and Dave Wilson.

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BIRR TIDY TOWNS

Birr Tidy Towns was delighted to win the All-Ireland Pollinator Award in the Small Town Category at the SuperValu Tidy Towns Awards ceremony at the Helix, Dublin. The Pollinator Award aims to encourage Tidy Towns groups to implement pollinator friendly actions in their towns and villages as part of the competition. The award supports the All-Ireland Pollinator Plan 2015-2020 developed by the National Biodiversity Data Centre and is sponsored by the Heritage Offices and Biodiversity Offices of Local Authorities across Ireland. (www.biodiversityireland.ie/pollinatorplan) Ireland's bees are in decline and without them our plants, trees and vegetables will not be pollinated. The aim of the award is to reverse this decline by taking measures such as leaving wildflower margins to grow and plant more pollinator friendly plants in parks and gardens.

Birr Tidy Towns has endeavoured to protect and encourage wildlife in the town over the last number of years. A bed of Nepeta (Catmint) at Chesterfield, on the Banagher road proved to be very successful with hundreds of Bumble-bees, honey-bees and butterflies visiting the blooms over the last few summers. This year we continued this plan by planting a pollinator friendly flowerbed beside the Mercy P.S. and placing bee and insect hotels in the two local parks.

In wildlife rich areas of the town a "No Mow" policy was adopted especially along the river walks and parks. Native trees and shrubs were planted to enhance the area and encourage wildlife. The use of pesticides and herbicides was discouraged and ivy was left in place as it is an attractive plant for bees. Signs were placed in these areas to raise public awareness.

A "Pollinator Friendly" category was added to our Estates, Garden and Window box Competition which is sponsored by Birr Credit Union. We also produced a leaflet highlighting the plight of our pollinators with a list of pollinator friendly garden plants. This was distributed at the Birr Enterprise Day and through Hannah's Garden Centre and the Organic Shop. With your help Birr Tidy Towns will continue to implement pollinator friendly policies and endeavour to keep Birr buzzing in 2017.

If you are interested in becoming involved with us you are most welcome. Contacts are Bernie (086 601 5497) or Greg (086 8933627)

Pictured right at the Super-Valu Tidy Towns awards are Bernie Fanneran, Michael Egan, Amanda Pedlow Offaly Heritage Officer and Greg Smith.



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BIRR GIRL GUIDES, BROWNIES & LADYBIRDS

The Birr Girl Guides had an eventful in year 2016. We met the Rathdowney and Borris-in-Ossary guides in May for an overnight camp in Rathdowney. In July, we went camping with these groups to Mount Mellary for four nights. We had a fantastic time orienteering, gadget making, going to mass up in the monastery with the monks and hiking . We also learned First Aid and CPR and would like to thank Birr Community Responders for teaching us CPR and Ross Manson for teaching First Aid. We are looking forward to a fun packed year in 2017. We also would like to thank everyone who has donated to our cause for any collections we have held this year.

The Camcor Ladybirds and Brownies had a wonderful 2016 using the new Irish Girl Guides "Journey Programme". We learned lots of new skills such as how to make a kite, how to stay healthy and how to stay safe at home, indoors and outdoors, road safety. We sang Christmas Carols at Sandymount Nursing Unit in December and at Super Valu in Birr. We also learned about our heritage and finished off the year with a trip to Lullymore Heritage Park last April. We went on a train ride around the park and saw loads of farm animals at the pet farm. We also learned about the history of the famine and saw how people lived around that time. We wish to thank the Staff and Residents of Birr Community Nursing Unit and the Manager and Staff of Buckley's Super Valu in Birr for letting us sing Christmas Carols.

A huge THANKS also to our leaders and unit helpers for volunteering throughout the year, without you we could not continue.

Ladybirds: Martina Cooke, Katie Corrigan, Sonia Izzi, Brona McDermott, Regina Delaney, Alice Corrigan, Kelly Bennett and Orlaith Plunkett.

Brownies: Joan Hogan, Pauline Bradley, Mary Williams and Aoife Hogan.

Girl Guides: Zara Cordial, Becky Cordial, Janet Ginty and Emma Guilfoyle.



Camcor Brownies learning about the National Flag and their County Colours.



Lily Tait and her son John supporting the An Post Race of Ireland when it passed through Birr.

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Enjoying the Christmas Market in Galway

The Spot Youth Café was founded in 2009 as a result of the dedication and hard work from the Thousand Stars community group who formed to address the real need for a youth facility for young people from Birr and surrounding hinterlands. The café is located on Main Street, Birr and has Foroige Junior Club on Monday evenings from 6-8pm for children aged 10-12 years and Foroige Youth Café Fridays from 2:30-5:30pm for young people in 1st -6th years in Secondary School. These clubs are fully supervised by a team of volunteer leaders who have received Foroige Volunteer Leadership Training Level 1 & 2. All our volunteers are Garda vetted. The aim of the project is to provide a safe, relaxed, warm and welcoming space for young people to hang out, meet with friends and have a voice in weekly activities, projects and themed events. The café is led by young people themselves. This empowers them to make decisions that directly affect their café, practice leadership skills and represent their peers at management level. The project also aims to provide fun and informative projects throughout the year to further support young people as they develop during their transition to young adults.

This year the project successfully organised a Bake Sale and Bag Pack club fundraisers, one week of action packed summer camp, various film nights, art workshops, visit to Galway Christmas Market and themed nights on top of their weekly Foroige Junior Club and Foroige Youth Café service. The 5th year Meitheal Mentors, from St. Brendan's Community School, accompanied their first year groups in a visit to the youth café during September 2016 as part of their transition to secondary school. This visit aims to grow the awareness of the Youth Café with the new first years and the opportunities available to them by becoming members. In September 2015 the project linked in with Offaly

YouthBank and delivered their training programme in collaboration with St Brendan's CS Transition Year Programme. Eighty-Eight young people were given the opportunity to take responsibility for proposing youth projects for funding. Sixteen projects were pitched and the top two were funded in 2016. These were: the Anti-Smoking workshop designed and delivered to 1st year students by Daragh Delahunt, Conor Meaney, Darrell Lally, Grace Gorman, Michelle Maher, and Maria Babu; and the Birr Youth Cinema Club which coordinated and hosted two movie screenings for 15-17 year olds during June & July 2016 with the support of the Birr Theatre & Arts Centre. This group included Ebony Hogan, Conor O' Meara, Leon Hogan, and Roisin Smyth. This community voluntary sector experience will stand to develop their personal skills but also can be used towards achieving Gaisce and similar awards. Furthermore, voluntary work experience significantly helps

towards making decisions regarding college and career opportunities.

The Spot Youth Café project is supported by an interagency group made up of the following: Maedhbh Gordon, Offaly Local Development Company, Bernie McHugh, Foroige, Sophie Dawes, The SUB Garda Youth Diversion Project, Cllr. John Carroll, David Gorman and Lynn Kelly, Voluntary Management Committee Representatives, Josephine Rigney, HSE, Pdraic Connaughton and Michael Dardis, An Garda Síochána, and Niamh Dowler, Offaly County Council. For more information about The Spot Junior Club and Youth Café or to get involved and support the project please contact us on 089 249 5101. Like and follow us on Facebook at The Spot Youth Café or email us on birryouthcafe@gmail.com.

THE SPOT YOUTH CAFÉ



CARRIG/RIVERSTOWN/KILLEEN ACTIVE RETIREMENT GROUP

Here we are after another year of pretty full-on activities. As is our usual agenda, we spent the early winter months playing indoor bowls and other table games. As soon as the weather improved we moved out to the Pitch and Putt course in Banagher.

Early April we went on our annual get-away. This year our destination was Youghal. This trip is in the main for fun and relaxation. However it can sometime be very educational, as we always try to visit places of historical interest. This year it was Mount Mellery, a really super place full of history. April also saw us going to Bunratty for an Irish night of music and song.

In July we were shocked and grieved to learn of the untimely death our member, Margaret Guilfoyle (pictured right). Margaret was a valued member and was our chairperson for some years. Rest in Peace Margaret.

Also in July we embarked on a Shannon cruise. This took us from Banagher to Shannonbridge with a stop-off in Shannonbridge for some leisure time. On our return to

Banagher we had a beautiful meal in Flynn's of Banagher.

We also took on a challenging course of 'Willow' or basket weaving. It does sound difficult, but with our usual tenacity and stubbornness we overcame all obstacles and ended up with rather splendid baskets. At our usual monthly meetings we always try to have a speaker or demonstration.

New members are always welcome and God willing we plan some of the same for next year.



BIRR SUB PROJECT

The SUB Project stands for Saol Ur Biorra or New Life in BIRR. It engages young people, aged 12 – 18 years from the BIRR/Shinrone area in Co. Offaly in a range of positive and constructive activities which facilitates their personal development and promotes their civic responsibility. The wide range of activities includes sports, fishing, arts and crafts, computers, community awareness projects, a variety of workshops and other special interest groups.

The SUB is a Garda Youth Diversion Project, managed by Foróige and is funded by the Irish Youth Justice Service and operated in conjunction with the Garda Community Relations Section of An Garda Síochána. Foróige are the biggest national youth organisation in Ireland and currently manage and operate 33 Youth Garda Diversion Projects. These projects provide a focus for local youth to get involved in productive and rewarding programmes and activities that support their own development and the development of their community.

The project has facilitated young people engaging in a number of pro-social activities throughout 2016 which have included fishing, computing, golf, beauty workshops and many more recreational activities of interest and benefit to the young people. The project also continues to successfully run a number of structured programmes that have been researched and designed by Foróige. These programmes of intervention aim to examine young people's decision making skills, motivation to change, empathy levels and their involvement in their local community. The programmes also examine a number of topics such as drug use, drinking, engaging in anti-social behaviour and the importance of living a healthy lifestyle.

During the summer the project made a visit to Bogathon at Lisduff Farm in Co. Laois where the young people engaged in a 5km Bog obstacle course. This successful trip allowed the young people to engage in a fun filled structured activity where they enjoyed completing a heavy endurance obstacle course through wet, rough and muddy terrain; which supported their programme work as it enhanced their decision making, team building and communication skills. The project has also worked to enhance positive Garda/youth relations within the community through the involvement of local Gardaí in the delivery of programmes. While much work has been carried out throughout 2016 the project is looking forward to engaging with young people in 2017 and supporting them as they continue their personal development.

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LEINSTER REGIMENT IRELAND - A FORGOTTEN LEINSTER SOLDIER

With the 100th Anniversary of the Battle of the Somme there were many major commemorations to mark this centenary however in a rainy wind-swept field at Ballyeighan on the 9th. September, there was a very small solemn ceremony held to mark the centenary of the death of Captain Lancelot Joseph Moore Studholme of the 7th (Service Battalion) Leinster Regiment (pictured right). The event was organised by Stephen Callaghan, the PRO of Leinster Regiment Ireland, and there were a number of people in attendance despite the poor weather. Archdeacon Wayne Carney said a few words, and this was followed by the laying of wreaths.

Lancelot Studholme was born in Birr in 1884 and was the only son of Joseph and Mary Studholme. He was appointed Justice of the Peace upon his father's death. Lancelot was a well-educated man and had a passionate interest in gardening. He joined the Leinster Regiment at the outbreak of war in August 1914, but chose to enlist as a private.

He was promoted to the rank of Captain in July 1916. At the Somme during the Battle of Ginchy on 9th September 1916 he led his Company over open ground under very heavy fire. His batman Thomas Harte was hit by a bullet. Thomas was from Crinkill and had worked on Lancelot's estate at Ballyeighan. It was whilst attempting to rescue his friend and neighbour that Lancelot ended up losing his own life. Lancelot was recommended for the Military Cross for this incredible act of bravery. He was well regarded throughout the Leinsters and his loss was deeply felt. A private of the regiment commented that he was "a grand officer, a brave man, we cried when we buried him".

A large impressive oak cross was erected behind Ballyeighan house after his death which is where the ceremony was appropriately held, as he has no known grave. Lancelot's name is commemorated in perpetuity on the Theipval Memorial to the Missing of the Somme. In addition to Lancelot the year 1916 saw the loss of 445 men from the Leinster Regiment, 37 of who were Offaly born.

2016 has been a busy year for Leinster Regiment Ireland

with several successful events, all the while as the association grows steadily. The visit to the Somme centre in Newtownards was most enlightening. It has excellent displays and a full size mock trench which gives a glimpse into the horrible conditions endured by the men in the trenches.

The weekend following Birr Vintage week was another success for

Leinster Regiment Ireland, with talks, tours and their AGM. The chairman John Goodman gave a talk in Birr Library titled "The 2nd Leinsters, who they were, what became of them". This talk was highly enjoyed by all in attendance as John gave the breakdown of where the men in the 2nd battalion were from, one of the take-away messages was that the regiment was an "Irish" regiment made up almost entirely of Irish men. The AGM was held afterwards in Dooley's Hotel. There was an informal tour of Clonoghill cemetery organised by PRO Stephen Callaghan. This tour took in the graves of some of the interesting men who had served in the Regiment and, after the tour and lunch, a wreath was laid at the Leinster Regiment memorial in Crinkill.

John Goodman will give a lecture on the 2nd Battalion Leinster Regiment in conjunction with the Western Front Association on 15 October in Collins Barracks, Dublin. To finish the year that was the centenary of 1916, Leinster Regiment Ireland will be back in Birr in November for the special Remembrance Service at St Brendan's Church of Ireland.



BIRR MEN'S SHED

We would like to thank The Birr Review for their invitation to us for inclusion in the 2016 issue and we congratulate all involved in the magazine.

The Men's Shed movement is the simple idea that every man should have a Shed, a place where they can retreat from the world, surround themselves in a relaxed environment where practical and impractical projects all have their place.

A movement that has grown as a result of goodwill from

people and the need for spaces where people can meet to socialise while pursuing practical interests.

We are always interested in gaining new members and you can be sure you will find a welcome with us. Anyone interested in getting involved can contact shedbirr@gmail.com or post to us at Birr Shed, Green Street, Birr, Co. Offaly.



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CARRIG/RIVERSTOWN/KILLEEN DRAMA GROUP



The cast of “Too Close to Home” with playwright James Kearney.

Back Row (L to R) :Brendan Hanamy (Producer), Stephen Guilfoyle, Leonard Deane, Deirdre King, Greg Hanlon, Niamh Ryan, Dermot Sullivan, Brian Doorley (Secretary).

