

BIRR YEAR REVIEW



Volume 8 - December 2008

BIRR YEAR REVIEW 2008

Volume 8

December 2008

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Over the past seven years the Birr Review has documented the activities of the town on an annual basis. Within its pages are stories of life and people who live here past and present. This year, the eighth edition is no different. It could not happen without the good will of so many people in the production team but above all it could not happen without the cooperation of all those people who share their stories with us. We hope you enjoy the end product. Each year when our committee meet for the initial planning meeting we wonder how we will fill the book and each year we eventually have to leave out material and file it away for the following year. The amount of information about clubs and organisations reflects a very healthy community life in Birr. What also comes across is the huge amount of voluntary time which the citizens of Birr contribute to these organisations. We hope that the Birr Review goes some way to acknowledge this generosity. Please send the book to your loved ones at home in Ireland and abroad. The Letter we publish on page 27 is a poignant reminder of just how important such connections can be.

Michael Donegan
Editor



We have arrived at that time of year again with the Birr Review hitting our shelves. This year is no exception to others – we have produced for you yet another excellent publication, bursting with articles and photographs. On behalf of Birr Lions Club, I am delighted to acknowledge our proud involvement with the magazine. Every year the funds raised by the sales of, and advertisements in, the magazine have been used to support the aged, youth and underprivileged in our local community.

Great praise must be given to Michael Donegan and the entire dedicated committee. A special thanks to Emer Dolphin–Murray and George Manzor for their tireless contribution, above and beyond the call of duty!

I would like to take this opportunity to thank the business community and sales outlets of Birr and district for their continued support; also the clubs, societies and contributors and especially to YOU the general public for purchasing this wonderful publication. All that remains for me now is to wish Birr Review 2008 continued success.

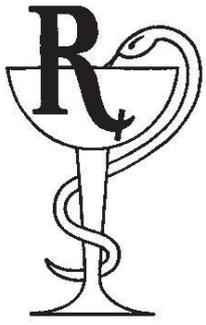
Denis Tierney
President
Birr Lions Club



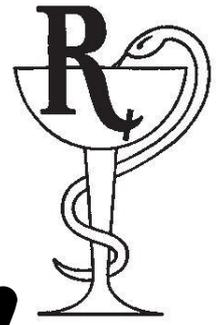
BIRR ANNUAL REVIEW COMMITTEE 2008

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

**Special thanks to Pat Cleary, Camillus King, Sean Hanniffy and The Cotter Family for photographs
Thanks to Mrs. Ann Dwyer, Mrs. Enda Manzor and Fr. David Carroll for all their help.**



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BIRR YEAR IN REVIEW 2007-2008

NOVEMBER 2007

A youth project was launched in Birr by Tánaiste, Mr. Brian Cowen at premises in Connaught St., Birr. Birr Youth Development Project, or SUB (Saol UI Biorra) project as it is known, is a Garda Youth Development Project funded through the Department of Justice and managed by Foróige.

Crinkill Tidy villages and Development Association won an endeavour award for Co. Offaly. This award is presented to the town or village that shows the most improvement on the previous year. They were up 17 points.

Birr Castle Demesne and Ireland's Historic Science Centre held a Science week for Schools, hosting a series of interactive exhibitions providing hands-on fun in a variety of scientific fields. Prizes were sponsored by Discover Science and Engineering, the official sponsors of this nationwide event.

Birr Stage Guild hosted a successful one-act drama festival over the October bank holiday weekend. Nine plays were staged over three nights. They were all excellent productions which gave adjudicator Garry Lombard plenty to think about before making his final decision.

Birr Council opted for an Eastern bypass during November's monthly meeting. The choice was for either a Western or Eastern bypass. The Eastern route was favoured by six votes to three votes. Going on the information provided by the Council executive it was obvious that the Eastern Route would be the right choice. It will be 2010 before work will start on the bypass.

Families from Birr and surrounding areas were spooked at Birr Castle on Halloween night when an overwhelming 340 children and their parents went around the gardens of Birr Castle to meet the deadly mummy, witches, the hunchback and Dracula.

Cllr. John Carroll said that he was delighted that Offaly County Council had secured funding for a study of possible uses for the Old Workhouse in Birr. This is thanks to the hard work of Amanda Pedlow, Heritage Officer working in liaison with the owner of the building.

The County Arms Hotel in Birr received an award of four stars from Fáilte Ireland. This is Offaly's first hotel to receive the award and a major boost for Birr.

Birr Rugby team defeated CYM Terenure in leafy Ballyeighan after a slow start to the season, the final score was Birr 36- CYM Terenure 5.

Birr Camogie team won the under 18's 'B' title in Clareen against Kinnitty, final score Birr 3-5 Kinnitty 0-4.

DECEMBER

Christmas lights were turned on in Emmet Square by Mundy. Santa also made an appearance with his Elves to hand out goodies to all who attended.

The annual Wilmer Tennis club tournament proved to be a very enjoyable occasion. The clubhouse was beautifully decorated and created a wonderful Christmas atmosphere as not just one but two Santas turned up for the occasion. A Budget 2008 briefing was held in Birr Technology Centre to provide local businesses and entrepreneurs with an overview of Budget 2007. Baker Tilly Ryan Glennon gave an extensive overview of how the Budget was affecting businesses and the self-employed.

Comhaltas Ceoltóirí Éireann reported a very busy and satisfactory year at their annual AGM.

Macregol Gospel Facsimile also known as the Book of Birr, the Rushworth Gospels and Bodleian Ms D2.19 was officially handed over to Offaly County Council from Birr Historical Society, at a reception held in Birr Library and Civic offices. This was a culmination of many years work by local historians and local interest groups to try and bring back home to Birr this rich and profound manuscript.

Birr Social club held a snooker tournament to raise funds for Birr Voluntary Nursing Unit. This was sponsored by Buckley's Super-Valu, Main Street, Birr.

A special patrons night was held in Birr Swimming pool. Patrons were given a tour of the facilities and provided with Christmas fayre afterwards.

What has now become an annual event in Birr, the GOAL mile was held on Christmas day.

Birr Town Council were praised for the work that they have accomplished in the past twelve months, by the Director of services Michael Roche who complimented both outdoor and indoor staff on their work.

Birr Community Hospital held its annual Old Folks Party, this event is organised by the Birr Lions Club for the benefit of the older members of the community. A great time was had by all, this was due to the hard work and attention of the staff of the Day-care Centre

Birr Scouts held a raffle at the Birr Bingo.

A combined Ecumenical message was sent from Fr. Tony Cahir, Rev. Colin Gracie and Archdeacon Wayne Carney.

Crinkill's regular turning on of lights and visit by Santa drew a good crowd this year despite the poor weather.

JANUARY 2008

Nanoclean, a clean room laundry business serving large microchip and pharmaceutical companies, based in Syngfield, Birr has been taken over by a NASDAQ listed company based in Minnesota. This is the US company's first investment in the Irish Market.

Birr recorded its warmest temperatures since 1949 in 2007 according to Met Éireann.

Birr Town Council was presented with a flag from Ipswich, Queensland, Australia by Fr. Michael Reddan on behalf of Mayor Paul Pisasale from Ipswich. Mr. Bob Green a friend of Fr. Reddan and resident of Ipswich where he was voted personality of the year brought the greetings of the Mayor with him when he came to stay in Birr.

Comhaltas Féile na Nollag was held in the County Arms Hotel. Three senior members were presented with Comhaltas achievement awards, Michael Smith from Cloghan, Nan Grimes from Knockbarron and Jim Kinsella.

The Wolftrap cycling club held a fitness class in Birr Leisure Centre for beginners or people returning to cycling for 6 weeks. This is being subsidised under the "Go for Life" programme.

Birr Theatre and Arts Centre has had its debt of €30,000 cleared by Offaly County Council. This was agreed at the 2007 budget meeting.

Birr Gardai are to return two officers to Pedal power. Laois/Offaly Garda division has purchased two Mountain Bikes for Birr in a bid to build relations in the community.

An undetected water leak in Birr has led to problems with the water supply to Birr residents. The council explained they are doing all they can to trace the leak.

'Colour Kinetic' art exhibition was launched in Birr Theatre and Arts Centre by artist, Aisling Morin. Aisling works with a variety of mediums including chalk, oil pastels, colour pencils and primarily acrylic paint.

FEBRUARY

Hollywood film scouts visited Birr Castle to see if it's a suitable venue for a major film based on the life of Mary Queen of Scots.

RTE Radio One's Ryan Tubridy officially launched the Birr Programme of Events 2008 at Birr Technology Centre and presented his radio programme live from Emma's Café.

Birr Chamber of Commerce in partnership with Shannon Development launched a new booklet highlighting the key attractions of Birr as a business and tourist location

As part of its 50th Anniversary Celebration, Birr Stage Guild plan to present a gala of excerpts from the best loved Gilbert and Sullivan musicals and auditions are under way for the chorus.

The annual black tie Ormond Hunt Ball took place in the County Arms Hotel.

The St. Brendan's Community School Parents Council made a contribution of €16,000 towards a new state of the art stage at the school.

The 40th Annual Birr Vintage Week and Arts Festival Committee aim to recreate the historic atmosphere of the town while celebrating its contemporary culture – they are recruiting new members to join the committee or help out at various events.

Having met and discussed the issue with Laois & Offaly IFA, Deputy Olwyn Enright hailed the Brazilian beef ban as a welcome step.

A Birr company Romaquip has been named as one of two firms which have won a €60 million contract to supply a new fleet of winter service vehicles for the United Kingdom roads.

Discussions took place at Birr Town Council regarding the suitability of Crotty's Church as a venue for a youth centre. Crinkill hosted the 2008 County Juvenile 40 x 20 Handball Championships.

The Birr Rugby Club Dress Dance was a great success.

The new cemetery in Birr located opposite the existing cemetery at Clonoghill has been blessed and opened.

A lucky selection of students from four local primary schools competed in the first ever Birr K'Nex Challenge hosted by Birr Castle Demesne.

The Tanaiste, Mr. Brian Cowen, opened the Citizens Information Centre in Birr.

A newly designed logo by Birr Graphic Designer Naomi Mooney sets a new image for Birr Castle Demesne.

Children's Opera Project "Bug Off!!!" was staged in Birr Theatre and Arts Centre in partnership with Opera Theatre Company, St. Brendan's Boys Primary School and Mercy Primary School and bass baritone John Molloy.

Birr hurlers faced old rivals and Ulster Champions, Dunloy in the All Ireland Club Semi-Final in Clones.

The Shannon Regional Fisheries Board has introduced a new trout conservation measure on its fishery river Camcor in association with the Camcor & Little Brosna Angling Club.

MARCH

Small amounts of cash were stolen in a number of burglaries in the area, two domestic premises in Rathcabbin and Hillside, Birr and houses in Riverstown and Lorrha and a further house in Military Road, Crinkill were broken into on 3 separate nights.

Congratulations to St. Brendan's National School who represented the Birr Credit Union in the Chapter 14 Annual School's Quiz Regional final.

Thanks to the team from Offaly County Council, a number of projects in Crinkill village have been completed including the planting of over 40 trees.

Midland League Schools Boys' u-14 Soccer Team – Tullamore 1 Birr 1.

A large crowd in the region of 250 was in attendance for the Bo Ju Kai Kick Boxing Tournament which took place in Birr Rugby Club. Some 104 fighters took part. Kick boxing is great for exercise and self defence.

A lecture on the first All Ireland Hurling Final took place at Birr library.

Excitement has been building in Birr and Portumna as St. Patrick's Day approaches. Supporters in both towns are eagerly looking forward to a great game of hurling.

The overall winner of the JFC Invitation Award for Rural Business is Ralph Haslam from Mossfield Organic Farm.

Birr Town Councillors paid tribute to Seamus Fanneran who retired from the Council due to ill health.

St. Brendan's Community School was given an opportunity to send six students to participate in an International School for Peace Studies Project in Messines, Belgium.

Congratulations to Birr Senior Hurling Selector Billy Mullins and his playing partner Jim Guilfoyle on winning the Leinster Masters handball title.

Congratulations to Niall Claffey on winning the AIB Leinster Club Hurler of the Year Award.

The final of the Birr Credit Union Ladies Spring League in the Glens fell victim to the foul wintry weather and had to be re-arranged.

Well done to all budding artists from Birr who participated in the Community Games County Final in Clara.

The Easter Bunny visited Birr Castle Demesne.

Members of the Birr team will be special guests at the Offaly Association dinner dance at the Regency Hotel.

Birr u-14 rugby team progressed to the quarter-final by defeating Rathoath 19-0 and they now play Dundaly.

APRIL

The Birr Community Nursing Unit celebrated the "remarkable lives" of our older people.

A proposed development of 159 houses at Syngefield which had been turned down by Birr Town Council has been given the go ahead by An Bord Pleanála.

The Youth Orchestra of the National University of Ireland, Galway performed at St. Brendan's Church of Ireland.

Price Waterhouse Coopers Players returned to Birr Theatre and Arts Centre to present "Babes in the Wood".

The lowest grass minimum temperature for the month of March – a reading of -10.9°C was recorded in Birr on March 18.

A group of Birr Pilgrims went to the Holy Land.

Birr Credit Union celebrated its 40th anniversary having been set up in 1968.

Arrabawn officially opened its new look premises on Croghan Road in Birr.

Birr Camogie Club beat St. Sinchills 2 – 8 to 1 – 2.

The launch of the Garda Siochana Strategy and Implementation Plan for Community Alert and Neighbourhood Watch Schemes took place in Dooly's.

Rickey Scully broadcast his popular Thursday night show on Radio 3 live from Kelly's of Green Street.

Birr businessman Stevie Grant received the Offaly Person of the Year Award 2008 at a reception held in Dublin.

The Ladies Winter League sponsored by Birr Credit Union in Birr Golf Club was won by Lena Guinan's Team on 137 points.

Midland Schoolboys' League Girls U-12 Birr 8–Edenderry 0. Councillor Ann Hynes-Spain raised an ancient problem – the traffic problem in Seffin.

Mundy's collaboration with Sharon Shannon on "Galway Girl" reached number 1 in the Irish Singles Chart.

Birr Tidy Towns plan to do a water feature on Mill Island and provide street furniture. They planted Whitethorn trees at Sandymount, Bridge Street and the Crescent.

The officers and members of Birr Fianna Fáil Cumann extended their warmest congratulations to An Tánaiste and Minister for Finance Brian Cowen, on his elevation to the position of Uachtarán Fianna Fáil and as Taoiseach designate.

Fine Gael Social and Family Affairs spokesperson, Olwyn Enright criticised the Government for their lack of action. The cost of living continued to spiral out of control.

Paul O'Brien, Concern's Overseas Director from Riverstown, Birr attended a reception in the Department of Foreign Affairs to celebrate the 40th Anniversary of Ireland's largest NGO Concern.

Patrice Delaney, a member of Birr Golf Club has been selected for the Irish International Juvenile Golf Team.

Birr and Crinkill GAA clubs reached a historic agreement. Both clubs voted in favour of the proposed agreement at a specially convened Emergency General Meeting.

Birr Town U-10 (soccer) claimed top honours defeating a gallant Gallen United side.

Well done to Billy Mullins and Jim Guilfoyle who defeated the Connacht Champions to win the Emerald Masters 'A' All-Ireland handball final.

Recession hits home as unemployment rises 37%. Birr had mostly men (659) signing on the live register.

An exhibition featuring the magnificent photographic work of local residents and other regular visitors to Birr Castle Demesne went on view.

Birr Town Council stated that Tesco should mark in some form the fact that the first All Ireland Senior Hurling Final in 1888 took place on the site of the new Tesco store.

MAY

The Birr Branch of Comhaltas unveiled details of their varied programme to celebrate their 50th Anniversary.

Bus loads of well wishers headed to Dublin on Wednesday, May 7th to see history being made as Offaly man Brian Cowen became Taoiseach.

Carmel Horan's charity CD 'I Know Who Holds Tomorrow' was launched in Dooly's Hotel.

There was a large turnout for the annual Birr Tidy Towns sponsored walk.

Birr artist Nicky Larkin exhibited his work at the European Media Art Festival in Germany.

Thousands of people gathered in Birr on Sunday, May 11th as Taoiseach Brian Cowen returned to his native county.

