

# BIRR YEAR REVIEW



# BIRR YEAR REVIEW 2007

Volume 7

December 2007

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### Front Cover

The colour photos feature Birr in 2007  
Photography : Paul Barber

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The arrival of the Birr Review in the shops is yet another reminder of how time seems to pass much more quickly nowadays. Can it really be all of twelve months since last year's Review? We hope there is something for you to enjoy in the book. Two of the most important sections of the book are the weddings page and the obituary pages. When we look at the weddings pages we are reminded of the wonderful, joyful occasions, which have brought so much happiness to family and friends. When we look at the faces of our deceased friends in the obituary section we recall with great sadness the many people who are no longer with us. Great credit is due to Tony McLoughlin for his dedicated work in collecting these photographs and names. Producing the Birr Review is very much a team effort and we are always looking for new people to join us. Finally I would like to say a big thank you to our advertisers who support The Birr Review so generously each year.

**Michael Donegan**  
*Editor*

As our lives move on relentlessly, we wish that we could sometimes pause the clock or live in the moment. The poet Patrick Kavanagh describes it as the longing "To snatch out of time the passionate transitory". In its own way, the Birr Review magazine manages to do this for us. It captures and records a snapshot of our community at a particular point in each year and allows us to revisit that past. In achieving this, the Birr Review bestows a very valuable gift on all of the people connected with the community, both at home and abroad. The credit for this, without question, must go to the Editor, Michael Donegan and the entire dedicated committee who give this invaluable gift to us each year. On behalf of the Lions Club of Birr I am delighted to acknowledge our proud association with the Magazine and I thank Michael Donegan and his entire team for the continued production of such a wonderful publication.

**Richard Kennedy**  
*President*  
*Birr Lions Club*



## BIRR ANNUAL REVIEW COMMITTEE 2007

Michael Donegan (Chairman & Editor), Jim Phelan (Assistant Editor), Paul Barber, Pat Connolly, Emer Dolphin-Murray, Tony Hogan, Brian Kennedy, Richard Kennedy, Ray Leonard, Martin McCarthy, Tony McLoughlin, Sr. Roberta, Denis Tierney.

Special thanks to Pat Cleary, Sean Hanniffy and Camillus King for photography.

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# Birr Year In Review 2006-2007

## NOVEMBER 2006

An oral history recording was carried out by Maurice O'Keefe on behalf of The Offaly Heritage Forum. This was launched at the Offaly Heritage Seminar held in Dooly's Hotel on 28<sup>th</sup> October by Cllr. Michael Campbell, Chairman, Birr Town Council.

Birr Neighbourhood Watch Theo Dillon stepped down as Secretary after 10 years service. Best wishes and gratitude were extended to Theo for his dedication. He will continue on in an advisory capacity.

Sean Walsh from Brosna, Shinrone, and a pupil of St Brendan's Community School won 1<sup>st</sup> place in Area No 1 Young Engineer Competition 2006.

A Festival of Hymns led by the Birr Choral Society was held on Sunday 5<sup>th</sup> November in St. Brendan's church in celebration of All Saints Day.

Birr Social Club Snooker tournament has started in aid of Birr Nursing Unit, sponsored by Buckley's Super Valu and C & C.

Birr native, David O'Meara opened a new pharmacy in O'Connell Street.

Ten Men from the Birr area received certificates for the Life skills programme at the FAS/West Offaly Partnership offices in Bridge Street, Birr.

Birr Chamber of Commerce launched its first annual Christmas Grand Draw to help light up the town.

Birr Theatre and Art Centre received €10,950 from the Arts Council following an additional €7.5m made available for capital projects by John O'Donoghue TD Minister for Arts, Sport and Tourism.

An all star cast lined up for the Birr Comhaltas annual concert in the Birr Theatre and Arts centre on 19<sup>th</sup> November. Top of the bill was renowned fiddler and banjo player John Carty.

St. Brendan's Birr Parish Triduum took place Monday 27<sup>th</sup> November to Wednesday 29<sup>th</sup> November with guest preachers including Fr. Tony Flannery and Bishop Willie Walsh.

At the Irish Schools Girls Golf Championships held at the Heath Golf Club, St Brendan's Community School was represented by Patrice Delaney, Niamh O'Brien and Orlagh Kirwin under their mentor Mrs. Colette O'Brien.

Contract documents were signed for the work to commence on the refurbishment of Birr Swimming Pool by Pat Connolly, chairman of the Swimming Pool Committee and Paddy McIntyre, contractor.

New Irish Game and Country Fair to be hosted by Birr Castle in August 2007 subject to planning permission.

The Wolftrap Cycling Club held its first AGM. They took part in numerous cycles in the Midlands and also travelled further afield to Wicklow and the border counties.

Richard Haslam was in Birr demonstrating the art of Flower arranging in the County Arms Hotel. Richard is an award winning florist renowned for his innovative and contemporary style. All proceeds go to the Organ Renovation Fund and Offaly Hospice.

## DECEMBER

The 6<sup>th</sup> Edition of Birr Year Review was launched in Birr's new Civic Offices on 8<sup>th</sup> December.

Birr Chamber of Commerce announced that there would be extended opening hours to enhance and facilitate a more enjoyable shopping experience during the festive period.

Birr Film Club presented the eagerly awaited Le Grand Voyage in Birr Theatre and Arts Centre.

John Molloy, Cara O'Sullivan and the combined choirs of Birr Choral Society and Birr Stage Guild brought the "Glory of Christmas" to the fore in St. Brendan's Church with two hours of quality entertainment.

Tullamore Gramophone Society members travelled to Birr for the Glory of Christmas Concert held in St. Brendan's Church.

Midlands Tribune journalist Derek Fanning launched two new books entitled "The Tunnel" and "Journeys through Elvish Realms – A Mountaineer's Tale" in the new Civic Offices in Birr.

Pupils of the Mercy Primary School in Birr treated their parents to a delightful performance of "The Christmas Story" in St. Brendan's Church.

The Inaugural GOAL Mile took place in Birr on Christmas Day. Approximately 600 people descended on Emmet Square on Christmas day to take part in the GOAL mile, where the starting gun was fired by Cllr. Tony McLoughlin. The event was organised and planned by James Delaney and the Leaving Cert Applied Class II at St. Brendan's Community School. The event was a huge success which raised a whopping €9,500 for GOAL. It is hoped to make this an annual event.

Ko-Rec-Type closed its doors for the last time in Birr. The company came to Birr in the late 1970's and was praised by Chairman of Birr Town Council, Cllr. Michael Campbell for the contribution it had made to the town.

Santa Visited Birr Library on 20<sup>th</sup> December.

Mr. Niall Sweeney addressed the December meeting of the Birr Town Council for the final time as he retired as County Manager after 10 years service. He remarked that he felt that Birr had a very positive future to look forward to.

### JANUARY 2007

Birr records the coldest temperature of 2006; according to Met Eireann's summary of 2006 the lowest air temperature was a chilly -7.8° while the lowest minimum grass temperature was recorded on the same date as -16.0° the lowest recording in Birr since 1982.

Birr Town Council set a commercial rate increase of 4.68% during its budget meeting.

Birr Comhaltas Annual Feile na Nollag Session took place in the County Arms on 4<sup>th</sup> January. This event has been held annually for more than 30 years and once again upwards of thirty young musicians, singers and dancers from South Offaly got together for a great evening's entertainment.

Birr Film Club showed "Heading South" on January 16<sup>th</sup>. "The Bog Beautiful", an exhibition by Carrig born Margaret Maher of calligraphic pieces and paintings of the bogs where Margaret grew up was displayed in Birr Theatre and Arts Centre from January until March.

Birr Credit Union presented the Swimming Pool Committee with a cheque for €50,000 towards the building work on the swimming pool.

Birr Tidy Towns committee held their meeting in Dooly's Hotel. The main agenda was the action plan for 2007.

The Lions Club presented Fr Pat Gilbert, chaplain of St. Brendan's Community School with a substantial cheque towards the extension of St. Brendan's Pastoral Building.

Birr ratepayers broke €1million barrier. This was confirmed by Cllr. Tony McLoughlin after the January meeting of Birr Town Council when a 4.68% increase in the commercial rate was struck by councilors.

Disappointment for Birr Rugby when the team travelled to Clane in search of a back to back victory after the previous weeks win over Terenure. Despite their outstanding defence they never got the chance and the final score was Clane 12- Birr 0.

Kidz Kraftz, a new drop-in club for children aged from 4 to 12 years started in Birr Resource Centre on a Friday evening 4-6pm. The idea of Kidz Kraftz is to introduce children to different arts and crafts and revive some of the more traditional crafts.

'Snow White Unplugged', an hilarious comedy, performed and produced by Reinventing Culture, which puts a different twist on the old fairy tale was staged in the Birr Theatre and Arts Centre.

Mundy, the Birr singer was nominated for a Meteor award. He previously won a Meteor Award in 2003.

### FEBRUARY

The Birr Swimming Pool committee embarked on a fundraising campaign to raise the local contribution to fund the refurbishment of the pool.

St. Brendan's Community School Talent Show took place. Every taste from rock to opera, traditional to comedy was catered for. "Enter Sandman" comprising William Gleeson,

Raymond Kearns, Brian Murphy and Peter Kelly eventually carried off the overall prize.

Birr Golf Club Captains' Drive-in took place in beautiful sunshine. The four magnificent drives were followed by a 13-hole scramble and a very tasty meal.

Birr based Fine Gael T.D. Olwyn Enright met with the Chief Executive Officer of the National Roads Authority to try to bring about a resolution to the long-running issue of the dangerous junction at Seffin, Birr.

Birr Town Council supported a motion that would see funds collected under development levies going towards the local contribution for the refurbishment and extension of Birr Swimming Pool. The Council agreed to provide €115,000.

Top former Irish National Hunt Jockey Charlie Swan, opened Birr Equestrian and Veterinary Supplies in the Old Railway Station on the Roscrea road.

A fire was started deliberately in St. Brendan's Boys' School but was contained to one room. Computers, light-fittings and teaching equipment were damaged.

Birr Camogie Club held a very successful Dinner Dance, the first dinner dance in the Club's 29 year history.

St. Brendan's Community School qualified for first All-Ireland Camogie Final when they defeated Our Lady's Grammar School, Newry 4-6 to 1-5.

Birr and District Motor Club had the official launch of their 2007 Stages Rally. Rally enthusiasts and locals turned out in their droves to view the rally cars on show.

Birr Stage Guild presented "Some Enchanted Evening" – a celebration of some of the best songs of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

An Art Exhibition in the Chestnut showed works by Birr artist and musician Roesy.

Offaly County Council was convicted of polluting the Rock River, a tributary of the Little Brosna in Crinkill.

A new community website ([www.birr-comm.ie](http://www.birr-comm.ie)) for Birr and the surrounding areas was launched.

Over 70 pupils from primary schools in the parish and St. Brendan's Community School converged on Birr Castle to celebrate the National Science and Engineering week.

St. Brendan's Community School co-ordinated a twenty-four hour fast. All monies raised went directly to Sr. Gabrielle to support her work in the Favellas (shanty towns) in the poorest parts of Brazil.

The annual mass for parents, cubs, scouts and venturers was held in the old folks centre. It was their centenary celebration and the investiture of new cubs, scouts and venturers took place.

Birr 66 Bridge Club celebrated 40 years of bridge playing with an anniversary dinner followed by a social game of bridge.

The young scientists of Mercy Primary School, Birr took up the science challenge during "Discover Primary Science Week" and set about designing and making, experimenting and applying scientific principles.

In the Leinster Colleges Senior Hurling "A" quarter-final Good Counsel New Ross 2-10 beat St. Brendan's

Community School 1-12. St. Brendan's Community School went down by the narrowest of margins.

### **MARCH**

The Irish Language Debating Team from St. Brendan's Community School, Birr, Joanne Ni hOgáin, Aoife Ni Chorrágáin and Dónal O'Riain debated against schools from Lucan, County Dublin, Maynooth, County Kildare and Edenderry, County Offaly. The team received great praise from Gael Linn for their efforts on the night and in previous rounds of the competition but it was the team from Lucan who were announced the winners and will go forward to contest the All-Ireland final.

Offaly County Childcare Committee in conjunction with Birr Library hosted storytelling sessions for parents and child minders of pre-school children.

Birr U-16 Rugby team travelled to Roscrea and returned home with a hard earned victory, Roscrea-3, Birr-5. The Birr U-14 team had a good victory over Mullingar scoring 14 points to Mullingar's 3. Birr U-12 rugby team was crowned Midland League Champions.

Crinkill Tidy Villages Association and Crinkill Development Association amalgamated to form Crinkill Tidy Village and Development Association.

Birr Historical Society Guest speaker Mr. Ger Murphy lectured on "Crime in West Offaly before the Famine".

Friends of Birr Community Nursing Unit hosted their 3<sup>rd</sup> Fashion Show.

The Birr Archaeology Company hosted a two day conference on conflict archaeology at the Battle of Aughrim Interpretive Centre, Aughrim, Co. Galway.

St. Brendan's Community School hopes of winning an All-Ireland camogie title were dashed by Scoil Mhuire, Carrick-on-Suir.

Birr Lady Golfers played the final of the Winter League sponsored by Birr Credit Union in glorious weather conditions.

St. Brendan's Church of Ireland hosted a Chamber Orchestra of over 30 musicians – staff and students from NUI Galway.

The prestigious Rosse Medal, a new student research award from the Institute of Physics in Ireland was awarded to its first recipient at a ceremony in Birr Castle.

Pupils of 5<sup>th</sup> class Convent of Mercy, Birr and Class 7 of the Boys National School, Birr planted a "Wish Tree" in the grounds of Birr Library to mark National Tree Week.

The 2<sup>nd</sup> year Civic Social and Political Education Week was completed at St. Brendan's Community School. Guest speakers included past pupil Deputy Olwyn Enright and Karen O'Shea, daughter of John O'Shea, founder of third world agency, GOAL.

### **APRIL**

Birr nurse Arlene Minnock, travelled to Uganda for charity work. She went with the A-Z Children's Charity and will work with 25 children who are orphans and are suffering from AIDS or are HIV positive.

The Easter Egg Hunt took place in Birr Castle where children hunted for hand painted eggs.

Election fever was in the air and Birr's Deputy Olwyn Enright was up there amongst them when she addressed the Fine Gael Ard Fheis and launched her Education Policy. Five young girls from the Crinkill Handball Club represented Offaly in the Leinster Juvenile 40 x 20 A Championships. It was the first time ever that girls from Offaly took part in handball championships.

Carrig National School was one of four runners up in the National Competition to promote road safety. The competition was for children in 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> classes throughout the country who participated in the Road Safety Authority's Seatbelt Sheriff initiative. The school received €500.

Birr Swimming Pool Committee was delighted with the news that they were to receive €60,000 in Sports Capital Grant (National Lottery funding) to assist in the purchase of new equipment for the new gymnasium at Birr Pool. Birr G.A.A. Club also received a substantial sum of €175,000. Birr Town Soccer Club and Crinkill G.A.A. Club were also successful with their applications.

A new organisation, "Meitheal an Bhiorra", was established to promote Birr as a tourist destination.

Election posters were banned from the centre of Birr. The ban applied to Market Square, Emmet Square, O'Connell Street, Main Street and John's Place.

The Birr Historical Society lecture this month was "The Parsons family in Birr" with guest speakers Lord and Lady Rosse.

Birr Town U-11's collected their second league title in two years when they beat Clara at home by 3 goals to 1.

Birr U-12's brought home silverware from the Leinster Rugby Blitz.

A dangerous explosion occurred in a Birr quarry which caused rock to travel beyond the distance anticipated and large stones landed in a garden of nearby property but there were no injuries.

Crinkill Tidy Villages held their spring clean up. All the litter was cleared from the village and the old disused cottages in Swag Street were painted.

Bank of Ireland, Birr was awarded the title "Business Banking Branch of the Year" at the 2007 National Excellence Awards.

### **MAY**

Minister of State at the Department of Finance, Tom Parlon TD welcomed sixteen additional FAS staff to Birr.

Fine Gael Leader Enda Kenny paid a flying visit to Birr ahead of the General Election.

"Back to square one as impasse between Birr and Crinkill remains deeper than ever" was the headline in the Midland Tribune as a three man Mediation Committee from the GAA's Disputes Resolution Authority indicated it was withdrawing from adjudicating on the Birr / Crinkill boundary row.

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It was reported that the former Union Workhouse at Syngfield, Birr could be the new headquarters of FAS.

The Birr Community Games hurlers won the county title. Panel members were – Ruairi Claffey, Craig Taylor, Cormac Kenny, Darragh Pilkington, Stefan Shalloe, Eoghan Cahill, Shane Donovan, Cathal Kirwan, Daniel O’Meara, Dylan Quegan, Mark Haines, Dylan Watkins, Jack Regan, Rian Dempsey, Ronan Murphy, Kenneth Taylor, Brian Hynes, Mark Nolan, Conor Daly, and T.J. Talbot.

Participants in the Birr New Directions Programme celebrated the completion of a 15 week computer course.

The Crinkill Bealtaine Concert was hailed as a great success.

Birr Gardai investigated a shooting incident in Crinkill.

Birr Airfield was the setting for a major emergency exercise.

The Marian Hall was the centre of political attention in Laois/Offaly in the wake of the May 24<sup>th</sup> General Election as it hosted the constituency count. Finance Minister Brian Cowen TD racked up the country’s highest personal vote of 19,102, securing him election on the first count. The other TD’s elected were Olwyn Enright & Charlie Flanagan (both FG) and John Moloney & Sean Fleming (both FF). The biggest casualty was Tom Parlon, one of six PD TD’s to lose their seats as the party experienced national meltdown.

Brian Whelahan was the guest of honour as a Road Safety Awareness Leaflet was launched by both the girls’ and boys’ national schools in Birr.

A number of Birr teenagers addressed the monthly meeting of Birr Town Council appealing for the provision of a skate park in the town.

Stephen Grant of Grant Engineering was named among the finalists in the prestigious 2007 Ernst & Young Entrepreneur of the Year competition.

### **JUNE**

The lead story on the Midland Tribune, dated June 6<sup>th</sup>, highlighted that Birr Swimming Pool was to re-open later in the month.

Cian Cashen, a pupil at Carrig NS, was a winner in the Agri Aware and FBD Trust’s annual Springtime on the Farm Art & Colouring Competition.

According to figures released by Met Eireann Birr enjoyed its sunniest spring since 1962.

Birr postman John Wrafter retired after delivering mail for fifty years in the area.

Councillors at the June meeting of Birr Town Council failed to reach a decision on which route the Birr by-pass should take.

Cllr. Michael Loughnane was elected Chairman of Birr Town Council.

The Birr ’66 Bridge Club held a special function in the County Arms Hotel to celebrate their 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary.

The organisers of the 39<sup>th</sup> Birr Vintage Week & Arts Festival hosted a very successful Midsummer’s Ball in Dooly’s Hotel.

Set dancers from all over Ireland and some from Britain enjoyed the annual Set Dancing Festival organised by Birr Comhaltas.

Birr Tidy Towns launched their Incentive Awards (sponsored by Birr Credit Union).

The Birr Encore Chamber Choir performed with The Three Tenors in Clonmacnois as part of the Shannonbridge Music Festival.

The Green Flag was raised at Killeen National School.

A group of descendants of the Usher Family gathered in The Thatch, Crinkill for a reunion weekend.

### **JULY**

The official opening of the newly extended Birr Swimming Pool and Leisure Centre was performed by Tanaiste and Minister for Finance Brian Cowen T.D.

The Flora Birrensis Exhibition at Birr Castle was opened by Olwyn Enright T.D.

Tom Parlon announced his intention to quit politics and take up the position of Director General of the Construction Industry Federation.

Birr Town Council heard that the NRA (National Roads Authority) was advocating the erection of traffic lights at Seffin to tackle ongoing traffic problems in the area.

It was announced that Birr curate, Fr. Pat Greed was leaving the parish after six years to take up a new appointment as Parish Priest of Clonlara, Co. Clare.

Birr Scouts celebrated the Centenary of Scouting.

Birr primary school teacher, Therese Haverty was among a number of people injured when a granite staircase collapsed at the National History Museum in Dublin.

Birr Golf Club member Justin Kehoe from Shinrone competed in the British Open at Carnoustie.

The Irish Game and Country Fair (to be held at Birr Castle on August 25<sup>th</sup> & 26<sup>th</sup>) was officially launched.

The 39<sup>th</sup> Birr Vintage Week & Arts Festival was officially launched.

Milne Foods and Grant Engineering donated seats to Crinkill Tidy Villages.

A cheque for €3,552.70 was presented to the Friends of Birr Community Nursing Unit from a group of Birr ladies who participated in the Ladies Mini Marathon.

There was no joy for Birr’s Brian Watkins, Paul Cleary, Mark Mulrooney, Michael Verney and Sean Ryan as Offaly went down to Dublin in the Erin Leinster U-21 Hurling Final by 2-18 to 3-9 in Parnell Park.

### **AUGUST**

According to the Central Statistics Office report approximately ten per cent of the population in Offaly comes from an ethnic or cultural group. Out of a

population of 4,859 Birr had 409 people who were categorised as from any other white background.

In early August a Mini Film Festival took place in Birr Theatre and Arts Centre. Short films, documentaries, feature length and art pieces ensured there was something for everyone.

A special presentation was made to Tommy Moody to mark his retirement after 20 years as foremen of the St. Brendan's Environmental Group FAS Scheme in the Birr area.

Birr Vintage week celebrated its 39th anniversary this year. A large crowd was attracted to the opening parade which was held in beautiful sunshine.

Thunderstorms the evening before put paid to the 'Tullamore Show'. A 'Traditional Fair Day' was held on the Saturday. A specially commissioned exhibition of contemporary art called 'Synaesthesia Sat' took place this year mainly based in the Birr Union Workhouse. Many other art exhibitions took place in venues around the town. Sporting activities to suit all age groups, from scooter and go kart racing to a vintage tennis tournament, mixed tag rugby and a heritage cycle took place during this week. The 'Offaly Arts and Crafts association' held their exhibition in John's Hall and this was one not to be missed.

Large crowds attended The Irish Game and County Fair which was held over two days in Birr Castle Demesne. Equestrian displays, clay pigeon shooting competitions, gundog demonstrations, terrier and lurcher racing were just some of the events to be enjoyed. There were numerous trade stalls and exhibits to provide a great family day out.

The news that Birr G.A.A. would be unable to host the 2007 Offaly Senior Hurling Championship Final was greeted with disappointment from the club itself and local business people. The bad summer weather has impeded the work going on at St. Brendan's Park.

A prominent American astronomer and telescope builder, James Steven, visited Birr Castle to see the Great Telescope built by the Third Earl of Rosse. Mr. Steven is credited with discovering the Hale-Bopp comet in 1995.

### SEPTEMBER

A spokesman for the state training agency FAS stated that 30 people were already currently working in Birr under the decentralisation of State Bodies plan. FAS had hoped to move 383 jobs from Dublin to Birr but just 66 staff were willing to move.

Tin Jug studio is opening every Saturday displaying and selling works of local artists and those with local connections. The Art Plan for the county is supportive of small independent art spaces opening on a regular basis rather than for limited times.

Caimin O'Brien, a native of Birr was invited by Birr Historical Society to give a talk on 'The Evolution of the Medieval Town of Birr'. A distinguished archaeologist,

Caimin gave a tour of Birr pointing out sites of archaeological and historical significance.

The O'Donoghue family of Moorpark Street is attempting a world record as the most amount of siblings to complete a marathon. The current record is 12 siblings and the O'Donoghue family has 15 brothers and sisters. The marathon takes place on Monday 29<sup>th</sup> October. The family hopes to raise money for Down Syndrome Ireland with their attempt.

A talk on the Leinster Regiment, whose head-quarters and barracks were located at Crinkill, Birr, was given by Sean Cooke in Birr Library. A collection of books and documents were also presented to the library which give invaluable research facilities to historians and visitors.

Proprietors Mary Noonan and Laura Spillane are to be congratulated on the opening of their new boutique 'Out of the Blu'. This is a welcome addition to the Main Street. Congratulations to all the children who represented Birr and Offaly in the Community Games finals in Mosney. Birr was represented in Art, Swimming, Model Making and Athletics.

Birr Scouts travelled to Co. Down for their annual camp where they took part in a range of activities including archery, abseiling and rafting.

A group of local people travelled to South Africa to participate in the Streetwise building programme. This project provides a shelter for some of the thousands of children living on Durban's streets. The trades people who travelled provided basic services such as toilets, sleeping quarters and re-roofed the structure the children live in.

### OCTOBER

Birr Tidy Towns have introduced an Initiative Awards Events to encourage people to become involved in Birr and its appearance. The categories in the event include best kept garden, estate, shop front. A special award was presented to Mr. & Mrs. John Lawlor for their dedicated work over the years in keeping our town looking well.

Stephen Grant of Grant Engineering is a finalist in the International Category of the Ernst & Young Entrepreneur of the Year Awards.

Birr designer Geraldine O'Meara-Shiels is wished well on the opening of her 'Bridal Design Studio' on Connaught Street.

Congratulations to Birr Under-10 hurlers and footballers and their respective trainers on winning the U-10 'B' football and U-10 'A' hurling county finals.

Well done to Brian Whelahan and the Birr Senior team on winning three in a row. Sixteen years after captaining Birr to win his first senior county title in 1991, Brian was again captain and Man of the Match in this year's final.

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

## FIFTY YEARS AND A MILLION MILES LATER

*By John Wrafter who retired from service in An Post during 2007, after fifty years on the job*

June 11th 1957, 9.30 a.m.: an early rise for a 14-year-old. Little did I know I'd soon be getting up at 5.15 a.m. every weekday morning for the next 50 years - but that's what would come to pass.

John Wrafter, Telegram Boy, would be my title, and at the time I thought that sounded rather good. Plus, telegram boys got to wear capes to keep their post dry: what 14-year-old wouldn't want to wear a cape?

The telegram then, was the equivalent of the SMS/text message today - a short burst of characters, communicating a message as speedily as possible. "These telegrams are important," I was told, "so it's important they're delivered fast." By bicycle, come rain or shine, these telegrams often carried news of death, birth, engagement or the much-needed weekly wage sent home - I saw the full suite of reactions from their recipients!

From the age of 19 to 21 I found myself transferred to Galway City and with it my move from bicycle-delivery to delivery using a van, something I was to do for the next 43 years.

These 43 years, like the preceding seven saw many changes: shillings to pence to cents; miles to kilometres; country-living to urban life; letterboxes-in-doors to letterboxes at the end of laneways (with the resulting loss of contact with customers); half-doors to electronic gates; the handwritten word to typeface; stamps to franking; the automation of sorting; the set-up of courier companies; the introduction of post women; the influence of the internet and email on modern communications and the ever-increasing number of foreign people and foreign names popping-up along my daily route.

I was lucky never, despite racking-up a good one million miles on the road, to have been involved in any serious accidents: though I did find myself running after my van



*Delivering the last letter to Ryan's, Killeen*

down a hill one day, when the handbrake failed to engage. I also knocked myself out cold another time when I collided with a wall, not when I was driving, but when I tried to jump it, two legs in the air. Now that I'm writing this I do recall running into the back of Christy Cleary's horse and cart when I was on my bicycle - cut knees and knuckles, a buckled front wheel, a damaged peaked cap, but it led to a lifelong friendship between Christy and myself. I think I was bitten by dogs over 20 separate times, and I was rained-on thousands of times, but "the mail has to get through".

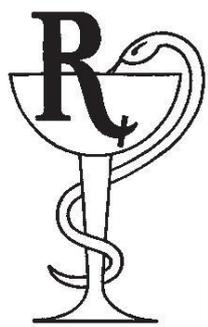
I've often been asked if I've noticed the climate change over the past 50 years. The answer is most definitely yes. Our winters are not as severe as they once were, little snow, ice or frost and less black ice on the road. Summers are more wet, yet warmer. The heavy overcoat, gloves and blackthorn boots now unnecessary are replaced by florescent safety wear in our safety-conscious society.

Then there's the other climate - a climate where one neighbour doesn't know the next; where the rush to get rich quick in Ireland's fabled Celtic Tiger found us forgetting to remember our culture, our past, and ourselves. The kindness is still out there though, as I've experienced throughout my years.

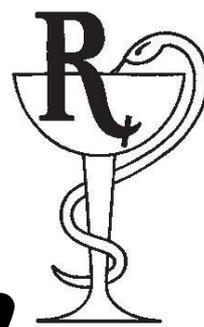
I made many friends. Happily a good number are still with us today, but we lost a lot of characters along the way, fellow postmen and clients among them. I was also lucky enough in my early years to work under postmasters like P.J. Kelly, John Graham and Joe Normile, good men all. With relief, I've reached the end of these fifty years, with my sanity and health intact, due in no small part to my many friends on my postal rounds.



*John sorting post in Birr Post Office*



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# HOW QUICKLY THE YEARS FLY BY!

*By Bro. Denis Minehane*

Little did I know, when I took my first timid steps into the little two-teacher school of Borlin, near Bantry in West Cork, as a small boy, that I was beginning a journey in education which would continue for the rest of my life. My first teacher was my aunt, my mother's sister. Both my parents had been to America during the difficult economic times of the 1920s – my father, who was a native of Whiddy Island, was in Montana in the Rocky Mountains and my mother in New York. They both came home with return tickets in 1931. My father was a small farmer and I am one of a family of seven, four boys and three girls. My mother, like most mothers of her time, was anxious to see her children educated.

When a Presentation Brother came to our school and told our sixth class about Edmund Rice and his work, I was inspired by his message to become a Presentation Brother. It was a culture shock to find myself, age 15, in the Brothers' Novitiate in the middle of Cork City. I was to remain there for a five-year formation. Visits home were rare and there were times of loneliness. The companionship of my fellow students and our interest in sport were redeeming features. I entered University in U.C.C. and took my teaching degree in Chemistry, Physics and Maths. (This year, 2007, I returned to U.C.C. with much more mature classmates to celebrate the Golden Jubilee of our graduation.) After U.C.C., I went on to teach in Coláiste Chríost Rí in Cork City for four years.

In August, 1961, I got a letter from Bro. Leo, the Provincial, informing me that my destiny, for the moment at least, lay elsewhere. I was to go to Birr in Offaly and take up a teaching post in Presentation College there. Bro. Leo was himself a native of Birr. Compared to second-level schools of today, Presentation College, Birr, was a humble place. It had a staff of five male teachers - three Presentation Brothers and two lay teachers. My companions were Brothers Liam and Stephen and Sean and Paul Glennon. We had 75 boys, all housed in what is now the Teagasc Offices opposite St. Brendan's Church of Ireland in Oxmantown Mall. There were five classes, five classrooms and five teachers. There were no secretarial or caretaker services. My first Leaving Cert. class had six students – John O'Hare, John Molloy, Michael Grogan, Bertie Bower, K.K. Kenny and Colm O'Connor.

At Christmas in 1961, I was appointed Principal. My role included full-time teaching, administration, caretaking and games master. School was a six-day week and there were 205 days in the school year. Many boys and their parents made great sacrifices for those boys to attend school. I know boys who cycled a round trip of 20 miles a day. Most of those boys were seldom late and were rarely absent. In 1961, there was a thriving hurling scene at club

level in Offaly. Club matches were very popular and attracted big attendances. Offaly clubs were competing successfully in tournaments against Tipperary and Kilkenny clubs. I got involved with Birr Club and travelled with Offaly Senior and Minor teams from 1962 onwards. In those days, organisation at county level was not good. The method of selecting and training county teams was not what it is now. One problem, I remember, was that the selection of the county team was done by a selector from each club! I found that, gradually, the enthusiasm at club level was transferred to county level. The first big success was the win over Tipperary in the National League of 1966. That Offaly team failed narrowly to win the Leinster final in 1969. It took another twelve years before Offaly won the first All-Ireland Senior hurling title in 1981. During the 1960s, we never had sufficient numbers to have a competitive school team.

The introduction of free education in 1966, closely followed by free transport, was to radically change everything in Irish education – not to mention Irish society! By 1968 and 1969, our pupil numbers were rapidly increasing. To accommodate the numbers, we were adding a new pre-fab each year and employing an extra teacher each year. By the end of 1971 we had a pre-fab Science lab. The other second-level schools in town, namely Birr Vocational School and the Convent of Mercy Secondary School, were undergoing a similar transformation and were trying to cope with similar intake increases. We co-operated with each other to widen the choice of subjects available, even ferrying pupils by bus between schools so that they could access certain subjects.

All three schools were at this time pestering the Department of Education to upgrade facilities and provide more accommodation. Our pleas seemed to be falling on deaf ears. Gradually, it became clear that the Department had no intention of developing three schools in one small town. Their plan was for amalgamation of the three into one school with all facilities under one roof. A public meeting was called by the Department in the Marian Hall to present their ideas for the future of the Birr schools. This was held on June 17<sup>th</sup>, 1971. A huge crowd attended – some local and many from other towns with similar problems. Parents spoke passionately about holding on to their schools. Family loyalties to each of the schools were vehemently expressed. Fears were raised about co-education and the dilution of spiritual values. A small number of those present were in favour of amalgamation but the idea was rejected. The Department of Education officials returned to Dublin determined that no further facilities would be granted to Birr until a solution was

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found to the question of amalgamation. Things were getting progressively worse in the schools so, by 1973, we had decided that, if we had no better solution than that proposed by the Department, we should withdraw our opposition and proceed with amalgamation. This was conveyed jointly by the three schools to the Department. Very quickly, plans for a single new school began to take shape. Five possible sites were considered. Eventually, the present site in Cappaneale was chosen by Birr Urban Council. A public competition was organised among architects to find an appropriate design for the building. It was the 1970s and money was very scarce. The design would be functional and cheap.

At teacher level, the Birr Post-Primary Teachers Representative Body came into being and began the tricky work of bringing three different staffs and two different teacher unions together to work under the one roof. In the autumn of 1979, the building was ready. The ten-member Board of Management was appointed during early November and met for the first time on 22<sup>nd</sup> November, 1979. The posts of Principal and Deputy Principal were advertised and interviews were arranged. On 19<sup>th</sup> December, 1979, I was appointed to the post of Principal with the late Des O'Brien as Deputy Principal. Very quickly, I had to come to terms with the fact that I was now responsible for the welfare of more than 800 pupils and over 60 teachers, as well as many non-teaching staff. In January 1980, at amalgamation, we inherited a Leaving Certificate class from each of the three schools. These students had to be reassured that their exam year would have our maximum attention. At staff level, there was not much time for differences of opinion. There was a great energy, a sense of co-operation, mutual respect and goodwill. It is a great tribute to the staffs of the three

schools that everything went so smoothly from the very beginning.

On the sporting fields, things also began to change. At last, Birr became serious contenders for success at College level. In 1979, as Presentation College, we won the Leinster Colleges Senior hurling championship, beating St. Peter's, Wexford, in the final. As St. Brendan's Community School, we retained that title in 1980 and finally made the ultimate breakthrough by winning the All-Ireland Colleges title in 1986. This team, trained by Pdraig Horan and Frank Bergin, formed the foundation of Offaly's first All-Ireland Minor success later in 1986. In 1994, our school again made national headlines when Jane Feehan won the Young Scientist of the Year award.

Over the years, the hallmark of St. Brendan's Community School has been a strong bond of loyalty between staff, students and parents. Parental support is one of the bulwarks of the school's success. This support has provided the resources for the purchase of an additional nine acres for playing areas; an extensive computer network; a flood-lit All-Weather Pitch; a beautiful stand-alone Oratory and, in recent times, a state-of-the-art Sports Complex.