Front Row: Sarah King, Emma Ryan, James Keary (Playwright), Edel Pey, Anne Hocht, Tony Dargan (Chairperson).

Setting up a drama group for the first time can be a step into the unknown for many people who would never had any experience in this field, be it on or off stage. But having a producer of Brendan Hanamy’s experience living amongst us and prepared to guide us through all the pitfalls that staging a show entails we took the plunge in September last year and set up the CRK Drama Group in our side of the parish. Brendan chose James Keary’s three act comedy – Too Close to Home – as our first production. Approximately 25+ rehearsals took place all through Oct and Nov with the first show pencilled in for Friday 4th December. Mid-way through the rehearsals we were delighted to welcome James Keary who wrote “Too Close to Home”, to Carrig/Riverstown Hall. James was not only impressed with the talent he saw on stage but couldn’t believe that only a few of our cast had appeared on stage prior to this, such was their commanding stage presence.

Men, such as, Michael Collins, Eddie Doorley and Ray Hoare volunteered to build props for our stage and this work went on during nights that rehearsals weren’t taking place. “Solos” participants, formally “FÁS” under their manager Liam Moran were tremendously helpful and wallpapered all the scenes, sanded and painted the stage floor.

As we were a new group and had no funds to cover ongoing cost, the committee organised a Table Quiz in Gleeson’s in late October. It was such a successful night that it is anticipated this will become an annual event. The support from all over the parish was amazing and the cast and committee realised that people were looking forward immensely to December’s show.

The work behind the scenes by the committee in advertising, allowing people to pre-book their seats in the weeks prior to the shows and the hundreds of important items that needed our attention before December meant that come show time everything fell into place. The full-house signs went up days before the shows began such was the demand for tickets. The feed back from many of those who attended was

extremely heartening and certainly the hard work, dedication and time given by both cast and committee was worthwhile.

In early February 2016 we all returned to rehearse and stage the show as a fundraiser for St. Cillian’s Camogie Club.

We presented both Carrig N.S. and Killeen N.S. with cheques for €300 each from the proceeds of the shows. We are now in the process of equipping the community centre with spot lights and sound, also paid for from the proceeds.

Our show this winter was “Run for your Wife”, a two-act farce written by Ray Cooney that was staged over three nights in December in the Carrig/Riverstown Community Hall.



CRK Drama Group Committee

Back Row: Tony Doorley, Margaret O’Brien, Janet Ginty, Mary King, Ailbe Hogan.

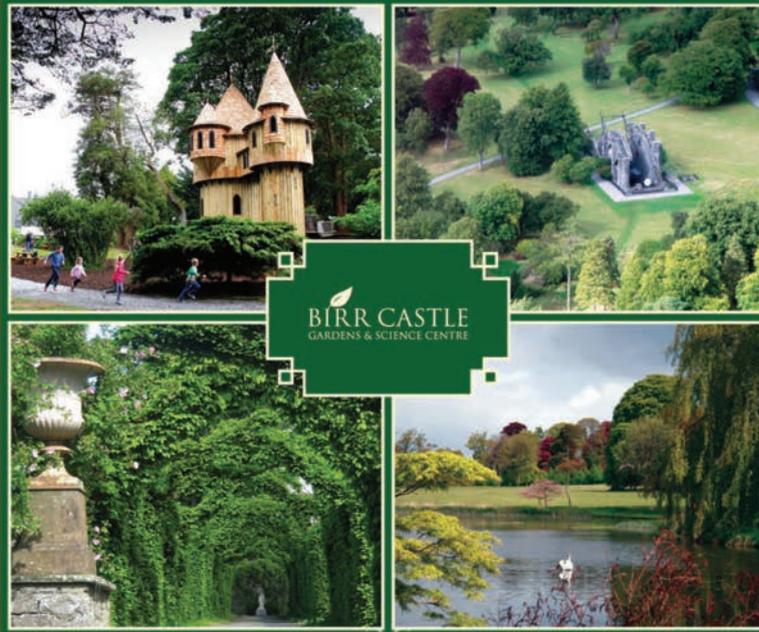
Front Row: Maureen Hoare (Treasurer), Brian Doorley (Secretary), Tony Dargan (Chairperson).


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BIRR COMMUNITY RESPONDER GROUP



Meet the Birr Community Responder Team.

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Missing Siobhan Mc Evoy, Ann Marie Flynn, Janis Nolan, Patrick (Junior) O'Callaghan,
Picture Taken By Paramedic Mark Sweeney Birr Ambulance Station.

Birr Community Responder Group is a voluntary group that works tirelessly providing medical support and assistance to the people locally, 24/7, 365 days of the year.

This year we have responded to over 80 emergency calls so far and the numbers continue to grow. We respond to the following emergencies;

- Cardiac Arrest Calls,
- Cardiac Chest Pain Calls,
- Choking Incidents,
- Stroke Related Calls

We run Irish Heart Foundation Courses and Cardiac First Responder Courses for people who would like to join our Group or other Groups. We have also run the Irish Heart Foundation Course for pupils in 6th class in local national schools.

If you would like to take part in our CPR Classes or for further information, please contact David on 087 6994272.

BIRR GARDEN CLUB

Birr Garden Club meets on the first Tuesday of each month from October to May at the Resource Centre (behind Costcutters). We have speakers covering various garden topics and flower arranging. In May we usually visit a local garden. In June we go on our annual outing, this year we went to Jun and Jim Blake's gardens in Blessington. We have over 40 members and new members are always welcome. Watch the Midland Tribune for details of our meetings.



BIRR 20:20

Birr 20:20 has had a good year. A pattern of public meetings in accordance with its fundamental intention to be open and accountable. The meetings are on the second Wednesday of each month, September through June, at 7.30pm, in the Municipal Council Chamber at the rear of the Library in Birr. All are welcome and if you cannot attend please look out for the account of the monthly meeting in the following week's Midland Tribune. We are most grateful to Derek Fanning for his faithfully accurate reporting.

With the objective of being a forum dedicated to the holistic welfare of Birr based on the promotion of collaborative and cooperative activity between existing Birr-related agencies and the promotion of new initiatives with the same or similar objects we have established a standard agenda format which centres on progress reports from the various pillars supporting Birr 20:20 with space also for information and new initiative presentations.

The current pillars cover Tourism, Arts and Crafts, Environment, Sport, Youth, Enterprise and Food. The common focus for their concerns is to develop Birr as a Tourist Destination through which greater wealth can be generated and shared. For some that central objective is more immediately and obviously relevant. The Tourism Pillar is the pertinent example and the Group is currently working on tourist packages which will make Birr an attractive place to come and stay. The significance of cooperation with the food, the environment and the arts and crafts pillars is immediate. An attractive environment with wholesome locally produced food, served appetisingly in local cafes and restaurants with good value for money in accommodation are the elements for a successful tourism industry. Conversations are already beginning about how to make educational opportunity an activity that supports tourism and this area will be developed in 2016/17.



Birr Court House

Things to do when you are a visitor to Birr are also important and the further elaboration of the attractions in the Castle are of crucial significance in this regard. So also will be an arts and crafts use for the Court House when we can untangle the web of ownership surrounding it. Much highly imaginative work has already been done by the Arts and Crafts Pillar who have produced a wonderfully exciting DVD demonstrating how the Courthouse could be used while still

preserving the key elements of its historic purpose. Some thinking has also begun about the use of the Workhouse and how its ownership and restoration to a new purpose may be funded.

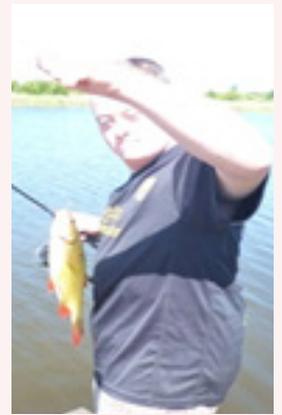
Early in the year the Youth Pillar created an amazing assembly of people and material to illustrate just what activities and opportunities there for young people in Birr. It deserved much greater support than it got. Perhaps it wasn't sufficiently well publicised.

One of the key messages that emerged was the need for a constant replenishment of volunteer youth leadership if you have skills of youth leadership to offer please do so.

Has sport become so competitive that the value of cooperation and collaboration is not necessarily seen or understood? The Sports Pillar has been wrestling with this possibility almost since the earliest of its meetings. Listening to some of the conversation it is obvious that many of the smaller clubs and minority sports could do with and would welcome sharing facilities and personnel. The talking continues and it is very much hoped that headway will be made this coming year so that Birr will be fully ready to take advantage of whatever community recreational grant-aid there may be from government in the future.

On the Enterprise part of the Birr 20:20 spectrum we welcome the re-activation of the Chamber of Commerce. With ILOFAR, which is the new radio telescope installation at Birr Castle which will connect Birr to the largest Radio Telescope in the world, being launched in 2017 Birr has to be ready to take and make whatever business and educational advantages this development in Astronomy puts in our way. We know it will because of what has happened to ILOFAR'S counterpart in the Netherlands so the big challenge for Birr in the almost immediate future will be to be ready to support the County Staff, the Universities and Enterprise Ireland when the data begins to flow as in partnership they will seek to maximise the advantages which will flow from having ILOFAR on our doorstep. In the same context of Enterprise Birr 20:20 has been able to confirm that Christmas Lighting in Birr will be there in 2016 as good as if not better than in 2015 when until the last minute almost we thought we might be going to have a dark Christmas.

I've kept the best wine to the last and that is the success of Birr Tidy Towns in winning the national pollinator award in 2016 and coming to within one mark of entering the category of national medal winners. Congratulations to Bernie Fanneran and her team. Birr 20:20 became involved in supporting Tidy Towns in a day-long consultation early in the year so that maximum advantage would result from the way in which the application/submission was presented to the national Tidy Towns Organisation it was exciting to be involved in that consultation and then to attend the Awards Night at the end of September and behold the community-wide display of achievement, success and enthusiasm across the board. Birr 20:20 will be backing Birr Tidy Towns in 2017. That backing of Birr is what Birr 20:20 is all about and what month by month it is getting better at doing.



A YEAR IN OUR LIFE IN ST. CRONAN'S

2016 has been another busy year for St. Cronan's Service in Birr. We are located in Syngefield and we provide a day service for adults with Intellectual Disabilities. The people we support take part in a combination of both on and off site activities during the week.

The following is a snapshot of the activities we are currently involved in: both in our house in Syngefield and in our local community. We continue to look after our health and well-being by keeping fit and developing an awareness of the importance of healthy eating while maintaining a healthy lifestyle. We love taking part in our Aqua Aerobics class at the Birr Leisure Centre on Monday mornings. On Thursday afternoon's we go to the gym and use the various fitness equipment.

We have begun a class in Mindfulness class with Ana Alves Smyth who attends the centre every Tuesday. This involves seated chair and stand-up exercises, including controlled breathing, stretching, relaxation, chanting and meditation. This activity provides a lovely relaxed atmosphere for us all. Every Wednesday morning some of us go to the Weight Watchers class in Dooley's Hotel where we meet lots of our friends from Birr and the local areas. In this class, service users are supported to develop an understanding of healthy eating and maintaining a healthy weight.

We enjoy taking part in Food and Cookery on Wednesday afternoons. This class takes place in house, and it allows us to learn new skills to cook simple and nutritious meals that are good for us

On Wednesday mornings we play Boccia in Crinkill Ball Alley. We had a brilliant sports day at Crinkill Ball Alley this year before we got our summer holidays.

During the summer month's we participated in 'The Walking Challenge' in conjunction with Offaly Sports Partnership and we received Certificates of participation for this. We joined our friends from other services and met at Birr Castle where we enjoyed walking together and chatting.

Over the summer we visited Birr castle, Lough Boora, Banagher etc. and other places of interest where we practiced our digital photography skills by taking the

opportunity to get some good photos of the beautiful gardens and the wildlife. We also went fishing in Lough Boora over the nice summer days and even caught a few fish!

We continue to work on our Art and Craft Project's in house. These include Knitting, Painting, scrapbooking, card making and seasonal projects. As part of our woodcraft project we are building various model buildings including a model Western Saloon. We have other woodcraft projects in progress to display in our garden.

We enjoyed looking after our plants and vegetables in our garden again this year. The mild weather afforded us the opportunity to raise seedlings in our glass house. We planted them out and looked after them all summer.

We also continue to work with Birr Tidy Towns and we maintain the area opposite Tesco's and keep it litter free.

We completed a module in QQI level 2 Goal Setting over the summer and we are looking forward to receiving our certificates. This took place in house with an external tutor. We look forward to completing QQI certification in Computers over the winter months.

Other areas we continue to work on include Travel Training, Personal Safety, Literacy and money management skills, Laundry Skills, home management and independent living skills. We continue to attend Literacy in Riverview and our community art classes. Over all it has been a very busy year in St. Cronan's.

We continue to visit 'The Spot Youth Café' weekly where we play air hockey, pool and use the computers. The 'Spot' is also the venue of our annual pool tournament held over the winter months.

We enjoy regular meals out to restaurants and cafes in our local community. This promotes our independence and increases our presence in the community.

Our Christmas trip saw us heading to Dublin to see *Robin Hood* at the Gaiety Theatre.

We would like to take this opportunity to wish our friends and family a very Happy Christmas and a peaceful New Year. We look forward to another busy year 2017.





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Lady Captain Margaret Feehan's Prize.

Back Row (L to R): Tessa Foreman, Gemma Butler, Mary Ryan, Vera Smyth, Trish Rowland, Mona Collins, Eileen Delaney, Ena Guilfoyle, Sue Reedy, Roma Gilmartin, Aileen Watkins, Sheila Brennan.
 Front Row: Ami Spain, Theresa Fealy, President Agnes Doolan, Captain Margaret Feehan, Ann Birmingham, Bernadette McTague (winner), Mary O'Gorman.

BIRR GOLF CLUB

The AGM of the Club was held on Sunday 2 December when a large attendance was given a detailed account of the affairs of the Club during 2015. The Hon. Sec Bernie McTague outlined in detail the running of the Club and Hon. Treasurer Joe Slevin gave a lucid financial report.

