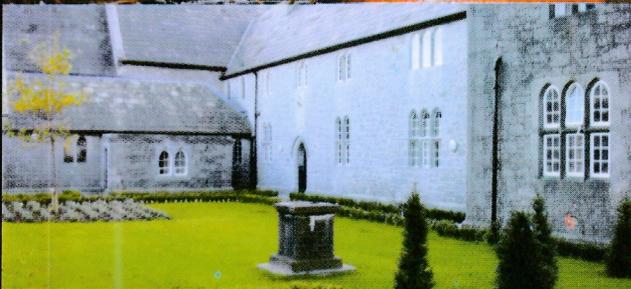
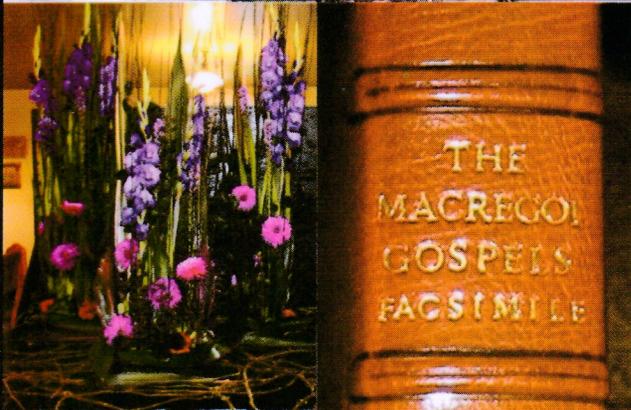


BIRR YEAR REVIEW



BIRR Year Review 2006

Volume 6

December 2006

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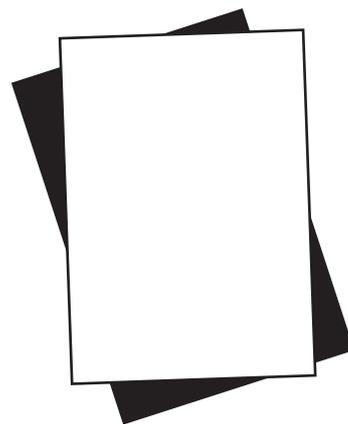
FRONT COVER

*The colour photos feature
Birr in 2006*

Inside Cover: Old Streetscapes

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Welcome to the sixth edition of the Birr Review. It has been a great pleasure to have worked together with the rest of the editorial team to prepare our Review for publication. This is the largest production yet. I hope you get enjoyment out of the mix of articles about life in Birr at present and in the past. Sincere thanks to all who contributed written material and photographs. Thanks also to Birr Lions for their support and enthusiasm. Without our many advertisers it would not be feasible to attempt such a project as the Birr Review. We hope that it makes its way into as many homes as possible at home and, especially, abroad and that it brings a sense of joy and pride in our town to everyone who reads it. If you feel you would like to become involved in next year's production, please contact any of the production team listed below.

Best wishes,
MICHAEL DONEGAN
EDITOR

This is the 6th edition of the Birr Year Review which contains interesting accounts & pictures of various events in and around Birr during the last year.

Birr Lions Club are very proud to be associated with the book since its first publication in 2001. As an organisation, we help the young, the old and the underprivileged and the funds we receive from the sale of this book help in no small way.

Naturally none of this would come about without the dedication and hard work of a small committee who work tirelessly to make the publication into the success that it has become. In this regard I thank Michael Donegan the editor and Martin McCarthy the assistant editor and all members of the committee.

I would also like to thank the business community of Birr and district for supporting our advertising campaign on behalf of Birr Annual Review Committee. This is very much appreciated.

Finally I thank all who purchased this publication and wish Birr Review 2006 every success.

PAT CONNOLLY
PRESIDENT BIRR LIONS CLUB



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BIRR YEAR IN REVIEW 2005/2006

NOVEMBER 2005

It was announced that a major commercial and leisure development will be built on the Tullamore Road if planning permission is granted by Birr Town Council.

The annual Birr Community School show "The Wizard Of Oz" played to packed audiences nightly. The show received rave reviews. The wonderful colours on stage and the special effects left a lasting impression of a magnificent show.

A Certificate of Merit for consistent high safety performance was awarded to Loughnane's Concrete, Birr at the Safety Awards 2005.

Clr. Tony McLoughlin was informed by Brian Cowen TD, Minister for Finance that St.Brendans Environmental Group had been awarded €19,486 in funding under the scheme for Community Support for older people.

Well known member of Birr Garda District Garda Michael Keogh retired from the force. A native of Westmeath, Michael came to Birr District in 1972. He served in Kilcor-mac for the latter period of his career. Mick was involved in the GAA in Birr for many years.

St. Brendan's National school defeated Dromakeenan by a single point to win the replay of the u-14 schools final.

Birr Senior hurlers were defeated by UCD in the Leinster Senior Club hurling final.

16 people out of a staff of 33 lost their jobs at Ko-Rec-Type, Birr.

Minister Brian Cowen TD cut the tape to officially open the new Birr Senior Travellers training centre located at Sedgefield Industrial Estate.

RTE 1 programme 'Seatrain' featured the Midland Tribune and Birr.

DECEMBER

Well known Crinkill man Michael Hogan, who delivered the post in the parish of Coolderry, Shinrone and Brosna areas retired recently. To mark his retirement, customers in the three areas made a presentation to Michael and his wife Mary. Fr. Kieran Blake, P.P. of Coolderry, made the presentation to this very popular man.

Local artist Yvonne Claffey held an exhibition titled 'Suas an Staighre' at Birr Theatre and Arts Centre.

Dick Roche TD, Minister for the Environment, Heritage and local Government, presented Birr Building Firm Old Builders Company with an award for the use of Hemp in construction.

Wilmer Tennis Club concluded their year with the finals of their championships. Presentations of prizes to the various category winners was made by Chairman John O Callaghan at a most enjoyable function held at 'The Chestnut'.

Santa Claus surprised the children of Crinkill. His magic Sleigh was decorated with flashing lights and a ringing

bell. A large crowd awaited his arrival and each child received a present. A great evening concluded with the turning on of the Christmas lights.

The inaugural Chairman's concert organised by Cllr. John Carroll, Chairman of Birr Town Council in Birr Theatre and Arts Centre proved a great success and raised a significant amount of money for charity.

JANUARY 2006

Birr was the coldest place in Ireland in January 2006. The local Met Eireann Station recorded that Birr also had the lowest annual total of sunshine in the country over a 12 month period.

Birr Town Council struck a rate of 7% increase in commercial rate, which is well above the inflationary rate.

It was revealed by the Director of Services, Michael Roche that the Council Executive had decided that they would advertise "Crotty Church" for sale.

At long last the paying public at Birr Castle will be able to view the night heavens through the Leviathun of Birr. Tom Parlon TD, Minister for State at the Department of Finance announced that the OPW will restore the famous Birr Telescope to working order.

St. Brendan's Community School ended its 25th year of education with a most enjoyable "Stars in Motion" talent show in the Sports Hall on the last day of the term.

Approval was given for Offaly County Council to accept the tender for the Birr Sewage Scheme. The 1.8 million project involves the upgrading of the existing scheme and extending the water main from the Tullamore road to the Banagher road.

West Offaly Partnership invited young people between the ages of 11 and 19 from the Crinkill area to put forward their views on what they think is needed for the young people of Crinkill.

The famous Garryown Rugby Club travelled to Birr with 2 busloads of children, their age ranging from 8 to 12. The young players took part in a blitz with the Birr under 8's losing narrowly to the visitors but the Birr U-10 and U-12's defeating the visitors. A very enjoyable day was had by all who attended.

FEBRUARY

Birr Theatre and Arts Centre has received a major boost in public funding for 2006 with an Arts Council Grant of €12,000.

Carrig and Riverstown Development Association thanks everyone who helped, sponsored or who attended the various events during the year.

Grow - A Grow group meets each week in Birr for those who experience depression or anxiety attacks or who are simply in need of company, all are welcome to the Community Health Centre, Convent, Wilmer Road, Birr, every

Tuesday evening at 8.15pm.

This is the AGM season among the Clubs and Organisations: holding their AGM are: Birr Swimming Pool, Birr Chapter of the Irish Georgian Society, Birr Refuge Support Group, Crinkle Tidy Villages Association, Birr Vintage Week & Arts Festival and Birr Tidy Towns.

Deputy Olwyn Enright warmly welcomed the provision of an Ambulance Service in Birr - something she campaigned for as an "absolute necessity". "The people of Birr and surrounding Districts will be much relieved to have a modern and sophisticated Ambulance Service at their disposal at all times" she said.

The highest ever number of National Hygiene Certificate presentations to a single organisation, 268 in total, were made recently in Dublin to the Centra Convenience Store Group and among the winners were Loughnanes Centra Birr.

A Dublin man was arrested for an attempted break-in to a guest bedroom in a Birr Hotel - he was remanded in custody to appear in Birr District Court.

Grass temperatures in Birr hit a chilly -14.4°C making it the coldest place in the country in the month of January and the lowest air temperature in January was also recorded in Birr at -6.7°C - the lowest January value recorded in Birr since 1987.

Birr Theatre and Arts Centre held a technical course for emerging sound and lighting designers.

A course of 6 classes on wine appreciation and tasting by Roger Delbrassinne was held in St Brendan's Community School

The Book Club book of the month was "2001 A Space Odyssey" by Arthur C Clarke

The Film Club films were the New Zealand film "In My Fathers Den" (2004), "Czech Dream", "Finding Nemo", "Whiskey", "Downfall".

Carrig and Riverstown Active Retirement Group held an evening out in Mullingar "at the dogs".

Birr's Olwyn Enright TD was nominated at the Annual General Meeting of the Birr Fine Gael Branch to contest the selection convention to select a Candidate for the next General Election and was unanimously endorsed by all the members present.

Birr mourns the passing of Canon John Shalloo. Canon Shalloo was laid to rest in the grounds of St Brendan's Church, Birr after 57 years of faithful priesthood. He was appointed Parish Priest at Birr in 1986 and Canon to the Cathedral Chapter of the Diocese in 1998. May he rest in peace.

Approval has been granted for Birr Swimming Pool to go to tender - the proposed refurbishment work will include the renovation and repair of existing structural elements, refurbish changing rooms, replace pool plant and equipment and up grade the existing mechanical and electrical installations.

The Birr Town Councillors welcomed a new Birr Town Clerk during their February meeting. Edel O'Brien

stepped down and was replaced by Mary Gaughran. Ms O'Brien said the Council offices should be moving to their new location in the Convent site at Wilmer Road in August or September.

The Farmers Vegetable Market operates in Marion Hall Car Park every Saturday from 10am to 5pm.

Councillor Anne Hynes Spain and Councillor Denis Sheils welcomed the news that contracts have been signed with Cavanagh's of Ballingarry to supply the equipment for Birr's new playground. Councillor Hynes Spain, PRO for the Playground Committee, thanked the people of Birr and all of the members of the Playground Committee for unstintingly supporting this initiative which, she said, will enormously contribute to facilities for children in Birr and the surrounding area.

Birr Camogie notes - Both Crinkle National School and Birr Girls National School took part in the Offaly GAA Indoor Camogie Blitz in Shinrone. Crinkle won against Carrig National School, drew with Ballyboy National School and lost to the group winners, Rath National School. Players were Shauna Carroll, Rachel Corboy Lisa Maher, Emily Quinlan, Nikita Corboy, Niamh West, Michelle Kealey, Catherine McCormack, Aoife Dempsey, Dawn Whelehan. Birr Girls drew with Kinnitty National School and lost to Shinrone, the group winners. Birr players were Ria Harding, Emer Teehan, Jasmine Patel, Niamh Betts, Rowina Murdock, Caoimhe Hand, Jessica Spain, Rebecca Hctor, Nicole Pardy and Katie Masterson.

Most Reverend Willie Walsh, Bishop of Killaloe presided over an evening Mass to say thank you for work done by choirs in the Diocese. Some 20 twenty parishes from east of the Shannon took part. Choirs were conducted by Mr. Paul Collins, organist, and choir Director Nenagh and Mr. Enda O'Connor presided at the organ. The Mass concluded with the singing of Handel's Halleluiah chorus by Handel conducted by Ms Lucy McCarthy.

Crinkle Sports and Recreational Centre - Well done to Noel O'Brien on reaching the Leinster final of the 40 x 20 Junior "B" Singles. Noel saw off tough challenges from representatives from Kilkenny, Carlow, Dublin and Meath.

Birr Rugby and Football Club saw off Roscrea to win the Leinster League by 14-5. Birr Team - Ozzy O'Meara, Stephen Gill, Joey O'Loughlin, Andrew Lally, Keith Scully (Capt), Garech Doorley, Keith Hehir, Evan Williams, Brendan Molloy, Christy Hogan, Kieran Campbell, Mick Keogh, Cronan Kennedy, Dermot O'Shea, Ronan Joyce, Conor Larkin, David Niland, Paddy Marshall, Brendan Brophy.

Midland School Boys League (Soccer) - U12 Birr Town 2 Mullingar Athletic 0

Birr enjoyed a successful trip to Mullingar and the panel were, Robert McKenna, Sean Nagel, Jack Feeney, Kevin Brummell, Sean O'Connor, Sean Brady, Steven Lyons, Colm Mulrooney, Shane Kerins, Shane Rigney, Paul Franks, Eoin Hayes, Christopher Guilfoyle, Paddy Mullins, Jonathan Dwyer and Mark Nolan.

Birr win for Birr Girls U18 - Mullingar Athletic 0 Birr Town 1.

Player of the match was goal scorer, Ria Harding Team - Kayleigh Sheils, Grace King (Capt) Meave Monaghan, Erin Byrne, Eleanor Heagney, Emma Hart, Ria Harding, Leona

Tyrrell, Bronagh Rigney, Megan Lavin and Catherine Hoare.

MARCH

Gerry Dolan honoured for contribution to Church Choir:

A surprise presentation was made to Gerry Dolan to honour his contribution to church music over the last half century. The award was made by the Most Reverend Willie Walsh, Bishop of Killaloe, at the end of a Mass appropriately celebrating the gift of music and song.

Milne Foods Syngefield, Birr have received a grant of €426,751 under the Capital Investment Grant Scheme for the fruit and vegetable sector.

Holocaust survivor captures minds of St Brendan's students: born in present day Slovakia (then Czechoslovakia), Zoltan Zinn is one of only 6 holocaust survivors living in Ireland and he told his story to the students in St Brendan's Community School. Everyone was impressed by his resilience and constant assertions that, while the awfulness of his childhood will never leave him, life goes on and life is for living.

An Exhibition of 12 maps detailing the town of Birr is running at Tullamore Library drawn from the unique publication, "An Atlas of Birr" by Dr John Feehan and Lady Alison Rosse. The Exhibition shows a selection of maps from 1610 to the present day illustrating the changing geography of the town. The Book on which the Exhibition is based is available from book shops and may be consulted at the library.

Major refurbishment of Birr Swimming Pool:

The €1.7 million to be drawn down was the big news at the AGM in Dooly's Hotel. The Manager's report stated that the turnover last year was up by €50,000 and she confirmed that maintenance of the pool proved most costly to sustain but, all things considered, the balance was a healthy one. The pool is almost at its full capacity with 35 schools using the facility.

Three burglaries in Birr area - one in Rudd's Syngefield, when a small quantity of cash was taken, one at an electrical warehouse in Syngefield where a small sum of cash was taken and the third at Ballyeighan, Birr where builders tools were stolen.

Birr Citizens Information Centre, Wilmer Road opening hours - Monday, Tuesday 10am to 5pm and Wednesday, Thursday and Friday 10am to 2pm.

Book Club book for this month is "Diary of an Ordinary Woman" by Margaret Forester.

Birr Camogie Superstars held a third heat in Whelehans. The 2 acts going through to the final are Heather Coolahan sponsored by Kelly's and Shanna Kenny sponsored by Ballingarry Potatoes.

Music & Drama Birr Theatre & Arts Centre:

Dominic Kirwan performed in concert. Lorraine Nolan sings the Eva Cassidy story, Frances Black in concert and for classical fans, Music Network present the Yukawa Chan Piano Duo (UK). The screening from Birr film club is "Downfall" - Director Oliver Hirschbiegel - this German

drama chronicles the collapse of the Third Reich and has been described by The Wall Street Journal as "a masterpiece of historical and cinematic drama".

Birr Town U12 Girls defeat Mountmellick:

The Birr Girls - Kayleigh Sheils, Grace King (Capt), Sinead Garland, Meave Monaghan, Eleanor Heagney, Emma Hart, Ria Harding, Shauna Byrne, Megan Lavin, Bronagh Rigney, Catherine Hoare, Chelsea Kennedy, Leona Tyrrell and Hannah McLoughlin.

Birr clinch great win over Carlow in Town Shield: Birr 7 Carlow 0

Team - K O'Meara, S Gill, J O'Loughlin, A Lally, K Buckley, G Doorley, K Hehir, E Williams, C Campbell, D O'Shea, C Kennedy, R Joyce, subs: A Galloghy, (for C Campbell), E Kavanagh, D Hiland, R Gallagher, P Marshall.

Birr celebrated their success in the hurling and football finals at their annual dinner dance in the County Arms Hotel. Medals were presented to the Senior Hurlers and the Junior Footballers who won County titles last year. Ollie Daly, Chairman of Offaly County Board, said he always loved Birr hurling. "Birr are hurling people and they have carried the flag for Offaly for the last 20 years". Mr Brian Coolohan, Chairman of Birr Club, thanked the team management, the club committee, sponsors and all the people who helped the club out during the year.

St Brendan's Community School saw off the challenge of Cistercian College, Roscrea by 7 points in the Leinster Senior Hurling "A" quarter final. Birr were in a commanding position when they led by 9 points with 12 minutes to go but Cistercian Roscrea came back with a late push and found the net with a second goal to cut the gap to 4 points with 8 minutes left. But St Brendan's held their nerve and 3 final points saw Birr win by 7 points. St Brendan's Community School team - Joe Dempsey, Kevin Larkin, Paddy Ryan, John Bevans, Donal Coughlan, Diarmuid Horan, Diarmuid Carroll, Brian Stephens, Colm Coughlan, Bryan Lonergan, Aaron Whelehan, Barry Larkin, James Mulrooney, Brian Nolan, Odhran Kealey, Subs: Simon Loughnane, Eanna Murphy & Barry Harding.

Shock Birr win opens up title race:

Battling Birr Town condemned Mullingar Town to their first defeat of the senior division. Birr won 3-0 which not only gives them a huge boost but opens up the title race between the most consistent sides in the division.

40 x 20 Golden Masters "A" Doubles

Billy Mullins and Jim Guilfoyle took the honours and this duo must now be favourites to take the All Ireland Golden Masters Doubles Title. In the 40x20 Junior "B" Singles, Noel O'Brien defeated Michael Lennon of Wicklow to take the Leinster Title.

Birr U12's retain Midland League Title which they will share this year with Tullamore. Both teams could not be separated over 3 competitive meetings when all the matches were drawn. Great credit must go to the squad (31 in total) and coaches, Gerry Dooley and David Baker.

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FAS public servants threaten strike on proposed move to Birr:

Only 51 out of 400 staff in FAS head office in Dublin have agreed to move to Birr. Decentralisation was originally due to be completed by the end of 2006 but this is no longer considered a realistic time scale.

Birr lives up to its name during cold snap:

Birr town made national headlines when it witnessed temperatures plummeting well below 0. Night time grass temperatures were reported as low as -16°C, these proved to be amongst the lowest temperatures on record over the last 10 years.

The HSE proposed that the old hospital, Birr be used to accommodate the Doctor's out of hours service - Midoc.

Camogie Club - training for junior players commenced in Crinkle GAA pitch. Camogie superstars for March are Rebecca Kelly sponsored by Corbett Insurance and Sharon O'Connor sponsored by Larkin Formalwear, Leanne McNamara sponsored by Sharovogue Construction and Franks and Woodlock sponsored by Dooly's Hotel.

Local Veterinary Practices in association with Pfizer Animal Health held a farmers information meeting in Dooly's Hotel on BVD diseases and how it affects herds and a discussion was also held on mastitis and the management of newly calved cows.

Talented Birr artist, Nicki Larkin, featured in Limerick Art Exhibition - EV + A.

Birr Rugby Football Club took on Wicklow in the Provincial Towns Shield in Ballyegan.

Birr Golfer is 2006 Team Ireland Golf Trust Golf Recipient - Justin Keogh was among 20 top Irish golfers who were allocated €270,000 through the Team Ireland Gold Trust. Justin received a total of €10,000 through the trust which is administered by the Sports Council.

Birr Community Games:

The local heats of the draughts competition were held in the Marion Hall. The winning U10 team was Kenneth Taylor, Conor Lavin, Anne Barry, Gillian Irwin, Katie Harding. The U12 team was Stephen Hoolohan, Emer McMahon, Emmet Hart, Darragh Hart, Emma Hart, Pdraig O'Brien and Megan Lavin. The winning U 14 team was Sean Hogan, Catriona Hoolohan, Nicole Parady, Tom Doyle, Ruari Keane, Kenneth Rice. The U12 and U14 teams took silver medals at the County Final. The U10 team was knocked out.

Solutions still to be found for Seffin Speed Problem:

It has been debated in the Council Chamber for almost 30 years and residents have often been red in the face about it but there still seems no light at the end of the tunnel for the dangerous stretch of road in Birr at Seffin. Cllr Anne Hynes Spain raised this ancient issue once more during the March meeting of the local council.

Gun Crime out of control and spreading to rural areas claims Deputy Olwyn Enright: She pointed to the fact that there have been 14 violent deaths so far this year and that every town and village is being affected by the growing

trend towards violent crime.

Dr Rory Masterson spoke on the Reformation and its effects on Ireland at the Birr Historical Society.

Birr Bonanza Week a success:

It has drawn many interested customers from across the midlands and beyond to the town. Geraldine Kennedy, who was primarily responsible for pushing the idea of Birr Bonanza Week, commented that the idea took on a life of its own and has definitely been a success.

The Parish of Birr Triduum of Prayer (Lent) was held from Monday March 20th to Wednesday March 22nd with Mass and Benediction each night with a special celebration of reconciliation during the Mass on Wednesday.

The Parents Council of Carrig National School held a very successful fundraising social in Riverstown and an enjoyable evening was had by all.

CSPE at St Brendan's Community School:

The annual CSPE week was held at St Brendan's Community School. The second year students were introduced to intensive modules in each of the core areas of civic, social and political education. The group welcomed past pupil, Deputy Olwyn Enright, who gave a most informative talk on the role of a full time politician in a modern democracy. A speaker from Third World Organisation Goal also addressed the students. Each tutor group also went on a fact finding visit around Birr commencing at Birr Traveller Training Centre and visiting among other places the Courthouse where Garda Sweeney facilitated a most interesting enactment of a court case.

Birr Stage Guild under the direction of Maureen de Forge and musical director Enda O'Connor produced a power packed and dramatic performance of Jesus Christ Superstar at Birr Theatre and Arts Centre. The show was a sell out and enthralled packed audiences over its 5 night run.

Congratulations to Bridie Rosney on her 70th Birthday;

Members of Birr Youth Club gathered together for surprise party in her honour.

The Birr Active Retirement Association travelled to "The Magic of Vienna" in the National Concert Hall, Dublin.

The St Brendan's Senior Camogie team reached the County final in style when they beat LSU Banagher in an exhilarating game in Banagher.

The Grand Finale of Birr Camogie Superstars competition took place in Dooly's Hotel, Birr and from an initial 54 entrants, the finalist had been whittled down to a mere 12 and these were: Rebecca Kelly sponsored by Corbett Insurance, Brendan McGarry sponsored by The Fighting Cocks, Heather Coolohan sponsored by Kelly's Bar, Neil Kennedy sponsored by Olwyn Enright TD, Carol Fitzpatrick sponsored by Birr Oil Company, Edel Byrne sponsored by Nolans Bar, Sharon O'Connor sponsored by Larkins Formalwear, Leanne McNamara sponsored by Sharovogue Construction, Franks & Woodlock sponsored by Dooly's Hotel, Shanna Kenny sponsored by Ballygarry Potatoes, Timmy Fogarty sponsored by Pat Guinan Footwear, Claire and Elaine Connors sponsored by Bergin & Connors Ltd. A very close contest ended with the final

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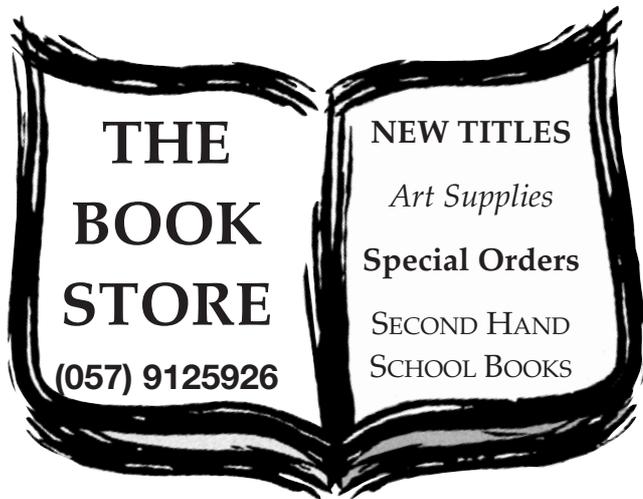


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decision going to Brendan McGarry. Mary Rigney, on behalf of the Camogie Club, thanked everybody who had supported the competition and said that the funds raised would be used to improve the facilities and provide a healthy source of recreation for the young people of our town.

Man held at knife point in Birr:

A 27 year man was a visitor to the area and undertaking contract work. The culprits involved relieved him of his wallet which included €100 in cash and personal effects. The incident occurred at the entrance to the car park at Wilmer Road between 2 and 2.30am.

Councillor Tony McLoughlin welcomed urban and village renewal funding which has been allocated for Birr. €45,000 for undergrounding of cables, €21,406 for public lighting in Connaught Street, €45,795 for lighting in Johns Place, €12,943 for upgrading the lamp standards at Johns Mall and €91,856 for civil works. Deputy Enright praised the initiative of the Council and stated that, for a heritage town like Birr, to have all cables placed underground will be a huge boost to the visual landscape and a more appealing location for tourists.

Confirmation that remedial works will be carried out at the pedestrian crossing at Emmet Street, Birr has been welcomed by Deputy Olwyn Enright who has strongly campaigned on the issue. A new anti-skid surface together with new road and warning markings are to be provided. The Council will then review the situation at this busy location.

APRIL

Lowest March temperatures on record in Birr. Birr's ground temperature of -16°C on March 3rd was the lowest such value in March since the station opened in 1954.

An Exhibition of 12 maps detailing the town of Birr is touring the libraries of Offaly drawn from a unique publication "An Atlas of Birr" by Dr John Feehan and Lady Alison Rosse. The Exhibition shows a special selection of maps from 1610 to the present day illustrating the changing geography of the town.

Crinkle's Noel O'Brien clinched the All Ireland Junior "B" title in Roscommon from Tyrone's Shane O'Neill.

Feile na nGael:

Birr U 14 hurlers defeated Shamrocks in St Brendan's Park by 6-22 to 2-0. Birr had their first outing in the U 16 "B" football league and recorded a good win over Kilcor-mac/Killoughey on a score line of 5-12 to 1-3.

Laois/Offaly Fine Gael TD Deputy Olwyn Enright raised the issue of fatal road traffic accidents in the general Seffin area of Birr stretching out as far as the Roscrea Road during a debate on road safety in Dail Eireann.

Progress on Birr Town Plan was welcomed by Councillors when they heard a progress report from the Development Plan for Birr and environs 2004-2010. The review was presented by County Council planners Andrew Murray and Paula Hanlon. The report referred to land use and zoning, housing development, social and affordable housing,

under grounding work, water metre installation, broad-band ducting, playground facilities, traveller accommodation programme, development of our swimming pool, new cemetery lands, new civic offices and library at the former convent site at Wilmer Road and the Council's introduction of the short stay parking control system at Emmet Square and Market Square with free parking nearby facilitating greater efficiency in the use of public car parks.

Wilmer Tennis Club Spring League draw is made and the AGM is over and it is time for tennis.

The Birr Parent and Toddler Group meet every Tuesday morning from 10.15am to 12.30pm at the Resource Centre in the Londis Car park.

The Leinster Handball Convention was held in Dooly's Hotel Birr.

Congratulations to Billy Mullins and Jim Guilfoyle on winning the All Ireland Golden Masters "A" final in Roscommon, where they overcame the challenge of Mayo's Kevin Geraghty and Michael O'Reilly.

Councillor Tony McLoughlin congratulated the staff of Birr Town Council for their work on the footpaths, trees and shrubs on Mill Island and Camcor Park.

Exhibiting Suas an Staighre

Suas an Staighre is a space at Birr Theatre and Arts Centre where artists have the opportunity to exhibit their work on a quarterly basis in the Theatre foyer.

The Book Club book of the month is "The Third Policeman" by Flan O'Brien.

Birr Town U11 team gained 6 points with wins over Tulamore 3-0 and 3 days later Birr were victorious at home over Mucklagh and the panel were Feeney, Flanagan, O'Connor, Rice, Hogan, Pilkington, Cahill, S Dunne, Connors, C Nolan, McIntyre, K Dunne, Mullins, Loughrey, Dolphin-Murray, Badiance, Horan.

Birr Vintage Weeks and Arts Festival Committee kick started the fundraising efforts with a very successful church gate collection in Birr and Carrig. The committee thank all the parishioners for all their generous contributions.

A decision of Birr Town Council to refuse permission for the development of apartments and shops in a protected Georgian House in the town has been upheld by An Bord Pleanala. The developer had hoped to convert an existing 9 bedsits and an office in the existing 3 storey protected structure on Johns Place.

Birr's Ann Hogan features in Opera Gala:

An Opera Gala featuring Ann Hogan, Mezzo Soprano, John Molloy, bass baritone and friends was held in Birr Theatre and Arts Centre.

MAY

Mrs Maureen Dunphy, 2 The Crescent, Birr was presented with a special citation at St Brendan's Church to mark her life long work in parish organisations and events. Among the organisations to which Mrs Dunphy devoted time were The Legion of Mary, Birr Apostolic Society, Meals on

Wheels, Altar Society, Mentally Handicapped Association, Birr Tidy Towns, Eucharistic Adorers, Pro-Life, Garden Group and Ladies Group.

According to figures released by Met Eireann, Birr recorded both the highest and lowest temperatures in the country during the month of April. The highest temperature recorded was on Friday, April 28th when it reached 17.4°C and the air temperature on April 5th was -4.4°C, the lowest recorded April value since Birr Met station opened in 1954.

A meeting of Offaly VEC was informed that it is planned to create a new roundabout outside Birr Outdoor Education Centre. This roundabout will be at the entrance to the proposed Tesco store.

Gracefield Guesthouse, run by two Dublin natives, Valerie Keleghan and Michael Burke, opened for business at Cornhill, Riverstown, Birr.

The Birr U-12 rugby panel, on their return from a trip to Scotland in late April, reported that they brought home many fond memories. Coaches Jerry Dooley and Dave Baker, along with parents Billy Delahunt, Martin Hogan, Mick Kenny, Damien Lynch and James Smith, made the trip. The players that travelled were – Thomas Bailey, Jack Baker, Max Barnok, Fionn Carroll, Nicholas Corcoran, Shane Delahunt, Peter Dooley, Gary Drought, Conor Fitzgerald, Conor Grimes, Maurice Guinan, Brendan Heffernan, Cathal Hogan, Jack Kennedy, Michael Kennedy, Mick Kenny, Pdraig Killeen, Graham Lynch, Rory Mounsey, Ronan Murphy, Emmet Nolan, Pdraig O'Brien, Kevin O'Connor, Seamus O'Connor, Jordan Parsons, Chris Pingree and Isaac Smith.

Irate Birr councillors expressed annoyance at their May meeting that the National Roads Authority (NRA) had written to them and said they wouldn't meet them to discuss the dangerous junction at Seffin. At the same meeting, councillors agreed to sell Crotty Church.

Birr Scout Master Jack Ryan was awarded the highest honour in scouting when he was presented with the Cuchulainn Award at a ceremony held in Dooly's Hotel. In 1968, Jack was the co-founder of the scouts in Birr along with Brother Polycarp.

Dunnes Stores received planning permission to build a new supermarket in Birr. The supermarket will be located at Loughnane's sand pit on the Tullamore Road.

Bebhinn Coghlan, whose parents, Michael and Jennifer, moved to Rosse Row, Birr, from Dublin, was presented with an An Gaisce Gold Medal Award by President Mary Aleese. Bebhinn was among 14 Gold Medal recipients from UCC.

Birr man, Paddy Loughnane, was honoured by the Irish World newspaper in England for his dedicated services to the Union of Irish Golfing Societies of Great Britain.

The key issues of Fine Gael's Education Policy were outlined by the Party Spokesperson on Education & Science Olwyn Enright TD during the FG Ard Fheis at the City West Hotel, Dublin.

Minister for Finance Brian Cowen TD announced that

€900,000 had been approved for refurbishment works to be carried out at St Brendan's Community School, Birr.

Birr U-11 hurlers won the Offaly Ground Hurling Tournament for the third successive year with a win over Kilcormac/Killoughey in the final. Birr squad: Aaron Flanagan (capt.), Jack Regan, Darragh Pilkington, Emmett Nolan, Conor Nolan, Shane Donovan, Scott Feenane, Craig Taylor, Eric Byrne, Brendan Heffernan, Dylan Patel, Ryan O'Meara, Andrew Conroy, Aaron Coffey, Cormac Kenny, Michael Cashen and Conor Roddy.

Cllr Sean Doorley strongly defended Birr in a debate regarding the decentralisation of FAS staff to Birr. Cllr Doorley appeared on RTE 1's Live-Line programme.

The Birr Community Games U-14 camogie team, managed by Martin McCarthy, Pat Ryan and Mick Hough, won the Offaly Community Games title for the first time with a 2-4 to 1-5 victory over Kilcormac/Killoughey in the final. Birr: Shauna Carroll, Jane Ryan, Emily Quinlan, Kelly Ann Milne, Chanice Lynskey, Caroline Soupe, Siobhan Rogers, Julie Stephens (capt., 1-4), Rebecca Hctor (1-0), Sarah Pilkington, Oragh Kirwan, Tracey Milne, Katie Masterson, Lucy Ryan, Nicole Pardy and Dearbhaile Sheils.

Trading Rights were secured for Birr's Market Square when the local media reported that, on April 29th, Bernie Stapleton set up a stall as part of the nation-wide campaign to exercise the 400 year old, established right to trade in towns and villages.

Birr Town Council was informed that broadband ducting was due to be laid on Main Street prior to the Vintage Week Festival in August.

Ms Aimee Milne, Crinkle, was elected to the National Youth Committee of Ogra Fianna Fail.