After 36 years in post-primary education in Birr, I retired in 1997. It is a great source of pride for me to see that the quality of education has continued to flourish and go from strength to strength under Tom Foley and his very dedicated staff. Since my retirement, I have been involved with the school as a member of its Board of Management. I am also involved with our Presentation Schools. August 2007 marked the 46<sup>th</sup> anniversary of my transfer to Birr. Even though I am technically still a "blow-in", I feel privileged to have shared in the lives of so many young people.



**Leaving Cert Class of 1971  
(Presentation Brothers College)**

*Back Row (L to R):*

*Jimmy Burns, Des Egan, John Normile,  
Liam Marshall, Gerry Murray,  
Ger Hayes*

*2<sup>nd</sup> Row:*

*Cyril Kelly, John Dooley, Sean Brophy,  
Joe Carroll, Paudge Coughlan,  
Denis Hctor, Michael Mahon*

*3<sup>rd</sup> Row:*

*Eugene O'Connor, John Gleeson,  
Patsy Ryan, Michael Loughnane,  
Packie Hctor, Rody Molloy,  
Toddy Dolphin, Mr. Jim Loftus*

*Front Row:*

*Pat Stephens, Martin Hoystead,  
Bro. Denis, Joe Garahy, Adrian Scally,  
John Carroll, Pat Guinan,  
Eugene Coughlan, Garret Foley*

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## THE TRAVELLING McNAMARAS

Two Birr sisters Clíodhna and Niamh McNamara, who have over the past year raised over €12,000 for two very different but equally deserving charities. The girls are daughters of Frank and Phil McNamara of Syngefield, Birr and their exploits have taken them to India and China in support of their respective causes.

In March this year Clíodhna trekked through India for the charity 'Fighting Blindness'. 'Fighting Blindness' is an organisation dedicated to doing just that by finding treatments and cures for blindness through the funding of Irish research. In fact research teams from Ireland are at the centre of the world's endeavours to cure blindness. So with seventeen other Irish people and four Indian guides Clíodhna set off on the trek of her life. The journey began in the Periyar Tiger Reserve near Kochi in Southern India and for the next four days she walked in six hour shifts through different types of terrain with fantastic scenery and idyllic settings. The group experienced the hospitality of indigenous tribes and saw at close hand, elephants, leopards, rare monkeys, wild boar and tigers. Then it was on to the town of Munnar and the most dramatic mountain scenery in the world. This area has the highest tea-growing plantations in India. The work of picking tea leaves is mainly the responsibility of the women and the men have the difficult task of entertaining themselves by doing nothing all day except smoke the local weed. The group hiked for three more days for eight hours a day with temperatures soaring to 40 degrees. At one stage they fed a whole village with fish they bought from the local travelling fishmonger. The last day took them through the 'Silent Valley' on their way to Meesapulimala or 'The Mountain of The Whiskered Tiger', the second highest peak south of the Himalayas, where they climbed to over 3000 metres. Clíodhna will never forget the courtesy and friendliness of the people they met, the colour, the chaos, the exotic sounds and smells. She was delighted to meet and be entertained by Bibi Baskin, R.T.E. presenter who now runs 'The Heritage Hotel' in Kerala. Above all she will remember the fun and laughter with her fellow travellers and the great feeling of achievement they all had on completing the trip successfully. Clíodhna is now preparing for another fund-raising trip in 2009 so sponsors 'Be Warned!' Clíodhna holds an honours degree in industrial relations and has recently been appointed as Industrial Relations Officer with the Civil Public and Services Union.

### The Special Olympics

Niamh's interest in and contact with the Special Olympics goes back to the National Special Olympic Games in 2002 and the Special Olympics World Games which were held in Dublin in 2003. In 2006 she applied to go to Shanghai as part of the support team. The first task was to raise the €7,000 needed to make the trip. Between parachute jumps, sponsored walks, The B.U.P.A. Run, volunteer bag-packing, Birr Lions Club and a lot of generous individual



*Pictured is above is the group, with Clíodhna at the wheel on a rare occasion when they hitched a lift.*

donations the money was eventually gathered and Sunday September 30th this year saw Niamh arriving in Pudong International Airport for the start of the Special Olympics. Niamh was part of the 200-strong support team for the Irish Olympic squad about to begin their participation in the 2007 World Special Olympics. As well as Niamh and her team of helpers there were 55 coaches and over 400 family members from Ireland, all cheering for the 142 Irish athletes who made up the total of 7,000 competitors from 169 countries. In all, the Games involved 40,000 volunteer staff.

The official unveiling took place on October 2<sup>nd</sup> and was hosted by celebrities such as Tai Chi, Arnold Schwarzenegger, Nadia Comaneci, Jackie Chan and our own Colin Farrell. From the emotionally charged opening ceremony to the final whistle on October 11<sup>th</sup> Niamh was completely caught up in the excitement of it all. The first 'Special Olympics Games' had been inaugurated by Eunice Shriver in 1960 and had only once before ever been held outside America (Ireland in 2003). So this was the first time the games were held in Asia. The Olympic slogan 'I Know I can' was everywhere to be seen and the Irish were determined to do justice to this motto. In all the Irish team took home 119 medals and 69 ribbons (awarded for 4<sup>th</sup>, 5<sup>th</sup>, 6<sup>th</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup> place). It was a unique privilege and a heart-warming and unforgettable experience to be part of the joy and love shared by the athletes and their loved ones as the events progressed. Ireland participated in 11 out of the 21 competitive sports, including aquatics, bowling, equestrian, golf, football, basketball, gymnastics and table tennis. We

## BIRR Year Review 2007

also had three football teams, two male and one female and a male and female basketball team. China did a superb job of hosting the games and contributed 40,000 volunteers, mostly student doctors to the support teams. Their kindness, cheerfulness and generosity of spirit left a lasting impression on Niamh.

There are so many memorable things to recall, not least the mosquito bites, the fake phone cards, the beautiful city, the humidity and the humility, the families and friends and above all the fantastic athletes themselves. Niamh's feelings about her two weeks in Shanghai are summed up in the beautiful words written by Gerard McWilliams a fellow volunteer;

### Equal Opportunity

*"I will think about you  
I will worry about you  
I will care about you  
And if you trust me  
I will help you"*

Niamh would like to thank the many people and organisations who made her trip possible by supporting her fundraising efforts.



Niamh (pictured on the right) in Shanghai



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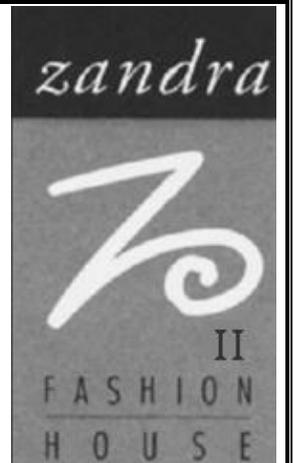
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# HOME THOUGHTS FROM ABROAD

By Barry Glendenning

When Mr. Tony Hogan, asked me to write “a few words” for this year’s edition, I was happy to say yes for a number of reasons ... the main one being drunkenness.

My brief was to write about Christmas. More specifically, Christmas in Birr, from the perspective of somebody returning from London, as I have annually for the best part of 10 years. Of course the fact that it’s now possible to fly from London to Dublin for considerably less than the price of a cheese sandwich on the actual plane means that a certain amount of mystique has been taken away from the Christmas homecoming of emigrants.

Where once we would have expected a police escort past the welcoming countryside bonfires, through the town and into the square, where joyous hordes would chant our names and wave flags to celebrate our triumphant return. At least it is in my house, where one of the first questions (I know, I know, but a boy can dream), these days the return of the Diaspora tends to be more low key. I’m asked every Christmas without fail is when I’m going back. My parents: “Well, how are things?”

Me: “Great.”

My parents: “When are you going back?”

Me: “Well if you’d just let me take off my coat ...”

To be fair, it’s not just the folks. Everyone you meet wants to know (a) how you are (which is nice) and (b) when are you going back (which is ... well, slightly rude). Obviously it’s nice that people care and yes, they’re only making conversation, but the returned emigrant at Christmas is a paranoid, nervous beast. So when the first thing people they haven’t seen in aeons ask about are the date, time and flight number on the return leg of their plane ticket,

it’s only natural that they might feel a bit unwanted and unloved.

Take it from somebody who knows, if it’s the hand of friendship and welcome you want to extend, offering to buy somebody who’s home from abroad for Christmas a drink, then giving them all the money you have on your person when you meet them is the kind of thoughtful gesture that they *really* appreciate.

But even if that doesn’t come to pass, there are many other things to appreciate about Christmas in Birr. There’s the obvious: Mrs. Glendenning’s cooking, Mr. Glendenning’s booze, sleep, Raiders of the Lost Ark and the company of friends and family. Then there’s the less obvious: nods of greeting from passing strangers on the street (such a gesture on the streets of London is normally a sign that a violent mugging is imminent), or the serene patience of shopkeepers and barmen who are happy to wait while you sift through your change like a halfwit, sheepishly mumbling something about not having figured out Euros yet even though they’ve been in circulation since 2002.

But perhaps the best thing of all about being home for Christmas, is the knowledge that, having finally written these “few words” for Tony Hogan, I can now look forward to walking the streets of Birr for 10 days without having to worry about bumping into him and having to explain why this year’s Birr Review went out with a conspicuously blank page. Merry Christmas everyone.

*Barry Glendenning is a journalist with the Guardian. He is grand, thanks, and will be going back to London on January 3<sup>rd</sup>.*

## IN THE DAYS GONE BY



*Eamon Hackett outside his shop on the Main Street.*

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# 'RICHER THAN PURE GOLD' – A LETTER FROM BRAZIL

By Sr. Gabrielle Kieran

Greetings to my friends in Birr! There is something in this country's 'poor' that is richer than pure gold, it touches the deepest core and I so very often say too 'obrigada', "my God, you have made my day".

This year I had a special trip home to Ireland as the Mercy mission was celebrating 25 years in Brazil. Four Sisters from the Archdiocese of Cashel and Emly came here in 1982 and chose to live and work in the North East, an area which was experiencing a severe drought at the time. Many others came and spent a number of years living and working among those rejected by society in so many ways. At the Mass to celebrate the silver jubilee, there was a tremendous sense of gratitude for each one's experience of Brazil, it was a celebration of our 'obrigada' to the people who made (and still make) such a difference in our lives.

There are three of us here now, Celine and Miriam living in the city of Campina Grande just about an hour and a half away from the city of João Pessoa where I live. In Campina Grande, Celine is involved in adult literacy. She also works with a cooperative on the city dump where they recycle plastic and paper. From the plastic bottles they made yard brushes and from the paper, they make notebooks, cards, gift-boxes etc. Miriam has set up a pre-school in a very deprived area and she also works with a mother and child care programme which aims at combating infant mortality and ensuring a healthier lifestyle.

Here in João Pessoa, I work with women who live in very difficult situations and who have been abused or have suffered violence. This year we opened a little centre called the 'Casa Lilás' (Lilac House), a safe haven where the women can meet. It's an open house where group activities take place and psychological accompaniment is available. We are part of a larger network of women's groups and together we lobby for justice issues, environment issues etc. We have set up two mini cooperatives – one making medicines from herbs and also a food complement which is wholesome for under-nourished children; the other works at different crafts including greeting cards that are hand painted on paper from the Campina Grande project.

Another area of involvement for me is with people who suffer from AIDS. I am part of a team that works with prevention programmes, hospital workshops and group work. The AIDS problem is being handled well by the government but issues like prejudice, discrimination, fear and anger are major and they need to be dealt constantly in the group work. The life and work here enthuses me

and challenges me too. Sometimes I feel it's only a tiny drop in a huge big ocean, but then every drop matters.

It's always a very special time for me to revisit Birr when I come home from Brazil and of course this year was no exception. My roots go deep in Birr. A brief trip down memory lane at this point is in order, I think! As a ten year old I moved with my family to Birr where we spent many happy years. I always remember the first day we visited the convent and met Sr. Mercy who was principal of the Girls Primary school at the time and Sr. Catherine principal of the Secondary. Even at that early age I remember looking in awe at the Pugin Chapel with its highly ornamental stalls, the elegant angels with their trumpets, the ornate altar and rich colourful stain glass. Something must have struck a chord in me then. Little did I know that I would one day join the Sisters of Mercy.

All of our family soon became involved in the Birr Stage Guild, my father and sister played the violin in the orchestra for the Pantomimes or Musicals, my mother helped at the make-up and the rest of us joined the troop of performers! As I think back just now, exactly fifty years ago we began rehearsing for "Beyond the Mill", a pageant written and produced by Jimmy Fanning in May 1958. It was the story of Bernadette and Lourdes and I played the part of Bernadette. I still have the programme of that pageant with the signatures of the cast: Bertie McCoy, Des O'Brien, Séamus Kennedy, Mary McLoughlin (Harte), Gerry Dolan, Frank McNamara, among others. I remember the fantastic work that Seán Donegan did as he made a stream spring up on the stage - 'twas like a real Lourdes miracle! Ciarán Murray, a teacher in the Presentation Brothers College at the time, played the part of the narrator, strumming a guitar and singing with the children: 'Tap your sabots, Bernadette'.

The years passed, I joined the Sisters of Mercy and in 1969 I came back to Birr where I taught in St. John's Secondary School and later in the Community School. They were happy years, not without struggles and challenges, especially as we (the three second-level schools in the town at that time) the Presentation Brothers, the Vocational School and ourselves worked to facilitate the transition to the St. Brendan's Community School. But there was very good will and a determination on the part of all the 'three-in-one' team to ensure the success of the new venture. The bonds built up with my fellow teachers in those years are still strong. Some keep in touch regularly, the occasional phone call, texting or emailing! Thank God for technology that has bridged the huge gap of space and time. Thank God too for friends.

Another feature of those years was The Birr Girls Club which met every Saturday night at St. John's. There was

## BIRR Year Review 2007

always a buzz of activities: debating, table tennis, dancing, stage shows etc. The annual pantomime was a highlight and each Summer Sr. Eileen (James), Ita (Ursula) and I would head off with a bus load of teenagers and their bicycles! We had cycling holidays in Kerry, West Cork, and Donegal .... Can you picture us? Any time I meet up with former club members, there's lots to chat and laugh about as we recall the escapades.

There have been big changes in Birr since I left in '86. What a different Burkes' Hill and Sandymount! The move of the Sisters of Mercy from St. John's Convent to Riverside and McAuley Drive was another big change that took getting used to! For years I looked sadly at the old neglected convent building and the overgrown gardens. One day I ventured in by the front door and walked around the cobwebbed cloisters, looked in to the chapel and the old community room and shed a quiet tear as I recalled some precious moments spent there. But time

moves on and we too must move, though sometimes reluctantly! While I was at home this summer, I must say, I was delighted to see the wonderful work carried out on the old convent inside and outside, all so sensitively done and with such care to protect and preserve the architectural beauty. The Library is a gem, like a secret that was waiting to be revealed. And what a wonderful setting for Macregol's Gospels! Congratulations to all those who worked to make the dream come true.

A visit to the Community School is always a 'must' and once again, this year I found myself sitting among friends in the same corner in the staff room! During Lent of this year the senior students carried out a major fund raiser to help the work here in Brazil. It was good to meet them, to show them a slide presentation of the scene here and especially to thank them for their fantastic efforts to help those who have so little.



*Daniel O'Meara presents a donation to Sr. Gabrielle for her Brazilian Mission. The money was raised by 5th years during Lent 2007. Sr. Gabrielle returned to St. Brendan's Community School in September, during a well deserved vacation in Birr.*

## GOOD OLDE DAYS

*By Michael Donegan*

Sheila and Paddy O'Callaghan have lived in Moorpark Street since February 1954. In fact they were among the first residents to occupy their house after the new scheme was officially completed just weeks before. Previous to that they had lived in High street since their wedding in 1951. They are both proud natives of Birr. Sheila was born in Mill Street. Her father, Jack Hegarty was Head Maltster in Williams Wallers Malting house in Castle Street. There were seven children in Sheila's family, all girls. Sadly only Sheila and her sister Lena are still alive. Sheila had a simple but happy childhood. She went to school to the nuns down the road, was a top class speller and very early on was spotted by the priest who trained the choir as having a distinctive voice. She could hit a High C without effort and was soon singing in the church choir. In those days childhoods didn't last that long. At the end of sixth class it was off to work in Birr Shoes like so many other 14 year olds. She started with the princely wage of 3/9d per week and by the time ten years had passed was earning about £3.10/-. It was the old story- long hours, small pay, glad to have a job. Work was always important to Sheila and over the years she worked in Keelan's, Woodington's and DuBarry's shoe factories, and also in North's protective clothing factory in Castle Street. Sheila also enjoyed working in Suzanne's Fashions in O'Connell Street. In the early 1960's Sheila also worked in the County Arms Hotel and enjoyed her time there very much. She speaks of her workmates over the years as being "the cream of workers". In those pre-war days there wasn't a lot of social life for a young woman in Birr. If you could muster the 1/3d you might get to the Oxmantown Hall to a 'Practise dance'. At this you could watch other more proficient dancers take the floor and try to learn the steps by observation. The real thing took place on Sunday nights from 10.00.p.m to 2.00.a.m. It was three times the price at 3/9d. The big band in the area was Ernie Barber's Carlton Band and at 18 Sheila found herself as its lead female vocalist doing the circuit of the halls in the surrounding towns as well as Birr itself. The money wasn't bad either at 10/- a night and the chance to do what she loved best-sing. The war was on and all the Vera Lynn classics were in vogue and boy could she make them swing.

Sometime in the late 40's she began to attract the attention of a certain High Street man called Paddy O'Callaghan. They had met at Paddy's sister's wedding in High Street and soon were going steady. They were married on June 4<sup>th</sup> 1951 in St. Brendan's Church. They travelled to Dublin in great style for their honeymoon by noisy steam train on the old Birr railway line. Then it was out to Dun Laoire on the bus. Imagine their surprise when



*Paddy and Sheila O'Callaghan*

the first people they met taking the air on the prom were three other newly-married couples from Birr. Paddy's father had been in the British army. There was a great tradition of young men joining up at Crinkill Barracks. He fought in France in the First World War and came home with nothing more than a few scrapes. There were 11 children in Paddy's family, 5 boys and 6 girls. He himself was born in 1923. He went to school to the nuns for a while and then transferred to the Brothers. He has very fond memories of a female teacher in the Convent at that time called Miss Hill. Sadly she was later tragically killed when she was knocked from her bike on the road outside the County Arms Hotel. Paddy was a handy hurler and at only 15 won a minor Championship with Birr against Kilcormac. The year was 1938 and Birr also won the Senior Championship against Coolderry that year. Straight after school Paddy worked in Pilkington's Dairy and then got a job as a messenger-boy in D.E.Williams. At first he cycled all over Birr and the surrounding countryside delivering the groceries to the customers for £1 per week but after a while he graduated to the position of lorry helper, a much more interesting job. Soon he was becoming familiar with the roads of East Galway, Clare, North and South Tipperary, delivering beer and spirits to the outlying pubs. Billy Murphy from High Street was the driver. Paddy worked in the job until 1966 when D.E. Williams closed for good. Then it was off to the Briquette factory for another 22 years. He says Sheila and he felt like millionaires when they saw his first B.N.M wage packet.

The Stage Guild has always meant a lot to the O'Callaghans, especially to Sheila. Since the first day Annie Noonan asked her to join the Good Olde Days at the first or second Vintage week she has been involved up to very recently. As well as Annie Noonan herself she has sung for Lynn Sarsfield, Kevin Carroll, Enda O'Connor and Deirdre Hannify. She has always been interested in A.I.M.S and for



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many years she and Paddy attended the annual A.I.M.S a lot of friends through this event. They were both very proud to be present on several occasions when their daughter Ann received the premier award for Stage Management among all the musical societies in Ireland. Their son Junior is a very active member of BIRR Stage Guild so the link with the greasepaint continues. For the moment at least they like a quieter life. They love having their children and grandchildren around and feel very loved and cared for by them all. Now 56 years married they talk gently about 'the twilight years' and are deeply appreciative of the good things God has given

bash wherever it was held. Over the years they have made them. They are very proud of Moorpark Street and their neighbours and remember fondly their friends from High Street long ago-the Hennessys, Shiels', Nevins, Mick Hehir and the Purcells and many more.

Paddy and Sheila are sociable, hospitable people, always ready for a chat. Keep an eye out for them in 'the County' on Saturday night or maybe Kelly's in Green Street on Sunday morning. They're the youthful stylish couple at the side table. If you're lucky the 'Guy' will tell you a droll yarn or two and if you're luckier still the 'Doll' might even give a gentle rendition of 'Smoke Gets in Your Eyes'.

## **LICENSED PREMISES IN BIRR 1846 AND 1934**

*Compiled by Richard Kennedy*

The following is a list and comparison of the number of Public Houses in BIRR in 1846 and 1934. In the period of almost 100 years it is interesting to note the recurrence of only four family names, Egan, Kelly, Madden and Molloy. Also noted is a list of Temperance & Coffee Houses for the year 1846. Three such premises are listed, one of which, Daniel Riddy has its address as "Graveyard", presumably serving the needs of those who declined to bestow their patronage on the premises of the Publican Henry Dillon, also of "Graveyard". The excess of Public Houses over Temperance Houses is not surprising given that in 1846 BIRR supported one Brewery, George Hackett, and two Distillers, Michael Hackett Elm Grove and Simpson Robinson, Castle Street. In the 1820's the two Distilleries had become the principal trade in BIRR, each producing 90,000 gallons of Whiskey annually.

### **Licensed premises in BIRR 1846.**

#### **Source Slaters Commercial Directory 1846**

Patrick Bowen, Castle Street  
 Denis Cleary, Market Square  
 Charles Conner, Church Lane  
 Henry Dillon, Graveyard  
 Margaret Dodd, Barrack Road  
 Thomas Egan, Main Street  
 Thomas Hernon, Main Street  
 John Higgins, Bridge Street  
 Thomas Kelly, Main Street  
 John McGarry, Crinkill  
 Michael Madden, Fighting Cocks, Cumberland Street  
 Margaret Maguire, Bridge Street  
 Joanna Molloy, Market Square  
 Michael Mulrooney, Main Street  
 John Murphy, St John's Place  
 Thomas Parlon, St John's Place  
 Thomas Scully, Red Lion, Main Street  
 Danial Shannahan, Spread Eagle, Main Street  
 Mary Troy, Crinkill  
 Ann Winter, Crinkill

### **Licensed premises in BIRR 1934. Source National Archives.**

James Kennerney, Bridge Street  
 John Delaney, Bridge Street  
 Hannah Delaney, Bridge Street  
 Joseph Reid, Castle Street  
 Daniel Williams, Castle Street  
 Michael O' Brien, Connaught Street

Daniel Molloy, Connaught Street  
 Daniel Williams, Connaught Street  
 P & H Egan, BIRR  
 William Egan, Green Street  
 Elizabeth Madden, Green Street  
 Margaret Kelly, Green Street  
 Patrick Pilkington, High Street  
 Joseph O'Keefe, Main Street  
 William Egan, Main Street  
 Edward Lowry-Madden, Main Street  
 Thomas Gilmartin, Main Street  
 Bridget Conway, Main Street  
 James Dooley, Main Street  
 Henry Davis, Main Street  
 William F. O'Meara, Main Street  
 John Carroll, Main Street  
 William Byrne, Moorpark Street  
 Thomas Delaney, Newbridge Street  
 Jane Kenneally, O'Connell Street  
 Daniel Williams, O'Connell Street  
 Thomas Gallagher, O'Connell Street  
 Michael Hough, Pound Street  
 Mary Molloy, Townsend Street  
 Edward Hogan, Townsend Street  
 Isabella Madden, Townsend Street  
 Thomas Milne, Crinkill  
 Joseph Leonard, Crinkill

### **Temperance Coffee Houses 1824**

Eliza Mooney, Bridge Street  
 Daniel Riddy, Graveyard  
 William Tecker, Bridge Street

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## DICKIE DONNELLY – OUR MAN IN IRAQ

Camp Taji is located 8 miles north of Bagdad and 1 mile from the historic river Tigris in an area known as the Sunni Triangle in Iraq. It was once home to Saddam's heavy weapon manufacturing and tank maintenance workforce. Now I live here along with about 12,000 American military and civilian personnel, about 200 hundred Iraqi civilians and some small detachments of troops from Australia and Estonia. My home is confined within a 60 km<sup>2</sup> rectangle in the middle of a war zone. To get here from Ireland takes 3 days travel. After flying in to Kuwait by commercial aircraft I have to hitch lifts, so to speak, on a variety of military aircraft from fixed wing C130's to Blackhawk helicopters. Flying over Baghdad is a breathtaking experience. From 1,200 feet you can see clearly the women working in the parched fields all dressed in black, the war-pocked landscape and the grand unfinished building projects of Saddam's Iraq. Like his grand mosque, the palaces and lakeside villas of his sons. I came here to sell cars. Well that, among a few other sidelines is what I'm used to doing in Ireland. It's a bit different than the usual run of the mill stuff at home. I like to think of it as 'sales with a difference'. We sell factory built American cars at factory prices. To buy one you have to be a member of the American armed forces and be serving overseas. That's the bottom line. The client comes to us and we present him with a menu of styles and brands. These are all famous American brands such as Harley Davidson, Ford, Chrysler, Buick, Mercury and Jeep. We can even build a vehicle to the clients own specifications. When he or she returns home it is waiting for them in the driveway. We can even arrange finance if the client so wishes. This program has been going for the past 35 years and I've only just got in on the act. I can't believe it!

My boss is an Irish guy and I share my cabin with a fellow called Nick Foley from Kerry. There are more than 20 other Irish in and around the base. Last St. Patrick's Day some of us had some leprechaun suits shipped in and we dressed up for the occasion and gave out badges with 'I spent Paddies Day in Iraq' stamped on them. I was really surprised when one guy came up to me and asked me what I was. I mean shouldn't everyone know what a leprechaun is? Life on a military base is not what you'd expect. Our base has its own internal bus service. We've got all the big brand fast food eateries such as Burgerking, Pizza Hut, Subway, etc. They're open 24 hours a day. I like to think of eating in them as "Ploughing Match Style" 'cos that's what it is. We've also got two huge dining halls or "Chow Halls" which can seat 2,000 people at a time. They open four times a day and the food is super. You can get everything you would not expect to get in an Iraqi desert-

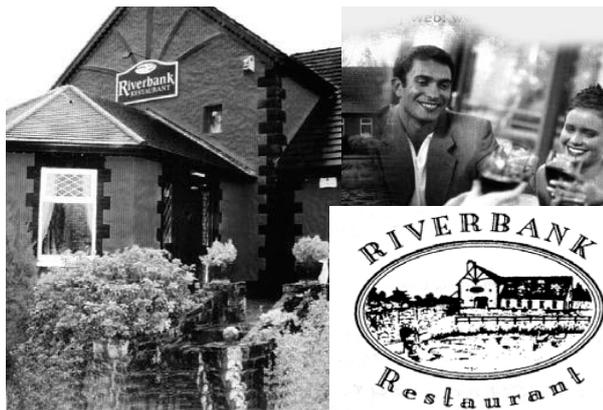
Ben & Jerries ice-cream, hotdogs, Indian food, a carvery with real spuds, fresh fruit, all types of juices and soft drinks and pretty well anything in the line of food that takes your fancy except real milk or butter, which I really miss. Best of all is the fact that it is all for free!

There's a strict no alcohol rule on every U.S. Army base but coffee is a real winner here. There are two coffee shops and that's where we all meet to socialise. There are loads of events run by the 'Moral Team'. So nobody has any excuse for being bored. There are sing songs or 'Open Mikes' and I am regularly asked to sing 'The Rattling Bog'. The Texas Brigade know the words and really go for it, stamping their feet to the beat big time. There are gyms, libraries, cinemas, swimming pools, pool halls and lots more, all housed in former Iraqi military buildings. We see touring shows and rock concerts and some of these are actually sponsored by our company. Sometimes we are invited to events like Brigade barbecues or tours of some of the Military Units. Every so often Nick or I get a parcel from home with the usual package of goodies like the teabags and copies of the Midland Tribune or The Kerryman. We work seven day shifts for nine weeks at a time and then we get three weeks off. We can go home or stay in Bahrain or Dubai for some R&R.

My next place of work is to be an air force base near the Kuwait border in a place called Talill near the remains of the ancient biblical city of Ur. That's where Abraham was born. I am always being asked by the soldiers 'how does an Irish guy end up selling cars in Iraq? I just tell them, 'it's a long story'. We have a map of Ireland on the wall here and there is great interest in the Irish books that we had shipped in. The younger soldiers often have only heard of Ireland because they have flown through Shannon but the older guys are very interested in researching their Irish roots. Sometimes we are mistaken for Canadians. Maybe our accents sound similar. All in all we are received very well over here and are treated extremely well by the military. I think they are grateful for the service we provide. Sure there are nights when you would just love to go out on the town but you get over that and that makes your time off all the better!



Picture shows Nick Foley (Kerry) on left and Dickie on right with the 2006 Taji Commander



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## THE CAMINO DE SANTIAGO DE COMPOSTELA (WAY OF ST. JAMES)

By Bernie Grennan

*Anywhere is walking distance if you have the time or are willing to make the time.*

On Tuesday September 4<sup>th</sup> 2007, I set out on foot, from St. Jean Pied de Port (SJPDP), a small French town just north of the Spanish border, with a rucksack on my back. My destination, like millions of pilgrims since the 9<sup>th</sup> century, was Santiago de Compostela in north eastern Spain. I planned to walk the Camino Frances, a pilgrim route of 793km (492 miles). Over the next 33 days I met people from five continents, experienced some wonderful hospitality from Spanish villagers and townspeople, walked through wonderful landscapes and viewed some of the great architectural treasures of Spain.

In the 9<sup>th</sup> century, a shepherd is reported to have found the burial place of St. James the Apostle, in a field in the north east of Spain, around which grew the city of Santiago (Sant Iago) de Compostela. In the Middle Ages, up to half a million pilgrims made the long trek each year, from all over Catholic Europe, to gain a plenary indulgence when they reached Santiago de Compostela. Towns and villages sprang up along the route to cater for the pilgrims' needs and these places are still giving hospitality to the modern pilgrim. In the larger cities along the route magnificent cathedrals were built (Burgos, Leon and Santiago). Due to the wealth of architectural treasures (1,800 buildings) and its contribution to culture, the entire Camino Frances was declared a World Heritage Site in 1993. Today the idea of pilgrimage seems to have caught the imagination of urban bound people. In 2006 there were 100,377 pilgrims from 138 nationalities who collected compostelas (completion certificates) in Santiago. My personal pilgrimage began with a Ryanair flight from Shannon to Biarritz. From there I travelled by train to SJPDP, feeling a bit nervous about the prospect of

being a lone traveller. However, from the moment I joined the queue to buy my train ticket, I realised that I would be among a family of pilgrims for the next five weeks.

The Camino office in SJPDP, where pilgrims get their credencial (or pilgrim passport) stamped before setting out was manned by helpful, friendly volunteers. This was to be a feature of the Camino all along the way - the number of volunteers working to support the pilgrimage, from the people who painted the yellow arrows on the route, on the most out of the way track, to those who gave a week of their holidays to volunteer at a pilgrim hostel or albergue (as they are called in Spain).

The Camino winds its way cross country from village to village, entering the larger cities of Pamplona, Burgos and Leon. The entire 793km route is marked with yellow arrows. This was a blessing to one who has no map reading skills. In Navarre (the first province) the outstanding memory is of small sandstone coloured villages on hilltops. The church tower was always visible from 3 or 4 kilometres and I knew there would be a bar with freshly brewed coffee and a bench in the shade, with a village fountain where I could refill my water bottle.

The next province was La Rioja, which gives its name to the famous wine and in this area the route runs through miles of vineyards, where mid morning hunger pangs were filled with bunches of black grapes.

The middle section of the Camino, from Burgos to Leon, when I was into the third week of the journey, runs across flat high tablelands known as the Meseta. These plains appear to be totally given over to cereal crops as far as the eye can see. I found walking this section was the most difficult in terms of motivation. Whether this was due to the landscape or the fact that it was the middle point of the journey I'm not sure, but things certainly improved once I was through Leon.

The last section of the Camino runs through the province of Galicia which is green and hilly. Here the track runs through some very memorable forest and landscapes. I remember in particular, the hundreds of acres of mature chestnut trees after O'Cebreiro. Also, becoming familiar with the sound of acorns dropping in the silence of the oak forests and two days before reaching Santiago the smell of the eucalyptus trees as the track weaved its way through more forests. Also in Galicia the route in many instances actually traverses through farmyards. These farmyards reminded me of the Ireland of 40 years ago with hens pecking around the yard and cows tied up in byres, waiting to be milked.



*Bridge at Hospital de Orbigio*

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What about the practicalities of sleeping, eating and drinking you might wonder? The Camino is very well served with accommodation. There are pilgrim hostels (albergues) every 10km or less. These provide dormitory style accommodation at a very reasonable cost, ranging from €4 to €7. The albergues are run by the municipal authority, local parishes, religious orders or as private businesses.

In most locations a "pilgrim dinner" is also available at a local bar or restaurant. These are basic 3 course meals which provides sustenance for under €10. After walking 25km or 30kms appetites were always sharp and food disappeared without much ceremony. The pilgrim dinner was generally served at communal tables, so it was an opportunity to share experiences and talk about reasons for "doing the Camino". English was the most commonly used language when different nationalities got together and full credit to the north Europeans, who seemed to be able to hold a conversation in any one of half a dozen languages. The experience in the villages and small towns was one of great hospitality and a tradition of catering for pilgrims. In one small village I recall seeing an inscription on the ornate water fountain which read "For the Pilgrims of the Camino". It's quite common in busy periods that the local sports hall is opened up to cater for an overflow of pilgrims. These lines by poet Christina Rossetti, which were scribbled on a piece of paper at a rest spot along the way, sum up for me the whole ethos and spirit of the Camino, "Does the road wind uphill all the way? Yes, to the very end. Will there be beds for me and all who seek? Yea, beds for all who come."

This city, with its ornate cathedral, is the destination of the pilgrimage and traditionally the pilgrim Mass is held at 12 noon. Sitting in the Plaza in front of the Cathedral one can observe the constant arrival of pilgrims. Without doubt the immediate emotion is joy at having reached the destination. The following day many pilgrims experience a sense of purposelessness and of wondering "What will I do now?" There is also the dawning of reality that one has to return to everyday life, work and family.

On Tuesday 9<sup>th</sup> October, I headed home on an Aer Lingus flight from Santiago to Dublin. I've given much thought to the experience since returning home but the most profound conclusion I have arrived at is that taking a long walk, with the sun on your back and the open road ahead, is good for the body, mind and soul.



*Bernie on the road outside Castrojeriz*

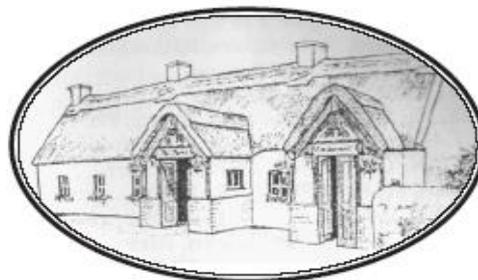
## THE GATHERING OF A CLAN

Descendants of Usher families of Ireland came to Birr in June for their first reunion. Arriving from USA, England, Canada, Dublin, and County Cork, they came to pay tribute to their ancestors who lived in Birr as far back as 1647.