The following were elected to manage the affairs of the Club for the 2016 season: Brendan O'Carroll as Chairman. Bernie Meagher as Vice Chair, Bernie McTague as Hon.Sec., Joe Slevin as Hon.Treasurer, Lady Captain Margaret Feehan, Presidents Agnes Doolan, and John Fleury, Vice Captains Theresa Fealy and Tony McCormack, Caroline McCarthy, Tom Rigney. Bernard Kennedy, John Connell, Ger Gath and Aidan Farrelly.

In July the Club hosted its inaugural Pro-Am kindly sponsored by Grant Engineering. The event, a resounding success, attracted a high quality entry from far and near. All were high in their praise of the facilities in Birr. Stephen Grant of Grant Engineering said that he was proud to be able to sponsor the event as his Company employs over 300 people in the town of Birr. He also noted that his son Stephen is a professional golfer and has a close association with the Club. The number of professionals who played was one of the top fields this year on the PGA circuit. It included two former

European Tour winners in Peter Lawrie and Damien McGrane. Other well known golfers included David Higgins, Damien Mooney, Colm Moriarty, Eamonn Brady and Neil O'Brien. Stephen Grant Jnr. plays on the Euro Pro Tour and has many successes to his name. He holds the course record at Rosses Point with a round of 64. He spoke of how delighted he was to have had the opportunity to play the PGA event on his home Club. He thanked the course staff for having the course presented in such superb condition.

Speaking at the presentation, Gary Chambers, Captain of the Irish Region of Professional Golfers Association, thanked the Club for hosting the event and had high praise for the course and facilities. He said the PGA was delighted to come to Birr and looked forward to returning again in the future.

The incoming PGA Captain for 2017 is Joe Frawley whose father was a former professional at Birr. Brendan O'Carroll, Birr Captain thanked his organising committee and the PGA for running the event so successfully. He singled out the green-keeping team and also Nigel Johnston and the staff in the restaurant. Kevin McGrath, former Professional in Birr, spoke how he always wanted to bring a major event to Birr. He brought the idea to the Management and immediately got their support. He was so glad that all came up trumps on the day.

In September the first meeting of the Club Development Committee under the chairmanship of Tom Rigney was held. The meeting was facilitated by John Hasset who focused on the future of the Club and selected four different areas for discussion that will feed into an overall development plan. The four areas were: (1) SELLING where the goal is to grow the membership. (2) CLUB STRUCTURE to ensure greater levels of continuation year on year so that long term plans can be achieved. (3) SOCIAL ASPECT/EVENTS, to concentrate on events and on better communication from the committees to the membership. (4) THE COURSE. The focus will be on improving the course to make it fairer and more attractive to existing members, visitors and societies.

Leaders of the groups are: Vincent Liffey (Selling), Bernard



Captain's Drive-In 2016 - Margaret Feehan, Agnes Doolin, Brendan O'Carroll and John Fleury.

Kennedy (Structure), Patricia Rowland (Social aspect/Events) and Tony McCormack (The Course).

Each of the groups will have 3/5 members who will meet separately to discuss in detail their individual area. The groups are anxious that members get involved and express their opinions whether positive or negative. After the original meeting the groups will combine and present their findings to the Management Committee.

In June a very successful Club Classic sponsored by Colm Quinn Motors of Galway and Athlone took place. As is now the tradition the Club members came out in force and substantial monies were raised.

Most competitions were run off efficiently and on time. Captain Brendan's prize, sponsored by Isovar, was won by Christy McGarry with a nett 132. President John's was won by Pat Madden and Gavin Young won the Senior Scratch cup with an incredible score of 63 nett. It will take many golfing rounds to knock Gavin off his perch.

Generally our Thursday Seniors had a trouble free year with the weather being favourable. Sadly during the year we lost John Gilmartin one of the founders and stalwarts of the Seniors. His enthusiasm and boundless energy was an inspiration to us all. Ni bheidh a leitheid aris ann.

Our Juniors under the guidance of Brian Guinan and Jeremy Plunkett were quite active on Monday mornings over the Summer months. Needless to say the Juniors are the future of our Club and need every encouragement from members and parents alike.

2016 was another active year in the Ladies Club. Several very successful days were run over the course of the year. Our Lady Captain's day is always the highlight. This year's Lady Captain is Margaret Feehan and her competition was run

over two days. Her sponsor was Ann Bermingham, Chiropodist, Tullamore and her wonderful prize was won by Bernadette McTague. On the night we even had an appearance from Michael Jackson along with some beautiful opera and lots of dancing.

Our Lady President is Agnes Doolan from Banagher and her prize sponsored by The Stables Emporium Birr was won by Patricia Rowland. Agnes is a great orator and we always look forward to her lively speeches.

Thank you to all our sponsors who are very much appreciated for their generosity throughout the year.

The year always starts with the Winter League. It gets us out on the crisp frosty days and keeps us playing right throughout the winter. The Glens Trophy, our last big competition of the year, now in its thirteenth year, was the brainchild of Mona Collins. It is still going strong, we get teams from all over the country and it was won this year by the ladies from Slievenamon Golf Club.

The Junior girls are always catered for on a weekly basis and coaching courses are run for their age group during the summer months. Gemma Butler had a great year when she captained the Irish team of the Girls Home International matches which were played in Conwy Golf Club, Wales. The Irish team were crowned the champions for the first time in golf history.

The Ladies Club is a very sociable and welcoming gathering. New members will be encouraged with organised coaching and any help that the other lady members can give. Golf is a leisurely sport providing exercise, the pleasure of walking in the open air in a natural environment, spending time with friends and fellow golfers and many health benefits. Contact Birr Golf Club 057 912 0082.

BIRR GOLF IN THE LAST 100 YEARS

by Liz Pardy

Birr Golf club was founded in 1893 and so at the time of the 1916 rising was already 23 years in existence. Its initial location was at Barone Court in Riverstown. The fourth Earl of Rosse was elected the first President. He and his successors held the office until 1984. The Countess of Rosse held the office of Lady President from 1935 to 1982.

The committee that was elected in 1893 reflected the military presence in the town as it did the commercial and landed persons. In 1909 the decision to re-locate was taken and Birr Golf club took a lease from Lord Rosse for the lands at the Glens for fifty years to 1959.

The membership of the club in 1916 consisted of military officers some landowners and town merchants. The officers were from the First Leinster regiment stationed at Crinkill barracks.

Colonel Newbold was attached to the Leinster regiment and was the club captain in 1916. He was the donor of a cup now displayed in the clubhouse cabinet. The winner of the captain's prize that year was a Mr. Henry Mussen. The winner of the Hackett cup in 1916 was Mr. JJ Kennedy.

Given their association with Ireland's political and social elite, golf clubs inevitably had a difficult time during the War of Independence and the ensuing Civil War. A number of club houses were burned down and competitions abandoned.

The role played by sport in binding up the wounds of a decade of conflict was noteworthy and may have been underrated. The Golfing Union of Ireland continues to run golf throughout the island of Ireland.

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WILMER TENNIS CLUB



Members of the Birr Wilmer Tennis Club who participated in the club's annual Vintage Tennis Tournament.

Front Row (L to R): Joe Harding, Mary Horan, Brian Roe, Pat O'Gorman, Pauline Walsh, John O'Callaghan, David Condron.
 Back Row: Janine Wilson (joint Chairperson Birr Vintage Week and Arts Festival), Hazel Greene, Noeleen Harding, Liz Moloney, Ann O'Meara (judge of best dressed competition), Betty Hunt, Cyril Stanley (joint Chairperson Birr Vintage Week and Arts Festival), Victoria Haliy-Svarycheskyy, Paula Quinlan, Carmel Kehoe, Susanne Dwyer, Betty Hynes, Peter Eastwood.

This has been a very exciting year at the Wilmer Tennis Club with a huge amount of activity at the club and lots of successful events hosted throughout the year. It was great to see many newcomers to the game joining this year and ensuring the club continued to thrive and progress and long may that continue.

The Club holds many events throughout the year, from its Open Week in July to many club events, such as the Vintage Tennis tournament and Christmas tournament, which are great fun events. People can play at whatever level they are happy with. There are plenty of competitions for those with a competitive streak, but many others are content to play their regular weekly game with their own friends and just enjoy the game.

Early in the year the club held an Open Day to showcase the club and to give people the opportunity to see the fantastic facilities available at the club, to sample tennis with qualified coaches and to chat to club members to see what goes on at the club throughout the year.

It was an outstanding success. The weather played its part in encouraging people to get out on a lovely day and an incredible 128 children between the ages of 5 and 13 registered for the day. They had a great time taking part in all the activities and hopefully they enjoyed it so much that they will want to come back! Thanks to the organising committee of Caroline Russell, Chris Collins, J.P. Savy and Pat O'Gorman who did a great job in piecing it all together. Thanks to all who helped on the day with the registration, kitchen, media, with the clean up afterwards and anybody who helped in any way to make the day a success. As well as the coaching there was face painting and plenty of food and refreshments for young and old. After the kids had finished, a number of adults also took the opportunity to avail of a coaching session, some new to the game and others returning after a long gap and hopefully they got enough of

a taster to entice them to return again.

There were follow up events, including tennis coaching at Easter and coaching for youngsters and adults and many of those who availed of this became regular players during the year. The club is also liaising with many of the local schools with a view to promoting the game among the juniors in the area. Some of the schools are already working on a coaching programme with a professional coach.

There was a record entry for the Club's annual Open Week, which provided a feast of tennis for everyone. Organisers had to schedule over 120 matches but everything ran smoothly and to plan, culminating in 10 finals on the Saturday. On the whole the weather was kind with only a couple of wet nights and that ensured large crowds turned up to watch the action and enjoy the hospitality in the clubhouse.

There was some superb tennis played over the week and competition was keen at all levels. It was very heartening to see many of the newer members to the club entering and taking part and they will certainly have learned from the experience of playing at this level.

In all 14 different clubs were represented over the week and seven different nationalities added an international flavour to the event!

Despite that intense competition, the host club won five of the ten titles on offer, which was a very impressive achievement. The club was represented in seven of the 10 finals and there were two all Wilmer finals. J.P. Savy and Chris Collins were both double winners. They teamed up together to win the Men's A Doubles title and faced each other in the singles final with J.P. coming out on top. Chris also won the Open Mixed Doubles with Csilla Varga. Indeed Chris had a very busy day as he also managed to play a final in the Puckane Open as well! Paula Quinlan was another member to be involved in finals in both Birr and Puckane.

She won the Ladies A Doubles title in Birr with Karen Smith and earlier had won the Puckane Mixed Doubles with Noel Russell. The other Wilmer winners were David O'Meara and Ryan O'Meara in the Men's B Doubles. The Club also had a number of other finalists, Cathal Kirwan in the Men's B Singles, Tim Mounsey and Caroline Russell in the Handicapped Mixed 'B' Doubles and Rory Claffey and Brendan Heffernan in the Men's B Doubles

The men's A singles final was one of the final events and the crowd present for that was one of the biggest to witness a final at the club and they were treated to a classic between two Wilmer players with J.P. Savy and Chris Collins sharing the first two sets before J.P. edged the Championship Tie Breaker to take the title.

The presentation of prizes took place in the clubhouse on finals night. Club Chairman Noel Russell, thanked everyone who had supported the event, particularly the many players from other clubs who had travelled to participate. He thanked Pat O'Gorman for organising the schedule so efficiently and getting everything run off on time. He thanked all the sponsors for their generous contributions.

The chairman also thanked all the people who brought food along during the week, and helped with refreshments, those who kept the clubhouse and grounds clean and tidy and everyone else who helped out in any way.

Club President Paddy Hoctor then presented prizes to the winners of the different events.

The Barbecue on the final two nights proved to be very popular and thanks to all who helped out with that.

The club was very active in the Midland League with teams involved in Divisions 1,2, 3, 4, 5 and 6 and many of the newer members participating successfully in the lower divisions. At

the time of writing the club was still in contention for honours in all divisions and hopefully silverware has now been captured by some of those teams.

The Wilmer is a very progressive club and last year invested €80,000 in upgrading their courts and floodlights. The floodlights are now acknowledged as among the best in the country and already the club is getting enquiries from other clubs around the country to come and see the lights, with a view to upgrading their own facilities.

With these impressive facilities, the club is keen to encourage more people to come and play the game, not just from Birr but from the surrounding areas as well. Tennis is now a year round sport and also is a lifelong sport with people of all ages regularly playing at the club.

So, if tennis is a game you have always fancied trying, get along to the Wilmer Tennis Club, where you will receive a great welcome



Victoria Haliy-Svarycheskyy, winner, best dressed lady and Peter Eastwood, winner best dressed man with judge Ann O'Meara.

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Club members who participated in this years SSE Airtricity Dublin Marathon on the 30th Oct.

Back Row (L to R): Brian Dooley, Podge O'Brien, Aidan Horan, Dave Heather.

Middle Row: Jack Mulvey, Andy Masterson, Philip Guilfoyle, James Harnett, John Guilfoyle, Liam Spain, Paddy Melsop, Donal Mannion, Damien Finnerty, Nicky Dunne.

Front Row: Sandra Brady, Jacqueline Forkin, Geraldine Fox, Mary Murphy.

Missing from photo: Elaine Masterson, Trish Flynn, Alice Burke, Claire Scully, Margaret Dooley, Caroline Sheils.

BIRR ATHLETICS CLUB

Birr Athletic Club was formed in April 2015. Within 12 months the club has grown to over 100 registered members of all fitness levels from the elite athlete to joggers and walkers.

Liam Brady has coached and been a valuable supporter to our runners since the beginning. Thanks to his expertise the club members have improved their running skills in leaps and bounds. In August 2015, our female and male teams brought home both 3rd place trophies in the Offaly Road Race Series. In 2016, our female team won 2nd place claiming the spot from early on and retaining it throughout the road race season.

The club was very excited this year to launch its new club colours and running singlets. We have steered away from the traditional colours and adopted three new colours, navy, fluorescent yellow and medium grey. Birr AC has also designed a new club crest in these new club colours.

This past year has been packed with a host of athletic activities and special events:

On Sunday 13th March 2016, Birr Athletic Club proudly hosted a memorial 5k Fun Run in memory of our club member and friend Mr. Sean Lowry who sadly past away in November 2015. Over 200 walkers and runners joined us on this special occasion to remember Sean and his family.