John Molloy (Bass Baritone), Ann Hogan (Mezzo-soprano) and Richard Pollok (Tenor) performed in an Opera Gala at Birr Theatre & Arts Centre on May 19th.

Mundy launched his live CD/DVD 'Life & Confusion' which was recorded at a crammed Vicar Street in October 2005.

Tom Parlon TD, Minister of State at the Department of Finance, announced that FAS had signed the contract for the purchase of a six acre site in Birr, bringing the decentralisation of the FAS headquarters to Birr a step closer to reality.

A plan to develop Convention and Visitors Bureau (CVB) business in Birr through aggressive marketing in the US, China, Europe and the home market was launched. Chairman of the Birr CVB is Peter Loughnane.

The Sportsplex facility at St Brendan's Community School, Birr, was officially opened by Minister for Finance Brian Cowen TD.

Birr Lions Club made a generous contribution of €3,900 in sponsorship towards an item of equipment catering for children with special needs which was installed at the new Community Playground, Wilmer Road.

JUNE

Carrig National School won an award for the Best Script at the Film in Schools (FIS) programme in Portlaoise. Carrig NS produced a seven-minute film entitled 'Let Everyday be a Green Day'.

Figures released by Met Eireann, showed that Birr had experienced its wettest May since 1916. Birr had just over double the percentage of normal rainfall for the month.

'The Beauty of the Bogs' exhibition opened at Spinners Townhouse, Birr.

Eighteen sports clubs in Offaly received funding totalling €869,000 under the 2006 Sports Capital Programme and among the local beneficiaries were – Birr RFC €30,000, Crinkle Sport & Recreation €15,000 and Ormond Flying Club €80,000.

Set dancing enthusiasts from all parts of Ireland and many parts of Britain converged on Birr for the annual set dancing festival organised by the local branch of Comhaltas.

A group of 1st Year students from St Brendan's Community School, Birr, along with their teachers, Mrs Joyce and Ms O'Carroll, paid a visit to Dail Eireann where they met Minister of State Tom Parlon TD and they also visited the National Museum of Ireland.

The Birr U-11 girls' soccer side, managed by Lisa Byrne, clinched the Midland Schoolboys/Girls Shield title with a 2-1 victory over Mountmellick. The successful squad was – Ria Harding, Grace King (capt.), Maeve Monaghan, Erin Byrne, Bronagh Rigney, Shauna Byrne, Leona Tyrrell, Eleanor Heagney, Sinead Garland, Kayleigh Shiels, Hannah McLoughlin and Catherine Hoare.

Birr's Sean Ryan was a member of the Offaly team that bowed out of the Leinster Junior Football Championship following a 0-15 to 1-10 first round defeat at the hands of Louth. Sean was also part of the Offaly senior panel that qualified for the Leinster Final for the first time since 1997. However, their hopes of glory were shattered by Dublin.

Birr Town Council Chairperson John Carroll cut the tape to mark the official opening of the new Birr Community Playground. The event attracted a huge crowd, including many excited youngsters, keen to sample the activities on offer. It was one of Cllr Carroll's last functions as Council Chairperson as, at the Town Council Annual Meeting, Cllr Michael Campbell took over the reins as Chairperson.

Over 150 revellers poured into Dooly's Hotel for the Birr Vintage Week & Arts Festival Midsummer's Ball. They danced the night away to the Marble City Showband and a fantastic night was had by all. The event was just one of many organised to raise the €60,000 required to organise the Vintage Week & Arts Festival.

The Confirmation Class at Crinkle NS were lauded and featured in the local newspapers for their generosity in donating some of the money they had received for their Confirmation to the Down's Syndrome Association.

The Fr Vaughan Cup returned to Birr for the first time since 2001 when St Brendan's NS U-13 hurlers defeated St Rynagh's NS by 4-8 to 2-5 in the Allianz Offaly Cumann na mBunscol Division 1 Hurling Final. The successful panel

was – Conor Grimes, Cathal Hogan, Eoin Pilkington, Shane Rigney, Colm Mulrooney, Conor Nolan, Kevin Donovan (capt.), Corey Parsons, Peter Dooley, Emmett Nolan (4-0), Patrick Mullins (0-3), Darren Cahill, Sean T O'Connor (0-5), Kenneth Rice, Michael Kenny, David Sheils, Dean Nagle, Peter Horan and Shane Claffey. 2006 was a memorable year for the U-13 hurlers as ten of the aforementioned also helped St Brendan's win the Offaly INTO Mini 7's title. While in October of '05, St Brendan's NS also won the Aidan Rosney Cup after they were successful in the Cumann na mBunscol U-11 Final.

Birr Gardai recovered property valued in excess of €30,000 following a search just outside Birr. The items recovered, were believed to have been stolen in thefts and burglaries in various parts of the country.

A special souvenir booklet to mark the conservation and refurbishment of St John's Convent of Mercy, Birr, was launched.

A pilot programme titled Encouraging Your Child's Development was delivered to learners in the Senior Traveller Training Centre in Birr.

Birr man David O'Grady launched his new cook book entitled 'Cooking for Fin, Fur and Feather'.

The Progressive Democrats held their Quarterly General Council meeting in Birr, with over 100 delegates attending, including Cllr Sean Doorley and Minister of State Tom Parlon TD.

At the June meeting of Birr Town Council, Cllr Tony McLoughlin called on the Director of Services Michael Roche to apply for Urban Renewal for the town. He outlined the benefits to the town when Birr was previously designated for Urban Renewal and he said that a tax break might encourage owners to upgrade some buildings in the town that required refurbishment.

Stan and Dettie Hayes, High Street, Birr celebrated their 50th Wedding Anniversary on Tuesday, June 27th. Mass was celebrated in St Brendan's Church, Birr to mark the occasions where the couple were joined by their extended family, including their seven daughters – Mary, Ita, Rosaleen, Gail, June, Paula and Olive, and two sons Barry and Stanley.

The pupils of St Brendan's NS, Birr were delighted to learn that their book about child labour had sold 4,200 copies. Mr John O'Connor, Managing Director of Blackwater Press, who published the book 'Sums Not Sticks', presented royalties of the sale of the book, amounting to €3,000, to Maria Barry, Education Officer of Trocaire.

Carrig National School celebrated the official raising of their second Green Flag. They won the flag for the second time in their campaign against waste, entitled 'Reduce, Reuse and Recycle'.

The residents of two Birr housing developments, Meadow Court and Meadowville, announced that they were going to object to the proposed ring road around Birr between the estates.

It was revealed that three young hurlers from Birr, Paddy Mullins, Conor Grimes and Sean T O'Connor, had been

selected to play in Croke Park in INTO Mini 7's Exhibition Games during the concluding stages of the Guinness All-Ireland SHC.

JULY

A war of words erupted between two local TD's, Olwyn Enright (FG) and Minister of State Tom Parlon (PD), in the wake of a Fine Gael poll that claimed the PD Deputy would lose his seat at the next General Election.

It was highlighted at a meeting of the Borrisokane Area Committee that 80% of the motorists that travelled through Carrig were breaking the speed limit.

Messages of congratulations went out to the children from the 'Homework Club' at Chesterfield Close who performed a concert to mark the end of the school year.

Mundy's gig in Birr Theatre & Arts Centre on Saturday, July 14th was an overwhelming success and a sell out.

A sponsored cycle in aid of the Birr Vintage Week & Arts Festival took place on Sunday, July 9th, leaving from Kelly's, Green Street and heading towards Kinnitty.

Birr's Bryan Lonergan was a member of the Offaly minor football team that defeated Dublin in the Leinster MFC semi-final at O'Moore Park, Portlaoise but subsequently went down to Meath in the provincial decider at Croke Park.

St Brendan's Game Club, Birr, were crowned county champions at the Offaly Regional Game Council Sporting Clay Shoot Final. St Brendan's registered a score of 2,275 points from a possible total of 3,000. The St Brendan's team members included Bobby Dickson, Seamus Glennon (capt.), Michael Dickson, Brian Smith, John Hehir and Ian Smith.

Birr was chosen as one of ten locations nation-wide for a new Garda Youth Diversion Project.

Hundreds of children from Birr and surrounding area enjoyed the Pepsi Soccer Summer Camp held at Woodfield, the home ground of Birr Town FC.

To celebrate the first birthday of RJ Barber & Sons in their new premises at O'Connell Street, Birr, Newbridge Silver launched their new Pet Collection in the premises.

The 'An Taisce' Green School Flag was formally presented to St Brendan's NS, Birr by Offaly County Council Environmental Officer, Clare Dunne.

A patient information booklet for new clients of the Birr Community Nursing Unit was released. The booklet was developed as part of the Unit's participation in a 'Patient Centred' Care Project.

The Birr Stage Guild Children's Theatre Summer Camp, co-ordinated by Maureen de Forge and with Sophia Bailey, Enda O'Connor and Christiaan Feehan as tutors, proved to be a resounding success.

The 38th Birr Vintage Week & Arts Festival was launched at Birr Theatre & Arts Centre on Wednesday, July 12th.

Minister of State Tom Parlon TD, along with local Independent Councillors John Carroll and Tony McLoughlin, welcomed the news that a significant grant had been allo-

cated for the Cappaneale Improvement Project under the Social & Community Facilities Capital Grants Scheme.

Following on from their first ever county success, the Birr Community Games U-14 camogie side went on to clinch provincial honours with a 8-8 to 0-4 win over Myshall from Carlow in the semi-final and an 8-1 to 0-2 win over Rathoath of Meath in the final. However, there was disappointment for the girls U-12 soccer team as they were defeated in the Leinster semi-final by Rathangan.

AUGUST

Fragments of an ancient Psalter (Book of Psalms) were uncovered by Edward Fogarty while using an excavator on a plot of bogland near Carrig. The owners of the bog are Patrick and Kevin Leonard. Archaeologists from the National Museum of Ireland visited the site and declared the finding to be of staggering importance.

A music CD "Garden Sessions", the brainchild of Chestnut Proprietor, Clodagh Fay, was launched at the bar in early August. Local and national artists feature on the CD and proceeds go to the National Hospice Foundation.

Birr Vintage Week and Arts Festival Parade was a colourful start to another successful Vintage Week. An action packed programme of events was organised by the committee. A great variety of Art Exhibitions were held at various locations throughout the town. A tennis tournament, beach volleyball competition, mixed tag rugby, croquet and golf were some of the activities to suit the more sporting minded among us.

Birr Town Council can be very proud of the new look Main St., which was officially unveiled in August.

Brothers Padraig and Jo Digan along with friend Matt Power travelled around Ireland as part of the W8 tour in aid of the aware charity. Their band "Wallmark" is arousing a lot of interest in the music industry.

Birr historical Society were proud to acquire a facsimile of the Mac Regol Gospel, an ancient Birr Manuscript, from the Bodleian Library in Oxford. The facsimile will be on display in the newly opened Birr Library.

Following on the success of the opening of the Playground in Birr, the Birr Children and Youth taskforce has an ambitious plan to implement community led actions to respond to the needs of the youth of the area and initially the group are focussing on the provision of a community childcare facility.

West Offaly Partnership organised a Summer School of Rock in Birr Theatre and Arts Centre. The project was well received by those who attended.

Birr Swimming Pool closed for extensive refurbishments. The new facility will include a Gym, children's learner pool, coffee dock, new steam room, sauna and Jacuzzi. They hope to re-open in April 2007.

SEPTEMBER

The All-Ireland Polo Crosse Tournaments took place in Birr Equestrian Centre in early September. It was a great honour for the club to host this event.

Young people from the area were congratulated on their performances in the National Community Games in Mosney. Birr was represented in Swimming, Art, Camogie, Athletics, and other events.

Offaly TD and Minister of State Tom Parlon was appointed President of the Progressive Democrats following the resignation of Mary Harney as leader of the PD's.

Stephen Brown from Moorpark, winner of a Phone In competition on 2fm, was thrilled to win the ultimate prize of travelling to the EA Sports 'You v Tiger' launch event in Leicester Square London. Competing against UK winners, Stephen was awarded the ultimate prize of appearing in the future version of EA Sports Tiger Woods PGA Tour video game.

To assist in the main activities of Birr Chamber Of Commerce the members elected a number of action groups to assist in driving the goals of the Chamber forward. Their goal is to attract new business to the town.

OCTOBER

Crinkill Tidy Towns Committee presented certificates to the winners in the competition for the best painted properties and well kept gardens in the village. The competi-

tion had been run over the summer months and resulted in the efforts of all coming in for much praise.

The ending of a two year project designed to give patients a greater say and input into the care they receive at the Nursing Unit culminated in a celebration conference. Birr CNU was one of the sites selected to pilot the programme. Achievements of the programme included an increased openness to change, change to work patterns and the setting up of the resident and patient action groups.

Gareth O Callaghan popular radio broadcaster visited St. Brendan's Community School to give a talk to parents and pupils on depression.

During October, Catherine Walsh, Sandymount, Birr undertook a fundraising walk in Thailand in aid of the treatment of the fight against Cystic Fibrosis sufferers. This is her eighth successive year to undertake this challenge and she had to raise €4,000 prior to departure.

The opening of the new Civic Offices and Library in Birr was warmly welcomed by the townspeople. The Offices and the Library are located in the premises of the old Convent on Wilmer Road.

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BIRR MILITARY HISTORICAL GROUP SOCIETY

For 2006 the Birr Military History Society decided to look at a less well-known theatre of the First World War—the North Italy/Austria front. Although there were not so many well-known battles in this area it was felt that it would be interesting to look where battles were fought under very different and difficult conditions in the Alpine region.

Prior to the outbreak of war in August 1914, Italy had tended to side with Germany and Austria-Hungary. To begin with, Italy kept out of the war. However, tempted by offers of more land once the war was won, Italy entered the war in April 1915 on the side of the allies. The Italian front is the name given to the fighting that took place along the border between Italy and Austria from the Swiss border to the town of Trieste on the Adriatic. Much of the front was high up in the Alps, which suffered severe long winters. The Italians only managed to advance a short way into Austria. Between 1915 and 1917 there were twelve battles fought along the river Isonzo just inside the Austrian border. After being defeated at the battle of Caporetto, the Italians were pushed back to the Piave River, 20 kilometers north of the gates of Venice. In October 1917, French and British troops arrived to reinforce the Piave River front line. These forces played a notable part, initially in a reserve and support role during the Italian defense of the Piave in 1917, then in the defeat of the Austrian June offensive, and finally in the total defeat of the Austrian army in October 1918. On 1 April 1917, the 1st (Garrison) Battalion of the Munster Fusiliers was formed in Cork and was dispatched to Italy in November 1917, where it remained in the lines of communications until the end of the war.

After researching and discussing the areas of most interest and looking at the logistics of travelling through this mountainous region, it was decided our group would travel in a roughly semicircular loop starting in Venice, moving north-west through the Dolomites and returning south-eastwards to finish in Trieste, an area that changed hands several times through the ages. With the exception of Val Johnson, who unfortunately could not travel with us this year, the same group of Joe Breen, Derek Coulter, Brendan Mooney, Oliver Craughwell, John Joyce, David Wilson, Eamon Coonan, Martin Hynes, Billy Gleeson and Martin Horan prepared to travel.

On Wednesday Sept. 13th. at 2am the group collected and headed for Dublin for the flight to Treviso, just North of Venice. Arrived early morning and headed into the Hotel Torino and its adjacent annexe. We strolled around Venice and the wonderful St. Mark's Square and had refreshments on the waterfront. We went out in the evening and sampled Italian cuisine, wines and Venetian culture.

On Thursday Sept. 14th. we again went on walkabout. We hired two gondolas and did a trip along the canals. This was a memorable excursion considering the view of the city from the water and the echoing songs and music of the gondoliers as they carefully manoeuvred along the narrow canals. We visited the famous Rialto Bridge and market stalls. After lunch we collected our cases and went by river taxi to the railway station to go to Mestre for the

cars. We collected the cars and Joe and Billy took the wheel for our drive north to the town of Bassano del Grappa and the lovely and friendly Hotel Positano, which we found after a few minor detours.

On Friday 15th Sept. we were met by our guide, Alessandra, and headed into Bassano del Grappa. We visited the Alpini Museum and the Town Hall where she is an elected councillor. She showed us the Avenue of Martyrs where thirty odd resistance men were executed by hanging from the avenue of trees and left there for 2 days by fascists during WW2.

We had a light lunch in the bar on the Ponte Vecchio, also known as the Alpine Bridge. After lunch we were joined by our second guide, Donatella. We drove to Assiago on the most incredibly high twisty alpine roads and visited Boscon cemetery and other British War Graves. Some Irish graves of note were Private Tuohig and Private JJ Crosby from Cork. Very wet weather as well as an incredible thunder and lightning storm that evening and night. Each evening after some rest the group would dine out in recommended restaurants and have some lively debates on historical and current affairs. That Friday evening was no exception.

On Saturday Sept 15th. we met our guides and headed for Monte Grappa at a cool 2100 m altitude and the museum there. We watched an interesting film showing original footage of the entire Italian war at the museum and walked through tunnels 5km long where 15000 soldiers lived. Monte Grappa was a fortress vantage point where the Italian army controlled many major passes through the Alps from Austria. Another chilling reminder of war was the presence of a cold war NATO underground missile bunker decommissioned from the early 1980's. Our next stop was the Tyrol town of Cortina which was about 4 hours drive from Bassano. The weather was very bad and roads very twisty but finally we got into Cortina quite late. We dined on pizzas and had an early night in our very Tyrolean looking hotel which showed the huge Austrian influence on this part of Italy.

On Sunday Sept 17th. we met our new guide, Franco, and visited a large Italian memorial, designed during the fascist 1930's and opened by Mussolini. It was the burial place of General Cantone about whose death there still remains some unanswered questions. The memorial contained four carved symbols of soldiery; Thought, Assault, Pain and Death. Drove up to the Tre Sassi Fort Museum which was very interesting and very comprehensive. The conditions for the ordinary soldiers high up in the Alps, on both sides, were cold and miserable. Many more were killed by cold, sickness and avalanches than by war itself. The final museum display was poignant from our group's perspective as this war here became a forgotten event

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until very recently, as the bitterness and anguish of such an upheaval caused by war between two overlapping nations, was too grievous and hurtful to contemplate until now. The weather still very cold and damp but some of the hardier souls went for a walk through damp Austrian tunnels cut into the mountains. Our guide was a real mountaineer and, although Italian by birth, was Austrian at heart. We took a cable car to Refugio Lagazuoi, in the cold and snow, and had our lunch surrounded by battle trenches and tunnels at 2752m above sea level. We had an afternoon drive down through the mountains and visited a German cemetery along the route. We returned to Hotel Meuble Neve in Cortina where Franco left us. Some of the group retired for aperitifs before dinner while others rested. We dined in a fusion Austrian / Italian style restaurant, with interesting cuisine followed by some grappa and jovial political discussion.

On Monday Sept 18th. we left Cortina and headed for Trieste, our fourth and final port of call. Not too early a start as we decided to take the drive easy and enjoy the scenery on the way to Trieste which was quite a distance. Cortina is a very Tyrolean and up-market town in beautifully scenic and spectacular mountain scenery. We finally drove out of the Dolomite mountains back down to the Plains of Venetia and onto the Autostrada motorway to Redipuglia to look at the largest WW1 memorial in Italy. It is estimated that 700,000 Italian soldiers and civilians lost their lives in the Great War. The memorial in Redipuglia has 100,000 names commemorated on gravestones. We found the name Corporale Laurie Kennedy at the memorial. Unfortunately there was no reference as to how or where this Kennedy met his death as an Italian soldier in 1918.

We took a beautiful and memorable drive down the coast road along the Adriatic into Trieste. We found our Hotel

Roma right in the middle of Trieste and dined in an excellent restaurant on the street under the stars, excellent cheeses, very fine steaks and a memorable local smoked pork delicacy which one of us enjoyed immensely. The heat of the city after the chill of the mountains caused us to stroll around this beautiful and lively town until the early hours.

On Tuesday Sept 19th. we decided to take another coastal drive into Slovenia which was only a couple of miles outside Trieste. We headed out along the coast to Portrose, a very nice coastal beach side town where the weather was beautiful and you could see the difference between the economies of Italy and Slovenia. The people seemed nice and Portrose looked quite affluent probably due to the influx of the Italian Euro. We drove back to Trieste and did some sightseeing of this most beautiful and architecturally elegant city. Trieste was the port of the Austro Hungarian Empire and the layout and buildings reflected its halcyon days. We dined in the Buffalo restaurant and had some refreshments in the James Joyce Bar. James Joyce, was an adopted son of, and lived, taught and wrote, in Trieste for approx. 20 years.

Wednesday Sept. 20th. was our final day. We did some last minute shopping and Trieste sightseeing before departing for the airport for flight to Shannon via Stanstead where there were long queues at the security checkpoints. All in all a very successful trip even if there were not as many Leinster or Munster Regiment connections as in previous trips. However, it was interesting to see how battles were fought over such mountainous terrain and easy to see how battle lines and subsequent national borders changed as frequently as they did on the Italian and Austrian front during WW1. Again the group's thanks to all those who did so much to make the trip a success.



War Memorial at Redipuglia near Trieste, Italy.

*Back L-r: Eamonn Coonan, Martin Horan, Oliver Craughwell, John Joyce, Martin Hynes, Joe Breen.
Front: David Wilson, Brendan Mooney, Derek Coulter, Billy Gleeson.*

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SADIE CAMPBELL – A LIFE OF SERVICE

By Michael Donegan

Sadie Campbell has lived in Moorpark Street since 1959. She was born, however, at the other end of town in Townsend Street. That was in 1921. Her father, Michael Scully owned a bakery, one of several that served the people of Birr at the time. He had two ponies with high-roofed vans delivering his bread to private houses and shops around the town and also to Riverstown and Carrig. He made several types of bread from Hovis to white and brown loaves and special coarse brown bread called Turog. On Saturday he made yeast buns which were sold at 1 penny each or twelve for nine pence. A normal loaf cost 4 pence. A speciality of the bakery was a very rich barmbrack. At Christmas he gave these as Christmas presents to his customers-the better the customer, the bigger the brack. On first Communion Day each year, Michael supplied an extra large brack to the Convent of Mercy sisters for the children's party. The nuns had an orphanage and between that and their own needs they were very good customers. Michael Scully was a Labour member of Birr U.D.C and very much involved with the life of the town. He was a good athlete and Sadie still has some mementoes of his success. He was instrumental with members of the Gardai in setting up a boxing club and was a committee member of Birr G.A.A. club. He helped run a fundraising carnival and worked with a horse and cart at the building up of the viewing banks of St Brendan's Park. As a small girl, Sadie often helped out in the bakery with her sisters. They had to separate the loaves when they came out of the ovens or paint a sugar paste glaze on the bracks. Sadie had three sisters. Mary, who later married John Feehan and still lives in the Crescent, Brid Callaghan who emigrated to America and now lives in Newbridge Street and Nancy who married Joe Vaughan, the tailor, but who sadly passed away at only 24 years of age after only four months of marriage.

Sadie and her sisters attended the Convent Primary School. She enjoyed her childhood. Birr was an intimate community. All the neighbours were close. She skipped or played hop-scotch on the footpaths and rolled hoops with a stick. A favourite pastime was spinning tops which they decorated with coloured chalk and shiny paper and there was great competition to see who could have the prettiest one. Boys played marbles. The girls could only stand and watch. Treats were a rarity. At Christmas there might be a glass of lemonade and on Sunday a very special treat of jelly or cornflower. When summer came it was off to Lord Rosse's bog to help with the saving of the turf for the house and the bakery ovens. On her First Communion day, she wore a dress especially made for her by Mrs. O'Meara of Townsend Street. Sadie remembers being brought to Tullamore by a neighbour as a treat after the mass. There was a school choir which sang in the church. The music was Gregorian chant and all the girls



First Council Meeting after being elected 1967

*Back L-R: James McNamara, J.I. Fanning, Pat Grogan.
Front: Tim O'Callaghan, Tom Carroll (Town Clerk), Whitten Haslam, Sadie Campbell, Paddy Cahill.*

had to attend practice at 10 o'clock each Saturday. When Christmas came Fr. O'Donoghue held a raffle for the choir members as a reward for attending every week. All children had to go to confessions once a month and attend a special mass. To receive communion they also had to be completely fasting from midnight the previous day. On one of those mornings Sadie remembers entering the church to see old Canon Ryan dousing the smouldering embers of a fire in the centre of the building. He was distraught as someone had attempted to burn down the Church during the night. The stench of the smoke hung in the air. Luckily, the attempt had failed but several seats had been burned and the beautiful ornate plasterwork ceiling with its glorious gold and pale green cherubs had been destroyed.

At the end of Primary school, Sadie suddenly became very sick with diphtheria and rheumatic fever. She suffered paralysis and had to stay at home for 18 months. When she recovered, she attended the Commercial School in Green Street. She spent two years there and studied book-keeping, business studies and domestic economy as well as Irish, English and Maths. About this time, John Lyndon and others opened a shoe factory in the Gorm or old workhouse building in Syngesfield. It was the first time any real employment had come to Birr. Before this, there was only limited work in shops or as domestic servants for girls. Soon all Sadie's peers were working in the shoe factory and Sadie joined them there. The war was coming and the Irish army was being hastily equipped with boots and uniforms. At one point, there were 350 workers in the factory. English personnel were brought in to train the workers. Some of these remained on as foremen and Sadie can remember one overseer from Northern Ireland called Miss Fleming. The factory was divided up into different sections located throughout the huge workhouse building. First there was the 'clicking room', so called from the sound made by the sharp knives with which the men cut out the leather for the uppers. Various styles were cut from different patterns. These were then bundled up, labelled according to style and passed on to the 'closing room'. Here 32 girls worked at heavy duty flat sewing machines, sewing the various parts of the uppers together as well as adding in the linings straps and eyelets. Then it was on to



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the 'making room'. This was where Sadie worked. Here the uppers were checked for faulty stitching or any other blemishes and then sewn on to the soles. The heels and soles were made in the 'press room' and then brought to the 'finishing room' where they were attached to the uppers and the shoes or boots were given a good polishing. The final stage of the process took place in the 'shoe room'. The finished products were put in boxes and labelled. The boxes were then brought to Birr railway station by horse and float to be sent to their destinations. Starting pay was seven shillings and nine pence per week. Women who got married had to stop work immediately. In 1945, Sadie got married. She had met Michael Campbell at a Carnival dance in the G.A.A. sports field some years before. Michael's father was English and he had been born in Hong Kong. When she met him he was playing drums in Ernie and Vincent Barbers' dance band, 'The Carlton'. Soon they were going out together. The rules of courtship were much stricter then. Girls weren't allowed to be alone with their boyfriends and it took a lot of coaxing at home to be let out to a dance. Supper dances were held in the Oxmantown Hall and 'big bands' came from outside to play there though the Carlton had the most popular following. Michael was also working in the shoe factory as a machine fitter, and when it shut down in 1959, he got a similar job in a new shoe factory which was opened in Elmgrove by Whitten Haslam. That factory did not last long, however, and when Woodingtons of Drogheda opened a ladies' shoe factory in the old Crotty Church building in Castle Street, he worked there as foreman until it too closed. After that he got a job in Green Isle Frozen Foods in Banagher. At first they lived in Newbridge Street but in 1959 they got a new council house in Moorpark Street.

It was through her activities with the Birr Tenants Association that Sadie first became involved in politics. Sadie had championed the rights of tenants and had formed a committee to lobby and fight for their right to buy out their houses. She was elected to Birr U.D.C. to represent the tenants. She had even led a delegation to Liberty Hall in Dublin on their behalf. It would be 20 years before another woman would be elected to the Council. Eventually in 1976, after five years, their campaign bore fruit. The tenants were allowed to buy their houses and the committee was dissolved. At that time, Tony Hogan came to her and encouraged her to stand again for Birr U.D.C. representing Fine Gael. Politics was in her blood as her father and grandfather had served on Birr U.D.C. representing the Labour Party. When she eventually retired from the Council in 1998, she had the distinction of being the longest serving member as well as the first female member ever to serve on Birr U.D.C. She was not afraid to address Ard-Fheiseanna especially on the rights of the elderly and was a founder member of Birr Credit Union and Birr Old Folks Committee.

Sadie and Michael were married for 46 years until Michael sadly passed away in 1989. They had four children, Johnny, Michael, Majella and Ann(Mulvey). Majella was born with Down's syndrome and is only recently deceased. Majella lived at home with her and was central to the life of the family for 54 years and Sadie misses her greatly. She has devoted children and wonderful grandchildren and feels very much supported and loved by them all. She loves Moorpark Street and her house is frequently busy with friends and family who have dropped in for a chat. Sadie considers herself a Birr woman through and through. It is a great source of pride to her that her son, Michael, is the fourth generation of the family to take his place on Birr Urban District council.



Committee of Old Folks Association – Christmas Party – Mid 70s

Back L-R: Fr Sheehy R.I.P., Michael Parkinson R.I.P., Joe Dooley R.I.P., Gerard Ryan, Fr Slattery, Fred Ryan R.I.P., John Carroll, Albert Mee

Front: Mary O'Connor, Mai Beamont R.I.P., Mrs Frank Hogan, Kathleen Ryan R.I.P., Maureen Reedy, Angela Ryan, Sadie Campbell.



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VICTORIA CROSS WINNERS FROM BIRR

By Michael Donegan

The Victoria Cross is the highest recognition for valour in the face of the enemy that can be awarded to members of the British and Commonwealth forces of any rank in any service, and civilians under military command. It is also the highest award in the British Honours system. The decoration takes the form of a cross bearing a lion and a crown suspended on a crimson ribbon with an inscription 'FOR VALOUR'. This was originally to have read 'FOR BRAVERY' until it was changed on the recommendation of Queen Victoria, after whom the award was named. She thought that some might erroneously consider that only recipients of the VC were brave in battle. The award was first instituted by Queen Victoria in 1856 and since that time only 1,355 crosses have been awarded. Of that number 168 awards have been made to Irishmen serving in the British forces. This the highest number attributed to any single nationality after England. Incredibly 3 of these awards have been to Birr men.

Thomas Bernard Hackett (VC) was born in Riverstown, Birr in June 1836 and served in the 23rd Regiment (later The Royal Welch Fusiliers) in India during the 'Indian Mutiny'.

At the age of 21 at Secundra Bagh, Lucknow, India, Lieutenant Hackett, with others rescued a corporal who was lying wounded and exposed to heavy fire. He also showed conspicuous bravery when, under heavy fire, he ascended the roof and cut the thatch of a bungalow to prevent it being set on fire. He later achieved the rank of Lieutenant Colonel. It is stated that he died at Arrabeg, Co. Offaly in October 1880 and is buried in Lockeen just outside Riverstown. Can he have been a relation of the Hackett family who originally owned the old Presentation Monastery in Moorpark Street? The whereabouts of this medal is unknown.

John Murray (VC) was born in Birr in 1837 and was a sergeant in the 68th regiment (later known as The Durham Light Infantry) during the Waikato-Hauhau Maori war in New Zealand. On the 21st June 1864 at Tauraanga when he was approximately 27 years old, he was involved in the storming of an enemy position. His citation states that he ran up to a rifle pit containing eight or ten of the enemy and without any assistance, killed or wounded all of them. He then continued up the defences fighting with his bayonet. He survived the war and many subsequent battles and died at home in Derrinlough on the 7th November 1911. He is buried in Eglishe graveyard though the exact location of his grave is unknown. Some years ago, a plaque was positioned in the graveyard to his memory. His medal is displayed at the Durham Light Infantry Museum and Durham Art Gallery in Durham.

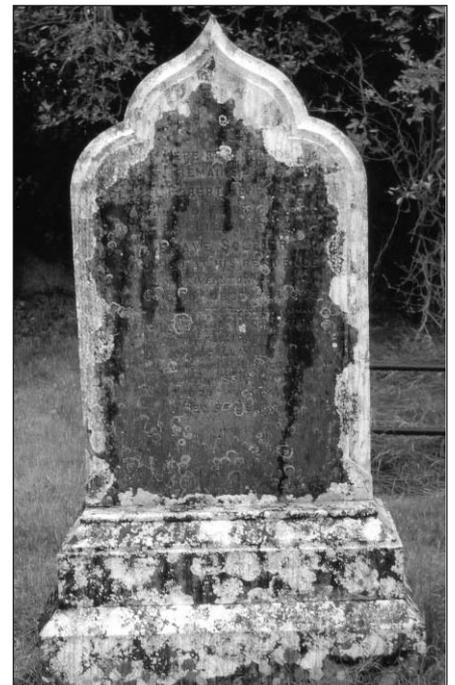
John Caffrey (VC) was born in Birr in October 1891 and was a private in the 2nd Battalion, York and Lancaster



Private John Caffrey, VC.

Regiment during the First World War. On 16th of November near La Brique, France, a man was badly wounded and lying in the open unable to move, in full view of and about 350 yards from the enemy trenches. A corporal from the Army Medical Corp and private Caffrey at once started to rescue him, but were driven back by shrapnel fire. They tried again and succeeded in reaching the wounded man and bandaging him up but as they were lifting him the medical orderly was shot in the head. Private Caffrey bandaged him up and carried him back to safety. Then he returned and brought in the other wounded man. He was later promoted to the rank of lance-corporal. He died in Derby in February 1953 and is buried there. His medal is on display at The York and Lancaster Regiment Museum at Rotherham, South Yorkshire. In the baptismal register of St. Brendan's R.C. church in Birr, his baptism is recorded for November 1st and his date of birth as October 23rd 1891.

The editor would be very interested in finding out about any connections to the above men or their families still surviving in the area.



Thomas Hackett's headstone in Lockeen graveyard.

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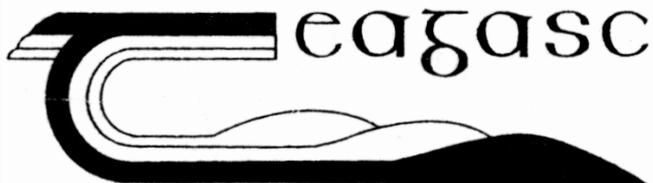
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FROM THE SLIEVE BLOOMS TO THE BLUE RIDGE MOUNTAINS

By Hilary Loughnane

Hilary Loughnane is a past pupil of St. Brendan's Community School and is currently studying for her Law Degree at Trinity College, Dublin. She has opted to spend her 3rd Year at Lexington's Washington and Lee University. Hilary is daughter of Ming and Christy Loughnane, Syngefield.

Cradled between the Allegheny and Blue Ridge mountains in Virginia, the city of Lexington has become my home since August. It consists of one main street where quaint shops occupy the sidewalks, baskets of flowers descend from the Lamp posts and the hustle and bustle of urban life really does not exist. During the summer months, Lexington becomes somewhat of a ghost town, but once Late August comes it transforms it to a hub nub centre for college students.