The early Usher families had come to Birr from Eyrecourt, Meelick, Loughrea, and Edenderry, leasing lands in Ballindarra, Seffin and Drumbane from the Parsons family. Each generation of one Usher family carried on the occupation of Apothecary (Chemist) until the early 1900's.

Several of the group are descendants of Noble Luke Usher who had an apothecary shop at 14 Main Street. His wife, Monemia White Usher and their children lived in the rooms above the shop. After his death in 1835, his son, John Usher, was the local apothecary. Last June, Paul Barber, now owner of No. 14 Main Street, took family descendants on a tour of the house. He presented Gwen Knowles, great-great granddaughter of Noble Luke and Monemia with a workable key to the house. Some of the group are descendants of Gertrude Usher Dooly and Thomas Dooly, who were Matron and Master of the Birr Workhouse just after the Famine. Margaret Hogan took the group on a tour of the Workhouse and also on a walking tour of Birr which was a highlight of the gathering. They visited the library, churches, Birr Castle Demesne and the old church cemetery where an Usher gravestone dated 1787 was found. They all became dear friends with all the Birr people who made them feel so warmly welcome. All plan to return to Birr someday.





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# THE BANBH MARKET

By Pat Smyth

In the last few months there has been a big increase in the number of pigs being transported through Birr. This is of course because of the extra capacity of the Roscrea bacon factory after the destruction by fire of the Edenderry processing plant.

Many will be surprised to know that pigs played a substantial part in the economy of Birr for many years and that Birr had its very own 'Pig Market' known as the 'banbh' market. It was situated in Castle Street almost opposite the Maltings Hotel in a yard which is now used as a council depot. In my youth I remember going in to sell our pigs on many a Saturday morning. You see, every house in the country kept a sow or two. Times were hard and people struggled to make ends meet. Pigs were easy enough to keep. They weren't choosy about what they ate and a half-decent shed would house them sufficiently. They were also great breeders. Jack Farrell of Riverstown House kept a Department of Agriculture approved boar. About four months after you visited him with your sow you could be the proud owner of ten or twelve piglets or Banbhs as they were called. Within a short time they would be fit to be brought into the Banbh Market in Castle Street for sale. Many people in the town with a small yard or a shed out the back kept one or two pigs. They were fed from 'the fall off the table' or in other words, the left over scraps of food from the kitchen. Some more enterprising people went to the hotels and took away the kitchen waste to feed to their pigs. No such thing as composting then!

For people in the town keeping a pig or two was a handy way of making a few extra pounds. After buying your banbh for £5 you might sell him fattened a few months later for £15. £10 profit was a lot of money in those days. Buyers from the bacon factories bought up the fattened pigs for slaughtering. People in the town rarely killed their own pigs but in the countryside it was different. Most litters of pigs always had one little pig, which was smaller and weaker than the rest. This banbh was known as 'the runt of the litter'. The farmer's wife would keep him back from the market for fattening at home.

The slaughtering of this pig was a great ritual in the farmhouse. It was a big day and everyone was galvanized into action. Early in the day a great quantity of water (30 gallons) was set to boil. This was to shave the pig. The pig had already been fasting and was then 'stuck' or killed with a sharp knife and the blood kept in a basin for later use. This was a skilled job and only certain men in the locality were trusted to do it right. The pig sticker came to the house and was treated with great respect. After killing and bleeding the pig he then opened the pig and took out



*Pat Smyth and Michael Quinlan at the site of the old Banbh Market, Castle Street*

the intestines. These were carefully washed out and put one side. Then the carcass was placed into a large bath and the scalding water poured over it. It was left to steep in the bath for a short time until the bristle and tough outer skin became soft. At that point the pig carcass was lifted onto a heavy table and literally shaved with very sharp knives. The purpose of this was to remove the hard skin and hair from the flesh of the pig.

Nothing was wasted. Even the bladder was saved and blown up for use as a football by the children. The head was cleaned and put to one side as were the four feet, known as 'crubeens'. These, along with the pork steaks and the hams were looked on as great delicacies. Black pudding was a great speciality. The blood, which had been saved at the killing of the pig, was mixed with lard, wholemeal, pepper, and other spices and salt to make black pudding. Every house had its own particular recipe. This mix was poured into the intestines and tied at both ends. Then the pudding was boiled until cooked to satisfaction. When the pig had been thoroughly scraped and cleaned it was then cut up into the various cuts and joints ready for salting. Pork was rarely, if ever eaten. The meat was placed in a special wooden box. As each layer was put in it was covered with a thick layer of salt. It could take two stone of salt to fully cover the meat from a single pig. Then it was covered with a jute sack and heavy weights were placed on top. It was left like this for three weeks and then taken out and hung on hooks in the kitchen to dry. The meat was then kept in straw to keep it clean. As the bacon dried it became very hard though it was easily cut with a sharp knife. When the housewife wanted some bacon she just cut off the required amount. As the bacon was heavily salted it had to be steeped in fresh water to remove the salt before cooking. Bacon and

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cabbage or bacon and turnip were very popular dishes and might be served up several times a week in most houses. Most farmhouses were self-sufficient and bought very little in the line of food. They had their own bacon, milk, butter, eggs, chickens and vegetables, not to mention turf from the bog and every housewife was an expert at baking brown bread. Flour and wholemeal were bought by the sack and loaf bread was hardly ever eaten. Sugar and tea were luxuries, which had also to be bought. Progress has brought many changes. Now even the farmer buys basics like milk in the shop.

The old banbh market is no more. When the factories expanded the piggeries, took over the pig production and the small producer could not compete. I have many fond memories of the Banbh Market in Castle Street. Often there were thirty donkey or pony carts lined up with their pigs waiting for the buyers to come. There were deals

being made with the help of 'blockers'- men who specialised in bringing buyers and sellers to agreement on price. There was loud talk, spitting and slapping of palms, while deals were made and the news and gossip of the place was shared. It was a great meeting place for all the farmers from the surrounding areas such as Drumcullen, Coolderry, and Shinrone. The lucky child might be treated to a 3 penny packet of biscuits from Mrs. Mulhearn's shop which he munched hungrily while waiting for his father to come out of Mick Earley's pub (now Craughwell's). Coming up to Christmas, Castle St. was also the centre for the 'Turkey Market'. The sheep and cattle fairs were held in the Pound St. area where the Mart is situated now. Sadly all this has now gone. No longer can we get the lovely sweet home-cured bacon of those days. The taste still lingers on my lips!

### **Offaly Junior Hurling Champions 1946 (Carrig & Riverstown)**



**Front Row (L to R):** Jack O'Meara, Henry Keeshan, Cronin O'Brien, Billy Cashen, Tom Keeshan.

**Middle Row (L to R):** Kieran O'Brien, Flan O'Brien, Thomas White, Fintan Cashen, Peter King, Donal Cashen

**Back Row (L to R):** Dinny Higgins, Jack Cashen, Dan Keeshan, Tommy Byrne, Tommy Finnerty, Bernie King, Des O'Brien.

*Missing from Team Photo: Jack Deveney and Seamus Kennedy*

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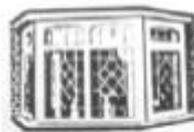
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## BIRR SWIMMING POOL – THEN & NOW

*By John Carroll with thanks to Frank McNamara*

Even the sun came out from behind the clouds on July 7<sup>th</sup> 2007 to join in the convivial atmosphere at the reopening of the refurbished swimming pool and major new extension, which is now known to one and all as Birr Leisure Centre. The official opening was performed by our Tanaiste and Minister for Finance, Mr. Brian Cowan T.D., in the presence of all our local dignitaries, after a multi-denominational blessing. The cutting of the tape was the fruition of years of work by a dedicated committee, who in spite of some setbacks over the years, always knew that the community was one hundred per cent behind them in their vision for a fully refurbished leisure facility.

In celebrating the success of the project one is ever mindful of the foresight of the group of people who in the late 1960's believed it was a reasonable idea to provide a swimming pool in Birr but more important, were prepared to work and unite the community to make that vision a reality. Through the good offices of Mr. Paddy Lalor T.D. a grant was approved by the Department of Local Government and that combined with a very successful local campaign of fundraising enabled the committee to seek tenders for the pool. Blue Pool Ltd. submitted a tender of £8,660 to provide the pool and local builders Hogan & Wolfe were awarded the contract to provide the building at a cost of £23,897. The original Birr Chamber of Commerce sub-committee was as follows: Chairman – Mr. Gerry Hoare, B.D.S., Vice-Chairman- Dr. Conor McManus M.D., Treasurer- Mr. Sean Hanniffy, Secretary-Mr. Frank McNamara, N.T. The original pool was opened by the then Minister for Local Government, Mr. Jim Tully T.D. in 1974 and served the community for over 30 years.

Over the years numerous people played a part in helping to make sure the doors opened each year. It would be unwise to mention names for fear of omission, but the present committee would love to have a record of all who

served over the years. All are entitled to take credit for what exists there today. The nucleus of the present committee came together in 1997, when their first task was to do necessary emergency work to get the doors opened and then plan some low cost improvements. From an early stage they made a decision to seek development funding for a full refurbishment and upgrade.

One could be critical of the obstacles we met but shall we say, we were on a learning curve and from early on we knew there was huge goodwill but this needed to be turned into practical support. The turning point came in October 2004 when Offaly County Council advised the Department of Arts, Sport and Tourism of its decision to prioritise Birr pool for refurbishment and committed €280,000 from development levies for this purpose.

In 2005 we were successful in our application for €300,000 towards provision of gymnasium facilities from the National Lottery and a further €65,000 towards equipment in 2007. The local community was not found wanting either. First on board was Birr Credit Union with a very generous contribution of €50,000, the Birr Lions Club presented €20,000 from fundraising and the local community contributed over €100,000 to our "envelope appeal". Birr Town Council came up trumps, making a contribution of €115,000 from development levies. The final accounts are not yet to hand but at this point the debt seems manageable.

A project of this magnitude needs a project manager and a design team working in harmony with the committee. Our project manager was Chris Murphy who was also the M&E Engineer, Dermot O'Keeffe was our Structural Engineer and our Quantity Surveyor was Gordon Campbell, who kept a close watch on costs. Suffice to say that we believe we had a great team. For the committee who drove this project under the Chairmanship of Pat



*The Opening of Birr Swimming Pool in 1974*

## BIRR Year Review 2007

Connolly, it has been a voyage of discovery, of labour but most of all of satisfaction at seeing the end result and today to see so many people, young and old making such use and getting so much enjoyment from the facility.

The committee is delighted to have so many dedicated members of staff, both full time and part time, who under our capable Manager Marian Carter makes the centre a pleasure to visit for patrons. We are always mindful of the sometimes unsocial hours which they have to work but they all show true commitment to the facility. We believe this venture has shown that a community working together can achieve

<u>Birr Swimming Pool Committee</u>		<u>Cash Account</u>		<u>for period ended 30th September 1969.</u>	
<u>Dr</u>				<u>Cr</u>	
<u>Receipts</u>				<u>Disbursements</u>	
<u>The Nett Proceeds of:-</u>					
<u>Collections</u>	795 10 6			By Ground Rent	7 10 0
<u>Bingo</u>	2330 2 0			" Bingo Expenses	840 8 9
<u>Silver Circle</u>	1152 13 11			" Fencing	94 11 6
				" Sundries	83 0 6
				" Bingo Equipment	108 13 0
				" Birr Development Co.Ltd	2343 19 3
<u>Total Receipts</u>	<u>£4278 6 5</u>			" Leasehold Land	150 0 0
<u>Balance Due Bank @ 30/9/1969</u>	<u>491 4 3</u>			" Prize Bonds	<u>300 0 0</u>
				" <u>Total Payments</u>	<u>£3928 3 0</u>
				<u>Cash at Bank 30/9/69</u>	
				Trift Deposit A/C	41.7.8
				Foster Finance Ltd	<u>800.0.0</u>
					841 7 8
					<u>£4769 10 8</u>
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**Extract from Statement of Accounts for Birr Swimming Pool 1968-1969**

whatever they wish to achieve. So let you take a pat on the back.

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## FRIENDSHIP IS TESTED ON LEGS

By Fr. Lorcan Kenny

Visiting Uganda was the fruit of a curious cross-pollination of ideas. North Tipperary VEC was looking for a third world project to begin a 36-month engagement process of fundraising and support. I have a close friend, Fr. Séamus Horgan, working in the Apostolic Nunciature in Kampala. Séamus reminded me on the phone of Sr. Eileen and Mona Maher, natives of Roscrea who have spent approximately thirty-eight years working in Uganda.

The first thing that hit me was the smell. It's a curious dusty, earthy fragrance, not unpleasant but hits the back of the throat, faster than a hen on a Honda. I was met by Séamus, and off we drove by night – a two-hour journey to Kampala. Now, driving by night, avoiding potholes, mopeds and pedestrians was one of the scariest journeys of my life. The sides of the roads were teeming with life and we wove like fish through oncoming traffic. As we arrived at the Nunciature, I soon realised I was staying in one of the finest houses in Kampala. Exhausted, I was shown to the rooms the late Pope John Paul II stayed in. That night as I gracefully flopped into the bed, pretending to be the first Irish Pontiff on a state tour, I spotted the biggest spider I had seen in my life ambling down the outside of the mosquito net. Nonplussed, (truthfully it was tiredness rather than bravery), I named her Charlotte, for spiders eat mosquitoes.

After two days with Séamus, I made the ten and a half-hour journey down to Mbarara. By the time we arrived at the convent outside the town of Mbarara, it was very late. There, I met Sr. Eileen whose moral fibre, courage and commitment continue to inspire me today. That night a power cut hit the country, so by candlelight I began reading 'The Last King of Scotland'. By coincidence it seemed I was taking the exact same route as the main character. 'How reassuring,' I thought, as tales of Idi Amin fluttered through my brain. Three nightmares later the alarm went at 5 am and sleepily I waddled to the concrete shower unit. Because of the power cut (the sisters have electricity perhaps three to four nights a week, when the solar panels work) it was a freezing cold shower by candlelight. Not very romantic, but the candle proved useful for checking for bugs!

A light breakfast later and off we hopped to St. Teresa's Vocational Secondary School. It's a two-hour journey on roads and dirt track to Ibanda. St. Teresa's is a boarding school for 450 girls from a rural background. Rural girls are low on the social pecking order in Uganda. Being a woman in Uganda is not easy. The average life expectancy is 47 and girls are very prone to disease, poverty and exploitation. The male mindset in Uganda needs a lot of attention. Gender issues and how they



Lorcan Kenny with his new friend Isaiah

affect women and children are of paramount importance because they spill over into healthcare, education, physical and emotional well-being and what the next generation will embody. That's why so much of Eileen and Mona's fundraising goes to education and community care.

I can't begin to describe how happy these girls are to be in education nor how proud they are of their school facilities. But, imagine ninety girls in a classroom made of mud bricks and a corrugated iron roof, wearing immaculate bottle-green uniforms in the heat of the sun. To western eyes it looked as if they had little, but they had so much pride. I learned so much that day. Things like how one book is shared between twelve girls; how the teacher has to write all the information on the board as they take it down in copy books; how there are two toilets, a latrine and a block of outside showers for 450 girls; how those girls work the small bit of land to feed themselves bananas; how they have to hike two hours in the dry season with jerry cans to get water from the reservoir before dark. In the afternoon they sang and danced in a concert for us; as guests it was so humbling to watch. I had shared fears earlier with Eileen that I didn't want any special treatment or show; just an opportunity to take pictures to bring home and help me fundraise for them. The concert, the dancing, the drums, the acting, the singing were spine-tingling and I loved every minute of it. At the end of the concert the girls came over and asked could they mime one last song. It was a 'Shakira' number. I chuckled quietly to myself and thought, 'Well, young ones are the same all over the world.' We love 'Shakira!' Walking away from St. Teresa's that afternoon Eileen suggested we pay a visit to Ibanda Babies' Home, an AIDS orphanage nearby. There, I met Sr. Rosa Mystica and the

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1<sup>st</sup> Class in Ngara Primary School

forty-four little boys and one girl (all under 4 years of age) who lived in a building designed for twenty children. In Uganda, little boys are abandoned. Whereas a girl can make money when she works, or is given to a man in marriage. Clementine is the only little girl in the orphanage. She is one of triplets. Their Mum left her into the orphanage with her brothers Christian and Caleb. Having five children already, her husband left her to cope on her own. Rosa said it was the saddest sight to see. She left the three babies in the orphanage cot, turned her back; walked down the narrow laneway and cried the whole way. That brave mum was giving her children a

start in life. Rosa is an amazing woman and knows each child not only by sight, but also by sound. They called me 'muzongi' (which means a foreign white man with a big nose – you wouldn't want to be sensitive). Looking at their little beds, at how some of them sleep on mats on the floor; the sheer scale of the washing of nappies, their effervescent smiles – it was impossible not to be moved. The following morning Eileen was busy with schoolwork and suggested I go with Vincent to Ngara Primary School deep in the heart of the country. Vincent is chairman of the Board of Management and his wife works as a teacher there. The government pays primary and secondary school teachers approximately €80 per month. By Ugandan standards it's a decent wage. Some non-government employed teachers live on €20 per month. A bicycle costs €45. Even more shocking were the signs nailed to the one tree in the dirt play area. They read 'Do not take money for sex.' 'Do not take medicine for sex.' 'AIDS is a lifelong illness.' AIDS awareness has to start early in Uganda.

Some weeks have passed since I have visited. Those words still echo inside me. Uganda has changed me. That's why I believe in Mona and Eileen Maher's projects - **100% of the money given goes to the actual source.**

If you are interested in supporting any of the above projects, an account has been set up in Roscrea Credit Union. It is: Uganda Mission Fund – Account Number 014918D

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# THE STOLEN RAILWAY

*By Tom Nestor*

In 1853, a decision was taken to connect Birr, then called Parsonstown, to the main line of the Great Southern and Western Railway. The first stage of that endeavour, the branch from Ballybrophy to Roscrea was opened on October 19th, 1857. It was extended to Parsonstown at the beginning of March of the following year. By then the greater part of the Railway's network, linking the midland and southern routes had been put in place and would be finalised by the line running from Roscrea to Nenagh and Birdhill, interconnecting with Ballybrophy and Limerick.

West of Parsonstown, however, was a vast tract of commercial opportunity which lay un-railed and untapped. To avail of this prospect a scheme to run a line from Parsonstown to Portumna was launched in July 1861. Not only would it access the trade and traffic from across the Shannon but it would also open up the opportunities of the steamer traffic of the Shannon Navigation scheme. The authorised capital agreed for the new railway would be funded by the issue of £65,000 in £10 shares and a loan of about one third of that amount provided by the Public Works Commissioners and the Great Southern and Western Railway Company. The Parsonstown and Portumna Bridge Railway opened for business in early November 1868, seven years after it was first proposed.

It became one the shortest lived ventures in the history of railway. From the beginning the touted traffic failed to materialise but even if it had been available the shortcomings of train schedule would have eventually mitigated against it. The service provided by the Railway had to comply with the timetables of the Great Southern and Western who managed the business and supplied the rolling stock. As a result, the service was limited and inconvenient. The train departed Portumna Bridge twice daily, 6.00 am and 1.20 pm. A passenger from the target location in Galway needed to be up at an unearthly hour to catch the train, probably after a drive of several hours by horse drawn transport. The train departed Parsonstown at 12.29 pm and 8.58 pm. So our exemplary passenger would again have an unearthly hour experience all on the same day.

The railway carried on a struggling existence for a decade. The death knell first sounded when the Great Southern and Western, which had been leasing the line for forty percent of the gross receipts, failed to renew, claiming that it had been losing £2,000 a year. Despite several appeals to government and other influential bodies the Parsonstown and Portumna Bridge Railway was closed on December 1878. Some of the mortgage holders took possession of the line but made no attempt to run it. Probably a shrewd economical move because in the last



*Railway Bridge near Ballyduff that was damaged during the Civil War*

three years of operation the line had averaged less than £100 per annum, per mile. The line lay derelict for five more years after closure but little damage took place in that period as the Commissioners appointed a team of workmen to keep it in order. The proposal to sell the movable effects of the line came to nothing so in 1883 the Commissioners withdrew the patrolling team and posted notices saying that they were no longer responsible for the line.

In the years that the line lay derelict it was kept mostly intact except for some rails that had been removed in lieu of unpaid rates and taxes. But after the Commissioners' announcement the heavens of pilfering opened, first the smaller items, then the larger ones that required visibility, ingenuity and sustained effort to spirit them away. It continued unabated. The police tried to bring a prosecution against some of the offenders but it was never heard, as no one, representing either an owner or a shareholder, turned up at the court in case admittance as an owner might provoke a case for compensation. That abandoned court case opened the heavens even further. The plunderers, from far and near made off with everything that wasn't set in concrete and even that, in one notable circumstance, as we shall see, was very nearly breached as well. The line, and everything mobile, disappeared like magic almost overnight. Sleepers, rails, carriages and their furnishings, signaling equipment, tools and discarded scrap metal went missing. The station buildings on the east side of Portumna Bridge were visible in the gathering dusk, by morning they had vanished: the booking office, waiting rooms, offices, sheds, an iron crane, cattle pens, turntable, sidings and a landing stage fronting the Shannon. Even an attempt was made to take away the girders of the six span bridge over the Little



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Brosna at Riverstown. It was only halted by the action of the police from the local barracks.

Over the next fourteen years many attempts were made to re-open the line. Unfortunately, all the endeavours floundered and all that is left today of a grand aspiration are a few relics of a railway that once ran between Birr station and the Shannon at Portumna. Some of these are still visible in the surrounding environs of Riverstown and its nearer communities. Making its way from the station at Birr the Parsonstown and Portumna Bridge Railway crossed the Little Brosna river over the most striking feature of its journey. This, a six girder span set on stone piers, was the crowning glory of the line's architecture and was still intact, except for the flooring, at the end of the 1930's. Fifty years before it had been saved from ruination by the efforts of the police from the barracks at Riverstown. From there the line entered an under bridge just beside the acute bend where the old road and the present road to Carrig fork in their separate directions. A short distance from the turn off to Carrig on the Portumna road, there is the ruin of a limestone arched bridge that crossed the line at Ballyduff. The bridge is beautifully wrought and a reminder of the skill and craftsmanship that were a feature of a more leisurely time when pride of workmanship was prevalent. It is also a reminder of another and more difficult time in our later history. The bridge was blown up by one faction during the Civil War to frustrate the movement of troops by the other. The

explosion exceeded to the extent that only a small part of the arch remains. In Derrylahan where the line crossed the road on the level there are two gatemens cottages still intact. So is the bridge that crosses the road at Johnstown and another at Cullagh.

The disbandment of the Parsonstown to Portumna Bridge Railway was a unique event of its time. Within one hundred years many more of its kind would have gone a similar way, this time without a whimper, in the great rush for travel and transportation by road. Some little foresight then might have tempered the headlong abandonment of rail travel and envisioned a time when it would be a viable alternative to the clutter and mayhem of our road system. Maybe that will be construed as merely the wisdom of hindsight but many other countries still make extensive use of transport by rail with great effect. Though the line has been abandoned for well over a hundred years perhaps some faint echo of its past could be resurrected again. It would make a very pleasant walk way, such as had been done through scenic and historic terrain in other parts of the country. The notion has a readymade name: The Parsonstown and Portumna Bridge Permanent Way.

Acknowledgment: My thanks to Pat Smyth who sowed the seeds and fleshed out the story of the Parsonstown and Portumna Bridge Railway, to Fintan Dolan for identifying local landmarks and to Margaret Hogan who pointed me towards a contribution by T.R. Perkins in the May 1938 edition of *The Railway Magazine*.



*Presentation made to Tommy Moody on the occasion of his retirement from FAS*

*(L to R): Liam Moran, Noel Houlihan, Tom Ryan, Mike O'Connell, Nancy Moody, Tommy Moody, Tony McLoughlin, Gerry Sammon, John O'Callaghan, Fr. Michael Reddan, John Carroll.*

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Banagher	8.35am	8.35am	6.35pm	
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Kilcormac	6.07am 6.37am 9.13am 2.13pm	9.13am 2.13pm 7.13pm	9.13am 11.40am 2.13pm 7.13pm	5.30pm
Tullamore	6.30am 7.00am 9.35am 2.35pm	9.35am 2.35pm 7.30pm	9.35am 12.00pm 2.35pm 7.30pm	6.00pm
Kilbeggan	6.40am 7.10am 9.45am 2.45pm	9.45am 2.45pm 7.40pm	9.45am 12.10pm 2.45pm 7.40pm	6.10pm
Tyrellspass	6.45am 7.15am 9.50am 2.50pm	9.50am 2.50pm 7.45pm	9.50am 12.15pm 2.50pm 7.45pm	6.15pm
Rochfordbridge	6.50am 7.20am 9.55am 2.55pm	9.55am 2.55pm 7.50pm	9.55am 12.20pm 2.55pm 7.50pm	6.20pm
Milltownpass	6.55am 7.25am 10.00am 3.00pm	10.00am 3.00pm 7.55pm	10.00am 12.25pm 3.00pm 7.55pm	6.25pm
Kinnegad	7.05am 7.35am 10.10am 3.10pm	10.10am 3.10pm 8.05pm	10.10am 12.35pm 3.10pm 8.05pm	6.35pm
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Tullamore, Birr	5.00pm 6.00pm	1.00pm 5.00pm 6.00pm	1.00pm 4.30pm 6.00pm 10.30pm	1.00pm 5.15pm 3.00pm 10.30pm
Banagher	5.00pm	5.00pm 6.00pm	6.00pm	
Portumna	6.00pm	1.00pm 5.00pm 6.00pm	1.00pm 4.30pm 6.00pm	3.00pm 5.15pm

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Kilcormac	9.15am	12.10pm	2.15pm	4.40pm
Tullamore	9.35am	12.30pm	2.35pm	5.00pm
Tullamore	9.40am	12.35pm	2.40pm	5.10pm
Hospital				

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Tullamore Hospital	12.55pm	-----
Tullamore	1.00pm	5.40pm
Kilcormac	1.20pm	6.00pm
Birr	1.30pm	6.15pm
Banagher	1.45am	6.30pm

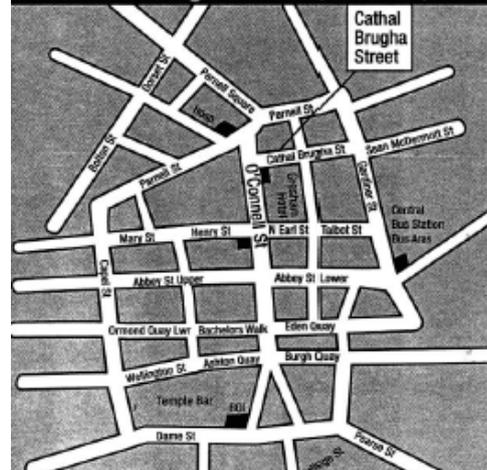
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## BIRR STAGE GUILD – 50 YEARS OLD

By Tony Hogan

**B**irr Stage Guild was introduced thus by the *Midland Tribune* of Saturday 26 October 1957: 'Something unique in the promotion of cultural activities in the county was launched in Birr on Wednesday evening when the first Marian Stage Guild was established in the town for the promotion of the arts on a broad parochial basis.' The function of the Guild would be the production of plays, pantomimes, operas and other entertainments. The guiding light behind the Guild was Fr. Martin Ryan and the first chairman was Dr. John Lucey with Bud Burke as Honorary Secretary.

The curtain went up in the Marian Hall on Sunday 19 January 1958 for Birr Stage Guild's first theatrical venture: *Little Red Riding Hood*. Geoff Oakley in the *Tribune* described it as 'brilliantly spectacular, gay, fast moving, tuneful and above all unbelievably lovely to look at.' Under the direction of Jim Fanning with the indefatigable Annie Noonan as musical director, it ran until the 2<sup>nd</sup> of February. During that long run, an estimated 10,000 people came from far and near and almost 1,000 attended a Sunday matinee.

Several pantomimes were produced in the '60s and '70s and plays and pageants have always been an integral part of the Guild's programme. Jim Fanning's *Beyond the Mill* attracted thousands to the Marian Hall. *The Honey Spike*, directed by Frank Bailey, *The Playboy of the Western World*, directed by Frank McNamara and Michael Donegan's *The Time is Now* were landmarks in the history of the Guild.

Musicals held centre stage for many years with the always popular *My Fair Lady*, *Oklahoma* and *South Pacific* winning several AIMS awards. Ray Jeffries, an exceptional director, encouraged and developed many talented performers. The splendid voices of Gerry Dolan, Breeda Connolly, Deirdre Hanniffy and Gerrard O'Connor attracted huge audiences to a succession of popular shows.

The organisers of Vintage Week encouraged the Guild to get involved and *The Good Olde Days* in Oxmantown Hall became a central feature of the Birr Festival. Enthusiastic audiences enjoyed the variety acts, solos by Sheila O'Callaghan and Gerry Dolan while Tommy Lyndon, Birr's own Leonard Sachs astounded the audience with his periphrastic verbosity.

Oxmantown Hall had been central to the social and cultural life of Birr since the 1890s and for most of the twentieth century the hall was in constant use. Unfortunately it lay idle for most of the 1980s and frequent calls were made for its restoration. A group of concerned people chaired by Salters Sterling undertook to

purchase the building and Sean McCarthy, Offaly Co. Manager guaranteed £20,000 of public funds. The remaining £22,000 was donated by Stevie Grant, Michael Hanna, Lord Rosse, Michael Ramsden, Julia Trench, Arnold Fanning and Salters Sterling. In February 1995, Frank McNamara, on behalf of Birr Stage Guild contacted Oxmantown Hall Management Committee with a view to leasing the Hall. After much discussion a 105 year lease was granted at a nominal rent of £1 per annum. Derek Coulter was appointed as architect with Gordon Campbell as quantity surveyor. Restoration was estimated at £430,000. The Department of the Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht gave a generous grant of £250,000 with a shortfall of £139,000 to be found locally.

Paddy McIntyre of Ballindown was appointed as main contractor and work commenced in September 1999. Birr Stage Guild's first production in its new home was *The Good Olde Days* during Vintage Week in August 2000. Since then the Guild has staged several shows and musicals under the direction of Maureen de Forge and Enda O'Connor.

Maureen de Forge, the present Chairperson, and her committee have organised a full programme to celebrate the Guild's 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary. *Cinderella* under the direction of John Irwin should see the season off to lively start in January. Without doubt we should see some grandchildren of the original pantomime treading the boards. A Gilbert and Sullivan Gala will take place in May with singers John Molloy, Ann Hogan and the Guild's chorus. A weekend of exhibitions, memorabilia and archival material is planned. Children's events are being organised for July and August and no doubt the Guild will be involved as always in Birr's 40<sup>th</sup> Vintage Week and Arts' festival. The Guild staged an All Ireland One Act festival in October 2007 and a play is planned for November 2008.

Now, fifty years on and well over one hundred productions later, we are in a position to assess the ideals of the founding fathers of the Guild. Their aims were ambitious: 'to serve its own community ... to make contact with the greatest amount of potential talent ... every branch of theatrical activity ... technical training ... create and retain a wide circle of enthusiastic artists and technicians ... keep abreast of modern developments both in theatre and film ... arrange for art exhibitions.' We record our sincere gratitude to our audiences, supporters and all who participated in such a great variety of ways in the past. The future seems bright and the Guild is determined to realise the ideals of its founders and play a central role in developing the arts in a changing society.

**'Gala Viennese Evening' – 1984**

**Front Row (L to R):** Carmel White, Anne Dunne, Majella Kerrigan, Caroline Hynes, Dorothy Keating

**Middle Row:** Sean Hanniffy, Geraldine Hynes, John O'Callaghan, Patricia Grogan, Arthur Kelly, Lily Melsop

**Back Row:** Michael Campbell, Maisie Melsop, Tommy Hynes, Michelle Hogan, Kevin Wrafter, Teresa Hoare



**'Ali Baba' - 1979**

**(L to R):** Sean Hanniffy, Donal Hegarty, John O'Brien



**'Cinderella'- 1959**

**(L to R):** Jim Hickey, Gerry Dolan, Bertie McCoy



**'Old King Cole' – 1976**

**(L to R):** Josephine Connery, Geraldine Dwyer, Frances Parkinson, Geraldine Winters, Caroline Corcoran, Joy Haines, Michaela Kenny, Mary Raher, Patricia Kenny, Patricia Dynan, Fiona Hayes, Mary Madden

# THE O'DONOGHUE FAMILY MARATHON ACHIEVEMENT

By Richard Kennedy

When Jo, daughter of Pat and Maria O'Donoghue was browsing through the Guinness book of records at Christmastime last year, one item caught her attention, the entry referring to the largest number of brothers and sisters to complete a Marathon. She suggested to her father Pat that he and his brothers and sisters should run the Dublin City Marathon in October, since as far as she was concerned this was a record that was there for the taking. Her father Pat had grown up in Moorpark street Birr as a member of a family of fifteen, and all fifteen were still well within capacity to take on a Marathon. To his credit Pat didn't dismiss the idea as an unrealistic notion, as many would, but agreed to mention it to the rest of the family. When he did suggest it, at the beginning of this year, the entire family, Willie, Kieran, Theresa, Joe, Pat, Robert, Mary, Margaret, Noel, Adelaide, Jimbob, Brenda, Kevin, Louise and Cronan were positive about the possibility of completing the Marathon, but it was not until the family gathered for the celebrations for Noel's birthday in February that the decision was cast in stone.

Once the decision was taken, the challenge was taken seriously and following research by various members of the family a training regime was put in place tailored to suit each individual. This regime was testing and demanded commitment from the family. At the beginning it involved shorter walks or runs and slowly building up to full Marathon fitness by October. This involved an early rise in the morning, at about 6.30 a.m. and getting in training before the normal working day would begin. For all of the siblings, and their families, one of the difficulties was fitting in this intensive training and also keeping together their normal family and working lives.

For some of the family the company of others during training was always available and this to some extent eased the pressure and the loneliness of the daily hours of training. Those who live away from Birr had to complete the training either by themselves, or with friends. Willie, the eldest, found that he could train more efficiently if he was on his own, and since he does not have any of the other family members living near to him in Waterford this proved a convenient circumstance, if only from the training point of view.

As part of the decision reached, the family decided to use the opportunity to do good for others and nominated Down Syndrome Ireland to be the beneficiary of all sponsorship to be raised by them. Joe O'Donoghue's two-year-old son Mark has Down's Syndrome, and it is this organisation in Offaly and Galway that will benefit from the sponsorship and donations raised by the O'Donoghues on their way to breaking the world record. "Mark is



Training in Birr Castle Grounds

learning how to talk using sign language," Ruth says, adding that the team is hoping some of the money raised will be used to train speech therapists. The appeal is eloquent; "While he is in great health at the moment, it hasn't always been easy and he has had lots of ups and downs in his little life. Money raised will go towards training speech therapists. Speech Therapy is critical in supporting the development of children with Down syndrome. Everyone needs a voice to be heard and right now we are these children's voices. We want them to be able to communicate with the world."

The target fund was set at €50,000 and the family set about seeking sponsorship both locally and nationally. The publicity effort for the attempt and the fundraising was very much co-ordinated by Ruth, married to James (Jimbob) and sister-in-law to the rest of the family. Ruth in addition to undertaking the responsibility as the group's PR woman also committed to the gruelling training schedule and the completion of the Marathon. "I can't praise her enough," Louise says of Ruth, "She's an only child, so when she married one of us she gained not only a husband, but also fourteen brothers and sisters.