In April 2016, the club celebrated with its club secretary Mr Andy Masterson who won a county medal in the Edenderry 10-mile road race on Sunday 28th March. The medal was awarded to him by Mr John Treacy at the Offaly Athletics Dinner Dance in Tullamore. John is a former Irish Athletic Olympic medallist who represented Ireland at four Olympic Games between 1980 and 1992.

In July, the club proudly hosted the 6th run in the Offaly Road Race Series on Friday 29th July. This is the second year Birr AC hosted the event with 330 athletes running on the evening. This was the highest numbers of runners taking part

in a single run in the 2016 Offaly Road Race series. As last year, the course was fair if not a little challenging in parts with a downhill sprint to the finish. We received kind compliments from all participants, regarding the friendly welcome they received on the evening, which added to the already energetic atmosphere of the event.

In Oct 2015, five members from Birr Athletic club took part in the SSE Airtricity Dublin Marathon. This year on the 30th October twenty-four Birr AC members took to the streets of Dublin for this year's marathon. For many runners, it was their first marathon. Our Marathoners don't just run within Ireland, they also fly the Birr AC colours abroad. We want to extend our congratulations to Podge O'Brien who took part in the Frankfurt Marathon on the same date. Best wishes to all runners who are currently in the mist of all marathon training.

We would like take this opportunity to thank the people and businesses of Birr and surrounding areas for their outstanding generosity and support for the club throughout the year. The success and growth of the club would not be possible without their support.

We look forward to the future where we have lots of fun activities in the pipelines for our members, so if you're interested in running for fun, or running to get fit or making new friends, come and join us every Monday and Wednesday evening meeting in Crinkill beside the Handball Club at 7.30pm. There's something for all level's from beginners to elite athletics. New members always welcome.



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Alex Byrne, Darragh McNamara and Luke Shiels who competed in the Model Making Competition.



Pitch and Putt team.
(L to R): Kieran Riley, Adam Fitzgerald, James Nolan and Ronan McNamara.



Boys Under-13 swimming squad.
(L to R): Ben Cruite, Damien Delaney, Keelin Franks, Darragh Guinan.

COMMUNITY GAMES

2016 was a great year for Birr Community Games. It was exciting to have participants reach the National finals in many events but in particular, to see them succeed in the more unusual events such as Pitch and Putt and Gymnastics. National Medals were won in both the Boys Under-16 Pitch and Putt and the Boys Under-14 Model-Making.

Birr had 11 swimmers reach the national finals. Great credit must go to the Birr Leisure Centre for their facilities and staff that play a major role in assisting these children throughout the year. Both Under-13 squads reach the semi-finals and were just unlucky not to reach their respective finals. Congratulations to all of them - Clare Kennedy (girls Under-12 Backstroke), Damien Delaney (boys Under-12 Breaststroke and Squad), Darragh Guinan (boys Under-14 Freestyle and squad), Charlene Powell (girls Under-14 Freestyle and squad), Keelan Franks (squad), Ben Cruite (squad), John Stevenson (boys Under-16 Freestyle), Maeve Hassett (girls Under-14 Butterfly and squad), Hannah Riley (squad), Sarah Freeman (squad) and Sarah Fallon (squad). Sinead Johnston flew the gymnastics flag for Birr at the National finals. This is a highly contested event and the competition, even at county level, is fierce. Sinead competed at Under-11 and was unlucky not to be on the podium. She is delighted with her county title.

One of the highlights for Birr this year was that of the boys Under-16 Pitch and Putt team. This was an idea that Kieran Riley had, as lots of juveniles are golfing daily in Birr Golf Club. He picked a few of his friends and they had their sights set on a medal. They practiced all over the summer, even

travelling to Longford Pitch and Putt a few times to get a feel for the course. This event has 32 teams competing so it was a great achievement for the boys to come 4th and receive the pewter medal.

Birr also took part in Chess Under-13. They retained their county title but were knocked out at the Leinster quarter-final stage. This was the first year that Birr advanced so far in the competition having beaten Laois for the first time. Thanks to Birr Library for providing us with weekly training facilities and to Vincent Drew and Billy Coffey for coaching the team. Well done to the team - Liam Hoare, Joshua Pyle, David Guilfoyle, Damien Delaney, Chelirs Brecq, Marriane Brecq and Seosamh McAteer.

The Under-11 Hurling team were unlucky to be beaten by a strong Shinrone-Coolderry team in the county final.

Birr had 4 participants in the Art and Model-Making competitions at the National finals. Alicija Piotruwska competed in the Girls Under-16 Art and Alex Byrne, Darragh McNamara and Luke Shiels competed in the model-making. Luke was in the Under-10 competition and this was his first year competing. Alex was unlucky not to make the medals in the Under-12 competition. Darragh took the pewter medal in the Under-14 competition. He did a pitch and putt theme. The Under-14 Tag Rugby team advanced to the Leinster Semi-finals for the first time. They had a great run in the competition this year beating Banagher, Shinrone-Coolderry and Portlaoise on the way. However, the Leinster title proved a step too far.

We are looking forward to an equally exciting year in 2017.



Under-14 Tag Rugby Team.
Back Row (L to R): Leva Jurkaiyte, Kate O'Meara, Patrick O'Connor, Orey Higgins, Luke Morris, Darragh Morris.
Front Row: Katie Guilfoyle, Niamh Coughlan, Makalah Emaike, Kyle Rock, Conor Franks, Sam Morris. Mascot Darragh Franks.



Blast from the Past - Social Club Golf Outing 1997 - Derek Ryan's Prize

Back Row (L-R) - Mick McGarry Jnr., Eddie Nevin, John Dwyer, Mike Horan, Noel Lowry, Paul Barber, Alan Naylor, Pat Guinan, Jimmy O'Neill, Johnny Kennedy, Helen Kennedy, June Carroll, Susan Carroll, Pat O'Callaghan.
Front Row: Pat Dunphy (Chairman), Derek Ryan (Captain), John Carroll (Winner) and Ena Guilfoyle.

BIRR SOCIAL CLUB

Once again we had a successful year on the competition front and on the fund-raising side of things.

Starting with the 5-Man Teams Tournament (sponsored by Super-Valu, Main St, Birr) in which the Gardaí led by Fergus Hogan beat Mick Parlon's team in the final. Pascal Ryan's team won the Open Section of our Annual Darts Tournament beating Martin Lyons team in the Final, Pilkingtons won the Town Section beating Dotts Cubs. In the Spring Cup Handicap Tournament Liam Dumpleton beat Miley Nolan 2-1 in the final. Richie Donnelly retained the Scratch Cup (sponsored by John Dwyer) beating Shamie Breen 3-2.

In the 6 Red Snooker Tournament Mick Parlon beat Alan Naylor 3-2 to win. We also ran a successful Golf Classic (sponsored by Joe Mallon Motors Portlaoise) with the winning team being Theresa Feeley, Mary Bolger, Eileen Delaney and Caroline McCarthy. As a result of our darts, snooker and quiz nights we made donations to Birr Community Nursing Unit, Birr Mental Health and to local families affected by cancer. It was a pleasure to be able to contribute to such worthy local causes in our own community.



Snooker - Scratch Cup Winner

(L to R): Winner Richie Donnelly, Sponsor John Dwyer, Acting Chairman Pat Dunphy.

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BIRR CAMOGIE CLUB



Birr Under-12 Camogie Team

Back Row (L to R): R. Parkinson, H. Feenane, C. Hoare, H. Riley, C. Conroy, M. Delaney, R. Ryan, A. Kennedy, A. Kinahan, C. Kennedy.

Front Row: F. Mulrooney, R. Kinsella, T. Kennedy, S. Hanlon, B. Pardy, R. Riley.

In Front: A. Carey. Missing from Photo - R. Lyons, H. Murphy, D. Connor.

Birr Camogie Club has had a very busy and enjoyable year. Our Under-8s and Under-10s played blitzes across the county and showed great improvement in every game and had great fun throughout the year under the guidance of Johnny Pilkington and Michelle Deeks O'Meara.

Our Under-12s had a very successful season finishing top of the league. Throughout the year, this group of girls showed great commitment, skill and team work and had a very enjoyable year along with their mentors Barry Kinsella, Audrey Kennedy, Tadhg Mulrooney and Frank Higgins.

Our Under-14 team got to the county 'A' final and with a very young panel of girls this was a great achievement for this group. Unfortunately on the day they came up against a very strong Kilcormac/Killoughey team but there is no doubt if this group keep up the hard work they will have better days.

Our Under-16s bowed out at Quarter-Final stage and our minor team were very competitive all season. Both teams are under the guidance of Mick Lyons, Joe Errity and Aaron Whelehan for the year.

Our senior team won the Offaly League Final beating St. Cillians in an extremely tough final. Unfortunately they bowed out at semi-final in the Offaly Senior championship to a very strong Shinrone team, it wasn't to be for the girls on the day but there is no doubt they will learn from the defeat and come back stronger. Johnny Pilkington, Kieran Ryan, John Kennedy and Pat Hoctor did a great job managing our senior panel all year.

The club was very proud to have a great number of girls

represent their county across all grades from Senior right down to Under-14 and particular mention must go to Sarah Harding, Aoibhe Whelehan, Alana Roddy and Doireann Errity who were part of the Offaly Minor Panel who won the Leinster 'A' Final. The club would also like to thank everyone who contributed to the clubs fundraising activities throughout the year, in particular the very successful 'Take me Out' organised by the club earlier this year. We would also like to convey our thanks to Birr Dental Clinic and Jamie Cummins for sponsoring a new set of jerseys for our Senior Panel. We look forward to an enjoyable and successful 2017.



Dr. Jamie Cummins, Birr Dental Care presenting new jerseys to Sheila Sullivan and Arlene Watkins.

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SLIEVE BLOOM RIDING CLUB

The Association of Irish Riding Clubs is an amateur equestrian association established in 1973. The association strives to promote the amateur leisure-rider and its vision is to enjoy equestrian activities. There are over 100 clubs scattered throughout the country. Our club is called the 'Slieve Bloom Riding Club', and was established in 2002. We meet every Tuesday night in Birr Equestrian Centre and have expert tuition from experienced teachers. New members are always welcome.

Our first competition this year was held in March at Birr Equestrian Centre. Our club hosted a leg of the Spring Show jumping League. It was a very successful day with a great turn out. Many of our members competed and it was well supported by many other clubs in our area. Eileen Landy competed in further legs of the league held by other clubs. She was successful on many days out and ultimately came 3rd her section.

The annual Riding Club Festival was held in June. It was held at Stradbally Hall, a beautiful location in Laois. Many members took part in various disciplines including Lavinia Read in dressage, Sinead Boyd, Amanda Hehir and Rachel Boyd in show jumping and Emily Hogan in dressage to Music. Great fun was had by all.

Our next outing was to the Show jumping Championships in Mullingar Equestrian centre. Amanda Hehir, Jan Boons, Sinead Boyd and Rachel Boyd took part. The competitions included show jumping and great fun was had in the derby competition where a rosette was won by Sinead.

Throughout the summer One Day Events take place around the country. This involves a competition which includes

Dressage, Show-jumping and cross-country riding. Both Amanda Hehir and Siobhan Maher had success at the One Day Events; Amanda Hehir came 4th in Monaghan, 5th in Clonmel and qualified for the Championship with 2nd Place at the event in Nuenna Farm, Co. Kilkenny in August. Siobhan Maher had a very successful day out in Clonshire in Limerick where she came 6th on her new mare, Indie Spice, her mare's first competition. These One Day Events culminate in the National One Day Event in Kilguilkey House in Mallow, Co.Cork. Amanda had qualified for the championship class, while Eileen Landy, Jan Boons, Siobhan Maher and Sinead Boyd rode in the non-championship class. There were no rosettes but a great day was had by all despite the inclement weather.

Our last outing was to the National Hunter Trials in Annaharvey in Tullamore. Due to the poor weather at the start of the year the National Hunter Trials were postponed until September. There was a great turn out from our club including Siobhan Maher and Eileen Landy taking part in the Advanced Primary Championship and Amanda Hehir, Jan Boons, Sinead Boyd and Rachel Boyd taking part in the Intermediate Championship. There was great success for our club when our youngest member Rachel Boyd won the Intermediate Championship on her mare, Grey Dreamer and third place went to fellow club member Jan Boons on Ponyland Lad. This was a great feat for both members out of a field of almost 70 horses.

This year we welcomed some new members to our club. We look forward to another successful year next year with more members competing and enjoying the sport.



2



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4



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1. Amanda Hehir on Jack at ODE in Monaghan.
2. Sinead Boyd at the Riding Club Festival in Stradbally Hall
3. Rachel Boyd being presented with 1st place in The Intermediate Championship from Tony Ennis, Chairperson of The Irish Riding Club Association
4. Siobhan Maher on Indie Spice at ODE in Clonshire.
5. Eileen Landy on Holly jumping in Birr Equestrian Centre



5

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Féile na nGael and Under-15 County Champions.

Back Row (L to R): Brendan Hanamy, Donal Corrigan, Adrian Egan, M. Cleary, P. Bergin, M. Reedy, B. Ryan Smith, M. Egan, J. Hoctor, J. Ryan, C. Errity, J. Heather, C. Molloy, M. Molloy, C. Kelly, Martin Errity, Kieran Ryan, Trisha Ryan Smith.

Front Row: P. Cleary, L. Hogan, P. King, P. Heather, C. Hanamy, L. Hoare, P. Kelly, A. Coakley, G. Markham, C. King, K. McDowall, J. Meara, J. Corrigan.

CRC GAELS

It was a very busy year for C.R.C. Gaels, starting in February and still in progress as we approach November. Pride of place this year must go to the Under-14 team who went through the year unbeaten and in the process won a national Féile competition and an Under-14 'B' county title. The Under-12 and Minor teams with just one competitive match defeat each also had a very successful year.

The year started in January with indoor hurling for Under-6, Under-8 and Under-10 in the hall in Carrig and the handball alley in Crinkill. From February onwards the Under-14 team were in training for the Féile competition on the wall in Carrig. The work paid off and the team won the Offaly 'B' Féile and the right to represent Offaly in the National Féile competition held this year in Tipperary/Waterford. Taking part in Féile for any club is special and memories are made that last a lifetime. The training, the challenge matches, the fundraising are all part of the build up to the weekend away. From the 17th-19th June they took on teams from Waterford, Wexford, Tipperary and Clare and came home unbeaten and Féile champions.