At a meeting of Birr Town Council, a presentation from the IDA 'painted a depressing picture' in terms of trying to attract foreign companies to the town.

Town Council Chairperson, Michael Loughnane Jnr, presented a plaque to Birr Stage Guild Chairperson, Maureen deForge, to mark the 50th Anniversary of the Stage Guild.

A public consultation meeting was held in relation to the

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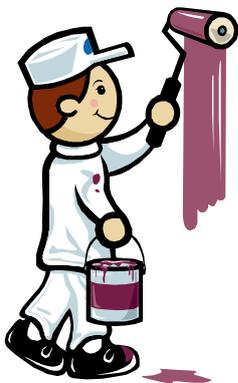
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Birr Town & Environs Development Plan 2004 to 2010. St. Brendan's CS, Birr student Elaine McAuliffe was awarded a scholarship to Germany based on her exceptional Junior Cert result in German.

Birr Gardaí crack down on juvenile drinking and seize large amounts of alcohol at Camcor Park and Sandymount.

It was reported that the provision of Day Care Services at Birr Community Nursing Unit could be hit during the summer by cutbacks in the HSE.

Birr Stage Guild marked 50th Anniversary with a special exhibition and publication of a commemorative magazine. The extension to the St. Brendan's CS, Birr Oratory was officially opened.

Birr Tidy Towns Chairperson, Cllr. Tony McLoughlin, expressed concern about 'dwindling community spirit' and he urged townspeople to become litter conscious.

Birr Girl Guide Aisling Guinan received a Gold Award for her work as Patrol Leader in the Birr Girl Guide unit.

JUNE

Figures released at the beginning of June by Met Éireann showed that it was the warmest month of May in over a century on record at Birr.

A room in memory of late Birr Librarian Violet Doolin was opened at the library by Offaly County Council Chairperson Eamon Dooley.

Set dancers were honoured during a big Set Dancing Weekend held in Birr over the June Bank Holiday.

There was a public meeting organised to highlight the need for a Skate Park to be developed in Birr.

HSE official Liam O'Callaghan gave assurances that the Birr Nursing Unit would not close during the summer months.

Cllr. Sean Doorley, Progressive Democrats, was elected Chairperson of Birr Town Council.

The Birr Civic Amenity Facility, located at Syngfield Industrial Estate, opened in early June.

In an electoral boundary shake up, it was announced that the Birr Electoral Area (Offaly County Council) is to lose one of its five seats.

The constituency of Laois/Offaly said 'Yes' to the Lisbon Treaty by a margin of 56% to 44%.

St. Brendan's Boys Primary School, Birr achieved its second Green Flag award.

Bishop of Killaloe, Willie Walsh ordained Fergal O'Neill to the Diaconate, on June 21st at St. Brendan's Church.

The Garden Sessions CD, recorded in Birr, raised €6,380 for the Offaly Hospice.

Birr singer songwriter Mundy performed on the Avalon Stage at the Glastonbury Festival.

Birr native Maureen Davy (daughter of Major & Mrs. Raymond Hoare, Birr) was named Midwife of the Year in the Northern Territories in Australia.

The Birr Skate Park Committee, chaired by Cllr. Ann Hynes Spain, was formed.

A number of local volunteers travelled to Belarus to work on the construction and repair of orphanages there.

There was a reunion of Birr Vocational School pupils and 211 people, including past pupils, partners and former teachers, attended the event in the County Arms Hotel.

JULY

The Mid Shannon Tourism Investment Scheme was launched by An Taoiseach, Brian Cowen TD, in Birr Technology Centre.

There was a fine turnout for the Blackbull Ladies Tractor Run in aid of Birr Hospice.

Cavanagh Foundry Ltd received their OHSAS 18001 award from An Taoiseach.

Sarah Bryant, the first female member of the British army to be killed in battle in Afghanistan, was the granddaughter of Crinkill resident, Mrs. Mae Feely, 13 Leinster Villas. She was the only daughter of Des and Maureen Feely, Carlisle, Cumbria.

Mrs. Margaret Loughnane planted a tree to mark the official opening of the refurbished County Arms Hotel. An Taoiseach Brian Cowen performed the opening.

An increase in the number of people on the live register saw Birr and Offaly labelled as 'a jobs black-spot'.

For the first time, a female Methodist Church Minister, Rev. E. Rosemary Lindsay, took up duty on the Tullamore, Birr and Athlone circuit.

The largest amount of methamphetamine ever recovered in Ireland was seized by Birr Gardaí.

Minister for Food & Horticulture, Trevor Sargent TD, visited the Organic Farm of Philip Dreaper near Birr, as part of a fact-finding visit.

John King (Director of Heritage & Tourism, Shannon Development) launched the programme of events for the 40th Birr Vintage Week & Arts Festival.

Birr's Padraic Grealy, Oxmantown Mall, finished the Ironman Switzerland competition in Zurich.

Birr business man Stephen Grant, of Grant Engineering, was part of a 40 strong group of past and present Ernst & Young Entrepreneur of The Year finalists who visited Haiti to impart expertise and assist local communities in the development of sustainable enterprises.

AUGUST

Mark Rode, an Australian artist was chosen to create a commemorative hurling sculpture to be displayed at the new Tesco development at the Railway Rd. The Tesco supermarket is being built on the field where the first Senior All Ireland Hurling was played in 1888. The Tidy Village and Development Association in Crinkill is to be complimented on the work it has undertaken to enhance the centre & the village.

Birr's 40th Vintage Week got off to an excellent start when the weather remained dry for the duration of the parade and other activities on its opening Sunday. During the week there were exhibitions, displays and other events to cater for all interests. A Stained Glass Trail, a new series of photographs of the Georgian doors of Birr,

numerous art exhibitions and the very successful fireworks display were enjoyed by many.

During Vintage Week, Derek Fanning launched his CD, 'A voice of Birr.' All proceeds of this CD go to Offaly Hospice. Birr Lions Club, Birr Credit Union, Friends of Birr Community Nursing Unit & Connolly Motors presented Birr Community Nursing Unit with a Renault Megane Scenic. The patients using the unit benefit greatly from the Unit having its own car.

Eileen Casey formerly from High Street, Birr launched her collection of poems, 'Drinking the Colour Blue' at Birr Library and Civic Offices.

The Irish Game and Country Fair took place for the second year on the last weekend in August in the grounds of Birr Castle Demesne. Large crowds attended and enjoyed the many displays and exhibitions. These included clay pigeon shooting, fly casting, gundog trials, medieval re-creations, jousting and weaving.

SEPTEMBER

Congratulations were extended to the Birr players who were part of the Offaly Minor Camogie team that defeated Waterford in the Minor 'B' All-Ireland.

Birr Community Games were well represented by their swimmers and track and field athletes at the National Finals. This was the last National Finals to be held in Mosney as in future the event will be held in Athlone. An art exhibition titled 'Flora Birrensis' took place from September to the end of 2008 in Birr Castle Demesne. It featured botanical paintings from some of Ireland's leading artists in the field.

Birr players on the Offaly junior camogie team who lost by one point to Clare in the All Ireland Junior Camogie Final were praised for their gallant performance in the hard fought final.

Ralph Haslam won two awards for his Mossfield organic cheese at the Great Taste awards 2008.

'Mundy' (Edmund Enright) finished the recording of his fourth studio album, ready for release in early 2009.

Birr singer/songwriter Orla Gibbons features on the new album 'The Nature of Flaws' launched by Peadar King a singer/guitarist from Inisboffin.

The Parents Association, Board of Management and Birr Town Council deserve great praise on the completion of a new set down area and entrance at the Mercy P.S.

Fáilte Ireland announced funding of €12,690 for development of a historic walking trail in Birr.

Birr U-12 camogie team beat Kilcormac/Killoughey in the Offaly 'B' final.

The newly refurbished facilities at Crinkill Handball Club were officially opened by an Taoiseach, Mr. Brian Cowen.

The Gwalia Singers, a Welsh Male Voice Choir, performed at the Birr Theatre & Arts Centre and also at Sunday Service in St. Brendan's Church of Ireland Church on the last weekend in September. Their performances were much appreciated by those in attendance.

Tesco opened its new store in Birr at the end of September. The store will create 90 jobs locally.

OCTOBER

The Dept. Of Arts, Sport and Tourism announced a much welcomed grant of €55,000 for the purchase of new equipment for Birr Outdoor Education Centre. Birr beat Kilcormac/Killoughey in the SHC semi-final to reach a record 10th consecutive Offaly Senior Hurling Final. The work of nineteen Midland artists went on display at the Birr Theatre and Arts Centre, from October to December. The exhibition is named 'Common Ground'. A day-long seminar on the Faddenmore Psalter was held in Birr to discuss the importance of the find in July 2006.

Birr Comhaltas held a 50th anniversary celebration where they acknowledged the contribution of a number of people to the promotion of Comhaltas and traditional music over the years.

Bishop Willie Walsh presided over a Thanksgiving Mass on the occasion of the refurbishment and restoration of the Church of the Annunciation, Carrig.

Birr Credit Union held a celebratory dinner to mark the 40th anniversary of its founding.

Birr Town FC Underage held a presentation night.

Congratulations were extended to the Birr U-16 Camogie team who beat Tullamore in the 'A' final.

Birr U-14 hurlers also won their 'A' final when they defeated Ferbane/Belmont by a comfortable margin. Birr Senior Hurlers completed four in a row when they defeated Kinnitty in the County Final.

Birr senior rugby players played their first home league match of the season on the redeveloped Scurragh pitches. The government announcement that decentralisation projects are put on hold until 2011 was met with much disappointment in Birr.

A group of artists connected with the Birr Mental Health Association held a successful one day art exhibition and sale in Birr Theatre & Arts Centre.

Birr Chamber of Commerce plan to bring back the French Market to the town for Christmas.

Stephen Grant, founder and managing director of Grant Engineering won a national Entrepreneur award in the industry category of the 'Ernst & Young Entrepreneur of the Year Awards 2008.

The involvement of the Leinster Regiment of Crinkill Barracks in the liberation of the Belgian town of Ledegem in 1918 was commemorated there recently.

'Secret Essence' Health and Beauty Clinic, Main Street, was awarded 'Yon-Ka Paris Salon of the Year'.

Birr woman Mary Ann Kelly tells her story of emigration from Birr in 1959 to the US in the book, 'Coming Home', which was launched by the Minister Micheál Martin TD.

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

OVER 40 YEARS IN THE CLASSROOM

By John Curley who retired from teaching after 40 years on the job

In my final year in the Vocational School, we were all advised to apply for an apprenticeship, so in January 1960 I applied for jobs advertised in the local papers. At the beginning of May I was offered an apprenticeship as a maintenance fitter at a local factory near the town of Ballinasloe, close to my own home. I was delighted with the news and started work as a trainee on May 16th of that year. The management was good enough to allow me time off, to finish my exams in June.

I settled into work easily, the job was good and the work interesting, every day brought about a different challenge. Personally I counted myself lucky to have a job near my home. Later I was offered other jobs including ESB, Eircom, and Bórd na Móna but these jobs necessitated staying away from home and the cost of accommodation would have been almost twice the weekly wage of a 1st year apprentice.

During my trainee years, two nights per week were spent at school. During that time Block Release did not exist. I completed my Trade Exams on time and remained on doing Decorative Metalwork as a hobby at night. It was at this time that the school Principal suggested to me one night that I should consider becoming a Metal Work teacher. My first inclinations were "No I don't want to be a teacher" but he highlighted all the good things about the profession and suggested "you should have a go anyway." After a bit more thought I, once again, found myself doing exams and interviews.

In September 1966 I relocated to Dublin to begin the two year Dept. Education training course for Metalwork Teachers at the Technical Institute, in Ringsend. The next two years were tough, with practical work as well as theory, which included some late nights. As Irish language was a part of the course we were required to spend some time in the Gaeltacht perfecting our Irish language. We had a great time there and needless to say we learned more than the cúpla focal.

During the summer of 1968 with the college course and exams finished I started a day job again, this time in Smyth's Garage of Harcourt Street, sole agent for Renault at the time in Dublin. There I gained more experience working on cars and this would prove to be of great value to me. In August 1968 I applied for teaching posts that appeared in the papers.

I did one or two interviews, and to my surprise one Friday at lunchtime my land-lady told me that there was a phone message for me. It transpired I was being offered a job in Birr if I wanted it. On 1st September 1968 I started work in Birr as a new teacher.

The Vocational School as it was then was a medium size with six rooms in the main building and a number of pre-

fabs. There were ten staff members and about one hundred and eighty students. The school had a pleasant laid back atmosphere and everyone got on well. School days were from 9.00 a.m. until 4.00 p.m. but staff very often stayed later and combined the last tea break with meetings to plan ahead for the following days. Block release courses for apprentices and night classes were very much part of school life at that time.

In 1969 the Intermediate Certificate Examination came on stream in the school with changes in most subjects and the new maths syllabus was examined for the first time. In 1971 the first state exam for Leaving Certificate Engineering, Technical Drawing and Construction Studies was held. These new subjects required training and much of this took place at night and over weekends.

The school began to grow with more student numbers and I found myself getting involved increasingly with sport and games in the school. Many hours were spent accompanying the students to match fixtures and I soon knew all the highways and by-ways of Leinster. This, while often tiring, was a worthwhile experience for both students and teachers, in particular when some past students went on to achieve All Ireland status at senior hurling level.

In 1972/73 there was growing un-employment in the country with industries closing down and Birr did not escape this either. So ANCO (now FÁS) set up training centres in the Vocational Schools to help the un-employed learn new skills. Three teachers from the school John Fealy, Tom Gavin, and myself facilitated these courses, which proved a great success with most of the participants finding new jobs and some people going on to start their own business.

During the mid seventies I was involved a lot with Adult Education and for the next number of years I was busy most nights organising and facilitating night classes, as well as doing my day classes. In 1980 the three schools in the town amalgamated and in January of that year the doors of St Brendan's Community School opened for the first time. The new school provided a greater choice of subjects and life as a teacher, though busier, was always challenging and enjoyable. Even with three times the number of staff and students everyone managed to work together.

The greater choice of subjects to all students brought about some positive changes to engineering and metalwork as a subject. For example for the first time there was more opportunity for girls to take up engineering. Some of the notable achievements during

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the following years include the first female student in Ireland to take engineering to Leaving Certificate level, the first female student in Ireland to qualify as a metalwork teacher, a number of past students winning awards at different levels in national competitions: - 1983 Young Engineer of the Year, and in 2002 overall 1st place in the country, Engineering at Leaving Certificate level. Further changes have taken place within the subjects of Engineering and Technical Drawing. I have in more recent times been involved with University of Limerick giving training on the revised changes taking place in the subject every year. The use of the computer is now very important in the class room as a teaching aid. Between St Brendan's C.S. and the Vocational School I have found teaching a very rewarding job. There is no

doubt that times are better and when people sometimes ask me are students different now than in the seventies my answer is almost always no! But society has changed, and there are many pressures now and expectations are much higher both for students and parents, making life more difficult at times for everyone.

On September 3rd 2008 I left St Brendan's Community School for the last time thus bringing to an end over 40 years in teaching. I have to say that despite the odd bad day I enjoyed it all, met some wonderful young people, parents and colleagues along the way who have contributed to this life and it makes me say "Yes, I would do it all again".



The first class John Curley taught in the Vocational School in September 1968 (Class 3B)

Back Row (L to R): Joe Davis, Liam Dunphy, Ger Hegarty, Finbarr Ryan, Michael Sullivan, Billy Gleeson, Brendan Flaherty

Middle Row: Eamonn O'Meara, Kieran Dooley, Gabriel Lally, John Heenan, Martin Keane, Joe Dooley

Front Row: Jack Egan, Colm Dunphy, Dermot Cusack, Paddy Bergin, Eddie Nolan

Right: The last class John Curley taught in St. Brendan's Community School 2008 (2nd Year Technical Graphics)

Back Row (L to R): Cian Rowntree, Gary O'Brien, James Carroll, Nathan Stapleton, Oisin Lyons, Aidan Ryan, Bryan Donnelly, Emmet Nolan

Front Row: Declan Cordial, Iona Nicole, Emma Hart, Erin Byrne, Ann Marie Guinan, Serena Pilkington, Mhuire Kennedy, Andrew Browne, Mr. John Curley





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"1968-2008 40 YEARS SERVING THE COMMUNITY"

BRINGING HOPE TO THE STREETS

By Aoife Carroll

Aoife Carroll is the daughter of Brendan and Martina Carroll, Poulmagannive. She was educated in the Mercy P.S. and St. Brendan's Community School. She is currently studying medicine in Trinity College and during the summer she took time out to go to India to work with street children.