During the months of training none of the family really doubted that they could do it. Each had an awareness of the commitment being made by the others and this helped them keep their focus. Interestingly, the entry which had caught the attention of Jo in the Guinness Book of Records was a record which had been set at the London Marathon, and this record was of eleven siblings completing the Marathon. This meant that in order to beat the record the O'Donoghue family would have to ensure that at least 12 of them would complete the course in the allotted time of 8 hours. However, unknown to the O'Donoghues at the time, events had moved on since the world record set at the

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London Marathon. In October 2005 a new record of 12 siblings had been set by the Irwin family from Donegal in the Dublin City Marathon. The Irwin achievement had not yet been published in the Guinness book of records, because of publication dates, but was due to be published in the 2007 Edition. Now the O'Donoghues had to get at least 13 over the line to break the record. Then, in September last, with just a month to go, and to add spice to the O'Donoghue attempt, a new record was set in the United States when the 13 Weiss brothers and sisters crossed the finish line of the Community First Fox Cities Marathon. Now the O'Donoghues needed 14 to complete. Any margin for error or injury was rapidly slipping away. Coincidentally, shortly after the Weiss family in the US had broken the record, Louise had a call from one of the Irwin family, who had heard of the O'Donoghue record attempt and had rung to wish the family luck. The Irwins didn't know it at the time, but their record had at this stage been broken, and when Louise told them, their support for the O'Donoghues was unqualified.

By mid October the family was fit and getting anxious for the day to arrive. Apart from minor mishaps there were no injuries. Within the week before the Marathon, all of the family came together in Birr and had their final long training session together. They then travelled to Dublin on the evening before the Marathon and sensibly ensured that they had an early night to give themselves every chance on the following day. On the morning of the race and due to the publicity already generated they found recognition wherever they went. At the pre-race registration the organisers had thoughtfully grouped their registrations together so as to allow them all to remain together during the registration process. This attitude prevailed throughout the day and one of the abiding memories of the family is the unexpected but welcome hospitality they encountered before, during and after the event. The girls (including Ruth) all stayed together for the entire Marathon and, to keep each other's morale up, they sang songs as they went along. All of the family went at their own pace, knowing that the goal was not personal glory, but for all to complete as a family within the time limit. The first to cross the line was Cronan in a very respectable four hours

twenty minutes, and the last crossed the line at six hours twenty six minutes. After that it was party time, nothing too energetic, but enjoyable nevertheless. The enjoyment was added to when Mundy turned up at their celebrations and stayed to sing with them.

By the time the Marathon was completed the family had raised the sum of €42,000 for their cause. This money was raised at fund-raising events locally as well as sponsorship from Birr Lions Club and Lucozade sport. The family intends to continue their drive to achieve the target set and hope to achieve this in the near future.

The achievement, in addition to bringing great credit to the family, also allows the town of Birr to bask in some reflected glory. However, there is some competition for this entitlement. There are prior claims. Shortly after the Marathon, a friend remarked to me *"it's a great day for Moorpark Street"*. I responded, not unreasonably, as I thought, by adding, *"it's also a great day for Birr"*. There was a pause for a second or two, and he repeated, *"it's a great day for Moorpark Street"*. Whatever about the geographical entitlements, what is certain is that the achievement by the O'Donoghue family was and is inspirational.

A family that together commits to month after month of tough training and sticks it through to the end is remarkable and extraordinary. A family that together takes on a task that has never been achieved before and succeeds is also remarkable and extraordinary. A family that does all of this because *"everyone needs a voice to be heard and right now we are these children's voices. We want them to be able to communicate with the world"* is an inspiration.

*The family gives the thumbs up ahead of their World Record Attempt*



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# BIRR – THE DEVELOPMENT OF AN HISTORIC TOWN

By Caimin O'Brien

This short article follows on from a walking tour of Birr that I gave during Heritage Week 2007 after an invitation from the Birr Historical Society. During the course of this walk the group discussed the evolution of the town of Birr from its first settlers who formed a monastic settlement based around the old church and graveyard up to the 17<sup>th</sup> century town that was developed by the Parsons family of Birr Castle. The origins of the town as an historic settlement goes back 1500 years to the middle of the sixth century when an evangelising monk from Kerry called Brendan decided to establish a monastery in a place called *Biorra*. The stone church that is known as St. Brendan's church located in the old graveyard opposite the castle was probably built on the site or close to the site of the timber church built by St. Brendan in the middle of the 6<sup>th</sup> century. Brendan probably founded his monastery at this location because of its close proximity to the river and to the natural spring well known today as St. Brendan's Well located in the grounds of the castle. It is possible, that this well was the spring from which the town received its Irish name of *Biorra*, meaning the land of springs.

The monastery would have attracted settlers to the area around the church as it would have stimulated the economy of the region. The monastery would have consisted of a timber church, earthen buildings with thatched roofs, a scriptorium (where the Book of Birr was made), a metalworking zone, and other features all of which would have been contained within an earthen enclosure crowned with a timber fence or a hedgerow of whitethorn marking the boundary of this monastic settlement. The local Gaelic chieftains may have donated some of their land to the founding saint thereby becoming the lay family acting as the patrons of St. Brendan and his monastery. This family was later to become known as the O'Carrolls giving their name to the territory of Ely O'Carroll in which Birr is situated. The medieval history of Birr town is inextricably linked to the fortunes and politics of the O'Carroll family.

The arrival of the Anglo-Normans between 1185-1200 AD saw the ownership of land become hotly disputed between native Gaelic families and the French families who now claimed certain lands in Ireland on behalf of the King of England. In order to secure and fortify their newly acquired lands the Anglo-Normans introduced the timber and stone castle into Ireland. The first castles built were of timber and were constructed on top of earthen mounds known as mottes. Around 1200 AD an Anglo-Norman (French) lord known as Adam de Hereford was described as head tenant of the territory of Ely O'Carroll who held it on behalf of his lord Theobald Walter, head of the Butler



*View of Birr Medieval church showing gable of 17th century extension in the foreground and 17th century Belltower in the background. The gable of the earlier medieval church can be seen to the left of the 17th century gable.*

family, later to become known as the Earls of Ormond. A deed from the year 1201 confirms that Ely O'Carroll was then in the legal ownership of Theobald Walter. The church and lands of Birr were now controlled by the Anglo-Normans who constructed a motte castle beside the medieval church. This motte was located beside the present day castle. From this time onwards the town and lands of Birr would become hotly contested between the Anglo-Norman Butlers and the O'Carrolls. During this time Birr was located in the medieval province of Munster. For the next 400 years these two families would claim ownership of Birr and its surrounding lands. Eventually this dispute was resolved when Sir Charles O'Carroll sent a petition to the English Crown requesting that the territory of Ely O'Carroll be made part of Kings County and not part of Tipperary which was then part of Butler lands. The English Crown agreed to this petition and Birr with its lands were made part of Kings County that was later to become Offaly in the province of Leinster.

The Anglo-Norman presence was a short-lived affair as they were under constant attack from the Gaelic chieftains. In 1207 AD the timber castle of Birr was attacked and burned by the O'Briens. After this attack in the year 1213 the English constructed a new castle at Birr and this was to be known as the '**Black Castle**'. It is possible that this was the first stone castle built at Birr and it appears to have been built on top of the mound or motte that was located beside the present day castle. By the year 1340, Birr was back in the hands of the O'Carrolls who took over the control of Black Castle. This event marked the collapse and end of the Anglo-Norman rule in

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Birr and its surrounding lands. For the next two hundred years the town was ruled by the O'Carroll family from their stronghold known as the Black Castle. During this time the timber church of Birr was replaced by a stone building part of which still survives to this present day.

During the second half of the 16<sup>th</sup> century the Birr branch of the O'Carroll family went into decline over succession rights to become the leader of Ely O'Carroll. The end of one great family was to see the arrival of a new family from England who was to have a profound effect on the development of the town. The Parsons family from Yorkshire is responsible for instigating the economic development of the historic town and for its architectural development creating one of the finest Georgian towns in Ireland. The buildings and streetscape that impress the modern visitor to Birr are the result of the efforts this family have made in developing the economic life of Birr from the 17<sup>th</sup> century onwards to present times.

On the 22<sup>nd</sup> of June 1620 the commissioners appointed by the English Crown for the plantation of Kings County granted Laurence Parsons the 'castle and fortillage of Birr; the watermill and lands of Birr and also accepting 20 acres as glebe land for the church of Birr'. This Lawrence Parsons was responsible for redefining the castle by constructing a new kitchen & office wing, by the addition of flanking towers, & a projecting watch tower. During this time the works were supervised by Mr. Francis Morley and carried out by the master mason Mr. Brian Mc Hugh Coghlan. In order to stimulate the economic development of the town in the year 1621 Laurence Parsons received a licence to hold 'a weekly market on Tuesdays at Birr in the King's Co., and two fairs there annually, the one on the feast of St. Mark the evangelist [25<sup>th</sup> April] and the day after, and the other on the feast of St Andrew the apostle [30<sup>th</sup> November] and the day after, unless such feasts occur on Saturday or Sunday, in which case the fairs are to be held on the Monday and Tuesday following'. The granting of this licence saw the first steps in the architectural development of the modern town of Birr. It resulted in the construction of the Market House in the Market Square around the year 1626 when Laurence Parsons granted a 21 yr lease to Darby Mulrean for the market place and to build a market house at a rent of £3 per annum. Around 1625 a market cross was erected in the Market Sq. There were 5 streets in 17<sup>th</sup> century Birr, these were Castle St., Main St., Market Sq., Bridge St. & Chapel Lane. The first buildings of 17<sup>th</sup> century Birr were constructed along Castle Street which was then the main thoroughfare leading up to the main entrance of the castle gateway located between the 2 flankers of the castle facing onto Castle St and the church and graveyard. Between the years of 1620 to 1640 the Parsons family added a bell-tower on to the southwest angle of the church. In 1615 the Protestant Bishop John Rider visited Birr church where Walter Fitz Simon was listed as curate.

The Bishop wanted his Protestant clergy to be able to communicate with the Irish speaking natives and was looking for clergy who 'Reades not only ye English but ye Irish service perfectly'. The Parsons family now controlled the church and the rights of burial were now controlled by the established church. The 17<sup>th</sup> century burial fees for Birr were recorded as 6s 8 d for burial inside the nave of the church while strangers to the parish were charged double the price at 13s 4d, the parishioners of Birr were to be buried without charge in the churchyard and all burial fees went towards repairs of the church. Some of these fees may have gone towards the construction of a second aisle to the northern side of the church in 1690 resulting in the ground plan of the church at it stands to this day. During this period the town appears to have been fortified by the construction of a town wall of earth and timber construction. It is not clear if these earthen town defences were ever upgraded to a town wall constructed in stone. These town defences ran from the castle over the Green near present day Green St. and over to Connaught St. and then down along the line of Back Lane down to the 'Green Patch' where there may have been an angle tower. From here they ran along the bank of the river down by Mill Lane onto the Bridge and crossing the road the defences ran parallel to the river behind the Maltings returning onto the castle.

During the 18<sup>th</sup> century under the encouragement of the Parsons family the cluttered settlement pattern of the 17<sup>th</sup> century was replaced by a planned grid pattern to the North of Main St. and a new façade was built along the Main St. In the year 1710 Thomas Silvester who was an innkeeper in the town built a new dwelling house next to the churchyard. The terms of his lease offer us an interesting insight into the relationship between the townspeople and the Parson family. It also clearly illustrates the interest the Parson family had in the quality of the architecture that was being constructed in the town of Birr. The lease stated that Thomas would pay an annual rent of £7 and supply 2 fat hens at Shrovetide and 2 fat capons at Christmas. He could build a chimney but only if it was built from lime and stone or brick, if it was of any other material it would be pulled down and have to be rebuilt in stone. Unfortunately the Black Castle that was built on top of the Anglo-Norman motte was demolished in the year 1778 by William Parsons in order to make way for his new formal gardens.

Today as one walks around Birr one can catch a glimpse of the historic town such as the steeply pitched narrow 17<sup>th</sup> century houses backing on to the houses facing onto Main St, the tall steeply pitched houses of Castle St and the Old Bridge on Bridge St which has been widened several times over the centuries still retaining its 17<sup>th</sup> century heart. Hopefully the town will retain this wonderful architectural heritage reminding us every day of where we came from and hopefully inspiring us to create a prosperous future for all.



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# THE NIALL MELLON BUILDING BLITZ

By David O'Brien

On November 2nd this year almost 1,400 volunteers from all over Ireland, travelled to South Africa for an extraordinary challenge in what was to become the largest volunteer mission in Irish history. Now in its fifth year the Niall Mellon Township Trust aimed – in just one week – to build 200 houses, a community centre and a Garden of Hope in the desperately poor township of Freedom Park 40km outside Cape Town. For the residents of Freedom Park home is often little more than sheets of plastic and scrap wood – one or two room shacks in which families struggle to survive in conditions that must be seen to be believed.

Dublin property developer Niall Mellon founded the charity in 2002 after he saw at first hand the dire conditions in which people were living across South Africa. Up to 10 million people live in the country's shanty towns, with on average 7 people crammed into each shack. The mission of the charity is to build high quality homes and community facilities for those that cannot afford a decent place to live.

Cape Town is a vibrant, modern and beautiful city with all the comfort and trappings of the wealth you would expect in a first world country. But take a trip just a few miles from the city centre and you encounter poverty and deprivation which truly beggars belief. Viola Macholisa lives in a two roomed shack built from scrap metal, plastic and what bits of wood she could find. Viola, her husband and six kids are crammed into this tiny space without running water or sanitation and the constant fear that her hut will be blown down, washed away in a flood or burned in one of the frequent and horrific fires that plague the shanty towns.



Life expectancy is just 45 in the shanty town that looks directly across a valley to some of Cape Town's most expensive houses. "It is very hard to live like this, very hard for my children," Viola told The Birr Review when we

visited her home. It's not just the living conditions that make life so cruel here – HIV is an incredible problem. "The majority of children living here will have lost one or both of their parents to AIDS", development worker George Meje said. While it's difficult to work out exactly how many people are living with the disease it is known to be as high as 70 per cent in places. "Another big problem here is that emergency services cannot get to the houses, so if there is a fire or people are sick they cannot be helped," George said.

The shacks are built so closely together that it is impossible for ambulances or fire engines to get through and the cramped conditions mean fire spreads at a horrifying rate. The Niall Mellon Township Trust is bringing hope to these people. Between 2003 and 2005 the charity built 448 houses in the nearby shantytown of Imizamo Yethu. Martha Mgidlana (62) and her husband Goodwell (64) along with her daughter and two grandchildren moved into one of the Niall Mellon houses in 2003. "My life is so much better, in my old house we had nothing. I was always worried about what would happen, always worried about the fires, now we are very happy," Martha told The Birr review when we visited her bright comfortable home, which has a toilet, shower and most importantly dignity. "It was a great change for me, it changed everything in my life," another resident Mavis Ngetu said. "When I lived in the shack, the hardest thing was to give my children a proper living.

"It was so difficult for them to study, we had only candlelight, and their health was poor." Now we have all we could ever need, everything is so much better. "I want to thank the people of Ireland for what they have done for me and my family", she said.

Among those taking part in this year's mission was Pdraig Madden from Lorrha. "This is my first time taking part in the blitz; it's been a brilliant overwhelming experience to see what is being done here." My father Paddy who died in June, noticed the ads in the newspaper and suggested I should go, I'm here in his honour. "The conditions here are astonishing, it's another world, you really have to meet the people and see the conditions to understand. For Mary Grennan from Rath it's been a tough but hugely rewarding week. "Life is not measured by the number of breaths you take but by the moments that take your breath away," was how Mary summed her week. Will Maher from Clonakenny, Roscrea was involved in the organising team behind this year's mammoth event. "I came out as a volunteer for three months labouring in the summer; I've also been involved in the recruitment of local staff in South Africa. "It's been an absolutely overwhelming and humbling experience and it has also

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been deeply shocking and gut wrenching at times. "You cannot help but be angered by the situation but I'm also hugely proud as a Midlander to see so many people from back home making such a difference.

This year's blitz proved rewarding. It was also seriously tough going for the volunteers who come from every walk of life. While the majority are involved in the construction industry back home, this year's blitz also included doctors, bankers, teachers, farmers, models, housewives and even Coast Guard rescue helicopter pilots and winch men. The volunteers put in seven gruelling days of early starts, backbreaking work, varied weather conditions which included fierce heat, rain storms and a ceaseless wind.



Joining the volunteers for this year's blitz was celebrity gardener Diarmuid Gavin who was part of the team who became involved after doing some publicity work for the Trust. "They are really doing amazing work and I wanted to be more of a part of it than just posing for pictures," Diarmuid told The Birr Review during a break from the hard slog. "To see the crowds of Irish people coming in here was outstanding and everybody, no matter what their background just pitches in, it's a great leveller but its tough going" said the top telly star who is working on the Garden of Hope which was designed by top landscaper Dominic Loughran. But despite the early starts, the

backbreaking work and an outbreak of diarrhea which struck over a fifth of the volunteers the volunteers managed to completed their mammoth task with the 203 houses handed over to the people of Freedom Park just after midday on Friday. As community Lesar Rule paid an emotional tribute to the volunteers even the toughest of brickies could be seen wiping a tear from their eyes.

For Mona Miller who has lived in the shanty town all her life it was a day she would never forget. "I cannot believe what the Irish have done for me and my family, I want to thank them all from the bottom of my heart but I find it hard to find the words," she said. The mum of four wrote this poem to express her gratitude to all those from Birr and the rest of the country for what they have done in bringing her a home, hope and dignity.

**From Me to You**

By Mona Miller

Nine years of hardship, struggling with fear  
Mostly shedding a lot of tears  
Never did I know that a joy so dear  
Would come my way through an Irish volunteer.

I've come to realise that people like you  
Are like the soil of the earth, solid and true  
Your hearts are as big as the open skies  
So much love, compassion yet without compromise.

Shane, Oliver, Jerry, Fiona, Mike, did you know?  
That every time I look at you my admiration grow  
Looking at this new found joy called my house  
Is worth every sacrifice that you have bestowed

I thank God for men and women like you  
A special blessing came from heaven's hue  
When you go back across the seas so far  
Please keep my family in your thoughts wherever you are.

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## VISITING BIRR IN THE 18<sup>TH</sup> CENTURY

*By Reverend Irene Morrow*



It is 300 years since Charles Wesley, known as a prolific hymn writer was born. As far as we know he visited Birr on only one occasion in September 1748 when he was a guest of a Mr. Jackson. His older brother, John Wesley, visited Birr at least twelve times, his first visit also being in 1748 and his last in 1789. The

brothers had struck up a friendship with a Mr. Handy of Coolalough near Horseleap and often used his home as a base for their preaching in the Midlands. Mr. Handy had been concerned that his sister-in-law was becoming influenced by Methodism and at her invitation had gone to Dublin to meet members of the Methodist persuasion. As a result of this meeting he was in fact to become a close friend of the very leaders of Methodism. The brothers included Birr on their journey to and from Horseleap.

When we say 'visited Birr' it was a completely different experience for a visitor coming in the 18<sup>th</sup> century to what a similar journey would be today. First there was the sea-crossing. In his journal for Thursday September 6<sup>th</sup> 1747, Wesley wrote 'Mrs Tucker and I set out for Hollyhead. We intended to cross over in Anglesey at Baldon Ferry four miles from Carnarvon; but not being able to inquire our way (as we spoke no Welsh and the country people no English) we could not find where the ferry was 'till we saw the boat coming over. We went into the boat about sunset and lodged that night in an inn in the Waterside.' The next day they crossed over to Hollyhead and then on Saturday... 'finding one of the packet-boats ready, we went on board about eight o'clock in the morning. It was a dead calm when we rowed out of the harbour; but about two in the afternoon the wind sprung up and continued till near four on Sunday morning, when we were in sight of the Irish shore....' He remarks on seeing a French privateer which for several days had taken every ship which sailed on the coast, but had now been captured and was imprisoned in Dublin Bay.

These entries in the journal give some idea of the difficulty and danger of crossing the Irish Sea in the 18<sup>th</sup> century. The next part of his journey involved hiring a horse and setting off to cross the country. The roads were not unlike our farm lanes and in wet weather they became muddy. There were no waterproof coats and woollen coats became sodden with rain.

Despite the challenges, Wesley visited Ireland every second year. His purpose was to visit the Methodist

societies all over the country and 'examine the classes'. All the members of the society belonged to a class or group of not more than twelve people. John Wesley met each class and conversed with each member. He preached at every opportunity in churches and in the street.

On his first visit to Birr the key of the Sessions House could not be found so he preached to 'a dull, rude and senseless multitude' on the street. It is not really surprising that the people who happened to be around on the street at the time were not really impressed by the small English clergyman, until recently an Oxford University Lecturer, making a speech on the streets of the small provincial town of Birr. He obviously wasn't too discouraged because less than a year later we find him again in Birr, again having travelled by horse, preaching to a large unconcerned congregation..... "The next day both in the morning and in the evening I spoke very plain and rough .....Love will not always prevail; there is time for the terrors of the Lord..."

On his last visit in 1789 Wesley was 86 years of age. He wrote in his journal..... "How is this scene changed here! One of the dullest places in Ireland is become one of the liveliest...." Wesley was not invited to preach in the Church Of Ireland in Birr, though he was accorded the privilege of this in other places such as Eyrecourt, Clara and St. Mary's Dublin. In Birr he preached in the square on the steps of a large house that belonged to a Mr. Joseph Marshall, possibly Cumberland House. It would be twenty years after his first visit that the Methodists would build their own Chapel which they called 'the Preaching House' in an alley of Church Lane in 1768. (that is where a new development of town houses now stands). There was also a house for the Methodist Preacher, as ministers were then known, on Church Lane. The Methodists continued to use this building until 1820 when their present chapel was built.



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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 23<sup>rd</sup> 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 Aghancon 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 68<sup>th</sup> regiment (later known as The Durham Light Infantry) during the Waikato-Hauhau Maori war in New Zealand. On the 21<sup>st</sup> 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 7<sup>th</sup> November 1911. He is buried in Eglisli 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 2<sup>nd</sup> Battalion, York and Lancaster Regiment during the First World War. On 16<sup>th</sup> of



*Private John Caffrey, VC.*

November near La Brique, France, a man was badly wounded and lying in the open unable to move, in full view of enemy trenches about 350 yards away. A corporal from the Army Medical Corp and private Caffrey started out 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 1<sup>st</sup> and his date of birth as October 23<sup>rd</sup> 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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# SHANGHAIS AND LOWS

By Mark Grennan, Past pupil of Crinkill NS and BIRR Community School,  
who spent four months at University in Shanghai earlier this year.

Situated at the mouth of the Yangtze River lies the sprawling metropolis of Shanghai. Sitting uncomfortably side by side, grand colonial buildings, ancient oriental temples, shining skyscrapers and shanty towns, make up one of the world's most exciting cities. Shanghai, a city of contrasts, became my home.

I decided to take advantage of the opportunity to study abroad for one semester. So in February, I took the leap and headed for China. The culture shock was immediate and intense. I had worried about food, customs, and fitting in, but for some unknown reason, I hadn't considered the language barrier an issue. Sitting in a taxi at the airport I became immediately aware of the fact that English is not *the* universal language I thought it to be, at least not in China.

Tongji University, situated near the centre of Shanghai, is home to 30,000 Chinese students, as well as a handful of Westerners. A 20ft statue of Chairman Mao stands guard over the entrance of the university, leaving visitors in no doubt of the country's politics. Aside from this, however, there is very little evidence of the Communist state. The spacious and leafy campus is calm and peaceful, the buildings are bright and modern, and the students are dressed like any of their counterparts in the West.

Although I hadn't really considered learning Mandarin Chinese, it quickly became apparent that survival in China would be very difficult without it. For 3 hours a day, 5 days a week, 20 of my European classmates and I recited unfamiliar sounds and tones, and struggled with complex Chinese characters. We also took business and economics classes, thankfully in English. Resources for these classes were difficult to find, with very few English books available and with the internet tightly controlled and censored.

One of the most memorable moments of class in China was the day when our Chinese teacher, perplexed by our Western names, proceeded to rename the entire class. Chinese workers are regularly given names like John and Sarah when they come to study or work in Ireland. In the same way, we were given Chinese names, mine being Zhang Cheng Gong.

Outside of the University campus, the buzzing city was as far from calm and peaceful as Shanghai is from BIRR. The city is one of the largest in the world. Population estimates range from 16million to 24million, and the city is struggling to make room for them all. This modernisation is plain to be seen in many quarters. Old shanty towns are being swept aside to make way for high rise apartments. Entire blocks are demolished in the blink of an eye, and skyscrapers are erected almost as quickly.



*The old in the shadow of the new*

After decades of dominance by the bicycle, the city is also racing to cope with the growth in car numbers. Elevated highways crisscross the city rising in 3 or 4 layers, and 9 metro lines are under construction.

The customs of the Chinese people were often surprising, in both good ways and bad. Despite being one of more than 300,000 westerners in the city, locals are still surprised to see a foreigner. Aside from the constant stares, it is not uncommon to hear shouts of "hello" and "weigoren (foreigner)" on the street, or to be asked to stand in family photos and holiday snaps. Having said that, the Chinese are incredibly welcoming and respectful of foreigners. On the down side, the constant spitting is quite a shock. Beijing has outlawed spitting in preparation for the Olympics, but this law hasn't quite reached Shanghai yet. The continuous sound of *hocking* is a warning to be on your guard!

In July, the end of term arrived, along with the sweltering summer heat. It was time for me to leave Shanghai. The city known as "the pearl of the orient" is a place I grew to love. The experience had been unforgettable. Shanghai is the engine of a country that is racing forward, I'm sure I will be seeing it again soon.

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## WILLIE LOUGHNANE - A BIRR SUCCESS STORY

by Richard Kennedy

When Willie Loughnane was still a secondary school student his father made a business decision, which was to have very significant consequences for Willie in his future career. The property now known as the County Arms hotel came on the market. The Fayle family had previously lived in the house, and it was sold as a private house. As Willie himself says, "After my father bought the house he added significantly to it. It opened as a hotel in 1962 and I came in to the business in 1972". Over the years Willie has seen a lot of changes in the hotel industry in Ireland." He feels that the greatest change has been that people have travelled more and tastes have become more sophisticated. People now understand what it is to ask for a particular wine and have a wider range of expectation when it comes to food and food or bar services. "I think travel has broadened the mind of most people. The standard of hotel keeping in Ireland would be higher here than in the UK by and large. That standard was not around forty years ago. All rooms in Ireland in hotel facilities are en suite. Lots of hotels have Leisure Centres and give services such as beauty treatments and massage. A comparable hotel in the UK wouldn't have as much facilities"

Willie sees his role of an Hotelier as having a social and community function. "Everything is extraordinary in a hotel in some ways. There are very significant celebrations and events such as Baptism, Holy Communion, Confirmation, Weddings or funerals. These are very important occasions for the people involved. The hotel management and staff have to be there for people in a very special way. For example, if we have a wedding today and the groom's people are from Dublin, and the other side are from Offaly, they don't want us to let the side down. They want the whole event to be as perfect as possible. It is a very significant experience for everyone involved. That's just one element of it. From a business point of view we are in the centre of Ireland. We are trying to attract people into Birr. Basically we have a family business that has been running for a number of years and have established a reputation and it is very important for us that we keep and enhance it."

Having spent almost 35 years involvement with the Hotel, Willie is now happy to have his sons take more responsibility for the running of the hotel. Two of my sons were in the States. One lived there for seven years and the other lived there for four years. I had one son who lived in England for 9 years. They are now all back in Ireland in permanent positions. Two of them, Barry and Conor are working full time in the business and Peter, who lives and works in Cork, looks after the marketing side of our business". The County Arms Hotel has recently been extended significantly and in carrying out the work Willie

was anxious to preserve the character of the original house.

"...The entrance was on the middle level, now the entrance is on the ground level. That was one of the things we addressed in the recent development. We tried to get the appearance of it back to essentially a three-storey town house. It is a listed building so we had to be very

careful as to what we did with planning, being careful in the sense of retaining the character and dignity, so what we have done has enhanced the dignity of the premises by removing the porch on the front and by recessing the building..." As well as creating significant new bedroom and dining facilities there are new conference and meeting rooms an ultra modern bar and reception area and a fantastic new leisure centre complete with swimming pool.

Looking back over his career in the business Willie is proud of the major improvements in service and facilities which have come about over recent years and he feels that this has helped to raise the profile of the hotel. It has now been recognised as the first four star family hotel in the Midlands. He is also extremely proud that the business contributes significantly to the local economy.

"We are growing our business substantially for various reasons and that has a huge knock on affect in the local economy. Our business depends on the locality. We employ between 75 and 80 staff. It's a facility for the locals and for this area. One of the real pluses for us is working with the local community. In the locality, you earn respect from other people and other businesses."

With his own sons happy to carry on this family business for another generation, the outlook is good for the future of the County Arms Hotel, especially in view of the willingness of Willie and his family to invest, both in terms of finance and in human resources, in the business. This is what makes The County Arms Hotel a real success story for Birr.



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# BIRR 1907

By Tony Hogan

There was no scarcity of interesting events in 1907 to keep the reporters of the *Midland Tribune* and the *King's County Chronicle* busy. As was its wont the *Tribune* concentrated on all things national with Home Rule a perennial topic. The *Chronicle* was somewhat more international in its approach. Early in the year the *Tribune* berated the National Theatre Society for staging Synge's *Playboy of the Western World*.

## The Playboy of the Western World

From the *Midland Tribune*:

"That this play should have aroused the anger of Dublin playgoers and that the police should have been called in to protect both author and actors is not surprising, for the piece as a whole is an insult to the manhood and womanhood of Ireland – a vile caricature of Irish life and character..... The *Playboy of the Western World* is not Irish comedy and it does no credit to Mr. Synge or the National Theatre. The wonder is, why an Irish audience should tolerate such a gross travesty of character, and, incidentally of religion, at all."

## Hurling display in Birr

There was a contest between two Birr teams, Senior and Junior against similar teams from Roscrea.

The weather was dry and bitterly cold – which suited the taste of the young men – and the large field at Cappaneale, let by Mr. John Byrne, was well filled by an orderly assembly, and there was a sprinkling of the fair sex. The Riverstown Fife and Drum Band, headed by a large green flag with a crownless harp, and the members wearing sashes to match, were in abundance and played some really good music on the way to and from the field as well as during the intervals.

At two pm the junior teams took to the field, with Mr. P.J. Dooley, Draper, Birr, as referee. Mr. Laurence Molloy of Killyon was the referee for the senior match. The Birrites were fortunate in gaining the formation of the field and the play was said by qualified judges to be very scientific. The Birr men were at all times the better team and at the final whistle the score was Birr "Fontenoy's" 3-1, Roscrea "Sinn Fein" 0-3.

## Gaelic League

There were many branches of the Gaelic League whose mission was the promotion of all things Irish and Gaelic. The League organised Aeridheachts which proved to be very popular throughout the county. The Banagher League organised such an event in June, but unfortunately it clashed with a hurling contest in Birr. This caused much anger in Banagher who wanted Birr to postpone their matches. A letter to the *Midland Tribune* berated Birr and

said that 'their attitude savours very much of John Bullism'. The writer pointed out that,

the Gaelic League wanted real honest thinking workers who are prepared to learn the language and history of their country and think in an Irish manner.

He pointed out that Banagher banded a greater power than the Birr hurlers and he thanked God that the Lusmagh Club had supported Banagher, 'and more power to them we say'.

## Some Health Maxims from the Chronicle

- Live in the open air as much as possible.
- Get up early and go to bed betimes at night.
- Drink a tumblerful of cold water first thing in the morning and another before going to bed.
- Avoid much meat in hot weather.
- Take plenty of vegetables and ripe, sound fruit.
- Avoid strong tea and coffee, and take milk in preference to either.
- Abjure salted and smoked fish and meat.

## Irish in the Birr Union Schools

Birr Union Workhouse school was in the news.

It is a happy coincidence and maybe nothing more, than that the teaching of Irish in Birr Union Female School should be so quickly followed by a marked improvement in the manners and discipline of the children. Such was the very satisfactory statement that the Master, Mr. Budds, was able to make.

## Birr Education Meeting

In late 1906, the British Exchequer gave the Irish Education Board £578,000 less than the Scottish grant. This caused bitter feeling throughout the Irish Education System and protest meetings were held throughout the country. In January 1907, a massive protest was held in Birr attended by leaders of all walks of life. Miss Catherine Mahon, Principal of Carrig N.S. and later to become first lady President of the INTO, led the local protest. The meeting was addressed by senior clergy, the president of the INTO and local MPs. One such addressee was Mr. Patrick H. Pearse, at that time, editor of *An Claidheamh Soluis*. In an impassioned speech he said that

the question of education was not merely a teachers' question. It was a question of interest to the Irish public in general. It was a question for every man, woman and child in Ireland.... 'the English Treasury was the real enemy of the people and had done its best to starve out the teachers. The Treasury was an illegal institution.' (Loud applause).

I wonder if there is any other record of Patrick Pearse speaking in Birr.

## Thanks

Most of this research was done in the astoundingly beautiful and universally admired Birr Library where both the *Midland Tribune* and the *King's County Chronicle* are now available on microfilm. Sincere thanks to librarian Martina Needham and to her very helpful staff.

## IDENTIFY THE FACES (ANSWERS ON PAGE 106)



1



2



3



4



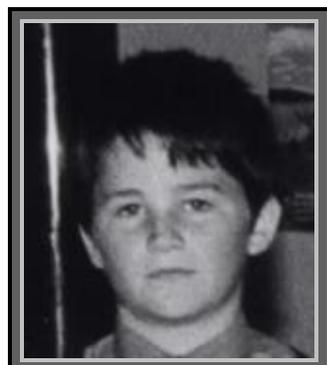
5



6



7



8



9



10



11



12



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## BIRR METHODIST CHURCH

Nobody likes exams! Tests and inspections are no different and yet they are a way of checking if everything is “up to scratch”. Every five years Visiting Commissions are sent to different Circuits in the Methodist Church to inspect the mission and property of the circuit. Last year it was our turn in the Birr, Athlone & Tullamore Circuit. All three churches and the manse were studied, probed and crawled over. Pages of notes were taken on the life of the church community. Thankfully, the maintenance work of the past few years had paid off and Birr was given a clean bill of health. All the scrubbing, painting and cleaning had been worth it!

Over the past few years, the number of foreign residents in our communities has become common and this has been well reflected in our three church congregations. With that in mind, we hosted an “India Night” in May (it also coincided with Christian Aid week). An illustrated talk was given by one of our nurses from Tullamore, on the subject of the Christian Church in India -but there was more! Curry sampling (with not a little help from *Shahi*

*Quilla* in Market Square) and sari wearing (not by the minister!) made it both fun and informative evening. The subject of immigration was again considered as part of our joint Lenten series of services which were shared with St. Brendan’s Church of Ireland. Other topics included alcoholism, healing and homelessness.

A service of Reception into full membership was held in April. This was the first such service since 2002. This is perhaps quite a contrast to other churches where confirmation services are many and annual. Given that, it was a great blessing for the congregation to witness Ruth Abbott and Philip Haslam make their declarations of faith and be received as full members of the church.

Some of our more regular events were again well supported by the congregation and the wider community: the May Sale in Oxmantown School, the Christmas “shop” in Main St. and a BBQ at the manse in August. This year marked the 300<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the birth of Charles Wesley, preacher and hymn writer which was also celebrated.