There are two universities in the City of Lexington (a city with 6,000 people). The first of these colleges is The Virginia Military Institute which is the oldest state military college in the U.S. While studying for a degree, the students, or cadets as they are commonly known as, both male and female, undergo a rigorous and physically demanding regime when not in the classroom.

Although side by side, the two Universities in Lexington are worlds apart. The driveway leading up to Washington and Lee university is similar to a colonial estate of times past with white pillared buildings coloured with red brick panelling, which line the frontage of the university campus. It is the most picturesque place imaginable in the Fall with the beautiful autumnal foliage strewn along the walkways.

The undergraduate school is one of the nation's top fifteen liberal arts colleges and it offers a unique convergence of arts & sciences, law, journalism and commerce. It has a student population of approximately 2000 students who travel from all over the US and further afield. The law school is the graduate part of W&L and it has a student body of about 390. If VMI is like a marine boot camp then life at law school has certainly earned the commonly used title MENTAL BOOT CAMP. It is a term that has been used—partly in jest, partly not—to describe the first year of law school at W&L. Thankfully, I do not fall into this bracket as a first year but, at the same time, the work ethic is the same no matter what stage you are at in Law school. To set the scene for you, the library is open 24 hours a day 7 days a week. Everyone is assigned their own desk equipped with a light and a closet. This compartment is known as a "Carrel".

Every classroom is beautifully furnished with top class office chairs, state of the art media systems, internet access and the most impressive thing to me is a recording system whereby if you miss a class you can watch it later on video! If the library doesn't have a book you want, there is a system known as "interlibrary loans", whereby they will re-

quest the book from the nearest library to facilitate your request. There is also a Moot Court Room where mock trials take place. This room has the same layout as a normal US courtroom.

The major difference between the system at home and here is really that at W&L you are being taught to think and act like a lawyer. As

this is a postgraduate course it is really in essence a training programme for America's next top lawyers. All of the students here have already completed a University degree and will go straight into a law firm when they graduate.

Through the Legal Clinics, second- and third-year students help to meet the need for legal assistance in the region and, at the same time, develop client contact and advocacy skills. There are 5 clinics in total ranging from one which provides free legal aid to inmates on death row to clinics involved in case work for workers suffering from the Black Lung Disease arising out of their work in the coal mines.

The teaching method is known as the Socratic Method. Basically, this means that, once in class, any student is liable to be called upon to answer questions or to give their opinion on the topic at hand. Most lecturers have a classroom plan with every student's photo beside the seat that they are sitting in. Therefore, there is no way to avoid any question! Lectures are more like an informal discussion and class participation forms the basis of this. In my view, this is the best method of teaching I have ever experienced. It encourages students to really think about what they are actually studying and your pre-class preparation really helps you to become attuned to the relevant points to look for on a particular topic or in a case brief.

Washington and Lee maintains a rigorous Honor System that traces directly to its founding president, Robert E. Lee, who said, "*We have but one rule here, and it is that every student must be a gentleman.*" Students, upon entering the university, vow to act honorably in academic and nonacademic endeavors. While "honor" is often interpreted as meaning that they will never lie, cheat or steal, the Honor System actually proscribes whatever behavior the current generation of students decides is dishonorable.

The most astonishing thing about this is that the system is completely administered by the student body and has been since 1906. Any student found guilty of an honor violation by his or her peers is subject to a single penalty: expulsion. Faculty, administration and even trustees are



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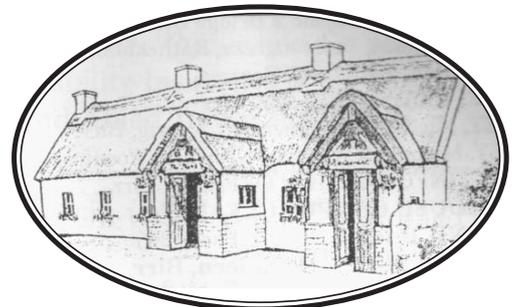
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powerless and there is no higher review.

The faculty and staff always take students at their word. In the Law School, for example, the classrooms remain unlocked, even the shop remains open without any surveillance of any kind. There are no video cameras anywhere on campus. Exams at W&L are ordinarily unproctored and self-scheduled. There is no exam supervision at all for either undergrad students or students in the Law School. Often professors will assign take-home, closed-book exams with an implicit condition that the students will not cheat. Of course, students drink excessively, dabble in drugs, do things which your average college student does but there is an underlying assumption that whatever they do does not breach the Honor System.

In this sense, Washington and Lee is really something special, completely removed for the harsh reality of the outside world. It is like a real life movie set and somewhere which I have grown very fond of over the past few months. My experience so far has

been nothing short of fantastic. Everything, so far, has been in the best sense a shock to the system. It is life on an extra-terrestrial level which has opened my mind up to thoughts and opinions which one could only get in America. On the basis of my experience so far, I would encourage anyone who has the opportunity to study abroad, be it in Europe or farther a field, to jump at the chance without hesitation. It is without doubt a life changing experience.



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BILL EADES – MEMORIES OF AN EARLIER AGE

By Richard Kennedy

"I remember someone once saying to me that I must have sawdust in my blood, like my father, and I think they were right"

Bill Eades, at the age of 79, is just putting the finishing touches to another project in his workshop. When he tells me later that, at the age of 12, while still a school-boy in the Model school, he started going to night classes in the Technical school to learn woodworking, the assessment appears not unreasonable.

It is clear that Bill has a respect and appreciation for his skills, skills that were encouraged and fostered by his parents since he was a child.

Bill is a person who is happy to acknowledge, with pride, the achievements and dedication of his parents and the upbringing that he and his late brother, Henry, received from them.

After his parents married they lived in a house in... "Mind this, not in Emmet street, but in Cumberland street", and they moved to their present house in Seffin "on August Monday 1935"

At the age of 79, Bill has a remarkable facility for remembering with precision dates and names stretching back to his childhood.

He went to the Model School for his early education and at the age of 14, started day classes in the Technical School.

At the age of 16, on the recommendation of a friend of his father, a man called Lindsay who regularly travelled from Dublin to service the generator in the Birr castle, Bill started as an apprentice to a firm in Dublin in what was then the trade of mechanical engineering. Part of the reason for his recommendation was because the firm preferred, where possible, to recruit "Country Lads" for their steady nature rather than the more flighty city boys.

Bill arrived in Dublin in April 1944 to commence his training, alone, but lucky to have employment in a time of great hardship and poverty.

During his time there he lodged in what was called the Harding Boys Home, situated beside Christchurch Cathedral, a hostel which catered only, and specifically, for boys who were training for a trade, or as Bill puts it "from a Cobbler to a Watchmaker". This interdenominational hostel, which catered for over 70 boys, was content to supply the basics in terms of comfort and accommodation and no expectation was raised at any time that this state of affairs was likely to change for the better.

With a weekly pay packet of 10 shillings Bill was never in danger of losing the run of himself in the city. The amount of 10 shillings translates to a Euro equivalent of about 63 Cent per week. After payment for his weekly board in the hostel at 7/6, he was left with 2/6 to cover all recreational activities for the remainder of the week. This surplus income was quickly disposed of by attendance at the Queens Theatre on Friday night and the Royal Theatre on Saturday night.

Even in those days, that level of pay was borderline in terms of a living wage and Bill had to depend on assistance from home to keep going. This assistance came in the form of a small suitcase of food prepared by his mother every week. This suitcase was collected from Bill's mother each Saturday morning, with the natural and unassuming generosity of the times, by Jimmy Kelly, the conductor on the Dublin bus, and delivered into the hands of a waiting, and grateful, Bill Eades, at Aston Quay that afternoon.

The case would contain " a few eggs, a few sausages, rashers, always a bit of butter, and of course I don't have to tell you, when you sat down at a table with eight lads and you produced a pound of butter, ... you would walk away with nothing"

On his days off in wintertime it was too cold to stay in the hostel. The heating system, which was designed to run on coke, was fuelled in these years by wet turf and timber which was "... like trying to burn stones. During the real hard weather in the wintertime what I used to do on a Saturday was to head down in to Woolworth's and hang around the warmest part of the shop. It was that cold"

After two years in Dublin, Bill returned home and worked for a time with his father in Birr Castle .He then started work with Ned Pennyfeather, Cabinet maker and Undertaker. At that stage, his brother Henry had been working as an apprentice in Pennyfeathers for a year or so.

After six years working in Pennyfeathers, Bill felt that, for various reasons, the time had come to strike out on his own. He had heard his father say often enough over the



years that the ideal state would be "to have a yard of a counter of your own". Perhaps this was what inspired Bill to become the proprietor of his own business, an aspiration which his father had never been able to achieve. He still remembers to this day telling his parents at the dinner table of his decision to give up his job in Pennyfeathers and go into business on his own. Not surprisingly, his father was concerned and dismayed at the prospect of Bill walking away from secure employment. Henry's response was more supportive and direct "...By God, if you're not going back, I'm not going back either. I'll work with you"

Having made up his mind Bill stuck to his decision and started up the business on 3rd September 1951. He had the help of his brother Henry, and capital of £70 between the two of them

It was tough at first. "I remember the Christmas of 1952 having to borrow a few pounds from my father, and he didn't have it to give away"

The business started off primarily as a woodworking enterprise, "making furniture, shelving, and anything that was going" and bit by bit developed into an engineering and garage business. "After the war we made a lot of car trailers, tractor trailers, that sort of stuff"

From there the business grew in time to provide a comfortable living for Bill and Henry.

Remembering the many people that inhabited the town during his years growing up Bill again impresses with the precision of his memory.

He can recite all of the names of the local people and characters that added colour and depth to what was at times a bleak landscape. Many of those he remembers were blessed with nicknames, often affectionate and descriptive, sometimes only descriptive.

One was "Neversweat" who kept a shop in Emmet Street and, during the war years, when cigarettes were scarce, made a practice of operating a merit system for those who wished to buy cigarettes. The unspoken rule was that you had firstly to demonstrate your commitment and loyalty to the establishment by the purchase of a significant quantity of confectionary, "sweets mainly", and only then would you qualify to purchase a proportionate quantity of cigarettes. "And whatever there was in them, you couldn't eat the sweets"

Bill, of course, remembers well the famous "Ham Sunday" in Birr. A week before this notable Sunday, Birr had hosted an important and very well attended Hurling final. Unfortunately it hadn't occurred to the people of Birr that the vast droves of people attending the match would expect that they would be able to buy food and refreshments on the day. "Not a bite was to be had". After the match, the very many supporters went home hungry and despondent. The match had ended in a draw.

The following week the replay of the final was again scheduled to be played in Birr and, with a fine unity of purpose, the people of the town resolved not to be found wanting for a second time. To this end, almost every household set to and prepared a vast amount of sandwiches (mostly ham) anticipating the demands of the famished travelling supporters. Unfortunately the travellers, who had gone hungry in Birr the previous week for want of a single ham sandwich, lacked the vision to let hope triumph over experience, and, to a man, came fully provisioned. The entrepreneurial spirit that had united the town was crushed beneath the weight of the mounds of unsold ham sandwiches. As Bill says, "You couldn't give them away on the day".

Bill has his own particular memories of the crowds that would attend matches in Birr; "I remember that the road out in front of the house would be black with people going up to the station after some matches. One very hot day when people were all flocking back to the train, and passing our front door, someone asked my father would there be any chance of a drink of water. My father got us filling a bath with water and he was filling cups and mugs and I would safely say that a thousand people or more got a drink of water here that evening on their way back to the train."

While his family was not in any sense well to do, Bill was lucky to have a bicycle at a fairly young age "When I was about twelve years old I got my first Bike. In fact we bought three bikes from P.I. Dolan, one for my mother, one for Henry and one for myself. The whole lot cost £13. One of my favourite spins for a Sunday was to cycle to Mountmellick and we wouldn't have the price of an ice cream when we got there, we would just turn around and cycle home again"

"When I got my first car, I brought home what there was of it, the chassis and the engine, with a donkey and cart. That would have been about 1946. The late Jack Roe, that was J L Roe in Emmet Street, had it and it was dismantled during the war. At this stage, the front axle was under a milk car belong to Mick Telford, the back axle was there in Telford's yard. I went and I bought the lot and brought it home. The body of the car had been aluminium and that was at a premium for making things during the war and so the body had been dismantled and there was nothing left only the windscreen and the bonnet. It took me about six months to get the car going again. I had to build up the body and I then put a little truck body on the back of it. I had it for a few years and afterwards sold it to the late Joe Scully of Fortel."

"One of the main uses I got from it was to draw the turf. Prior to that, we had bought Lady Synge's donkey, and my father had made a donkey's car and this was our only way of getting turf home".

What does Bill think of the "good old days";

"Well, they weren't that good from the point of view

that none of us had anything”

“There was a lot of hardship about and I mean real hardship, and certainly, I would have known people who were on the breadline. I remember a man who was working doing a job for my father once and my mother brought him in to the house for a cup of tea and something to eat and was asking him if he preferred either creamery butter or country butter and his reply was, “Ah sure, I don’t have butter at all. Have you any dripping, that’s what we have on the bread”.

“Of course life then was very simple. There was an awful lot of rambling done between the houses. If you were calling on someone, you would just knock at the door and stick in your head. There was no waiting for someone to answer the door”.

“When we were lads, the only employment was very minimal. If you didn’t have a trade, the only other choice was labouring and then we had the shoe factory. The shoe factory was a great boost to Birr but, when it went, it was a great loss to the town.”

“The trouble in town in those years was nothing like the same degree as goes on now. One of the major things

that I remember was the burning of the chapel. Of course, there were always some people who continually got into trouble but you felt that the town was a much safer place then.”

Bill met his future wife Betty in 1949 and they got married in May 1952

Life has had its share of happiness and tragedy for himself and Betty over the years and Bill acknowledges the quiet support of his wife over their many years of marriage.

Having worked from the year 1944 until his retirement a number of years ago, Bill has few regrets about his working life. As his own boss, he worked hard to succeed but never had an ambition to have his business grow beyond his ability to tend to it. For many years he had the companionship and help of his brother Henry, until his death in 1992. Having entrusted the business into the capable hands of his son Roger and daughter Hazel, Bill enjoys his retirement, spending his time in his workshop, and surrounded by sawdust.

FROM THE PAST...



Inaugural Meeting of Birr Mart Committee 1962

Back L-R: Wm. Milne, Wm. O’Brien, James Haslam, Tom O’Meara, Ml. O’Meara, Jack Guinan, Pat Fleury.
Front: Patrick Kirwan, Denis Hctor, James Grennan, Liam Ryan, Kieran Pilkington, Tim Guinan.



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FROM NENAGH TO BIRR – VIA PARAGUAY

By Fr Michael Reddan

I was born in Nenagh Co. Tipperary in 1948. My father was a tailor and my mother devoted her life to looking after myself, my three sisters and my brother. I was the second eldest of the family. My earliest memories are of going to school to the Boys N.S in Nenagh and of later transferring to the C.B.S. I never liked school and found the processes of learning and concentrating a stressful experience. After a brief period in the C.B.S. secondary school I couldn't wait to 'Give Up' as the term went and at 14 years of age I found myself part of the workforce in the local Aluminium factory.

'Castle Brand Cookware' was a thriving factory employing 200 workers. I had said goodbye to the regimentation and boring routine of school for once and for all but little did I realise that I had escaped one form of drudgery to experience another. My job was to feed sheets of aluminium into the power presses which shaped the lids. It was an endless boring routine. The presses slapped down with the relentless, automated monotony of a steam-train piston and, at the end of the line, the lids reeled off with unvarying regularity. Later in life I realised that I had really graduated to another school and that my new teachers were the men and women who worked on the benches around me. Wide-eyed and even wider-eared, I shared the dramas of their lives- Who they loved or didn't like, their hopes for the future or their plans for the following week-end and all the delicious gossip of the Monday morning post-mortems. The factory was a university in its own way and, every day I was there, I was perfecting the art of survival. I spent two years there and then decided on a career in the retail trade. I moved to J.K.C. on Main St. selling newspapers, sweets and tobacco. My next career move was a bit further up the street to the V.G. supermarket.

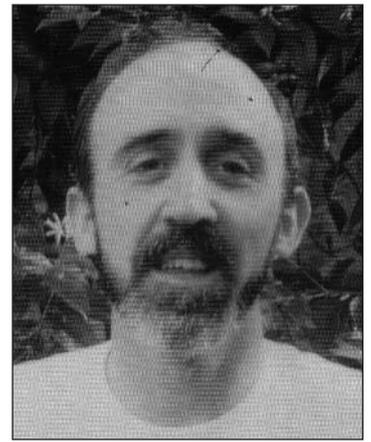
I was living at home all this time and I was beginning to feel smothered by the small town life around me. My father did a lot of tailoring work for the clergy of the town and nuns, brothers and priests were frequent visitors to our house. I still served mass for the nuns even up to the age of 15. I felt somehow intimidated by their presence about me. When I was 12 I remember the fear in our house and among our neighbours when we discovered that the local Parish Priest, who was our landlord, was intending to sell the houses we were renting from him from over our heads. My father was appointed spokesman for the neighbours and went to the P.P to explain our concerns to him. He was dismissed and told that there were 'lots of people over in Clare' who would gladly pay good money for them. He continued with his plan to sell the houses and the, some of the tenants, my father included, struggled very hard to raise the money to pay for them over many years. So, suffering a sense of claustrophobia I began to look at ways of escaping Nenagh.

I saw an advertisement in the paper for postmen in Dublin. I applied and did a small exam and interview. Soon I was in 'digs' in Ringsend with 15 others. They were a mix of

dockers, harbour policemen, barmen and fellow postmen. We slept 3 to a room and paid the landlady £3-7-6 per week. My wages were £7-2-6. I joined the local G.A.A. club, 'Fontenoys' and trained and played with them in my spare time. It

was in Ringsend that I also came into contact for the first time, in a practical way, with the Legion Of Mary and Vincent De Paul. As an active member, I took part in 'The Apostolate to the Seamen's Mission. We visited the ships which came into the port and tried to bring some comfort to the sailors. They were from all parts of the globe and often had not contacted home for many months or even years. We organized telephone connections for them and got them their national newspapers from their embassies. I was very privileged to meet Frank Duff the founder of the Legion of Mary. He was before his time in his concern for and rehabilitation of prostitutes and his care for the winos who lived on the streets. All this activity brought me to increasingly think about the idea of a vocation to the priesthood.

I had a lovely girlfriend called Angela and was really trying to put the idea of being a priest out of my head. Then, one Saturday night as I was leaving to go out on the town with Angela, I happened to catch a piece of a Late Late Show programme devoted to men who had joined the priesthood later in life than the norm. Two Sundays later the Sunday Press carried an article dealing with the same subject. Was somebody trying to tell me something? I knew that the Diocesan seminaries were chock-a-block with recruits and, anyway, I wouldn't have a hope there with my very limited education. My memories of Nenagh did not encourage me towards the idea of being a diocesan priest though I do remember being very impressed as a schoolboy by a visiting Columban priest who had spent 47 years working in the Philippines. Then, one snowy weekend when the hurling had been cancelled, I picked up some leaflets in church from the S.M.A. fathers and S.V.D.'S (Societas Verbo Divino or Divine Word Missionaries). I wrote four lines to them explaining my situation and almost by return received a letter from the S.M.A.s explaining that as I hadn't a Leaving Cert they could not consider me. I was relieved more than disappointed as now I wouldn't have to struggle with my vocation. It had been decided for me. But things are never that simple and almost five weeks later I got another letter. This time it was from The Divine Word Missionaries and it was an invitation to an interview to discuss my 'vocation'. Sadly, I said goodbye to my beloved Angela and on the 12-9-72 I made my way to Donamon Castle in Co. Roscommon to begin my preparation for the priesthood.



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I was ordained on 27-9-80. Of my class of 15 students only 2 survived to the end. My mother was delighted but my father had been a little sceptical from the start. However I will never forget his words to me as I left for the seminary. 'You've only one life to live and we can't live it for you but, if this isn't to be, our door is always open to you.' After a year at home doing school retreats, I left for South America. My father had passed away by this time and my mother found my leaving very difficult. She probably thought she would never see me again. When I first went out to Paraguay the rule was 3 months holiday every 5 years. I was completely lost at first as I had no knowledge of the language. I was sent for a crash course in Spanish to a school in Bolivia. They were 11 people on the course and they were from 9 different countries. I was the only English speaker. All my fears about school and learning surfaced again but this time I persevered. Soon it was back to Paraguay and my first parish on the border with Argentina. The P.P. was from Dingle Co. Kerry. The parish extended for 60 square miles. There were 25,000 parishioners and 47 chapels. The people were dirt poor farmers trying to survive against all the odds. They kept a few pigs and chickens and scraped a meagre existence from the soil by growing cotton, 'the poor man's crop'. They spoke a native Indian language called Guarani. T.B. was common and there was no free healthcare. To get into hospital they had to buy their own sheets, bedclothes and even medicines. In prison, if their people did not feed them, they starved. Paraguay was ruled by a dictator called Don Alfredo Stressnor. He had complete power. Paraguay even allowed Germany to dump its toxic waste on its territory. He had a policy of selling tracts of land to other nationalities such as Japanese, Germans, Koreans, Chinese, and Ukrainians. With this money, he kept his generals paid and on his side. 'Land Reform' consisted of selling large tracts of land to North American Investment Companies so that their shareholders could benefit in New York or other American cities. Usually his soldiers evicted the poor farmers first. They had to move further into the jungle to try to clear another piece of ground. In a few years, the soldiers

would come again to repeat the process. I could see how interconnected the suffering of the poor is. My job was to give them a voice and to support them in their protests. They were gentle and loving and generous beyond words from the little they had. I tried to make them aware that their situation was unjust and that the gospel of Jesus Christ was on their side. Naturally, the regime did not approve. My mail was censored and, at one stage, stopped. I was brought before a military court and warned about my behaviour and, on two occasions, was driven off the road and my life put in danger.

My mother's failing health meant that I had to come home in 2001 to be with her. I took up the chaplaincy of the Midland Prison in Portlaoise. There I saw deprivation 'Irish style'. It was a tough place to be either as a worker or an inmate. Many of the men were actually mentally disturbed or drugs addicted and were locked up because there was no other place to put them. For the most part, the prisoners were poorly educated and from the most deprived sections of society. Rehabilitation was non-existent or at best a token job. I tried to show compassion no matter what the crime. It was a privilege to be of some comfort to the families of the prisoners during my three years there. From there it was back to Dunamon to help with administration especially in the printing section which produces greeting, Mass and Christmas cards as a source of funds for the order. I had intended to go back to Paraguay after my mother passed away in early 2006 but then I was asked to help out in Birr for Easter as Canon Shalloo had just died. I was delighted to be able to do so.

Now the months have slipped by. I have been made very welcome here and enjoy my work with Fr. Tony very much. I love the contact with the people especially through my visits to the Hospital and the Nursing homes. Sometimes, during our recent summer, the blossomed scent of the evening air or the distant shouts of the children playing in the playground reminded me of my old friends in Paraguay and I have that uneasy feeling that maybe one day I will see them once again.



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1906 – WHAT IT SAID IN THE PAPERS

By Tony Hogan

On the international front 1906 seems to have been a peaceful and tranquil year. The disastrous earthquake and fire in San Francisco is still spoken about and the election of the Liberal Party in Britain gives the Irish renewed hope that Home Rule is within reach. The Irish Parliamentary Party with eighty-four seats, now dominates the Irish political scene.

In Birr the *Midland Tribune* promoted the newly-formed Gaelic League and introduced a supplement in Autumn with the aim of encouraging all things Irish while the *King's County Chronicle* kept people informed of happenings across the Empire and the United Kingdom.

Sewage Works

1906 was an auspicious year for the town as Messrs Hegarty and Gault who had secured the contract for transferring the town sewage from the old bridge outlet began work on Wednesday 7 February. Mr. H. Brown, Town Surveyor, Mr. John Hickey, Clerk of Works and some of the public were there on that memorable day to record when the first pick and spade were put into the ground. Interestingly, on the previous day an official inquiry was held with the object of having the town served with water from the Kinnitty Hills.

Trade

Judging by the many advertisements in both papers, trade was booming. John Pilkington in a very striking advertisement thanked the public for making his turnover in 1905, a record one. He found it necessary to greatly enlarge his premises, which "is today, the MOST SPACIOUS, the MOST LIGHTSOME and the MOST up to date SHOP in the locality. At his new counter will be found piles of Costume Tweeds, Zebilines, Voiles, Hopsacks, Cheviots, Mercerised Lawns, Fancy Delaines and Sateens'.

Sports

A Camogie Club was formed during the year and a letter to the *Midland Tribune* applauded the fact that this was an Irish game and it was to be hoped that the hand that rocked the cradle would build an Irish nation. The writer was not impressed with the physical condition of Irish womanhood and noted that 'vast numbers of them are very puny creatures indeed ... and a kick from a fly would upset the equilibrium of half the children we meet today.'

Hurling in Birr was at a low ebb when a Mr. Corbooy of High Street came to the rescue and gave the players a 'beautiful recreation ground.' A Senior Hurling Club was formed, in great measure due to the dedication of Mr. Kelly (Jnr.) of Messrs. Williams & Co. The writer exhorts the players 'to make themselves fit to carry on the noble work which their duty to Ireland commands. In doing so, they will leave footprints in the sands of time, they will do credit to themselves and be an honour to the native land.' As an aside, it is worth noting that the present generation of hurlers have certainly left footprints on the sands of time. Too bad that nobody has as yet recorded the history of this

great club.

Soon afterwards, at the end of November, Birr played Crinkill in a well contested match. Play was brisk throughout and ended in an easy victory for the Crinkill boys: Crinkill 0-9, Birr 0-0.

In view of the increased interest in cycling nowadays, it is worth noting a twenty mile road race organised by Birr Cycling Club in 1906. A large crowd turned up at Woodfield to see the eight competitors race from Birr to Kilcormac and return via Rath, Clonbeale with the finish at Lisheen Lane. One competitor, Kennedy, collided with a dog, while two others, Murphy and Buckles, fell at Kilcormac. This did not prevent Buckles from finishing second behind Dunne, who kept up a 'rattling pace'. The time taken was about fifty-five minutes.

Theatricals

The Oxmantown Hall had quite a busy year with several plays, entertainments and lectures. The newly formed branch of the Gaelic League organised a massive Feis at the end of May with an impressive number of competitions. Prizes were awarded for Irish proverbs on the Weather, on Temperance, and on the Crops. Other competitions of interest were: 'The First Six Chapters of the Catechism', won by James Carroll of Presentation College and prizes for the Most Neatly Kept Cottages, won by Mrs. M. O'Brien, High Street, Mrs. E. Kelly, Cappaneale and by Mrs. T. Kenny and Mrs. M. O'Sullivan, both of Pound Street.

Temperance Movement

The newly appointed Bishop Fogarty was keen that temperance be promoted within the Diocese of Killaloe. In September, a large congregation met in Carrig where Fr. O'Donovan spoke on the evil of distributing liquor at threshings, wakes and funerals – often followed by other vices. He noted that these happenings were not scenes of edification for those outside their Church, and prevented those who might otherwise be trying to do so from entering the Catholic Church. He noted that distributing drink was not an Irish custom. People had got into a rut and it was always difficult to get out of a rut. A great responsibility rested on the women of the country and a great deal of the drunkenness that prevailed could be laid at their doors. They should learn to cook and to cook properly. Nothing tempted a man more to give himself over to the enjoyment of alcoholic excess than bad cooking or lack of comfort in the home for the cosiness of which he had worked so hard.

Thanks

Many thanks to County Librarian, Anne Coughlan and her staff and to John Kearney and his staff at Offaly Historical Society, Bury Quay for use of their microfilm facilities. The good news for Birr people is that the *Midland Tribune* and the *King's Co. Chronicle* are now available on microfilm in the beautiful new Birr library.



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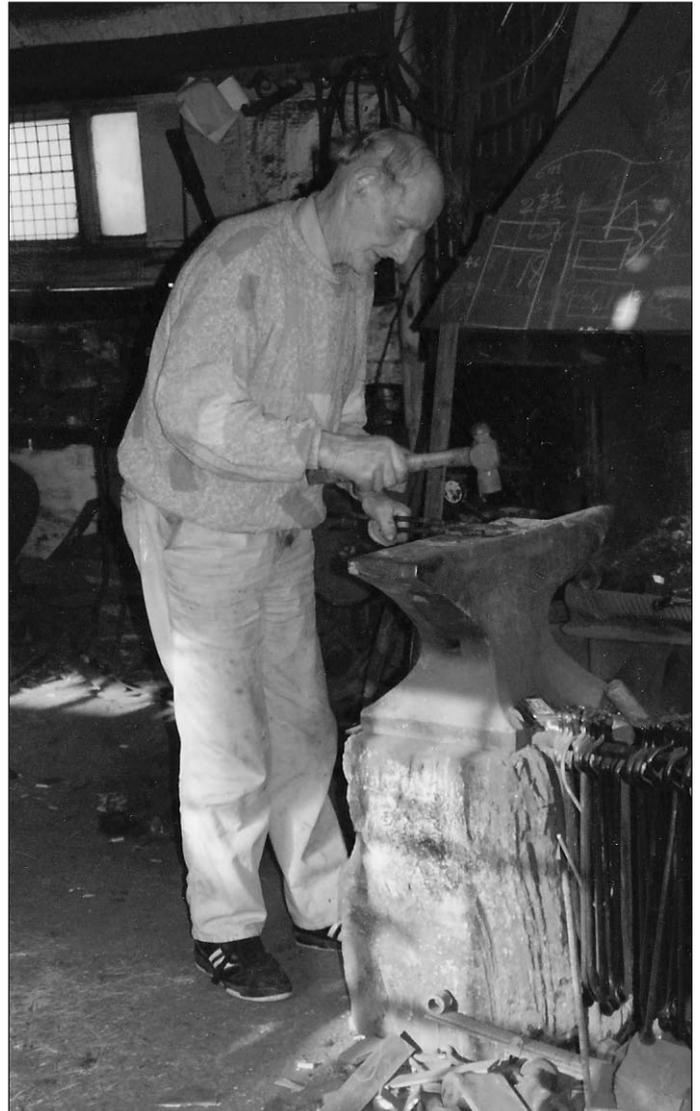
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PADDY O'NEILL – THE BLACKSMITH FROM NEW ROAD

By Michael Donegan

Paddy O'Neill of New Road, Birr was born in Castletownbere in the townland of Filane in the heart of O'Sullivan Bere country in West Cork in 1926. Paddy was one of six children and his father was a small farmer running a few sheep on the mountains. Like most of the children of his age Paddy left school after 'The Sixth Book' and set about getting himself a trade. He describes his father as having 'good hands' and, just as an older brother had done before him, Paddy decided to try the trade of blacksmithing.

He was taken in as an unpaid apprentice at Dineen's forge in Middleton. It was a tough job for a boy of 14. The country was full of horses at the time and there was lots of work for him around the forge. There was the carrying of coal and the stoking of the fire and the heavy sledging and drawing out of the iron until the blacksmith put his skilled hands to finish the work. After a period of closely observing the blacksmith Paddy began to learn the trade in a practical way. If a horse was already shod the blacksmith first had to remove the old shoes. Then he took a shoe and measured it against a new length of iron and cut the iron to the required length. He then put one end of the iron into the fire to redden it and when it was pliable enough he beat it around the horn of the anvil to make the curve. Then he put the other end of the iron into the fire and repeated the process to complete the shoe. Next he punched seven holes into the shoe. Four of these were placed where the shoe met the outside of the hoof and three were punched on the inside of the shoe. Then he beat out the clip on the front of the shoe. This was a small piece of the iron which was turned up and sat against the front of the hoof to stop the shoe slipping back. When the shoe was ready it was reddened again in the fire and held against the bottom of the hoof so that it would be seated properly onto it. Although there was a great smell of burning and lots of smoke this did not hurt the horse in any way as it only touched the horn part of the hoof. Horses could be nervous and skittish, especially young horses, and the smithy had to be cautious particularly when working on the hind feet. Then after the hoof was pared and a small groove cut into it at the front for the clip, special nails were driven through the shoe and into the hoof. This was done at an angle so that the ends appeared on the outside of the hoof and could be clinched off by the smith to tighten the shoe. Finally the blacksmith filed the edge of the hoof with a rasp to give it a neat finish. This process was repeated for the four hooves. It could take one and a half to two hours to shoe a horse completely. A working horse might be shod two or three times a year depending on how much road use it got. Some farmers swapped the shoes from left to right so that they would get even wear. In frosty weather, special frost nails were used. These had chiselled heads which gave the horse a grip on slippery roads. Shoes for full grown horses were cut from seven-eight inch flat iron and shoes for ponies and cobs from



three-quarter inch. The iron was delivered in bulk by dray from Scotts of Cork.

After four years in Dineens, his brother came home from where he was working on Spike Island and opened a forge in Castletownbere. Paddy joined him there. The only items they bought were an anvil and a bellows. They made the punches, pliers, tongs and even the hammers themselves. As well as shoeing horses, there was the work of making harrows and hay rakes and repairing farm machinery. Making gates was an art in itself. Gates were a status symbol for the farmer and on view to the passers-by. The measuring and squaring of the iron was all important. Every blacksmith had his own unique design. Some even had their own metal stamp so that their work could be recognised and admired. Paddy never bothered with a stamp. He was always proud of his handiwork. People knew his gates by the quality of the workmanship. As the war came, iron became scarce. Blacksmiths had to recycle old iron from cart-wheel hoops to make the horseshoes.

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After a few years working with his brother in Castletownbere, Paddy got itchy feet. He moved to Limerick and got a job with a firm making horse-drawn traps. Paddy's job was to forge the metal work for the traps. It was skilful work as each piece had to be precisely engineered to fit with the carpenter's design. A fully finished trap was sold for £52. Many people of his age were going to England looking for work. Paddy thought of emigrating but changed his mind when he saw an advertisement in the paper for a job as a blacksmith in Breartons of Rathcabbin. It was 1949. He walked and hitched a lift to Rathcabbin but was disappointed to discover that the job was gone when he got there. Paddy felt 'the wind was at his back' and continued on to the town of Birr. He heard of an opening for a blacksmith at Martin Burns' forge in Castle Street. He got the job and located digs with Mrs. Houlihan further up the street at £1-10 shillings per week 'all found'. He regularly went for a pint in Mick Early's of Castle Street to wash away the dust after a hot day in the forge.

He would work at the forge until it finally closed 17 years later. From the start, he found Birr a friendly town. He went to dances in The Oxmantown Hall and at one of these dances, he met his future wife, Margaret Caufield from Kilcormac. After they got married in 1954, they lived in Newbridge Street and, in 1960, they moved to Eden Road where they have lived since. They have a family of 4 girls and 2 boys.