This summer I volunteered with The Hope foundation in Cork. The Hope foundation work with impoverished children in Calcutta/Kolkata. The organisation aims to reach out to as many children as possible, to give them the chance of a better future and a brighter tomorrow. The organisation was established over twenty two years ago when a Cork woman, Maureen Forrest was travelling in India with her husband. Being shocked and appalled by conditions and poverty on the streets of Calcutta, she vowed to return home and take action. Since then, Hope has gone from strength to strength thanks to Maureen, her fantastic team working in both Cork and India and to those who give of their time to raise funds for such a worthy cause. The Hope foundation, an Irish organisation, raises lots of money each year through its sponsors, fundraising activities, Irish schools, organised walks, etc. This money is used in India to support many different NGO's working on the ground to help those in need. Hope is involved in funding over fifty different projects. These include two girls' homes, a boys' home, several Nabadisha's which are drop in centres for street children, a children's hospital, coaching centres, a centre for addicted children and many more initiatives.

The term street children refers to children, and often their family, for whom the street has become their real home. It includes children who might not necessarily be homeless or without families, but who live in situations where there is no protection, supervision, or direction from responsible adults. They are abandoned children who rely completely on the streets for survival, nourishment and protection.

During my time in Kolkata, I volunteered in the Nabadisha's. These are drop in centres where children can call in during the day to play, learn and interact. Most importantly they provide a safe haven for these children all of whom live on the platforms nearby, maybe the odd child coming from a local slum. Abc's, numbers, colours, fun and games are all part of the Nabadisha's, just like any Irish playschool. The only difference being the children do not return in the evenings to nice homes, warm dinners, toys and hugs. Many begin their days work begging and selling on the street, many are abused physically and mentally. Life is very tough. The needs are great and the stories are heartbreaking. One night when travelling around Calcutta the Night Watch team came upon a little child dressed in rags lying on the pavement next to her grandmother. Maggots were

attacking the open wound in her head. She also appeared to have symptoms of chicken pox. This vulnerable, little girl needed immediate hospitalisation. For many hours the ambulance drove her from one hospital to another and was rejected each time on the grounds of overcrowding or the fear of infection from the child. Poverty has no mask to hide behind and the label 'street child' carries a heavy burden. As the night wore on there was little choice but to admit her to a private hospital. With time she made a full recovery.

The sad story is always the same for the 'street child', constant neglect, rejection from government hospitals and agencies, no help, no hope and no future. This awful situation prompted the Foundation to look into the possibility of opening their own hospital, especially for underprivileged, impoverished children and their families. The hospital, funded by Weight Watchers Ireland is now up and running and providing for those most in need.

Fully equipped diagnostic centres and an out patients department occupy the ground floor. Two 15 bedded wards and an operating theatre fill the remaining stories of the building. The fifth floor in the hospital is being developed as a special unit for children suffering from infectious skin diseases. Most of the children living on the street and slums suffer from skin diseases e.g. scabies, which is infectious. These children are not accepted in any government hospital. The hospital is a wonderful facility for the children which I was delighted to visit during my



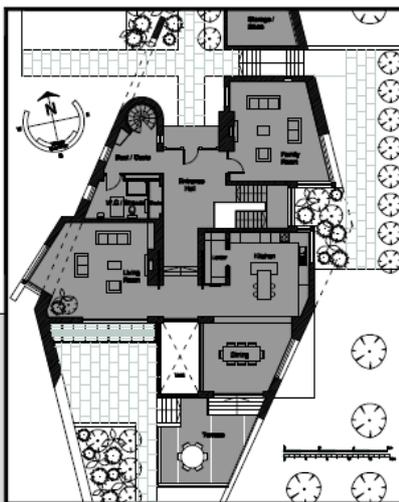
Aoife with some street children

Hector Smyth

Architecture & Engineering



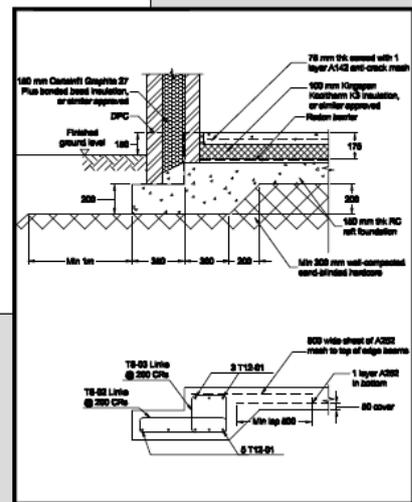
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Hector Smyth is an Architectural and Engineering Consultancy based in Birr, Co. Offaly. The consultancy was established in January 2007 by Shane Smyth, a qualified Architect, and Kieran Hector, a chartered structural Engineer, in order to bridge the gap that traditionally exists between planning stage and construction stage. By providing both disciplines in-house the client profits from a better quality, cost-effective and efficient service.

In its first two years of operation, Hector Smyth has secured planning permissions for projects in Birr and other areas of Offaly such as Rath, Fortal, Banagher, Cloghan, Ballyegan and the Blue Ball, along with applications lodged in North Tipperary, Laois, Kildare, Galway, Dublin City, South County Dublin and Dun Laoghaire. Typical projects have included single houses, crèches, offices, renovations and extensions to dwellings and protected structures.

To date, the consultancy has achieved a 100% record in securing planning permission for all projects on the first application.

Visit Hector Smyth's website at www.hsdesign.ie for more information.

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**(e) info@hsdesign.ie
www.hsdesign.ie**

Directors: Shane Smyth B.Arch, Dip.Arch Kieran Hector BSc.Eng, Dip.Eng, CEng MIEI

stay in Calcutta.

Calcutta is a city of many contrasts. It is the capital city of the Indian state West Bengal. To some it is the city of Joy, to others it is overcrowded, dirty and poverty ridden. It is home to some 15 million people, some who come in search of work and food and live in the world's poorest slums or on the city streets.

The railway is also home to many children and their families. With a steady flow of people passing through daily, the children come in the hope of food, money and shelter. Howrah station is one such station with over two million people travelling through daily, making it the busiest station in the world.

Substance abuse is a major issue for these children, as young as four and five. They sniff glue to fight off the hunger pangs. Many children become victim to train accidents, they fall unconscious after taking drugs, fall under a moving train and are killed or seriously injured. One such child is Dipak, an eleven year old boy who had both his foot and hand removed when he fell under a train. He is

now living in Punooiban, one of Hope's homes which provides for addicted children and offers emergency protection.

As funds are always in short supply for the Hope Foundation, it was a requirement that each Volunteer raise a substantial sum of money prior to travelling to Calcutta. This money is then used for very worthy projects and goes directly to the children's aid. As part of my fundraising activities I wrote to practically all the business owners in BIRR and I was overwhelmed by their kindness and generosity. I would like to take this opportunity to sincerely thank all those who contributed and assure them that their money was used to directly help the children of the 'streets'.

Anyone that might want to make a donation, they can send it to me at 'Sandyvalley' Syngfield, BIRR and I will forward same to the aid workers in Calcutta or send directly to the Hope Foundation.

Should anyone like to know more about the work of Hope please take a look at www.hopefoundation.ie.



Staff at TESCO, BIRR on opening day 26th September 2008

Back Row (L to R): Damien Gleeson, Naomi King, Tara McNamara, Anthony Lanipekun, Paul Nassri, Patrick Grimes, Michael Keane, Nigel Wrafter, Michael Bracken

Middle Row: Laura Hogan, Amanda Coughlan, Helen Loughnane, Grace Stapleton, Anne Eaton, Debbie Sharpe, Rosalind Brack, Deirdre Corrigan, Martin Cox, Lisa Nolan

Front Row: Stephen Shiels, Marie Coughlan, Niamh King, Tiffany Cruickshank, Majella Robinson, Catherine Betts, Kelly Hogan, Sandra Murdock, Cynthia McNamara, Jenny Dunne, Bernie Abbott, Gary O'Regan



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MARY COWEN – BIRR'S FIRST LADY

In conversation with Richard Kennedy

As well as being very good company, Mary Cowen immediately impresses one as being a kind and thoughtful person. This is evident from the way she spoke of others, in her recollections of her childhood and her family.

She is also utterly proud of and protective of her family, and at your peril do you breach that fortress. As a demonstration of this, there was the occasion during last summer when a journalist had insinuated their way, incognito, into the company of Brian and a friend during the family summer holidays. When the journalist finally revealed their identity, Brian turned to them and said, "If I was you, I'd get out of here before Mary gets back". And they took his advice.

Mary's parents Jackie and Viney Molloy ran a grocery shop and public house in Connaught Street in Birr, and it was here that Mary was reared and lived until she left school. Sometimes the rest of us overlook the significance attached to Connaught Street by those who grew up there. Until the changes in recent years, this street was almost an enclave unto itself, and the families who grew up there wore, (or to some of us, flaunted) their background as a source of pride "I have lovely memories of my childhood in Connaught Street. It was a great street to live in and we had great fun growing up there. It really has changed a lot since I lived there. A lot of the families have gone now.

I remember there was Paddy Conroy and Mabel, his sister, they used to make fish cakes when we were kids and they only became fashionable again in the last couple of years. Mabel was very friendly with Mrs. Bowes down the street. Then there was Nora Dooley or 'Miss Dooley' as we used to call her. Your parents would give you a clip on the ear if you did call her Nora.

There was Stephen Sherlock and Mrs. Sherlock who had a shop and Tea-rooms down there and Mrs. Reedy was another lovely lady and Rita Molloy, another legend in the street and then of course there was Mrs. Shaw who lived down beside Eileen Kennedy. There were so many of these families and businesses in the street that have gone without trace, and it's really not so long ago.

You had McGraths, they're all gone out of the street. Hanniffys are gone and the only one I suppose there is Declan Phelan's which would have been Jack Talbot's Shop, so there is some continuation there. Then there was Scullys the far side of the road. I remember Jim Scully. He used to come out in the street with a big beard on him and we were a bit frightened of him when we were younger. There were the Carrolls, Jimmy and Johnny. Jimmy used to work in CIE and they lived in one of those houses near Mrs. Bowes. There was a great sense of community in the street, even for the children. We never



Mary with her mother Viney and husband Brian on his triumphant return to Birr as Taoiseach

had to go out of Connaught Street to play because no matter when you went out there was always someone there to play with. It was a great street when we were growing up because you had all the other families, the McGrath's, the Smyth's, the Nolan's, the Kennedy's and of course our own family, my sisters Martina, Ann and myself. I remember Frank McNamara when he was a guard here in Birr. He was a real tough guard and he'd be coming around the bank corner or Egan's corner and you'd be gone like forked lightning because you'd either be playing rounders or football or doing something in the street that you weren't supposed to be doing.

My other fond memory of my childhood was the time spent in the sports field. I lived in the sports field when we were growing up, every Sunday we'd be there. When Offaly was going well in the 80's there was hardly a Sunday that I wasn't in Croke Park.

I think I inherited my love of the GAA from my father. He used to hurl for Birr years ago and my uncle Michael was very involved in the pitch down there. Our pub was very much a GAA pub, and listening to all of the talk in the pub when I was younger I'm sure must have sparked my interest as well. I also got to know all the characters that came in to the pub.

I remember people coming in to our shop and pub from the country by pony and trap. Ms. Langley used to come in from Riverstown with her pony and trap and get her messages. I can remember my father's uncle Ned coming in. I can remember Mrs. Nolan's uncles, Tom and Mick Kennedy, who used to come on a tractor on a Saturday night for their messages and bring them home in a big sack. They'd come in and have a few drinks in the bar and leave the list into the Grocery and they'd have a few small ones before they went home. They'd lift the bag up over the shoulder then and off they'd go home.



Childhood Days

Mary(left) with her sister Ann

Growing up in a bar and grocery business in a small town was a lesson in life really. We knew everybody that came in and out of the bar, spoke to everybody and it gave us great communication skills. I think it was a great upbringing and I do think certainly being born and reared in a business was good for all of us. We mixed with everyone. From the time we were young, we were washing glasses and sorting out bottles. It gave us a work ethic and a sense of responsibility. Everyone put their shoulders to the wheel and did their bit. I think that my time with the nuns in Birr helped to reinforce that work ethic for me. They weren't easy on us,

I wasn't aware of their qualities at the time. Often when I was there I thought – O God, do I have to be in this place, do I have to do all these things? But as I matured, I could see they were good people doing their best for us. Sr. James taught me in Sixth Class. She was tough but made it her business to treat everybody equally. Looking back I can see that she was preparing us for a life that was not all a bed of roses. In secondary school I met a lovely woman called Sr. Immaculata. Sr. Anne, and later Anne Joyce taught me Irish. Margaret Hogan taught Art and the History of Art. She was good fun. I made great friends in secondary school in Birr and still meet up with them from time to time.

After I left school I did a secretarial course and then I went nursing for a while in Galway. I soon realised nursing was not for me. I went to work for Telecom Eireann in Dublin and stayed there for ten years until I got married.

I first met Brian at a Fianna Fáil function during the by-election of 1984, shortly after his father died. My father would have been a staunch Fianna Fail supporter. I actually remember the first time I voted, I was 18. Dad took me to the Town Hall, John's Mall to vote at the local elections and told me "now make sure you put the X down along the FF's."

While I really appreciate the influence of my father in my political loyalties, I wouldn't want to put too much pressure on our two girls with regard to any political choices they may make in the future. Politics, and especially Brian's election as Taoiseach has made a huge

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impact on our lives and I think it is very important for me to keep a normal home life for them as much as possible."

Mary in recent years has become very involved with Dóchas, Offaly's Cancer Support Group. "Yes I'm very involved in it. I'm on the Board of Directors and very involved in the fundraising. I volunteer for one day every week. We have good volunteers that go into the centre between Monday and Friday to meet the clients that come in. We make a cup of tea for them and chat with them or just clean up or do the shopping for them. I got involved with Dóchas when they asked me to launch a Canal-Run fundraiser. At the launch one lady told what it meant to her to be able to come in and have a cup of tea on a bad day and have someone there to listen to her. I decided there and then to help with fund-raising. With my friend Sheila McDermott we decided to do a ladies lunch and are now in our fourth year of this. It's a huge event, a big commitment and brings me in to contact with a wonderful group of people from all different walks of life.

The centre provides counselling, reflexology, reiki and more for the client. There is a new house that is there to house these facilities and this has to be paid for. I love being involved in it and it's really very dear to my heart."

In the past year the changes which have come about for Mary and Brian and their family, following Brian's election as Taoiseach have been immense, and yet, and perhaps not surprisingly, the family has remained securely grounded throughout.

"Our girls, Sinead and Meadhbh are very good about the whole thing and I'm delighted with them and very proud of them but they get on with their own lives too. When they came home from school on the day that Brian was made Taoiseach-Elect they were saying "we're not moving to Dublin Mum. Don't even go there" They were putting down their ground markers.

We did consider whether we should move to Dublin but our feeling was that Brian would like to think he could get out of the city on a Friday evening and back to his own house in the country. He didn't want to move to Dublin and I certainly didn't want to move to Dublin. There is also the question of protecting the privacy of our family.

As a family we value our privacy and I would say that since Brian's election as Taoiseach there has been an unwelcome intrusion by the media. I'm not that kind of a person. The privacy of our family life is very important to me. I have no problem if I'm out there with Brian in his official capacity as Taoiseach and I'm there as his wife. I think that private family arrangements such as holidays are off-limits. I am not thick skinned and such intrusions do upset me at times.

People are surprised to hear me say that Brian's election as Taoiseach happened much earlier than expected. We came back from holiday on the 25th March and within a week he was leader-elect. That's how quickly it happened. I had sleepless nights and I'd wake up and pinch myself and I'd say is this really happening. People said "you knew



it was going to happen" but I had thought it would be possibly two years away when Bertie would retire.