L to r: Rev Colin Gracie, Ruth Abbott, Philip Haslam & Rev Irene Morrow

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## ST. BRENDAN'S CHURCH OF IRELAND

Just after returning from Christmas holidays in France, Archdeacon Carney became very ill and was off duty for about seven months. We thank God that he has returned to good health and was back on his feet in time for his daughter's wedding in August.

In January, the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity was observed with an ecumenical service at which the Right Revd. Michael Mayes, Bishop of Limerick & Killaloe was the special preacher. Congratulations to Michael and Sylvia Finney-Kennedy on the birth of a baby boy.

February saw the passing of Mrs. Julia Trench, a wonderful woman who took such a great interest in every aspect of life. She was laid to rest in her 'home' church in Ballingarry. A memorial service in thanksgiving for her life was held in Birr in April.

In March, we were delighted to welcome the youth orchestra from NUI Galway under their conductor, Mr. Hugh Kelly. They gave a most enjoyable recital in the church and we hope that they will be able to pay us another visit in the not too distant future.

As has been happening for a few years now, Birr Methodist Church and the C of I combined their Lenten observances. This year special speakers attended, giving insights to the particular type of work they do in encouraging others who need a helping hand. It was with deep regret that Birr lost another larger than life person with the passing of William (Billy) Eades in April. His

remains were laid to rest in Clonoghill.

June and July were busy months! The Summer Fete at the Rectory was held on a Thursday. There were two weddings, Stephen, son of Whitten and Linda Gill and Patricia, daughter of Mary and the late Pat O'Gorman and the marriage of Alicia, daughter of the Earl and Countess of Rosse to Nathaniel Clements. A baby boy was born to Edel and John Gill, a grandson for George and Ruth.

Mrs. Elizabeth Henshaw, who had been a long-time resident in Elmgrove Nursing Home, died there peacefully, her funeral and burial taking place in Banagher.

In August, Kathleen, daughter of Archdeacon and Mrs. Carney married William Landin, with the ceremony having a delightful blend of English and French and closing with a blessing in Irish.

September and October saw students returning to schools and colleges and the usual round of services of Thanksgiving to God for the harvest – each well attended and a reminder of how closely farming is knitted to the earth and the elements.

On the 30<sup>th</sup> November, St. Brendan's Day was celebrated in the Church of Ireland with participation from the whole community.

At this point, we look forward to Advent and Christmas and the yearly reminder of how one so great came to earth as a helpless baby so that he could live life as we do.

## Birr Town Council Staff 2007



**Back Row (L to R):** Michael Daly, Pat Sharkey, Michael DeForge, Michael Carter, Aidan Hogan,

**Front Row (L to R):** Joe Cahill, Anthony Murphy, Philip Clancy, Peter Grennan

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## ST. BRENDAN'S PARISH, BIRR

The Parish of Birr experienced another busy year as the parishioners and clergy strove to meet the increasing demands of an ever changing parish community. In November '06 St. Brendan's Church hosted the annual St. Brendan's Day Service, with participation from all of the Christian communities in Birr Parish.

There were two memorable concerts in December 2006 and October 2007. The former featured Birr baritone John Molloy and renowned soprano Cara O' Sullivan, the latter Peter Jackson and Peter Jeffers. Both were uplifting spiritual experiences for all attending.

A Triduum was held in November with Fr. Tony Flannery and Bishop Willie Walsh the main speakers. In the Lenten Triduum an innovative format was organised by Andrew O' Connell (Vocations Director, Presentation Brothers), with Senator Ronan Mullen and Bro. Martin Kennealy among the guest speakers.

In May Bishop Willie Walsh Confirmed over 90 pupils from the five parish primary schools. There were two 1<sup>st</sup> Communions in St. Brendan's and one in Carrig. On a sadder note we had over 50 funerals in the Parish of Birr during the year.

The refurbishment of Carrig Church commenced, with the replacement of leaking lead valleys. Unfortunately, due to unexpected delays in the granting of necessary consent to carry out works on listed buildings, we were unable to complete the Carrig job in the expected time. It is hoped to recommence this project in the spring. Similar problems were encountered in the refurbishment of St. Brendan's railings and steam cleaning of the building's exterior. Clarifications are ongoing with the Co. Council's Consulting Architect and the building committee is hopeful of commencing these necessary works in the New Year.

To make the Parish more accessible to all a Parish Office opened during the year, at the back of St. Brendan's

Church. It is open on Tuesday and Friday mornings from 10.30 a.m. to 12.00 p.m. and will deal with requests for certificates, supply Mass Cards and deal with any relevant enquiry.

A new Parish website is now in operation and may be accessed at [www.stbrendansbirr.ie](http://www.stbrendansbirr.ie). This site contains all news from the Parish; it also includes history, the weekly newsletter, pictures of our churches, useful contact numbers, etc. Our new e-mail address is [info@stbrendansbirr.ie](mailto:info@stbrendansbirr.ie).

In conjunction with the launch of Birr Library's Leinster Regiment Collection, a special ceremony took place in St. Brendan's last September, when Fr. Tony Cahir P.P. rededicated the Leinster Regiment window. The water used in the ceremony came from St. Brendan's well. Among those present on the occasion were the County Librarian Ann Coughlan, Major-General O' Murchu of the Leinster Regiment Association, Sean Cooke local representative of the association, the Earl and Countess of Rosse and many local representatives.



Stained Glass Window in honour  
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## 1978

### *Birr Girls Club who qualified for All Ireland Table Tennis Series*

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McLoughlin (Coach), Helena Gormally,  
Sr. M. James, Eleanor Hanniffy*





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*Front Row (L to R): Clodagh Hayden, Sinead Hoctor, Lilly Whelehan, Joseph Hoctor, Dylan Hogan, Robyn Killackey, Niamh Costello, Saoirse Moran*



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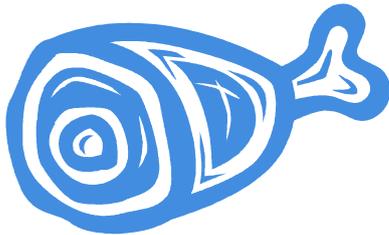
*Back Row (L to R): Mr. Sampson (Principal), Mrs. Ita Houlihan, Ms. Ann O'Meara*  
*3<sup>rd</sup> Row (L to R): Tim Hogan, Danielle Bond, Niamh Cleary, Sarah McCarthy, Lorraine Fogarty, Rebecca Egan, Siobhan Killeen*  
*2<sup>nd</sup> Row (L to R): Rachel Brennan, Emily O'Brien, Charlotte Cavanagh, Niamh Collins, Laura Hogan, Stephanie Maher, Aine Kennedy, Cian Cashen*  
*Front Row (L to R): Ciara Hoctor, Damien Maher, Liam Larkin, Liam Pingree, Barry Hogan, Paul Kennedy, Dale Hayes-Beehan, Joe Curran*

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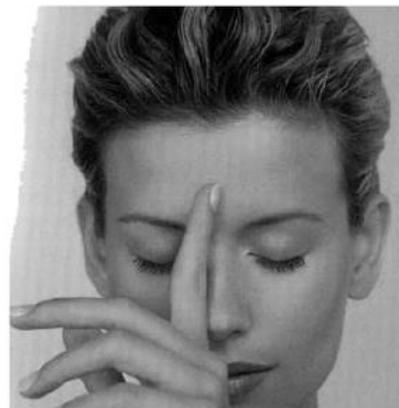
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*Third Row (L to R): Grace Hoare, Lynn Murdock, Danielle Loughnane, Caoimhe Kinsella, Marcela Turtakova, Lara Finnerty, Olivia Reville, Nina Achtelek, Alex Brady, Mia Byrne, Chelsea Sharp, Lily Colbert.*

*Second Row (L to R) : Klaudia Zielinska, Saoirse Joyce, Saoirse Campbell, Chloe Murdock, Grace Reddin, Weronika Miedzinska, Leah Byrne, Brodie Shiels, Latisha Hansburt Atomori, Laura Loughnane, Saoirse Egan, Melisa Szoma.*

*Front Row (L to R): Jessica Rusu, Sasha Townsend, Lara Boulter, Eve Murray, Kate O'Meara, Lauren Kelly, Emer Yeates, Klaudija Kundrotaite.*



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

*Back Row (L to R) : Roisin Watkins, Niamh Hogan, Leona Tyrrell, Karonlina Szamreto, Agata Kicka, Rebecca Dunne, Laura Dunne, Martyna Miedzinska, Patricia Nolan, Eimear McMahon, Mayra de Oliveira Alcantara, Rachel Spain, Ms. Therese Haverty.*

*Middle Row (L to R): Lauren Lynskey, Amelia Field, Danielle Boyd, Hannah McLoughlin, Amanda Gora, Edyta Gieszczyk,*

*Front Row (L to R): Sinead Murdock, Emer Grimes, Kara Sampson, Ava Haines, Kim Lynam, Kayleigh Shiels, Emma Hutchinson.*

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*Middle Row (L to R): Ellen Regan, Gabja Baskovaite, Sarah Gorman, Harvey Dickson, Tom Erritty, Niall Lyons, Joseph Ryan, Ronan Bergin, Dillon King, Fergal Heffernan*  
*Front Row (L to R) : Roisin O'Sullivan, Niamh Ryan, Allannah Morris, Ivor Corboy Banks, Terence McInerney, Shaun Meehan, Ciara Murtagh, Lauren Dunican, Barry Smith*



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

*Back Row: Kahila Hart, Hayley Ryan, Mrs. Dolan (Principal), Jessica Mahon, Aine Delahunty, Sarah Cleary, Aoife Hayes, Diarmuid O'Carroll, James Glennon, Mrs. Kelly (Class Teacher), Lydia Murphy Corboy, Leanne Nolan*  
*Middle Row: Gerard Hutchinson, David Dooley, Jessica Blake, Cian Hart, Jack Burke, Dawn Whelahan, Evan Ryan.*  
*Front Row (L to R): Leanne Madden, Scott Feenane, Lisa Maher, Jack O'Keeffe, Dylan Hutchinson, Aaron Murtagh, Rebecca McDonnell*

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### Junior & Senior Infants

*Back Row (L to R): Cathal Errity, Dara Purcell, Ryan Lowry, David Cooke, Bill Burns, Ella Conn, Emma Harding, James Harding, Zohra Anjum, Caoimhe Rice.*

*Front Row (L to R): Ms. Kathrena Ryan, Nessa O' Neill, Elaine Hanlon, Ava Molloy, Damien Monaghan, Conor Hanamy, Chloe Kelly, Eden Raper, James Corrigan, Marc Reedy, Rebecca Watson.*



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

*Back Row (L to R): Brian Hogan, Michael Cashen, Conor Freeman, Joseph King, Thomas Hough, Ciaran Connaughton*

*Middle Row (L to R): Rebecca Campbell, Ms. Brid Connolly (Principal), Billy Guilfoyle, Conor Lavin, Alex Sarin, Steven O' Rourke, Aaron Dolan, Aine Murray, Megan Lavin*

*Front Row (L to R): Caoimhe Cleary, Fatimah Anjum, Philippa Ryan, Aileen Ryan, Katie Harding, Lauren King, Colleen Mullarkey, Aislinn Fox, Aoife Plunkett*

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*Middle Row (L to R) : Gavin Carroll, Darragh Cleary, Dean Byrne, David Cotter, Nathan Williams, Maxwell Boyd, Cian Long, Daivarus Marinkeviciute, Roberts Zagars*  
*Front Row (L to R) : Edvinas Ozelis, Michael Lally, Thomas Byrne, James Taylor, Sean Agbenisi, Darren Mooney, Shane O'Donoghue, Pdraig Kelly, Jake Hansbury, Jahno Udosen*



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

*Back Row (L to R) : Shane Loonam, Colm Witts, Mr. Crofton, Conor Doran, Shaun Hogan, Evan Moylan, Ciaran Cooney, Jack Cleary, Ryan O'Meara, Oran Regan, Conor Guinan, Ondrej Turtak, Conor Roddy*  
*Middle Row (L to R): Stefan Feehan, Eric Byrne, Andrew Conroy, Kay Chan, David Donoghue, Patrick Hutchinson, Frankie Hanlon*  
*Front Row (L to R): Jake Jones, Patrick Kelly, Barry Hehir, Stefan Carroll, Brendan Heffernan, Dillon Patel, Aaron Coffey, Oisín Clarke*

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## ST. BRENDAN'S COMMUNITY SCHOOL

In November '06 the students staged a sell-out performance of the musical 'Oliver'. The standard reached was a credit to all concerned and a big challenge for this year's cast of 'We Will Rock You', to emulate. The new Sportsplex proved a valuable addition to the staging of the musical.

As usual the school had many visitors over the course of the year. Featured among them were then Tanaiste Michael Mc Dowell, Junior Minister Tom Parlon, Deputy Olwyn Enright and Senator Ronan Mullen. Bishop Willie Walsh also paid his annual pastoral visit to the Leaving Certificate Class.

Refurbishment of the school building is ongoing with additional work on sound-proofing the roof, widening of internal doors for disability access and complete reproofing of the Sports' Hall completed during the summer holidays. These improvements along with the previous reproofing of the main building and renewal of the entire heating system have greatly enhanced the working environment of the school for staff and students alike. They are part of a programme of developments initiated by the Board of Management and the Office of Public Works to ensure St. Brendan's continues to be at the cutting face of education in the Midlands.

The Leaving Certificate results received on August 15<sup>th</sup> were thankfully well up to the previous high standards, with students scoring up to or above the national average across the wide spectrum of subjects on offer. The Junior Cert results were similarly good in September. This year there is an increase in uptake on the Transition Year option.

On the spiritual side there was a very moving Graduation Ceremony in May. Students also participated in remembrance services for their dead in November. Generally the Oratory is very well used and is a most edifying addition to the school. At the end of the last school year an extension to the oratory called 'St. Mary's', came into use. This will be most beneficial in the realm of counseling and group discussions.

On a sad note we must acknowledge the passing of our former esteemed colleague Jim Loftus. All Jim's past students and colleagues will remember with fondness his kind and generous spirit. May he rest in peace!

We began a New Year in late August with the arrival of a record intake of enthusiastic 1<sup>st</sup> Year students. Thus begins a new chapter in the life of St. Brendan's C.S.

May I take this opportunity to wish all of our students past and present season's greetings, from all at St. Brendan's.



*2<sup>nd</sup> Year Gaga Kids*



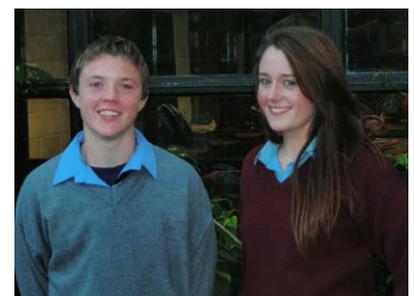
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*Teen Queens*



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*Oisín O'Carroll (Khashoggi) & Lyndsey Farrell (Killer Queen)*



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**Emma Fealy & Brian Fogarty**



**Jane Feehan & Ronan Girard**



**Jennifer Glover & Shane Walsh**



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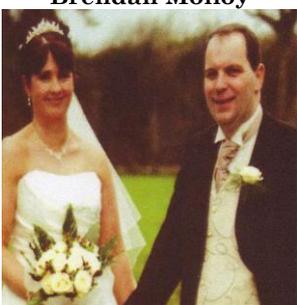
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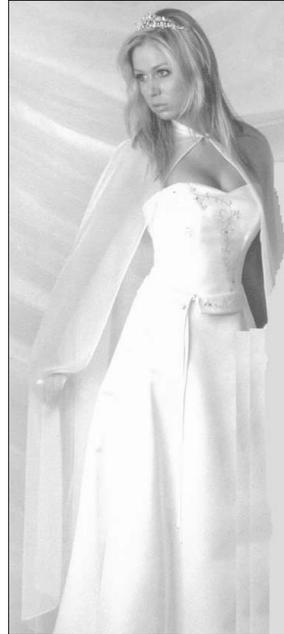
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## Birr Military History Group

In 2007 the Birr Military Historical Group travelled beyond Reims east of Paris to the most sacred battlefield of France – Verdun – and the region of the greatest American contribution in 1918 – the Meuse, Argonne and Chateau Thierry fronts.

On 21<sup>st</sup>. February 1916 the German 5<sup>th</sup> Army attacked Verdun in a battle that lasted for ten months, but Verdun never fell. French casualties were estimated at 540,000, German at 430,000.

The Birr Military Historical Group researched and organised the areas of interest that could be visited in an eight day time frame from 18 – 26 September. The plan was to fly in and out of Charles De Gaulle airport and travel east in a clockwise loop with Verdun at the furthest easterly point.

On Tuesday 18<sup>th</sup> September morning the group had an early start and Kearn's Buses got us to Dublin Airport for a 6.30 a.m. flight. Arrived into Charles De Gaulle Airport, Paris, hired our minibus and carefully proceeded north to the city of St. Quentin, to our Hotel Le Florence, home for the first night. We had just one stop along the way to visit the French National Great War Museum at Peronne, where they managed to logically convey origins and consequences of a tragic conflict that ultimately defied reason.

On Wednesday 19<sup>th</sup> we visited the magnificent St. Quentin Basilica. This immense stone silhouette has loomed over the city of St. Quentin since the twelfth century. We moved on to Etreux, a special place of Munster interest. Etreux is the scene of the heroic stand of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Btn. Royal Munster Fusiliers. The force surrendered only when they had run out of ammunition and only a small number of men remained unhurt. They were warmly congratulated by their captors for their actions.

We continued to Flavigny-Le-Petit cemetery where soldiers from Germany, French Muslims and English Jews are buried side by side. Next we drove into the town of Crepy and to the cathedral at its highest point.

We continued on to The Chemin Des Dames which is a plateau and ridge some 60 miles north east of Paris. The Germans held the ridge from 1914 until 1917. The French attacked this fortified position continuously with appalling casualties. Offensive and counter offensive meant that the Chemin Des Dames changed hands a number of times but it was eventually liberated in October 1918. Then we headed to the city of Reims for two nights.

On Thursday 20<sup>th</sup> we headed to our first stop at the French National Tank Monument commemorating the site of the first engagement by tanks in April 1917. This was one of the most recognisable symbols of *Total War*. We continued back along the Chemin des Dames to the Caverne du Dragon museum. This museum is set in a disused mine complex that the Germans referred to as Drachenhole or Dragons Lair. The Germans in 1915 turned the complex into an underground barracks with special command and firing posts, also hospitals, dormitories and



*Museum in Peron.*

*L to R: Ger O'Meara, Joe Breen, Brendan Mooney, Derek Coulter, Martin Horan, Martin Hynes, Eamon Coonan, John Joyce, Oliver Craughwell.*

a chapel. The remarkable thing about this place was that the Germans and French cohabited in the caverns only yards from each other with special precautions against attack especially with gas. Today it is an excellent museum to the Great War with helpful staff and excellent guides.

From The Chemin des Dames we drove southward to the American Sector and visited Belleau Wood cemetery which is beautifully kept and where the Carillon plays some American tunes every evening at five o'clock which is very moving to witness. We visited Belleau German cemetery and the American Aisne Marne monument and cemetery before heading back to the Bristol hotel in Reims.

Friday 21<sup>st</sup> we packed our bags and headed for our main destination in Verdun, the Hotel St Paul. We called by Reims Cathedral which is a magnificent structure started in the fourth century and added on to almost continuously since that time. On 19<sup>th</sup> September 1914, 93 years earlier, the Germans shelled the city and the Cathedral was reduced almost to a complete ruin. For 20 years after the war the building was renovated and has now regained its former glory. We continued east on expansive landscape in beautiful sunshine and called to Auberive International Cemetery where soldiers from France, Germany and interestingly Poland rest. We moved next to the Russian Cemetery and memorial at St. Hilaire-le-Grand. The Russian army in France split in two reflecting the revolution in their mother country. Ironically they briefly fought each other and today the memorial quotes the Russians "that when France is free her sons and daughters would bring flowers to remember their Russian friends

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*At site of The Lost Battalion.*

*L to R: Joe Breen, Martin Hynes, Martin Horan, John Joyce, Eamon Coonan, Ger O'Meara, Brendan Mooney, Oliver Craughwell, Derek Coulter.*

and allies". We continued into the village of Suippes for lunch visiting the French site at Joncherry along the way. We drove the 140km or so into Verdun visiting the German Kaiser Tunnel command centre along the route. Ireland and France were playing in the Rugby World Cup that evening and Sylvan at the hotel graciously invited us to his local in Lestainamet where we were entertained by his friends from the Verdun rugby club. We didn't dwell on the result too much; needless to say the French were magnanimous in victory.

Saturday the 22<sup>nd</sup> had the tour group in the capable hands of our guide, Tony Noyes. Our first visit was to Madeleine Farm on the Meuse Argonne Sector. This was one of the first battles in which the US Army participated. It was very much a baptism of fire for the Americans / Doughboys. Standing in the same fields where those young Americans advanced and died gives one an appreciation of the huge obstacles they faced.

Our next appointment and lunch was in Romagne Museum. Apart from weaponry, the museum is testament to the enormous resources that are consumed by an army engaged in prolonged battles - transport equipment, draught animals, food, water, clothing, storage containers, etc. The Dutch owner conversed with his various patrons in French, English, German and Dutch. He promotes peace as well as reverence for the victims still scattered throughout the surrounding forests and farmlands.

The tour stopped for a brief period in Apremont German Cemetery, where 17,000 soldiers lie. We then continued on through the Argonne to the site where "The Lost Battalion" fought. According to our guide they were neither "Lost" nor were they a "Battalion". Instead it was 8 American Units attacking German positions. This time it wasn't just high ground. The Americans were tackling something more reminiscent of sheer cliffs. The US

soldiers were literally trapped under the cliffs and suffered alarming casualties before they were rescued. This day in the Argonne was spent in what were historically forest areas. The forests have merely reclaimed what was there before the French and German armies took temporary residence and then left behind their young men and the detritus of war.

Sunday was a day of rest of types. We drove into Luxembourg city and walked around in beautiful sunshine in this very attractive city. On our return journey to Verdun we visited the Luxembourg American WW II Cemetery at Hamm and the resting place of General George Patton. We continued on to the adjacent German WW II Sandweiler cemetery where 11,000 Germans are interred.

Tony arrived at 9 o'clock the next morning and we set out on a segment which was at the heart of the French involvement. We started at the Ossuary of Douaumont which is dominant in the landscape and houses the remains of 130,000 men, both French and German. From there we proceeded to Fort Douaumont which was captured by the Germans with little effort as the fort was virtually unmanned when they arrived. We proceeded to London Trench and onwards to Trench of Bayonets, reputedly where troops were buried alive with only their bayonets visible after shelling. We continued to the village and museum in Fleury. The village is completely destroyed and telling witness to the absolute destruction that took place here in 1916. From there we called to the Froidterre shelter and bunker and onwards to the memorial to Andre Maginot, who gave his name to the famous line of forts.

Tuesday 25<sup>th</sup> our group spent the early morning around Verdun and then headed for Paris to leave back the minibus. We took the train/metro to the centre of Paris and close to our Hotel Touring. We settled in and relaxed for a while after our weeks extensive trekking.

On Wednesday 26<sup>th</sup> after a sight-seeing tour of Paris we all met back at the hotel around 6 o'clock to head for Charles De Gaulle Airport, for our flight at 9.30pm. We arrived back in Dublin Airport at 10.30 p.m. where Kearn's bus was waiting to bring us back to BIRR. We arrived home early a.m. very tired after a busy week.

As always our group had a very successful and enjoyable trip to the Verdun sector. Our next trip planned, is to visit Leperes in Belgium for the ninetieth anniversary of the Armistice on the 11.11.1918. Again the group's thanks to all those who did so much to make the trip a success.

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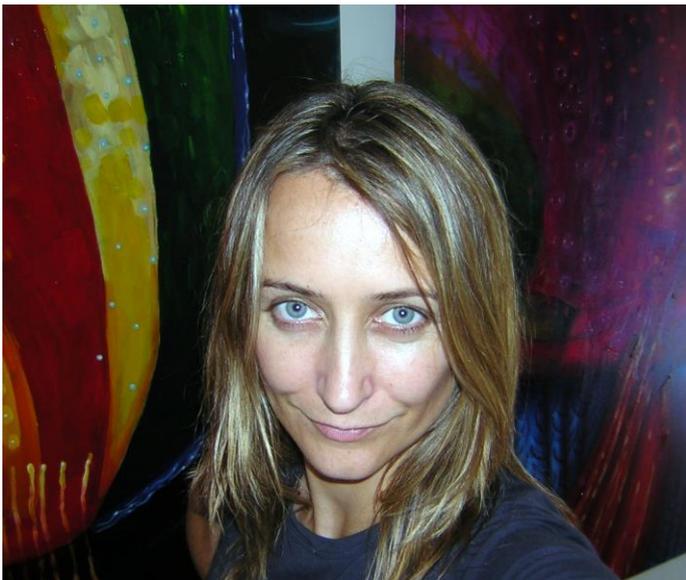
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## BIRR THEATRE & ARTS CENTRE

2007 was a very busy and successful year for Birr Theatre & Arts Centre. Having secured Arts Council funding and matching funding from Offaly County Council together with support from Birr Town Council, the Theatre was in a position to host a variety of high quality productions and events throughout the year.

Celebrating twenty-one years of touring, Opera Theatre Company came to Birr with *Hansel & Gretel* – a stunning production with set, costume and lighting to match. The quality of classical performance continued throughout the year with the RTE Vanbrugh Quartet, pianist Ivan Ilic, duo Elizabeth Cooney & Redmond O’Toole, Sefhira, The Slovak Festival Orchestra and of course, our very own John Molloy & Ann Hogan.

Artists who exhibited *Suas an Staighre* were Margaret Maher, Orla Clancy, Judy Pearson and Emma Barone. *Suas an Staighre* is a gallery space in the foyer where artists are selected, through application, to exhibit their work for a three month period.



Artist Emma Barone (above) exhibited her colourful Shoe Show at Birr Theatre & Arts Centre during the autumn.

There was no shortage of drama throughout the year with *The Matchmaker* (Mick Lally & Neighbours star Ann Charleston) and *Who by Fire* which celebrated success throughout the country before a two week run at The Olympia. Birr Stage Guild’s production of *And They Used to Star in Movies* written and directed by Campbell Black was a great success at lunchtime during Birr Vintage Week & Arts Festival and Offaly Drama Project 2007 presented *Cat Among the Pigeons*, directed by Fiona Breen.

Comedy included Des Bishop, Kevin McAleer and Maeve Higgins with lots more planned for 2008. On the music scene there was Jack L, Roesy, Liam O’Maonlai, and Duke Special

and of course Summer School of Rock which saw almost 40 young musicians participate in a 2 week summer project facilitated by Brendan Keeley.

Dance was to the fore in 2007 with Chelsea Ballet Company returning to Birr with a selection of extracts from the classic ballets. During the summer young dancers participated in a series of workshops, VIVIDance facilitated by Myriad Dance and Ballet Ireland presented a showcase of new work from young choreographers. The highlight of the dance news at Birr Theatre & Arts Centre is the dance residency of the newly formed dance company Legitimate Bodies, established in October. Led by the artistic duo of Nick Bryson and Cristina Goletti the company create and present refreshing and exhilarating work locally, nationally and internationally as well as provide dance-based services for the community. The residency is generously supported by Offaly County Council, Birr Theatre & Arts Centre, The Arts Council and Dance Ireland.

Hullabaloo! was Offaly’s first Arts Festival for Children with a series of workshops at numerous venues throughout the town (clay craft, mask making, puppet making, percussion together with dance and live family performances and lots more). It is hoped that this festival will grow throughout the county and be part of October mid-term break activities for all children for future years.

Birr Theatre & Arts Centre looks forward to 2008 with lots of exciting events in the pipeline and celebrating 50 years of Birr Stage Guild.



In an exciting new project Nick Bryson & Cristina Goletti of the newly formed dance company Legitimate Bodies, took up residency at Birr Theatre & Arts Centre this year.

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## 39<sup>TH</sup> ANNUAL BIRR VINTAGE WEEK & ARTS FESTIVAL

On Friday 10<sup>th</sup> August the Georgian Heritage town of Birr turned back time to herald the beginning of the 39th Annual Birr Vintage Week & Arts Festival. Despite the inclement weather which epitomised the past summer, thousands of locals and visitors, old friends and new enjoyed the historic atmosphere of the town whilst celebrating its contemporary culture through a dynamic all-inclusive programme of vintage and modern events for the whole community.

The highlight of the Festival was undoubtedly the Vintage Parade which saw huge crowds lining the streets. Recent years have seen this event grow in size and this year was no exception. From marching bands to street theatre to vintage cars and machinery there was something for everybody. It was a spectacular display of both the vintage and modern, bringing its own special brand of atmosphere and colour to the town.

The opening weekend saw a flurry of activity with the Ormond Flying Club taking to the skies for their Annual Fly-In whilst on the ground the Olde Time Fair Day took place in the Courtyard of Birr Castle. Notwithstanding the atrocious weather conditions, there were a large number of stalls, a Lunchtime Concert by Birr Stage Guild and a Children's Vintage Costume Competition which had a huge number of entrants.

Campbell Blacks surreal comedy "And They Used to Star in Movies" proved to be a huge hit. This 50 minute satire which was a sell-out success at Dublin's Theatre Fringe Festival in 2006 had the local audiences rolling around the aisles with laughter.

For music lovers there were a wide range of events. Duke Special was the headline musical performance in Birr Theatre & Arts Centre whilst the Stage Guild's Lunchtime Concerts ran daily. The Guinness Singing and Swinging Pubs took place in pubs across the town and as always attracted great crowds. Aspiring musicians of the future



*Rachel, Aoife and Jessica Darmody taking part in the Childrens Vintage Costume Competition at the Olde Time Fair in the Courtyard of Birr Castle.*

competed in the Busking Competition for the inaugural Michael "Dom" Egan Memorial Cup. A performance of "O'Carolans Dream" by renowned flautist and harpist duo Karin Leitner and Cormac deBarra took place in Birr Theatre & Arts Centre to great acclaim. The 38th Annual Antique and Fine Art Fair was opened by Olwyn Enright T.D. in the County Arms Hotel. This largest provincial Fair in the country ran most successfully for 3 days.

The Donkey Derby proved to be a great hit once again as amateur jockeys representing locals businesses, pubs, clubs and societies hee-hawed their way to the finish line! The following night saw the Camcor Capers take place with a spectacular fireworks display closing the evening.

Unprecedented numbers participated in the free children's events each day; story-telling sessions, scooter and go-kart races, Scavenger Hunt, Pavement Art competition, Arts/Crafts and Percussion workshops, Teddy Bears picnic and opportunities to take part in the Opening Parade.

Sports enthusiasts had the choice of Vintage Tennis, Mixed Tag Rugby, Heritage Cycles, Basketball and Beach Volleyball Competitions and a Swim Gala at Birr Leisure Centre.

The Festival Finale saw large crowds packing into Dooly's Hotel to watch the finals of several inter-pub competitions which had been running throughout the week. After all the prizes had been awarded late night entertainment by DJ deBrun brought the Festival to a highly successful conclusion.

This year saw the Festival expand its Visual Arts Programme by welcoming Paul Murnaghan as Curator of Synesthesia Sat, a specially commissioned exhibition of contemporary art specifically developed for the week long visual arts programme which took place primarily in Birr Union Workhouse. Many of the artists selected to



*Pupils from St. Brendan's Boys P.S. take part in the parade*



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participate are of international standing and were attracted to Birr by the opportunity of working in such beautiful historic surroundings with an eclectic group of artists, in a place noted for its positive attitude to the arts. Many venues throughout the town were also utilised. The Visual Arts Trail continued with a number of additional exhibitions in several locations in the town. With old annual favourites and new events, vintage flavour and modern entertainment throughout, the 39th Annual Birr Vintage Week & Arts Festival was an exciting and vibrant celebration of Birr's remarkable heritage and culture. The Festival has expanded dramatically in recent years as has the importance of sponsorship, organisation and manpower. This year's committee is so proud to have had the opportunity to present such a wide-ranging programme of events with something special for all ages and interests. Sincere gratitude is expressed to all sponsors; to all volunteer helpers over the preparation months and during the Festival itself and all those who participated in and supported Festival events. If you enjoyed this year's Festival, your support of future fundraisers, joining the committee or helping to any degree with events would be greatly appreciated. Next year the Festival will celebrate its 40th Anniversary and it is hoped to make it the biggest and best Festival to

date. If you would like to become involved please contact any Committee member or come along to the AGM (see local press for details). Looking forward to a successful 40th Annual Birr Vintage Week & Arts Festival, Friday 15th-Friday 22nd August 2008. For further information check out [www.birrvintageweek.com](http://www.birrvintageweek.com).



*Joseph Harding & Darren McLoughlin taking part in the Vintage Tennis Tournament at the Wilmer Tennis Club during Vintage Week.*



*Join the festival committee at the  
**A.G.M.**  
Check website / local press for date.  
All welcome.*

*To all Venues, Societies, Clubs, Groups and  
Individuals who helped organise, facilitate and run  
fundraisers and Festival events;*

*To all Sponsors and Patrons;  
To all those who attended Festival events*

## **MANY THANKS**

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## BIRR STAGE GUILD 2007



**Pictured Left** (L to R): Tommy Hynes, Lisa Byrne, Dawn Lagace, Stefan Lagace in Rehearsal

### **Below: IACT Festival – October**

(L to R): Garry Lombard (Adjudicator), Michelle O'Brien (Best Actress – Confined) Frank McNamara



### **Left: Opera Gala 2007**

(L to R): Mairead Hurley, John Molloy, Michelle Sheridan, Ann Hogan, Chris Turner



### **Right: IACT Festival – October**

(L to R): Kathrena Ryan-Hoctor, Michael Loughnane (Chairperson, Birr Town Council), Garry Lombard, William Mansfield (Best Play), Frank McNamara, Fred Boulton, Tony Hogan, Maureen DeForge (Chairperson, Birr Stage Guild)





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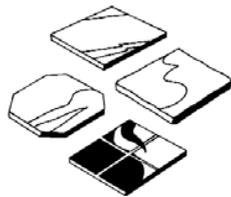
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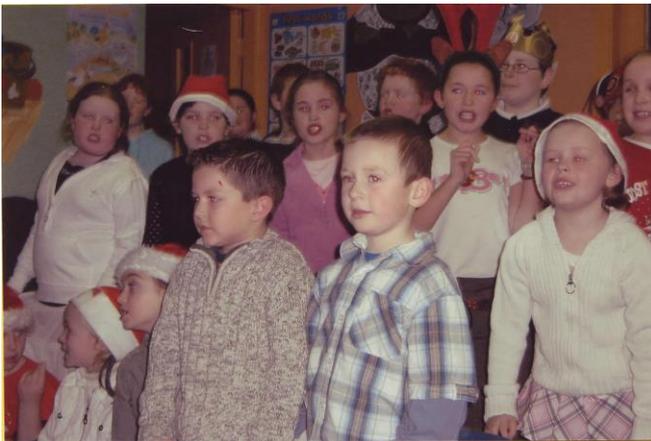
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2007 was a very successful year for CAMP. Many seasonal activities took place at the centre. There were summer camps for children of all ages. There were coffee mornings for mothers and toddlers on the second Tuesday of every month. A Community Development group was formed last year and this consists of estate management and community development/ active citizenship. Members of the CAMP committee meet twice a month to discuss aims and actions within the area. A survey was carried out and people had an opportunity to list their hopes and dreams for the area. None of the projects would be possible without the help and support of Respond Management who are responsible for the community building and without the voluntary support of the good people of the area throughout the year.