After Burns' forge closed, Paddy worked for local farmers. The hours were long and the work very tough in all weathers. Needless to say the pay was poor, a mere £3-14 shillings per week. Paddy also set up a small forge in his back garden. He bought an anvil for £50 from Mick Cash and, as well as continuing to shoe horses, he did light engineering, making trailers and supplying leaf springs for Dick Alexander's trailer making business further up the street. He made and repaired utensils such as fire irons, towel-rails, candle-holders and other household equipment for the people of Birr for many years. Pieces of his work have made their way as cherished gifts to America and the U.K.

Eventually Paddy retired altogether. Paddy was always an animal lover and there is a story told about a time Paddy was called out to look after a donkey out the Roscrea Road. The donkey had just given birth to a foal and when Paddy got there, the mother had died. Realising that the foal would also die he carried it in his arms the whole way home and his children fed it glucose and milk until it got strong enough to fend for itself.

For the past year, Paddy has been a resident of the nursing home in Shinrone. He is an alert man with great powers of recall who loves a chat. His family regularly visit him there and he loves to keep up with all the news from Birr. On the 26th of November, Paddy celebrated his 80th birthday.



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RIGNEY-DOLPHIN AND THE BIRR CONNECTION

By Michael Donegan

The heading on the introductory brochure of The Rigney-Dolphin group reads 'Great Companies Need Great Partners'. The list of 'great companies' referred to is like a Who's Who of the top fifty companies active in the booming Irish economy. They're all there, from Vodafone to Meteor to Green Star along with all the prestigious automobile brands such as B.M.W., Alfa Romeo, Citroen, Peugeot, Hyundai and Fiat. The 'Rigney Dolphin' part of the title refers to Frank Dolphin (Rigney is in fact his mother's maiden name). At 46, he is the owner and managing director of a company which employs over 800 people in four major centres all over Ireland. Frank is the son of Frank and Elizabeth Dolphin. He was born and raised in Moorpark Street. His father sadly passed away in 1992 but his mother still lived on the street until she moved to a new house in Meadow Brook. Although settled in Waterford for many years, Frank Dolphin is a Birr man to the core and, although he has studied and worked in many educational establishments over the years, he willingly admits that his first university was Moorpark Street, Birr.

His childhood was a time when the street was an intimate community snugly embedded in the close-knit community of Birr. The greatest excitement was the occasional appearance of a shiny new car outside a neighbour's house or the feeble flickering of a newly purchased black and white telly in someone's front parlour. Central to the street was the sober presence of the Presentation Brothers. Their substantial three storey residence commanded the street and seemed to radiate out a sense of permanence and continuity. Naturally, Frank attended the 'Brothers' Primary school. At the time, there were only two lay teachers on the staff, Frank McNamara and Billy Molone. He has particularly fond memories of Brother Polycarp. He was an innovator, a man before his time, and he feels that he had a great influence on the direction his own studies later took. Brother Polycarp was a pioneer in Special Education. Single mindedly and single-handedly, he had set up and developed a special education unit in the school to cater for boys with serious learning difficulties. Later, Frank himself would embark on extensive studies in this field and Brother Polycarp would be there to mentor and encourage him and take genuine pride in his progress. After the National school, Frank moved on to the old Brothers' Secondary School on Oxmantown Mall where he spent five years under the watchful eye of Brothers Denis and Cronan.

He wasn't very interested in field sports although he had become a junior member of Birr Golf Club with his friend Tom O'Donnell at the age of thirteen. He can clearly remember handing over his £2 to Jim Mulhern who was



the secretary at the time. He directed his energies in other directions, becoming involved in Junior Vincent De Paul with the late Joe Dolan and Sister Ann O'Driscoll and the Offaly Handicapped Association through his contact with Brother Polycarp. As a member of these organizations, he discovered that he had a talent for organizing and fundraising. He ran teenage dances in the Marion Hall and became quite expert as a bingo compeer. He also got involved in the Stage Guild and has fond memories of the Good Old Days shows in the old Oxmantown Hall. His role was mainly as a stage hand under the diligent supervision of the late Albert Mee, making the stage out of beer barrels and squirreling up the ladder to adjust the lights or untangle a curtain rope. It was a heyday of the Stage Guild with Annie Noonan on the piano, and Gerry Dolan and the late Eamon and Mary Connolly lifting the roof with wonderful choruses from the shows.

Frank went to U.C.D. in Dublin after his Leaving Cert. His first choice was pure psychology. He knew it was a tough subject to take on with a high failure rate but he was convinced that it was the path for him. He loved the freedom and the independence of U.C.D. and still feels that the whole experience of independent study created a sense of independence and responsibility in him which stood to him in later life. He was under no illusion that his chosen subject would be an easy one. By the time he graduated three years later there were only 39 students left from a starting group of 500. In U.C.D., Frank joined the St. Vincent De Paul Society and it was through his voluntary work there that he met his wife to be, Adri-



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enne. During his undergraduate year, he had done a lot of research on speech and language disorders. Having had a stammer himself as a boy, he was fascinated and chose to do Masters by research on the subject. As a result he was chosen as the Young Psychologist of the year by the British Psychological Society. He was the first U.C.D. student to win this and he was presented with his award in Guilford University. For the next five years, he worked on his Ph D at Temple Street children's hospital in Dublin while also lecturing in Trinity. He then moved to the Regional Technical College in Waterford to set up and run the department of Psychology there. Regional Colleges were trying to create their own identity and Frank discovered that unlike university, Waterford R.T.C had no real pastoral support systems for students. He was responsible for introducing counselling and medical services and for having seating placed on the corridors to create a space where students and teaching staff could meet between lectures. He set up, with others, a 'Campus Company' to provide a bar service on the campus and to provide suitable cheap accommodation for students. Frank was to remain in Waterford R.T.C. until 1990 and in that time he was proud to see it expand and prosper and his own Dept. of Psychology grow in status and stature. He feels that it cannot be long now until the College achieves full university status.

A feature of Frank's approach to life is that he has always tended to involve himself in different projects simultaneously. While he had been working in Waterford R.T.C. he also lectured to and ran workshops for interested groups on human resources and consumer behaviour. He also worked in Ferry House in Clonmel as a visiting Psychologist. 1990 was to prove a momentous year for him. He was married to Adrienne by now with two small children. Eventually there would be five children to provide for. He could look forward to the long term security of his work in Waterford R.T.C. with progressive career advancement there but he was also increasingly uncomfortable with the predictability of it all. His work on human resources and consumer marketing had shown him that there was a real need for a professional company to service this market. So he decided to do just that and The Rigney -Dolphin group was born.

The concept was brilliant and simple. Big and small companies alike needed the highest quality personnel to give the best possible service. Rigney-Dolphin could be the vital link between the individual needs of these companies and the career profiles of the brightest and the best. Soon he was door-stepping the top companies. He had a service they could use. He would profile prospective candidates for them, and recruit and train them to the specific needs of the company. Then he could organise the systems to service these needs and all the company would have to do is pay for the service. At first some companies were sceptical but, when he showed them that by using his system they would no longer have

to carry a multiplicity of staff types or constantly retrain their existing staff for every new need, they soon saw the light. On a very simple level it works like this. You, the customer buy a Meteor phone. You have a problem with it or wish to get information on how to use it. You ring the service help line. Meteor doesn't even know you've made the call. The technician you talk to actually works for The Rigney -Dolphin group. Meteor pays them for the service. Equally, should a company wish, to research the market and gauge potential customer needs, Rigney -Dolphin design and execute the survey and then supply solutions for delivering the service to the customer. It's called outsourcing and it's now the way things are done. The Rigney Dolphin reputation is such that it now has over 800 employees in four centres around Ireland, all servicing top of the range brand names and the list of these is growing. It's a 24 hour a day 365 days a year job. They are now beginning to move into the U.K. and German markets. The possibilities are endless. Frank Dolphin believes strongly in keeping jobs at home if possible but it is a highly competitive business. A lot of costs go on training. Relocation of the business to cheaper markets such as India and or the Phillipines can occur overnight. After all, the essential components of every transaction are simply a trained technician and a telephone connection.

Frank has just finished a very busy year as President of Waterford Chamber of Commerce for 2005-2006. It is Ireland's third largest Chamber. It was a hectic year of lobbying for, and representing, business interests in the region. Its activities included a business school, and a 'skillnet and e-learning centre'. It hosted the Euro Info Centre as part of a 300 strong Chamber network across Europe and presided over numerous seminars on subjects ranging from energy efficiency to infrastructure and tourism promotion. Highlight of the year for Frank was presenting a paper on 'Training Solutions' to the World Chamber Congress in the South African city of Durban. Waterford Chamber was representing Ireland and his submission was short listed to the final four out of fifty.

He sees himself ultimately as an opportunist who is willing to think outside the box and take risks. The secret is to keep ahead of the market, have a high standard of delivery and be competitive. BIRR has always been the starting point for Frank physically and emotionally. It was here he first gained the confidence to innovate and take risks and it was here also he met his first great mentor, Brother Polycarp and took an interest in Psychology. Eventually he would like to go back to Psychology. He feels there are challenges he has not yet fully explored in this field, especially in the area of behavioural assessment and maybe..... But that's for another day. At the moment he has a company to run and after all 'great companies need great partners'!

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PORTUMNA	8.25am	1.25pm	8.25am			8.25am			8.25am	1.25pm	10.50am	1.25pm	6.15pm		
BANAGHER	8.35am		8.35am			8.35am			8.35am		6.35pm				
BIRR	6.00am	9.00am	2.00pm	5.50am	9.00am	2.00pm	5.50am	9.00am	2.00pm	2.45pm	9.00am	2.00pm	11.30am	2.00pm	7.00pm
KILCORMAC	6.10am	9.13am	2.13pm	6.00am	9.13am	2.13pm	6.00am	9.13am	2.13pm	2.55pm	9.13am	2.13pm	11.40am	2.13pm	7.10pm
TULLAMORE	6.30am	9.35am	2.35pm	6.30am	9.35am	2.35pm	6.30am	9.35am	2.35pm	3.15pm	9.35am	2.35pm	12noon	2.35pm	7.30pm
KILBEGGAN	6.40am	9.45am	2.45pm	6.40am	9.45am	2.45pm	6.40am	9.45am	2.45pm	3.25pm	9.45am	2.45pm	12.10pm	2.45pm	7.45pm

DEPARTS FROM DUBLIN

TO	MONDAY		TUES., WED., THURS.		FRIDAY		SATURDAY		SUNDAY						
TULLAMORE/ KILCORMAC/ BIRR	1.00pm	5.00pm	6.00pm	5.00pm	6.00pm	1.00pm	5.00pm	6.00pm	12noon	4.30pm	6.00pm	3.00pm	5.15pm	10.30pm	
BANAGHER	5.00pm		5.00pm		5.00pm		6.00pm		6.00pm						
PORTUMNA	6.00pm		6.00pm		1.00pm		5.00pm		6.00pm		12noon	4.30pm	6.00pm	3.00pm	5.15pm

DEPARTS FROM MAYNOOTH (Bus stop opposite Glenroyal Hotel)

TO	MONDAY		TUES., WED., THURS.		FRIDAY		SATURDAY		SUNDAY	
TULLAMORE/ KILCORMAC/ BIRR	6.40pm		6.40pm		1.40pm	6.40pm	12.30pm	6.30pm	3.30pm	
BANAGHER					6.40pm		6.30pm			
PORTUMNA	6.40pm		6.40pm		1.40pm	6.40pm	12.30pm	6.30pm	3.30pm	

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	1.25pm		1.25pm	1.25pm	6.15pm	
Banagher	8.35am	8.35am	8.35am	6.35pm		
Birr	6.00am	5.50am	9.00am	11.30am		
	9.00am	9.00am	2.00pm	2.00pm	7.00pm	
	12noon	12noon				
	2.00pm	2.00pm				
	4.30pm	4.30pm				
Kilcormac	6.10am	6.00am	9.13am	11.40am		
	9.13am	9.13am	2.13pm	2.13pm	7.10pm	
	12.10pm	12.10pm				
	2.10pm	2.10pm				
	4.40pm	4.40pm				

TULLAMORE•KILCORMAC•BIRR•BANAGHER•PORTUMNA

FROM TULLAMORE						
To	Mon.	Tue, Wed, Thur, Fri.	Sat.	Sun.		
Kilcormac & Birr	1.00pm	1.00pm	1.45pm	4.40pm		
	2.30pm		6.05pm	7.00pm		
	5.30pm	5.30pm	7.40pm	11.55pm		
	6.50pm	6.50pm				
	7.50pm	7.50pm				
Banagher	6.50pm	6.50pm	7.40pm			
Portumna	7.50pm	7.50pm	7.40pm	4.40pm		
				7.00pm		

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From	Mon.	Tue. Wed. Thur.	Fri.	Sat.	Sun.
Birr to Portumna	7.45am	7.45am	7.45am	7.45am	12.40pm
	8.20pm	8.20pm	9.00am	9.00am	5.10pm
			3.20pm	2.20pm	
			8.20pm	8.15pm	7.45pm

PORTUMNA - BIRR SERVICE

From	Mon.	Tue. Wed. Thur.	Fri.	Sat.	Sun.
Portumna to Birr	8.25am	8.25am	8.25am	8.25am	10.50am
	1.25pm	9.00pm	9.00pm	1.25pm	1.25pm

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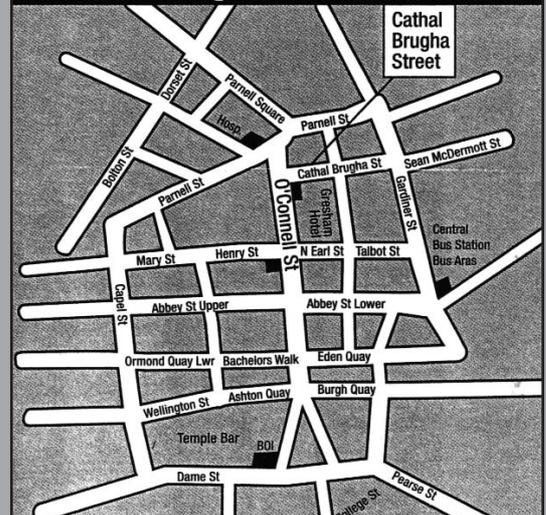
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FIRST ALL IRELAND

By David O'Brien

ON September 3rd, over 80,000 people crammed into one of the finest stadia in Europe to witness arguably the Irish sporting and social occasion of the year – the All Ireland Hurling Final.

The majority of the population tuned into Croke to watch the match live on television or through the lilting radio tones of the poet/commentator, Micheal O'Muircheartaigh.

Across the United States in the early hours, Irishmen and women, both real and imaginary paid to get into bars showing the match live by satellite, supping on breakfast pints and the odd chicken wing. In China, Thailand, all over Asia, from Egypt to Nigeria to Kenya and Malawi expats followed the occasion over the internet, though many a Cork and Kilkenny supporter feeling the view from the Hogan Stand was better than over the world wide web had dashed home from Australia for the match along with a bag full of washing for the Mammy.

An Taoiseach Bertie Ahern arrived by Merc from Ireland's answer to the White House, St Luke's, his constituency office in nearby Drumcondra, taking his place with the great and the good in the VIP section. Enda Kenny and Pat Rabbitte, all smiles and waves, took their seats a few rows behind. Archbishops, TDs, former GAA presidents and then, with Garda escort and military aide de camp in tow, the President and her husband took their seats

In the corporate boxes, Ireland's new Archbishops, the property developers, the builders, the investors the traders drank long and deep of fine wine, brandy and the odd pint; crab salad, steak and lobster bisque to keep the hunger away.

The plain people of Ireland were more than happy to pay €60 for their tickets and many paying much much more. Before the game a pair of Canal End tickets were on sale over the internet for €1,518 – not €1,500 mind but €1,518.

On Easter Sunday, April 1st 1888, things were different, things were very different but, on a bright sunny afternoon in a rough sloping field (that's still a field, though probably not for much longer) behind the petrol station on Wilmer Road and right next to the current Birr GAA grounds, a crowd of an estimated 5,000 gathered for the very same reason – the first ever All Ireland Hurling Final.

The All Ireland Senior Hurling Championship of 1887 was the first national championship of the game of hurling ever held. Things moved at a different pace back then with the final not being played until 1888. The Gaelic Athletic Association had been formed four years previously on the night of November 1 in Hayes' Hotel, Thurles with the aim of fostering and promoting the native Irish pastimes, of opening athletics to all social classes and to aid in the establishment of hurling and football clubs which would organise matches between counties.

Of course under the thundering leadership of Michael Cusack, a man mercilessly lampooned by James Joyce in *Ulysses* as the ignorant, bigoted, violent 'Citizen', the early GAA was as much about 'not being English' as it was about 'fostering native pastimes'.

In 1887, the GAA consisted of only 12 counties willing to participate in Gaelic Games, and only five of those entered the inaugural hurling championship. From 1887 until 1891, the club champions represented the whole county. In the very first All Ireland championship the participating counties were represented by the following clubs, Clare by Garranboy Smith O'Briens, Galway by Meelick, Kilkenny by Tullaroan, Tipperary by Thurles and Wexford by Castlebridge.

The format of the very first hurling championship was unique in that it was the only "open draw" All Ireland championship ever played. The five participating teams were pared off against each other regardless of their provincial locations. Three teams – Galway, Kilkenny and Wexford – advanced directly to the semi final stages of the competition, while Clare and Tipperary met in a "quarter final". Disputes in Cork and Limerick as to what club should represent the respective counties led to neither county participating. Hard to imagine a dispute in the GAA but it was of course a long time ago.

Scoring was also different in the first championship. One goal was worth more than any amount of points while "forfeit points" (five forfeit points equalling 1 point) were awarded in place of 65's. Scores were recorded in the form goals-points-forfeit points e.g. 2-4-1. The playing pitch was significantly larger than the modern pitch, particularly in width and the teams lined out with 21 players and no subs. In the case of the Birr field there was also a fine slope to contend with.

Media interest in Gaelic Games at the time was minimal, and so it was for the first All Ireland decider. Sadly, there is little written record of the great event, though we do know the people of Birr made the most of the occasion.

Birr was chosen because of its central location but also perhaps because in 1888 Birr was considered a "Unionist town". There was a strong sense within the GAA at the time of the need to 'bring the game' to places more accustomed to pursuits of cricket, tennis, soccer and rugby. Though it's also worth noting that, before 1884, one of the very few places where hurling was played regularly was the very Unionist Trinity College. Indeed, the founder of Unionism, Lord Carson himself, was reportedly a fearsome hurler in his day and was a founding member of the Trinity Hurling Club.

It's also likely that the huge attendance of 5,000 at the Birr All Ireland was swelled by some of the 1,000 or so British soldiers stationed at Crinkill barracks.

The game was due to begin at 3 pm and before the throw

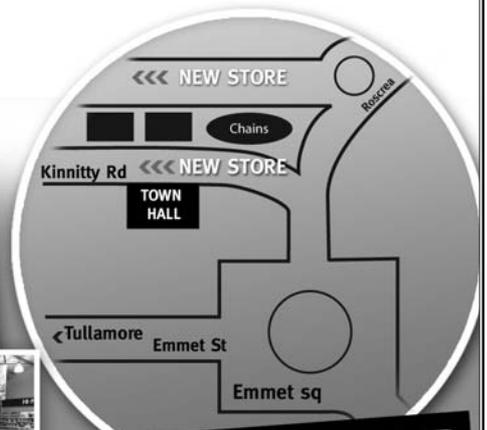
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in the two teams were led through the streets of Birr by a band to the field of play where the crowd had gathered. No tickets, no turnstiles, no stands or VIPs, no hot dogs or choc ices, not even dressing rooms for the players, but when referee Pat White threw in the sliothar, a roar went up and the All Ireland Final was born.

Confusingly Galway (Meelick) took to the field wearing green jerseys and white stripes, while Tipperary (Thurles) donned green jerseys with white stripes. Green being very much in vogue in the early GAA.

Early in the game, one of the Thurles players received facial injuries when he fell on his hurl and had to retire from the game. In a sporting gesture, unlikely to be repeated in the win-at-all costs atmosphere of today's championship, Meelick withdrew one of their own players to level the teams.

The two teams were evenly matched and this would prove Thurles's toughest test of the championship. After 11 minutes they scored a point and were 0-1-0 to 0-0-0 up at half time. In the second half, Tommy Healy of Thurles scored

the winning goal to claim the first ever All Ireland victory for Tipperary.

After the game, there was no presentation, no cup, no medal, only bragging rights were awarded to the victorious Tipp team. But, as the GAA grew into one of the cornerstones of Irish life, that bright Spring afternoon in Birr took on huge significance. For those there it was an Easter Sunday amusement – it was to become, in time, a key date in Irish history.

The 1887 crown was the first of 25 All Irelands to date for the Premier County. Galway wouldn't win one until 1923 and, so far, have only four, despite being there at the very start.

The victorious Tipperary team on that historic day was Martin McNamara, Matty Maher, Tom Maher, Tom Burke, Jer Dwyer, Ned Murphy, Ned Bowe, Ger Ryan, Tommy Healy, Pat Leahy, Tim Dwyer, Ned Lambe, John Leamy, Jack Mockler, Jim Stapleton (Capt.) Andy Maher, Tom Stapleton, Dan Ryan, Jack Dunne, Mick Carroll and Tom Carroll.

FROM THE PAST



A Night on the Town circa 1965

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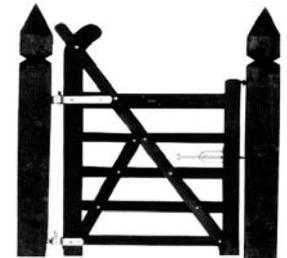
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100 YEARS OF CHANGE

A century of change in Birr Parish

By *Brian T. Kennedy*

The ancient Parish of Birr may owe its origins to the monastic settlement of St. Brendan in the 6th century, but the last century has arguably changed its way of life, more than at any time in its colourful history. Two thousand years ago, the Holy Family made their flight into Egypt on a donkey. In 1906 this was still the mode of transport for many people. In a century that experienced two World Wars, the splitting of the atom and space travel, it is interesting to examine how this century of change affected a small South Offaly town.

Great sources of information on Birr of the past are the censuses of 1901 and 1911. These are more than mere statistics. They give an insight into the parish's streets, villages and rural areas in a most comprehensive manner. This includes the profession of the head of the household.

The first thing obvious to anybody is the shift of population from the centre of the town to new outlying areas. In 1911, Main St. had 45 occupied households, Castle St. 25, Duke St. (O'Connell St.), 15 and Duke Square, 13. On that occasion, there were 14 enlisted R.I.C. men's initials recorded in the Police Barracks. The unique Bridge St. partly built over the Cam-Cor River had 20 occupied houses. This was a time when the great majority of business people lived over their premises, a noted contrast from today. Another feature was the number of shop workers and domestic servants living with their employers.

On looking at the 1901 census, we can note the number of areas that have physically disappeared from the residential map of Birr. Crinkle Military Barracks had 37 families living in it and 358 enlisted men, surely a marvellous industry for the area. Fayle's Lane was home to 14 families, Gallows Hill had 3 residents, Mill Lane (off Bridge St. had 2 families and Mountsally 7. Other areas, that have disappeared or are no longer occupied, are Old Ball Alley Lane, Orchard Lane, Post Office Lane, and Shambles Lane (now part of Super Valu).

Name changes are also a feature of the 20th Century. Spinners Lane is now Cornmarket St., Graveyard St. is High St., while Duke St./Square and Cumberland St. have all been renamed after the patriot Robert Emmet. Also part of John's Place has now become John's Mall, originally the entire street from the Square to Compton Row was called John's Place.

In 1901, the village of Riverstown had two R.I.C. families. It also numbered among its inhabitants a mason, clerk in holy orders, ex soldiers, a blacksmith, corn & flour merchant, publicans, coachman, seamstress and national schoolteacher. This was clearly a self-sufficient commu-

nity and a far cry from the residential village of 100 years later.

Self-sufficiency was very much a feature of Birr and its environs in times past. The 1911 census gives us a marvellous knowledge of the trades and professions practiced in the town at that point in history. Main St. possessed trades no longer in existence e.g. harness maker, tailor, fish merchant, pawnbroker and coach-builder. Other trades/jobs present in Birr were milliner, cooper, boot maker, gas fitter, whip maker and astronomer. This was obviously a far cry from the present when we purchase everything ready made, often from the farthest ends of the earth. The town then possessed a large number of clerks. The computer revolution was then an unimaginable dream.

Changes in religious life are also apparent from the census of 1911 when the Convent of Mercy had 35 sisters and the Presentation Brothers had 8 members. However, the Parish Priest and curates were resident at their present locations. This was also the case of the C. of I. Rector. On the other hand, the Methodist Minister lived on Oxmantown Mall and a C. of I. Curate on Emmet St. From even a passing glance, we can see the great changes that have taken place in the lives of the inhabitants of Birr over the last 100 years. Thankfully, many of these are positive e.g. in 1911 the Workhouse had 214 inmates, the Mental Asylum 9 inhabitants. The respective numbers were 224 and 11 in 1901. Prosperity and the 'Celtic Tiger' have its benefits when we look at these statistics. While many areas of the town have experienced population decline, this is more than compensated by the huge expansion in new housing estates on green field sites, over the last 10 years. We must rejoice in these developments, when we consider the poverty and deprivation in some of the town's lanes of a century ago.

It is interesting that, as late as 1935, landlords and not the licence holders, owned 17 pubs in the Birr/Crinkle area, an unimagined fact in modern Ireland. One of the lamentable facts of modern life is the extinction of so many of the old trades and ways of life. The trade of coach builder is long gone, a fact we may nostalgically regret some day as we sit in a traffic jam or have difficulty in finding a parking space.

All in all, if we could call back our great-grand parents, they would find an area unrecognisable and strange to them. We share in their heritage, rejoice in the many fine buildings they left behind and are proud to bear the family names that live on, even though so much else has changed.

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EARLY DAYS OF SISTERS OF MERCY

By Sr Anne Hannon

At a recent visit to the Birr Civic Offices, formerly the Convent of Mercy, I was reminded of the coming of the Sisters to Birr. The foundation party, Mother M. Aloysius Scott, Sr. M. Rose Lynch and a postulant, Anne Maria McEvoy, led by Catherine McAuley, left Baggot Street on December 26 and came by canal boat as far as Tullamore where they stayed in the convent founded four years previously. At noon the next day they proceeded to Birr by Coach, where they found their new home to be a fine old coach house within easy reach of the parish church. Standing back from the road at the end of a country lane, it was surrounded by open country which gave an impression of spaciousness. The Camcor flowed serenely at the rear. The serenity and peace of the place was in sharp contrast to the bitterness and division that had split the town. "The unfortunate Crotty is indefatigable in his evil works" wrote Catherine McAuley. "We have not met any poor Crottyite yet, but expect to see them soon, for they are utterly unhappy though still obstinate - the common punishment of rebellion in religion".

These Sisters who were to be so successful in combating schism, were truly spiritual and had little except their deep faith and immense trust in God. Gaiety and playfulness mingled easily with their deeper qualities and proved invaluable in winning the confidence and affection of the townsfolk. One little incident brings out well the high spirits in which they faced their task. On their first morning in

Birr, they attended Mass in the parish Church. To introduce them to his parishioners Fr. John Spain referred to their coming in these kindly words "My dear people" he said "I have a present to make to you, I have a New Year's gift for you, the most gratifying that a pastor could have, I present to you the Sisters of Mercy, who by their example and pious instruction will draw upon our town the blessings of heaven. I recommend them to your respectful attention, and I beseech God to help them and you". This greatly amused Sr. Rose and, when the Sisters got back for their breakfast, she quickly set them off in fits of laughter, saying in a whining and melancholy voice "He might have kept us a little longer, he need not have given us away so soon! Catherine herself wrote of these first days "How sweet, how blessed our life is. I do not think anyone in the midst of all the Christmas festivities was so happy as we were".

During those first days they were surrounded by ice and snow and were "obliged to keep hot turf under the butter" to enable them to cut it. Catherine McAuley describes one of her trips to visit a couple whose son had been killed accidentally. "All my wardrobe is washing, I came home yesterday with at least a half-yard deep of mud, melted snow and I have not a cold in my head. I was out five hours. Hurrah for foundations. Makes the old young and the young merry".



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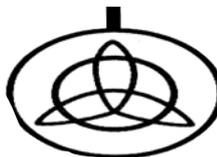
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J.D. FRASER (1809-1852) – BIRR'S FORGOTTEN POET

By Jim Phelan

J.D. Fraser who has for many years passed into literary oblivion, was in his time better known by his nom-de-plume 'J de Jean'. He also wrote as 'J. Robertson', 'Z', 'Y', 'F' and 'Maria'.

He was born in the 'environs' of Birr in 1809 within hearing distance of the River Brosna as it meandered along its way and about which he wrote in one of his better poems, 'Brosna's Banks'. Along these banks he dreamed the poet's dream which forms the basis of many of his pastoral poems.

His parents had high hopes that he might become a Presbyterian clergyman but they lacked the means to realise their dreams. While still a youth, Fraser and his older brother were apprenticed to a cabinet-maker. He grew up an Orangeman and a Presbyterian.

Fraser moved to Dublin reasonably early in his life and continued his employment as a cabinet-maker until his death in 1852. In Dublin he developed a passionate enthusiasm for Irish nationalism. He joined the Young Ireland movement joining Davis, Duffy, McGee and many other Irish literary figures. Fraser became one of the leading poets in the Nation newspaper.

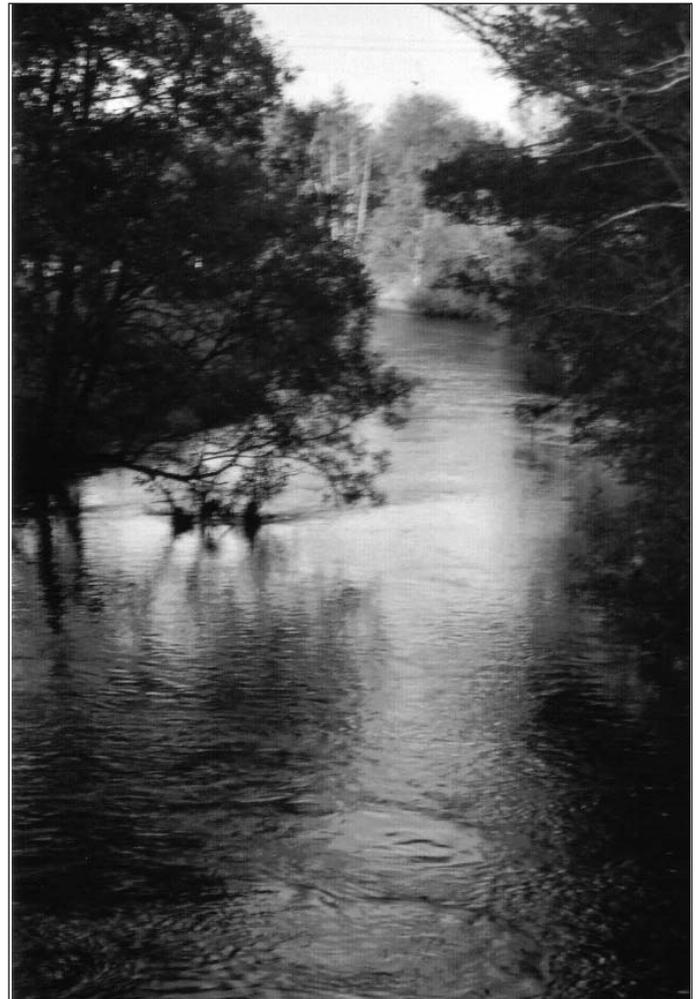
He was a poet in spite of adverse circumstances. Most of his time was devoted to his trade and the hours he devoted to poetry were those few he could steal from work at his bench. His difficulties were greatly accentuated by severe ill-health and chronic poverty.

Many of his poems were inspired by quiet rural beauty. In 'Brosna's Banks' he recollects with pathos his early hopes in his rural surroundings. He was totally opposed to bigotry of any description and promoted its replacement by toleration and kindness among all classes. The same hopes and aspirations were enunciated by Thomas Davis in the lines,

*What matter if at different times
Our fathers won this sod?
What matter if at different shrines
We pray to the One God?*

When Duffy, in conjunction with Dillon and Davis, put into effect their formula 'Educate that you may be free' through their writings in the Nation, they were passionately supported by Fraser who had by now adopted the religion of the people as well as their cause.

There is very little information about Fraser's life and what is available is gleaned from his own writings. He was an unassuming, diligent man, hardly conscious of his own influence as the Nation grew in popularity and continued with its own mission of regenerating Ireland. Fraser, in his poem 'Song for July 12th 1833', asks all Irishmen to join hand in hand for fatherland:



Brosna River

*Yes, let the Orange lily be
Thy badge, my patriot brother;
The everlasting Green for me,
And we for one another.*

One of his pastoral poems is 'Clondallagh' in which there is just a hint of romance with one 'Jane of Clondallagh'.

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

Another of his poems with 'close to Birr' references is 'Woodfield'.

*The spell is broke - life's low-hung clouds from hour
to hour move by
And veil the loftier golden ones that fix my gaze on
high;*

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Clondallagh

*The struggle with the world is o'er that on my nature
cast
A sadness like the drip of leaves, when thunder show-
ers have passed.*

Fraser died in 1852 in Dublin and in a short biographical sketch attached to his Ballads of Young Ireland, a writer suggests that it would be a 'kindly act and duty' if the class he did so much to uplift would raise a simple monument to his memory. This, like his poetry, was soon forgotten.

Over the years John de Jean's memory has faded into oblivion and now his name is but a meaningless sound near Brosna's Banks, at Clondallagh and at Woodfield. No monument or epitaph marks the final resting-place of this singularly gifted man who might have carved a niche in the temple of fame and affluence but for the severe handicaps Fate left on his pathway through life. There was no imposing funeral to accompany his remains to their last resting place in an unmarked grave in an obscure corner of Glasnevin waiting for the Final Judgement.

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ST BRENDAN'S PARISH BIRR – 2006

By Brian T. Kennedy (Secretary Pastoral Council)

The last twelve months were very eventful in Birr Parish. The Parish covers an ever-expanding area, with many new house completions in urban and rural areas. It is a constant task for the Pastoral Council and co-workers to keep track of the changes.

The death of Canon John Shalloo A.P. in February was a major loss to the Parish. His Funeral Liturgies led by the beautiful Gregorian Chant of St. Brendan's Church Choir were a fitting tribute to a dedicated pastor. (See Obituary elsewhere).

Many meaningful liturgies were organised over the year by the members of the active Liturgy Group, including Mass for those who died over the 12 month period, 2 weeks of prayer (November & Lent) and the Easter Ceremonies. This year Bishop Willie Walsh confirmed over 80 Parishioners. For the first time to accommodate the extended families attending, there were two First Communions for St. Brendan's Primary/Mercy and Killeen/Crinkle. As usual First Communion was held at Sunday Mass in Carrig. Christmas and Easter Ceremonies were packed to capacity.