We were all in a state of shock for a few weeks up to the day that he was actually appointed Taoiseach. It was a huge occasion for us all. It was a very memorable and lovely day. My nicest memory of that day was coming out onto the lawn in Leinster House and seeing all the familiar faces from the county, just to see all those people and all so excited about what was after happening.

It was such a big occasion and there was so much going on that a lot of it went over my head at the time. I was in the Dáil chamber for most of the day for the formalities, and then we went up to the Phoenix Park. When I came out and saw all the people it was just lovely for me. Meeting the President was such a special occasion for all of us especially for my mother and Brian's mother. I thought it was lovely because it was such an opportunity for them to go there. Later that evening when the excitement had passed it was nice to sit and talk about it all with family and friends. The next day my aunt and a couple of my friends came over to the hotel where we were staying and chatted for about 4 hours. I got the low-down from them on all the bits that I had missed as I was nervous and anxious during the actual ceremony. I had been trying to make sure that everyone else was ok and was being properly looked after. It was lovely now to get the full story".

In spite of all of the transformations in her life, and the challenges which have been presented to herself and her family, Mary gives the impression of composure and serenity, with a sense of humour and a sense of proportion which keeps it all in perspective for her.

And for Mary one of the mainstays in her life will always be her memories of and connection to Birr and all of its associations of family and friends.

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CRINKILL BARRACKS – A BRIEF HISTORY

By Derek Coulter

After the invasion by General Humbert to the west of Ireland in 1798, the British Army started a building programme around the country.

In this area, a Martello Tower was built in Banagher at the Galway side of the bridge. Meelick Tower is on the Offaly side and Keellog Battery is downstream. In Shannonbridge, the fortifications were built on the Roscommon side. These fortifications were built to prevent any foreign army crossing over the Shannon and into the east of the country. Around the country, Military Barracks were built.

Birr was selected as a site for one of the Barracks because it was only two and a half hours march to Banagher and also, at that time, there were 40 officers and 1,000 men in temporary accommodation in the town. In 1805 Lord Rosse received letters about the need for a Barracks in Birr and he proposed a site at Drumbane or Crinkill. Crinkill was decided upon and in February 1808 a letter in Kilmainham Papers indicates a survey in Crinkill. Crinkill was leased at £300 per annum. It was not the first time that a military fortress was built in Crinkill. In the 14 acres part of a fort is visible on aerial photographs, but on the ground no features are seen. Aerial photography shows the outline of two sides of a square or rectangle fort, with a demi bastion at the north west corner, a redan or triangular projection evidently central in the west side and part of a second bastion or demi bastion. (See *Irish Sword*) The Ordnance Survey map of 1838 and 1909 indicate only a quarry on part of the site, the excavation of which most likely destroyed the other two sides of the fort. This quarry has since been filled in as the site is relatively level ground. This fort was possibly connected with military activity at Birr in 1642, 1650 or 1688-91.

The building of the barracks began in February 1809, took three years to complete at a cost of £42,500. It was built by Bernard Mullen who built Ballyeighan House from the bonus he received on the barracks. (The Barracks was scheduled to be built within 4 years and he rented it to the army for one year for a reputed sum of £10,000.)

The Barracks was built in duplicate, having been built for two Battalions. In 1812 it could accommodate: 1 field officer commander, 3 field officers, 39 officers, 14 staff sergeants, 1140 NCOs and privates, 30 officers' horses. Another 500 men could be accommodated in the 14 acres under canvas. The accommodation stated is on a peace establishment, to be doubled in time of war, 224 half barrels of powder, 60,000 gallons of water supplied by water from the quarry pond, from the roofs of the buildings and from the well in the Barracks.

The Barracks was lit internally and externally by gas from its own gasworks. It had its own sewerage works north east of the Barracks. It had its own hospital with 12 wards and 112 beds. The original building did not include the



Army Camp in Crinkill Barracks

church, school or gym as these were not shown on the 1838 Ordnance Survey six inch map of the area. Indeed the time between 1812 and 1862 is not recorded well, but we know that in 1831/32 only 2 field officers, 15 officers, 368 NCOs and privates and 26 hospital beds were occupied in the barracks.

The Church (Church of Ireland) was built about 1860 and it also served as a school. It was built of cut stone. In 1863, the Improvements Commission made recommendations to build its own sewerage treatment works and gas works.

The school was built about 1872 following an Act of Parliament making compulsory the attendance of all children at school. The gym was also built at about the same time.

The register of the garrison shows that there were 562 baptisms between the years 1864 and 1921. With regiments coming and going all the time there was a big turnover of men and families. The average length of stay was 1 year.

The military cemetery was opened in 1864 when the first recorded burials took place. Between 1864 and 1887 110 burials took place but there were many more after that up to 1921. In the cemetery today, there are 64 headstones. Memorials to the officers are in Birr Church of Ireland church. Roman Catholic baptisms and funerals took place in the local church and burials took place in the local cemetery.

There was a memorial to the Duke of Connaught at an opening between the barracks and the fourteen acres which reads: ***This stone marks the spot through which the Duke of Connaught passed on the 3rd of April 1877 on his way to present the New Colours to the 59th Shropshire Regt.*** (this is now in the Historic Science Centre at Birr Castle.)

There was a rifle range approx. 2 miles north of the barracks and regiments came to shoot there. The road between Whiteford Cross and Syngefield was constructed to shorten the route for soldiers marching to the range.



The Barrack Square

In 1881 the Leinster Regiment was formed and their Depot was based in the barracks. The depot occupied one half and the 2nd Battalion occupied the other half. The 2nd Battalion moved out in 1885 and other regiments came and went.

The monument beside the church bears the following inscription: **This monument was erected by the officers Warrant Officers Non-commissioned Officers and men of the 3rd Batt. Leinster Regiment In Memory of their comrades who were killed in action and died of disease in South Africa during Embodiment between 18th January 1900 and 26th May 1902.** A list of 12 names were listed on it, 1 officer, 4 NCOs and 7 privates. (this monument was later moved to the graveyard where it is still there today.) During World War 1 recruitment in Birr resulted in a constant flow of recruits for the first 18 months of the war. After that time there was a steady decline. Nearly 6,000 men were recruited in the Depot area. Training for the trenches was carried out in the 14 acres where trenches were formed for tactical exercises. In 1917 an aerodrome was built in the 14 acres and three 'planes were kept there. On 29th March 1919 the first air crash recorded in the area occurred when a Sgt. Allen was killed. The plane crashed into Crinkill House, south of the Barracks.

After the War, the Depot garrison aided the civil power in North Tipperary and in the Birr area. Following the Anglo-Irish Peace Treaty, the British Army issued orders for the removal of the Leinsters from Crinkill. The Barracks were handed over to Capt. Felix Cronin on 13th February 1922. A few weeks later, the IRA came into possession and about 300 of that body were in occupation up to the beginning of April 1922. When the Irish Army split developed the section of the troops who approved of the Treaty (styled Free-Staters) were compelled to leave the building, which thus came into the possession of the 3rd Southern Division, whose occupation terminated with the historic burning of the Barracks on the 14th of July 1922.

When the British Army marched out of Crinkill for the last time all they took with them were the regimental silver and

awards won on the sports field or on the rifle range. (This silver is now in Canada) They left all the cutlery, linen, pianos, and furniture. On the burning of the Barracks, looters stripped it of everything that they could find. Leading citizens of Birr pleaded with the Irregulars that to destroy the Barracks would destroy the Birr economy, but alas, the pleas went unheeded. Thus the ill-fated building was burned from one end to the other simultaneously. Little is recorded about the burning of the Barracks in the two local papers of the time, only a bald statement that the burning took place. This was indicative of the state of affairs that existed in the country, with two opposing Republican forces preparing to launch into a bloody Civil War over the signing of the Anglo-Irish Treaty of December 1921.

In the 1940s (during the second world war) a survey was carried out to examine the feasibility of rebuilding the Barracks. However the stone had suffered from the heat of the fire and the foundations were in a poor state because of underpinning carried out in the early 1900s.

Little now remains of the Barracks at Crinkill. The perimeter walls still stand but only fragments of the original buildings still survive. The clock tower was demolished in 1985 as it was considered to be in a dangerous condition.

The church was the only building not destroyed by fire. It was dismantled and the cut stone was used in the tower at Mount St. Joseph, near Roscrea. A private factory, Grant Engineering, now operates within the barrack walls. A section of the barracks is still owned by the Department of Defence and until recently was used for training by FCA personnel and now used by Crinkill GAA. Crinkill Handball Club also have alleys there. The remainder of the barracks is in private ownership.

In May 1964, a stained glass memorial window designed by Michael Dunne was erected in St. Brendan's Roman Catholic Church in Birr in memory of the Leinster Regiment. It was unveiled by Field Marshal Earl Alexander of Tunis. It was unusual that a British Regiment should receive such an honour in a Roman Catholic church in Ireland.



Parade Ground in Crinkill Barracks
(another view)

MICHAEL MADDEN – A MAN OF MANY INTERESTS

By Michael Donegan

One of the best known inhabitants of Birr must surely be Michael Madden. He was born 80 years ago on the 24th June 1928 to be exact, above the family business in 29 Main Street and he has lived in the town all his life since. His family had originally come from Roscrea where they had a business not far from the railway station. Indeed Michael remembers his father singing a song he had heard soldiers from the Birr Leinster Regiment singing as they waited for the Dublin train to take them to fight in the Boer war in 1900.

'...Goodbye to old Ireland, We're all going away
To fight the poor Boers in South Africa,
To fight the poor farmers we are not inclined,
So God be with you old Ireland
We're leaving behind...'

His father had qualified as an accountant in 1909 and after working for a few short years in Dublin he returned home to take over a shop left to him by an aunt, Mrs Kelly, in Birr. Afterwards the family were known as the 'Kelly Maddens' to distinguish them from other branches of the family. Michael was delivered by Dr. Houlihan, a first cousin of his father and the grandfather of Jim Houlihan, solicitor, of John's Mall. The shop was a thriving grocery business with a big yard. There was a bar at the back and the farmers would often have a drink there while their wives shopped in the front grocery area. The lane along side, which connected the Main Street with Back Lane, was called Shambles Lane and contained the remains of nine houses. Michael remembers an old resident of the lane, Mrs. Quirke, listing out all the trades that had been carried on there in the past. Trades long since extinct, such as candle making, coopering, and soap making. Michael was the only boy in the family so it was natural that he would inherit the family business when his time came. He has clear recollections of his early school days. First as an infant in Miss Hill's class in the Convent school and then as a pupil in the Brother's school in Moorpark Street. Once when Miss Hill was leaving the classroom she put Michael in charge and when she came back and found the place was in uproar she scolded Michael. But he took the talk off her by replying '... Sure how can I keep them quiet when you can't?' When he crossed over to the brothers he remembers a Brother Celestine and a lay teacher called Mr. Cotter from Cork who lived in Rosse Row. Michael didn't like Irish at school but was very fond of Art and Mathematics.

He had three sisters who were older than him and all are alive and well to this day. Mary is the eldest. She emigrated to England, married an Englishman and then moved to Canada. She is now in a nursing home in Montreal. After her move to Canada the family lost contact with her for

almost 60 years. About 15 years ago while making a visit to see Eithne, another sister in Portland Maine, U.S.A. Michael researched her whereabouts with the help of the Canadian Embassy. Since their reunion he has visited her in Canada and has had her home to Birr on several occasions. She is now 89 years old. He regularly rings the nursing home where she stays and they

have long chats about Birr and their childhood. Nora, Michael's second sister, lives in Dublin. She is a hale and hearty 86. Olivia Mitchell T.D. is her daughter. She proudly carries on the Fine Gael political line begun by Michael's father and continued by Michael all those years ago.

Eithne who lives in Portland Maine U.S.A. was a doctor and married a doctor. One of their daughters is a heart specialist while another son is psychologist to the American Olympic team.

As a boy Michael helped in the shop and although he was not supposed to, sometimes even served alcohol in the bar. At that time each publican had to bottle his own stout and spirits. Bottles were reused and Michael remembers washing up to 300 dozen bottles in preparation for the Christmas trade. A pint of porter cost 9 old pennies in 1938. The shop had its own labels for the bottles and some years ago he was amazed to get a photo of a pub front in San Sebastian in Spain with an exact copy of the label carved into its marble façade. The photo was brought home to him by Billy Delaney from Roscrea who was there on his honeymoon. Michael has no idea how his label could have been copied and used

in this way in Spain. He never liked bar life and in 1950 he closed the bar for good and opened an off-licence in its place. This proved to be a very wise move as off- licence trade was to far surpass any bar trade. He would later specialize in South African wines and his customers came from far and near. Even the monks from the



Michael with his father in
Bray in 1944



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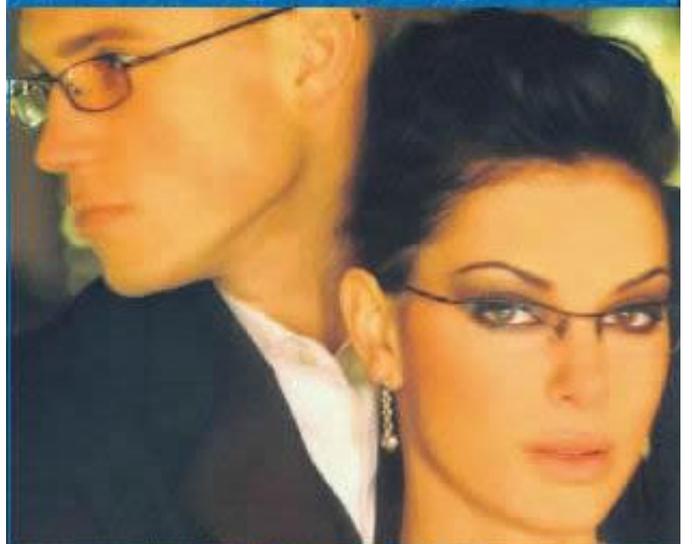
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monastery in Roscrea sought him out for wine for their guest house.

The shop was to prove a thriving business when Michael took the helm. He remembers leaving Birr at five in the morning to buy fruit, vegetables and fish in the Dublin markets and being back in Birr with the produce for sale by eleven o'clock. On one occasion coming up to Christmas he saw that turkeys were only making 1/9 a lb in the Dublin market. Michael knew that they had been costing 3/- a lb in Birr the previous Saturday so he bought the entire consignment there and then hurried home to get them plucked and ready for sale. He sold the entire lot almost immediately at 2/9 a lb and made a handsome profit. It helped that Mrs. Kennedy of Kennedy's Hotel bought twenty of them in one lot! Michael always loved dealing with people and as the years went on he diversified the business into selling fishing rods and tackle. He was always a very keen fisherman and even owned a fishing lodge at Victoria Lock on the Shannon so that he could be near the river. Sadly this is now in a vandalised state and unusable. The highlight of his fishing career has to be the evening he caught over 74 lb of salmon on the river Moy. That evening he was with Harry Warren, Noel Lowry and Mick Meagher and they fished in an absolute downpour with thunder and lightning crashing about them. Afterwards they drove home to Birr soaked to the skin having no change of clothes with them.

Michael's father died in 1966 after serving for 43 years as a Fine Gael member of Birr U.D.C. Michael then took his seat and was to serve for another 17 years. Those were busy years. He had always been active in various clubs and organisations in the town and had been treasurer of many of them such as the Game Club, Cycling Club, Athletic Club, Fishing Club and Golf Club, G.A.A. Club and C.Y.M.S. He had an interest in cycling as a result of the influence of Garda Sergeant Lynn who lived in Newbridge Street and as a young man won a few novice races. He can recall that Birr Athletic Club produced two all-Ireland champions. Andy Monaghan as a 10 mile runner and Sean Murphy as a 120 metre hurdles champion. Joe Mc Cormack was also an all-Ireland cyclist. Michael was a founder member of Birr Vintage Week along with people such as Gerry Hoare and Brendan Murphy. Eventually the constant round of meetings and events took its toll and he decided to resign from the Council in 1983. Things weren't helped by the fact that he had two bad falls sustaining serious injury to his legs. One of these occurred when he was putting up election posters during the 70's and the other when he was out at his fishing lodge at Victoria Lock.