Children in CAMP putting on a Christmas show for friends and family

## BIRR COMHALTAS ACTIVITIES

Comhaltas continues to keep the flag of traditional culture flying in the Birr area. Most of the work is done by a small but enthusiastic group of dedicated people.

The most important work of the organisation is in the teaching of traditional music and passing on the tradition to the younger generation and in this connection a very successful class is held in the Marian Hall each Monday evening. It is disappointing that this is not being more widely availed of by local children, as a large number of those taking part come from outside the urban area.

This year for their annual concert the branch featured the 'Echoes of Erin' group which toured Ireland. They put on a spectacular exhibition of Irish music, singing, dancing and story-telling to a large and appreciative audience in the Birr Theatre and Arts Centre, on 25th October last.

The Birr Comhaltas Set dancing festival has now achieved international status and last year visitors from Britain, Australia as well as all parts of Ireland attended the event which took place on the June Bank Holiday weekend. A new line-up has been arranged for the 2008 festival which will take place over the same weekend.

Over the winter months weekly lessons in Set Dancing are held each Thursday in the Marian Hall and while these are reasonably well attended there is still room for more. No experience is necessary and anyone interested is invited

to drop into the Marian Hall any Thursday after 8.30 p.m. The branch annual Christmas /New Year function will take place in the County Arms Hotel on Wednesday 2nd January at 8.30 p.m. and the organisers will avail of the opportunity to honour some of its members who have rendered outstanding service to the organisation over the years. This is an open night and all are welcome.

The organisation is also anxious to recruit new members and anyone interested in any aspect of Irish culture is welcome to join. Members receive a complimentary copy of the organisations quarterly review of traditional music activities. For further information on Comhaltas activities contact branch secretary, Donal Morrissey, Seffin, Birr – 087-9347968.



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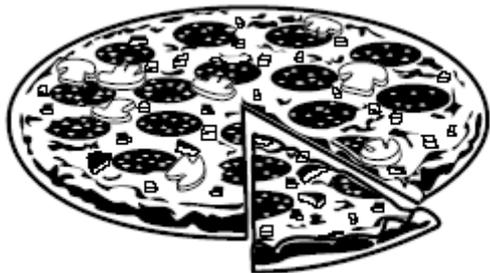
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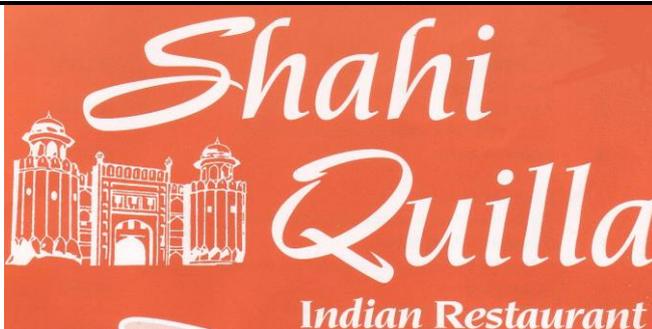
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## BIRR LEGION OF MARY

*Legion Work in Glasgow (Sr. Ignatius McCarthy)*

Peregrinatio Pro Christo (P.P.C.). In English, 'Travelling Abroad for Christ' is the name given to Legion of Mary work done by a group of Legionaries who go in teams to different parts of Great Britain and other parts of Europe from March to October each year to spread the Good News and promote devotion to the Eucharist and to Our Blessed Lady.

I, Sr. Ignatius, from Birr have volunteered five times for Peregrinatio work in the past. Last July (7<sup>th</sup>-14<sup>th</sup>) I was chosen as one of a team of ten to go to Glasgow in Scotland. It was a very memorable experience. We went to the parish of St. Teresa of Lisieux. The parish priest there was Fr. Thomas Hendry. He was a great pastor and helped us in every way. We had Bed and Breakfast at the University Residence for students. The base for our work and meals was the Franciscan Sisters centre next door to the church. We did door to door visitation in twos each



Sr. Ignatius, centre, with other members of her group in Glasgow

day. We knocked on 2,262 doors in all. Needless to say we got some 'No Reply'. Overall we were very well received. We were invited into many homes and were offered refreshments. Sadly enough many were lapsed Catholics. However, many were very interested and anxious to get back praying and practicing their faith again. Most agreed to pray with us and we gave out many miraculous medals. I will now tell you about one of my most memorable visits. My companion and I came to a door in an apartment building. We could hear loud band music. As we waited for the door to open I had visions of long-haired hippies appearing out. I was surprised when a young smiling gentleman opened the door and greeted us graciously. We introduced ourselves and he said 'I am an Orange man'. We then remembered it was the 12<sup>th</sup> of July and they were probably practicing for a parade on their special day. He told us he had a partner and one child. He was delighted when we offered him miraculous medals for the three of them. He joined with us praying the Our Father, Hail Mary and Gloria. We then continued our visitation. He was very happy that we had called to see him. We met many more interesting people like our 'Orangeman'. We recorded our visits and filled in reports each evening. Each member of our team gave a report on one interesting visit at our meeting. At our morning meeting we said the Legion prayers and got our assignment for the day. Peregrinatio has been a wonderful experience for me and each year I am glad to have helped in some small way with evangelisation which Pope John Paul II stressed so much and is so needed in our world of today.

I am looking forward to our next venue for our next P.P.C. Two other members, Anne Kennedy from Roscrea and Leo Minnock from Kinnitty also went on P.P.C. during the summer. We had a Rosary Rally in St. Brendan's Church, Birr on October 3<sup>rd</sup>. Many thanks to Fr. Reddan, to the teachers, parents, children and all who participated.

## BIRR COMMUNITY & FAMILY RESOURCE CENTRE

Birr Community & Family Resource Centre is a Community Facility funded by the Midland HSE. We provide meeting space for voluntary and community groups we are home to Bábóg parent and toddler group, Birr Active Retirement Group, New Directions, Kidz Kraftz, Literacy groups, Art Classes and once a month there is a hearing clinic held here. An administration service is offered to Community groups. This service is free of charge. Birr Community Resource Centre was set up in 2002 and since then has

gone from strength to strength. In October we also work with operation Christmas Child collecting shoe boxes for Africa and other third world countries. This year we are hosting a craft event for telethon. There are also subsidised summer camps and various other activities throughout the year. For more information please contact Mary at 057 9123583 or email us on [birrresourcecentre@eircom.net](mailto:birrresourcecentre@eircom.net)

## **CITIZEN INFORMATION CENTRE AND HOW IT ALL BEGAN**



Sister Alice Gleeson (Sisters of Mercy) (pictured) founded the pastoral centre in Nazareth House, Wilmer Road, Birr. She worked voluntarily and supervised community employment participants.

Services provided were youth services, cookery demonstrations in partnership with HSE personnel. A self-sufficient home bakery provided much needed funds for the service coupled with the annual church gate collection. The funding of an independent information service was part of Sr. Alice's unique vision for community care. These strong foundations are the basis of a vital and professional service in the town today.

The centre initially subscribed to the National Social Service Board paper files. These updates were forwarded monthly to the organisation. The centre's information service reached out to the region of South West Offaly. The aims of the service provided those on low incomes equal access to resources and services i.e. Education, Health issues, Employment rights. Training schemes in conjunction with FAS ensured quality services and also met the needs of the client base. Effective referrals were essential for adequate service provision.

Due to ill-health, Sr. Alice was forced to retire and was a great loss to the service. Her pioneering efforts can never be forgotten. During her working career, Sr. Alice, employed over 100 people at the centre and successfully supported many in employment.

There after the formation of a local committee continued to secure the continuance of the information service, the committee was made up of community and voluntary representatives. The Birr Project Group forwarded a submission to the Government. This action successfully secured funding from the Citizens Information Board.

A part-time post was created in Birr through a county wide structure now know as Citizens Information Services. The principal offices are located in the Bridge Centre Tullamore, with supporting offices in Edenderry and Birr.

The original pastoral centre continues to support community groups through West Offaly Partnership Programmes liaising with FAS. St. Brendan's Environmental Group operate from the same building.

And today the Citizens Information Board is the statutory agency responsible for supporting the provision of information, advice and advocacy on social and civil

services to the public. To support the information provider, the board offers VETEC accredited programmes (level six) to equip the provider with appropriate training skills. On a monthly basis the board publishes a "Know Your Rights" feature to be distributed locally to the public on the website, [www.citizensinformation.ie](http://www.citizensinformation.ie). Specific questions are addressed in this publication. The board pays particular attention to social policy agenda affecting the citizen.

Other publications available at the centre include:

Entitlements for the Over Sixties (September 07)

Employment Rights Explained (September 07)

National Organisation Unemployed 2007

The office is staffed by a part-time Information Officer and Community Employment Participant. In October of 2005 the Birr Committee sought a meeting to source extra funding from The Citizens Information Board for the provision of a new premises. Following these efforts the current service was relocated to its present address,

The Courtyard Office Centre,  
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Birr.

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Fax: 057-9125810

Email: [birr@offalycitizensinformation.ie](mailto:birr@offalycitizensinformation.ie)

Website: [www.offalycitizensinformation.ie](http://www.offalycitizensinformation.ie)

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### **The answers to the IDENTIFY THE FACES**

1. Brendan Mooney
2. Brian McNamara
3. Sambo Kelly
4. Carol Bass
5. Patrick Hogan
6. Charlie Cavanagh
7. Marian Normile (Egan)
8. Conor Egan
9. Michael Fallon
10. Donie Hanley
11. Joe Errity
12. Liam Hennessy

## CRINKILL SPORTS AND RECREATION CENTRE

It's that time of year again when we reflect on the year gone by and wonder where it has gone. It doesn't seem like 11 months have passed since our players started their rigorous training regime in anticipation of the forthcoming season. Who could have guessed, back then, that their efforts would pay such dividends. Not since the zenith of our clubs success in the eighties have we enjoyed such good fortune.

This year saw Offaly enter in the Leinster Girls Handball Championship for the very first time, with the Crinkill club providing all the participants in the competition. Nikita Corboy was our U-13 Singles representative with Vivienne Maher and Bronagh Tully making up the Doubles at the same grade. Shauna Carroll partnered Emily Quinlan in the U14 Doubles. They represented their club and county with pride and their commitment and dedication saw them advance all the way to the Leinster Final. Unfortunately there was to be no gold on this occasion with lack of experience rather than lack of ability being the determining factor. Still this was a notable achievement which can only enhance the profile of handball as a sport for all.

On the adult circuit Michéal O'Brien was one of the county's best performers reaching a staggering total of 10 finals, in all competitions. He was successful in his 4 Leinster Final appearances (Junior B Singles and Doubles 40x20, 60x30 Doubles and Junior Inter-Club Championship 60x30) but his bid to attain All Ireland glory has as yet proved fruitless. His quest, however, continues with the 60x30 Doubles Final still to be played. Hopefully on this occasion he will capture that ever elusive title.

The enhancement of our facilities is ongoing and this year saw the installation of a state of the art heating system which will greatly improve the level of comfort for both players and spectators alike. The club is continuing to increase the number of activities catered for with Kickboxing and Badminton being the latest additions to our schedule with the introduction of various other indoor games very much in the pipeline. Other clubs and organisations continue to avail of our facilities; Crinkill GAA, HSE, West Offaly Partnership, to name but a few.

All in all, 2007 has been a memorable year and we would like to thank our members and supporters for making it so.



*Juvenile Handball Players who received their County Medals*



*L to R: Kevin Cooke, Noel O'Brien, Michéal O'Brien, Conor O'Brien, Stephen Kane.  
Leinster 60x30 Inter Club Junior Champions*

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## BIRR NEW DIRECTIONS PROGRAMME

November 2006 saw the start of a new programme in Birr for unemployed people in need of a New Direction.

The Birr New Directions group work from the Birr Community and Family Resource Centre, the venue for their first success in May 2007. As part of the presentation of Certificates following the successful completion of 'Introduction to Computers', the group also showed a selection of the stained glass projects undertaken – no church windows here! Jewellery boxes, Thomas the Tank Engine mirrors, a clock in the shape of a guitar, incorporating a Kurt Cobain insert were just some of the projects.

This programme is unique in that it was designed for those who have difficulty accessing courses on offer from other agencies. One of the most important aspects is integrated literacy, to replace the sometimes negative experiences coming from mainstream education days; the course provides a second chance to get badly needed support and encouragement through this holistic approach to learning, in the form of personal development, literacy,

computer classes, individual career plans, stained glass etc.

Rita Spencer, Training & Employment Officer with the Linkage programme came up with the idea for this course, and was supported in setting it up by all the local agencies and many very committed local groups. Frances Kawala was brought in as stained glass instructor and co-ordinator, but the programme would not be able to go ahead without the continued support of the DFSA, the VEC, FAS, West Offaly Partnership, HSE and the Probation Service.

Since then, the group has broadened horizons - they painted the Resource Centre's windows with scenes from Jungle Book! Suzanne Dwyer achieved Junior Cert English; Anthony Hough and Ciara Monaghan have taken up places in Moate Business College, and the first of a series of articles on The Showband Era, written by John Tait has already been published in the Midland Tribune!



**May 2007: Presentation of Certificates on completion of Introduction to Computers Course.**

**Front Row:** Liz Bermingham, Suzanne Dwyer, Mary Hutchinson, Michael Campbell (Chairman, Birr Town Council), Mary Byrne (West Offaly P'ship Tutor), Frances Kawala (Co-ordinator).

**Back Row:** Christy Todd (FAS), Sgt. Aidan Farrelly, Sr. Roberta Delaney, Rebecca Hehir, Billy Parsons, Ciara Monaghan, Kathleen Breslin, John Tait, Anthony Hough, Owen Smyth, Alma Gavin (Prob. Offr.), Rita Spencer (Linkage Programme), with selection of glasswork in the background.



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## BÁBÓG MOTHER AND TODDLER GROUP

Bábóg was set up in 2001 with assistance from the Health Board to provide support and advice for parents in an informal setting and also to give babies and toddlers their first experience of social interaction which is so important for their development. Six years on and three venues later the group is still going strong. While we still receive invaluable funding from the Health Board, as well as from Offaly County Council Childcare Committee, Bábóg is now run by a voluntary committee elected from among parents who attend the group.

We meet on a Tuesday morning from 10.15am to 12.30pm in the Family Resource Centre, Glebe St., Birr. Babies and toddlers come with their Mums, Dads, Grandmothers or minders and play together while the adults chat. There is a wide range of toys provided by the group to suit all ages and interests; and the younger babies have special mats or low chairs where they can roll around and play or just watch the activity going on around them. We also have a set of child-sized tables and chairs where the older children enjoy activities such as jigsaws, colouring, painting or crafts. Babóg employs a play-facilitator to encourage and provide assistance to the children with these activities. At these tables too, a break of juice and fruit and a biscuit is provided in the middle of the morning. This encourages the children to socialise and helps them learn to share with others. Adults in the group

have found it very useful as a social outing and, especially for those who are new to the town or who may not have family locally, it provides a great source of support and advice on child-rearing (and many other) issues. We have members spanning a wide age range and a good mix of new and experienced parents; and yes, we even have some Dads who come along! Recently we have welcomed new members from outside Ireland and the group has helped the newcomers make new friends and improve their English. It has also been good for the Irish children to mix with children from other cultures.

We also organise social activities such as day trips for the parents and toddlers to indoor play centres, pet farms, music and movement classes with Gymboree and 'parent only' evening dinners which have proved very popular over the last couple of years. Seasonal parties and our annual visit from the man in the red suit always create great excitement. At our weekly meetings we try to advertise and promote activities and events happening in the community which may be of interest to our members such as storytelling in the library, parent and toddler swims at Birr Leisure Centre or courses and seminars on parenting organised by the Childcare Committee. Over the last few years we have held fundraising events for various charities and have taken part in Vintage Week with our popular 'Teddy Bears' Picnic.



*Down on the Farm*



*Party Time at Bábóg*

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## BIRR SOCIAL CLUB

As this, our 38<sup>th</sup> year as Birr Social Club, we are going nearly as long as Vintage Week.

Our Team Snooker competition, once again, proved to be a great success with Brian Whelahan's team winning. This was their fourth year in the final. A young star Brian (Miley) Nolan won our Scratch Cup, beating Declan Murray in the final 3-2. Nigel Dooley won our Handicap Tournament beating Junior O'Callaghan in the final, 2-1.

Our Team Darts Tournament again proved to be a huge success with Eddie Spain's Bord Na Mona team beating

M. Lyons of Banagher. Proceeds from the tournament go to I.H.C.P.T., Birr Branch.

Our Golf Society enjoyed a successful year under the captaincy of Tony McCormack. We started with an away outing to Thurles which was won by our captain Tony McCormack. On then to our Captains' Prize in Birr in which Brian Guinan proved successful beating Alan Naylor by one shot. Our second away outing was to Mountrath. The great John Dwyer, playing off a handicap of 4, beat a big field to romp home on the day with a score of 37 points.



*Captain Tony McCormack (left) presenting his prize to Brian Guinan*



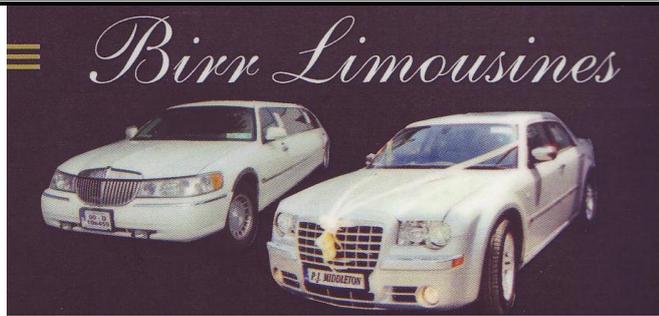
*Brian (Miley Jnr) Nolan receiving the Banner Scratch Cup (Snooker) from Patrick O'Callaghan (Birr Oil)*

## Birr Social Club 1991 – Celebrating Joe Fahy's 90<sup>th</sup> Birthday



*Seated (L to R): Joe Kennedy, Cecil Kennedy*

*Standing (L to R): Joe Dooley, Jack Molloy, Roy Breen, Joe Barry, Joe Fahy, Bill Eades, Bill Harte*



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## **ST. BRENDAN'S CONFERENCE OF THE SOCIETY OF ST. VINCENT DE PAUL**

St. Brendan's Conference is one of over 200 conferences of the St. Vincent de Paul society throughout Ireland. It is a voluntary organisation responding to the call of Christ to bring His love to those in need. 'I was hungry and you gave me food' (Mathew 25).

Birr Conference Centre is at Ozanam House, Wilmer Road, Birr. A weekly meeting is held there every Monday night commencing at 7.30 p.m. The meeting opens with prayers. Requests for assistance and conference decisions are dealt with. The meeting always closes with prayer. Through visitation and personal contact the members are committed to supporting and befriending those in need. Confidentiality is assured at all times.

The members of St. Brendan's Conference believe that it is not enough to provide short-term material support. Those we assist must also be helped to achieve self-sufficiency in the longer term. This can be done mainly through education. Hence there is great emphasis on encouraging families to avail of education at all levels, primary,

secondary, third level and adult education. After-school homework and language classes for Eastern Europeans are vitally important at the moment. Wherever the members cannot fully support projects of this kind we try to put clients in contact with other relevant organisations. There are twenty five active members in the Birr Conference with nine other voluntary helpers who assist in the shop during the week. The society is open to male and female members. Renewal is vital to the society. Funding is obtained from various sources including affordable sales at the shop, an annual summer draw, Christmas church gate collection, Christmas bingo night draw, proceeds from a Golf Classic and various individual donations throughout the year.

Members of the Birr Conference wish to express their sincere thanks to the people of Birr who generously contribute and support the local branch of the St. Vincent de Paul Society.

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## **BIRR TIDY TOWNS**

Our lovely Georgian town of Birr has a small but very dedicated Tidy Towns Committee to whom we are most grateful for their hard work over the last year. Often times members are seen beavering away in the Square or busying themselves on some of the by-roads weeding, planting, or simply collecting bags of discarded litter.

2007 was indeed a busy year for our Committee. Not only did we enter the National Tidy Towns Competition, we also organised and promoted a local town initiative in association with our competition sponsor, Birr Credit Union, to whom we are most grateful for their generous sponsorship and support.

The aim of this local initiative was to reward and encourage pride in our town and in our own local areas. Independent adjudicators visited the town and awarded category prizes for the Best Shop Fronts, the Best Kept Estates, the Best New Estates, the Best Kept Gardens, and finally Highly Commended Gardens

This year's event was very successful and it culminated in a most enjoyable awards ceremony being held in Dooly's Hotel in September to mark the occasion and to present the prizes.

Over the summer and despite the very bad weather, we

still held a series of work nights - focusing on weeding and litter collection. The annual clean-up of the river in association with the Little Brosna and Camcor Fishing Club also took place as did a number of other worthy projects including work at the Tullamore Road and at Woodfield. A number of new litter bins were purchased and strategically placed around the town, their arrival is most welcome. We would very much like to take the opportunity to thank all concerned for their assistance in all of these collaborative ventures. We would also like to thank Birr Town Council for their assistance and help over the year, especially in regard to the hanging baskets which add so many colours to the main streets of our town during the summer and early autumn.

The committee was delighted to see an improvement in our marks in the National Competition this year alas, we repeatedly seem to struggle in our category despite encouraging remarks from the adjudicator.

Another year is nearly over. We look forward as a committee to the spring and the new season as we have some planting and maintenance programmes scheduled for the New Year as part of our five year plan.

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## CARRIG, RIVERSTOWN, KILLEEN ACTIVE RETIREMENT GROUP

Since our formation in September 2005 our group has gone from strength to strength. The last year has been both active and enjoyable. Our activities are too numerous to mention but the more memorable ones are worthy of highlighting. September saw us visit the Heritage Golf Club in Co. Laois where we enjoyed a day of indoor bowling. Also in September our Art Group spent an evening in Borrisokane Community College where we were presented with FETAC Level 3 award certificates. A proud moment indeed for all. In October we hosted a social evening which began with Mass and to which many other groups of active retired joined us. In February our art classes resumed. April saw us jetting off to Donegal where we enjoyed a very pleasant four day break. Among other activities on our trip we visited Glenveagh National

Park, Giant's Causeway and Derry city. Also in April we held a fund raising cake sale in tandem with a display of our art work. This proved to be a huge success and we were able to donate the proceeds to the Alzheimer Society of Ireland. Our computer classes began in April and this, for some of us was a totally new experience. At last we were in touch with the 21<sup>st</sup> century. In May we visited Derryglad Museum in Athlone, followed by lunch in the Hudson Bay hotel. We took time out in June and July to recharge our batteries. August saw us off again to Knock, Holy Cross and a most enjoyable evening's entertainment in Bunratty Castle. What, with our visits to other groups, monthly meetings, weekly bowling sessions ACTIVE is clearly the operative word that describes our group!



*The group enjoying a trip to Donegal*

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## BIRR CHAPTER OF IRISH GEORGIAN SOCIETY

In July a group of fourteen BIRR Chapter members flew from Dublin to Leeds, Bradford for a weekend visit to Yorkshire. En route to their hotel in Harrogate from the airport they stopped off at Harewood House home of the Earl of Harewood, cousin of Queen Elizabeth II where they viewed the magnificent state rooms with its Chippendale furniture and portraits on display. Next stop Stockeld Park an impressive stone-built Palladian villa set in beautiful gardens and surrounded by parkland with its fine collection of 18th and 19th century furniture and paintings introduced by the Foster family. Next day they continued, visiting Ripley Castle which has been in the same family for over 900 years. It is noted for its fine portraits, paintings, furnishings and chandeliers. We then went on to Newby Hall to view its fine collection of Chippendale furniture. Then on the following day we visited Fountains Abbey & Studley Royal in the care of the National Trust, where in 1132 thirteen exiled monks came to the area and established the Cistercian Foundation which was to become the richest abbey in Europe.

On the third day of the tour one of the gems of the trip was a visit to Fairfax House in York. This is the finest Georgian townhouse in England and this premier historic house museum is home for the famous Noel Terry Collection of English 18th Century furniture and clocks. This was followed by a visit to the Treasurer's House just behind York Minster which was built in 1419 as a home for the treasurer of the Minster. The house contains a fine collection of medieval furnishings, as well as later 17th and 18th century furniture. The final day en route to the airport the tour stopped off at the 16<sup>th</sup> Century

Benningborough Hall. The house is the home for an exhibition of 17th and 18th century paintings from the National Portrait Gallery placed here in 1978 and we discovered that many of the portraits were by the Shinnone artist, Charles Jarvis.

Then the group called to the village of Haworth, home of the Bronte family. This was a unique experience as the parsonage is where Charlotte, Anne and Emily lived with their brother Branwell and father Revd. Patrick Bronte from 1820 to 1861 and is now preserved as a museum with many references to Banagher.

Finally, the group reached home to BIRR exhausted but exhilarated determined to return to Yorkshire to visit other grand houses and places of interest in the not too distant future. Our Treasurer, Gerry Browne put a good deal of research and organisation into the trip to make it the success it turned out to be and it is to him to whom we extend our grateful appreciation. Thanks Gerry!

During October, Offaly County Council, The Arts Council and BIRR Chapter Irish Georgian Society in association with Offaly Drama Project 2007 staged *Cat Among the Pigeons* which was very successful. It is hoped it will be presented at a future date in the Beckett Theatre, Trinity College.

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](mailto:info@irishgeorgiansoc.org) website: [www.irish-architecture.com/igs](http://www.irish-architecture.com/igs) or local secretary, BIRR Chapter, Irish Georgian Society – Tel: +353 57 9120433 or email: [dowley@eircom.net](mailto:dowley@eircom.net)

## BIRR NEIGHBOURHOOD WATCH

BIRR Neighbourhood Watch was set up in 1994. It is a voluntary group with a working committee comprising of Chairman, Vice Chairman, Treasurer and Secretary. Our aim is to provide additional security for the elderly in the BIRR Urban area. We provide socially monitored alarm systems, which can be monitored by either a relative or neighbour or by a centrally controlled monitoring system operating on a 24 hour system. We also provide security lighting, door and window locks and door chains. These services are provided free to the individual - the only charge being the annual monitoring fee.

Neighbourhood Watch is run under the auspices of An Garda Siochana and is grant aided by the government. We also raise funds voluntarily with a Church Gate collection

in December and an Easter Raffle, permits obtained for these activities from An Garda Siochana. Donations from the public to assist the service are also welcomed.

Our AGM is held in October each year and at the 2007 AGM the following officers were elected: Chairman, *Michael Hough*, Vice Chairman, *Rosaleen Harding*, Treasurer, *Helena Kennedy*, Secretary, *Dympna Mackintosh*, Assistant secretary, *Katie Mitchell*. PRO *Judy O'Neill*.

Any elderly person in need of an alarm, door chain/lock window locks or security lighting should be advised to contact any of the above. Ideally each area of our town should have representation and all interested persons are invited to attend our monthly meetings.



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## CRINKILL TIDY VILLAGES

### *CRINKILL GETS ENDEAVOUR AWARD IN TIDY TOWNS COMPETITION*

When the Tidy Towns winners were announced in Dublin Castle on 10 September 2007, the Crinkill Tidy Villages & Development Association (CTVDA) were delighted to hear that Crinkill had been given the Endeavour Award for the most improved entrant in Co. Offaly.

The CTVDA continued to make steady progress in implementing its 5 year plan and obviously impressed the Tidy Towns' judge who awarded the village an extra 17 points, giving a total of 225. Most points were gained under the Landscaping, Litter and Tidiness headings.

The committee was delighted to receive the award as an acknowledgement by an experienced, independent judge of the progress made over the years.

In 2007, the association planted a further 60 trees in Hawthorn Drive and Cypress Grove and sowed climbing plants as screening on bare concrete walls at Boherdeel Road and Cypress Grove. We also erected an Information Board on the history of Crinkill Military Barracks.



As part of the improvement plan for the village the association painted the cottages on Swag Street, which greatly added to the appearance of the street.

The flower beds on the bank under the barrack wall and at the entrance to Grove Street added a welcome splash of colour to these areas.

Litter is a continuous, ongoing problem which demands a continuous, daily effort (which is often beyond the resources of a voluntary committee). However, some areas, such as the Military Cemetery which were

specifically targeted by the committee for attention, showed a marked improvement on last year.

The CTVDA would like to thank the following for supporting our efforts:

- Local residents for practical and financial support
- Offaly LEADER+ Company
- Offaly County Council – Local Management and Team
- RSS team who made a significant contribution in keeping the grass under control in what was the wettest summer on record.
- Local businesses –
  - Geraghty's Superstore for sponsoring Santa Claus on his visit to Crinkill
  - The Thatch and Milne's Pub for hosting and sponsoring Table Quizzes
  - Grennan's Post Office and Shop for sponsoring prizes
  - Hassett's Topline Hardware for sponsoring paint and flowers competition
  - Grant's Engineering and Milne's Foods – for Benches on Barrack Street
  - Sinead Ryan (Accounting Services)

For 2008 the CTVDA intends to move ahead with the next stage of its 5 year plan. Over the coming months we will be looking at where we can make improvements and what goals can be achieved. The main thing is to be realistic with our targets and to ensure that we can continue to make steady progress.





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## BUSY BODIES MONTESSORI SCHOOL

Our school returned on 28<sup>th</sup> August 2006. 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 the 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 18<sup>th</sup> December. All proceeds from our play went towards Temple Street Children's hospital. We collected €925. We had our Summer Camp from July 2nd to July 27<sup>th</sup> in Carrig School. It was a great success despite the bad weather. A big thank you to Carrig School, Carrig hall, Birr Leisure Centre and to all our helpers: Lisa O'Brien, Deirdre Shields, Matt Moylan, Catrina Houlihan, Sean Hogan, Fiona Kennedy, Ailish Harte, Laura King and Mary McEvoy. Best wishes to the children who left us for the following Primary Schools:

**Killeen:** Conor Hanamy, Damien Monahan, Emily Mullarkey, Nessa O' Neill, Caoimhe Rice, Chloe Kelly, Cathal Errity, Rebecca Watson.

**Carrig:** Billy Butler, Joseph Hoctor, Leah Egan, Grace Cashen, Anna Dickson, Sarah Brophy.

**Lorrha:** Colm Fogarty, Luke Heenan, Ronan O' Meara, Lee Reddin, Cian Mannion.

**Rathcabbin:** Sean Heenan, Kevin Cathalan, Kieran Kennedy, Natasha Delaney

**Kinnitty:** Fiona Walsh.

**Redwood:** Daniel Buglar

**Crinkill:** Tom Errity, Harvey Dickson, Alannah Smyth, Roisin O' Sullivan.

**Mercy Girls:** Caoimhe Kinsella.

**Oxmantown:** Rory Tierney

**Clareen:** Cathal Mulrooney, James Cunningham.

**Shinrone:** Hazel Young



Busy Bodies staging their Christmas Play

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## CAMCOR PARK/SCURRAGH COMMUNITY CENTRE

The centre is situated in the Camcor Park, Scurragh and McRegol Close housing estates. There are two main rooms, one at the front of the building which is used as a computer room with its own entrance. At the rear of the building there is hall which can be divided and let as two separate rooms. Both these areas have toilet facilities. The centre is wheel-chair accessible. There is a fully equipped kitchen. There is limited parking space at the side while activities are in progress.

A Health and Drugs Awareness session was held at the centre during the summer of 2007. The speaker was Ms. Joan Tierney from Offaly HSE. A very successful summer camp was held there also. Children from Birr and the local area participated. The tutor was Mrs. Ann Murray from the Mercy primary school. On Mondays and Thursdays

Little Pixies playschool is in operation from 10 a.m. until 1 p.m. Geraldine Wheeler is in charge of this group. On Tuesday nights two English classes are held in the centre from 7 p.m. to 9 p.m. One is for beginners and the other is for advanced students. Immigrant parents of primary school children and immigrant workers participate in these classes. Community activities have included an after school club for primary school children, disco and movie nights, Christmas and Halloween parties for children of the estates. Santa visited the centre and distributed gifts to the children before the last two Christmas festivals. More local volunteers are needed and welcome to form an active Community Development Committee.

### BIRR LIONS CLUB

Continuing our commitment to the Youth, the Underprivileged and the Aged, Birr Lions Club raised in excess of €50,000 in the past twelve months through various means such as, the local telephone directory, the Birr Annual Review magazine, the Annual Christmas Fast, Church Gate collection and Country Fair collection. The Lions Club has distributed its funds in various ways during the last year, and two notable beneficiaries have been Birr Community School, for the provision of an Oratory, when a sum of €20,000 was donated, and Birr Swimming Pool, which received a donation of €20,000.

Other projects to benefit from Birr Lions Club included Northside Bus Committee, St. Vincent de Paul, Birr Neighbourhood Watch, Camcor/Scurragh Community Group, Chesterfield Summer Camp, Offaly Down's Syndrome, Fighting Blindness and many more charitable organisations and causes.

The Club organised a Christmas party for the Senior Citizens in the Day Care Centre on Sunday 3rd December 2006 and a most enjoyable day was had by all.

Our Christmas fast was held on 15th December and realised almost €4,000 and our Church Gate collection which was held in February 2007 raised over €3,000.

In April we gave our support to the Special Olympics and helped raise over €7,500. During Vintage week we gave our help to the Committee in running the Camcor Capers and this proved to be a very successful event.

Finally we would like to take the opportunity to thank you, the general public, most sincerely for all of your support throughout the year, and to assure you of continued commitment to the Youth, the underprivileged, and the Aged. Your generosity is very much appreciated.



### BIRR BRIDGE CLUBS

Birr has two Bridge Clubs, both active and thriving. Birr "66" Bridge Club plays on a Monday night in the County Arms Hotel with an option to play a friendly game on a Thursday night. The Camcor Club plays on a Wednesday night.

Each Club has its own active membership and Club Officers. The Officers are elected on a yearly basis.

The active season for Clubs is from September to May. The Clubs close for the summer.

Both Clubs are independent of each other but each year the Clubs come together to play for the prestigious Desmond A. Houlihan trophy. This is competition in memory of the late Desmond Houlihan who distinguished himself as an International Bridge player.

Other than competition nights visitors are always welcome to play in the Clubs.

Last season was the 40th Anniversary of the Birr "66" Club. To mark the occasion the Club had a celebration dinner in the County Arms Hotel on the 12th March, followed by a game of Bridge. Among the special guests at the celebration were Mrs Doreen McInerney, National President C.B.A.I. and Mrs Connie McGoev Regional President C.B.A.I. A very enjoyable evening was had by all.

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## BIRR APOSTOLIC WORK GROUP

The Birr Apostolic Work Missionary Society is a branch of the Killaloe Diocesan Missionary Society established by Bishop Rogers on the feast of Corpus Christi, 9<sup>th</sup> June 1955 in Maria Assumpta Hall, Ennis, Co. Clare. The Birr branch was founded on Mission Sunday in October 1969. Some of the founding members included Mrs. R. Garvey (President), Mrs. L. Lyndon (Vice-President), Mrs. Pey (Secretary), Mrs. Calvey (Treasurer), and Monsignor Hamell (Spiritual Director). Sr. M. Gertrude, Superior of the Convent of Mercy at the time, was very helpful in getting the branch organised.

On Sunday, October 23<sup>rd</sup> 1994 the Birr branch celebrated the Silver Jubilee of the foundation of their branch. The celebrant of the Jubilee Mass was Rev. Anthony Finnegan O.C.S.O. Certificates were presented to the founding members; Mrs. Maureen Saunders, Mrs. Rosaleen Barrett and Miss Bridget O'Brien as well as various representatives of branches throughout the Killaloe Diocese who attended.