The Parish is blessed with two splendid church choirs in St. Brendan's and Carrig. They participate at all ceremonies throughout the liturgical year and never fail to participate at all Funeral Masses. Many members of these choirs must be congratulated on their decades of voluntary service to the Parish. Their work was celebrated with a marvellous gathering of choirs from the Parishes East of t h e

Shannon, in St. Brendan's last February. A folk group also augments our church music.

With a large influx of eastern Europeans into the Parish there is a Polish Mass in the Church each Month.

One of the great successes of the year was the Legion of Mary's Rosary Rally, last October. The Apostolic Workers also held a successful Display and sale of work in May.

The Marian Hall Committee continues Trojan work, to keep the Parish Hall running on a viable basis. The Hall is in perfect condition and is a great asset for the entire Parish.

At present plans are progressing for the refurbishment/restoration of the Church of the Annunciation, Carrig. This will be a major project and will commence after Easter 2007. The Prayer Garden at the rear of St. Brendan's Church is nearing completion.

Birr is a busy Parish, which can only function with the large team of voluntary workers who dedicate their time each week to the betterment of the Parish community. It is marvellous to see so many youth involved with over 55 altar servers in St. Brendan's, one of the largest groups in the Diocese of Killaloe.

If you wish to contact anybody concerning Parish affairs the following contact numbers should be useful: Sacristy 057-9122928, Fr. Tony Cahir P.P. 9120097, Fr. Pat Greed C.C./ Fr. Pat Gilbert 9120098 or Fr. Michael Reddan S.V.D. 9121757.



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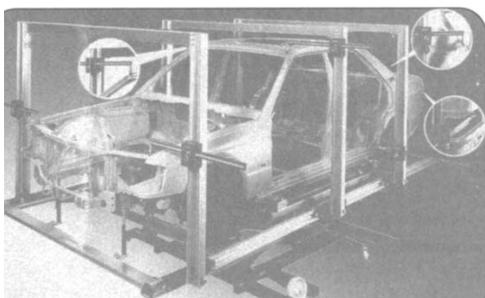
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NOTES FROM ST BRENDAN'S CHURCH OF IRELAND

The year 2006 was an eventful one for St. Brendan's Church Of Ireland Parish. In the year since the last year review went to press we have had only one death in the parish. Dorothy Jackson died on the 16th December, 2005 after many years of declining health.

Confirmation :

On Sunday 7th May Bishop Michael Mayes came to Birr for a service of Confirmation. Those confirmed were Thomas Bailey, Nicholas Corcoran, Shane DeLahunt, Jacqueline Eastwood, Laura Eastwood, Robert Eastwood and Ruth Sheppard.

Baptisms :

We have had a number of Baptisms in recent months :

- Sinead and Brendan Johnson, twin children of Paul and Breda, grandchildren of Val.
- Ross Kennedy son of Sylvia and Michael.
- Joshua Pyle, son of June and Jonathan.
- Olivia Rose Xuewei, daughter of Patrick, Lord Oxmantown, and Anna, and grand daughter of Lord and Lady Rosse.
- Daniel Benn, son of Tracey and John, and grandson of Ruth and Seymour Kenny.
- Paul and Jamie Tallon, twin sons of Mildred and Cyril.

The Rev. Ruth Gill :

In October, the Rev. Ruth Gill returned to Birr as our Assistant Priest. Ruth has been the Curate in the

Cloughjordan Group of Parishes since her Ordination in 2004.

Flower Festival :

Our Parish Flower Festival "Songs Of Praise" was held at the weekend of the 11th to the 14th of August, in conjunction with Vintage Week. The festival featured over thirty floral displays designed by Richard Haslam and his team of flower arrangers from the parish and community, and was featured on RTE's Nationwide programme the following Friday. The amount of money raised was in the range of €10,000 with the proceeds being divided between the Parish Organ Fund and the Offaly Hospice. The festival was sponsored by Sylvia Crawford and her family, in memory of her late husband Larry. The opening night Service was particularly enjoyable, due to the participation of the Birr Choral Society and the Killaloe Brass Band. As the Choir sang a medley of some of the hymns illustrated in the floral display, spotlights in the gallery were trained on the pertinent display. Clergy taking part included Canon Stephen Neill, new Birr Roman Catholic Curate, Fr. Michael Reddan, and the Rev. Irene Morrow representing the Methodist Church.

Festival of Hymns :

On Sunday, 5th November, St. Brendan's Church hosted a Choral Festival of Hymns, "For all the Saints", with the participation of the Birr Choral Society.

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BIRR HISTORICAL SOCIETY

By Rev Irene Morrow

The year 2006 will be remembered as the time when the Historical Society succeeded in bringing the facsimile of the Macregol Gospels back to Birr. Just in case any reader does not know about the Macregol Gospels, here is a short explanation.

There was once a man in Birr called Macregol who is described in the Annals as 'scribe, abbot and bishop at Birr' and who died about 822 AD. There is a manuscript of the Four Gospels in the Bodleian Library, Oxford dating from the eighth or ninth century at the end of which is written 'Macregol illustrated this Gospel. Whoever reads and understands the story, pray for Macreguil the scribe.'

By the tenth century the manuscript was in England where a gloss or translation was inserted between the lines of Macregol's beautiful insular script. The manuscript now contained one of the two earliest copies of the Four Gospels in any version of the English language, the other one being the Book of Lindisfarne and it was believed to have originated in England.

In the early nineteenth century Fr Charles O'Connor, of the O'Connor Don family from Co. Roscommon was a keen student of early manuscripts. He identified Macregol of Birr as the original ninth century scribe, an identification which is universally accepted.

So this facsimile that we now have in Birr commemorates an outstanding achievement by those who inhabited our place over a thousand years ago. The manuscript needed over eighty calf skins, ink made from carbon or oak galls, quills of geese or swans and colours made from local and imported ingredients all in the hands of a saintly man who spent more than thirty days writing it and no one knows how long doing the colourful illumination.

The task was accomplished during a time of unrest and danger while Macregol's contemporaries, both lay and

clerical were struggling violently for power. A renewal movement called the 'CÉIL DÉ' was spreading in the Church and the Vikings were attacking the offshore monasteries.

This was a time when precious copies of the Sacred Scriptures were hidden or lost or carried away to a place of safety. Macregol's Gospel Book somehow survived but the Faddenmore Book of Psalms was lost and was only this year recovered from Faddenmore Bog in the parish of Birr and only five miles from the town.

Soon the copy of Macregol Gospels will be on display in the new Birr Library to the great satisfaction of all who have contributed and worked to see this dream realised.

In September 2006 the Historical Society hosted a conference to celebrate the return of Macregol to Birr. About two hundred people attended a series of lectures in the County Arms Hotel and in Dooly's Hotel. They came from all parts of the country and from abroad and were delighted with the friendliness of Birr and the welcome they received.

The panel of lecturers included scholars from Irish and British universities as well as our own Margaret Hogan.

On the making of the facsimile we heard from James Allen of the Bodleian Library who supervised the photography, Diarmuid Guinan, the printer from Brosna Press, Tony Cains, the antiquarian bookbinder from Dublin and Teresa Ryan-Feehan who co-ordinated the production. They were then all together for the first time.

Then it was a great privilege to hear Dr Patrick Wallace of the National Museum and Dr Bernard Meehan, Keeper of Manuscripts in Trinity College speak about the finding of the Faddenmore Psalter and its recovery from the bog and how so many experts are working to conserve and restore it.

The conference members appreciated the reception given by Birr Town Council in the new Library and the reception in Birr Castle given by the Earl and Countess of Rosse.

The Historical Society owes a special debt of gratitude to Bridget Sullivan who on our behalf received all the bookings and wrote a personal letter of welcome to each participant in the conference.



Margaret Hogan, Bridget Sullivan, Rev. Irene Morrow (President) Teresa Ryan-Feehan. Arrival of Macregol Facsimile.

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ST. BRENDAN'S PRIMARY SCHOOL



Junior Infants

Back L-R: Maria Donegan, Barry Guilfoyle, Adam Fitzgerald, Darragh Middleton, Darren Lally, Dylan Hannify, Mary Lonergan.
 3rd Row: Eoin Bergin, Andrew Martinez, Dean Rasheed, Padraic Watkins, Ronan McNamara, Oisín Wells, Michael Hand, Jack Shortt.
 2nd Row: Wayne McDonagh, Gavin Carroll, Barry Kearns, Tristan Murdock, Zachary Gallagher, Kevin Tierney, Peadar Talbot, Alex Taylor, Jamie Mooney.
 Front: James Lally, Sean Carry, Ceilim Ryan, Mark Whelan, Paul Stokes, T.J. Loonam. Absent from photo: Declan Molloy, Tyler Flynn.



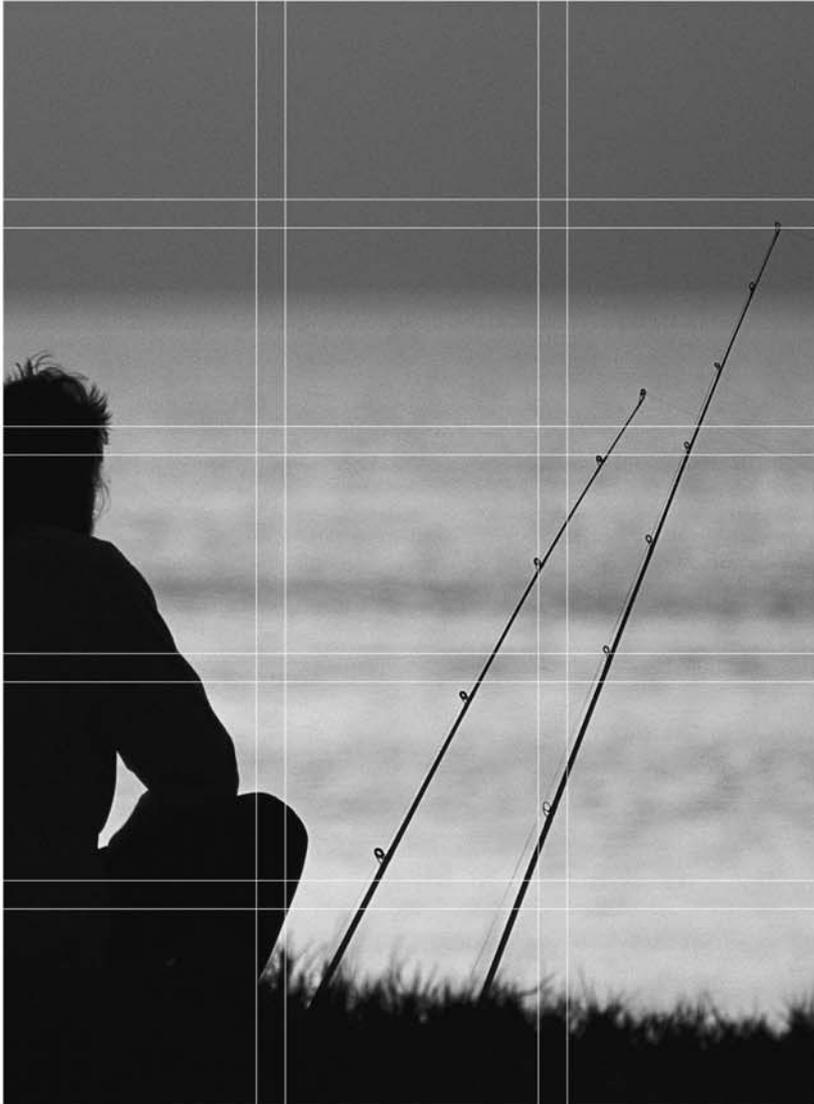
6th Class

Back L-R: Mr Crofton, James Guinan, David Kearns, Shane Claffey, Peter Horan, Eoin Pilkington.
 3rd Row: Michael Pardy, Brendan Bergin, Emmet Nolan, Peter Dooley, Conor Nolan, Darren Cahill, Mrs O'Callaghan.
 2nd Row: Keith McDonagh, Dale O'Brien, Tom Doyle, Aaron Flanagan, Darragh Harte, Eamonn Hogan, Rafal Slowikowski, Artur Sadowski.
 Front: Padraig Gath, Nathan Stapleton, Alex Murphy, Frankie Tuohey, Kyle Lynskey, Hugh Feehan.
 Absent from Photo: Leo McDonagh, Emmett Hart, P.J. McDonagh.

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Middle: Bill Burns, Dara Hanamy, Caroline Purcell, Una Murray, Ella Conn, Saoirse Rice, Aoife Hogan, Zohra Anjum, Emma Harding, Dara Purcell.

Front: Diarmuid Scully, Emma O'Rourke, Alex Tully, Piara Errity, Louise Bergin, Óran O'Neill.



5th & 6th Class

Back L-R: Max Baranok, Ciarán Connaughton, Michael Cashen, Daragh Butler, Thomas Hough, Bríd Connolly, Conor Freeman, Joseph King.

Front: Aileen Bermingham, Amy Carroll, Megan Lavin, Áine Murray.



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Middle: Gavin Farrelly, Thomas Moten, Aran Curley, Nicole Delane, Brooke Whelahan, Holly Corboy, Leona Spain, Aoife Guinan, Tara Kenny.

Front: Niall Reddin, Mark Molloy, Gearóid McCormack, Brendan Hutchinson, Jake Heather, Adam Hart, Keelan Maher, Bartosz Zakrzewski.

Ms Lorraine Carthy, Class Teacher, Mrs Mary Dolan - Principal, Mrs Patricia Connors SNA.



6th Class

Back L-R: Mrs Clare Kelly, Class Teacher, James Heffernan, Declan Cordial, Dean Keenahan, Richard Brereton, Aodhan McCormack, Gary Ward, Stephen Dwyer, Ryan Smith, Mr Conor D'Arcy, Teacher.

Front: Aisling Guinan, Michelle Kealey, Aoife Dempsey, Leah Haines, Laura Sheils, Emma Nolan, Corena Guidera.
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3rd Row: Alicja Piotrowska, Anastasia Neudacina, Lauren Doonan, Shanna McDonagh, Winnie Ann McDonagh, Megan Morrissey, Chloe Doyle, Airida Krasickaite.

2nd Row: Rachel Donoghue, Lara Kelly, Nessa Hart, Jodie Donoghue, Caoilinn Digan, Eileen Delaney, Sarah Cooke, Orla Campbell, Róisín Byrne.

Front: Nicole Bracken, Allana Morris, Megan Hough, Nina Achtelik, Molly Kavanagh, Chantelle Hutchinson, Emma Murphy.



6th Class

Back L-R: Claire Yeates, Emma Hart, Serena Murphy, Meave Monaghan, Catherine Hoare, Bronagh Rigney.

3rd Row: Julie Fanneran, Helen McDonagh, Margaret Dwyer, Rebecca Corrigan, Aibhe Kenny, Joanne Featherstone, Éadaoin Nolan, Chelsea Kennedy, Nadia Feehan, Ms Thérèse Haverty (Class Teacher).

2nd Row: Sinéad Garland, Áine O'Donovan, Rebecca Kinsella, Aoife Joyce, Revina Murdock, Shannen Quegan.

Front: Grace King, Erin Byrne, Ceola Campbell, Maura Bruce, Shauna Byrne, Maria Harding.

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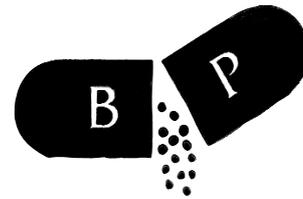
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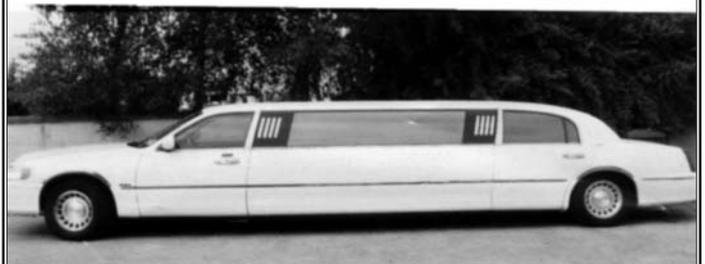
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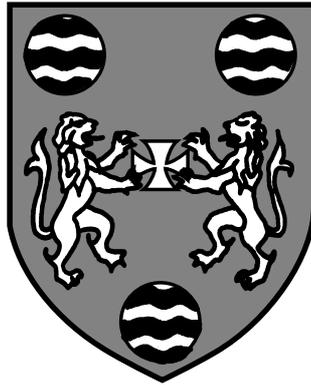
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6th Class

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Junior Infants

*Back L-R: Luke Harris, Michael Egan, Mark Cleary, Dylan Hogan, Niamh Costello, Lilly Whelehan.
Front: Michelle Fogarty, Wren Higgins, Clare Hogan, Saoirse Moran, Robyn Killackey.*



6th Class

*Back L-R: Aidan Ryan, Conor Fitzgerald, Pádraig O'Brien, Jack Cavanagh, Pádraig Killeen, Stephen Houlihan, Jack Kennedy, Rory Mounsey.
Front: Christopher Pingree, Jamie Doyle, Aoife King, Evie Curran, Megan Curran, Gary O'Brien.*

ST. BRENDAN'S COMMUNITY SCHOOL

In a busy secondary school a year passes very quickly. In St Brendan's there was certainly enough in the academic, cultural, spiritual and sporting fields to give a school year, full of activity. To great acclaim the students presented 'The Wiz' to packed auditoriums in November '05. The calendar year ended with a most successful and enjoyable talent competition.

There were also victories for the senior hurling, soccer and camogie teams in the course of the year. Soccer, golf and basketball also continue to improve in all grades.

One of the highlights of the year was the official opening of the state of the art 'Sportsplex' and dressing rooms by Minister for Finance Brian Cowen T.D. Bishop Willie Walsh performed the blessing of the complex, assisted by Archdeacon Wayne Carney and Rev. Colin Gracie. A moving occasion was the visit of Holocaust Survivor Zoltan Zinn in March. He left an indelible mark on all he met.

Due to the renewal of the heating and electrical systems, the State Exams were held successfully again at the Technology Centre for the second year running. The results of the Leaving and Junior Cert exams lived up to the previously high standards set by the school. Increased numbers of St. Brendan's students have entered college, with many studying courses requiring maximum points.

The beginning of 2006/07 school year was one of change with the retirements of Benny Mc Hugh and Maureen de Forge from the staff. Ten new teachers joined the teaching staff on the same day that 150 new first years begun their second level education in St. Brendan's.

At the time of going to press the 2006 return of 'Oliver', to the school stage has just taken place, and the rhythm of life continues in Birr's Community School as it has since 1980.

OLIVER 2006



Oisín O'Carroll (Artful Dodger) & Ciara Rice (Widow Corney).



Daniel O'Meara (Bill Sykes) & Lindsay Murphy (Nancy).



Louise Smyth (Mrs Sowerberry), & Aoife Corrigan (Workhouse Asst.).



Vivienne Maher & Teresa Dooley of the Workhouse Gang.



Aidan Carroll, Simon Beale (Bow Street Runners) with James Roddy (Mr Brownlow) centre.



David Sheils (Charlie Bates), Sean Stone (Oliver), & Sean T. O'Connor.

BIRR CHAPTER, IRISH GEORGIAN SOCIETY

The BIRR Chapter continues to be well supported by its members and the good work of the society goes on.

Our thanks are extended to Amanda Pedlow, Offaly Heritage Officer, for meeting us to discuss our submission to the Offaly Heritage Plan 2007-2011 was grateful for our having taken the time to submit it to her. She wished to prioritize the objectives and actions to be done to ensure the more important tasks are undertaken within a five year time frame and stressed that as BIRR is the designated heritage town for Offaly it would set a good precedent for others to follow.

On a lighter note many of our members and friends enjoyed a Sunday afternoon in Stradbally in Laois county when we visited Stradbally Hall, Ballykilcavan House and garden and finished up at the Millhouse which has been recently restored by Glen Bradshaw. It was a most enjoyable outing and we are planning a weekend trip to Cork city which is to hap-

pen shortly We also had a fun day at the vintage croquet during Vintage Week. The Knight of Glin will give a talk in mid-November in Dooly's Hotel entitled "Topographical Views from Glin Castle" and the No.1 - 'Windows Pamphlet' outlining information for owners of heritage properties in BIRR will be launched at it.

The Irish Georgian Society is always open to new members and you can help our conservation work by contacting Irish Georgian Society, 74 Merrion Square, Dublin 2. Tel: +353 1 676 7053 or email: info@irishgeorgiansoc.org web: www.irish-architecture.com/igs or local secretary, BIRR Chapter, Irish Georgian Society - Tel: +353 57 9120433 or email: dowley@eircom.net

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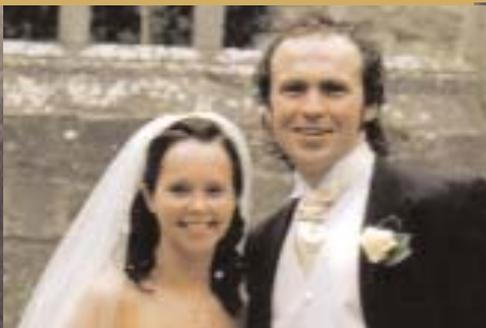
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Anne Morris & David Coughlan



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Amy Larkin & Ger Oakley



Davina Egan & Simon Dempsey



Pauline Kelly & Liam Lennon



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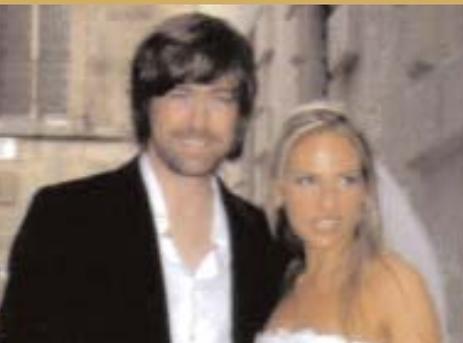
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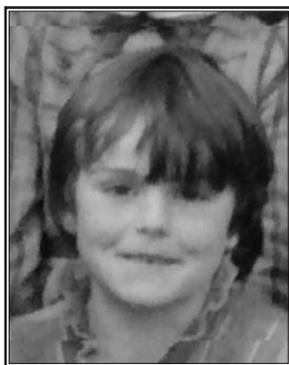
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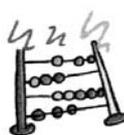


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EMPLOYMENT OPTIONS

What is it?

Employment Options is a 26 week full time local training initiative which aims to build confidence of all participants and supports people to identify specific career paths which will facilitate their progression into employment/self employment or onto further education or training.



Employment Options 1 – September - March 2005/2006

Back Row L-R: Tracy Carroll, Anita McDermott, Joane Molloy, Mary Heron, Donna Mellisop, Lisa Kelly, Aine Jennings, Mary Larkin (Co-ordinator).

Front: Sarah Dunne, Sinéad Campbell, Donna Kelly.

What is the content of the programme?

Every course is different and we try and meet the needs of as many as possible in the group but the list below describes many of the components of courses to date:- Computer Applications*, Information Technology Skills*, DIY, Occupational First Aid*, Site and training visits*, Work Experience*, Optional areas of interest to be decided by the group. **These modules are delivered as a part of the FETAC Level 4 national certificate.*



Employment Options 2 – April - September - March 2006

Back Row L-R: Jackie Maher, Triona Dignan, Rute Udosen, Mary Conlon.
Front: Niamh Parry, Linda Hutchinson, Selina Granger, Ann Dolan.

Where & When?

The programme takes place in the West Offaly Partnership/FÁS offices at Bridge Street, Birr. The programme runs Monday to Friday 9.30am - 4.30pm. The programme commences again in early April 2007 (26 weeks). To get involved contact your local FÁS placement officer or:

Sarah Kennedy or Sinead Campbell

Employment Options,
West Offaly Partnership,
Bridge Street,
Birr. 057 9121155

The Job Club

The Job Club offers support, assistance, advice and help to any one wishing to actively seek employment. The aim of the Job Club is to enable people to plan, actively seek and achieve realistic work opportunities. If you are unemployed or if you wish to change jobs then we can help you.

The Job Club is an active, practical process in which participants will develop skills, which they will use in actual job finding activities under the guidance and the supervision of the job club leader. It is a facility where people come to work. To work at getting a job. The Job Club offers group and individual attention to those seeking work.

This consists of 4 weeks formal training, which covers the following areas:

CV preparation and design, Letter of Application, Application Forms, Advert Analysis, Interview techniques, Assertiveness/Confidence building, Career Direction, Aptitude Tests, Guest Speakers – Money, Advice and Budgeting Services (MABS) and Citizen Information Centre (CIC) etc.

The Training Course runs for 4 weeks, in the mornings from 10.00 - 1.00. From previous training courses there has been over 80% success rate in participants gaining employment/further training from constant, active job seeking and support and guidance. To get involved contact your local FÁS placement officer or:

Job Club Co-ordinator: Catherine Hoctor,

Job Club Administrator: Siobhan Murphy, 057 9121155

LIFESKILLS

What is it?

Lifeskills consists of six core modules: Personal Development, Communications, Maths*, Computer Literacy*, Preparation for Work* and First Aid. Depending on the interests and needs of the participants a number of modules are then added on to the programme including: Personal Care & Presentation*, DIY, Cookery, Horticulture*, Keep Fit and Food & Nutrition. **These modules are delivered as a part of the FETAC Level 3 National Certificate.*

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Lifeskills for Men – August - November 2006

Back Row L-R: Darren Kelly, Anthony Hogan, Anthony Kelly, Alan Kirwan, Jason Hall.

Front: Peter Loonam, Darren Mannion, John Tait, Patrick Craven, David Regan.

Where and when?

Lifeskills is facilitated locally in communities in South and West Offaly. Since its foundation it has taken place in Crinkle, Birr and Kinnitty. Two Lifeskills programmes will take



Community Training Centre

place in Birr in 2007. To get involved contact your local FÁS placement officer or:

Pauline Hctor

Lifeskills Co-ordinator
West Offaly Partnership
Bridge Street
Birr 057 9121155

LEGION OF MARY – SPECIAL AWARD – MAUREEN DUNPHY

A member of the Birr Presidium of the Legion, Maureen Dunphy was honoured at a special event during the month of April in recognition of the many good works she has engaged in, through many different community groups and societies.

A Mass, attended by family, friends and fellow society members, concelebrated by Fr. Tony Cahir, Fr. Pat Greed was held, after which a presentation was made to Maureen by her peers.

Groups and Societies which Maureen is associated, and who have benefited from her dedication over the past decades are:- Legion Of Mary, Birr Apostolic Society, Meals on Wheels, Altar Society, Mentally Handicapped, Birr Tidy Towns, Eucharistic Adorers, Pro-Life Group, Garden Guild and Ladies Group.

Maureen arrived in Birr (from Terryglass) in 1939, met and married Sean Dunphy and reared a family of 8 children. Despite the fact that she had home, husband and family to care for, she reached out and found time to be actively involved in the wider community. We thank you Maureen for your unflinching generosity and commitment.

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All the best

BIRR STAGE GUILD 2006



A merry evening of Christmas carols, poetry & prose returned again this year, being first of many successful Birr Stage Guild productions over the last year. The 'Magic Of Christmas II' was warmly received over two nights on a cold December weekend, raising the festive spirits of adults and children alike with well-known songs and tales.

A workshop was held in early January to invite interest from new people in the Guild. Over 60 potential cast and crew turned up, many of whom joined the Guild for their production of *Jesus Christ Superstar*.

Birr Stage Guild produced a power-packed and dramatic performance of *Jesus Christ Superstar* at Birr Theatre & Arts Centre last March, entralling audiences over its five night run. The show was sold out two weeks in advance and those who booked their seats in time weren't disappointed. The audiences were clearly impressed, as the standing ovations given to the cast testified. Director Maureen de Forge has to be congratulated on the overall impact the show left on everyone. An excellent pace was maintained throughout as the scenes smoothly flowed together and you barely had time to catch your breath. The scenes leading to the crucifixion were harrowing and dramatic but weren't over done and left a lasting impression. The music was in the capable hands of Musical Director Enda O'Connor and he ensured the pace was maintained as one number almost blended into the next to keep events moving swiftly along.

PriceWaterhouseCoopers Players were welcomed back to Birr for the sixth year running for their April pantomime. Their matinees and evening performances drew packed houses and the Guild hosted a reception for the cast and crew on their final night.

Birr Stage Guild was proud to support Ann Hogan's Opera Gala in May, in which she sang a popular selection of classical arias and musical numbers to thunderous reception.

The annual church gate collection in July was very well supported, many thanks to all who contributed.

A Youth Summer Camp in July saw children take part in a variety of workshops to learn skills in the areas of theatre, drama, music and movement under the guidance of Enda O'Connor, Christiaan Feehan and Sophia Bailey. This weeklong course encouraged development of their creative talents and it is hoped that many will participate in future Stage Guild productions.

Daily Lunchtime concerts were hosted during Vintage Week. Many thanks to the venues: Kelly's Bar, The Sun-

rise Inn, The County Arms Hotel, the Castle courtyard and Dooly's Hotel. Many thanks to the performers also. Music ranged from classical with John Molloy, traditional with the Keegan Family, singer-songwriters Claire and Elaine Connors, and the wonderful Ann Hogan putting a splendid end to the Vintage Week lunchtime concerts in the castle courtyard.

Dance / Choreography Classes

Birr Stage Guild ran a series of Dance and Choreography classes with Sophia Bailey for four and six weeks in May and October of this year. Both classes were thoroughly enjoyed by all participants, with the 6 week course selling out in a matter of days. Early booking is essential for future classes! Birr Stage Guild presented the acclaimed 'Arsenic and Old Lace' in early November. With a fantastic cast of many familiar faces and an excellent director in Eamonn O'Donoghue, it was a great success overall. Many thanks to audiences, advertisers, sponsors and patrons who supported the Guild over the past year.

Profits from all Stage Guild productions are donated to the Oxmantown Hall Restoration Fund.

See local press for details of future auditions & productions. New members always welcome

Birr Stage Guild Committee 2006/07

Chairperson:	Maureen de Forge
Vice Chairperson:	Declan Milne
Secretary	Kathrena Ryan
Treasurer:	Amanda Luttrell
PRO:	Annette Ryan
Social Secretary:	Dawn Guilfoyle
Committee Members:	Seamus Davis
	Enda O'Connor
	Tony Hogan
	Anne O'Meara
	Frank McNamara
	Eve Larkin
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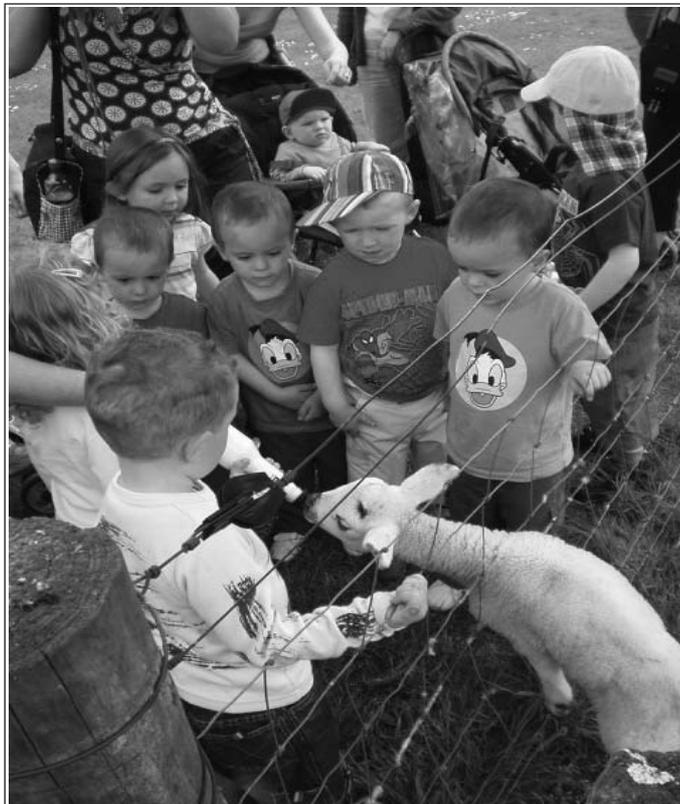
BIRR METHODIST CHURCH

We are always grateful for the friendship and support that come from the people of Birr in the work of the Church, and the last year has been no exception. Our work with other church communities to witness to the Kingdom of God continues as ever. The second St Brendan's Day service in November and the joint Lenten series with the Church of Ireland were just two such events. In December, it was our turn to host the community carol service.... but the church was too small! We were very grateful to our friends in St Brendan's C of I parish for allowing us to host the service in their building. So many school groups and choirs came together to make this such a meaningful service.

The church in Birr is part of a Methodist circuit that also includes Athlone and Tullamore. The three church congregations (called "societies" in Methodism) work together to support each other in worship and witness. Each of the three church buildings is over 150 years old and required a lot of maintenance. Circuit financial debts were tackled with an increase in weekly offerings – and donations to overseas aid were nearly doubled! The people of Birr gave great support to our two longstanding sales (in the Main Street in December and in Oxmantown School in May). For the first time there was a circuit Car Boot Sale in Charville Castle estate in June which was a great day and raised €2,800.

The number of children and babies in our congregation continues to increase. The past year saw the baptism of Matthew Gill and Annabel Haslam. A second Sunday School class was required to facilitate the growing number of pre-school children. JMA ("Junior Mission for All") re-

turned to the circuit after an absence of some years. Boys and girls of national school age collect money for, and learn about, Christian children around the world. A JMA summer party was held in August with fun and games and a challenge to consider how we use the talents and gifts that God has given us all.





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Summer School of Rock 2006



Participants gave a lively performance for family and friends after two weeks intensive training with Brendan Keely. This project targeted 13-18 year olds where participants underwent intensive training in how to write and perform their own and well-known songs. The course also provided training in various aspects of the music business including copywriting, publishing, the recording process, voice training and instrument tuition.



Honor Blackman at Birr theatre & Arts Centre

In October Honor Blackman (aka James Bond's Pussy Galore) pre-formed 'Word of Honor' a drama about her own life and times.

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My Community ~ My Place

My Community ~ My Place was a project to develop community awareness for children through the Arts. Pictured above are the participants on the Drama course. Front Row: Katie O'Brien, Katie O'Sullivan, Ciara O'Donoghue, Paula Donnely, Abigail Causer, Evan Lynskey, Second Row: Kim Murdock, Revena Murdock, Chloe Walsh, Aine Donovan, Kim Lynam, Lauren Lynskey, Back Row: Lorraine Lynam (Birr Theatre & Arts Centre) & Jared Madden (Facilitator).

Friends Programme

2006 saw the launch of the Friends Programme and will continue for 2007 with even more offers for Friends.

Support your theatre by becoming a Friend of Birr Theatre & Arts Centre for just €50 per annum. This will entitle you to:

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CHESTERFIELD CLOSE COMMUNITY GROUP

Chesterfield Community group is buzzing with a wide variety of events and activities taking place on a regular basis. These include a Preschool, after school, and a women's group.