The odyssey began with a farewell from parents, grandparents and well-wishers at the clubhouse in Carrig on Friday morning. First stop was at Carrig-Beg just outside Carrick-on-Suir to take on St. Mollerans whom C.R.C. defeated on a score of 3 –7 to 1-3. Next up at the same venue was Wexford team, Oylegate/Glenbrien, who had no answer for C.R.C. The young players then moved on to their host club, Clonea, while the adults headed for the Copper Coast. Saturday was a long day with 4 matches. The host club was taken care in the morning and this secured a quarter-final spot against Waterford team, Clann na nGael. Another win followed. Next stop was the semi-final in Thurles. Tipperary team, Burgess, were the opponents and put us under pressure but had to give way to C.R.C. Sunday morning and the entourage headed to Golden to take on Clare team, Bodyke/O'Callaghan's Mills, in the final. This was to prove a stern challenge for a team that had had been unbeaten in any game all weekend. C.R.C. made a good start and led by 4 points to no score at the break. Bodyke had the game level within 4 minutes of the restart and the game see-

saw until Lee Hogan put over the winning score. The last five minutes were nail biting but C.R.C. held on bravely for an historic win. Back to Crinkill and Carrig for the home coming. What a weekend!

Having done so well in Féile the team went on to compete in the Under-14 'B' competition and were again unbeaten, reaching the final against Clara. The final was played in difficult conditions in Kilcormac on 24th September. After a very stiff challenge C.R.C. Gaels were crowned champions. A very successful year, for the team and management.

The Under-10's started training last March making great use of our ball wall. They trained twice weekly and had their first blitz in Birr. On a monthly basis we participated in blitzes with local teams and others from the surrounding area. On 25th July we took part in the All-County Blitz hosted by St. Rynaghs. It has been a busy year with plenty of practice matches. Once again, a great turn out for training, with very enthusiastic hard working young players, 16 in all.

The Under-12's participated in *Go Games* throughout the season winning all bar one of our matches. They competed in a tournament in Borris in Ossary in early July. We had a day out in Abbotstown, Dublin in mid July - winning 2 out of the 3 matches with Portlaoise beating us by just a point. We also hosted and travelled to a number of challenge games ensuring that the boys had a very busy year and improving with every match.

The Under-16 team had very limited numbers in the panel this year. Early in the year they took part in the league and finished second in their group. They found the going difficult in the championship, competing in the 'A' competition. However, they put in some great performances against the odds and can be proud of their years hurling.

The minor team had a very successful year to date. Early in the year they competed in the League and reached the final against Clara. After a very tough battle C.R.C. Gaels came out winners. In the Championship they had some excellent performances with wins over Birr and Tullamore and a draw with Cuchulainn Gaels. In their final game they lost by a single point to Shamrocks. Only one team from their group progressed to the knockout stages of the minor 'A'

competition so they entered for the 'B' competition. They overcame Drumcullen/Seir Jieran in the semi-final and qualified for the final against Ferbane/Belmont.

C.R.C. Gaels are very proud of its 4 representatives Brendan Hoctor, Ryan Hogan, Ross Connaughton and Aidan King, on the Under-17 Offaly team that won the Div. 1 final of the inaugural Celtic Challenge when they defeated South Kilkenny in Nolan Park on 18th June. Well done!

The younger players at Under-6 and 8 had a busy year.

Having started indoors they trained every Friday night and took part in many blitzes and challenge matches. They also travelled to Croke Park and got the opportunity to play on the hallowed ground as well as enjoying the Croke Park tour and experience.

A great year of activity made possible by the dedication and talents of all our many coaches and mentors. Thanks to all of them.



C.R.C Gaels Feile 2016 Under 16-Team

Photographed with their mentors in Rath after their victory over Clara in the Minor "B" league final in May.

Back Row (L to R): Denis Hoctor, T. Hogan, R. Connaughton, C. Smith, J Cooke, J. Kirwin, A. King, D. O' Meara, K. O'Brien, A O'Riordan, Eddie Dolan, J Kelly, C O'Meara, R. Hogan, Pat Kelly, Paul King.

Front Row: Jimmy Hogan, Michael Hoctor, D. Hogan, C. Hanlon, M. O'Brien, R. Nolan, M. Gleeson, B. Hoctor, M. Fitzgerald, C. Hayden, Ger. Brennan,

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BIRR RUGBY FOOTBALL CLUB



Birr RFC Senior Rugby Team and Mentors.

Back Row (L to R): Alan Purcell, Stephen Molloy, Paddy Donaghue, Daniel Troy, Michael Heron, Jason Bracken, Sam Eaton.
 Middle Row: Christy Hogan, Philip Haslam, Simon Eads, Darra Culbert, Pdraig Burns, Thomas Bailey, Mark Whitten, Simon Moylan, Eoin Gannon.
 Front Row: Stephen Niland, Emmet Scully, Donnacha Purcell, Luke Fogarty, David Guinan, Alan Guinan, Michael Dwyer, Brendan Heffernan, Darcy Howley, Thomas Lyndon.

2016 will live long in the memory for Birr RFC, with the 1st XV bringing home silverware, some heartbreak and, more importantly, an abundance of pride.

The Midland League proved to be a very fruitful competition for Birr RFC with victory in the final of the Midland League Bowl securing the first silverware at adult level for the club in recent years.

The Leinster League was not such a happy hunting ground for the team but despite the tough competition they managed to secure their Division 2B status for the season to come.

The real story of the year came in the Leinster Provincial Towns Seconds Cup where a string of hard fought victories

brought Birr to the final, and within touching distance of cup glory. Enniscorthy RFC were the opponents in that final and the Slaney-siders proved a formidable foe. There was heartbreak when Birr fell just short of the challenge but their journey to the final injected an abundance of pride and energy into the club.

Birr Team: Jeffery Pardy, Mike Heron, Jason Bracken, Paddy Donoghue, Stephen Niland, Simon Eades, Eoin Gannon, Alan Guinan, Brendan Heffernan, Darra Culbert, Colm McEvoy, Danny Troy, Emmet Scully, David Guinan, Mick Keane, Stephen Molloy, Brendan Hynes, Philip Haslam, Sam Eaton, Padder Loonam, Donnacha Purcell, Ray Cordial, Jack Cleary, Mark Guinan, Paul Bergin.



My ball!



Peter Dooley and Jack Regan after Leinster "A" victory over Ulster in October 2016.



Coaching the mini's can be a dangerous job

BIRR RFC YOUTH SECTION

For youth rugby in Birr we can all look back at last season with much satisfaction. For the first time ever the youths section fielded teams at U13, U14, U15, U16, U17 and U18 levels, a monumental achievement for a club of Birr's size. All the teams competed in Midland\Leinster Leagues and also in Leinster Cup competitions, with varying degrees of success. In total the various squads amounted to approximately 120 players and notwithstanding this increase in numbers, our coaches, having completed Leinster coaching courses, were suitably equipped to coach and enhance youth player development.

Coaching is strictly on a volunteer basis and Birr youth rugby is indebted to Barry Loughnane, Kevin Hand, Eamonn O'Meara, Caimin Walsh, John Heffernan, Alan Purcell, Garech Doorley, John Regan, Stephen Niland, Frank Higgins, Tony Morris, Richard Dolan, Brian Hogan, Catherine Haverty, Tony Murphy and Willie Burns, for their dedication to the cause. A special mention for the youth coaching co-ordinator Eamonn O'Meara who oversees the smooth running of the youth section and former Director of Rugby Brian Hogan, both of whom have encyclopaedic knowledge on all aspects of Leinster youth rugby. Our referees John Heffernan and Brendain Molloy who are of invaluable assistance by keeping everybody up to date on law changes etc.. The youth section is also very fortunate to be able to call upon the coaching expertise of Pieter Swanepoel, a former 1st team player and club coach, who is currently Head Coach in Cistercian College, Roscrea.

Overseeing the implementation of the IRFU Safeguarding Policy is Ann O'Connor who is Birr's Rugby Welfare Officer. The IRFU seek to promote the welfare of all Age-Grade Players so that they develop to the best of their ability in a safe and fun rugby environment.

Ireland will host the Women's Rugby World Cup in 2017 and Birr youth rugby will have a special interest in the proceedings as we are now running a successful women's section comprising of U15 and U18 girls. Since their inception back in September 2015 women's rugby has gone from strength to strength and now competes in the Leinster League. They are now an integral part of Birr Rugby and it's a section which will continue to grow in coming seasons. Well done to all the players, the coaches, Andrew Lally, Fiona O'Meara, Audrey Butler, Alan Purcell, John Heffernan, Caimin O'Brien, Imelda Smith, John Regan, women's co-ordinator, Emma Ward and all associated with women's rugby in Birr.

In a year when Connacht rugby won their first ever title, beating Leinster in the Pro 12 Final in Edinburgh in May, two former Birr youth players, having progressed up to the senior ranks, were ever present in both province's Pro 12 campaigns. Connacht's Shane Delahunty ended the season with a Pro 12 winner's medal whilst Leinster's Peter Dooley had the consolation of playing in the final. Jack Regan (UCD) represented Ireland at U19 I, Leinster U20 and Leinster "A" levels. Aaron Browne (Cistercian College Roscrea) represented Ireland at U19 level and Michael Milne (Cistercian College Roscrea) represented Ireland at U18 Schools level. All in Birr Rugby are very proud of the lad's achievements, all of whom are quick to acknowledge the

significant role Birr Rugby played in their respective rugby careers. Hopefully current youth players like Conor O'Meara, Michael Hand, Luke Barry, Jack Ryan and players attending County Development sessions will shortly follow in their footsteps.

In 2016 Birr Rugby launched their new website www.birrrugby.ie which has proven to be a great success, with both our local and rugby diaspora, with up to date news, events, fixtures, results and match reports relating to Birr Rugby now online. Registration and payment of subscriptions can now be done online and the website also has a link to Facebook, Twitter and YouTube.

Under 11's and 12's Easter Tour (A Coach's Tale)

On Good Friday morning the 25th of March at 4am after 12 months of fashion shows, table quizzes, discos and clothes sales 90 odd Birr Rugby members boarded 2 buses to catch the ferry in Rosslare that would take us to Wales for the Birr Rugby Under-11/12 Easter Tour, where our young players would take away memories that will last them a lifetime. It would be the first time on a boat for some and their first opportunity to play the 15 aside format of the game, but for most it was the first weekend away that they were responsible for their parents, they had to get them to bed at a reasonable hour and tuck them in bed with a large glass of water so they would be fresh in the morning and up in time for breakfast and the bus.

We stayed in the Park Inn North in Cardiff for the 3 nights of our trip and enjoyed wonderful hospitality there. On Saturday morning we played our first matches against the very hospitable Penalta RFC and scored some amazing try's. We then travelled into Cardiff City for a tour of the Millennium stadium. Later that evening we gave the parents a couple of hours' free time when the team mentors took both teams to a trampoline park, parents had agreed to be back at our hotel at 10:30 pm, no one was late but a few were sweating a bit and looked as if they had pushed their deadline to its limit.

Sunday morning saw us heading on the bus again to our second host club Llantwit Fardre RFC, these were big lads but again our boys showed the fighting Irish spirit and gave them two great matches which could have gone either way when the final whistles were blown, again we were treated to some wonderful hospitality by the host club.

We were then whisked off to a Pro 12 match where Newport Gwent Dragons were playing Edinburgh Rugby and the highlight of this game was when we met with Warren Gatland the Welsh and Lions coach, he was so pleased to chat, sign rugby balls and take selfies with our young lads. We travelled home on Monday evening to be greeted by some well rested mums and dads with bags of dirty washing and heads full of wonderful memories.

Special mention must go out to Ann Sheppard, Sylvia Kennedy, Laura Guinan, Frank Higgins and Brian Kenny who was so excited to be in charge of the club mascot bunny that he left his own bag in Birr and had to buy a whole new wardrobe in Cardiff, right down to new Calvin Klein underwear.

BIRR RFC MINIS & LEPRECHAUNS

It would do your heart good to take a walk up to the rugby club in Birr on a Sunday morning between 10am and 12 noon during the Rugby season between September and April, the place is a hive of activity with over 100 boys and girls aged between 6 and 12 years of age being coached to both play and enjoy Rugby in a family and child friendly environment where they learn the skills appropriate to their age in the wonderful game of Rugby. The beauty of this game is that whether big or small, fast or not so fast there is a place for you to express yourself as a mini Sean O'Brien or Jonny Sexton or even the next Peter Dooley.

We are blessed with the support we get from the parents of the children, they organise the parking, help the coaches, prepare the hot chocolate and marshmallows (the food of champions), provide a feast of sandwiches, buns and cakes for visiting teams at blitzes and most importantly fall out of bed on a Sunday morning in all weathers and bring their to meet their friends and play Rugby.

The year as ever was a busy one, the Under-11 and Under-12 teams trained hard all season knowing that they would need to be at the top of their game for the Easter Rugby tour to Wales. The Under-12 team also had a fantastic day out

when they played and beat a strong Wanderers team during half time in the European Cup match in the RDS when Leinster played Bath Rugby

We travelled to mini rugby blitzes in clubs in Leinster, Connaught and Munster and enjoyed the experience of playing the different styles of Rugby played by teams like Portumna, Nenagh, Thurles, Roscrea, Loughrea, West Offaly Lions, Tullamore and Midland Warriors to name but a few. In each and every club we visited whether it was the Under-7 team or the Under-10 teams we received a warm welcome and a hot cup of tea or coffee and some goodies for the players and our parents were wonderful in providing the same welcome for the many home blitzes that we hosted. During the year it was a pleasure to get some playing tips from a few of our past mini players Shane Delahunt from Connaught and Peter Dooley from Leinster, the kids really enjoyed being able to meet these players that they see on the TV, in the Showgrounds and the RDS.

Finally we would like to thank all the parents, volunteers, coaches and most importantly the boys and girls that pull on a Rugby shirt and boots every Sunday and try their hearts out in a Birr Rugby team, win, lose or draw.

Below are this year's crop of Leprechauns and right is the Under-10 team with their coaches



Pat Shiel, Gene and Frank Barry on a cycling road trip in the southeast of Ireland in the 1950's.