Meetings are held once a month in the basement of the Curates' House on John's Mall to pray for the Missions, organise fund raising events and report on the progress of

the member's needlework, embroidery, knitting and stamp collecting. The following fund raising events are held each year, a church gate collection, a Christmas raffle, raffle at Birr bingo and a small sale and raffle at display time. The parish clergy, sisters of Mercy, Presentation Brothers and indeed all the people of Birr are very generous and supportive. New active and honorary members are very welcome and are vital for the carrying on of the good work, you don't even need to be able to sew knot or embroider. We can show you. The people of Birr who have donated Mass kits and sacred vessels in memory of their beloved parents or relatives who have died have been great missionary benefactors.

The present committee includes Mrs. Ann Hough (President), Sr. Roberta Delaney (Secretary), Mrs. Catherine Murphy (Treasurer), Fr. Tony Cahir (Spiritual Director), Mrs. Maureen Dunphy, Mrs. Mary Nolan, Mrs. Mona Micks, Mrs. Bernie Kirwan, Mrs. Imelda King, Mrs. Kathleen Ryan and Sr. Nora Ryan. You may contact the president on 057-9120084 or secretary on 057-9120891 for further information.



*A group of Apostolic Society members proudly displaying their work*

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## BIRR ACTIVE RETIREMENT GROUP

The Birr Active Retirement Group came together four years ago in 2003. The main focus of the group is to respond to the needs of Senior Citizens in the Birr area. These needs may be social, cultural, educational or recreational. They may also have a Health and Safety element. The first committee members were Agnes O'Brien (Chairperson), Agnes Dolan (Secretary), Sr. Roberta (Assistant Secretary), Frances Ardle (Treasurer), Catherine Murphy (Assistant Treasurer). In 2004-2005 Agnes O'Brien was re-elected as chairperson. The club continued to develop and was greatly supported by Róisín Lennon from West Offaly Partnership. The group went on outings to places of interest including Kinnitty, Cadamstown, Mullingar, Aras an Uachtarain, Pitch and Putt in the Glens. There are 35-40 members in the group presently. The 2006-2007 committee members include Sr. Maeve (Chairperson), Sr. Roberta (Vice-chairperson), Nancy Buckley (Secretary), Mary McLaughlin (Assistant Secretary), Jean Larkin (Treasurer), Maura Guilfoyle (Assistant Treasurer).

Meetings are held once a fortnight, on Thursday at 7.30 p.m. – 9.00 p.m., in the Family Resource Centre, Townsend Street at the back of Londis' supermarket. The club is open to both male and female "Active Age" citizens. There are no brave men coming forward yet. There was one male member last year but he and his wife have since changed residence.

Interesting events during the past year included a visit from Mary Trimarco who gave a demonstration on the making of Christmas cards. The group had an outing to Athlone and enjoyed a bowling session there. The winners

of the event were Maura Guilfoyle, Frances Ardle and Mary Nolan. Another memorable session was when Betty Houlihan came to lead the group in gentle keep-fit exercises. All moved with great agility to the sound of music. Around last Easter a trip to Clonmacnoise was proposed but had to be cancelled owing to the inclemency of the weather. However the brave group ventured into the 'Wild West' (Salhill) during the summer. The rain came down in bucketfuls and to add to the doom and gloom one of the committee members nearly got lost! She arrived back in Birr before the bus so all was well. The group also enjoyed a trip to Bunratty Castle that was rounded off with a banquet.

David O'Meara from O'Meara's Pharmacy visited the group and gave a very informative talk on Osteoporosis. He brought with him an osteopath who is based in his pharmacy and she spoke about the simple things which can improve one's lifestyle. Two members of the group, Sr. Maeve and Sr. Roberta, went to the Bealtaine launch in Tullamore. Tony Murphy from Birr Town Council visited the group and brought a selection of plants and shrubs. He gave a very informative talk on gardening and in his generosity he left the plants to be raffled among the group. Mary Madigan visited the group recently. She was promoting hygiene wipes which would make house cleaning easier. Many of her products were bought on the spot and more had to be ordered as she ran out of supplies.

Each member always enjoys the fortnightly meeting which always ends with a cup of tea. New members are always welcome.



*Members of the Birr Active Retirement Group*

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## BIRR SCOUTS

This year (2007) marked a milestone in the Scouting Movement as it celebrated its centenary. Scouting is a world-wide organisation that was founded in 1907 by Robert Baden Powell. Today the scouting movement has nearly 28 million members world-wide.

The early movement was very much attached to the British establishment and Protestant churches in Ireland. After the Free State was formed many people sought the formation of a truly Irish scouting organisation for young people. In 1925 in Greystones, Co. Wicklow, Fr. Tom Farrell formed the Catholic Boy Scouts of Ireland. Throughout the years both scout associations have worked closely together.

In 1998 talks commenced to seek the establishment of a new association for the betterment of all young people in Ireland. Both agreed to form a new association and Scouting Ireland was founded in January 2004.

Scouting in Birr flourished in the 1930's and we had two Troops (30 in each troop) and a pipe band. In the early 1940s with the outbreak of the war scouting fell into decline. Scouting in Birr was then revived by Fr. Carey, Senan Corbett and Jack Ryan in the late 1960's. In 1970 at the inaugural ceremony of the new unit Paddy Cavanagh (RIP), who was the Scoutmaster in the 1930's handed over the old scout flag to Jack Ryan. Today the Unit consists of Venturers, Scouts and Cubs having a total membership of sixty and the organisation has again captured the attention of young people here in the midlands with many villages now forming their own unit.

To celebrate the centenary this year the Birr unit joined with other scouts in the Slieve Bloom region for their annual camp in Crawfordsburn (Northern Ireland National Scout Centre) in Co. Down. The camp was held from the 14<sup>th</sup> July to the 22<sup>th</sup> July and fortunately for us we had fine weather and were able to complete our programme



*Cubs at the Log Cabin in the Slieve Blooms*

which included archery, abseiling, orienteering, ice skating, bowling, grass sledging and caving.

In May the unit camped in Portumna Forest Park on a training weekend for our annual camp. This is the most popular site with the scouts and we have camped there every year since the 1970's. We pitched our tents where the marina is now. Many of the past generation of scouts visit us to recall their camp there and it is known as their "Happy Hunting Ground". The weather was good and the boating and water activities on Lough Derg were enjoyed by all.

In June a survival weekend was held in the Slieve Bloom mountains. June and July must have been the worst months for rainfall in a decade as the rain came down in "buckets". This did not deter the hardy scouts for on Saturday night they took off on midnight survival hike led by Scout Leaders Mary Hayes and Pdraig Connaughton covering a distance of 16 KMS. All returned safely, none the worse for their adventure despite the harsh conditions. In October, as a reward for passing their test on the survival weekend, scouts travelled to Quilty, Co. Clare to explore the west coast. A visit to Lahinch swimming pool and a walk on the cliffs of Moher was on our schedule. A visit to Mount Shannon Marina on Sunday concluded the programme.

The Parents Committee was busy during the year fund raising and helping out with the various activities. Our special thanks to the officers, Emer Dolphin-Murray, John Reddin, Michael Stapleton and also to the Marian Hall Committee for assisting us with our fundraising. Finally we are very grateful to the people of Birr for their continued support and especially the business people who have encouraged and contributed generously over the years.



*Scouts at the Giant's Causeway*



*Venturers, Scouts and Cubs with Leaders and Fr. Gilbert at the Annual Investiture Mass – March 2007*

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## BIRR MENTAL HEALTH ASSOCIATION

*Birr Mental Health Association is a local voluntary organisation affiliated to the Mental Health Association of Ireland.*

### Our aims are:

To help mentally ill people and their families  
To promote positive mental health

Our members comprise of a group of volunteers from different ages, backgrounds and interests. Locally, we aim to provide support, care and friendship to people who are affected by mental health problems and daily stresses. We organise social and leisure activities for clients availing of local community mental health services.

The local mental health services are facilitated at the Community Mental Health Centre, Old Convent, Wilmer Road, Birr. This is a Monday to Friday service available to people with mental health problems.

For further information about the above services please contact [057-9120576/20540](tel:057-9120576/20540).

Birr Mental Health Association aims to improve community understanding and acceptance of mental illness and promote a positive awareness of mental health and the availability of self-help organisations. In this regard we organise public lectures, workshops - e.g. personal development, public speaking projects in schools, book lending, parenting course and free information leaflets.

2007 was another successful year for our Association. Again we took a number of people on holiday 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 Kilbeggan Races during the summer months. Visits were made to the Japanese Gardens, Knock and local areas of historical interest. Transport is provided to all events by the Mental Health Association's minibus. Deserving cases are catered for in times of financial difficulties and at Christmas, by the provision of hampers, fuel, etc. 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 the same.

As a result of our survey carried out two years ago to assess the needs of people with mental health problems, we arranged to provide support and contact at week-ends during the winter months as this can be a time of isolation and loneliness, especially for those living alone. This comprised of social evenings 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 successful venture and we plan to organise a busy programme again this winter.

We are continuing to send people to Lourdes from the funds raised by our 2004 Golf Classic.

We were also associated with other projects held in the Community Mental Health Centre, including the Annual Physical Activities and Fun Day in August.

We celebrated World Mental Health Day on 10<sup>th</sup> October by hosting a Reminiscence Day. This involved an exhibition of photographs, coins, antiques and fashion from bygone days. This proved to be very enjoyable for young and old alike.

There was a very enjoyable party held on Halloween Night where fun and games were had by all with some very interesting fancy dress costumes.

All the above events were provided as a result of the generosity of people who contributed to our fundraising efforts during the year which included Church Gate Collections, Ladies Mini Marathon, Raffles, etc.

Our next big event to look forward to will be the Annual Christmas Party and Christmas Raffle which will be held in a local hotel.

Anyone wishing to contact us may do so by telephoning 057-9120576 or 9120540 or call in person to Community Mental Health Centre, (Old Convent) Wilmer Road, Birr. New members are always welcome.

### CONTACT PERSONS

Ms. Jackie Conneely, Chairperson  
Ms. Claire Hernon, Honorary Secretary  
Ms. Mary Kearns, Treasurer  
Ms. Veronica Higgins, Public Relations Officer

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## CARRIG- RIVERSTOWN COMMUNITY CENTRE

Carrig & Riverstown Community Centre is a hive of activity. Any night you pass the centre you will see the lights on and you can be sure that there is some sport or social activity going on.

On Monday nights, you will hear the whoosh of badminton rackets as shuttlecocks go whizz through the air. Tuesday nights we have cards, an excellent way to pass the long winter nights and perhaps win a few Euros as well. Wednesday morning is a busy morning with the Parent & Toddler Group which is now in its 7th year. Wednesday evening sees Phil Corcoran stepping it out with the local children for Irish Dancing. Whoops of delight can be heard on Thursday night as the Active Retirement group get down to playing Indoor Bowls and other various activities. On Thursday nights once a month, there is social dancing so get out your dancing shoes and dance the night away. Friday night you will hear the clash of the ash with hurling for the underage with their dedicated trainers.

The community centre is also used by the local school for their activities such as Speech & Drama, Physical

Education and their bi-annual Christmas show. The First Holy Communion class uses the centre for their annual communion breakfast, which is very much enjoyed by everyone.

Many local groups use the centre for their meetings such as the GAA, Ladies Club. Active Retirement Group, Tidy Towns and other groups. The centre is also used for catering for funerals. Every Christmas we have our parish party which is a great success.

There have been a lot of refurbishments going on in the past year. We got a grant from An Pobail last year, and we put the money to great use. We laid tarmac around the hall, painted inside and outside, and did some necessary repair work and purchased much needed equipment as well.

The community centre would not run without the help of various committees, down through the years. A very special thanks to Mary Keavney and Tommy Moody and the FAS workers for their Trojan work down through the years for the upkeep and maintenance of the centre. To all these people we say a very **BIG THANK YOU.**

## THE JOB CLUB

The Job Club offers support, assistance, advice and help to anyone wishing to actively seek employment. Its aim is to enable people to plan, actively seek and achieve realistic work opportunities. If you are looking for work 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.

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The course runs for 4 weeks, in the mornings from 10.00 a.m. - 1.00 p.m. There is a high success rate in participants gaining employment/further training from constant, active job seeking and support and guidance.

### Employment Options.

As part of our training initiatives, an Employment Options Training Programme is currently being held in Birr, for people who are unemployed, on Social Welfare and registered with FAS who want to return to work and need

to gain more skills and confidence. The course subjects include: Computers, Personal Development, Job Preparation, DIY, Office Procedure, First Aid, Maths and Food & Nutrition. There is an opportunity to gain five FETAC level 4 modules. In addition the participant will go into a work experience situation in their chosen occupational area. It runs on a full-time basis five mornings a week.

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FAS Placement services are available Monday to Thursday, 9.30 a.m. - 1.00 p.m. 2.00 p.m. - 4.30 p.m.

**VEC Literacy and Numeracy classes** are available every Thursday 3.00 p.m. – 5.00 p.m. and are delivered by the VEC who also provide a one to one tuition.

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## Birr GAA

2007 will be recalled as another memorable year for Birr GAA Club. On the field, the club retained the Offaly senior hurling championship title. The intermediate hurlers were also crowned county champions and parish U-21 side St Brendan's won the title in the 'boardroom'.

At underage level Birr contested both the Minor 'A' hurling and Minor 'B' football finals only to go down narrowly to St Rynagh's and Ballinamere/Durrow, respectively. The U-14 hurlers reached both the Feile na nGael and Championship Final and they were unlucky to lose out to a strong St Rynagh's side on both occasions.

The U-10 players made it a double triumph, after their defeats of Coolderry and Na Fianna in the hurling and football finals respectively.

Off the field, an ambitious development project to upgrade the playing and spectator facilities at St. Brendan's Park commenced. A successful night at the dogs was held at Mullingar Greyhound Stadium to raise funds for the development.

The fact that St Brendan's Park was closed for much of the year created some problems when it came to the training and preparation of teams. Birr GAA would like to sincerely thank everyone that provided and made their facilities available to them – it was much appreciated.

The year saw Pat Joe Whelahan return as senior / intermediate hurling manager and he delivered the goods once again.

The Little Man with the 'Midas Touch' now has the distinction of guiding Birr to an Offaly intermediate and senior hurling championship double on three occasions – 1997, 1999 & 2007.

As manager with Birr (from '97 to '04, and again this year), Pat Joe's honours haul reads – 3 All-Ireland club titles (1998, '02 & '03), 4 Leinster club titles ('97, '99, '01 & '02), 7 Offaly SHC titles (1997, '99, '00, '01, '02, '03 & '07) and 4 Offaly IHC titles (1997, '98, '99 & '07).

For good measure, he was also a Birr selector in 1991 (Ken Hogan was manager) when Birr won the Sean Robbins Cup for the first time since 1971 and they went on to win the first of their six Leinster club titles, beating Ballyhale.

Here are some short reports from Birr's final appearances in '07;

### SHC Final: Whelahan slays Kilcormac/Killoughey

Birr 0-15 Kilcormac/Killoughey 0-10

Stickman supreme Brian Whelahan was in sparkling form as he grabbed ten magnificent points and inspired Birr to their 21st Offaly SHC title on October 21st in O'Connor



*Birr triplets Sam, Luke and Darragh Morris supporting Birr at the Senior Hurling County Final in O'Connor Park, Tullamore. (Picture by Ger Rogers, Tullamore 087 2246878).*

Park. Whelahan genially orchestrated the show from centre forward, and he landed seven second half points as Birr came from 0-4 to 0-6 behind to capture the Sean Robbins Cup for the third year in succession. Whelahan previously captained Birr in 1991 – he's now the fourth man to have lifted Offaly's most sought after hurling prize twice, following in the footsteps of Brendan Loughnane, Pdraig Horan and Aidan Fogarty. And sixteen years ago Millennium Man won the first of his eleven county medals. Brian, along with brothers Simon (10) and Barry (9) and his son Aaron (3) now possess thirty-three county medals between them. Whelahan's heroics saw him deservedly chosen as man of the match (sponsored by PJ Middleton Limousine Hire) but he was closely followed by the mercurial Niall Claffey at full back.



*Birr Captain Brian Whelahan receiving the Man of the Match Award from sponsor PJ Middleton after Birr overcame the challenge of Kilcormac/Killoughey in the Aidan Bracken Building Design Senior Hurling County Final in O'Connor Park, Tullamore. (Picture by Ger Rogers, Tullamore 087 2246878).*

## BIRR Year Review 2007

Scorers: Brian Whelahan (0-10, 0-7 frees), Gary Hanniffy (0-2), Stephen Brown (0-1), Paul O'Meara (0-1), Keith Hehir (0-1)

Team: Brian Mullins; John Paul O'Meara, Niall Claffey, Michael Verney; Rory Hanniffy, Paul Cleary, Dylan Hayden; Barry Whelahan, Neil Rogers; Gary Hanniffy, Brian Whelahan (Capt.), Stephen Brown; Paul Molloy, Michael Dwane, Simon Whelahan.

Subs.: Paul O'Meara for P Molloy (24 mins), Brian Watkins for N Rogers (24 mins), Keith Hehir for S Whelahan (half time), Sean Ryan for M Dwane (41 mins), Darragh Molloy for S Brown (62 mins).



*Fergal McKeown Chairman Coiste na nOg presenting Birr Captain Cormac Kenny with the cup after Birr defeated Na Fianna in the U-10 'B' Football Final at O'Connor Park, Tullamore. (Picture by Ger Rogers, Tullamore 087 2246878).*

### IHC Final: Birr win 4th title

#### *Birr 2-15 Ballinamere 1-12*

INSPIRED by the scoring exploits of Keith Hehir and Mark Mulrooney, Birr romped to their fourth intermediate hurling title as they overcame Ballinamere by six points, 2-15 to 1-12 at O'Connor Park. It was Birr's first IHC success since winning three-in-a-row between 1997 and '99 and Pat Joe Whelahan has been the manager for all four triumphs. And as Birr captain Declan Pilkington accepted the Michael Keary Cup from County Board Chairman Ollie Daly he paid a glowing tribute to Pat Joe. Pilkington, who also had the distinction of lifting the Sean Robbins Cup when Birr won the 1999 SHC title (a rare if not unique record to accept both trophies), said he has known Pat Joe for the past 21 years since he won an All-Ireland medal under him in '86 and that he has provided him with some of the best memories of his life. Three times inside the opening quarter, the teams were level, but when Keith Hehir blasted in an 18th minute Birr goal the outcome was never in doubt. Ballinamere trailed by six points at half time, 0-7 to 1-10, and although Barney O'Brien's goal helped them to get back to within four points (1-10 to 1-14 & 1-11 to 1-15) that was the closest they got and Brian Nolan's 48th minute goal wrapped up the title for Birr.

Scorers: Mark Mulrooney (0-6, 0-4 frees), Keith Hehir (1-3), Brian Nolan (1-1), Darragh Molloy (0-1), Conor Egan (0-1), Declan Pilkington (0-1), Aaron Whelahan (0-1 free), Bryan Lonergan (0-1).

Team: Shane Walsh; Paddy Ryan, Garrett Doorley, Mark Quinlan; Barry Harding, Donal Franks, Brian Watkins; Declan Pilkington (Capt.), Conor Egan; Aaron Whelahan, Mark Mulrooney, Bryan Lonergan; Brian Nolan, Keith Hehir, Darragh Molloy.

Sub.: Barry Ryan for D Franks (47 mins), Alan Hennessy for A Whelahan (58 mins)

### MHC Final: Birr fight-back falls short

#### *St Rynagh's 0-10 Birr 0-8*

Birr's bid for a 19th MHC title, their first since 2004, came unstuck when they were defeated by St Rynagh's in Shinrone on Saturday, October 27th. Birr, who started the final without key attacker Bryan Lonergan, were camped in the Rynagh's half of the pitch for practically the entire second half but their inability to translate territory to scores cost them dearly. Their shooting too was very erratic and the wides tally of 14 to St Rynagh's five tells its own tale. Earlier in the group series of the MHC Birr defeated Rynagh's by 0-10 to 1-5 and Saturday's score-line was similar, except the roles were reversed. Birr, who are joint top of the MHC roll of honour along with Rynagh's on 18 titles, won the corresponding U-12 (2001), U-14 ('03) & U-16 ('05) championships so it was a big disappointment to them to lose out on this occasion.

Defenders Donal Ryan, John McIntyre, Barry Harding, Daniel O'Meara and James Roddy acquitted themselves well and further afield Thomas Bolger made most impact.

Scorers: Barry Harding (0-3, 0-2 frees & 0-1 '65), Thomas Bolger (0-2), Ger Teehan (0-1), Aaron Whelahan (0-1), Craig Shortt (0-1).

Team: Michael Mulrooney; Daniel O'Meara, Donal Ryan, John McIntyre; James Roddy, Barry Harding, Cormac Pardy; Aaron Whelahan, John Corrigan; Oisín O'Carroll, Emmett Fanneran, Craig Shortt; Ger Teehan (Capt.), Alan Maher, Thomas Bolger.

Subs.: Alan Guinan for E Fanneran (38 mins), Daryl Nolan for O O'Carroll (54 mins).

### MFC 'B' Final: Slow starts proves costly

#### *Ballinamere/Durrow 2-9 Birr 2-5*

"TUS maith leath na hoibre" and so it proved in this minor 'B' football championship final at Ballycommon as Ballinamere/Durrow's early score blitz, orchestrated by Stephen Callen, saw them lay the foundation for glory. Callen's brace of goals gave B/D a 2-2 to 0-1 advantage after 17 minutes and while Birr refused to give up the ghost they were always playing catch-up. Birr, managed by John Ryan, did get to within two points, 1-4 to 2-3, six minutes into the concluding half but B/D were always that

step ahead and the Darragh Carroll captained side held a 2-8 to 1-5 lead as the game drifted in to its final minute. When Birr sub Shane Kinsella cracked in a deflected goal, they inevitably pushed forward in quest of an equalising goal. It didn't materialise and Ballinamere/Durrow sealed the title as Ken Molloy gave a clever pass to sub Sean Treacy and he curled over the insurance point. Birr sorely missed the influence of their injured captain Bryan Lonergan.

Scorers: Barry Harding (0-3 frees), David Egan (1-0), Shane Kinsella (1-0), Alan Guinan (0-1), Brian Kelly (0-1).

Team: Craig Shortt; Oisín O'Carroll, Alan Guinan, Darren Madden; James Roddy, Donal Ryan, Emmett Fanneran; Barry Harding, Brian Kelly; Conor Nolan, Cormac Pardy, David Egan; Michael Mulrooney, Sean Grimes, Thomas Bolger.

Subs.: Shane Kinsella for S Grimes (half time), Alan Maher for D Egan (53 mins), Oisín McCormack for C Nolan (57 mins), Hugh Connolly for M Mulrooney (59 mins).

**U-14 HC Final: Brave Birr beaten**

*St Rynagh's 1-15 Birr 0-7*

BIRR'S bid for U-14 hurling honours was denied by a strong St Rynagh's side in the final at Rath.

Scorers: Sean T O'Connor (0-5, 0-2 frees), Ronan Murphy (0-1), Eoin Hayes (0-1 free).

Team: Conor Grimes; Jimmy Irwin, Colm Mulrooney (Capt.), Cathal Hogan; Shane Rigney, Eoin Hayes, Kevin Brummell; Pdraig O'Meara, Mark Nolan; Peter Dooley, Kevin Donovan, Paddy Mullins; Sean T O'Connor, Finn O'Carroll, Ronan Murphy.

*Birr full back Paul Cleary with his son AJ and nephew Darragh after the Senior Hurling County Final.*



*Birr captain Brian Whelahan receiving the Sean Robbins Cup from Offaly GAA Vice Chairman Pat Teehan after Birr overcame the challenge of Kilcormac/Killoughey in the Aidan Bracken Building Design Senior Hurling County Final. (Picture by Ger Rogers, Tullamore 087 2246878).*

**Birr U-10's on the double**

THE Birr U-10's completed a fantastic double by winning the U-10 'B' Football title in O'Connor Park, Tullamore and the U-10 'A' Hurling title against Coolderry in Clareen. Considering that all their matches were played at away venues, this was indeed a wonderful achievement by any standards. The hurlers came up against a fancied Coolderry side, which had beaten Birr well in the earlier rounds. Coolderry began well and dominated much of the first half but Birr's defence refused to yield and defended magnificently, soaking up a lot of pressure. Eoghan Cahill's well taken goal left Birr a point up at half time. Coolderry started well in the second half, dominating the early stages but Birr's blocking and hooking and overall work rate reaped their rewards and they hung on for a narrow victory in the end. This was a fantastic game of hurling, with some fabulous blocking, hooking, striking and score-taking on both sides. Well done to both sets of players for serving up such a fine game and there is no doubt that with players like these coming through, Offaly's future looks to be secure.

Panel: Daniel O'Meara, Cormac Kenny, Jack Regan, Dylan Watkins, Riain Dempsey, Mark Haines, Dylan Quegan, Shane Donovan, Cathal Kirwan, Stefan Shalloe, Eoghan Cahill (cap), Mark Nolan, Dylan Murphy, Conor Sampson, David Mullins, Simon Moylan, Dean Cahill, Aaron Talbot, Ben Russell, T.J. Talbot, Ryan Kelly.

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The footballers took on Na Fianna, having beaten them by one point in a very close encounter earlier in the season. This was a great game of football, with nothing between the teams all through. Birr were on the back foot early on as Na Fianna created a lot of scoring chances and some first half misses possibly cost them dearly at the finish. But Birr were prepared to hang in there and despite going six points behind at one stage, kept on fighting back. Again, there was great skill, courage and graft in evidence on both sides. Well done to all the boys on both panels and to their mentors on providing us with such entertainment all year and thanks to all those parents

who transported and supported the boys through the season.

Panel: Dylan Murphy, Pdraig Bergin, Cormac Kenny (cap), Dylan Watkins, Mark Haines, Jack Regan, Riain Dempsey, Stefan Shalloe, Dylan Quegan, Eoghan Cahill, Shane Donovan, Conor Sampson, Cathal Kirwan, Daniel O'Meara, David Mullins, Daire Stapleton, Simon Moylan.

*The Birr team who defeated Kilcormac/Killoughey in the Senior Hurling County Championship winning the title for the 21<sup>st</sup> time.*



**The Birr Team that won the town's FIRST County Championship in 1912**  
 Front Row (L to R): Paddy Sullivan, Jack Meara, Jim Mulrooney, Danny Molloy, Jim Lehane  
 Middle Row: Tom Sullivan, Martin Whelan, Jimmy Breen, Jack Murphy, R. Sharkey  
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*The Birr minor football team that was defeated in the MFC 'B' Final by Ballinamere/Durrow in Ballycommon. (Picture by Ger Rogers, Tullamore 087 2246878).*



*The Birr U-14 hurlers pictured prior to their county final defeat at the hands of St Rynagh's in Rath. (Picture by Ger Rogers, Tullamore 087 2246878).*

*The Birr team with the cup after Birr defeated Na Fianna in the U-10 'B' Football Final at O'Connor Park, Tullamore. (Picture by Ger Rogers, Tullamore 087 2246878).*



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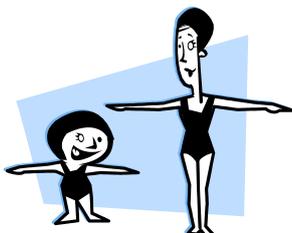
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## BIRR FLYING CLUB

At the time of writing this article, work is nearing completion of our new Hangar. This has been some four years in the planning and we were delighted to be awarded a Sports Capital Grant to fund some of the cost of the building.

Kevin Glynn, one of our members, finished his training this year and now joins the ranks of Instructors in the Club. Kevin completed some of his Microlight Instructor Training in Portugal. We congratulate Kevin on his achievement and are delighted to welcome him to our panel of instructors.

During the course of the year, a Landini Tractor was acquired by one of our members to replace the 27-year old David Brown. This is used on a weekly basis for several months of the year in runway cutting and airfield maintenance.



Galway airport and then back to Birr. A great night was held afterwards in a Birr hostelry.

The Club held their Annual Fly-In again on 11<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> August this year. Unfortunately, the weather proved to be too bad on Saturday for any visitors to make it in, which was a disappointment to all. However, with over 20 aeroplanes, Microlights and helicopters flying in on Sunday it made up for the previous day. On Sunday we had a display from the Irish Coast Guard Air Sea Rescue Helicopter, aerobatic displays by David Bruton in his Extra 200 and Gerry Humphries in his Vans RV7. Saturday night was the Function night which was held in Dooly's Hotel. Despite the bad weather on Saturday, many of the flying fraternity came to Birr by road and joined in the usual craic and tall stories. Presentations were made for First Solo flights achieved in the previous year to Ciarán Hogan, John Heffernan and Colm Wright and a PPL pin was presented to Martin Kennedy on achieving his Private Pilot's Licence.

**[www.ormandflyingclub.com](http://www.ormandflyingclub.com)  
057-9121300**



There were two Breakfast Fry-Ins held during the year, the first on 1<sup>st</sup> April and the second on 14<sup>th</sup> October. We were blessed with glorious weather on both days and had an excellent turnout of hungry pilots who flew in for the full Irish.

A National Emergency Drill took place at the Airfield on Saturday 19<sup>th</sup> May. The simulation involved an aeroplane crashing during a display at the field, resulting in fatalities on board, fire, and serious and minor injuries to spectators. The Drill gave the Airfield's Fire and Rescue Crew a chance to brush up on their own skills and also an opportunity to see how the professionals cope with a major emergency. Thanks to all involved for giving the airfield crew an opportunity to participate.

The Microlight Island Hop took place from 6<sup>th</sup> – 8<sup>th</sup> July from Birr Airfield. 33 aircraft and 1 helicopter took part in this event. After a breakfast courtesy of the club, they routed from Birr to Spanish Point to the three Aran Islands. €445 was presented to the Aran Island Lifeboat appeal from the visiting aircraft before departing to



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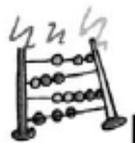
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Cycling is an activity that can be pursued at many levels – as an enjoyable leisure activity for all the family, as a means of keeping fit, which in turn contributes to a healthier lifestyle or as a competitive sport for those who wish to attain a level of excellence, (through dedication and discipline to a strict training regime). Wolftrap CC, founded in August 2005, aims to promote cycling at all of the above levels and for all ages in Birr and the surrounding area.

The year 2007 has seen an increase in our membership and also an increase in the number of people cycling in the area. To prove the point that cycling is for everyone, we have active members ranging in ages from 16 to 71 years. New members always welcome and if you would like to take part in our weekly cycles please contact Bernie at 085-1500519 or Gary at 086-3580978. Beginners will be catered for.

During the winter months there is a weekly club cycle on Sunday mornings, of approx 2 hours. A supervised, shorter cycle is organized for beginners. In the summer months there is also a midweek club cycle. The club organized a range of activities in 2007, both to cater for members' interests and also to encourage new people to take up cycling, either as a leisure activity or as a competitive sport. The following outlines some of the club's activities this year:

### February

Members took part in a training seminar, run by top cycling coach Pdraig Marrey. The seminar, which was held in the County Arms Hotel, Birr covered practical training on the bike, nutrition and strength and flexibility exercises.

### March

On a wet and windy Sunday, at the invitation of Rath Mentally Handicapped Association, 28 club members did a cycle around the four corners of Eglisk parish. They were treated to much appreciated tea and refreshments afterwards in Rath hall.

### April

The club went to Ballyvaughan for an away weekend. Cycles in the Burren included the Corkscrew Hill climb (and descent) and a coastal trip.

### June

The club was well represented at two of the most popular, non-competitive cycling events in the country i.e. the Wicklow 200 km challenge and the BorderTrek 200 mile tour (a 2-day event). Both events also provide the option to do shorter distances and provide a training goal and focus for thousands of leisure/touring cyclists in the country.

### July

Some of our club members took part in the Triathlon event in Athlone. This event had over 1,200 participants

and took place on a windy, showery day, (yes, remember our summer) and conditions in the river Shannon were very difficult. Three members, who participated in relay teams, performed very well. Two of our members – Gary Bracken, (cycling) and M.J. Grogan (swimming) – were on the winning relay team and Cormac Hoare (swimming) had a very good personal time and his team was placed in fourth position.

### August

The club had an interesting learning experience in running a Cycling Ireland recognized Time Trial event. The Wolftrap Hill climb was held on 25<sup>th</sup> August for the first time. The club plans that this will be an annual event in the Cycling Ireland calendar. A quality field representing 12 Leinster clubs took part in the trial. The winning time for this event was 12 min 58.35 sec.

The Club held its second annual Billy Butler Leisure Cycle and played host to a number of clubs from all over the country. This was the highlight of our year and surpassed the success of the previous year's inaugural cycle. After one of the wettest summers on record, we were favoured with a warm, dry day. Over seventy cyclists from all over the Midlands, Dublin, Galway and Tipperary took part in the event. There were three distances 50 km, 100 km and 120 km to suit all levels of fitness. Thankfully all cyclists completed the course without incident, and were treated to refreshments afterwards in Birr Rugby Club.

In August also, six Wolftrap cyclists took their bikes to Carcassonne and toured the French countryside, while checking out some French wines in the process.

August was a busy month for the club and we also teamed up with the Vintage week committee to organize a ten mile Heritage Cycle around local heritage sites. Unfortunately, due to weather conditions that day (heavy downpours and flooding), the event had to be cancelled.

### September

Wolftrap CC travelled to Tullamore to participate in the annual Pat Colgan Cycle. Some members also took part in a charity cycle around Lough Derg.

### October

The club has availed of the wonderful new facility at Birr Leisure Centre for winter training and has organised a weekly spinning session for members.

So, all in all 2007, the club's second year was busy and varied. Wolftrap Cycling Club will continue to promote cycling in the area in 2008 and hopes to see more people out on their bikes. If you would like more information about the club or you wish to become a member you can contact Bernie Grennan at 085-1500519.



*Members of the Wolftrap Cycling Club 2007*



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## ST. CILLIAN'S CAMOGIE CLUB

On June 2<sup>nd</sup> 2007, St. Cillians Camogie club made history as the under 12 girls played and won the first ever county camogie championship game in Carrig against Tullamore. A big crowd turned out to see this game which was played in sunshine on a Saturday afternoon.

The next game was against Lusmagh in Lusmagh which we lost but the girls picked themselves up and went on to beat Birr, Kilcormac/Killoughey and St. Shinchells. This earned the team the honour of finishing on top of the group and a place in the county semi-final. This game was played in Shinrone on September 4<sup>th</sup> the girls played with great heart and pride but a stronger St. Rynagh's team beat them.

This was the end of a great summer of camogie. This did not happen by accident. A lot of people put time and effort into training, fixing challenge matches, etc and most

of all the parents and all the people who came to support the team.

The Under 12 panel was Niamh Collins, Niamh Cleary, Danielle Bond, Stephanie Maher, Leanne Maher, Rachel Brennan, Aishling Maher, Charlotte Cavanagh, Siobhan Killeen, Emily O'Brien, Ciara Hoctor, Laura Hogan, Cailin Fitzgerald, Aideen Freeman, Aoife Plunkett, Rebecca Egan, Siofra Ryan, Niamh Killeen, Megan King, Kiera Brady, Rachel Dolan, Ellen Cashen and Sheena Birmingham.

The club hosted a blitz for the under 8 and under 10 teams. They also played in a blitz hosted by the Birr club for which all the teams received medals. The under 10 girls also played on the under 12 Team.