The Pre-school caters for toddlers, aged 2 years 10 months to school going age and is open 3 days a week (Monday, Wednesday, Friday) from 9.30am to 12.30pm.

The women's group meet every fortnight on a Tuesday morning at 10.30am for a coffee and a scone.

Chesterfield Close community saw the re-opening of its after school service, which caters for primary school boys and girls, 1st class to 6th class open from 3.30pm - 5.30pm Monday to Thursday.

In July we ran two weeks of summer camp with up to 40 children attending and this proved to be a great success thanks to local groups such as The Birr Lions Club and St Vincent de Paul for their kind donations.

Without the support and backup from our Managers Respond, and FÁS this service would not have been possible.

For further details on any of the above services Chesterfield Close has to offer please contact Sarah, Kathleen, Caroline, Johanna at the Chesterfield Community building or phone 057-9122289 between 9.30am-12.30pm (Mon, Wed, Fri.) or 3.30pm-6.00pm Monday to Friday.

Chesterfield Community Hall is not just for residents of Chesterfield Close, it is a Community Hall for everyone.



Children who attended Chesterfield Close After-School Homework Club organised an End-of-Term show for parents, teachers and friends.





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This is Mary's second time to win the Award. We featured the story of Mary and her garden in last year's 'Review'.

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CRINKLE SPORTS AND RECREATION CENTRE

This year 2006 proved to be a great one for the Crinkle Club. The AGM was held in February and with a solid committee put in place it was hoped to bring many projects to fruition throughout the year. The committee set out by applying to various bodies for funding to help with these projects. The club had some outstanding work to be finalised from 2005 and this was achieved in the first half of the year. With our renovated viewing galleries, our 40x20 and 60x30 alleys both having been plastered and repainted our complex took on a whole new look. For the second half of the year we decided to install a state of the art heating system and also resurface the car park, both projects are ongoing and its hoped that they will be finished in November.

On the handball front we got a great welcome back into the competitive scene from the Irish Handball Council and we were thanked for our contribution to the sport throughout the years. The director of the IHC Lorean O'Rourke complimented us on our very strong approach to introducing children to the sport and said that we were an inspiration to every club in the country. For some time now there have been more than seventy children playing handball which is testament to this. The reintroduction of juvenile handball proved to be a success with our first ever female handballers playing for crinkle. The club will be entering both grades, A and B from under ten singles to under seventeen doubles for boys and girls in the forthcoming county championships.

Adult handball is well up in the club and county with over ten participants in the Leinster championship in all grades. In the All-Ireland final of golden masters A singles, Billy Mullins narrowly missed out on gold, but in the doubles of

the same competition Billy and Jim Guilfoyle took gold in the All-Ireland final. Billy lost in the final of the Irish Nationals Golden Masters A grade, Billy's success didn't stop there, he travelled to Canada in August to play in the world championships where he showed the world what a great left hander he was and in doing this he was narrowly beaten in the final of the Golden Masters A doubles where he partnered Roscommon's Martin Bruen. In the intermediate grade Conor O'Brien was beaten in the final of the golden gloves and also in the semi final of the Irish Nationals, his younger brother Noel showed what could be done with a little heart and determination he too took gold in the all Ireland Junior B final.

Our alleys were host to many underage inter provincial games, college finals, Leinster finals and many other competitions including, two senior 60x30 softball All-Ireland quarter finals, 2 senior 40x20 world championship qualifiers, 1 intermediate 60x30 softball all Ireland final, 2 junior A 60x30 hardball all Ireland finals sngl/dbls, 1 silver Ireland final, 1 ladies minor A 60x30 all Ireland final.

The committee are working with the South Offaly Forum in trying to establish a youth club. This project is in its infancy but it is hoped to bring it to fruition in the near future.

We have also worked alongside various other groups like west Offaly partnership, Offaly VEC, Fas and many more organisations. This brings great contentment to the committee and these groups involved in building our community. As a recreational facility our aim is to provide a source of enjoyment for people of all ages and promote the health and well being of every member in our club.

BIRR SOCIAL CLUB

The Club had yet another very successful year with our snooker tournament in aid of the Birr Hospice won by Darren Kelly's team who defeated Bank Of Ireland in a thrilling final on a score of 3-2.



Our darts tournament in aid of IHCPT was won by Sullivan's of Kilcormac who defeated Bord na Móna 14-11 in an excellent darts match.

On the golfing front incoming captain Tony McCormack won Capt Junior O Callaghan's prize, 2nd was Eddie Nevin and 3rd was Alan Naylor. At our away outing to Ballinasloe the winner was Eddie Nevin, 2nd Sheamie Breen and third Alan Naylor.

In our ring tournaments Graham Carroll beat Alan Naylor by 2 games to 1. Derek Kelly beat Eddie Nevin 2-1 in the Glanbia sponsored singles and Declan Murray beat Brian Nolan in the Ned Farrell memorial trophy.

It was with great sadness that we came to learn of the passing of a very faithful member in the late Mick Daly. Mick loved to play snooker, was no

Winners 2006 – O'Sullivan's

Social Darts Tournament in aid of I.H.C.P.T.

mean solo player and generally was a great craic. He will be sadly missed by his family and friends and fellow club members.



Winner of Glanbia Singles Snooker
Derek Kelly receiving trophy from Brian Guinan (Chairman).



Winner of Summer Singles Snooker
Graham Carroll receiving trophy from Brian Guinan (Chairman).



Our Chairman Brian Guinan retired from the RDF after 43 years, at his retirement function Brian thanked all who served with him down through the years.

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The society has been helping the poor and disadvantaged in Birr for over one hundred years. It is currently based in the former laundry of the old Convent of Mercy. Facilities comprise a shop, meeting room and furniture store.

Members are involved in visitations to people in need and the running of the shop. A weekly meeting is held on Monday nights to consider requests for assistance and to discuss the affairs of the conference. It opens and closes with a number of prayers that are common to all conferences. This year the members have also taken part in a National Shop Seminar in Head Office in Dublin, a Members Training Course and the annual SVP pilgrimage to Knock.

The single biggest activity during the year is the organisation and distribution of the Christmas List of assistance. Fuel distribution, which is carried out on a regular basis

throughout the winter, also involves substantial expenditure. As the society has a strong belief that education is a way out of the poverty trap for many people, as much support as possible is provided to students. In recent years this has included help for individual second and third level students and also the provision of a Breakfast Club in St. Brendan's Community School, for the last two years. Otherwise, support is provided to individuals or families who find it hard to make ends meet. Despite the new-found wealth in the country, there are many situations where it doesn't reach and the Society is the only place to find help.

Funding is obtained from various sources, including shop receipts, an annual summer draw, Christmas church gate collection, a car boot sale, Christmas Bingo Night draw and various individual donations throughout the year. The members of the Conference wish to express their appreciation for all contributions and other support received over the year.

Contact No. - 086 3440145



Cllr. John Carroll presents cheque to St Vincent de Paul Society

Cllr. John Carroll presents a cheque for €3,792 to Mr Pat Pilkington, former President, Birr Branch St Vincent de Paul Society who is pictured together with some committee members. The cheque was half the proceeds of a very successful Inaugural Chairman's Concert held at the end of the year in Birr Theatre and Arts Centre.

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C.R.K. ACTIVE RETIREMENT GROUP

We are affiliated to the Active Retirement Association who's Head Office is in Dublin. There are now over three hundred groups all over Ireland. The Logo of the association is: "Get inspired with the Active Retired". This year we have certainly been inspired.

We meet the third Monday of every month in the Community Hall, in Carrig when we have speakers, demonstrations or a quiz. Also we get together every Thursday evening for game of bowls, table games and a few exercises, then a cup of tea and a chat.

During the year we have been "To the Dogs" at Mullingar Stadium, a day in Dublin visiting the National Museum followed by the afternoon in the Dáil, which was most interesting. A day out to Coolepark and Ennis, a memorable evening at Bunratty Castle having a meal while being entertained by a group of traditional Irish Dancers and musicians. Next we went on an evening Vigil at Knock followed the next week joining other people from the diocese for Mass concelebrated by Bishop Willie Walsh at Holy Cross followed with a meal and entertainment at the Abbey Hotel.

During the winter, twelve of our members attended an art course and last week we were presented with our certificates, of which we are very proud having never attempted to draw or paint before. We have now resumed our class again.

In March we were joined by a few friends from Birr Active Retired Groups when we spent a few nights in Ballina. The weather was not very kind to us, but never the less we made the most of it by dancing the evenings away and having the craic.

Lastly but not least we spent a most enjoyable evening in October, when we were joined by Active Retired Groups from Birr, Lorrha, Eyrecourt and Cloughjordan. The evening began with Mass in the hall celebrated by Father Pat Greed followed by tea and sandwiches then an evening of dancing and singing.

Now we are planning for next year. New members are always welcome so why don't you join us and "Be Inspired"?

BIRR CHAMBER OF COMMERCE

The Birr Chamber of Commerce is a voluntary organisation which was established in the mid sixties. Our goal is to represent the views and aspirations of the local business community, through representation, lobbying and dialogue. The Birr Chamber is managed by an elected committee of a President, Treasurer and Secretary and who are in turn aided by representatives from varying business concerns who form the action groups. The three Action groups represent Retail/Commercial, Tourism and Town Promotion, and the Council Liaison group. Our future goals as a Chamber is to aide and drive business development in Birr, to facilitate businesses and individuals with relevant information and direction to enhance, develop or expand their own business, to expand our membership, to develop strategies through dialogue as to the most efficient and effective way to market Birr as shopping and entertainment destination. With the emergence of large business concerns entering the town in the near future and with the considerable housing development taking place, Birr is positioning itself as a proactive and expanding Town which offers varying attractions to suit all tastes. For further information or to contact the Birr Chamber of Commerce contact Nigel Craughwell on 05791-25800.

The members of the Committee and Action Groups are as follows:

President: Nigel Craughwell

Treasurer: Greg Smyth

Secretary: Jackie Hynes

Action Group Members

Tourism and Town Promotion: Martin Kearns, Barry Loughnane, Des O'Connor.

Retail/Commercial: Geraldine Kennedy, Kevin Mahon, Gordon Kennedy.

Council Liaison: Eddie Enright, Adrian Haines, Chamber Committee.



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BUSY BODIES MONTESSORI SCHOOL

Killeen, Rathcabbin, Roscrea, Co. Tipperary

2005

Our school returned on 28th August 2005. We took part in "Operation Christmas Child" a project of Samaritan's Purse. We collected 220 gift filled shoe boxes to be sent to countries like Armenia, Belarus, etc. for children who have nothing. These boxes were sent to Nenagh and from there brought to Dublin to be shipped out to these places.

This helped our children to think of others who are less well off. We also had a Halloween party. We had our Christmas play in Carrig Hall on the 18th December. All proceeds from our play went towards The Autistic Society and Down Syndrome Association. We collected 300 euros for autism research and 320 euros for the Offaly branch of Down Syndrome Association.

2006

In April, we went to Birr Theatre to see *Jack and the Beanstalk*. We had our Summer Camp from July 2nd to July 27th in Carrig School. Best wishes to the following children who left us for National School:

Killeen School – Emma Harding, James Harding, Bill Burns, Ella Conn and Dara Purcell.

Carrig School – Michelle Fogarty, Niamh Costello, Lily

Whelan, Clare Hogan, Micheal Egan, Dylan Hogan, Luke Harris and Mark Cleary.

Lorrha School – Mikey Houlihan, Julie Boons and Michaela Young.

Rathcabbin School – Emer Hogan, Saoirse Guinan and Aimee Ryan.

Eglisk School – Eoghan Slevin

Redwood School – Stephen O' Sullivan and James Guinan

Crinkle School – Sarah Gorman, Aran Curley and Chloe Quirke

Birr Boys N.S. – Oisin Wells and Andrew Martinez

Birr Girls - Nessa Harte

Oxmantown School – Elizabeth Harding, Raymond Armitage and Harrison Q Collins.

Roscrea School – Fred Webb

We re-opened our school for another school year on August 29th 2006 for another school year.

Thanking you,

Ann Delahunt Smyth

CAMCOR & SCURRAGH SUMMER CAMP 2006



Children, parents and supervisors pictured here in front of the bouncing castle during the 2006 Summer Camp held at the Camcor Community Centre.

Donovan Finnerty and Conor Roddy were winners of the Art Competition during a very successful and fun-filled Summer Camp organised by the Camcor and Scurragh Community Group. They are pictured here with Ms Judy O'Neill and Sr Roberta at the presentation of awards. Congratulations boys! Keep up the good work.



Judy O'Neill, Donovan Finnerty, Conor Roddy, Sr Roberta.

JUBILEE CONGRATULATIONS



Sr Anna May Guest

Sr Anna May Guest and Sr Maeve Quinlan celebrated the Golden Jubilee of their Religious Profession in St. Brendan's Church, Birr and afterwards at the County Arms Hotel, Birr on Saturday 27th June 2006.

May they both enjoy many more years of faithful ministry in the Mercy Congregation.



Sr Maeve Quinlan

FROM THE PAST



BIRR - RATHCABBÍN DANCING TROUPE

Prizewinners in All-Ireland Céili Dancing Championship, Oldcastle, 1961

Back L-R: J. Bowe, M. Brophy (R.I.P.), P. Hayes, P. O'Meara (R.I.P.), W. Smyth, M. O'Meara, P. Molloy, T. Kennedy, W. Morris, J. Whelan.

Front: D. Brereton, E. Windsor, M. O'Meara, F. Windsor, P. Windsor, L. Ryan, B. Egan, E. Brereto.

MRS EILEEN RYAN CELEBRATES HER 100TH BIRTHDAY

A hail and hearty Mrs Eileen Ryan, Railway View, Roscrea celebrated her 100th birthday on Saturday the 14th of October along with a large gathering of family, friends and, in particular, her "younger sister" Lucy at 93 years of age.

Fr. Michael Collins presented Eileen with a letter of congratulations from President Mary McAleese and Fr Tom Corbett made a presentation on behalf of the Parish of Roscrea.

Eileen's mother, Helena Flannery, was born in Strandhill, Co. Sligo and came to Roscrea at an early age as governess to Violet Corcoran whose family owned the Portarlinton Arms Hotel (now the Damer Court Hotel) in Roscrea. Helen married Paddy McEvoy, of Birr Road, Roscrea, in Mount St Joseph's Abbey. Paddy fought in the Boer War and, on his return, worked at Inane for Vincent Jackson, the owner of the estate and his next employer was Major Henry Palmer of Ballinlough, Kings County (now Offaly).

Eileen was born in 1906 at Ballinlough, in Coolderry, and christened in Kilcolman Church. One of 6 sisters, Sheila, Lucy, Kathleen, May and Esther, the family later moved to Roscrea and settled in Glentara.

In 1928, Eileen married Denis Ryan, son of John Ryan of Ashbury and Bridget Dooley. John worked as a shunter on the railway and three of his sons were engine drivers for the Great Southern and Western Railway Company. Eileen's husband, Dinny, worked for George Earle for thirty-six years. This family business was on Barrick Hill in 1893. Crawford's are in business there today.

Eileen and Dinny had four boys and seven girls, John, Denis, Billy, Michael, Mena, Helen, Sheila, Lucy, Mary



A hail and hearty Eileen Ryan celebrating her 100th Birthday

Kathleen and Noelie. The wider family includes 53 grandchildren, 76 great grandchildren and 2 great great grandchildren. Mary, her daughter, lives in Whiteford, Birr.

A woman very involved in her hometown, she was a founder member of the I.C.A. in Roscrea and a member of Vincent de Paul and was also a committee member of the Community Centre.

"We walk this path but once. Any kindness that we can show or good that we can do, let us do it now, for we shall not pass this way again" – a belief practised for a lifetime and a lesson to us all.



The Ryan clan celebrate their mum's birthday



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BIRR TIDY TOWNS

Birr flourish as it has the capability of doing

At the recent AGM of Birr Tidy Town the following delegates were elected;

Cllr. Denis Sheils	Chairperson
Rita Frawley & Peter Stokes	Ass. Secretary
Paul Barber	Treasurer
Cllr. Ann Hynes Spain	P.R.O.

Committee Members:

Ann Harte, Denis O Sullivan, Eileen O Sullivan, Eamon Hahessey, John Hoare, Mr. & Mrs. T. Lawlor, Ann Ward, Cllr. Michael Campbell, Cllr. John Carroll, Cllr. Tony McLoughlin, M. Frawley, Jimmy Lucey, Noel Scully.

At the meeting, the new Chairman thanked the outgoing Chairperson, Ann Harte, for her hard work and commitment during the year, along with her dedicated committee members and also Birr Town Council for the many great improvements seen throughout the town to date. Cllr. Denis Sheils and Cllr. John Carroll agreed

to continue to liaise with the Town Council.

The Chairman paid special tribute to all involved in the outstanding workmanship in the development of the new Civic Offices and Library. The renovation of this beautiful building complements the surrounding structures. Also the Playground Committee for their achievement in providing our children with a much needed facility.

Litter was addressed as being a major issue in the town and was one of the areas that lost points in the marking scheme this year. It was suggested that concrete litter bins would be more useful in deterring vandalism.

Approach roads were addressed by adding features on newly intended roundabouts.

A recycling plant, where people could get rid of their obsolete appliances, was urgently needed.

The Chairperson and Committee members called on the Community to take pride in their town and aim for higher standards this year.

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CRINKLE TIDY VILLAGES

CRINKLE TIDY VILLAGES ASSOCIATION

Crinkle Tidy Villages Association was reformed in 2003, after a lapse of four years. A group of local people came together with the aim of improving the local environment and, as a consequence, generating a sense of community.

The year 2006 has been another busy year in which we continued to make steady progress with our Five Year Plan and achieved some of our goals.



New trees on Military Road.

Tidy Towns Competition:

The Tidy Towns competition encourages entrants to set achievable goals and make steady progress. Small steady steps are better than one giant leap.

We set ourselves a target of improving our score in the Tidy Towns Competition by 5 points. We surpassed this target and actually scored 208 points, an increase of 9 on the previous year and an overall increase of 26 in four years.

The Committee:

The Association has a committee of nineteen people and ropes in many extras for litter pick ups and planting flowers. You may have seen the team out in Crinkle on a Tuesday evening in their yellow high viz jackets. The dry spell this year placed a great strain on our members and it was all hands to the pump (or watering can) in order to keep the flowers alive. Some members were even heard praying for rain!

We operate a two pronged strategy – do it yourself and, if you can't do it yourself, persuade the County Council to do it.

We meet regularly with the local engineer and we have had great cooperation from the Offaly County Council team in the area.

House and Garden Competition:

This year for the first time we ran a competition for the best use of paint and best flower garden (sponsored by Dulux and Crinkle Merchants). This competition rewarded those households who had made a significant effort in presenting their homes to a high standard. The winner of 1st prize was Michael Deegan, Military Road and 2nd prize winner was Tommy Doherty, The Terrace. There were eleven other highly commended householders. A special commendation was awarded to John O'Gorman, Crinkle N.S., for the best public building.

Progress to Date:

Since re-establishing in 2003, after a four year lapse, the Association has built on the work started by the original committee in 1997 and 1998.

- Almost two hundred trees were planted in this four year period.
- The reconstruction of the stone walls at Whiteford Bridge (part funded by Offaly LEADER+ company)
- Erection of bi-lingual street signs
- Village regeneration scheme on Swag Street
- Information Boards erected in the old Military Cemetery, recording the information on the remaining headstones and depicting the wildflower species. This data was collected by the children of Crinkle N.S. under the supervision of their teacher, Mrs. Kelly
- Maintenance of public green areas through the services of a worker under the RSS scheme (LEADER sponsored)



The newly repaired bridge at Whiteford.

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Old military graveyard.

projects which we will be carrying out in the next year or two:

- Plant Trees in Grove Street and Hawthorn Drive
- Continue to erect street signs in new housing developments
- Erect Information Board on the old Military Barracks
- Complete the development of woodland area beside the school by sowing suitable woodland plants and flowers e.g. bluebells, violets etc.
- Complete the sowing of hornbeam trees along the length of Military Road

Some of our goals are short term and others are for the long term. However, our Five Year Plan is not set in stone and can be added to as necessary or as a good project is identified or becomes achievable.

Local Support:

None of this would have been possible without generous support from local people, who contributed to our table quizzes and church gate collections and most generously to our door to door appeal last May, when we had a very encouraging response. We would like to thank all who responded so generously to our appeal.

Plans for the Future:

Whilst we have made significant progress since 1997, there is still a long way to go in enhancing our village and building on the unique architectural and natural heritage which we have in Crinke. The following are some of the

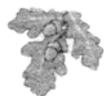


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BIRR LIONS CLUB REPORT

During the past twelve months Birr Lions Club lost two of its most esteemed and committed members – the late Billy Butler and the late David Dowley. R.I.P. Billy passed away last November after a short illness. He had been a Lion for several years and served as President in 1988-89. Amongst the many tributes paid to Billy, the words constantly repeated included: gentleman, energetic, kind, dapper, time for everybody – words which describe Billy to a T. He loved life, cherished his family and friends and will be sadly missed by them all.

David Dowley was our first President in 1974-75 and had to institute the format of the Presidency. The greatest tribute that can be paid to that format is that it has survived almost unchanged for thirty-two years. As Club Treasurer over a long period, he was utterly dedicated to his office, was meticulous in looking after the Club's finances. His passing will be a big loss, not only to Birr Lions but also to Clodagh and their family.

Ar Dheis Dé go raibh a anam uasal – ní bheidh a leithéad arís ann.

The Club would like to congratulate the Birr Community Playground Initiative for putting in place a very important

and much needed facility for the youth of our town. Providing resources for the youth is one of the prime aims of Birr Lions Club. We joined with the Playground Initiative in running a raffle to raise funds for the project. We also provided substantial funding to purchase equipment for the playground.

The new TELEPHONE DIRECTORY was produced in May of this year – a very opportune time, corresponding with the time when local telephone numbers were changed. The project was achieved with skill and speed due to the tremendous efforts of President Liam Butler and his sub-committee. Our very best thanks are due to the business community of Birr and district who took advertisements in the Directory to help ensure its success.

The Club, through its various activities, continues to support the youth, the elderly and the underprivileged in the Birr District area.

Finally, our thanks to you, the general public, for supporting our Church Gate Collection and our Day of Fast – your generosity is very much appreciated.

BIRR BRIDGE CLUBS

Birr has the distinction of supporting three bridge clubs in the town, each of which is active and thriving. Birr Bridge Club is the oldest and play takes place in the County Arms Hotel, Birr on Thursday nights.

The Birr "66" club plays on Monday nights.

The Camcor Club plays on Wednesday nights.

The active season for the clubs is usually from about the end of September or early October until early May.

The clubs tend to close down from early May until October.

Each club has its own active membership and club officers. The officers are elected on a yearly basis.

While the clubs are independent of each other there is always a certain amount of contact and play between members of the various clubs.

In addition, the three clubs come together on an annual basis to play for the prestigious Desmond. A. Houlihan trophy. This is a competition which is held on a yearly basis in memory of the late Desmond Houlihan who over the years distinguished himself as an international bridge player.

Visitors are always welcome to play in the three clubs.

Peter O'Meara
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Caption??

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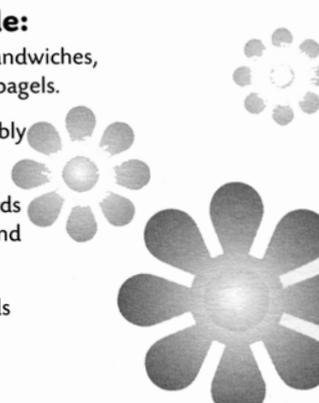
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from breath the spirit comes by Eileen Casey

When she had stepped out of silk skinned
kimonos, the ball gowns worn at Lissadell,
I folded them
in soft tissues of rose lit rooms.
Exchanged for military uniform
there was never enough talk of revolution
of guns, heroic deeds.
All that summer
released at last from school,
I was free to walk the mile to Crinkle
where the barracks lay in ruins.
There I saw the wounds of Easter
bleed into evening skies
and in wild fields
I picked curls of blackberries
glossed as tumbling ivy.
Her face was the sun itself,
how could others compare?

Women who bent over lean cooking pots
who fired out dull salvos
into the early hours, sewing machines
stitching sounds of making do.
Our mothers fought other battles,
were casualties of other wars. Yet,

from breath the spirit comes.
Like leaves shed from green seasons
words and deeds
seep into birthing soil
breathe life into each new generation.

Stripped to naked truths
who they were, how they shaped us,
their victories
are just as binding, just
as beautiful.

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OBITUARY

VERY REV. CANON JOHN SHALLOO – 1924-2006

The passing to his final reward of Canon John Shalloo A.P. brought to a close 57 years of faithful priesthood, 20 of which were spent in the Parish of Birr.

Born in O' Callaghan's Mills, Co. Clare, on May 6th 1924, Canon John was educated at the local primary school and St. Flannan's College, Ennis. Following Leaving Certificate, he entered the National Seminary at St. Patrick's College, Maynooth. His years at Maynooth coincided with the Emergency and he often recalled the harsh conditions at the college in those years of rationing. He was ordained to the priesthood in June 1949 and immediately was appointed to the staff of St. Flannan's College.

The young Fr. John was a great athlete and took enormous interest in school teams in addition to his academic duties.

He was to spend a period of 25 years at the college, becoming Vice-President in 1969 and College President in 1970.

His first parish appointment was in 1974, as curate to Shannon, Co. Clare. He became Parish Priest of Shannon in 1975 and, while there, he led the construction of the new church, which last year celebrated its 25th anniversary.

Always altruistic, in 1983 he volunteered to serve on the Killaloe Diocesan Mission to the Diocese of Mutare in Zimbabwe. There he worked closely with the Carmelite Order and served with Fr. Tony Cahir, among others.

He was recalled to Ireland in July 1986 to succeed Msgr. P.J. Hamell V.G. as Parish Priest of Birr. Thus began a fruitful 20 years of ministry in this Parish. In 1988 the late Bishop Michael A. Harty appointed him as Canon of the Cathedral Chapter.

During his term as Parish Priest, he greatly enhanced the facilities at St. Brendan's Church with the building of the new sacristy and conference room. This building will serve as a lasting memorial to his time in Birr. The Canon was also instrumental in the reorganisation of the Marian Hall Committee and took a great interest in the continued success of the hall. The Parish Schools were also tremendously improved over this period with the extension and refurbishment of St. Brendan's Boys, Carrig and Crinkle Primary Schools. Major works were also carried out on the Mercy Primary School.

However, it will be for his devotion to his spiritual duties that Canon Shalloo will be most fondly remembered. His immense reverence for the Blessed Sacrament was an example to all. He had a great affinity with the sick and many



Caption???

recall with gratitude his visits to the sick and housebound. Up to a few weeks before his death, Canon John was a familiar sight on his weekly visit to patients in Tullamore Hospital. He shared the highs and lows of parishioners from baptism and marriage to funeral Masses. It was a great source of joy to him that St. Brendan's Church hosted three ordinations during his time in Birr.

Although never forgetting his Clare roots, Canon John was an avid supporter of the Birr hurlers and rejoiced in their county and All-Ireland successes. He had grown to love his adopted Parish of Birr and, on retirement as Parish Priest in 1999, he chose to remain in the Parish for his remaining years. Blessed with a strong constitution, Canon Shalloo continued to serve as assistant priest until his death, completing duties that would have fazed a younger man.

His peaceful passing from this life, at the Midland Regional Hospital, Tullamore on the morning of February 8th, brought to an end almost six decades of faithful service to the people of Killaloe Diocese.

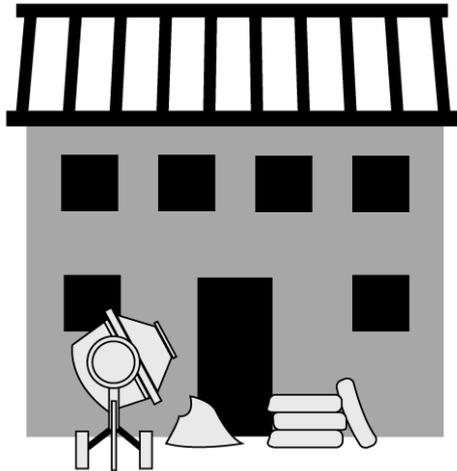
The large crowds attending his lying in repose at the Funeral Home, reception and Funeral Mass at St. Brendan's Church were a testimony to the esteem in which he was held. Canon Shalloo was laid to rest in the Church Grounds following Concelebrated Mass. The Chief Celebrant was Bishop Willie Walsh.

He is survived by his sisters, Chrissie and Nora, brother-in-law, sisters-in-law, nephews, nieces, Bishop and Clergy of the Killaloe Diocese and Parishioners of Birr Parish.

May he rest in peace.

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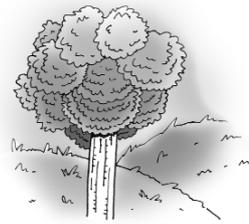


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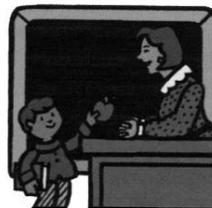
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BIRR MENTAL HEALTH ASSOCIATION

By Claire Hernon

2006 was another successful year for our association

Again we took a number of people on holidays to Galway. There were a number of very enjoyable parties organised by our own and other Mental Health Associations.

Mental Health Association members took a number of people to the Kilbeggan Races during the Summer months. Visits were made to Kilkenny Castle and local areas of historical interest. Transport is provided to all events by the Mental Health Associations minibus.

Deserving cases are catered for in times of financial difficulties and at Christmas by the provision of hampers, fuel etc. Practical help is also provided in the area of home improvements.

Members of our Association visit the mentally ill and are always available on the phone for support to people who may need someone to talk to.

We aim to educate the younger generation by organising quizzes and involving secondary schools in the National Public Speaking Competition. This encourages them to research the subject of mental illness and have an understanding and acceptance of same.

Last year we carried out a survey to assess the needs of people with mental health problems

While they were very satisfied with supports and services available from Monday to Friday, it was highlighted that there is quite an amount of iso-

lation and loneliness for people, especially those living alone, at the weekends.

In view of this, the Birr Mental Health Association decided to commence social evenings for those people on the first Sunday of each month. These events consisted of social support, music, dancing, bingo, table quizzes, slide shows and evening tea. This was a pilot scheme to be run for a six-month period to include the winter months and the benefits of same will be reviewed in 2006. This was a successful venture and we have to arrange a busy programme again this winter.

All the above events were provided as result of the generosity of people who contributed to our fundraising during the year. Our fundraising included Church Gate Collections, Ladies Mini Marathon, Raffles, etc...We are still sending people to Lourdes from the funds raised by our 2004 Golf Classic and will continue to do so for some time.

Contact Persons

Ms. Jackie Conneely, Chairperson

Ms. Claire Hernon, Honorary Secretary

Ms. Mary Kerins, Treasurer

Ms. Veronica Higgins, Public Relations Officer

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BIRR ACTIVE RETIREMENT CLUB

Since its foundation in June 2003, Birr Active Retirement Club has gone from strength to strength. The club continues to meet twice monthly in the Birr Resource Centre, Glebe Street. Over the course of 2005/2006 the group undertook a varied programme of activities.

- Flower arranging
- Computer Course
- First Aid
- Fire Safety
- Foot Care
- Hearing problems

The club purchased Pitch and Putt equipment and members had lessons from Kevin at the Golf Club. Now, on summer days, the clubs are put to good use in Banagher Pitch and Putt Club. Some members went "To the Dogs" in Mullingar, and had good fun. We didn't break the bookies!

To cater for music lovers, we travelled to Nenagh to see "The Merry Widow" and the National Concert Hall for "The Magic of Vienna". What a treat!

For our Summer outing, we travelled to the "Enchanted Vale of Fore" with its seven wonders and then to Tullynally Castle and Gardens where we had a most enjoyable time.

June saw us on the road again, this time for a guided tour of Farmleigh House and Gardens. The fine Georgian House formerly owned by the Guinness family has now been completely refurbished and is used to accommodate visiting dignitaries and high level Government meetings. Dinner in the Spa Hotel rounded off a wonderful day.

In July, we received a surprise invitation to a Summer Garden Party at Áras an Uachtárain. We were warmly greeted by President Mary McAleese and Dr. Martin McAleese and enjoyed an evening of good food, wine and wonderful entertainment.

We would like to take this opportunity to thank all those who have contributed in any way to our association. If you are active and retired, why not join us, you will be most welcome. Here's to another good year.



Birr Active Retirement Group on their visit to Áras an Uachtárain

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BIRR NEIGHBOURHOOD WATCH

Neighbourhood Watch is a voluntary organisation run by members of the Community with the aim of helping to reduce crime in the locality and offering security assistance to those in need, especially the elderly.

It is under the auspices of the Garda Síochána. As the crime rate and antisocial behaviour increases, it is even more important to have a local Neighbourhood Watch. New members are always welcome to attend our regular meetings. Venue and date of meetings are always published in the Birr News in the Midland Tribune.

The organisation receives funding, but monies are used up fairly quickly and there is not a Pool in reserve for emergencies. Thankfully, we have received donations from Birr Lions Club to boost our pot. Also people in the Parish always give generously when we have our annual Church gate collection. We also raise money through holding Raf-

file's, especially at Easter. Prizes are donated by retail outlets and committee members also.

Over the years Birr Neighbourhood Watch has supplied a vast number of security devices namely:

- Alarm Systems
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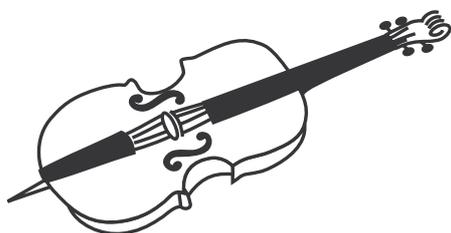
Members have committed a great deal of time, energy and funds to help the elderly and vulnerable of our community feel a little safer in their own homes.

BIRR COMHALTAS ACTIVITIES

Comhaltas Ceoltóirí Éireann continues to uphold the Irish cultural traditions in the area. Instrumental music is taught at a weekly class in the Marian Hall and the interest in the set dancing worldwide is responded to at a well attended weekly session also in the Marian Hall. Both are in a position to accept new applications after the Christmas break.

The annual celebratory concert held in November is always eagerly looked forward to and, in addition to the celebrities, the opportunity is used to showcase upcoming talent from the local area. The annual Féile na Nollag, an evening of Irish music, song and dance, held during Christmas time, is also a permanent fixture in the calendar.

Set dancers from far and near attend the Annual Set Dancing Festival held in the town over the June Bank Holiday week-end. It features the country's top Céili Bands as well as workshops in solo traditional dancing and set dancing. Comhaltas is always anxious to attract new members and anyone interested in supporting the work of promoting any aspect of our culture, whether as a performer or a supporter should contact branch Secretary Donal Morrissey at 087 - 9347968 or any branch officer.