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MIDLAND MODEL FLYING CLUB



The hobby of building and flying radio controlled model airplanes & helicopters has been on the decline in Ireland in recent years. However, there has been an explosion in the popularity and availability of so-called 'Drones'. A radio controlled drone, in the modern sense, can be described as a 'Multi-rotor' craft which consists of a chassis with several legs sticking out carrying tiny motors which each turn a propeller. Imagine having four or more tiny battery-powered helicopters connected together, all acting as one unit. With developments in modern electronics like accelerometers (the sensor in your smart-phone that knows which way round to turn the screen) and GPS (global positioning) these aircraft have become very stable and extremely easy to operate which makes them very attractive to camera crews and film-makers. The largest area of interest for manufacturers has been in toy versions which are cheap and widely available. These have earned a dodgy reputation with public and authorities alike. Camera drones spying on neighbours, flying dangerously and sometimes crashing over busy towns and cities or sporting events. The Irish Aviation Authority and the Model Aeronautics Council of Ireland eventually got together and set some safety guidelines and regulations. Unfortunately it's the established and experienced person that has been trying to do the right thing for years by flying in an established club settings with safety rules and regulations that gets penalised. As a MACI affiliated club we have always operated in a very organised fashion with insurance to fly our aircraft at the club-owned site in Boora.

However, it's not all bad! Some of our members have embraced the new technology and are involved in Drone Racing. A tiny camera in the nose of the craft looks forward and beams the live video back to the operator who wears a special pair of goggles with tiny screens. So the wearer sees exactly what the drone sees - its like the person is sitting in the little drone and along for the ride!

The main events in this year's calendar kicked off with a round of the well established Helicopter competition in Boora. This event follows a very specific International regime with three judges marking each competitor on manoeuvres performed. The skill and concentration required to compete at this level comes only with years or dedication and practice. The winners included our friends from down the

country Noel Campion (Cork) & William Gaule (Clare) who later went on to represent Ireland on the international stage. Andriy Fristak from Roscrea and originally Ukraine and myself (pictured left) were on hand with laptop to calculate scoring from the three judges and keep the competitors posted on their progress.

Next on the calendar was the now annual Boora Funfly which is a fun three-day event. We invite fliers from all over the country to come and enjoy a relaxed weekend of flying, competitions, buy & sell, camp, BBQ and maybe even enjoy a beer or too in the evening. One of the exciting pursuits that happens is the 'Night-Flying'. We have a small battery in the plane powering light strips to allow you see your plane or helicopter in pitch black! This year the weather was not as sunny and hot as previous years, so the crowds were down a little, especially on the Sunday.

Every year now we are very proud to support David Corboy,



Colm Wright and all the guys and girls in the Ormond Flying Club in Birr for their annual Family Day during the Birr Vintage Week. We put on a static display of aircraft (pictured above) and if weather permits, we do some display flying. The MMFC members are always on hand to talk to any interested person and answer the usual questions like 'how high, how fast and how much'. Plus we get to see the fantastic airshow that Ormond builds on every year. So this is surely a highlight of the year for many of our club members.

As you can imagine, there are very strict guidelines about mixing model flying with full size aircraft. Then when you add in a Public Display, it becomes a huge safety concern. We begin preparations five weeks in advance of the day to get forms filled out with fliers names and qualifications and get the permissions in place. Only model fliers with B-Cert accreditation are passed through this process and allowed to fly by MACI and IAA rules. This must be strictly adhered to at all times and purely in the interests of public safety, there can be no exceptions to these rules.

Club membership is pretty healthy at the moment numbering about twenty-six, with some people holding full membership of the fantastic club site at Boora from as far away as Ennis. We have everything from the aforementioned drones to miniature model Jets. They can all be seen flying most weekends down at the club site in Boora and spectators are always welcome

David McIntyre

HIGHFIELD UNITED FC



Presentation of sponsored jerseys to Club Captain, Daryl Nolan by Adrian Shiels of Pro SprayFoam Insulation for the 2016-2017 season.



Presentation of sponsored training tops to Club Captain, Daryl Nolan (left) and Club Chairman, Stephen Pardy (right) by David Watkins of The Fighting Cocks.

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ST. CILLIAN'S CAMOGIE CLUB

Following on from a successful 2015 when our senior girls won the Junior championship, minors girls won the Under-18 championship and Under-14's the County "B" championship, St. Cillians looked forward with great enthusiasm to the year 2016 and what it would bring. It was also the 10th year since the founding of the club so it was important to celebrate this anniversary. Many of our young girls have now moved on to participate at many levels outside of the club with their counties and schools. Three of our girls Megan King, Niamh Killeen and Orla Killeen won the Munster College Intermediate "A" championship representing their school Borrisokane Community College in mid-January. They defeated Ennis college 1-7 to 1-3. Another member of our senior team Rachel Brennan helped Banagher College win the Leinster "B" Schools final when they defeated Abbey Community College from Ferrybank, Waterford. Cailin Fitzgerald played with the successful University of Limerick team who won the colleges intermediate All-Ireland.

We continued our successful annual presentation night on the 6th February 2016 in Carrig Hall. This was a great occasion and gave the club the opportunity to thank the players and mentors at all age groups for their efforts in the previous season. We welcomed players of the Junior, Minor and Under-14 girls teams with their trophies. The boys and girls of the Under-8 and Under-10's were also presented with certificates to acknowledge their achievements. The night was jointly hosted with CRC Gaels whose Under-16 team won the Leinster League title and their Under-12 team winning a County shield title. Brian Carroll was a special guest on the night. We also acknowledged on the night the success of our girls Louis Bergin, Claire Hogan, Emma Harding, Elaine Hanlon and Eva Molloy in winning bronze medals in the National Community games finals

On the 27th of February we hosted a celebratory dinner dance at Dooly's hotel in Birr. There was a fantastic turnout and a great night was had by all. It was an occasion to mark our 10th year as a club and we honored our championship winning Junior and Minor teams. Cilian Buckley, wing back with Kilkenny, was invited as a guest of honor to present the medals and he brought with him the Liam McCarthy Cup. Members of our committee published a souvenir brochure

as a gift for all attendees and this highlighted the many achievements of the club teams during the previous 10 years.

The playing season kicked off in earnest in March with our senior team playing their first game v Tullamore in a new senior league tournament. We won our first game and continued unbeaten in the league for the next three matches. We contested our first league final on the 16th of July and we were beaten by Birr Camogie Club on a score line of 3-13 to 1-7.

In the senior championship we were drawn in a strong group with Drumcullen/Lusmagh, Shinrone, Tullamore and Naomh Brid. Our campaign started in May with an outing to Drumcullen/Lusmagh. It was a tough opening game for this panel of young, talented players and they came through with a victory on a score line of 0-19 to 1-12. Our next game saw us defeat Tullamore in Carrig. In our third group game we had to travel to Shinrone, home of the county champions. This game was well contested by both teams and resulted in a well-deserved draw 2-9 to 1-12. In our final group game we defeated Naomh Brid. At the end of the group stages St Cillians were level on points with Shinrone and this meant that we had to contest a playoff game with Shinrone to determine who would advance straight to the county semi-final. Our ladies gave a tremendous performance and beat Shinrone to advance. The County semi-final was played on 18th Sept in Birr in difficult conditions against Tullamore. This again was a tough game and St Cillians came out victorious on a scoreline of 1-15 to 1-5. The senior final took place on the 1st October in Birr and the opposition was again Shinrone. This was our third meeting with Shinrone this season and our first senior camogie final. We entered the final unbeaten in the championship which was a fantastic achievement for such a young panel. Unfortunately, this time we came up short with the reigning county champions driven on by a marvelous display by Michela Morkam at centre back supported by a strong team performance eventually running out winners on a scoreline of 2-16 to 1-6. Reaching a county final in the team's first year at senior grade was a fantastic achievement. The mentoring team of Leonard Deane, Jack King, Ger Oakley and Enda Gleeson along with Paula Hogan



St. Cillian's Senior Panel at County Final v Shinrone.

Back Row (L to R): Aoife Hogan, Brid Ryan, Ellen Cashen, Emily O'Brien, Siobhan Killeen, Michelle Gleeson, Megan King, Fianna McCormack, Siofra Ryan, Niamh Collins, Stephanie Maher, Laura Hogan, Leanne Maher, Orla Killeen and Ciara Brennan.
Front Row: Lisa Hoctor, Cailin Fitzgerald, Dara Hanamy, Clodagh McCormack, Niamh Killeen, Rachel Brennan, Aisling Brennan, Aideen Freeman, Elizabeth Harding, Orla Plunkett, Ciara Hoctor, Sinead Bergin and Aoife Plunkett.

deserve great credit for their work with the panel of players over the year.

Our Under-12 panel attended the "Caman to Leinster" held in Abbotstown and played games against Piltown from Kilkenny, St Brigids from Dublin and Kildare. They won two of their games. Overall it was a great experience for them playing at the wonderful facilities in Abbotstown. Later in the year we brought the panel to Croke Park to the All-Ireland camogie final taking in a game against Lucan Sarsfields on the way. Our Under-12 panel contested well in the championship which culminated in a blitz in Kinnitty.

Many successful and well run blitzes for our Under-8's and Under-10's took place this year and it culminated in a festival of hurling held in Kinnitty on 10th September. It was great to see some of our senior girls help out with these up and coming stars. Our Under-10 team was selected for the "Hurl with M" program and was delighted to be coached by Benny Wyre over four weeks.

Feile na nGael weekend for our Under-14 team took place on the 9th and 10th April. We won two games against Naomh Brid and Tullamore and lost two against Birr and Banagher bringing our participation in this competition to an end. In the Under-14 "B" championship we played steadily through the championship campaign eventually losing out to Tullamore in the semi-final.

On the 10th of July we held a fun morning in Carrig for all the underage groups in St. Cillian's and CRC Gaels. The day commenced with a mass for all deceased members of our clubs. The center of our activities in the field revolved around the fun inflatable pitch where all the teams engaged in novelty games. The under age groups also took part in skills competitions such as the long puck, target shooting, relay solo runs. The morning was finished off with a presentation of medals to all the winners.

Congratulations to our county PUC FADA winner Michelle Gleeson.

In 2016 we had lots of representation on the Offaly County Panels across all age groups. Congratulations to Under-14 County Shield winners. On Sunday 15th May, Offaly beat Wexford on a score line of 3-04 to 1-06. St Cillians representatives were Caoimhe Rice, Niamh Costello, Elaine Hanlon and Edel Daly.

Offaly minors won the Leinster "A" Minor title on 28th

August in a tough game against Wexford. This was a fantastic achievement. Congratulations to St Cillian's players who were part of this panel – Ciara Brennan, Aideen Freeman, Aisling Brennan, Dara Hanamy, Clodagh McCormack, Elisabeth Harding, Orlaith Plunkett and Megan King along with our club mentors Declan Fitzgerald and Denis Hoctor who were part of the management team. A homecoming was arranged for the victorious team in Carrig.

Congrats to Niamh Costello who came second in the Leinster Féile skills competition.

The Offaly senior team had a great year reaching the quarter-final of the All Ireland championship where they were defeated by Kilkenny who were the eventual winners of the Championship. We were proudly represented by Aisling and Ciara Brennan and Cailin Fitzgerald.

Congratulations to Carrig National School and Killeen National School on their successes in the Cuman na Bunscoil finals. Carrig NS defeated Coolderry NS on 11th May. Killeen NS defeated Rath NS on the 18th May.

Our Under-13 team participated in an end of year league which saw many of our younger players step up to a full size pitch for the first time. They were in a strong group with Shinrone, St Rynaghs, Lusmagh Drumcullen and Kilcormac. The league games were well contested and we went through the group stages only losing to Shinrone who topped the group. Well done to the players and their mentors for this strong showing.

St. Cillian's would like to congratulate all the players for their hard work and commitment during the year. We have had the good fortune to have many great mentors and trainers with all our age groups this year who dedicate countless hours to training players for the love of the game. St Cillian's are very thankful for this commitment and it is great to see hard work rewarded by the continual improvement of our players camogie skills.

St Cillian's would also like to thank the Carrig and Riverstown Club for their ongoing support and use of their excellent facilities in Carrig. We also extend our appreciation to the continued support of our sponsors and the supporters of our various fundraising activities. Finally a huge thank you to all the Parents/ Guardians of each of the playing members. Without your support all of the above would not be possible. St. Cillians thank all involved.



St. Brendan's Boys P.S. Year probably....1953/54.... Class probably 4/5th.

Back Row (L to R): Gerry O'Connor, Wiggy Kavanagh, Jackie Cahill, Larry Nugent, Herbert Hennessy, Paddy Murdoch, Sean Nevin, Jack Devery, Cormac Cunningham.

Front Row: John Wrafter, John Dooley, Tom Taylor, Bobby Walshe, Gerry Sammon, Sean Fanneran, Ritchie Featherstone, John Regan, Freddie Holland, Francis Cumiskey.

LITTLE BROSNA & CAMCOR FISHING CLUB

During the 2016 fishing season, the weather once again played a major part. Rain and floods were the main feature of the summer months, which made it difficult to fish at times, and meant the run of croneen trout arrived late. Night fishing was also affected because of the late run. However taking all this into account, it wasn't a bad year,

As with all Clubs these days, fundraising remains a challenge. We always welcome new members, and all of our committee members have membership cards.

The Club would like to acknowledge the fundraising effort of one of our members, Simon McGarry who

organised a draw just before Christmas last year. There were many prizes to be won and the club would like to thank everyone who sponsored the prizes. The figure raised was €980 which will go towards juvenile competitions. Well done to all concerned.

The Club would like to thank the staff of Inland Fisheries Ireland, for their hard work and dedication, because their presence on the river is invaluable.

It is also important that the public stay vigilant, and report anything suspicious to the IFI.

Tight lines for 2017.



Club member, Brendan McGarry with his haul caught on a fly on the Camcor in August 2016.

CRINKILL GAA CLUB

Crinkill competed in the Junior 'A' Championship this year having sought to be re-graded as we had lost a number of players for various reasons such as injury and retirement. While we expected to do well in the championship we knew that winning any silverware this year was most probably an unrealistic goal so instead set our sights on at least reaching the knockout stages.