The club would like to thank our sponsors and anyone who helped us on our way.

**Back Row:** Niamh Killeen, Siobhan Killeen, Aideen Freeman, Ellen Cashen, Kiera Brady, Rachel Dolan  
**Front Row:** Megan King, Lisa Hoctor, Cailin Fitzgerald, Aisling Brennan, Isobel Cavanagh



**Back Row:** Sarah Harding, Siofra Ryan, Chloe Costello, Sarah Pingree

**Front Row:** Ciara Brennan, Orla Plunkett, Michelle Maher, Orla Killeen



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## The Little Brosna and Camcor Fishing Club

'Rain, rain, go to Spain never show your face again!' This very familiar catchphrase was never more apt than it was for 2007 given that we experienced a seriously wet season. Indeed we have to admit that this resulted in night fly fishing being a bit disappointing owing to the constant high water levels in the river. However, overall there was a very good run of Croneen, some of which weighed in at very healthy sizes for their skilled catchers. The Club had a busy season again this year. Our first outing was our annual clean up at the Chapel Bridge in conjunction with the Birr Tidy Towns Committee. It's really lovely to see this area being kept in good order. Not only is it important from the fisherman's point of view but it's also a focal point in our town and it is important to see it looking at its best.

The ESB in association with the Shannon Regional Fisheries Board are continuing their excellent in-stream work on the River. Research into the unique croneen species is on-going and further samples from the fish have been sent by the Shannon Regional Fisheries Board to Queen's University in Belfast for analysis. The results of this are awaited. A new bridge has also been erected by the ESB below Derrinsallow Bridge making this stretch of the river much more accessible for anglers.

A number of our Committee members also attended two very interesting seminars run by the Shannon Regional Fisheries Board during the summer on the 'Powers of Water Keepers' and 'The Management of a Fishery and Club'. These events were most informative and helpful.

As most of you will already be aware there is a prohibition on the use of maggot fishing, in all its forms, in the river. However to assist in its enforcement the Shannon



Regional Fisheries Board informs us that they will be erecting signs all along the River to advise those fishing of this complete ban. We are further informed that from the commencement of next season this will be strictly enforced.

Additionally, designated 'fly-fishing only' stretches of the river will be clearly signed for river users and we trust that all anglers will adhere to these regulations.

Our Pollution Officer and Water Keepers have been very active throughout the season and we thank them for the hard work, time and effort that they are putting in on our behalf. In addition we wish to extend thanks to all our officers especially our dedicated Chairman and our very hardworking Secretary.

Finally, if you are interested in fishing we would encourage you to come and join our club as new members are always welcome.

Happy fishing for the season ahead - tight lines!



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## BALLYEIGHAN CRICKET CLUB

By far the most memorable aspect of the season for the club was the opening of the new pavilion built by the members themselves and named after the late Eddie Dwyer, one of the founding members in 1976. It's a fitting tribute to Eddie, who is remembered fondly by all who knew him.

On the day of its official opening – fortunately a splendid sunny one – a large crowd was in attendance, and although there was a natural element of sadness about the event this was tempered by a good-natured game of cricket between the so-called President's Eleven and Ballyeighan, the result of which was irrelevant. The meaty barbecue that followed the game went on long into darkness. By that time stray dogs were sniffing around for leftover bones and the Leaky Shed that had once served as a changing-room was consigned to the dustbin of bittersweet memory.

As for the season's more serious cricketing, many days were lost to rain, and matches cancelled. The season, which normally ends in early September, went on until October. Few members could recall playing that late in the year. If climatic change continues as many predict it will, cricket at Christmas may be the trend of the future – a perplexing notion to players who are accustomed to oiling their bats in September and perhaps even laundering their whites and tucking everything away for another year. Or consider the possibility of a match on Christmas Day, with all players obliged to wear a Santa Claus suit. To add to the spirit, the stumps could be decorated with tinsel and ribbons, and the two umpires might be lit by coloured bulbs.

Early results were good for Ballyeighan. They won seven games in succession, the first against an Irish Woman's Team, followed by wins over Civil Service, Halverston, Ballyhaunis, Athlone, and Wexford. The team was bolstered by the arrival of South African all-rounder Peter Swanepoel and quick bowler Sunny Kumar, while the



*The Eddie Dwyer Pavilion  
(Photos courtesy of Mark Shakespeare)*

captaincy passed from Graham Kenny to Matt Dudley.

The first defeat of the season came against The Leprechauns, a youngish team from Dublin. It was a match Ballyeighan might have won if the batsmen hadn't had a rare off-day, which is to take nothing away from the vigorous bowling of the Leprechauns.

In the O'Neill Cup, Ballyeighan lost the final, in slightly contentious circumstances, against NUI Galway. In the 20/20 version of cricket, Ballyeighan won the inaugural ABL Cup, a trilateral competition in which Athlone and Portlaoise also took part. The season ended with Ballyeighan winning 11 games, and losing 5.

Because cricket-players and fans alike are slightly deranged, besotted devotees of statistics, what follows is a brief compilation of the season's performances. Graham Kenny amassed 499 runs, for an average of 45.3, Peter Swanepoel made 439 for an excellent average of 73.1, Matt Dudley contributed 405 for an average of 36.8, John Kenny 242 for 26.8, Sunny Kumar 208 for 41.6, Robbie Kenny 183 for 30.5. Two players managed to score a century – Peter Swanepoel made 110 runs in one innings, closely followed by Matt Dudley with 109.

In bowling, Graham Kenny took 23 wickets at a cost of 333 runs, Matt Dudley 22 for 268, Peter Swanepoel 16 for 215, Dennis Walker 14 for 303, Sunny Kumar 9 for 196, James Smith 7 for 136, and Patrick Headon 6 for 140.

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*View from the New Pavilion*

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## BIRR RUGBY CLUB

President: Michael Botha, Hon. Sec: Desmond Corcoran, Hon. Treasurers: Ann Hogan & Frank Doorley, Club Captain: Garech Doorley, Club Coach: Camillus O'Meara, Youth Co-Ordinator: Paul Kelly, Mini Co-Ordinator: David Baker, Youth Development Officer: Liam Hogan, Club PRO: David Kelly, Referee Liaison Officer: Brian Hogan.

**Seniors:** This was a good season for our senior side, who finished the season mid-table, and with a little bit of luck could have won promotion. The end of the season saw Camillus O'Meara hand over the coaching reins after three

great years at the helm. Camillus also coached the Offaly team for two years, winning the Leinster final in the first year buoyed by a core of Birr's finest.

**Youth and Minis:** The club fielded teams from under 8 to under 18. The under 12's were most successful retaining the Midland League for the third year in a row. This team also won the Plate at the Leinster Blitz in Coolmine. The under 14's had a good run in the Leinster Cup just losing out to eventual winners Navan at the quarter final stage.



### Birr Under 12 Rugby Team

*Back (L to R): Maxine Baranok, David Baker (Manager), Gerry Dooley (Coach)*  
*Middle (L to R): Ciaran Cooney, Shane Claffey, Jack Kennedy, Cathal Hogan, Ryan O'Meara, Graham Lynch, Conor Fitzgerald, David Kearns, Conor Guinan, Aaron Dolan, Sam Eaton, Oran Regan, Jack Baker, Pdraigh O'Brien*  
*Front (L to R): Liam Tierney, Rory Mounsey, Seamus O'Connor, Brendan Heffernan, Oisin Clarke, Peter Dooley, Stephan Carroll, Chris Pingree, Patrick Kelly, Martin Byrne, Niall Duffy, Dillon Patel, Luke Wells*



### Birr Under 14 Rugby Team

*Back (L to R): Reuben Noyce, Peter Kelly, Malcolm Campbell, Maurice Guinan, Dean Bracken, Mark Guinan, Michael Kenny, Pat Camon, Kevin O'Connor, Isaac Smith, Cathal Hogan, Jordan Parsons*  
*Front (L to R): Eoin Loughman, Daniel Smith, Garry Drought, Seamus Hctor, Donal Spain, Damien Gormley, Ronan Murphy, Shane Delahun, Peter Dooley, Mark Pardy*

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## BIRR CAMOGIE CLUB

Our club has gone from strength to strength over the past few years and reward came in the shape of the Junior Championship victory last season. We entered a new level, playing in the Senior Championship this season, so it was going to be a big challenge for a young team overall.

At underage level it was a case of building on all the great work being done at Primary School level in both Crinkill and Mercy Primary and many thanks to the teachers in both schools for their help. It was the first time for many years that Birr club entered teams in every competition run by the Offaly Camogie Board from U-12, 14, 16, 18 and Senior. Our U-8 & 10's played in Go Games and some blitz competitions throughout the season. Many thanks to Gail Spain and Deirdre Cahill who took care of these young girls, some as young as six and also all those parents who stay to attend the training sessions and give a hand out. Thanks to Birr Rugby Club for the use of their facilities for indoor training over the winter and St. Brendan's Community School over the summer months. We are deeply indebted to Crinkill GAA Club who continue to allow us to use their facilities. Indeed it is fair to say that without their assistance we would struggle to find playing facilities and while the younger players have to travel from the town to Crinkill, it remains our only option.

Our U-12 team did really well during the year and gained great experience with their games. They may only have won one game but the girls enjoyed themselves and numbers were steady all year and next season they will improve even more. So well done to all involved with these girls, notably Gail and Deirdre once again.

Our U-14 team was managed by Patrick Hoctor with the assistance of Gail and Deirdre as selectors. They started well with a victory over Tullamore but then were unlucky in three games losing narrowly but still qualified for a playoff against Tullamore again to reach a semi final. They were unfortunate not to reach a semi final but great credit to this team. They lost some players through the season due to holidays and injury but they always gave their very best on the day and played so well in the playoff. Some of the younger girls gained great experience.

The U-16 team was managed by Martin McCarthy and Patrick Hoctor. This group of girls have worked so hard over the past few years and hoped that this year they would make the breakthrough. They did everything asked of them both on and off the field and they reached the U-16A semi final against Tullamore. We made a mistake of playing with some of our key players away on holiday in what turned out to be a great game lost by a single point. The girls were bitterly disappointed and didn't realise the

progress they have made. Most of this panel is also playing U-18 which is still in progress at the moment.

Our senior team had a very good season. Moving up from Junior last year they played some lovely camogie this year. They were the only team to beat the winners of the competition, Tullamore, in their second game of the year. Reaching the Senior semi-final was great reward for this team who trained hard all year and with this continued determination will definitely be in contention again next year. Losing to Tullamore in the semi-final was hard to take on the day but this has made the team even more focused on what needs to be done to reach the final next season.

We entered a team in the Community Games again this year but they were beaten by Kilcormac/Killoughey who went on to represent Offaly in Mosney and brought home gold medals. Thanks to Crinkill GAA for use of their pitches all year for training and matches. This is greatly appreciated.

We had five players on the county U-14 panel who won Leinster medals. Well done to Caroline Soupe, Orlagh Kirwin, Rebecca Hoctor, Emily Quinlan and Shauna Carroll. We had four players on the county U-16 panel, Jane McCarthy, Sarah Pilkington, Julie Stephens and Gillian Molloy. Michelle Gleeson represented the club at county U-18 level. She also was on the junior county panel along with Sheila Sullivan and Arlene Watkins.

Many thanks to all our players who represent our club with great pride. Thanks also to all the parents who continue to support the girls by bringing them training and to games and also helping with fundraising. We may not have any silverware this year but it has been a very successful year in the development of the club. Thanks to all team managements and committee members who give so generously of their time throughout the year. We look forward to 2008.





***Birr Under 8's who played in the Camogie Blitz in Carrig in October.***

***Back Row (L to R): Megan Kinsella, Alannah Roddy Pardy, Doireann Erritty, Shauna Duffy, Ciara Nolan, Amy Carroll, Aoibhe Whelahan***

***Front Row (L to R): Caoimhe Abbott, Roisin Donovan, Alison Harding, Elaine Mullins, Courtney Dwyer, Brooke Whelahan.***



***Birr U-10 Camogie team who played in the Blitz held in Carrig in October.***

***Back Row (L to R): Aoife Hogan, Alannagh Duffy, Ciara Ryan, Sarah Lyons, Ali Lyons, Laura Kealey, Amy Lyons.***

***Front Row (L to R): Maricia Cleary, Jamie Spain, Aisling Garland, Ciara Murray, Niamh Horan, Linda Tyrell, Rochelle Patel***



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## WILMER TENNIS CLUB

The past year has been a very fruitful one for the Wilmer Tennis Club with success in the Midland League and a number of very successful events staged at the club.

The club had unprecedented success at Midland League level with the Division 2, Division 4 and Division 5 teams all winning their respective titles.

The first title was annexed by the all ladies Division 5 team. They took on Puckane in the final in Nenagh and it was a very close affair but the Birr ladies held their nerve to earn a deserved victory. Congratulations to team members, Ann O'Meara, Ann Quinlan, Ann Coughlan and Catherine Barry.

A few weeks later it was back to Nenagh for the Division 4 final where the Wilmer took on Athlone. Again it was a close fought final and was tied 2-2 after the regulation games so it went to a reversed mixed. The Birr pair came strongly at the finish to win that 6-4 and claim the title. The winning team members were Cathal Barber, Gary King, Noeleen Harding and Michelle Tierney, who subbed for team captain Karen Smith who was unavoidably absent for the final.

Nenagh was again the venue for the Division 2 Final and Abbeyleix provided the opposition on this occasion. It was another close battle with the singles being shared and Wilmer winning the mixed to take a 2-1 lead into the mens and ladies doubles. The ladies came from 8-3 down to level at 8-8 to take their match into the tie breaker but they lost that and the match was tied 2-2. Simultaneously on the next court the men were having a great battle in their match but they came from behind to win 9-6 and ensure a third title came to the Wilmer. Afterwards the Eugene Garvey trophy was presented to the Birr Captain Chris Collins. His colleagues on the night were Michael Costello, Claire Nee and Csilla Varga. This year the club introduced a regular social tennis night on Friday nights and it has proved to be an outstanding success. This is basically a fun night about every three weeks, where tennis is mixed with fun and entertainment and it attracted very good crowds right through the year. It was mainly about creating a good club atmosphere where people of different standards mixed together for an American Tournament and enjoyed refreshments and a chat in the clubhouse through the night. It brought together people who wouldn't normally play together and also helped members get to know other people within the club in a friendly and pleasant atmosphere. This was definitely one of the success stories of the year within the club.

The annual Open Week attracted a large entry and was one of the better open tournaments at the club in recent times. There was a great spread of entries from many surrounding clubs, including Athlone, Abbeyleix, Templemore, Roscrea, Puckane and Nenagh among others



*Winners of the Midland League Division 4 title. Front (l. to r.) Noeleen Harding receiving the trophy from Pat O'Gorman (Chairman Midland League), Michelle Tierney). Back; John O'Callaghan (Chairman Wilmer Tennis Club), Gary King, Cathal Barber, Tim Conway (Secretary Midland League).*

as well as an international flavour with players from New Zealand, South Africa, France and Hungary taking part. There was also a good local entry. The large entry could have been a major headache for the tournament director, with some very heavy rain on two nights and gale force winds on another but, with the excellent co-operation of the players, play continued and all scheduled matches were played. There were many fine matches throughout the week, many of them straddling midnight. Finals night provided some very enjoyable tennis in all events. Brian Mullins, after playing in goals for Offaly in Cork in the afternoon, rushed back to Birr and regained his singles title by beating Chris Collins and narrowly lost out with his partner Suzanne Dwyer in an exciting three set mixed doubles final to Pat Cleary and Helena Darcy from Puckane tennis club. Other Wilmer winners were Chris Collins and Michael Costello in the Men's 'A' Doubles and Michelle Tierney and Noeleen Harding, who won an All-Wilmer Ladies 'B' Doubles Final.

Prizes were presented afterwards by club President Kathleen Roe. John O'Callaghan, Chairperson, thanked all the sponsors, AIB Bank, Bank Of Ireland, Paul Barber Jeweller, Liam Butler Pharmacy, Chestnut Pub, Londis, Birr, Nigel Craughwell Auctioneers, Birr Credit Union, Birr Theatre & Arts Centre, GK Sports, Grant Engineering, O'Meara's Pharmacy, Mary Noonan Hedgerows, Smith & O'Mahony Opticians, Sportsman's Dream Nenagh, for their generous sponsorship of the tournament. John also thanked everyone associated with the tournament and all those who provided visitors and spectators with refreshments during the week.

## BIRR Year Review 2007



The Division 2 team being presented with the Eugene Garvey Cup. Front (l. to r.) Csilla Varga, Chris Collins, Claire Nee. Back; Pat O'Gorman (Chairman Midland League), Michael Costello, John O'Callaghan (Chairman Wilmer Tennis Club), Tim Conway (Midland League Secretary).

The Junior Open Week also had to battle some inclement weather, particularly on finals day when players had to be called off court for some time due to incessant downpours. Eventually all finals were completed and congratulations to all the winners and thanks to Brendan Mullins and his team for their great work running the event all week. Winners were as follows: Boys - U-12, Val Feeney defeated Brendan Heffernan; U-12 Plate, Ryan O'Meara defeated Liam Pingree; U-14, Robbie Pratt defeated Patrick Mullins; U-16, Robbie Pratt defeated Brendan Mullins; U-18, Brendan Mullins defeated Darragh O'Brien; U-14 doubles, Patrick Mullins & Conor Nolan defeated Val Feeney & Mark Nolan. Girls - U-12, Shannon Ramzan defeated Triona Cleary; U-14, Orlagh Kirwan defeated Shauna Carroll.

There was a great turnout in vintage costume for the annual Vintage Tennis tournament and a very enjoyable night was had by all who attended. The winner of the Best Dressed Lady was Cathy Owens while the Best Dressed Man was Darren McLoughlin. Thanks are extended to the sponsors of this event, Ann O'Meara, who judged the competition and also sponsored the prize for best dressed lady, Seamus Pierce, Manager Bank of Ireland, Birr, Glennon's and Liam Butler. Thanks also to the organisers Patricia Molloy and Grainne Cashen for the lovely array of prizes and for having the clubhouse looking so well for the occasion.

There were many other events at the club throughout the year including the inter firms tournament, club championships and Christmas tournaments, which ran successfully and provided good competitive tennis as well as lots of fun.

It has indeed been quite a busy and successful year at the club and everyone looks forward to an even better year in 2008.



Winners of the Midland League Division 5 title. Front row (l. to r.) Catherine Barry, Ann Coughlan, Ann Quinlan, Back. Tim Conway (Midland League Secretary), Ann O'Meara (Wilmer Captain) receiving the trophy from Pat O'Gorman (Chairman Midland League).

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## BIRR COMMUNITY GAMES 2007

2007 proved to be another exciting year for Birr Community Games. Although no medals were achieved at a national level, we had record numbers of children participating this year in events ranging from draughts to hurling, to name but a few.

Our most exciting event this year was the Boys U-11 Hurling competition. The team was successful in winning the county title, something Birr hadn't achieved in quite some time. It was a very tight competition in Offaly and the boys, under the guidance of Gary Cahill, Noel Russell and Ollie Nolan, secured the gold medal. They progressed through the Leinster competition with ease, beating Malahide in the semifinals. Unfortunately, they came up against a very strong team from Kilkenny in the final, held in Carlow, but none the less claimed a Leinster silver medal. Well done to the team-Craig Taylor, Ruairi Claffey, Cormac Kenny, Darragh Pilkington, Stefan Shalloe, Eoghan Cahill, Shane Donovan, Cathal Kirwan, Daniel O'Meara, Dylan Quegan, Mark Haines, Dylan Watkins, Jack Regan, Rian Dempsey, Ronan Murphy, Kenneth Taylor, Brian Hynes, Mark Nolan, Conor Daly and T.J. Talbot.

Unfortunately, due to the renovations on Birr Swimming Pool, our swimming entries suffered. However, this didn't stop a few determined swimmers from competing at a county level. Well done to those who won county medals, and to Pdraig Connolly who won gold in Offaly and represented Offaly in the National Aquatic Centre in the national finals.

The Chess and Draughts events drew a lot of interest from children of all age groups. The U-10 Draughts team won a bronze county medal, while the U-12 team took gold in the finals held in Rhode. They were unlucky in the Leinster quarter-finals meeting a very strong team from Westmeath. Well done to the team-Megan Shiels, Hannah McLoughlin, Anna Barry, Conor Guilfoyle, Stephen O'Rourke, Megan Lavin and Conor Lavin. The U-12 Chess team won a gold county medal with a very tight home victory. It was a nail-biting affair that came down to the last game! Who said Chess wasn't exciting! The team was unlucky in the Leinster competition, meeting very strong opponents in the first round. Congratulations to the team-Jack Regan, Conor Guilfoyle, Andrew Ryan, Patrick Parsons, Kerrie Byrne, Gillian Irwin and Megan Byrne.

A very successful year was had by our Art and Model-Making participants. There was a huge entry in our local heats and many of these went on to win county medals. Those who won gold went on to represent Offaly in Mosney. Congratulations to all for getting so far in the competition-Laura Sampson( U-8 art ),Conor Sampson (U-10 art ), Roisin Burns (U-16 art), Ciaran Cooney (U-12 art), Stephen Lyons (U-16 art), Katie Harding (U-12) model-

making), Orla Plunkett (U-10 model-making) and Jessica Spain (U-14 model-making)

Following their bronze national title in 2006, the girls U-14 camogie team gave a gutsy performance against a very strong Kilcormac/Killoughey team who, incidentally, went on to the National Finals. Hopefully these girls will come back next year as many of them are still underage.

The athletic events drew great crowds to our local heats, in Highfield Soccer grounds. Many thanks to them for their continued generosity. Birr did extremely well at the county finals and won the title of 'Best Turned Out Team'. All the team wore jerseys sponsored by John Gleeson and Birr Camogie Club. The boys U-12 relay team – Ronan Murphy, Niall Dolphin-Murray, Peter Corbett, Barry Hehir and Oisin Clarke, ran a great race in Mosney. Well done. Congratulations to the girls U-14 relay team, which also ran a great race – Shannon Quegan, Zoe Field, Bronagh Rigney, Jasmine Patel and Kirsty Patel. Also competing in Mosney were Clodagh Hanniffy (Girls U-10 Hurdles) and Ronan Murphy (Boys U-12 600m). They all gave 100% and ran their best. Well done. Thanks to their trainers throughout the year – Valerie Reynolds, Margaret Irwin, Catherine Barry, Tony Murphy and Marie Brady.



**Under 14 Girls Relay Team at Mosney**  
L-R: Bronagh Rigney, Kirsty Patel, Zoe Field,  
Shannon Quegan Jasmine Patel



**Under 12 Boys Relay Team at Mosney**  
L-R: Ronan Murphy, Peter Corbett,  
Niall Dolphin-Murray, Barry Hehir

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## BIRR GOLF CLUB

### MANAGEMENT AGM

A large attendance was welcomed by Chairman John O'Hare, to the Club's AGM on Sunday, December 3<sup>rd</sup>. Hon Secretary Mary O'Gorman, gave her usual detailed account of the years happenings in the Glens. She stated that the club had now over 1,000 members and that the Juvenile section was now in a very healthy state due to the great work undertaken by Kathleen Doorley and Bernard McGurk. Planning permission had been received for the development of the new lands and she looked forward to the day when various bottlenecks on the course will be no more. She welcomed incoming captains Billy Donlan and Yvonne Boland and Presidents Fintan Dolan and Mary D'arcy and wished them every success. The Chairman announced that Mary would be stepping down from her post and thanked her for being such an outstanding ambassador for the club and always keen to uphold the highest standards. A notice of the motion called on the members to approve the plans for the new land at Ballaghanoher. Jim McMenamain gave a power point presentation of the planned development and called for the members approval. The motion got an enthusiastic approval.

### EGM

A well attended EGM on Sunday, September 2<sup>nd</sup>, discussed at length many issues concerning the developments on the new lands. Noel Molloy, chairman of the development committee gave a detailed account of progress and replied to the many issues raised by members. These dealt mainly with the size of the lake, the fairway drainage, consultation with members and costings. Captain Billy Donlan noted that the members were delighted to see such progress within such a short space of time and he stated the committee would take on board the issues of concern to members. Work would commence on the replacement of the 9<sup>th</sup>, 10<sup>th</sup>, 11<sup>th</sup> & 18<sup>th</sup> greens towards the end of September.



*Tom Hayes receiving his Honorary Membership from Billy Donlan (Captain)*

### CAPTAIN'S PRIZE

Captain Billy Donlan's prize was held in mid – August. President Fintan Dolan noted that Billy was at the club on a daily basis and thanked him for taking on the difficult task of overseeing the developments in the club.

In replying Billy stated how appreciative he was of the work done by the members and staff of the club. He congratulated Joe Lyons on gaining an international cap and Stephen Grant for being selected for Leinster. The highlight of his year was standing on the 1<sup>st</sup> at Carnoustie at the British Open and hearing the name of Justin Keogh being called out. An unforgettable occasion. He congratulated all the winners and gave a special mention to Michael Yeats who romped home with his Captain's Prize.

### JUNIORS

Captains Simon Hogan and Niamh O'Brien attracted a huge field of competitors for their prize at the end of August. Vice Captain Paddy O'Brien thanked all who had helped out over the summer. He acknowledged the generosity of the sponsors and encouraged the juniors to continue on the excellent trails blazed by the many fine golfers from our club.

### LADY CAPTAIN'S PRIZE

Lady Captain Yvonne Boland ran her captain's prize over two days in July. Luckily the sun shone on both days which meant fine scores were returned by the large number of entries. In her speech, Yvonne expressed deep gratitude to the organising committee and thanked the course, bar and catering staff that made the day a resounding success. Yvonne Claffey, a very popular winner, stated how delighted she was to accept the prize especially on a day when Padraig Harrington's performance at Carnoustie left one breathless. Incidentally, Yvonne also won the Lady President, Mary Darcy's prize and also 'Golfer of the Year' trophy.

### THE GLENS TROPHY

Congratulations to the Birr Ladies who came through to claim the Glens trophy from a field of thirty teams from across the country. The team consisting of Mona Collins, Kathleen Doorley, Aileen Watkins and Ann McIntyre won over Mullingar with 10 shots to spare.

### CLUB FINALS

On Sunday 21<sup>st</sup> October the finals of the Loughnane, the Kenny, the Hackett and the Club Championship cups were played. The final of The Loughnane Cup was contested by the brothers Stephen and Kevin Brummell. Kevin pipped his

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*(L to R): Fintan Dolan (President), Mary Darcy (Lady President), Yvonne Boland (Lady Captain), Billy Donlon (Captain)*

brother on the 18<sup>th</sup>. The Hackett Cup, sponsored by Ulster Bank Midland Business Centre was won by Roger Byrne with John Connell as runner-up. In the Club Championship, sponsored by Cavanaghs' Foundry, Seamus Breen defeated Stephen Grant in a close contest. During a very busy year Captain Billy Donlon found time to play a little. In the final of the Kenny Cup, sponsored by Ollie Bergin, he won over Leslie O'Meara on the 17<sup>th</sup> and also collected Golfer of the Year. He certainly deserves the congratulations of all.

**TUDENHAM CUP VICTORY**

Congratulations to Michael Yates and his Tudenham Cup team on an excellent victory over Castle Barna in the final of the Mullingar sponsored competition. The final played at the Mullingar venue proved to be a close affair but Birr proved worthy winners at the finish. Interestingly the team had to win the hard way, as Birr had to play three out of five away in all the rounds. The team was: Séamus Breen/KP Kelly, Michael Yates/Jonathan Kelly, Robbie Sheils/Fintan Dolan, Pat Madden/Jim McMenamin and Albert Kelly/Leslie O'Meara. Also on the panel were Conor Murphy and PJ Lowry.

**SYMPATHY**

During the year the club lost many fine members; Donough Lempriere, Sean Corrigan, Rosaleen Guinan, Phyllis Houlihan, Paddy Hogan, Alf Regan, Michael Loughnane and Jim Loftus. I measc na naomh go raibh siad.

**HONORARY MEMBERS**

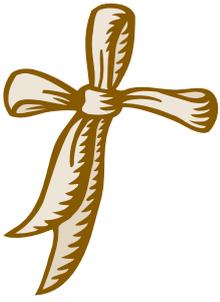
During the year the club was delighted to confer honorary membership on Tom Hayes, Justin Keogh and Joe Lyons.



*Michael Loughnane Scramble*

*Front Row (L to R): Fintan Dolan, Michael Loughnane Jnr, Mary Loughnane, Mary Darcy  
Back Row: Frank Horan, Noel Lowry, Mary Bolger, Eddie Nevin, Mary O'Gorman, Seamus Breen,  
Alan Naylor, Mary Ryan, Martina O'Brien, Billy Donlon.*

# MAY THEY REST IN PEACE



*Phyllis Houlihan*



*Peter Bruce*



*Rosaleen Guinan*



*Brendan Fanneran*



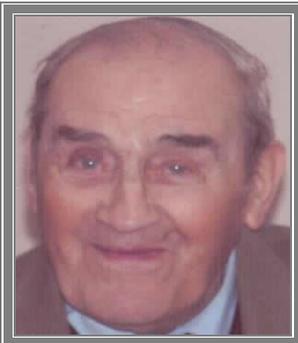
*Gareth Turner*



*Christine Brereton*



*Sheila Goonan*



*Christy Leake*



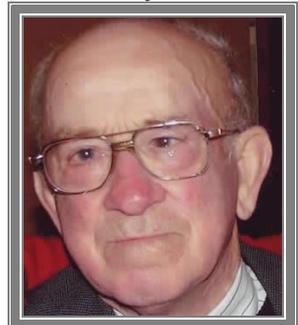
*Martin Mongan*



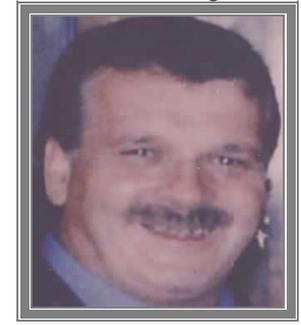
*Teena Purcell*



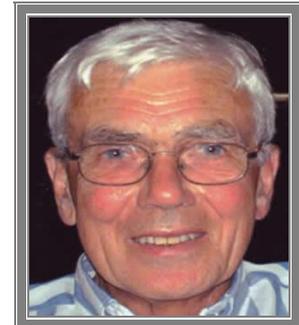
*Christy McLoughlin*



*Tom Pardy*



*Willie Kelly*



*Seamus Davis*



*Lil Egan*



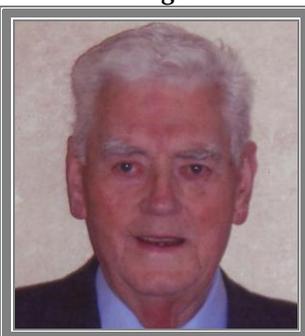
*Martha Hayes*



*John Hogan*



*Mary Cahill*



*Bill Eades*

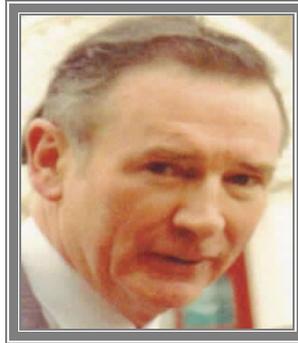
# MAY THEY REST IN PEACE



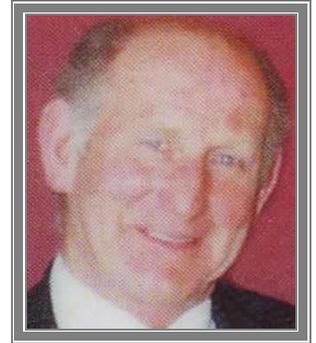
*Kathleen Spain*



*Martin McDonagh*



*Bill Carr*



*Sean Keenan*



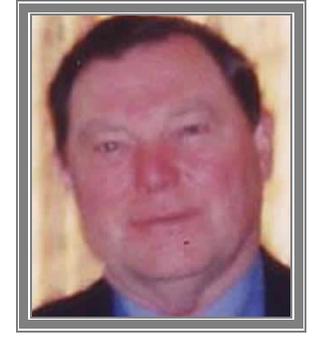
*Mary Pierce*



*Eileen Hawkins*



*Kieran Hourigan*



*Alf Regan*



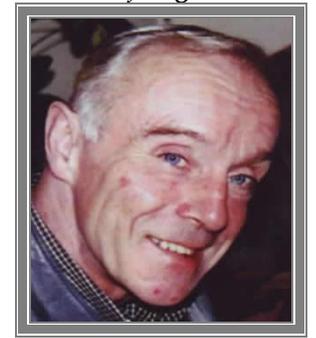
*Mary Murray*



*Sr. Dympna Forde*



*Mick 'Dom' Egan*



*Alan Cullen*



*Bernadette Turner*



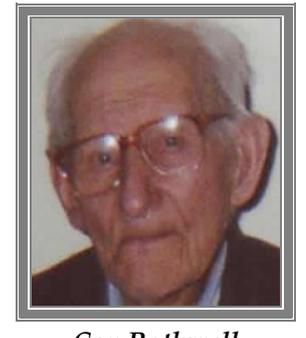
*Tim Clancy*



*Oliver Clarke*



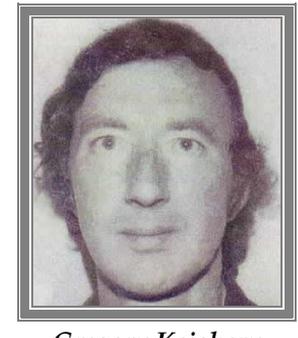
*Peggy Gallagher*



*Con Rothwell*



*Elizabeth Kirwan*



*Gregory Keighery*



*Sally O'Brien*

# MAY THEY REST IN PEACE



*Paddy Hogan*



*Elizabeth Dolphin*



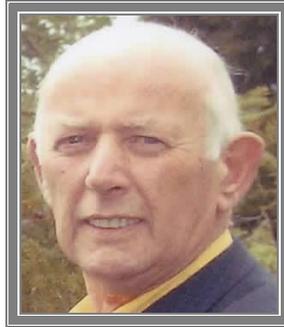
*Paul Coffey*



*James Tooher*



*Muriel Jackson*



*Michael Loughnane*



*Marjorie Joyce-Kelly*



*Jim Loftus*



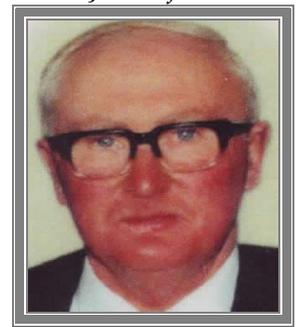
*Josephine Stickley*



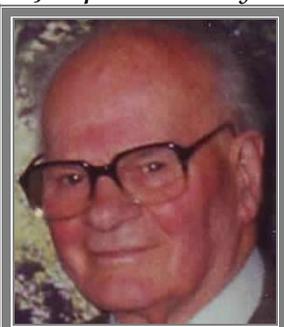
*Mary Ryan*



*Michael Hoare*



*Michael Quinn*



*Tom Maguire*



*Michael Roche*



*Mick Coogan*



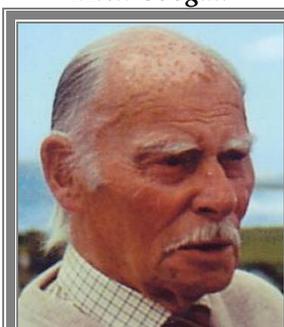
*Robert Millar*



*Tommy Hynes*



*Annie O'Brien*



*Robert Christie*



*Julia Trench*