Michael's mother used to say that she '.... had reared three daughters but her son was the best cook...' and how observant she was. Apart from fishing Michael's other great passions are cooking, jam and cake making and gardening. Since he sold his business in the 90's he has really developed these interests. He can't resist buying



**Michael and his mother (left) with two customers
– (c 1969)**

cookery books. Last year he made 27 Christmas cakes and is now in the middle of this year's supply. He makes hundreds of pots of jam, marmalade and chutney. Last year alone he made 200 pots of his speciality 'Whiskey Marmalade'. He usually gives these away as gifts to people as he doesn't believe in making profit from his labour of love. His back garden is a mass of beautiful flowers and from his poly-tunnel he supplies tomato plants and geraniums to all and sundry. His other great love is dogs. He used to breed Labradors and always had a few good dogs in his shooting days. Nowadays he breeds miniature Jack Russells and likes to have a few playing about at his feet as he moves about the house. He usually goes out three nights a week playing cards to halls in Shinrone, Carrig or Rath. He misses his friend Bill Owens from Moorpark Street who always brought him to Clonfert to play. There are always callers to the door and everyone is given a hearty welcome and invited in for a chat. Michael still sells fishing rods and tackle and takes great pride in kitting out young people at cost price. On one occasion last May he was delighted to see 15 boys fishing at the Chapel Bridge with rods he had supplied to them. For thirty years he has had responsibility for issuing fishing licences in Birr and is always well informed on all the best fishing.

Michael Madden is a contented, active man with tremendous powers of recall. He has a busy lifestyle and a very positive outlook on life. His house is a little like 'The Old Curiosity Shop' which Charles Dickens wrote about. It is full to the door of all the articles of his various interests. There are barely enough hours in the day to cater for all his activities. Long may he continue to have the health and stamina to enjoy them.

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LIVING YOUR DREAMS

An interview with Michael Daly, Birr's international tennis coach.

Michael Daly is son of Maura and the late Mick Daly of Burke's Hill. Growing up in this area (adjacent to the Wilmer Tennis Club) it is not surprising that the young Michael quickly gained a lifelong love for the game of tennis. The Wilmer Club then, as now, was very youth centred and here Michael quickly honed his natural talents for the game.

He fondly recalls beginning his career at the age of seven, under the guidance of the late Liam O' Callaghan. To this day Michael is also loud in his praise for the enormous help he received from the late John Joe Sheeran and the club committee. For the next sixteen years his Irish career went from strength to strength until departing for the U.S.A. at the age of 23. This new life began in the bleak 1980's when emigration was very much part of life for young people in the midst of an overwhelming economic depression.

Michael has great memories of tennis victories in Nenagh, Kilkenny, Limerick and Castlebar, just to name a few of the locations he travelled to. Pride of place goes to his victory in the National Junior Championships at Malahide, in 1982. In the senior final he managed to defeat Paul Casey of Riversdale, in what was described by the national media as 'a fine match'. The 1980's also saw wins over Davis Cup players Robbie Dolan, Conor McCullough and Liam Croake. Few younger Birr people today probably realise their fellow Birr man was at that time ranked number one in Munster and number ten nationally. It is clearly an achievement any small town would be proud of.

A coaching career that began in Birr at the end of Michael's junior playing days led to a coaching career in the U.S. This gave him an opportunity to travel with his tutees to tournaments in Mexico, the French Open and Wimbledon. As a youth Bjorn Borg was Michael's tennis idol. He is very proud of the fact that he coached David Hull who played Borg, at Longwood Cricket Club, Boston, when Borg returned to the professional circuit.

Among his pupils over the last twenty years Michael has the satisfaction of coaching many players who have received full scholarships at top American Universities. These players in turn have achieved topmost honours in the academic and tennis fields. One player even went on to reach a top five U.S. junior ranking, going on to win many top level tournaments during her career. Jill Craybas (Michael's most famous student) achieved the distinction of being the only player to win NCCA titles with two colleges. In 14 years she has achieved a ranking of 39 in the world, with wins over Kim Clijsters and even Serena Williams at Wimbledon.

In conclusion Michael expressed his wish to thank many in



Michael looks on as his student hits a forehand

Birr who nurtured and made possible his dream career. In particular he is loud in his praise for the Wilmer and Ormond Tennis clubs in the town and the local schools for getting him off to a good start in life. He also wishes to remember his good friends Michael and Patt Grogan for giving him the encouragement at a key moment in life to pursue his dreams. Michael has enjoyed his world travels but still loves coming back to Birr to visit his mother, sister Mairead, her family and his many friends. When asked if he had any advice for the youth of his native town Michael simply says 'Dream big and chase it'.

Mr. J. McEvoy,
15 Vista Court,
Raynalla 5161
South Australia
11. 7. 2007

Dear Editor,

I have been given your Birr Annual Review for 2006 by a friend who comes from Crinbill and resides here. I also come from Birr and left there in 1952. Through the years I have tried to keep up with whatever news I could get from Birr and the rest of Co. Offaly.

I thoroughly enjoyed the Review although a lot of the people named in it I did not know. I did however know some of them. I would like to subscribe to your next Review and to know if you post them overseas. I am prepared to pay all costs by money order.

Good luck for the future
yours sincerely
J. McEvoy.

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BETTY DWYER - MEMORIES OF A BIRR CHILDHOOD

By Michael Donegan

Betty Dwyer is a true born native of Birr. She was born Betty Bowes in Connaught Street and spent her childhood and youth there during the 1930's. There were eight children in her family, four boys and four girls. Betty's father was Lar Bowes and he worked with his own mother, Grandmother Bowes, in the fowl and game business in Main Street. Grandmother Bowes was one of the very few people to hold a game buying licence. She turned this to good use and had a thriving business buying rabbits and pheasants and other game and passing them on to the markets in Dublin and London. Mrs. Gilmartin used to say that Granny Bowes and Mrs. Madden were the only two 'ladies' in Birr because they each owned a fur coat. As a young man her father had served with the British army during the First World War and had even done a tour of duty in India. At one point he considered going to England to become a teacher. His sister aunty Birdie was a school teacher in Manchester and this may have influenced him but after being accepted for training he changed his mind and decided to stay at home.

Childhood for Betty was a very happy time. The street was like a play ground. She remembers friends such as Meg Smith, Eileen Leake and Sheila Hegarty with great fondness. They played ring-a-rosy and skipping and hopscotch on the street and footpaths and were welcome in everyone's house along the street. There were great neighbours who shared whatever they had. The Smiths, Bowes, Kellys, Carrolls, Winters, Dooleys and Reidys lived close by. Mary Kate Shaw, daughter of Mrs. Kelly baked bread on an open fire for sale and the aroma of it cooling outside on the window sill filled the street. Johnny Carroll worked in Shepherds sweet shop in the square and brought them home a treat of toffees from time to time. Mr. Winter, another neighbour escorted them to Mass every Saturday morning and brought them for a walk afterwards. On Sunday Grandmother would arrive soberly dressed, to bring them back to the church for 'Evening Devotions'. Their games took them running through the doors of Kate Day's pub, now Nolan's and up Dooley's Lane. Sometimes they stopped to watch Mr. Dooley making coffins in Reidy's lane. Sandymount was a favourite haunt. With a few pennyworths of sweets in your pocket there was no better place to be on a fine summer's day. Swimming in the river was a real treat. Better still was an evening of winter snow for sliding down the hill. Jack Grimes up at the end of the street had a pet monkey. He had got it from a fellow who worked in Myles' Chemist. It had originated in Africa and was called Jacko and no one was quite sure how it had found itself an exile in Birr. Betty remembers her father and Billy Winters borrowing Jacko once. They were entering in a fancy dress



parade in the Sports Field as Robinson Crusoe and his servant Man-Friday. She can't remember if they won a prize but it must have been an exotic sight for Birr in 1939. Billy Grant ran a travelling Bazaar every so often in the Banba Hall in Church Lane. This was a very exciting place to be for adults and children alike and everyone looked forward to it eagerly. Betty can still picture the beautiful tinted glassware and sets of delph which were put up as prizes in the raffle.

Her first teacher was Miss Hill. She remembers her fondly as a gentle, good-humoured plump woman, full of warmth and kindness. The children addressed her as Inion Cnoic and loved to listen to her stories. She was the only lay teacher on the staff of the Mercy Primary School. School was generally a very happy time for Betty. The nuns ran an orphanage and the girls from the orphanage also attended the school. Betty often sat beside them and felt very sorry for them. She felt they had a hard lonely life. Friendship wasn't encouraged between them and the local children. Apart from school they were never let out with the exception of regimented walks on Sunday during which they were not allowed to talk to anyone.

Christmas was always a time of delight for the children of the street. Betty and her sisters and brothers went down to Granny Bowes in the afternoon to exchange gifts and be treated to lots of goodies. Then later that evening there would be a party and sing-song in Winter's house which continued late into the night. Party pieces were sung in turn and her father played the piano and accordion. Betty remembers one Christmas when she nearly brought

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disaster on the whole day. Her mother had been up very early to prepare the turkey for the oven. The bird was left on the table in the scullery, beautifully buttered and stuffed. Betty decided to look for something in the press overhead. She reached up but in doing so knocked a paraffin lamp. The lamp oil fell on the turkey and everything was ruined. She remembers her mother feverishly trying to rescue the situation by running hot water over it at the sink with everyone looking on in dismay. They were all afraid of what her father would say when he found out but when he came in and saw what happened he was very calm and good humoured about it all. He consoled Betty and her mother and pointed out that between the ham and the spiced beef there was more than enough to make a fine dinner. The turkey was thrown out and forgotten about and everyone had a great day in the end.

Aunt Ellie lived in Roscrea and there were also some cousins in Nenagh. Sometimes during the school holidays it was a great treat to get over to visit them and maybe even stay for a few days. On those occasions her mother might hire a hackney car from Connaughtons in Moorpark Street or they might travel by train from Birr to Roscrea. Their uncle Billy Parkinson worked at the railway. Aunt Ellie was married to Frank Hynes who also worked in C.I.E. and because they didn't have any children of their own they took a great interest in Betty and her family. Aunt Ellie was a talented seamstress and supplied them with beautifully made Communion dresses when the need arose.

Betty has always had a great interest in the Stage Guild and is still a very active member though she always prefers to work in the background at costuming and wardrobe. Over the years she has come into contact with many people and made many friends through the Guild. She especially enjoyed meeting the many young people who trod the boards and has high praise for their courtesy and kindness to her during the shows. Her sister Sheila Dillon is a member of Rathcabbin drama group and Mary McLoughlin (Bowes) performed with Birr Stage Guild. Both are very accomplished actresses. She feels that this interest

probably goes back to the fact that her own father Lar was a founder member of Birr Little Theatre along with people such as J.J. Fanning, Willie and Joe Herson, Paddy Kelly, Martin DeForge, and Jim Austin. This group was very active during the 30's and their little theatre in Emmet Street was always full to overflowing for performances. She remembers, as a child seeing shows such as 'Autumn Fire' and 'Vigil'. She especially loved to go down to rehearsals though she doesn't remember her mother being that interested.

After leaving Primary School Betty went to the old Technical School for a few years. Girls cycled in from as far away as Lorrha, Lusmagh and Kinnitty to attend the school. A Miss Roach taught Domestic Economy which was a popular subject with all the girls. She then went over to her aunt in Manchester and trained as a hotel receptionist. The war was just breaking out and she felt lonely so she came home and worked in Dooly's Hotel. The manageress was Miss Buckley. It was a busy place as many commercial travellers used it as their base when working around Birr. Then she met her husband, Tom Dwyer from Cappaneale, at a dance in the Oxmantown Hall. The hall was a favourite place for socializing and dances. They had seven children and it is a huge source of pride to Betty that they all live locally and look after her very well. Betty has a great interest in all the activities of her 17 grandchildren and 3 great grandchildren and is very proud of them all. She is full of life and good humour and would you believe it preparing to help out in Birr Stage Guild's production of 'The Field' by J.B. Keane. There is nothing she enjoys more than meeting up with her good friend Lily Tait for a chat and a laugh.

Betty has very fond memories of growing up in Birr and often remembers in her prayers, the gentle people who surrounded her childhood. She is sad about what she feels is the lack of respect which some young people show for the Church and for older people and hopes that we will not lose the spirit of neighbourliness and community which was so much a part of her youth. Betty Dwyer is truly a good neighbour and gentle friend to all.



Declan Ward at the Crinkill School protest in 1993

Aisling Photography



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FROM BIRR TO THE OBAMA NOMINATION

By Olwyn Enright T.D.

The D.N.C. or Democratic National Convention is as eagerly anticipated among people with an interest in politics, as the European Championship or World Cup is among soccer and rugby fans. Held this August in Denver, Colorado it was probably the most talked about Convention in years.

The stage was set by an enthralling primary season, where the expected winner Hillary Clinton, was finally toppled by a man who only eight years earlier, was unable to get a ticket into the event – Barack Obama.

From the moment we arrived in Denver airport, all you could see and hear was Convention, Obama, Clinton, and commentators asking who will be Vice President. Denver papers such as the *Rocky Mountain News* and the *Denver Post* looked almost like Democratic publicity papers, such was the scale of coverage of the events. I had no idea beforehand just how huge the whole event would be, nor how much of an honour it was to be able to attend.

Of course, for me, there was the extra excitement of the prospect of someone with strong Offaly connections, in Moneygall, becoming a presidential candidate. It later transpired that his Vice Presidential candidate Joe Biden has even stronger Irish ties.

The Convention officially got underway on Monday. Quite a lot of official business is carried out during the day. However, in the evening the excitement mounted as the main players appeared. The delegates, who are the Democratic Party members chosen to represent their State at the Convention, sit together with the other delegates from their State on the convention floor. The choreography of the entire event is spectacular, with flashing lights, screens and signs displaying particular messages and candidates names each evening. Particular attention is given to the so called “swing states” as it is these States which will decide the election. Once a sign has delivered its message, thousands more are distributed with a new message.

The excitement on the first day was generated by a promised tribute to Senator Ted Kennedy and concerns as to whether he would be well enough to appear in person. His niece, Caroline Kennedy, daughter of the late President John F. Kennedy appeared on stage to begin the tribute to her uncle. After an emotive film of his life story, he appeared on stage himself and delivered a powerful speech, despite his obvious ill-health, he drew a very emotional response from the crowd, with many believing that it may well be his last time to address the Convention. Michelle Obama, wife of the Presidential candidate closed the Convention that night. It seems almost expected now in U.S. elections that the spouse of the candidate plays a significant role and she was clearly very comfortable with it. Her purpose was to introduce Obama the person, not



Olwyn Enright with former US Secretary of State, Madeline Albright

Obama the politician. It went down really well with the audience; although I found it a little too sugar coated and can't imagine a speech of that nature being as well received in Ireland.

The formidable Clinton duo dominated the Convention for much of Tuesday and Wednesday to the discomfort of the Obama supporting democrats. The main issue was whether Hillary would deliver her supporters to Obama. I was close to the platform for her address and it was one of the most powerful political speeches I have witnessed. Her composure, in what must have been an immensely difficult moment in her life, was incredible. She effectively told her supporters that it's time to move on with Obama. She paid tribute to her “sisterhood of travelling pantsuits” referring to the millions of women who supported her and helped to put as she described it “18 million cuts in the glass ceiling”. Her husband former President Bill Clinton followed suit the following night, when he pledged full support to Obama. Earlier, he had made comments at a meeting of the National Democratic Institute (who were our hosts at the Convention) which were interpreted as saying that Obama had made promises he couldn't keep. In fact in his entire speech to us that morning he never mentioned Obama by name which I found really unusual, but he more than made up for it in his main speech.

Probably the biggest difficulty Obama faced was his perceived lack of experience, something McCain was attempting to capitalise on. President Clinton drew comparisons with what was said about him, when he ran for President, in a similar vein to which Ted Kennedy had spoken about his brother.

The choice of Senator Joe Biden as Vice Presidential candidate was greeted with some surprise. His personal life story – he lost his first wife and daughter in a car

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Olwyn Enright (middle) with Kenyan Minister for Water and Irrigation Charity Kluki Ngilu and Stella O'Leary (organiser) at a luncheon to celebrate Obama's Irish Kenyan ancestry

accident when his two sons were very small – was used to great effect in portraying him as a more conservative man than the Presidential candidate and very much as a family man. Indeed, as with most speakers, when he finished his speech his entire extended family appeared on stage.