JOINT POLICING COMMITTEE

Offaly is among seven counties selected for a Joint Policing Committee. The matters to be considered by the committee and sub-committees may include traffic, vandalism, anti-social behaviour, underage drinking, casual trading, litter, planning for events attracting large crowds, community based crime prevention initiatives, Garda Divisional and district annual policing plans and authority initiatives.

There are 4 joint policing committees in Offaly, Edenderry Town Council, Offaly Town Council, and Birr Town Council. This is a pilot scheme which is scheduled to have two meetings a year between the various groups. The Minister for Justice Mr. Michael McDowell TD, must be complimented for his inventiveness for providing a link between elected members of the community, voluntary sectors and the Gardai in each town. The formation of a link between the various agencies and the Gardai will lead to better communication between the Gardai and the public in our community.



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BIRR COMMUNITY GAMES 2006

The highlight of 2006 was the fact that Birr entered so many new events - camogie, draughts, drama, music, to name but a few.

The success story of last year has to be the girls U-14 camogie team. This was history in the making as Birr had never entered a camogie team in community games previously. They beat Tullamore easily and then found themselves in the county final against Kilcormac/Killoughey. This was an extremely tight match that went to extra time. The team dug deep and emerged victors and won the county final for the first time in their history. They cruised through the Leinster Championship reaching the semi-finals in Carlow where they easily beat Westmeath to reach the final. There they encountered a very tough Carlow team and this match went all the way to the wire. Amid great scenes of joy, they again emerged as winners and now their sights were set on Mosney. The standard of camogie in Mosney was high and they were unfortunate to meet a very strong Galway team. However, even though they lost this game, it was a great experience for them and they won Bronze medals for their efforts. Well done to all the girls, the team was :- Shauna Carroll, Orlaith Kirwin, Caroline Soupe, Sarah Pilkington, Julie Stephens, Siobhan Rodgers, Dearbhaile Sheils, Kelly Ann Milne, Chanice Lynskey, Tracy Milne, Jane Ryan, Emily Quinlan, Rebecca Hctor, Katie Masterson, Lucy Ryan, and Nicole Pardy. Thanks to manager, trainer and selectors; Mick Hough, Martin McCarthy and Pat Ryan. A home coming celebration was organised for the team and all the Mosney participants in Birr Rugby Club. Many thanks to the Rugby club for providing the venue, Camillus King for taking photos and the committee members who helped out with the catering.

The Art and Model Making competition took place earlier in the year through the Primary Schools. The local winners progressed to the County Finals in Clara. Birr won 7 County Medals, including one gold medal for Conor Sampson in U-10's Boys Art. Conor represented Offaly in Mosney in August, well done Conor!

A new event for 2006 was Draughts. Local heats were held in the Marian Hall and three teams travelled to the county finals in Portarlinton. Birr did extremely well to win silver medals in U-12 and U-14 events.

The local heats of the swimming took place earlier in the year. Birr swimming pool was proud to host the County Finals for the first time ever. It was a very well run event and thanks to the pool committee for providing a very fine venue. Birr won 17 county titles, including 9 gold medals. Congratulations to Sam Pearson, Liam Pingree, Chris Pingree, Padraig Connolly, Sinead Garland, Shauna Carroll, Niamh West, Amy Kelly, Clodagh Bergin and Aoife Cashen who represented Offaly in the National Finals held in the National Aquatic Centre at Blanchardstown. Thanks to MJ Grogan for all his help with these events.

Another new event for Birr was the Culture Corner event. This included, Drama, Dance, Music and Singing. Birr travelled to Clara for the county final and entered many

events. Caitriona Houlihan, Shauna Cleary and Ciara Fogarty took the gold medal in the Drama event. The girls travelled to Mosney in May, where the standard was extremely high. Hopefully Birr will continue to participate in these events.

We entered an U-13 and U-15 boys handball competition. Birr managed to claim both county titles. Unfortunately the teams did not progress any further in the Leinster competition. Thanks to John Hayes for his time and efforts.

As usual Birr had a great turn out for the local athletic events held earlier in the year. Many thanks to Highfield Soccer club for providing their facilities throughout the year. The County Finals held in Tullamore Harriers was a huge success for Birr with the medal tally standing at 26. Training for Mosney continued until August. Birr had 11 athletes who competed in Mosney:- Oisin Murphy, Joseph Kennedy, Michael Kennedy, Ryan O Meara, Ronan Murphy, Megan Parsons, Shannon Quegan, Bronagh Murphy, Kayleigh Sheils, Amelia Field, and Danielle Boyd. Well done to all concerned. An enjoyable week-end was had by all, thanks to Valerie Reynolds, Margaret Irwin, and Catherine Barry for their assistance throughout the year.

The boys hurling team had a very challenging competition and reached the county final for the second year in a row but, unfortunately, they were beaten by a very strong Shinrone team. They have their Silver County medals to show for all their hard work.. Thanks to Gary Cahill, Matt Finnane and Ollie Nolan for their help.

The boys U-11 Rugby team had a difficult task to hold onto their existing national title. Many of last years team were over age this year, but that didn't stop Birr reaching the County Final. This was a very tight match with Edenderry and went to extra time, unfortunately luck was not with them on the day. Well done to all the boys who played their hearts out, thanks also the Gerry Dooley and David Baker for their assistance.

The girls U-15 outdoor soccer team under the guidance of Amanda Byrne, reached the County final by beating Ferbane at home. Their opponents in the final, Killeigh, proved too strong on the day but many of these girls are under age again next year and they will be hoping to go one step further. Thanks to Lisa Byrne for coaching the team.

The committee would like to thank all the parents and individuals who gave their support and time throughout the year. Thanks to Doolys Hotel for providing a venue for meetings, Birr Credit Union for their Financial Donation during the year and John Gleeson for sponsoring Polo Shirts.

The current committee is: Chairperson : Josephine Rigney, Secretary : Catherine Barry, Treasurer : John Gleeson, Margaret Irwin, Valerie Reynolds, Noel Coughlan, John Hayes, Alan Hoare, Tony Murphy, and John Carroll. We are always looking for more help, so if you would like to get involved, please contact any of the committee members. 2006 was an eventful year, so roll on 2007.



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WILMER TENNIS CLUB

The Wilmer Tennis Club has enjoyed another active year with plenty of activity on the courts over the Past 12 months.

The club organises plenty of tournaments spread throughout the year and these provide both competitive action and a lot of fun for members.



Una O'Gorman was judged to be the best dressed lady at the Wilmer Tennis Club Vintage Tournament. She is presented with her prize by Ann O'Meara (right) judge and sponsor.

The Club welcomed a lot of new members this year and it was good to see a number of old faces returning to play again. Hopefully, they are enjoying their tennis and will be part of the club for many years to come.

While the competitive element is an important part of the club activity, the club is also keen to emphasise the social aspect of club activity. Events like the Vintage tournament and the Christmas tournament are great fun events, where tennis is played but fun and enjoyment are just as important.

One of the highlights of the year is the annual Senior Open Week, which attracted a very good entry this year. The glorious weather was a great bonus and added to the enjoyment of the week.

The event was well supported by many of the surrounding clubs and the titles were well distributed with prizes going to Roscrea, Athlone, Killaloe, Nenagh and Puckane, while the host club also collected two titles. The Wilmer winners were Brian Mullins & Suzanne Dwyer, who won the Handicapped Mixed Doubles 'B' title, while Carmel Kehoe & Mary Horan won an all Wilmer Ladies Doubles 'C' final.

There was some excellent tennis played throughout the

week, and a couple of late night matches provided great entertainment.

A fine crowd turned up on finals night and they were treated to some titanic battles. The tremendous standard of play kept the crowd enthralled until the last ball was struck.

The presentation of prizes was made in the clubhouse afterwards by the Club President, Eileen Delaney.

Club chairman John O'Callaghan, extended thanks to everyone who had helped make the event such a success. He paid particular thanks to Claire Nee, who was the chief organiser, for the efficient and smooth way in which the Open Week was run.

There was a wonderful array of prizes on display and the support of generous sponsors helped to provide those prizes. The chairman thanked all their sponsors, which included Whelahans Newsagent; AIB; Bank of Ireland; Paul Barber; Mary Noonan, Hedgerows; Londis - Sean and Catherine O'Toole; John Hassett, Crinkle Merchants; Liam Butler; Brian and Lorraine Hogan, Axis Investor Relations Ltd; A Sportman's Dream; Jim Cashen, Remax; Noel Coughlan Painters; Benny Larkin; Smith and O'Mahony and Henri Hoffman.

John Hassett of Crinkle Merchants very kindly donated a lawn mower, which was raffled. Tickets were sold throughout the week and the lucky winner was Michelle Tierney.

The annual Vintage Tennis tournament has been a feature of Birr Vintage Week since the early years of the festival and this year's event will go down as one of the best ever.

There was a great turnout for the event with good support from other clubs who joined club members for a great night's fun. Thanks to everyone who made the effort to dress in vintage costume for the night.

The prizes for the best dressed lady and gent were won by Una O'Gorman and Joe Harding respectively. Thanks to Ann O'Meara, who judged the competition, and who also sponsored by prize for the best dressed lady and thanks also to Seamus Pierce, Bank Of Ireland, Birr, who sponsored the prize for the best dressed man. Thanks to other sponsors on the night, including Company Hairdressers, Portlaoise, and Glennon's Cash & Carry.

The tournament winners were Michael Costello and Betty Hunt, Joe Harding and Carol Thompson.

Everyone had a very enjoyable night. Thanks to Patricia Molloy and Grainne Cashen, who organised the event.

The club also entered a float in the annual Vintage Parade and won a prize for their efforts. Thanks to Peter Eastwood, who organised the float and to everyone who helped put the float together and also to those



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who took their places on the float on the day.

The club was well represented in the Midland League again this year and, while no trophy returned to the club in 2006, the teams represented the club with distinction and a couple of them weren't far off ultimate success.

The Kit Kat Parks tennis programme continues to be very popular and once again over 120 children attended for a week's coaching during the Summer and had a very enjoyable time. Encouraging young children to play is very important, particularly in this day and age when there is lots of talk of obesity and children not getting enough exercise. Parks Tennis is a great start for them and, hopefully, many of them will practice what they have learned and will continue to play for many years to come. After all, it is young people who are the future of the club.

Other events which were held during the year included the Spring League, Inter-Firms tournament, John Joe Sheeran tournament and Junior Open Week.

The club is always delighted to welcome new members. The past year has seen a number of new faces around the club and hopefully, 2007 will see many more. Make it your New Year's resolution for next year to take up tennis and join the Wilmer!



Joe Harding was the best dressed man at Birr Wilmer Tennis Club Vintage Tournament. Joe (left) received his prize from Ann O'Meara, Judge.



Wilmer Tennis Club held its annual Vintage Tournament in August. Pictured are some of the participants in Vintage costume.

Front row (l. to r.) Grainne Cashen, Siobhan Dwyer (Vintage Week Committee), Una O'Gorman (winner Best Dressed Lady), Ann O'Meara (judge and sponsor of Best Dressed Lady), Orla Watkins (Vintage Week Committee), Joe Harding (Best Dressed Man), Patricia Molloy, Noeleen Harding. Back row; John O'Callaghan, Jan, Kathleen Pardy, Carol Thompson, Stephanie Harte, Vivienne Crawford, Cathy Owens, Clive Kerron, Mary Horan, Gillian Kerron, Brian Hogan, Dermot Horan, Pat O'Gorman, Karen Smith, Liam Cashen.



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GOLFING IN THE GLENNES

Management AGM

A very well attended Management AGM got comprehensive details on the progress of the Club over the past year. Interestingly the 'year' consisted of ten months as the AGM had been moved to December from its traditional January date. Chairman Jim McMenamin opened the meeting and called on all present to observe a minute's silence for our deceased members. Hon. Sec. Mary O'Gorman read the minutes of the previous AGM and then gave her usual comprehensive and detailed account of the club's happenings during 2005. A few salient points should be noted. The membership now stands at 961 with 111 applications processed during the year. The final payment on the new lands was made in May. She commented on the success of the Development Classic and congratulated the staff on having the course in such good order. She noted that a number of machines had been bought and that one thousand furze had been planted. She was delighted to see that the Juvenile section was going from strength to strength under the direction of Kathleen Doorley, Captain Ann McIntyre and Bernard McGurk. Hon. Treas. Pat Madden, in his report, gave a thorough account of the Club's finances which are in a healthy state. Needless to add his report was received with acclaim.

Management Committee for 2005-2006

Chairman John O'Hare; Vice-Chair Ann McIntyre; Hon. Sec. Mary O'Gorman; Hon. Treas. Gemma Butler; Committee: Presidents Ena Guilfoyle and Des. McDowell; Vice-Captains' Yvonne Boland and Billy Donlon; Arthur Joyce, Jim McMenamin, Gladys O'Meara, Kathleen Doorley, Pat Madden. Tony Hogan (PRO) and Noel Molloy.

Welcome



Central Towns Winners at Tullamore

In January, our new catering manager, Cathal McIntyre and his staff, were welcomed to the club. He was guaranteed a warm *céad míle fáilte* and strong support from the members. Warm thanks and good wishes were expressed to John Foley and his staff on his departure as catering manager.

Spring Leagues

The Ladies Spring League, sponsored by Birr Credit Union was won by Kathleen Doorley's team. The winning team was Kathleen Doorley, Mary Grennan, Madge Lally, Jo Graham, Leilagh Hogan and Aileen Watkins. The Men's Spring League, also sponsored by Birr Credit Union, was won by Vice-Captain Billy Donlon's team.

Senior Scratch Cup

Patrick Higgins (2) of Mullingar Golf Club was the impressive winner of the Bank of Ireland sponsored Birr Scratch Cup. With scores of 67 and 69, this was Patrick's first Scratch Cup win.

Presidents' Prize

President Des McDowell's prize took place at the end of June and was carried off by Joe Rowland with a fine score. The President thanked Brendan O'Carroll of Premier Insulations for his very generous sponsorship. Lady President Ena Guilfoyle's prize took place in August and the James Hamill sponsored prize was won by Agnes Doolan.

Captains' Prizes

Lady Captain Ann McIntyre's prize sponsored by John Grennan and Sons, Rath, attracted a splendid entry with well over a hundred entrants. Ann congratulated the winner, Agnes Doolan, on her fine score and noted that run-

Juvenile Captain, Kate Flynn's prize.

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ner-up, Evelyn Lynch, had lost seven shots the previous week.

Captain John O'Hare's prize was run over two days in August with well over three hundred participants. The prize was sponsored by Central Motors Tullamore and won by Michael McGarry who romped home with a score of 126, seven shots ahead of runner-up Michael Yates. This was Michael McGarry's third time winning the Captain's Prize. The gross was won by Stephen Grant, Past Captains by John O'Meara and Veterans by Fintan Dolan.



Menolly Homes Winning Team

*Front L-R: Lady Capt. Ann McIntyre, Mary O'Gorman (Manager).
Centre: Ann Kenny, Mary Ryan, Kathleen Doorley, Ann Frawley.
Back: Tori Baker, Annette Kenny, Mairéad McIntyre, Mary Grennan,
Gemma Butler, Vera Smyth.*

Club Trophies

The finals of the club trophies took place at the end of August. With Francie Horan winning the coveted Kenny Cup, Ciaran Slevin the Hackett Cup, Club Championship won by Michael Yates and the Hi/Lo (McDermott Trophy) won by Jim Spain and Martin Young, Loughnane Cup won by Robert Lynch. Golfer of the Year was Joe Rowland. Agnes Doolan, winner of both the Captain's and President's prizes, was the popular Golfer of the Year while Tori Baker collected the Club Match Play.

Juveniles

The Juvenile Golf is in a very healthy position due to the hard work of Kathleen Doorley and Bernard McGurk and their committee. The Club now has over 250 Juvenile members and competitions were run during the months of June, July and August. An innovation this year was a very successful Home-and-Away arrangement with Portumna Golf Club. Juvenile Captains Kate Flynn and Darragh Claffey held their Captains' Day at the end of August. Kate's prize was won by Katherine Tooher and Darragh's by Darren Cleare, both with 43 points. Lady Captain Ann McIntyre thanked all who looked after the Juveniles and congratulated Patrice Delaney on her excellent progress over the year.

Interclub

The Central Town's team under their manager, Paddy Kirwan, came through in a nail-biting final over host club Tullamore. From an original entry of forty-four teams, Birr won by 4 and 3 on the 19th. The team was Tony McTague, John Delaney, Bernie Kennedy, KP Kelly, Fintan Dolan, Tony McCormack and Tomas Moylan. Hard luck to our Tudenham Cup Team who reached the final but were pipped at the post by host club Mullingar.

Not to be outdone, the Ladies Menolly Homes team and their manager, Mary O'Gorman, captured the Regional Trophy at Roscommon, defeating Mount Bellew by three matches to one in rainy conditions. The team was Ann Kenny/Mary Grennan, Ann Frawley/Tori Baker, Kathleen Doorley/Mairéad McIntyre and Gemma Butler/Annette

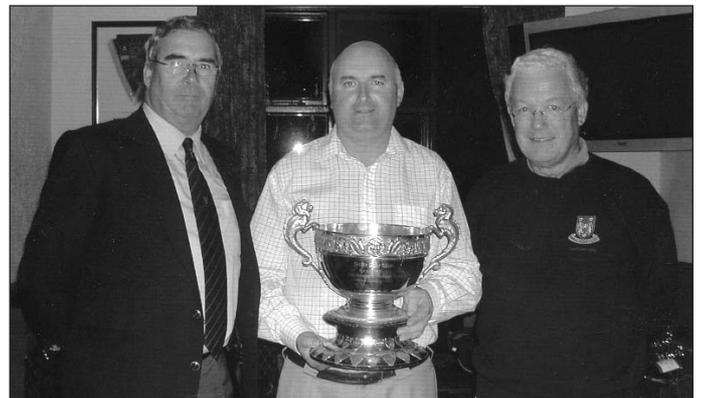
Kenny with subs Vera Smyth/Mary Ryan. The team qualified for the All Ireland Semi Final against Waterford at Mount Juliet in September. The Glens Trophy was held in October and Birr were victorious from an entry of thirty teams.

Commemoration

During the year, two members who had contributed much to the Club were commemorated. On St. Patrick's Day there was a large turnout for the Lorna Hogan Memorial sponsored by JJ Hogan and his family. Captain Ann McIntyre reflected on Lorna's sterling service to the Club and noted that she had served on several committees and taken a special interest in Juveniles and Beginners.

In October, the Glens hosted a special memorial competition in memory of the late Austin Gleeson. Austin's family made a very generous donation towards the development programme and a trophy in his memory was presented to the club. In response, the committee decided to dedicate a commemorative seat beside the eighteenth green.

With over a thousand members, the Glens Golf Club is in rude good health and members are looking forward to the development of the new lands over the next few years.



*President Des McDowell, Francie Horan Winner of Kenny Cup,
Captain John O'Hare.*

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BIRR CAMOGIE CLUB

The year 2006 has been a very successful one for Birr Camogie Club both on and off the field. The highlights of the year were undoubtedly on the field, the winning of the County Junior Championship and subsequent elevation to Senior Status, the historic achievement of our U-14 girls winning the Leinster final and representing Offaly in the Community Games in Mosney. Off the field, the Birr Camogie Superstars snowballed into a momentous occasion with a Grand Final in Doolys Hotel.

The year began with the launch of the Superstars Competition. This was the brainchild of Club Chairperson Mary Rigney. It was primarily to be a fundraising event. There were 6 heats in the competition and a Grand Final. As the competitors took part in the heats it became very evident that the talent on show was exceptional and that it was going to take very special performances to make the grand final. Each competitor was sponsored by a local business. Without the help of local business this competition could not have taken place. The Grand final in Doolys hotel was a sell-out. The judges throughout the competition were professionals involved in the music industry and they were of the opinion that much of the talent on display would reach the final of any Superstars competition in the country. The overall winner of the Grand Final was a young local man Brendan McGarry who represented the Fighting Cocks. We are extremely grateful to all who made this event the success that it was, we hope to repeat the event in 2007.

Training commenced in February for U-14 and U-16 under the guidance of Mick Hough, Martin McCarthy and Pat Ryan. The U-14 were this year in the A Section and acquitted themselves very well against the big guns at this level. This group of girls worked so hard all year and were unlucky to lose out narrowly to a very strong Kilcormac/Killoughey team in the semi-final but their reward for all the hard work was yet to come. The club decided to enter the team into the Community Games. They advanced to the county final where they came up against a much fancied Kilcormac/Killoughey team. This was a thrilling heart

stopping final which went all the way to extra-time. The spirit and determination of these young girls came through and, amidst joyous scenes of celebration, they pipped Kilcormac/Killoughey to take the County title for the first time ever. Greater things were to come when they advanced through to the Leinster Final where yet again they emerged victorious. We then set off to Mosney for the finals and even though we were beaten by a very strong Galway side, the girls and parents had a fabulous weekend, one that the girls will always remember. The experience will stand to them well in the future.

Our U-16 team reached the County semi-final and were beaten by a single point by St. Sinchills. Most of this team are under-age again next year and will hope to go one better.

The Junior team started the year in the worst possible way losing in the league to Kinnitty, Shinrone, Naomh Brid, and Drumcullen. It was very hard to keep players training throughout the summer as the championship did not commence until August. Only three clubs participated in the Junior Section this year :- Birr, Seir Kieran and St. Shinchills. All teams had to play each other at home and away. Birr and Seir Kieran emerged top of the group to contest the final. This was played in Kinnitty on the same day and time as the County Senior hurling final replay but the small crowd were treated to a fine display by the Birr girls. They will now play senior in 2007. After many many years playing for Birr, long-serving players, Caroline McCarthy and Deirdre Cahill, retired on a winning note. We hope that they will continue to be involved with the club for many years to come.

Our U-8's, U-10's and U-12's were coached by Deirdre Cahill and Gail Spain. These young girls are showing great interest and there are some very promising players for the future among them. They took part in the Go-Games in Banagher during the year and also played some games against St. Cillians in Carrig and other local teams. Many thanks to Deirdre and Gail for all the hard work they have put in with the girls this year.



Our Club was well represented at County level this year. Sheila Sullivan and Arlene Watkins were on the Offaly Junior team, Kate Ryan and Michelle Gleeson on the U-18's and Grace Ryan and Michelle Gleeson on the U-16's. Our U-14's who won Leinster

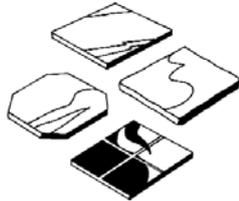
The Birr Junior Camogie Panel with mascots after their victory over Seir Kieran in the Junior Final in September 2006

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Caption

Medals with Leinster were ; Shauna Carroll, Orlagh Kirwin, Julie Stephens, Kelly-Ann Milne, Jane McCarthy and Sarah Pilkington. Julie Stephens won the player of the match in the Leinster final. Well done Julie Four girls are already in training for the Offaly U-14's next year ; they are Shauna Carroll, Orlagh Kirwin, Rebecca Hoctor and Emily Quinlan.

The club would like to thank all those who give so freely of their time to train teams and also to committee members who wash jerseys, organise refreshments and, most of all, support our players on the field. Thanks to the parents who travel to games and fill their cars whenever needed. Having so many parents involved in the club makes all the difference and we look forward to many new faces next year.

*Brendan McGarry
winner of Birr
Camogie Club's
very successful
'Superstars' Tal-
ent Competition.*



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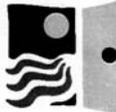
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BIRR RUGBY CLUB



U-12

Back L-r: Gerry Dooley (coach), Pdraig Killeen, Seamus O'Connor, Rory Munsey, Peter Dooley, Neil Joe Maher, Kevin O'Connor, Cathal Hogan, Issac Smyth, Jack Baker, Ronan Murphy, David Baker (Mini Co-ordinator).

Middle: Thomas Bailey, Michael Kenny, Jordan Parsons, Garry Drought, Fionn O'Carroll, Shane Delahunt, Conor Grimes, Graham Lynch, Maurice Guinan, Nicholas Corcoran.

Front: Maxine Barnock, Conor Fitzgerald, Pdraig O'Brien, Christopher Pingree, Brendan Heffernan, Jack Kennedy, Emmet Nolan, Michael Kennedy.

U-14

Back L-r: Liam Hogan (Coach), Niall Maher, Shaun Smith, Peter Kelly, Dean Bracken, Ryan Ingels, Ruben Noyce, Pat Gamon, Michael Hough, Liam Grimes, Colm McEvoy, Paul Kelly (Youth Co-ordinator).

Front: Mark Guinan, Seamus Hoctor, Vincent Kerins, Donal Spain, Damien Gormley, Gavin Guilfoyle, Jamie Bowe, Liam Dolan, William Maher.

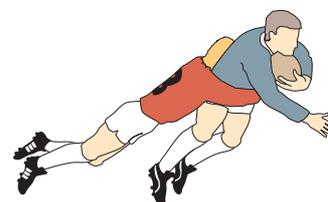


U-18

Back L-r: Liam Hogan (Coach), Declan Lou8ghnane, Cian O'Raghallaigh, Aidan Delaney, Peter Bruce, Stephen Dooley, Cathal O'Donnell, Denis Hanly, Jordan Culbert, Aaron Slevin, Jason Bracken.

Middle: Leslie Armitage, Ronan Kirwan, David McMahon, David Guinan, Alan Guinan (Captain), David Kelly, Conor Cleary.

Front: Stephen Smyth



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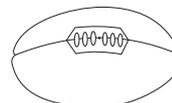
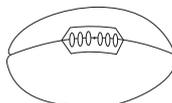
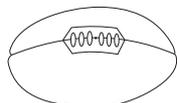
12.30 p.m. to 2.30 p.m.

Evening a la carte

U-18s in action



Birr players in photo... Alan Guinan (back to camera), Jordan Culbert (in air), David McMahon, Aaron Slevin, Denis Hanly, Ronan Kirwan, Leslie Armitage.



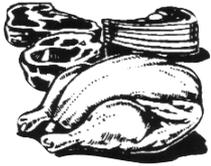
Birr Senior Rugby Squad 2005/2006

Back L-R: Christy Hogan, Cronan Kennedy, Conor Larkin, Dermot O'Shea, Ciaran Campbell, Mick Keogh, Evin Williams, Brendan Molloy, Rodney Gallagher, Ronan Joyce, Kevin Purcell, Stephen Gill.

Front: Brendan Brophy, Paddy Marshall, David Niland, Andrew Lally, Kevin O'Meara, Keith Scully (Capt.), Garech Doorley, Joey O'Loughlin, Keith Hehir, Camillus O'Meara (Coach).

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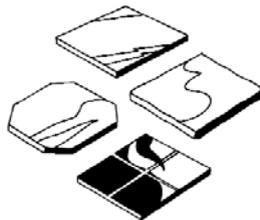
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BALLYEIGHAN CRICKET CLUB 2006

Ballyeighan Cricket Club played a full season this year, from May to September, with 21 games fixed to play. Alas, it ended up being an up and down year with a record of: played: thirteen; won: five; lost: seven; drawn: 1, and then a further eight games being cancelled for one reason or another. This year also saw the sad loss of one of the founding members of the club, the late Eddie Dwyer, who will be sorely missed.

This year also saw a flood of firsts. We saw the first Russian to play for Ballyeighan. The first ever 9 year old to play, in turn being the youngest ever player for Ballyeighan, young Matthew Walker. The first time 6 full Irish Internationals played at the ground in Ballingarry. When Ballyeighan played host to a Leprechauns side. All be it these players were under 15s, 16s and 17s. It was the first time Ballyeighan entered the Connacht League, unfortunately with no great results, but there's always next year. For the first time, four sets of fathers and sons played in the same game. John and Graham Kenny, Ian and Tim Cooke, Denis and Matthew Walker, John and Mark Shakespeare. Lastly and most importantly, the first ever clubhouse for the club is finally being built. Many thanks to Larry Wing and his band of merry men for making this possible.

Thanks must go to everyone who took part and helped



Ballyeighan v Cranham (Eng)

Back: C. Black, J. Smith, L. Wing, T. Cooke, I. Cooke.

Front: M. Walker, M. Dudley, M. Shakespeare, J. Kenny, P. Headon, D. Walker.

make the season what it was, a very enjoyable, competitive and friendly time for all. Also congratulations to Matt Dudley for winning the Player of the Year Award. Mention must go to the Kennys for their batting display throughout the season, with a couple of hundreds and numerous fifties between them. Not forgetting Patrick Headon for his bowling displays every time he took to the field.

The team each week was from the squad of: M. Dudley (Capt.), J. Kenny, G. Kenny, R. Kenny, P. Headon, M. Shakespeare, R. Powell, T. Cooke, L. Wing, B. Taylor, D. Walker, I. Cooke, C. Black, M. Walker, J. Smith, D. Weedy, D. McKenzie, A. Shine, A. Sterling, D. Swan, P. Tynan, L. Dudley, J. Shakespeare, W. Blackley.



Ballyeighan v Laois

Back: T. Cooke, G. Kenny, J. Smith, R. Kenny, M. Shakespeare, R. Powell, L. Wing, I. Cooke.

Front: J. Kenny, M. Dudley, L. Dudley, L. Black.

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THE LITTLE BROSNA AND CAMCOR FISHING CLUB

By *Seamie Breen, PRO*

Our rivers are flowing freely undisturbed by the line, rod and reel as yet another fishing season has come to an end but, behind this present silence, hides a year of intense activity and achievement for our Club.

First up was the clean up at the Chapel Bridge in conjunction with the Birr Tidy Towns Committee. An excellent collaborative venture between two local voluntary groups the results of which I think you'll all agree greatly and tastefully enhances this beautiful part of our Town.

From the outskirts working inwards, there has been a huge amount of work done this last year between Palmers and the Red Bridge. Working quietly yet consistently, the workload here has been borne principally by the ESB, with technical advice and assistance coming from the Shannon Regional Fisheries Board. The River is now fishable from one Bridge to the other and sports a new weir at Palmers. To say that we are delighted with this is an understatement, we are so thankful to all concerned for their endeavours.

Behind the scenes, all the stakeholders are involved in drawing up a Catchment Management Programme which it is hoped will be of huge benefit to the Catchment in future years and we'd like to thank the ESB and the Shannon Regional Fisheries Board for their tremendous efforts in this regard.

A lot of local fishermen started a 'catch and release' programme of the Croneen that were caught in September and the Club very much welcomes this and would support and encourage others to get involved in this practice.

National Fisheries Awareness Week was marked in Birr by a great evening of fun and exhibition in the Camcor Park. It was a very well attended event and young and old took part in learning the art and craft that is fly fishing and fly tying.

It has been noted that a large run of fish came into our system in June and levels have happily remained high. Another large run arrived in September which augurs well, I am happy to report, for next year's season.

Our Pollution Officer and Water Keepers have been both vigilant and visible over the last year. They not only assist in policing the Rivers but they are crucial community contact persons in the event of something untoward happening that might either pollute the Rivers or endanger the fish stocks.

Next year, we hope to finish at Palmers and move on down to Sandymount. The Hill looks so different now from the Sandymount of our childhood, but the River is still there, sparkling and soothing as it winds its merry way past the good folks of the Birr Community Nursing Unit. I trust it continues to provide as much pleasure and joy to them today as it did to us all in our youth.

We would also like to start some work on the Little Brosna in the New Year, time and, of course, resources permit-

ting. We have some excellent plans for this River to enhance its development, but, sure, Rome wasn't built in a day!

If I were to extend thanks to everyone who should be thanked for their help over the year I could fill many, many pages of this Review Book, so suffice it to say that our genuine and sincere thanks goes to all those who have helped us in any way over not only the last year but since our inception.

If I may be permitted one comment, I think it is fair to say that the Club, under the chairmanship of Finbarr Spain, has gone from strength to strength. We now have a membership in excess of 100 and I am reliably informed by our Membership Officer that each year has seen an increase so our expectations for the 2007 Season are high.

We would appeal to all the fishermen who have not yet joined the Club to come along and get involved. We have a lot to offer and would welcome and encourage your participation and involvement. As they say, many hands makes light work!

It is our responsibility to hand over the Rivers to the next generation in as good, if not a better condition, than that in which we inherited them and we would ask all people to try and play their part in achieving this. We have a beautiful natural resource at our disposal that we wish to enjoy yet prudently preserve for those next in line.

Anybody interested in joining the Club should contact our Chairman, Finbarr Spain on 086/8560710 or our Secretary, Mary McGarry on 086/1651647. The Shannon Regional Fisheries Board has a very good, user friendly website (www.shannon-fishery-board.ie) and, if you've never fished before and are contemplating taking the plunge, or if you're a seasoned campaigner and are hungry to know more, log on there for all you need to know.

Happy days on the bank, and many hours of relaxation await you - so why not join us?!



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BIRR SCOUTS

Last year scouting, in Birr was very successful with our programme being completed for the year despite the vandalism to our hall and log cabin which placed a financial burden on our funds. During the year scouting activities continued in the Slieve Blooms with five weekends in the log cabin. Over a hundred children turned up for the Christmas party in the cabin and, as usual, Santa made his appearance with his bag of "goodies" and the 'around the fire' sing along was enjoyed by all.



Leaders presented with awards by the Chief Scout

L-R: Alan Hoare, Mary Haes, Jack Ryan, Maureen Corrigan.

Eight scouts qualified for the start scout award with Emma Hayes winning scout of the year. The highlight of the year was the attendance of the Chief Scout (Martin Bridge) in Dooleys hotel where he presented awards to Maureen Corrigan, Mary Hayes and Alan Hoare. Jack Ryan was presented with the highest award in scouting, the Cu Chulainn award for his commitment to the leadership and development of young people.

Swimming was very popular during the year with the Cubs and Scouts. Water safety and life saving was part of the programme and four of the entrants are now qualified lifeguards. Canoeing at the riverside was enjoyed by all in preparation for annual camp and our thanks to Mary



Birr Scouts fishing on Lough Key, Co. Roscommon

L-R: Oran Dolphin Murray, Sean Stone, Ronan Watkins, Jack Carroll, Leader Patraic Connaughton.

Clarke and her staff in the Outdoor Educational Centre for their help here.

Lough Key Forest Park was the popular choice for our annual camp this year with visits to the Arigna mines and boating on Lough Key. The visit to the mines was a unique experience, an education in terms of history, geology and human endurance. The staff that had worked there took us for a walk underground through what was the last working mine in Arigna where coal was mined. The Venturers did a survival trip on Lough Key, spending a night on a haunted island, but the night passed off peacefully as the spirits of the past failed to turn up.

Scouting in the Midlands has gone from strength to strength and we now have sixty young people in the Birr group. The Scouting centenary starts in 2007 and will be marked in the Slieve Bloom Country, (which cover Laois, Offaly and North Tipperary) with a celebration of founders day, a charity project, and a giant beaver sleep-over, a county camp and a national summer camp.