Our campaign got off to the perfect start with a win at home to Gracefield. While the score line of 2-15 to 0-16 suggests an easy win the reality was far from it. The game was in the balance right up to the final minutes when we managed to tag on a couple of points to pull away. There was a six week wait before our next outing against Ballinamere in which we were well beaten, the long layoff not assisting in the preparations with most players struggling to keep up with pace of the game. Another heavy defeat in the next round at

the hands of eventual finalist Kilcormac Killoughey left us in a do or die situation in our final group game versus Tullamore. This we won quite convincingly to set up a Qtr Final appearance against Kinnitty. Unfortunately we were carrying a few injuries into this game and didn't really have sufficient time to recover, the game being played only a week later. Despite this the lads showed great heart and gave it everything. A couple of missed opportunities saw us come up just short at the final whistle to lose by the absolute minimum. Overall the season can be seen as successful in that we achieved what we set out to do, which was to make the knock out stages.

We would like to thank all our players for their commitment and effort throughout the year and also our management team of Peadar Robinson, Robert Parkinson, Des O'Brien and Bobby Corboy.



Crinkill GAA Club Committee.

Back Row(L to R): Brendan Finnerty, Bobby Corboy, Sean Maher, Brendan Cooke, Mark Corboy, Des Corboy.

Front Row: Des Connole, Declan Cooke, Des O'Brien, Robert Parkinson, Jimmy Grennan
Missing from photo David Corboy, James Hogan, Declan Ward and Tom Geraghty.

BIRR BOXING CLUB

In the year under review Birr Boxing Club wishes to put on record a story of considerable success. In 2015/2016 the Club had 30 boxing members in addition to the trained Coaches and support staff. Members are divided into training categories by age, the juniors being from 6 years to 11 years and the seniors being from 12 upwards. Both groups meet twice each week on a Monday and a Friday evenings. In respect of membership fee the age divides at 16 with those below paying €15 per year and a session fee of €2. Those over 16 pay an annual membership fee of €30 per year with a session fee of €3.

There is a strong training discipline in the Club and this has paid off with wins in county and provincial competitions. Three out of four Birr competitors won their bouts in the Offaly County Championships and our one Birr entrant in the Leinster Championships, Alex Kinahan, came top in the 11 year old class. This county and provincial achievement comes about not only because of the work in the Birr Club itself but also because much organisation and energy is expended on sparring competitions with other clubs. A list of the clubs visited by Birr Boxers in the last year includes Crumlin in Dublin, the Elite Boxing Club in Mullingar and the Boxing Clubs in Banagher, Clara and Nenagh. It also has to include competing in the International Boxing Club in Monkstown, Dublin which is precisely what its names states, a place where Boxers from a number of nations compete. So the Birr Boxers are experiencing form on an international as well as a national basis. Further specialist skill training is also organised by Leinster Boxing in Kilcullen and Birr Boxers attend. The class winning Alex is receiving her specialist training under Leinster auspices in Kildare.

Early in the year the Birr Boxers, themselves, organised a hugely successful sparring competition using the premises of Crinkill Handball Alley. For the use of it many thanks to our friends in Crinkill. Several hundred people attended and for a Club only 15 months old at the time it was an immense achievement and a real feather in Birr's Cap. On which note we need also to record the fact that while the Club is most deeply grateful to the owners of the Green Street premises the facilities there are not adequate to do justice to the potential of the Club which is constantly receiving requests to organise competitions. Birr Boxing Club has the leadership capacity to respond positively to these requests but it does

require an upgrade of premises and the acquiring of such is going to be a major preoccupation in 2016/17.

In addition to the sporting activities of the Club the Officers have devoted considerable time to putting in place a Club Constitution in keeping with best Boxing Club practice. We are grateful for the help we have received to this end and in the complementary activity of devising bench-marked protocols for best behaviour from the IABA. In that context the Birr Club at its most recent Committee Meeting affirmed its absolute commitment to the conduct of Boxing as a sport centred on the values of healthy living, self-discipline and absolute equality of practice. We enter our third year with great expectations.



Alex Kinahan from Birr Boxing Club was winner at Under-11 44kg weight in Kildare in April with coaches John and Mark Parady.



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CARRIG/RIVERSTOWN GAA CLUB

This past year has shown real and substantial progress after a very disappointing 2015. Getting to the league and championship final was just reward for the hard work put in by the team and management. That success eluded them this year is disappointing but the club can look back with pride on many fine performances and look to the future with confidence.

At the start of the year few would have predicted that we were capable of getting to a final this year. A new management team of Ger Brennan, Declan Fitzgerald, John Kennedy, Denis Hctor and Eddie Dolan was put in place and training started in early February. The team took part in the Leinster league and while they failed to progress to the knockout stages, they got some very competitive matches which has stood to them. Traveling to Windgap in Kilkenny and Ardclough in Kildare helped to bond a team together. First round of the Championship was in the middle of April and the team put in a great second half performance against Banagher to come away with a nine point win. The team has had a good run in the Division 2 league with wins over Seir Kieran, Lusmagh, Kilcormac/Killoughey (KK) getting to the league semi-final against Birr. That semi-final played in Crinkill on Saturday 25th June was one of the Clubs better performances this year and the team ran out convincing winners. The league final against Coolderry proved disappointing. Challenge matches against Camross, Clonakenny, Roscrea and Toomavara helped to build and gel the team together and hopes were high facing Coolderry in the league final but on the day we failed to deliver and lost by two points. The next championship match against Brosna Gaels, in late July, was another disappointing affair. We failed to cope with their sweeper system and while we were level at half time they were convincing winners. The performance against Clara in the next championship match was much better but the concession of two goals and our failure to take our goal chances in the first half proved to be our undoing, losing by four points. Our final championship game was against Drumcullen. We put a number of poor performances behind us and dictated the game from the start and won by nine points. This put us into a quarter final against Kilcormac/Killoughey. Getting beyond the quarter final stage had become a big issue having failed to do so since we last won the championship win in 1996. A battle from start to finish there was only a point or two between the teams for most of the game. Heading towards

full time KK had a two point advantage but two goals and a point in the final minutes gave us a five point win and a place in the semi-final. This represented progress for us.

The semi-final against Brosna Gaels, who had beaten us in the league stage, was a big ask. We started well and were five points up midway through the first half when we had a goal disallowed. By half time the teams were level and only a point or two separated the teams for most of the second half. The teams traded point for point and only in the final minutes Carrig & Riverstown pushed two points clear. Those final minutes were hectic with some great defending as Brosna Gaels fought to get a goal. We held firm and were into the Intermediate final for the first time in twenty years. Getting to a final was a great boost for the club and it brought great colour and excitement to our small community. The team trained hard and hopes were high as we travelled to O'Connor Park Tullamore for the final on 9th October against Clodiagh Gaels. We started poorly showing signs of nerves. The team put in a good second quarter and led by a point at the break. Clodiagh Gaels started the second half brightly and scored three points without reply. The concession of a goal early in the half really gave us a mountain to climb and from then on we had no answer to the free running Clodiagh Gaels forwards. The final score of 1-21 to 1-9 was a disappointing end to a year that brought us some memorable moments. Hopefully the experience gained from the final will stand to the team in the coming years.

The Club took great pride in the success of the CRC Gaels Feile team and the selection of four of our players, Ross Conoughton, Brendan Hctor, Ryan Hogan and Aidan King on the successful Offaly Under-17 Celtic Challenge team.

The club continues to develop our facilities at Ballaghar with painting of the Ball Wall and improvement of lighting. The organising of an 8K road race in May involved a big community effort as did the long days in stewarding at the ploughing championships in Screggan. Thanks to all for their continued support and to all our coaches and trainers Congratulations to Carrig National School and Killeen National School on their successes in the Cuman na Bunscoil finals. Carrig NS defeated Coolderry NS on 11th May. Killeen NS defeated Rath NS on the 18th May.

Thanks to our sponsors and to the community who support our various fundraising activities.

Looking forward to the coming year with confidence.



Carrig & Riverstown Intermediate Hurling Team.

Back Row(L to R): Thomas Hogan, Jack Kennedy, Paddy King, Conor Fitzgerald, Ger Oakley, David Brady, Thomas Hough, John Cashen, Michael Keane, Aaron Dolan, Conor Freeman, Daniel England, Michael Kennedy, Ryan O'Meara,
Front Row: Andrew Carney, Michael Gleeson, Ray Bourke, Enda Gleeson, Damien Maher, Eoin Doorley, Stephen Guilfoyle, Gary O'Brien, John Hanlon, Dan O'Meara, Joe King, Kieran O'Brien, Jack Delahunt.

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Coffee Stop!

(L to R) Pat Delany, Pat Mannion, Joe Mannion, Tony Fahey, Cormac Hoare, Bernie Grennan and Susan Reidy.



William Finnane receiving his award for completing the inaugural Wild Atlantic Way Challenge.

WOLFTRAP CYCLING CLUB

The long nights have drawn in, signalling the close of the Wolftrap Cycling Club's 11th season. The shorter days result in less frequent and shorter cycling spins, thus affording the cyclists the opportunity to rest their bodies during the winter season. In order to keep muscles toned during the winter, the club organises spinning classes, at The Birr Leisure Centre. The same cyclists eagerly anticipate the forthcoming 'stretch' in the evenings and the milder conditions of early spring.

Each cyclist enjoys the bike for different reasons. For the vast majority of the cycling family, it is the healthy feeling of both mind and body. For others the challenge is to increase speed averages, cycle extreme distances in all categories of terrain in hills and mountains. The Wolftrap Club aims to assist and encourage all members in attaining the most enjoyment from their participation in the club's activities.

Over the years cyclists assemble at Horan's shop for the Sunday spins. These begin at 9.00 am in the cycling season and at 10.00am in the winter. Groups also organise spins on Tuesday and Thursday evenings during the longer summer evenings. During the 2016 season the club organised a Saturday cycle to encourage new people to cycling. These Saturday spins, at a controlled pace, proved to be successful with many new people joining and indeed some lapsed cyclists taking to the road again!

When the Wolftrap Cycling Club formed in 2005, sports or leisure events were infrequently organised. There are now over 350 such events countrywide. These cycles vary in distances from family friendly shorter spins to longer distances for the harder cyclists. Leisure events introduce most people to the sport of cycling and these cycles are also a fun and social way of developing fitness levels along with visiting some very scenic parts of the country.

The Club's blue and white strip was seen at many major cycles throughout the season. We had representatives at many cycles that were sponsored by our sister clubs in the Midlands including Portumna, Lynx in Ferbane, Tullamore, Athlone and Mullingar as well as further afield. Our own Billy Butler cycle was held on Sunday July 24th and the number of participating cyclists was the biggest since the event's inception. Some charity cycles were held towards the end of the season. The Grant Engineering charity cycle set off from Dooleys Hotel in difficult weather conditions. On September 25th, The Pieta House Offaly/Tipperary cycle started and finished at the County Arms Hotel.

On 17th of September the first of five cycles was organised for young people, in Lough Boora Discovery Park. Portumna Forest Park was also used as a venue for the young people's cycles. It is hoped that such cycles will encourage young people to get involved in cycling while developing their bike handling skills and road safety awareness.



Cycling in Lough Boora.

Back Row (L to R) : Pierre Greijmans, Liam Butler, Joe Mannion, Finn O'Sullivan. Front Row: Niamh Coughlan, Ally Conneely, Fia Naughton, Alysha Williams, Goda Butkeviciute, Maya Ubowska, Sam McAulay, Conor Greijmans, Cameron O'Sullivan.

In the Birr Review 2015, we had a feature celebrating William Finnane's odyssey on the famous long distance cycle Paris-Brest-Paris. Early on the morning of Friday 17th June 2016 William began the inaugural Wild Atlantic Way Challenge. This cycle was organised by Audax Ireland which is an organisation that oversees long distance cycling events in Ireland. The Wild Atlantic Way challenge was a 2100km cycle along the west coast of Ireland. The cyclists were obliged to complete the cycle within 175 hours (7days and 7 hours!). Of the 60 entrants, 36 finished inside the cut-off time of 175 hours. All cyclists, who completed the event within the allocated cut-off time, received the same trophy or medal. William plans to attempt the London-Edinburgh-London event in 2017.

On Saturday 8th Oct, The Slieve Bloom Extreme Challenge started at the County Arms Hotel. It was the second year that the club organised this unique event. The 2016 Slieve Bloom Extreme Challenge attracted cyclists from twenty two clubs and there were twice as many participants as in 2015. The 76 cyclists left the County Arms Hotel, Birr in misty, foggy conditions. However, the skies soon cleared to afford the athletes ideal conditions. The route was designed so that cyclists of varying ability could participate and each cyclist

BIRR Year Review 2016

had the option of completing 2, 4, 5 or 7 peaks. The maximum distance was 170 km, but the attraction of this event was the climbing of the peaks. These climbs included Glendine (twice), The Cut (twice), Lakaroe, and The Wolftrap (twice). Most of the cyclists had completed four climbs when they reached the al fresco food stop in Kinnitty. The food stop provided the athletes with some necessary sustenance and recovery time before they continued to cycle the remaining hills. The food and water stop was facilitated by Joe Mannion. The visiting cyclists were very impressed with the route and the organisation of the event. The Club hopes to continue promoting this event and attract more visiting cyclists to the Slieve Bloom area, over the coming years. The club welcomes new members every year and we hope that many new members will join us in 2017. Prospective members will find more information about the club on our website www.wolftrapcc.eu and our Facebook page.



Back-Up Team on the Seven Peaks Tour.

(L to R): Bernie Grennan, Maurice Quille (cyclist), Camillus O'Meara, Annie Nichol, Tony Fahey, Joe Mannion, Nancy Murtagh, Niall Milne, Laura Brown, Mary Lonergan and Grainne Hoare.

Training for Seven Peaks on Glendine.

Front: Colin Roddy, Jim Cloonan, Declan Milne, Pierre Greijmans.
Back: Chris Sullivan, Cronan Grennan, David Baker.

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BIRR TOWN FOOTBALL CLUB

Another successful season for Birr Town F.C. culminated in victory in the Division 3 cup for the reserve side managed by Eamon Pardy.

Birr won an intense final on penalties after they finished level at one-all with Portlaoise after extra time. Hero for Birr was Barry McEvoy who replaced veteran Sean Ryan in goals for the shoot out and saved three of the Portlaoise spot kicks to break the opposition's heart.