Despite the gathering of thousands of his party faithful from Sunday, the candidate himself was only scheduled to arrive in Denver on Wednesday, preferring instead to continue to campaign among voters he had yet to win over. He arrived on stage briefly on Wednesday night to acknowledge his running mate and the venue was instantly transformed.

The main event of the week was of course Senator Obama's speech. Due to the unprecedented crowds attracted to the event, it was transferred from the Pepsi Convention Centre to the Mile High Field (so called because Denver is literally

a mile above sea level), home of the Denver football team. The date was particularly symbolic, falling as it did on the 45th anniversary of Reverend Martin Luther King's "I have a Dream" speech at the Lincoln Memorial in Washington before a quarter of a million people on the 28 August 1963. It's difficult to describe the atmosphere in Mile High Stadium. The *Rocky Mountain News* description of it as "part rock concert, part political rally, part old-time revival" probably describes it best. The emotion, particularly of African Americans was very poignant. His predominant message was of change, with slogans like "Obama for the Change we Need", "Change we can believe in".

His commitment to "bringing American jobs home" as he described it, concerned me from an Irish prospective, and to end US dependence on foreign oil within ten years seemed unachievable. But the detail didn't matter to the 80,000 people gathered to hear him. The response was rapturous and he and his family acknowledged the crowds for several minutes after his speech.

There is no doubt that the Barack Obama's candidacy has given millions of Americans hope. His message of change is very simple and writing this now just 3 weeks before Election Day, it appears to be working very effectively.

John McCain announced Sarah Palin as his running mate the day after Obama's convention speech, in what was seen as an attempt to steal his momentum and it worked – for a while. Media commentators were stunned, most Americans hadn't heard of her and she appeared to receive wonderful publicity for a time.

It seems however, at the time of writing that Obama has regained his momentum and looks to be on course to become the first African American (with Offaly connections) to become President of the United States.



Pictured at the 50th Wedding Anniversary of Mary and Michael Hehir in 1987 (L to R): Chrissie O'Meara, Mary Hehir, Michael Hehir, Fr. John Kelly, George Flynn

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JOSEPH STERLING COYNE

BIRR FOUNDER OF 'PUNCH' MAGAZINE

By David O'Brien

During the 19th century a small-scale satirical magazine became one of the most hated publications in the country and is remembered to this day for its strongly anti-Irish stance and depictions of Irishmen as sub-human brutes who presented a real and imminent threat to the British establishment.

The depictions of the Irish as hunched, dangerous, Neanderthals in the infamous Punch Magazine are burned deep into the memory and illustrations from the magazine are used in today's school history textbooks to give an account of the strong anti-Irish feeling prevalent in some sections of the British establishment at the time.

Ironically the magazine which was published right up until 2002 was founded by an Irishman – and a Birr man at that. Joseph Sterling Coyne was born in Birr in 1803, the son of a British Army Officer.

Little is known of the family's origins but it is believed Coyne's father was posted to Birr which at the time was becoming an increasingly important military town. As an officer of the Commissariat in charge of supply Coyne's father was heavily involved in the construction of Crinkill barracks which began in 1807 and lasted until 1812.

His father had hopes his son would join the legal profession and after his initial education, possibly at one of the local preparatory schools which existed in Birr at the time, sent him to the prestigious Royal School in Dungannon, Co. Tyrone, one of the oldest schools in the country. However, the law wasn't to the liking of young Joseph who developed a much stronger interest in writing, especially drama.

After some success with light articles he had sent to Dublin periodicals, he abandoned his law studies, and presumably much to his father's displeasure decided to take up writing as a fulltime profession. He specialised in comic farce, hugely popular at the time but a genre which has not stood the test of time and appears bawdy and lacking in merit to today's reader. While not the greatest of dramatists he was certainly prolific. In his lifetime he wrote almost 50 plays, burlesques and farces. His first farce, 'The Phrenologist', was produced at the Theatre Royal in Dublin in June 1835, was well received and quickly followed by the 'Honest Cheats' and 'The Four Lovers'. Over the next twenty years he would write prolifically in a similar vein.

In 1836, Coyne went to London where he got work writing for the magazine "Bentley's Miscellany". That year his farce, 'The Queer Subject', was produced at the Adelphi, and he joined the literary staff of the "Morning Gazette", the short-lived first cheap daily London paper and the forerunner of today's tabloid.

While working in London he met fellow journalists Henry Mayhew and Mark Lemon. Together with the engraver Ebenezer Landells they set up "Punch magazine", a satirical publication based on the French magazine 'Le Charivari'. Lemon, Mayhew and Coyne were all reforming liberals and the plan was to combine humour and political comment.

The first edition of Punch Magazine was printed by Joseph Last of Fleet Street and published on Saturday, 17th July 1841. In an article entitled 'The Moral of Punch' Mark Lemon wrote that he hoped the journal would help, "destroy the principle of evil by increasing the means of cultivating the good".

For the first few years of its existence the magazine developed a reputation as "a defender of the oppressed and a radical scourge of all authority". Early targets included the monarchy and leading politicians. It was particularly vocal in its campaign against the high cost of the monarchy. It pointed out that Prince Albert had a yearly allowance of £30,000, whereas the total amount spent on educating the poor in England was only £10,000.

The magazine continually argued that the Irish presented a threat to the British way of life, were ungrateful for the civilizing affect of British rule and needed to be put in their place. Illustrations depicting Irishmen as apelike, uncouth and uncivilized served to emphasise the point and reinforce the prejudice.

In its first year of publication Punch Magazine sold about 6,000 copies a week. However, sales of 10,000 were needed to cover the costs of the venture. In December 1842 it was decided to sell the magazine to publishers Bradbury & Evans.

During this time Coyne also parted with it but continued to establish a reputation of sorts in London and did experience further success, especially when he was appointed secretary to the Dramatic Authors' Society.

Perhaps today his most famous work is the two-volume work, Scenery and Antiquities of Ireland in which he writes the text for engravings of Irish scenes by the artist W.H Bartlett was published in 1847.

The romantic text describes the various regions of Ireland in turn as they appeared at the time of the authors' travels through the country.

While Coyne was to die in London on 18 July 1868 Punch was to continue for another 140 years until its eventual closure in 1992. The title was revived in 1996 by that most vocal of critics of the British establishment, Harrods owner Muhammad Al Fayed. However the magazine was never able to recapture its former position and was shut down permanently in 2002. But Joseph Sterling Coyne's publication lives on 167 years after the Birr man helped found it – it still has a website at www.punch.co.uk.



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FROM BRENDAN'S PARK TO THE PHOENIX PARK

By Camillus O'Meara

Brendan Duffy is the son of Tom and Majella Duffy from Syngefield.

"Growing up in Birr has left memories that will reside with me no matter where work and life takes me. I can never forget the lazy summers basking in the sun up in Clay's hole, then the ten foot jump into the ever inviting Camcor, and afterwards dodging the nettles and ragwort as I scooted down to Cloonan's for a bottle of orange. This was innocence at its best and when the swimming pool was opened I could spend all the time I wanted there without even going as far as the Camcor". So says Garda Sergeant Brendan Duffy, native of Birr and head of the Garda mounted unit.

Around that time, his father Tom, purchased a horse for him at Ballinasloe horse fair. At first he didn't know the front of the horse from the back end His father was a great teacher and the learning curve was both rapid and enjoyable. It is ironic that a man who hadn't a clue how he might make a living, should now make that living from the two great interests of his early years, water and horses.

Brendan comes from a long Garda tradition as his grandfather was Detective Joseph McNamara who was stationed in Birr. Joseph also had four brothers who served within the force, which in itself is a bit of a record. So with a background like that he was bound to find himself one day walking through the gates of Templemore Garda Training College. That day came in 1986. After emerging from 6 months of training, he spent the next few years working 'the beat' in various locations around Dublin. When a position arose for a diver within the sub aqua unit Brendan saw it as a great opportunity to diversify away from mainstream policing and into a more specialised arena. The training was highly specialised and intensive. It brought him to places like Fort William in Scotland and Killary Fjord in Mayo. He learned search techniques, safety aspects, and all the skills required to



Brendan in full diving gear



Brendan on 'Fionn Rua'

dive in hazardous conditions. After many months of tough, abrasive, technical dive training, he emerged a qualified Health & Safety Executive, parts 3 & 4, commercial diver. Brendan says that the work in the unit was sometimes harrowing. On missing persons operations you never really know what you're going to find as you swim blindly through flooded rivers. However, there was a great feeling of satisfaction when weapons which were connected to serious crime were recovered. Such finds are often the means of solving difficult cases. Recovering a missing person was often the most difficult of all, as Brendan and his fellow Gardai frequently saw the stress, pain and anxiety etched across the faces of the families of the siblings they searched for. Knowing that the recovery meant these people could put closure on their tragedy, always inspired them to keep looking no matter how harsh the conditions. There were however, lighter moments as frequently under O'Connell Bridge, they came across discarded engagement rings. Obviously it is a prime spot for second thoughts and cold feet!!

After 5 years, while still at the sub aqua unit a new challenge and opportunity arose. The Garda headquarters had decided to purchase a quantity of horses, jeeps, trucks, etc. from North Yorkshire Mounted Constabulary. The plan was to set up a new Garda Mounted Unit. After a successful interview, in 1998, he transferred to the new mounted unit. This unit consisted then, of one sergeant and seven guards. Since then it has grown to twelve horses, fourteen Gardai and two sergeants.

Brendan now has full responsibility for the running of the unit. From procuring horses, to managing stables, staff rota, and logistics, life is always busy and never dull. It requires a man with steady shoulders, and that man, from our own native town, is Sergeant Brendan Duffy.

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ESCAPE FROM ALCATRAZ

By Michael J. Grogan

The Escape from Alcatraz Triathlon is one of the most popular multi sports events in the world. Starting on Alcatraz Island, it consists of a one and a half mile swim across San Francisco Bay, on exiting the water competitors run one mile to their bike, cycle twenty miles and finish the race with an eight mile run. After six months of serious training, with ten or twelve hours spent training each week and I thought I was just about ready to 'escape'. I watched the sun rise over San Francisco Bay with over two thousand hardy souls waiting to board a boat bound for Alcatraz prison. We sat together in small groups chatting, sharing nervous laughter and exchanging stories of how we managed to get our place in the race. I had won one of the coveted lottery spots that took place six months before the race.

At eight o'clock we all stood for the National Anthem and as the last bars of the Star Spangled Banner rang out I knew it was 'go time'. Three double doors opened on the boat and organised chaos ensued, with an eight foot plunge to the water it felt like we were paratroopers exiting a plane in World War 2 with race officials on each side of the exit doors shouting "GO GO GO and JUMP JUMP JUMP". The instructions we received the day before at the race briefing were simple; pick a spot in the water that is empty, jump in and start swimming before someone lands on you. I took the eight foot plunge into the choppy waters that surround Alcatraz. The water in San Francisco Bay is an icy 12 degrees, a far cry from the balmy 29 degree waters of Birr Swimming Pool. The opening minutes of a triathlon swim are always frenzied and today was no different. Two thousand athletes all pumped with nervous energy kicking legs and swinging arms make for almost impossible swimming conditions. I have often heard it compared to swimming in an industrial washing machine. Fortunately the field was quickly spreading and I managed to find some clear water to begin to try and find a comfortable rhythm that I could hold for the next mile and a half. A four mile an hour current and choppy waters make open water swimming



Swimming away from Alcatraz

The Bike Section

skills vital. Every couple of strokes I looked straight ahead and checked my progress toward the Sutro Tower (The city's tallest landmark) on the San Francisco skyline. We had been told at the race briefing the day before that if we aimed for the finish point of the swim that the



current would take us at least one mile past it and our race would be effectively over. The swim was going well; I was feeling strong and swimming well within myself. I stopped for a brief moment to wipe the fog from my brand new anti fog goggles and look around. Alcatraz prison was about a mile behind me, the golden gate bridge stood about four miles to my left and my finishing point on the shore was only about half a mile away. The view was awesome. The waters began to get a little choppy in the last half mile but I was really enjoying the challenge of swimming the bay. The race today wasn't about my finishing time, I was here to enjoy the event but old habits die hard, I checked my watch whilst running up the beach after exiting the 1.5 mile swim; thirty four minutes.

After landing on the beach the organisers had quite thoughtfully added a one mile run before we reached our bikes. This was to ensure we were sufficiently warmed up before starting the bike section. The crowd was huge. I have never seen so many people at a triathlon; over twenty thousand people had turned out to cheer us on. I managed to spot my Manager, Cheerleader, Nutritionist and Girlfriend in the crowd and she had enlisted five or six people to cheer me on as I passed. With my spirits lifted I entered the transition area and headed straight for the area where I hoped my bike would be. A sea of shiny metal stood before me. With over two thousand bikes in the transition area and many of them looking suspiciously similar, it is vital to memorise exactly where your bike is racked. I found my bike, changed into my cycling gear and started the bike course.

The bike section was short and hilly, twenty miles of sharp one or two mile climbs with fast and winding descents. The course was spectacular; our first climb brought us up to Lincoln Boulevard, overlooking the Golden Gate Bridge and San Francisco Bay. As the course progressed I wondered if the course was not just a publicity stunt to showcase some

of the fantastic sights around the city. In preparation for a course that involved quite a few taxing climbs, I had spent a lot of Saturday mornings in April and May cycling up and down Kilcolman Hill. I felt great on the bike and began to pass people on almost every climb, a few of them passed me almost immediately on the descent but I was on a new bike and had also witnessed an awful crash at the bottom of the first descent. We cycled through Sea Cliff past Robin Williams who waved to us as we passed his house. As the day began to heat up I tried to drink every fifteen to twenty minutes. The race had started at 8:00am and I probably would not be finished till about 11:00am. Water and food stations were dotted all over the course with lots of race marshals and volunteers eager to help, all of them smiling and offering encouragement. The bike section flew by and coming back down toward Chrissy Field I decided to up the pace for the last two or three miles.

I blitzed through my second transition, changed footwear and head gear took a quick swig of my slightly warm green energy drink (it was quickly losing its appeal) and headed out on the run. When Mundy titled his first album 'Jelly Legs' I don't think he realised how much the title captured exactly how a triathlete's legs feel when starting the run section of a triathlon. Eight miles is long enough to ensure I don't try anything heroic on the first four or five miles, so I start to ease out my legs into a steady pace heading for Bakers Beach. I began to get into a comfortable rhythm and started to enjoy the run. I see an athlete coming towards me at a break neck speed. I realise its Andy Potts, one of the top class professionals in the world of triathlon. As we pass each other he is starting the last mile of his run and I have quite a few to go. The run course takes us through forest trails and tracks that run along the coast line, a lot of the track forces the competitors to run in single file and passing can be difficult. At this stage of the race it's not something I am overly concerned about. We begin the descent to Bakers Beach and I can see the turnaround point about three quarters of a mile up the beach. As I approach the end of the beach, the infamous sand ladder towers before me. Four hundred challenging

steps of energy sapping torture, my strategy is simple, one step at a time and don't look up. Shortly after the sand ladder, I turn a corner and see Alcatraz Island sitting in the center of the bay. I remember some of "The Rock's" most infamous guests, Al Capone, Machine Gun Kelly and Robert Stroud "The Birdman of Alcatraz", and I wonder what the prisoners would have thought about having the infamous prison becoming the starting point for one of the world's most celebrated endurance events.

The last few miles begin to hurt and I imagine my run has all the grace of a drunken penguin. As I grind out the last mile, the crowds urge on the tired athletes approaching the finish line. I enter the home straight and I spot the clock as I cross the finish line and realise I am about fifteen or twenty minutes faster than my predicted time.

Alcatraz is over. I gulp down some ice cold water and allow a big cheesy grin to take over my face.



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INTERESTING TIMES IN BIRR

THE CROTTY SCHISM AND HOW IT ORIGINATED

By Brian T. Kennedy

Birr in the period 1826 to 1840 was the centre of attention for all of the wrong reasons. When Fr. Michael Crotty fell out with Bishop O' Shaughnessy the resulting schism was unique in Irish Church chronicles. The Birr dispute brought together some of the most interesting and unique characters to ever populate an Irish town at any one time.

First and foremost was the central character Michael Crotty a native of Broadford in Co. Clare. Crotty had been labelled a 'Fool and mad man' by the Maynooth authorities and expelled from the Seminary. This left Crotty a very bitter man and hell bent on revenge.