Finally, we would like to thank all our friends for their help and support, especially the parents committee who carried out the repairs to the log cabin as a result of the vandalism.



Back: L-R: Brendan Ryan, Eoin Hogan, Oran Dolphin, Mark Guinan, Stephen Lyons, Melissa Eades, Niall Maher, Paul McCarthy, Donnacha O'Carroll, Michael Keane.

Front:
Chris Guilfoyle,
Jack Featherson.

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BIRR SWIMMING POOL

Birr Development Company trading as Birr Swimming Pool are delighted that the tender submitted by them and supported by Offaly County Council has been accepted by the Minister for Arts, Tourism and Sport, Mr. John O'Donoghue and approval given to sign a contract for work to commence immediately.

To get to this stage it took a lot of campaigning by the local committee which included a public meeting over four years ago, numerous delegations to Offaly Co. Council and extensive lobbying of our Ministers and Oireachtas members present and past whom we now wish to thank for their support and co-operating with us.

A major breakthrough came two years ago when Offaly Co. Council was persuaded to prioritise Birr upgrading and committed themselves to matching with 20% , the 80% Department Grant that was available for wet facilities in pools.

We were also pursuing funds for the dry side of the facility i.e. reception area, cafeteria, gymnasium, lift etc and this received a major boost when Minister O'Donoghue via the Sport Capital Grants (lottery funding) committed 300,000 to this side of the project.

The tender approved by the Minister is 2.271 million euro of which 1.4 million euro is coming from the Department of Arts, Sport and Tourism swimming pool budget, €280,000 is coming from Offaly County Council development chares, €300,00 is coming from National Lottery funds and the remaining €290,000 has to be raised locally. We have a committee working tirelessly to make sure we get value for money and provide a facility that will cater for the needs of our community in the 21st century.

What's new, what's refurbished, what remains?

A new two storey block will be built at right angles (town side) of the existing pool and will incorporate a reception area, cafeteria, viewing area and changing village. Upstairs will be the new gymnasium which we hope to equip with the most up-to-date equipment and also a general purpose area which will be used for health and fitness promotions.

The existing dressing rooms will be demolished and replaced by a new building, incorporating staff quarters, first aid room, store rooms etc..

The existing pool will be completely revamped with replacement membrane on the existing roof and a new ceiling within. The pool itself will be tiled. A new sauna, steam room and Jacuzzi will be installed, with new

showers close to the changing village. There will also be a complete upgrade of electrical and mechanical equipment, car parking and entrance road.

Because of the escalating oil costs we have made provisions to use a number of alternative sources of energy including solar, water pellet with the possibility of the pool being a pilot project..

The sting in the tail of all this good news is that we have to raise the shortfall in overall funding of €290,000. We as a committee, are committed to raising this locally and we will be hoping the public will be as wise and as far-seeing as our "forbears" were in collecting a substantial sum in the 1960 and early '70's to put the original facility in place. Their wisdom and efforts should never be forgotten and always remembered by the present committee. We also appreciate the work of various management committees over the years.

We believe that this is a very important development for the people of Birr and surrounding areas and we are open to any donations, corporate or otherwise, or, if anybody out there, has fundraising suggestions they will be seriously considered. More importantly, if any person wants to give a short-term commitment to helping to raise this finance, it will be more than appreciated.

The committee who have driven this project are Pat Connolly, Chairman, Helena Kennedy, Hon. Sec., Brendan Fogarty and Charlie Delahun, Treasurers, Cllr John Carroll, P.R.O., Cronin Grennan, Vice Chairman, Majela Hart, and not least, our hard working C.E.O. and long time committee member Marian Carter.

We would also like to say a special work of thanks to our staff full and part-time who have helped to make this facility what it is. They have been most co-operative with us at this time when flexibility of work practice is necessary.

Cllr. John Carroll

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ST CILLIANS CAMOGIE CLUB

A group of parents held a meeting in Carrig Hall last February and the outcome of this meeting was a Camogie Club which now has 29 members and two teams – U-8 and U10. The club caters for girls from Riverstown, Carrig and Ballingarry. The Club played in two Go-Games Blitz which were held in Banagher.



Back L-R: Emily O'Brien, Niamh Collins, Leanne Maher, Laura Hogan, Danielle Bond, Siobhán Killeen, Stephine Maher, Niamh Cleary, Ciara Hctor.

Front: Rachel Brennan, Charlotte Cavanagh, Aoife Plunkett, Cailín Fitzgerald, Sheena Bermingham, Aisling Brennan. Missing: Rebecca Egan.



Back L-R: Emma Cleary, Nicola Dolan, Kiera Brady, Chloe Costello, Aideen Freeman, Niamh Killeen, Lisa Hctor.

Front: Ciara Brennan, Bríd Ryan, Orla Plunkett, Siofra Ryan, Sarah Harding. Missing: Sinéad Bergin.

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WOLFTRAP CYCLING CLUB IS ONE YEAR OLD

Inaugural Billy Butler Cycle

The Wolftrap Cycling Club celebrated its first anniversary by holding its inaugural Billy Butler Cycle. The event attracted 75 entrants from as far afield as Drogheda and Wicklow and was a great success. There were three routes – 50 km, 100 km and 130 km – with terrain ranging from leisurely to challenging.

Club Activities

The club has had a very busy year. You may have seen a flash of blue and white pass you on the road recently. No, it's not the Laois team on a training run in Offaly, but the distinctive strip of the Wolftrap CC.

The club has 35 members, who cycle on a regular basis. There are three levels catered for – racing, touring and leisure cycling.

Racing

The club has two racing members: Gary Bracken, who competes in the B category, and Mark Shaw, who began racing in the C category this year. Both have competed successfully throughout the season in races all over the country. We always welcome new members who would be interested in trying racing. For more information phone Gary Bracken on 086-3580978

Some members of the group are not content just to cycle, but also like to run and swim, and have taken part in a number of triathlons.

During the summer, the club ran a series of individual time trials for cyclists of all levels. These are a fun way to measure your fitness and particularly useful for people competing in triathlons.

Touring & Leisure

The touring group has travelled to various non-competitive events in Athlone, Carlow, Mullingar,

Nenagh, Wicklow, Tullamore and Kerry. The highlight of the year was when fourteen of the group completed the Border Trek, a 200-mile cycle over two days. This was more a test of stamina than speed and a great sense of achievement was felt by all who finished. Two of our leisure cyclists also completed the Mini-Trek on the same weekend – a 50-mile spin in the sunshine from Enniskillen to Carrick-on-Shannon.

Age is no barrier to cycling. Our members' ages span five decades, from the 20s to the 60s. In fact, the club was involved in an initiative designed to encourage participation in recreational sport and physical activity for the over-50s. After a number of weeks training this initiative culminated in a 50-kilometre spin around the Burren, last April.

Away Trips

The club does not neglect the social end of things either. Last April, it had its first away weekend, when we took our bikes to Lisdoonvarna and toured the Burren. In early October, the club travelled to the Glen of Aherlow for a weekend.

Six members of the group travelled a bit further afield and cycled the pilgrim route to Santiago de Compostela in Spain.

Sponsors

The club would like to thank its sponsors for the financial support that helped us get started – in particular our major sponsor, Craughwell Auctioneers – and also Plants & Patios, Butler's Pharmacy, Horan's Foodstore, Hunky Dorys and Haines of Birr.

New Members Welcome

Cycling is a great way to get fit and promotes a sense of well being, both physical and mental.

New members are welcome and beginners will be catered for. You don't have to wear lycra, all you need is a roadworthy bike and a helmet. Club cycles are held twice a week in summer, once a week in winter, starting in Birr. For further information phone Bernie Grennan on 085-1500519.



Caption???

BIRR G.A.A.

Birr's path to 20th Offaly SHC title

Group Series

30/04: Birr 5-23 Clara 0-8.

07/05: Birr 3-15 Lusmagh 1-8.

23/07: Birr 1-27 Killavilla 2-11.

30/07: Birr 2-13 Belmont 0-9.

Semi-Final

16/09: Birr 0-18 Kilcormac/Killoughey 1-10.

Final

01/10: Birr 0-11 Coolderry 1-8.

Replay

07/10: Birr 2-9 Coolderry 1-11.

Totals - For: 13-116. Against: 6-65. Difference: +7-51 (72 points).

Brown was Birr's leading marksman

SIXTEEN players contributed to Birr's huge seven match Offaly championship winning total of 13-116 (13-89 from play, 0-26 from frees & 0-1 from a sideline cut) and Stephen Brown, with 1-23 to his credit, was the leading marksman.

Brown and Birr's third highest scorer Michael Dwane, with 2-15, were the only two forwards to find the target in all games. Second placed Simon Whelahan scored in five of the seven matches.

Of the 16 scorers, four scored in six or more of the games – Brown (7), Dwane (7), Gary Hanniffy (6) and Brian Whelahan (6).

Dwane, with 1-6, and Dylan Hayden, with 2-3, both against Clara in the first round of the group, were the highest single hauls recorded by Birr players in the SHC.

The full list of Birr scorers was;

Stephen Brown 1-23 (0-1 sideline cut), Simon Whelahan

1-20 (0-16 frees), Michael Dwane 2-15 (0-1 free), Gary Hanniffy 1-15, Dylan Hayden 2-7, Joe Errity 3-3, Brian Whelahan 0-9 (0-8 frees), Paul Molloy 0-8, Paul O'Meara 1-4, Sean Ryan 1-4, Ger Teehan 1-1, Neil Rogers 0-2, Rory Hanniffy 0-2, Barry Whelahan 0-1, Keith Hehir 0-1 and Paul Cleary 0-1 (free).

Retaining SHC title was highlight of year for Birr GAA Club

"IT is unbelievable, words can't describe it," was the reaction of Birr captain John Paul O'Meara after Birr scraped past Coolderry (2-9 to 1-11) following a titanic SHC Final replay struggle in St Brendan's Park.

That memorable victory, on Saturday, October 7th, was the highlight of the year for Birr GAA Club.

It gave the club their 20th county title and at the time of writing this article, the four-time All-Ireland and six-time Leinster club kingpins were gearing up for a crack at Ballyhale Shamrocks of Kilkenny in the provincial final (due to be played on November 26th).

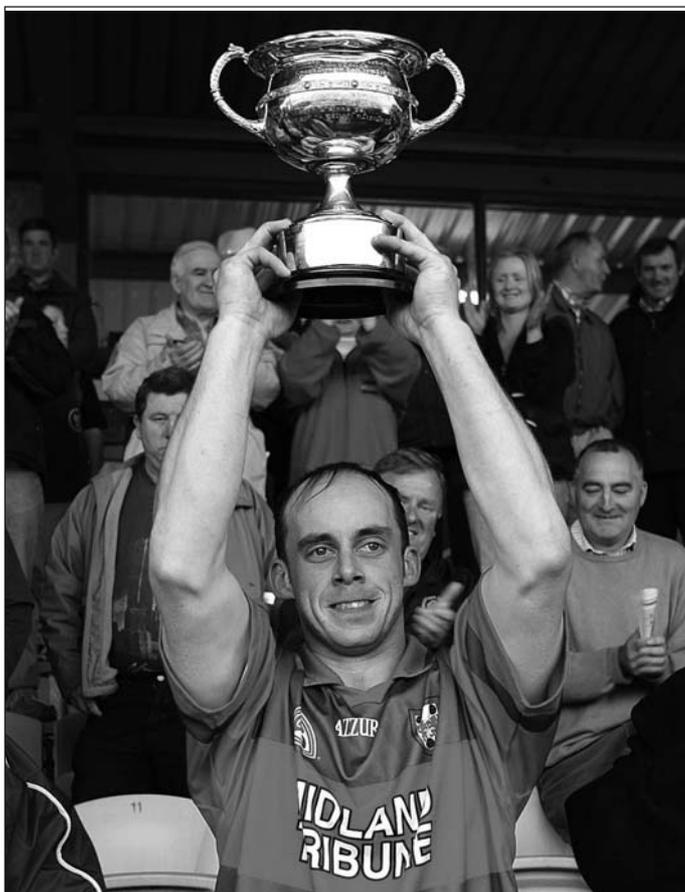
Birr and Coolderry clashed for the third successive year in the county's showpiece hurling game on Sunday, October 1st, with the honours shared from the previous two finals – Coolderry getting the verdict in '04 and Birr in '05 – there was much pride at stake.

Birr were the bookie's favourites, but it ended in stalemate Birr 0-11 to Coolderry's 1-8. And it was the wearers of green and red who were by far the more relieved as Gary Hanniffy's magnificent levelling point in the second minute of injury time earned them a second bite at the cherry. Despite a torrential downpour, both sides served up one of the best matches in recent years, thereby whetting the appetite for the replay six days later.

Birr led by 1-7 to 0-8 after 35 minutes, however, twelve minutes later they looked to be in absolute dire straits as Coolderry deservedly surged 1-11 to 1-7 ahead.



The Birr Team who defeated Coolderry in last Saturday's Aidan Bracken Building Design Offaly SHC Final Replay in St. Brendan's Park, Birr.



Birr Captain John Paul O'Meara lifts the Sean Robbins Cup after Birr defeated Coolderry in the Aidan Bracken Building Design Offaly SHC Final Replay in St. Brendan's Park, Birr.

With just 13 minutes remaining, the initiative seemed to be firmly with the '04 champions but they failed to score again. Birr exploded to life when, in the 49th minute, Sean Ryan laid off an intelligent pass to Gary Hanniffy and the man whose point set up the replay, fired a bullet-like shot to the net.

This crucial goal injected life back into deflated Birr limbs. Stephen Brown levelled it, 2-8 to 1-11, in the 50th minute following great defensive work by Rory Hanniffy and in a tension-filled finish Paul O'Meara popped over the decisive point after Brown's initial strike bounced back off the post.

The drama didn't end after O'Meara's 58th minute point though, and, in injury time, with excitement buzzing through the crowd, Damien Murray went raiding, and much to his, and the anguish of the Coolderry fans, his scorching shot flew across the face of goal and inches wide.

It was agonisingly close. Coolderry groaned with despair. Birr cheered and gasped with relief, as they clung on to see corner back and captain John Paul O'Meara get his hands on the Sean Robbins Cup ahead of his cousin and Coolderry counterpart, Brendan. Ironically, it was a strike by their cousin Paul that ultimately decided the destination of the coveted silverware!

Birr's success was their seventh in eight years and it was their tenth title since 1991 and Millennium Man Brian

Whelahan played in all of those victories.

Birr full back Paul Cleary picked up the 'PJ Middleton Limousine Hire' sponsored Man of Match accolade, shading the verdict ahead of Michael Verney and Rory Hanniffy.

While team manager, John Goode, praised his players for 'showing great heart' to come from four points behind and fight back to retain their title.

The Birr team and scorers from the SHC final replay were - Mark Mulrooney; John Paul O'Meara (capt.), Paul Cleary, Michael Verney; Brian Whelahan (0-3, 0-2 frees), Rory Hanniffy, Niall Claffey; Barry Whelahan, Neil Rogers; Paul O'Meara (0-1), Gary Hanniffy (1-0), Stephen Brown (0-2); Sean Ryan (1-0), Dylan Hayden (0-2), Michael Dwane (0-1 free). Subs.: Paul Molloy for N Rogers (45 mins), Simon Whelahan for M Dwane (53 mins) and Donal Franks for Brian Whelahan inj (59 mins).

In other adult hurling grades, Birr intermediate hurlers qualified for the county final but their bid for glory came unstuck, as they were defeated 2-10 to 1-11 by Kilcormac/Killoughey.

The Birr team and scorers from the IHC final were – Gary Cahill; Paddy Ryan, Garrett Doorley, Alan Hennessy; Conor Egan (0-1), Keith Hehir (0-2), Barry Ryan; Darragh Molloy, Declan Pilkington (0-1); Sean Ryan, Aaron Whelahan (0-6 frees), Brian Stephens (0-1); Barry Harding, Ken Spillane (capt., 1-0), Brian Nolan. Sub.: Liam Power for D Molloy inj (16 mins).

At the time of writing, St Brendan's U-21 hurlers had qualified for the county final where they were due to cross sticks with St Rynagh's. The Birr parish got the better of St Cronan's in the quarter-final and in the semi-final, thanks to a five-star display from Neil Rogers, they defeated Kilcormac/Killoughey by 0-13 to 0-9.

The St Brendan's team and scorers from the U-21 semi-final was - Mark Mulrooney; Paddy Ryan, Michael Verney, Barry Harding; Brian Watkins, Paul Cleary, Brian Stephens; Darragh Molloy, Neil Rogers (0-7, 0-3 frees & 0-1 '65); Bryan Lonergan (0-1), Dylan Hayden (capt., 0-2), Aaron Whelahan (0-3, 0-2 frees); Sean Ryan, Mark Quinlan, Brian Nolan. Subs.: Ger Teehan for B Nolan (43 mins), John



Sarah Lyons, Kerrie Farrelly and Amy Lyons supporting Birr at last Saturday's Replay in St. Brendan's Park, Birr.

Cashen for D Molloy (50 mins) and Wayne Cooney for M Quinlan (57 mins).

In the Intermediate Football Championship, Birr made great strides but their quest for success came to an end when they succumbed to eventual champions, Tubber, in semi-final on a score-line of 0-13 to 0-8.

The Birr team and scorers were - Declan Ryan; Keith Hehir, Richard Dolan, Conor Egan; Michael Verney, Clifford McDonald (capt.), Alan Corboy; Joey O'Loughlin, Dave Coffey; Donal Ryan, Liam Power, Sean Ryan (0-5, 0-4 frees); Stephen Lonergan (0-2), Martin Skeffington, Bryan Lonergan (0-2). Subs.: Shane Lonergan for R Dolan (25 mins), Barry Whelahan for D Coffey (39 mins), R Dolan for Donal Ryan (51 mins) and Kevin O'Meara for L Power (57 mins).

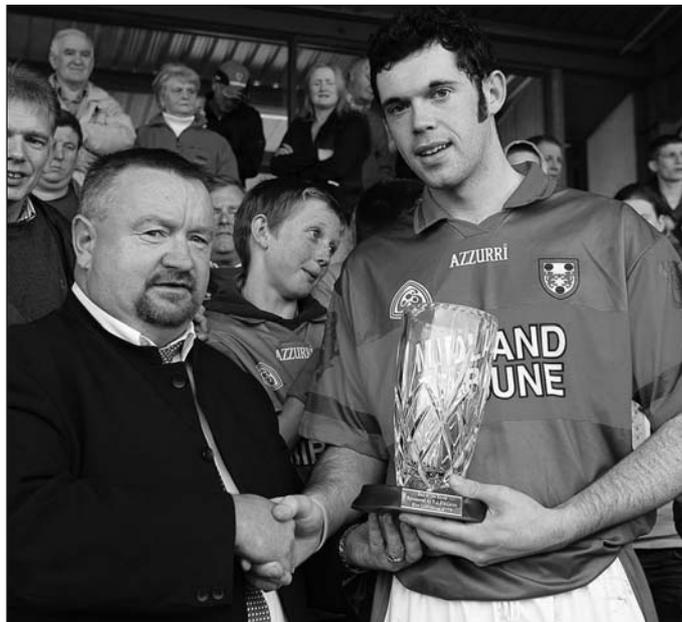
A number of Birr players also lined out with Wheery in the U-21 football championship, where St Broughan's beat them in the semi-final.

By Birr's high standards, it wasn't one of the better years for the club at underage level and it was the first time since 1994 that Birr didn't win a Coiste na nÓg organised competition or championship. However, the club did retain their U-11 Ground Hurling Tournament title and at Cumann na mBunscol level, St Brendan's NS won both the U-11 & U-13 hurling titles.

Birr, after a rousing performance, were unfortunate to lose to eventual champions Kilcormac/Killoughey in the minor hurling semi-final by 2-9 to 2-5. The team and scorers from that match was - Michael Mulrooney; Alan Guinan, Donal Ryan, Aidan Delaney; Cormac Pardy, Barry Harding, Cian O'Callaghan; Aaron Whelahan (0-5, 0-3 frees & 0-1 penalty), Bryan Lonergan (capt.); John Corrigan, Eoin Kelly, Emmett Fanneran; Ger Daly, Sean Grimes (1-0), Ger Teehan (1-0). Sub.: Daniel O'Meara for J Corrigan (45 mins).

At U-14 and U-16 hurling level, Birr also bowed out to the eventual champions at the penultimate hurdle, Tullamore and St Rynagh's, after a replay, respectively. Birr U-12 hurlers were progressing very nicely but that competition was put on hold by Coiste na nÓg to address long running boardroom issues.

Birr competed in the U-12, U-14, U-16 and Minor football championships also, with the U-14's going down to Na Fianna in the 'B' semi-final.



Man Of The Match sponsor PJ Middleton (PJ Middleton Limousine Hire) presenting Birr's Paul Cleary with his Award after Birr defeated Coolderry in the County Final Replay.



Eddie Nevin presenting the Billy Nevin Memorial Cup to Birr Captain, Craig Taylor.

The victorious Birr U-10 team



ST. BRENDAN'S P.S. MAKE CLEAN SWEEP

Pictured below are the St. Brendan's P.S. U-11 and U-13 hurling Teams who won both Bord na Scol Competitions at U-11 and U-13 in Offaly for the 2005-2006 school year



Cumann na mBunscol U-11 Winners, 2005 – St Brendan's N.S., Birr

Front L-r: B. Heffernan, D. Patel, A. Flanagan, S. Claffey, S. Feehan, E. Byrne, O. Regan, E. Cahill, A. Coffey.
Back: M. Donegan (Principal), S. Carroll, C. Taylor, P. Horan, D. Cahill, E. Pilkington, C. Hogan, C. Nolan, E. Nolan, P. Dooley, R. O'Meara, D. Nevin.



Cumann na mBunscol U-13 Winners, 2006 – St Brendan's N.S., Birr

Front L-r: B. Kenneth Rice, David Shiels, Darren Cahill, Conor Nolan, Kevin Donovan (Capt), Peter Horan, Eoin Pilkington, Sean T. O'Connor, Emmet Nolan, Shane Claffey.
Middle: Corey Parsons, Cathal Hogan, Shane Rigney, Conor Grimes, Michael Kenny, Dean Nagle, Peter Dooley, Patrick Mullins, Colm Mulrooney.
Back: Noel Russell, Gary Cahill, Ollie Nolan, Michael Donegan (Principal).

Paddy Mullins, Conor Grimes, Sean T. O'Connor were chosen to represent St. Brendan's and Offaly in the All Ireland Mini Series.

Conor and Patrick played on All Ireland semi final day (Kilkenny v Clare).

Sean T. O'Connor played on All Ireland final day (Cork v Kilkenny).



Seán T. O'Connor, son of Joe and Ann O'Connor, Moorpark Street, Birr, 2nd from left in the front row on All-Ireland Day in Croke Park.

THE GLORY DAYS OF THE LATE PAT SHEERAN R.I.P.

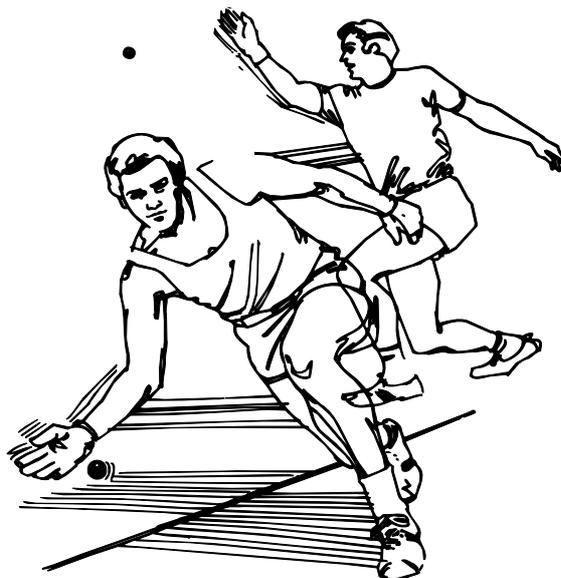
By Tony McLoughlin

Pat Sheeran was one of the greatest handballers to grace the Handball Courts of Ireland. A wonderful two handed player, a natural with his left and right hands. He was widely acknowledged for his sportsmanship in the ball alley. He would never obstruct or hinder an opponent to gain an advantage. This was epitomised in the final of the Gael Linn Tournament. The referee mistakenly mixed up his score sheet. After half an hours play he called time and instead of Pat being declared the winner, his opponent was given the decision and, although demoralised, Pat did not make an official complaint.

Pat's handball career commenced at a very young age when he played against the Castle Wall opposite his home in William Street. He quickly acquired the skill to compete against Des Dillon, Paddy Murray and other greats who utilized the CYMS, a three walled handball court, with no back wall. Pat excelled in this environment where his two handed skills were nigh impossible to defeat. When the new four walled court was built in the Fair Green in the early 1950's, Pat's game improved greatly and he teamed up with Jody Coughlan to win a minor All-Ireland final. Defeat in that All-Ireland final only inspired Pat to become one of the all time great handballers representing Birr and Offaly with great distinction. Pat won the Leinster softball and hardball singles in 1965. In hardball, he defeated Joey Maher who was to win All-Ireland and world titles. Pat won softball and hardball All Ireland Junior doubles titles with Jimmy Carter as his partner.

Pat received much help from his father who drove him all over the country to tournaments. He, along with his brother Eamon, trained extremely hard down through the years. With the closure of the Handball Alley in Birr, he, along with many others, transferred to Crinkle where he played for many years.

Pat was also voted sport star of the year on 4 occasions by the readers of the Offaly Independent. We thank him for the many great sporting memories. Ar Dheis Dé go raibh a anam.



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Email: twenrightsol@eircom.net

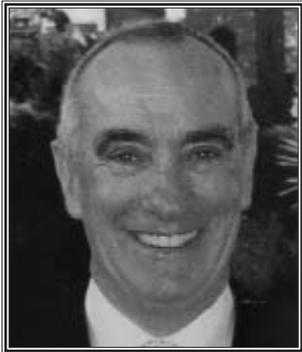
ALL LEGAL WORK UNDERTAKEN

WILLS & PROBATE • PERSONAL INJURIES • ACCIDENT CLAIMS
SALES • PURCHASES - COMMERCIAL, RESIDENTIAL & AGRICULTURAL PROPERTIES

MAY THEY REST IN PEACE



May Byrne



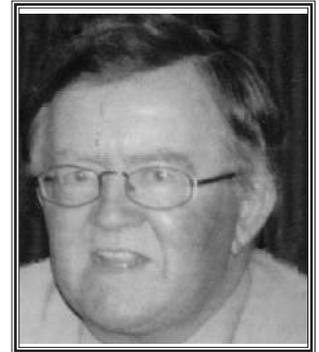
Billy Butler



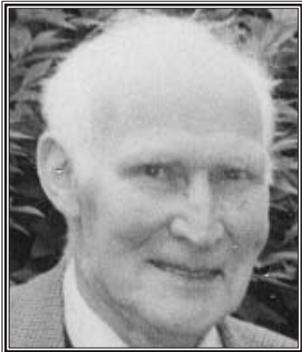
Madeline Ryan



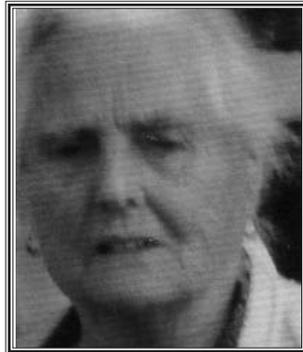
Peggy Donoghue



Paddy O'Connor



Jack Scully



Eileen Burges



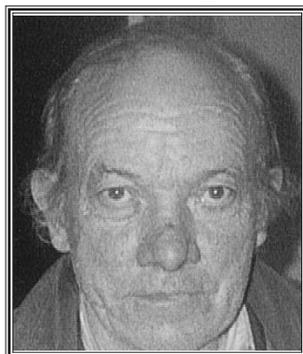
Maisie McCarthy



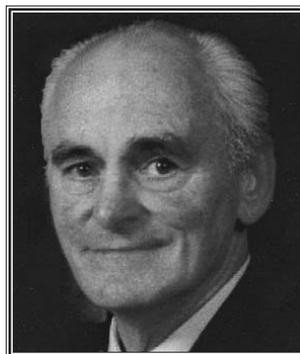
Eileen Feehily



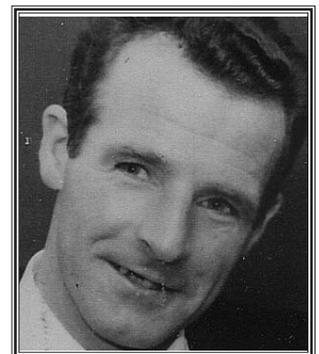
Rose Finlan



Paddy Horan



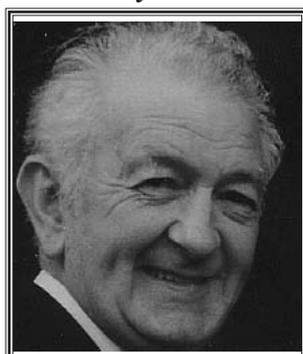
William A. Watson



Pat Sheeran



Bridie Dunne



Mick Daly



Michael Purcell



Nancy Pilkington



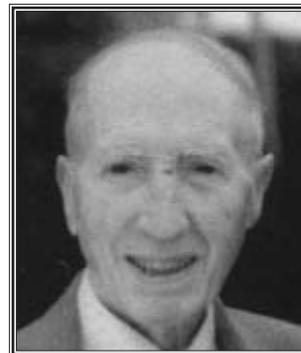
Jimmy McCafferty



Joe Egan



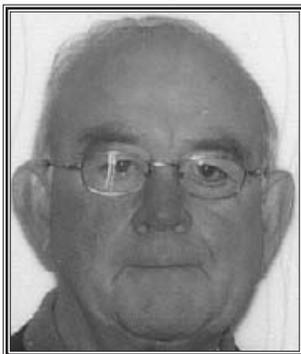
Mary Donegan



Geoff Liffey



Jane Dwyer



Paul Quinn



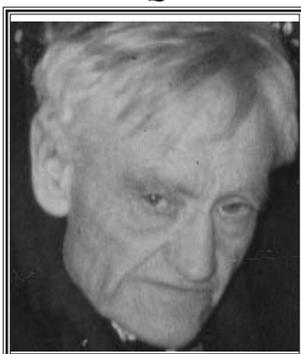
Michael Smith



Michael Hogan



Tom Gallagher



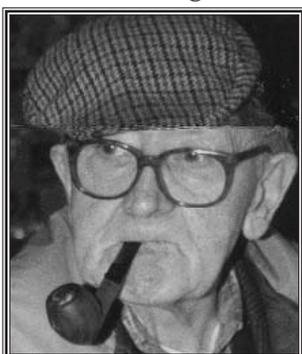
Seamus Mulrooney



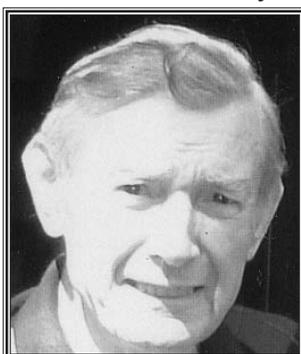
Maureen Maher



David Dowley



Jack Nevin



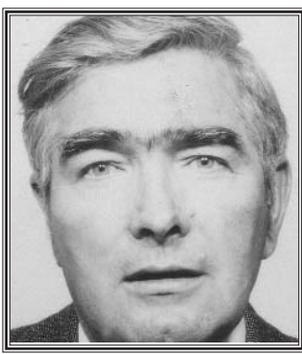
Eamon Sheppard



Majella Campbell



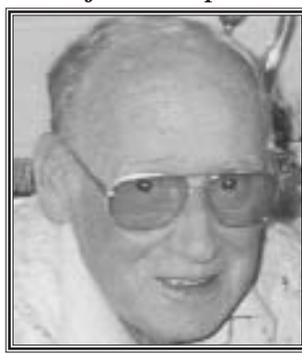
Margaret Pilton



John Egan



Martin Rice



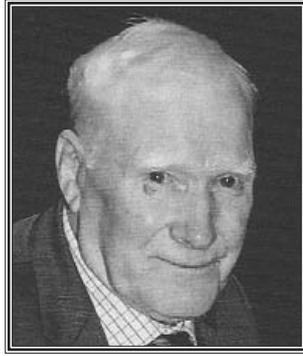
Des Talbot



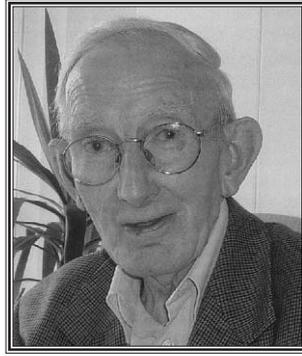
Kathleen Hennessy



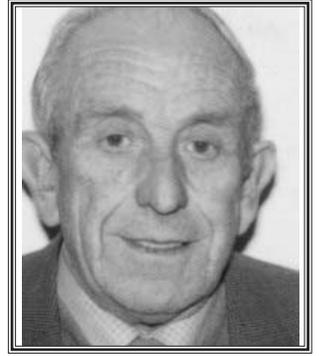
Molly McGrath



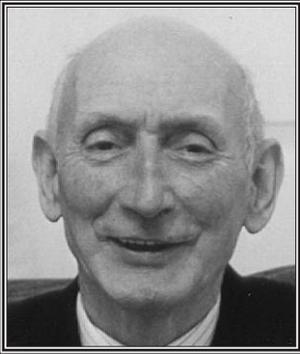
Joe Scully



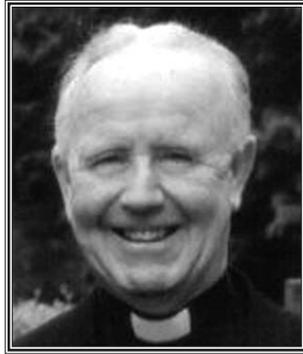
Denis Murphy



Jimmy Cahill



Paddy Kelly



Canon John Shalloo



Dorothy Jackson



Ena Hctor



John Murdock



Margaret Pey



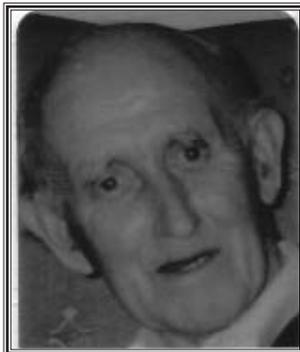
Mary Betty O'Brien



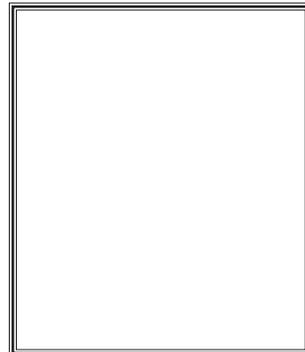
Mary Oakley



Michael Hehir



Tom Keeshan



Sally Grogan ???