On the schoolboy/schoolgirl front Birr brought four trophies to the club. The Under-10, Under-11 and Under-12 sides, along with the Girls Under-18 teams were the successful sides.

Birr managed to field 18 teams at underage level and a lot of thanks must go to all the managers who gave of their time freely to look after these sides. A great deal of thanks must also go to all the parents who helped with transport and with club activities throughout the year. It is very much

appreciated.

A very successful summer camp under the F.A.I. was run in the first week of July and a very high attendance enjoyed a week of football coaching. Well done to all involved.

Our chairman John Corboy was honoured with an award for his contribution to football by the C.C.F.L. This was a well merited award for a man who has given most of his adult life to the cause of Birr town. Indeed his dedication to the club over the years as a player, manager and chairman has been instrumental in the continued success of Birr town.

On a final note the club would like to thank all of those who have supported the club in their fund raising events over the years and without whose support we would not be able to function. Once again a very big thank you. Let's hope we can work together in the future to bring success and help to keep the high standards of this great club for future generations.



Birr Town FC Division III Winners.

Back Row (L to R): Jamie Byrne, Shane Kearns, Aaron Flanagan, Martin Gallagher, Barry McEvoy, Eamon Pardy (Manager), Martin Bannon, Pio Downey, Danny McIntyre, Shane Pardy, David McEvoy.

Front Row: Craig Pardy, Joseph Corboy, Dermot Shields, Sean Ryan, Keith McEvoy, Jason Parsons, Darren Cahill, Philip Evans.

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BIRR GAA MINOR CLUB



Birr Under-14 Offaly Féile na nGael Champions and County Finalists 2016.

Back Row (L to R): Ronan Bergin, James Nolan, Kevin Tierney, Dean Rasheed, Bill Burns, Adam Fitzgerald, Luke Nolan, Christopher Kelly, Rodhán Dempsey, Joseph Boyd, Tom Erritty, Sam Morris, Niall Lyons, Tommy Byrne, Nathan Williams, Shane Rasheed.
Front Row: Darragh Morris, Adam Duffy, Cian Nolan, Sam Smyth, Maxwell Boyd, Darragh McNamara, Lochlann Quinn, Ben Miller, Ben Pardy, James Hayes, Luke Morris, Ailbe Watkins, Darragh Tierney, Michael McCarthy.

Photograph: Martin McCarthy

We started off in earnest on a January evening in Birr Town's All Weather facility where over 50 young hurlers from ages 4-10 braved the conditions and it set the tone for a year where a lot of building blocks were put in place for the future.

We held a Parent Information Night and Underage Registration night in February where our plans for the coming year were outlined and parents and players got to speak to their respective management teams while a large group of club members completed the Code of Ethics, Good Practice for Children's Sport course put on by Sport Ireland the following month.

With preparations well under way and all teams training diligently, we received a great shot in the arm with Féile success for our Under-14 hurlers. Their energy, enthusiasm and skill was a breath of fresh air and they represented us with distinction at the National Féile na nGael finals in Waterford. Unfortunately a couple of results didn't go our way but the effort made by players, management and all supporters who travelled down was immense. The weekend will live long in everyone's memories. Huge thanks to the Nire/Fourmilewater clubs for hosting our team, the Division 2 group stage results were as follows: St Mary's (Clonmel) 2-4 Birr 2-3, Birr 2-5 Raharney 1-5, Birr 4-9 Fourmilewater 2-4. Despite finishing level on points with St Mary's and Raharney we were eliminated on scores conceded before falling to Trim (Meath) by a point in the Shield Quarter-final. After defeating Na Fianna in the last four, they later made it the Under-14 'A' final on October 15 but struggled to get motoring against a physically strong Tullamore side, who were deserved 4-9 to 0-7 winners. Huge credit must go to Michael Lyons, Kevin Nolan and Joe Erritty for their work with the lads and we look forward to watching this exciting group develop over time.

The Under-10 Billy 'Snipe' Nevin Cup was a massive success yet again with winners Moneygall, St Rynagh's, Portumna and Birr all participating keenly throughout the day. Our

Under-10 side progressed massively throughout the year under Martin Hogan and thanks to all mentors, referees and everyone who helped organise this festival of hurling.

Similarly, the Under-12 Tom Ryan Memorial Cup & Shield was a thriller of a day with Camross taking the Cup while Birr were victorious in the Shield. A super day for all involved nderwith Neil Tierney's U-12s in just one of many blitzes up and down the country for all our stars of tomorrow.

Our Under-16 side may not have made the knock-out stages, losing heavily in a play-off to Na Fianna but they improved immensely throughout the year while our minors failed to build on a brilliant opening round defeat of Cúchulainn Gaels and disappointingly exited at the group stages.

But with Birr's Cúl Camp numbers increasing significantly from 2015 things are on the up at underage level and Coaching Co-ordinator Johnny Pilkington deserves huge credit for all his hard work with our underage players. While it is still very much a work in progress, huge strides have been made during 2016.

Congrats to all our young hurlers who represented Offaly at various grades throughout the year but in particular to Dylan Watkins with the minors and Oisín Murphy, Mikey Milne and Jack Pardy who were part of the victorious Offaly team who claimed the Under-17 Celtic Challenge and also to minor football selector Stephen Lonergan, who helped Offaly reach the semi-finals.

A big thank you to all of our coaches and parents, without whom it would be impossible to run our minor club. Thank you in particular to parents who drive the lads from game to game, we really appreciate your dedication and we encourage all parents and guardians to take an active role in your children's sporting development.

Also I would like to thank our hugely dedicated minor committee, chaired by John Irwin, who run our underage club so efficiently and raised important funds during our annual Church Gate collection and SuperValu bag pack. Looking forward to seeing you all again in 2017.

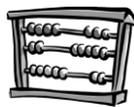
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John Molloy, Anne O'Callaghan, Denis Sheils, Janine Wilson.

Special Thanks To Camillus King for photographs.



Birr GAA Senior County Finalist Team.

Back Row (L to R): Craig Shortt, Cathal Kirwan, Kevin Donovan, Barry Whelahan, Colm Mulrooney, Rory Hanniffy, Brendan Murphy, Conor O'Callaghan, Eoin Hayes, Paul Cleary, Mick Cleere, Eoin Pilkington, Stephen Lonergan, Cormac Kenny.
 Front Row: Conor Egan, Sean Ryan, Michael Verney, Brian Watkins, Brian Mullins, Eoghan Cahill, Emmet Nolan, Barry Harding, Aaron Whelahan, Craig Taylor, Dylan Watkins, Donal Ryan, Dylan Quegan.

BIRR GAA

2016 was a highly proactive year for Birr GAA club with amazing work completed by our members and the wider GAA community. Our continuous efforts to upgrade St Brendan's Park were rewarded in mid-January when we hosted Offaly v Kilkenny in the Walsh Cup.

Huge numbers flocked through the turnstiles while two months later Offaly welcomed Kerry to St Brendan's Park in the league with even bigger numbers turning out and despite a lack of Offaly SHC semi-finals or finals returning in 2016, we will do everything in our capability to keep the pressure on 'the powers that be and make sure Offaly hurling returns home. Particular mention must go to Field chairman Pat Thompson and his team of workers who have overseen a wonderful transformation on the grounds.

In early spring, we raised a healthy sum selling tickets as part of the GAA's National Draw but 2016's main fundraising activity was The West End Battle of the Musicals, which yielded a staggering €43,000 profit. We would like to thank everyone for making Friday June 10 one of the most memorable nights in the club's history as relations between the club and the surrounding community were further cemented.

As a result, we ran this year's Golf Classic as a Golf Outing on September 16 to thank the numerous sponsors who supported us with complimentary food and music for all involved. The prestigious Peter Parady Perpetual Cup was won by the team of Eddie Nevin, Alan Naylor, Liam O'Brien and Brian Guinan. Thank you to our team of organisers and all who took part.

We must also extend a huge thanks to our dedicated team of lotto sellers who keep our club going financially on a weekly basis, your extraordinary work is not going unnoticed and we encourage new faces to get involved.

After going unbeaten throughout the group stages our senior hurlers defeated Belmont and Kinnitty in the knock-out stages to set up a county final meeting with old rivals St Rynagh's. Unfortunately things didn't go to plan on the day but seeds have been sown for the future with many of our young hurlers showing what they can do on the big occasion. Many thanks to Paddy Kirwan and his selectors Mick Keogh, Garech Doorley and team secretary Mick Lyons for their trojan work throughout the year, Birr will be back. Also, it

was great to see the town decorated in green and red with everyone buying into the club and our hurlers again, long may it continue.

Thanks to all who supported us in any way and particularly to Sportswear Direct for their jersey sponsorship. Thanks also to Paddy Kirwan and Mick Mulrooney for taking charge of our intermediate and junior hurling teams respectively. Similar praise must go to junior football manager John Ryan and his selectors Matt Corcoran (Kinnitty), Mick Mulrooney, Dave Coffey and team secretary Dave Bolger. The footballers, who were grateful to have permission players from Kinnitty, Carrig and Riverstown, Crinkill and Claren, went through the group stages unbeaten before unfortunately falling at the quarter-final stage to Clodiagh Gaels.

Our parish U-21 hurling side St Brendan's reached the county final after two fine wins against St Rynagh's and Na Fianna but were just edged out in the final by a late Shinrone goal after an enthralling contest. Thanks to all sponsors of the team and to the management quintet of Johnny Kelly, Joe O'Connor, Matt Feenane, Colm 'Cha' Cahill (Crinkill) and Eddie Dolan (Carrig and Riverstown) for their brilliant work throughout the year.

Congratulations to Paul Cleary on his Offaly Poc Fada success in Lough Boora, Paul went on to represent Offaly in the Leinster Poc fada where he came an excellent third. Well done also to Emmet Nolan on being nominated for the U-21 Hurling Team of the Year for his performances with Offaly. A lot has been achieved in 2016 but there is a lot more to do and we encourage the people of Birr to be active in your support of our club, get your hands dirty and help out where possible because the GAA is the heart and soul of our town. Finally, we could not finish without offering sympathy to all friends and family of Birr GAA who passed away throughout the year, in particular Liz Kennedy and Joe Kerins, who served their club with distinction for years. Liz was loved by all who knew her, a Birr woman to the core and a proud wearer of the green and red who will never be forgotten. Joe soldiered for many years serving the club in a variety of important roles and rarely did he miss a game on the gate in either St Brendan's Park or O'Connor Park. He was one of life's true gentlemen. Ar dheis Dé go raibh siad.

MAY THEY REST IN PEACE



Dinny Sheeran



Sharon Guinan



Jim Fogarty



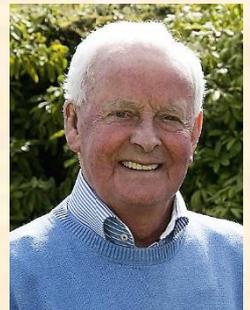
Elizabeth Egan



Paddy Fitzgerald



Patricia Hourigan



John Gilmartin



Olive Byrne



Matthew McMahon



Elizabeth Sherlock



Liam Cooke



Mamie Gleeson



Terry Lynskey



Teresa Galvin



Paschal Campbell

MAY THEY REST IN PEACE



Margaret O'Neill



Billy O'Donoghue



Mary T. White



Callum Lee O'Donovan



Rose Hughes



David 'Budgie' Byrne



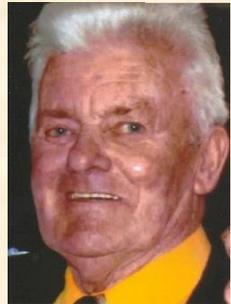
Triona Loughnane



George Watkins



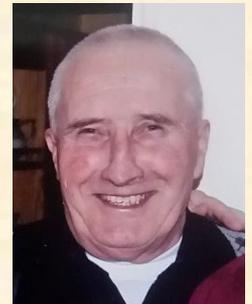
Liz Kennedy



Paddy Kirwan



Margaret Kelly



Fintan Larkin



Ann Day



John O'Connor



Betty O'Dwyer



MAY THEY REST IN PEACE



Geraldine Hynes



Dick Hanlon



Dolores Owens



Fintan McManus



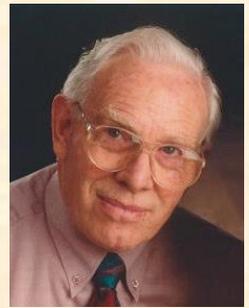
Lena Murphy



Joe Kerins



Ursula Tooher



Paddy Howley



Sheila O'Callaghan



Jacinto Jose Viegas



Babe Murphy



John Lawlor



Paddy Hackett



Ann Haslam

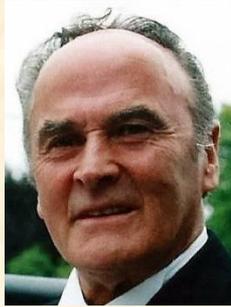


Sean Forde

MAY THEY REST IN PEACE



Pauline Wilson



Michael Parnell



Christina Tooher



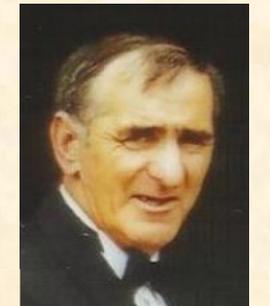
Roseceline Delaney



John Quigley



Margaret Guilfoyle



Tony Nevin



Josie Raleigh



Sean Lowry



James Donnelly



Martin Hynes



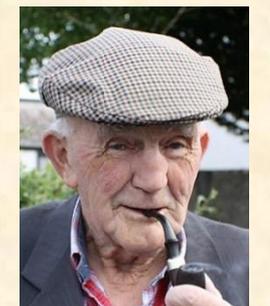
Maudie Hoare



Richard Flanagan



Bro Nilus O'Regan



Tom Delahunty

Birds

by Eileen Casey

Gunfire whistled through the GPO
detonating fear in hearts
who heard the cordite tune of bullets,
knew how to read smoke.

I have met them at close of day
walking like birds on the periphery
of a shoreline, slowly fading. In magpie markings
light and half-light, their dreaming reeds
bend. Though buildings rise, phoenix like,
their faces are not vivid.

Among the detritus of the everyday
such possibility is glimpsed as in a swan's
full stretch, along the banks of the Royal Canal.
Yet, their faces are not vivid.

They lean into dusk gathering streets
almost forgetting the gift of flight.



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