The real origin of the dispute which exploded in Birr stretches back to that expulsion and the interesting case of the trial of Fr. Matthew Corbett, at Castleconnell in 1817. Bishop O' Shaughnessy was far from popular with his clergy, as he had a number of nephews priests in the Diocese of Killaloe, and was not shy in promoting them to comfortable parishes. This naturally left a bad taste in the mouths of the priests he overlooked. Another married nephew of Bishop O' Shaughnessy had gone to the U.S.A. leaving behind his wife. Bishop O' Shaughnessy found her employment as house-keeper to the afore mentioned Fr. Corbett. To make a long story short the young Mrs. O'Shaughnessy became pregnant more than 12 months after her husband's departure. Naturally human nature being what it is the unfortunate 34 year old Fr. Corbett was accused of being the father. Corbett vehemently refuted these allegations and the clergy supported him against Bishop O' Shaughnessy.

A trial was convened for Castleconnell Chapel and presided over by a representative of the Arch-bishop of Cashel. Despite the evidence of a servant boy who admitted to having intercourse with Mrs. O'Shaughnessy, Fr. Corbett was found guilty. The crowd outside the church were incensed with the verdict and attempted to throw the Bishop and his carriage into the nearby Shannon. Intervention by Fr. Michael Crotty senior (Crotty's uncle) diverted the mob and the Bishop made good his escape to Limerick. A grateful Bishop O'Shaughnessy reinstated Michael (junior) to his clerical studies and he was ordained against the odds at St. Suplice in Paris. After a term in Toomevara he eventually was transferred to Birr and it all kicked off.

In his 'Narration on the Reformation in Birr' Crotty recalls that following this event in Castleconnell Dr. Mc Mahon coadjutor- Bishop of Killaloe and his colleagues retired to Dundon's hotel. During the course of their dinner which Crotty said was conducted 'amid the gaiety of wine and the licentiousness of a tavern', Bishop Mc Mahon declared



Crotty's Church in Castle Street today

Crotty would never be ordained when he became full Bishop of the diocese. Whether true or false it is clear Crotty was deeply embittered against the church authorities and circumstances in Birr gave him the opportunity for revenge.

Fr. Philip Meagher the saintly P.P. of Birr was by Crotty's arrival already on in years and due to ill health unable to control the wayward cleric. Meagher was ordained with Bishop O' Shaughnessy in the old Birr Chapel in 1782. Following time spent at Monsea (Puckane) from 1791 to 1806 he had returned to Birr and spearheaded the project to build the present St. Brendan's Church. His delicate state of health meant Crotty had a free reign.

As early as 1808 the 'Chapel Committee' was founded to replace the old building described as 'a wretched fabric'. They placed a weekly levy on parishioners and on August 1st 1817 they had Lord Oxmantown (the future famous astronomer) lay the foundation stone. Progress was at a snail's pace as the committee only did work when they had the money in hand to pay for it. The 'Chapel Committee' was never popular (probably viewed as elitist) and when Crotty began to allege misappropriation of funds he was on a winner. The noted historian Thomas Lalor Cooke now joined the fray and chaired a meeting where Crotty's allegations were repeated. As a result the toll boxes at the Chapel were thrown into the Camcor.

Cooke and Crotty working together were a formidable combination. Crotty was a man hell bent on revenge and Cooke also had 'issues' with the 'Chapel Committee'. The committee were mainly local business men and saw Cooke from Borrisoleigh as an outsider. He was also frequently in Dublin at the courts and viewed as a poor team player. His request for a distinguished pew in the new Church had been rejected by the committee. This was an obvious affront to his dignity. It is interesting to note that Lord Rosse saw Cooke as the principal instigator

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of the trouble.

As a result of the allegations the account books were examined by Fr. Ambrose O' Connor (Nenagh) and Coadjutor Bishop Mac Mahon. They found the books were badly kept but there was no evidence of fraud.

To make matters worse Crotty was sent to Shinrone as temporary Administrator on the death of Fr. Francis Kennedy in 1825. This was a bad decision as Shinrone was an Orange Order stronghold and a place the hot-headed Crotty was bound to fall into trouble if possible. On July 14th 1825 he was charged with assaulting a couple Alice Proud and her partner a man named Kennedy. He had accused Kennedy of taking liberties with Proud (an alleged prostitute). The local Orange Order saw their opportunity to embarrass a Catholic priest and encouraged Kennedy to bring charges.

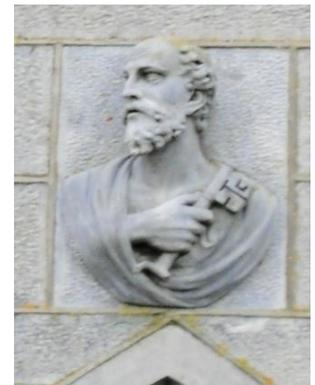
The trial of Crotty took place at the autumn Quarter Sessions in Birr. There was a hung jury, with the Protestant members finding him guilty and the Catholics finding him innocent. Next Sunday an emboldened Crotty denounced Mr. Cruise a R.C. magistrate from the pulpit. He was promptly transferred to Toomevara and replaced by Fr. Thomas Blake, a native of Birr.

Crotty did not appear at the next Quarter Sessions and was fined 'A Green Wax Fine' of £20. Later an unauthorised collection among parishioners raised £40 to pay this fine (a clear indication of Crotty's popularity). At his request the Bishop transferred him to Killaloe. He was arrested there in April of 1826 and returned to Birr for trial. This time the jury was composed of ten Protestants and two R. C. members. By sheer coincidence one of the Catholics was Fr. Thomas Blake's father. Crotty was convinced of an acquittal but totally shocked when they reached a unanimous verdict. He was jailed for two weeks but this was reduced to a fine. Furious at this Crotty preached against the magistrate and Blake whom he accused of influencing the Protestant jurors against him.

Crotty was now staying with Cooke at his home in Emmet St, it was there that he learned of the suspension of his priestly duties. This added to his sense of injustice and

desire for revenge. The situation was not helped when Fr. Philip Meagher resigned due to ill health in May 1826 and Fr. Patrick Kennedy was transferred from Lorrha to become Birr's new P.P. Instead of throwing oil on troubled waters Kennedy (referred to as 'the fighting cock of the Diocese', by Bishop O'Shaughnessy) relished the conflict with Cooke. On June 29th Crotty from the congregation of the old Chapel began a dispute with Kennedy on the altar. As a result Kennedy had to return to the sacristy without saying Mass. From July 1826 until August 6th of that year Crotty held possession of the chapel. On that date Kennedy assisted by troops from Crinkill Barracks succeeded in regaining possession of his own Parish Church. On Dec 2nd 1826 Fr. Meagher died. 14 days later the roof of the old chapel was knocked in. On Christmas Eve, Crotty again had to be expelled by troops from the new Church.

The conflict later known as 'The Crotty Schism' was now in full swing and would not be resolved until the coming of Mother Catherine McAuley and her Mercy Sisters in 1840. This was a bitter period in Birr History with opposing sides crossing the street to avoid each other. On occasions animosity spilled over into full scale rioting. During one such occasion on April 13th 1834 the stone key above the main door of St. Brendan's Church was broken. (see right) A unique cast of characters came together in Birr at the same time and gave the schism its unique place in Irish Church History. They were interesting times indeed as we can see as on examining why the Birr Schism began in the 1820's. The full story of the actual events of the schism is too long for this publication but perhaps can be examined in future editions of 'The Birr Review'.



Pictured at the handover of the MacRegol Facsimile to Offaly County Council on behalf of Birr Library where it is on display
 (L to R): Rev. Irene Morrow, Bridget Sullivan, Tony McLoughlin, Teresa Ryan-Feehan, Ruth McNally

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HOW WONDERFUL LIFE IS!

By Colm Mannion O.P.

Colm Mannion is a son of Brendan & Mary Mannion, Emmet Street.

People often remark that it's strange to find somebody entering religious life nowadays, but when I look back on my life and see how Our Lord and His Blessed Mother have carried me along, I don't think there is anything unusual about my decision. I grew up on Emmet St. in Birr and have happy memories of serving Mass as a boy. I'll always be grateful to the Presentation Brothers and lay teachers in St. Brendan's B.N.S for the efforts they made in passing on the faith. I can still remember sitting in the classroom when Tony Sampson taught us how to pray 'The Memorare'. That prayer taught me how to place total trust in the Blessed Virgin and I don't think a day has passed when I didn't say that prayer.

When I entered the Community School I shook off some of the shyness I had as a child and got up to all the things a typical teenager can do in Birr. I would continue to say a few prayers in the morning and before going to bed at night, but I drifted away from Sunday Mass. It wasn't until I was in my early twenties and living in Dublin that I began to really search for God. I knew I had a lot to be grateful for, but despite all the opportunities I had been given in life, I was failing to achieve anything that was really worthwhile. I had a deep desire to do something with a sense of purpose, but no matter how hard I tried to find a new challenge, I always seemed to end up sitting on a bar stool somewhere.

I used to pass by a Church on my way home from work, and even though I hadn't been to Mass in a long time, I would occasionally go inside and say a prayer. I remember kneeling before a statue of Our Lady and I asked her to show me what God had planned for my life. Shortly after that, I was approached by a stranger and he invited me to a Legion of Mary meeting. I had never heard of the Legion of Mary before but decided to try it. After all, I was looking for something different!

When I arrived at the meeting the following week I felt embarrassed to be in the company of such devout Catholics. Yet, much to the surprise of my friends, I returned to the meetings every week and began working in the Morning Star (a hostel run by the Legion for homeless men). It was there, in the midst of men branded as 'down and outs' that I began to understand Christ. It was incredible to see how people, who had absolutely nothing in life, could turn their lives around through the power of prayer. I knew that if I sincerely wanted to help others, I too would have to strengthen my own relationship with the Lord.

As the months went by I became more and more involved



with the Legion. Through the formation of the meetings and guidance of experienced members I started to grow in knowledge of the Catholic faith. My view of the world completely changed as the teachings of the church, which I had once rejected as 'old fashioned', were now being revealed in their true beauty. I was also amazed to find so many people my own age returning to the sacraments and joining apostolic groups such as the Legion of Mary. Despite what I may have believed, the Catholic Church was still very much alive in Ireland and it was very exciting to be part of it.

Two years later I left my job and entered the Morning Star Hostel as a full time volunteer. Living with the poor and being constantly at their service was at times physically and spiritually exhausting, but there were also moments when I felt so happy that my heart could have burst with joy. It was as if everything I could have ever wanted in life was now intertwined with God's will. Mass, Rosary and Eucharistic Adoration all became part of daily life. As well as the work in the hostel, my involvement with the Legion took me around the country engaging in various apostolic works. I even had the opportunity to work in places as far away as India and Sri Lanka .

In September 2007 I entered the Order of Preachers and took my first vows the following year. Since then, every day has become like a new adventure. Of course it's not always easy, but I've learned that striving for holiness does not restrict freedom - it actually sets us free. Only when we give ourselves completely to Jesus can we truly see how wonderful life is!

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Banagher					8.35		8.35				18.35	
Birr	5.25	5.55	6.25	6.55	9.00	14.00	9.00	14.00	9.00	14.00	19.00	17.15
Kilcormac	5.37	6.07	6.37	7.07	9.13	14.13	9.13	14.13	9.13	14.13	19.13	17.30
Tullamore	6.00	6.30	7.00	7.30	9.35	14.35	9.35	14.35	9.35	14.35	19.30	18.00
Kilbeggan	6.10	6.40	7.10	7.40	9.45	14.45	9.45	14.45	9.45	14.45	19.40	18.10
Tyrellspass	6.15	6.45	7.15	7.45	9.50	14.50	9.50	14.50	9.50	14.50	19.45	18.15
Rochfortbridge	6.20	6.50	7.20	7.50	9.55	14.55	9.55	14.55	9.55	14.55	19.50	18.20
Milltownpass	6.25	6.55	7.25	7.55	10.00	15.00	10.00	15.00	10.00	15.00	19.55	18.25
Kinnegad	6.35	7.05	7.35	8.05	10.10	15.10	10.10	15.10	10.10	15.10	20.05	18.35
Clonard	6.40	7.10	7.40	8.10	10.15	15.15	10.15	15.15	10.15	15.15	20.10	18.40
Enfield	6.55	7.25	7.55	8.25	10.25	15.25	10.25	15.25	10.25	15.25	20.20	18.50

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Departing Dublin:	Monday to Friday	Saturday	Sunday
Cathal Brugha St.	18.00	13.00, 16.30, 18.00	15.00, 17.15, 22.30
Ha'penny Bridge	16.15, 16.45, 17.15, 17.45, 18.15		

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Other operator coaches may be used on some services

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Friday 13.00 18.00
Saturday 13.00 18.00
Sunday 15.00 17.15

To Banagher

Monday to Friday 18.00
Saturday 18.00
Sunday

Birr – Tullamore Service

Departs From	Monday to Friday						Saturday		Sunday		
Portumna					8.25		8.25	13.25	8.25	13.25	18.15
Banagher					8.35		8.35				18.35
Birr	5.25	5.55	6.25	6.55	9.00	12.00	14.00	16.30	9.00	14.00	19.00
Kilcormac	5.37	6.07	6.37	7.07	9.13	12.13	14.13	16.40	9.13	14.13	19.13

Departs Tullamore	Monday to Friday						Saturday			Sunday		
To Kilcormac	13.00	17.30	17.50	18.20	18.50	19.50	14.45	18.05	19.40	16.40	19.00	23.50
To Birr	13.00	17.30	17.50	18.20	18.50	19.50	14.45	18.05	19.40	16.40	19.00	23.50
To Banagher						19.50			19.40			
To Portumna						19.50			19.40	16.40	19.00	

Some changes may apply to Bank Holidays

OPENING A WINDOW ON THE PAST - THE LIFE OF PETER TOOHER

By Michael Donegan

When Peter Toohar first came into the world in 1917 the first world war still had another bloody year to run, Dublin's Sackville Street lay in ruins after the 1916 rising and the 'War of Independence' hadn't even started. He was born in the Rotunda hospital in Dublin and came home at six months of age to live in the same house in which he now lives. His great grandfather had married into the place at Tirlough, Carrig when he had married Winifred Comerford. His grandfather was born in 1839 eight years before the 'Great Famine'. Peter's own mother was born in 1878 just ten years after the Fenian Rising. His father had joined the old Dublin Metropolitan Police force in 1907 and resigned in 1917 to come home and work the farm. He served in 'C' division which covered the centre of the city.

Peter was one of nine children, six boys and three girls. Three of his brothers and one sister are still alive. Peter is the oldest. One of his earliest recollections is of being awakened from his sleep to the sound of lorry engines and the glare of headlamps while he slept in his grandfather's bed. Outside in the yard there was the crunch of running boots and the angry shouts of men. Free State soldiers were making a raid in search of irregulars during the Civil War and had chosen the wrong house. He can still clearly remember one of the workmen on the farm getting a slap in the face from a soldier because he didn't answer up smartly enough. The road into Carrig was regularly cut with trenches to slow up the army lorries and sometimes the local men were forced to turn up and help to fill them in. In 1921 the family gathered at the gable of their house to see red glow in the sky as Crinkill Barracks burned in the distance. It had been set alight by irregulars retreating from Birr as the civil war raged. Peter went to school in Carrig. The two-roomed school house had been built in 1911. There were 30 children in each room. Miss Canning taught in one and Miss Mahon in the other. Arch-Deacon Ryan was the manager. The school was heated by open fires and a Mr. Harte came from Birr every so often to replenish the turf. The children played hurling and chased each other around the playground for recreation.

Peter's closest pals were Willie Hctor, Paddy Feehan, and Paddy King all now deceased. Life was more uncluttered then. Christmas and Easter were favourite holidays. Gifts from Santa were simple and very treasured. Once his brother John got a little china milk cow and he got a draughts set. John was disgusted when the little cow refused to eat the bundle of hay he brought in to her from the hay barn. At Christmas the house was decorated with holly from the hedgerow and his mother cooked a goose from their own flock on the open fire. Before Easter fasting was the order of the day as Lent was in vogue and then lots of delicious free range duck and hen eggs on



Easter Sunday. When he was older Peter loved to go to the Cinema in Murphy's picture house in Green Street in Birr. He was particularly fond of cowboy films. Tom Mix and Gene Autry the singing cowboy were his favourites. If you sat near the screen in the 'pit' it cost 4d while further back it cost 9d. To be really posh you paid even more to sit in the gallery.

Carrig was a small village of only eight houses. The oldest buildings were the ruined old windmill and stone-roofed barracks. Tradition had it that the windmill was destroyed and the sails torn down on the night of the 'Big Wind' on January 5th 1839, the same year his grandfather was born. The Barracks had been used as a kiln for drying corn.

When he was about 12 years old Peter began to attend fairs in Birr with his father. There was a fair every month and he can list off the actual date of each one without a single mistake. The largest fair of the year was always held on March 23rd. The big farmers from Meath came looking for store cattle on that day. It was important to be in the fair green with your cattle by 8 o'clock so that you could get a good stand to show your cattle. They would leave home at 6 o'clock to walk in the cattle. Selling at the fair was a tricky business as an offer from a buyer made in the morning and refused might not come again later in the day. In the evening when they had sold their cattle they might do some shopping in Dooly's, Fayles' or Liptons. Before going home his father might stop for a pint in Egan's public house in Green Street and treat him to lemonade. The worst period for selling livestock was during the economic war in the 1930's. England was placing a tariff on Irish produce because Mr. DeValera was refusing to pay the land annuities. As a result there was no sale for anything. The Minister for Agriculture Dr. James Ryan was known as 'Calf Ryan' because farmers could only get 7/6 d for a calf skin at the time. The calf itself was considered worthless. Peter went into Birr with his father

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in 1932 to hear Dev speak in the square. The Toohers sowed quite an amount of tillage crops such as potatoes, mangolds and turnips. When the sugar factories were in operation they would sow sugar beet and bring it to the railway in Birr by horse cart. They used horses for all the farm work. Peter was a good horseman and always kept two working horses. It was slow work compared to today as the most you could till in a day was ½ an acre. They sowed malting barley for sale to D.E. Williams in Banagher. The barley was threshed by Smiths of Tinlough. The threshing machine went from farm to farm and the neighbours helped each other on the day. Peter's mother might have to feed twenty men at their kitchen table. The usual fare was home-cured bacon and cabbage and potatoes. His father made sure to have a ¼ barrel of porter for the men to drink during the day. The ¼ barrel contained 8 gallons and porter cost 9d a pint. Although Peter never drove, he owned a car and a tractor later in his life.

When Peter was 23 years of age he married Sarah Brown from Newtown on the Roscrea side of Kinnity. Her aunt and uncle owned Whites public house in Carrig and they were brought together by her uncle Pat. He then went to live in Kinnity with his new bride and her parents. Although he was still farming this time the land was different. It was unsuitable for tillage as it was hilly and therefore less labour intensive. He kept cattle and sheep and pigs. Although it was only a few miles from his native Carrig the people even spoke differently. It was strange to be cutting turf at 1200 feet above sea level. It took half a day to draw a load home compared to the shorter journey to the bog in Carrig. His arrival in Kinnity coincided with outbreak of World War Two. Ration books were the order of the day. Basics such as tea, sugar and flour were scarce. Bread was rationed to three loaves per person per week. Bicycle tyres and tubes etc. were impossible to buy anywhere except on

the black market. At night the noise of German aircraft could be heard droning overhead as they returned to Germany from bombing runs in England. To ensure a supply of food the Government made an order that every farmer had to sow a certain amount of tillage crops. Peter was familiar with the story of the Coolacrease murders and actually knew two of the men who acted as lookouts on the day. He took a great interest in the recent R.T.E. programmes and is quite sure that the deaths were not the result of greed for land but of genuine fear of collusion with the enemy.

Peter spent sixty years living in Newtown, Kinnity and only moved back to Carrig in the year 2000. His wife died 24 years ago and now he is back in the house in which he started out his life. It is a snug place with a blazing turf fire and the old hearth and crane still in place. The house is probably 250 years old and is unique in having its original sod roof and timber crossbeams in place, albeit now covered with sturdy galvanized iron instead of thatch. Part of the fire back is made from sheets of iron salvaged from the old Birr to Portumna railway line known as the 'Stolen Railway' and featured in last year's Birr Review. He walks every day, has a great appetite and follows the news on the radio, T.V. and newspaper. All his life he has had a keen interest in sport, especially hurling. He can remember seeing Christy Ring playing in Thurles when Tipp beat Cork in a Munster Final and Mick Mackey playing in Roscrea when a match between Limerick and Galway was abandoned because of a fracas. He is lucky to have his daughter Jane to look after his needs and loves visits from his grandchildren and many friends. Peter is a true example of the healthy benefits of a simple hardworking life and a positive attitude. As he says himself the secret to a contented life is not wanting more but appreciating the good things we have already.



Five Generations from Birr to Manchester

*Front (L to R): Carmel Jones (nee Cole) holding her great-great grand nephew James Bernard Geoghegan, Siobhán Geoghegan (baby's mother)
Back: Alan Geoghegan (grandfather), Mary Geoghegan (nee Colohan, great-grandmother)*

Carmel is a sister of the late Kathleen Colohan and Elsie Gillen. She left Birr for Manchester over 40 years ago. Her niece, Mary Geoghegan went to Manchester 35 years ago. This picture was taken at James' christening.

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THE MAGIC GARDEN

By Michael Donegan

Before they left Moorpark Street for the very last time in 1997 the Presentation Brothers made a gift of a piece of the old Monastery garden to St. Brendan's Boys P.S. The garden was surrounded by a high stone wall and had supplied the Presentation community with fruit, flowers and vegetables for more than a century. In recent years as the age profile of the brothers increased and their numbers decreased, the garden had become overgrown, the fruit trees neglected and the beautiful old glasshouse had suffered vandalism. Soon the old house, an original residence of the Hackett family, would be sold and a developer would soon move in to build twenty-two town houses in the grounds. The first task for the Board of Management of the school was to build a partitioning wall to separate the square of ground they had received from the rest of the garden which had now become a building site. The Nolan brothers were called in and a high block wall was built. The temptation was to then knock the existing stone walls separating the garden from the school playground and put the whole thing together into one. But the school is lucky to have extensive playground space already so it was decided to leave the old walls in place and instead leave the piece of ground enclosed. Mick Coughlan came and skillfully breached the old rubble wall and made an opening into the garden. Then a sturdy gate was hung in the opening and suddenly 'The Magic Garden' began to take shape. St. Brendan's P.S. has a strong Green School Policy in place. Parents, pupils and teachers began to think about and discuss how best the space could be used for the educational and recreational benefit of the school. It was decided to create an outdoor classroom. It would be a place where the boys would experience nature and science at close hand. Soon the Parents' Association had the bit between their teeth and the project began to take shape. The Christmas bag-



The Magic Garden

packing fund raiser and the Church gate Collection were earmarked for funding. We made a valiant effort to win a complete 'Garden Makeover' on R.T.E.'s 'Afternoon Show' but were unlucky with the main prize. We did however win €1,000 and this was put into the project. A budget of approximately €11,000 was decided on. The professional advice and skills of 'Gardenia', a landscape gardening team from Toomevara, were employed. Soon the garden took shape. The final plan included sandpits for the children to play in, raised beds for vegetables, a sensory garden and a nature area. There is a wildlife area and decking, a garden shed and some seats. We even have a water feature with a fountain and a waterfall. The new block wall was plastered and the boys and teachers left the imprints of their hands in the wet plaster for posterity. Two beautiful old apple trees were preserved in one corner. Some climbing and play equipment with special shock-absorbent safe surfacing was also put in place. A beautiful, specially designed, seat was installed under the apple trees in memory of Geraldine Bergin. Geraldine had been a very active and loyal member of the Parents' Association right up to her untimely death in January. Then on June 11th the official opening took place. Brother Nilus was invited back to cut the ribbon and Fr. Cahir P.P. did the blessing. Since then the garden is in constant use by the children and teachers. It serves as an outside classroom for Science and Nature Study. The sand and the play areas are a big hit with the boys. There are barrows and shovels and rakes and buckets at work on every side but best of all are the wonderful chaotic sounds of children having fun.

St. Brendan's Boys P.S. would like to thank all those who helped to bring the project to fruition, especially the members of the Parents' Association, our main sponsors, Birr Lions Club, Rigney Dolphin, Waterford, David & Noeleen Coffey and to those parents who donated items for the garden.



Bro. Nilus cuts the ribbon

Also pictured are Michael Donegan (Principal) and Emer Dolphin-Murray (Parents Association) and some 6th class boys

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THE FADDENMORE PSALTER

By Margaret Hogan

The rather unfamiliar word 'Psalter' just means a copy of the *Psalms* which in turn is a collection of poems written in Old Testament times and frequently used in Christian and Jewish liturgies. The Psalter found in Fadden More bog in July 2006 was just such a copy but its importance lies in the fact that it is the only vellum manuscript (handwritten on treated calfskin) copy ever yet found immersed in a bog for over twelve hundred years and the names of finders Eddie Fogarty and Kevin and Pdraig Leonard go down in the history of Irish archaeology because, as Director of the National Museum of Ireland, Patrick Wallace said, 'They knew what to do.' They placed Eddie's mysterious find on a plastic bag, covered it with damp peat, secured it and called the National Museum.

The National Museum of Ireland organised a seminar in Dublin on 6 June 2008 to reveal conservation progress to date. Several Birr people attended and Rev. Irene Morrow, President of Birr Historical Society deployed her powers of charm, persuasion and insistence to secure another seminar, this time for Birr and so 150 people were treated to a wonderfully enjoyable and interesting experience on 11th October 2008 at Dooly's Hotel, Birr.

The seminar was preceded on Friday evening 10th October by a liturgical celebration of the psalms at St. Brendan's RC Church, Birr. Fr. Richard Purcell OCSO, Mount St Joseph Abbey, Roscrea and Rev. Irene Morrow who together designed the liturgy, spoke - as did Michael Hanna and Salters Sterling - about the Psalms and how they were cherished over the years and performed in a great variety of ways which would be recreated for the congregation. Rev. Rosemary Lindsay chanted in Hebrew, the Cistercian Chant Schola sang antiphonally and responsorially in Latin. Martina Carroll read in Irish, Barbara Hanamy sang in Irish, Ann Hogan sang Boney M's *By the rivers of Babylon* a modern version of Psalm 137, Birr Choral Society sang Anglican Psalm Chants, the congregation sang, Birr Stage Guild recited in choral verse speaking, Gerry Dolan sang responsorially, Rev. Fergal O'Neill led in prayer and Brian Kennedy thanked all on behalf of the Pastoral Council.

Dr. Patrick Wallace opened the seminar on Saturday morning, paying tribute to the finders and to the gifted team who have taken charge of conserving the manuscript. Leading experts in the field who delivered illustrated lectures were Dáibhí Ó Cróinín of the School of History, NUIG and Bernard Meehan, Keeper of Manuscripts at TCD, while from the National Museum of Ireland we had Eamon Kelly, Keeper of Irish Antiquities, Rolly Read, Head of Conservation, Ragnall Ó Floinn, Head of Collections and John Gillis of TCD who was seconded to the National Museum as Conservator of the Fadden More Psalter.

A highlight of the seminar for many was a trip to the bog where Kevin Leonard explained the procedure of harvesting peat and he and Eamon Kelly pointed out the exact spot where Eddie Fogarty spotted the unusual article in his digger. Eamon pointed to an island in the bog with a holy well called Toberbrandy, suggesting a possible link with the monastery of St. Brendan at Birr where we know there was a scriptorium. Other finds were made in the Fadden area in recent years but a comprehensive sweep with a metal detector provided no results. Perhaps a geophysical survey will provide useful information.

All six lecturers showed colour images illustrating the find, the context, their experiments and the conservation process. All but about ten percent of the manuscript is lost, according to John Gillis who is in charge of conservation. Some fragments of pages survive but the rest has dissolved into a kind of gelatinised mass. The letters in oak gall ink formed a chemical bond with the vellum base, many floated free and were lost but thousands were retrieved in a dish in what looks like an alphabet soup. A decision was taken to clean and preserve the manuscript without the use of any chemical that would remain in the vellum and to find a drying method that would involve the least shrinkage. After several experiments, the process eventually chosen involved the use of industrial methylated spirits, deionised water and a vacuum machine. The damp manuscript is stored at 4 degrees Centigrade to inhibit the growth of mould.

Why the book was in the bog we will probably never know. It was hardly lost because it was found placed carefully upright with its folder and covered by a piece of calf skin. Hair in the vicinity may be human. Radiocarbon dating applied to organic material such as seed pods in the book may help to date the find which is tentatively dated to the eighth century, probably somewhat earlier than the Macregol Gospels.

The cover or folder found with the manuscript is also described as being extremely exciting and a unique discovery. It is a single piece of leather with a flap that folds over and could be secured by three hide buttons. Reference to contemporary manuscripts shows several evangelists holding their books tied with three similar buttons.

So the experts continue their long, patient, detailed work on the Fadden More Psalter in anticipation of further research developments. New acquaintances and friendships were made at the seminar and Birr Historical Society looks around for new members, new ideas and perhaps a likely basis for another seminar!

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BEIJING 2008 - THE EXPERIENCE OF A LIFETIME

By Alison Rosse

We never expected to go to an Olympic Games; it was not really on our list of fifty things to do before we die. However, we were lucky enough to have our son, daughter-in-law and two grandchildren living in China. More than that, Patrick, who speaks fluent Mandarin and has lived in Beijing for 15 years, had been appointed the Irish Attaché to the Olympic Games. This was obviously a chance that we should not miss, quite apart from wanting to visit our latest 3 month old grandson! When we arrived we found the 'new' airport had been superseded by an even newer airport which is apparently 5 times the size of Heathrow. (Everywhere in China the statistics stagger one). New subway systems had been built specially for the games. In the 15 years Patrick has been there, Beijing has become a huge modern capital with innovative modern architecture and at least 4 ring roads – their equivalent of the M50. We had been there before, so we knew what we should expect.

There were some changes, however. On our first visit downtown we saw the Olympic Volunteers that we had heard of. They wore pale blue T-shirts, all with a small amount of English and big smiles. The girls and boys, unpaid but fed and housed and coming from all over China, were everywhere to help foreigners – from the subway to the stadium and even to help you at the cash-points and street crossings. You would expect that there must be two or three thousand of them. In fact there were 20,000.

During the Olympics the atmosphere of the city seemed to mimic the Volunteers' big smiles. The pollution had lifted. Everyone was friendly and delighted with themselves and their city.

As Patrick was the Attaché, liaising between the Irish Embassy and the Team and other Chinese officials, his car was allowed in 'Olympic lanes'. Special lanes, like Dublin's bus lanes had been marked out on the city freeways. Traffic especially involved with the games could speed easily to its destination so we felt really privileged on our journey to the stadium for the Opening Ceremony. The stadium itself, both inside and out, was awe inspiring. Until you stand close to it and start to climb the stairs to the top of the 'Birds Nest', where we were to sit, you can never realise the scale of it. For the opening ceremony the atmosphere was electric. The Volunteers there became cheerleaders, encouraging us when and how to use the torches and rattles that appeared in the 'goody bags' on all the seats. It was, however, well over 30 degrees and the heat was rising from the centre. Patrick was with the Irish team and sweating in his Paul Rocha-designed team suit! We strained to catch a glimpse of the Irish, and at last they came, waving the Irish flag proudly. On this hot evening though, the Africans in their robes and jelabas



Lord and Lady Rosse with their two sons Michael and Patrick in front of the Bird's Nest, Beijing

were much better dressed for the temperature.

As we looked around at the 90,000 or more in the stadium we wondered how on earth we would ever get out, let alone meet up with Patrick and the driver. However, thanks to mobile phones and the ever smiling volunteers we were re-united before too long and whisked back to the tranquility of Patrick and Anna's home, through the big gates to the housing estate beside a lake where my grandchildren love to feed the ducks.

After the opening ceremony we left Beijing for a few days for a trip to Guilin in the south, and then another few days to the North near the Korean border to look at trees. Here it rained as much as Ireland, and was even colder so I was glad to be back to the warmth of Beijing. In the last few days we went to several exciting events, including the diving in another amazing stadium. One great excitement was seeing the famous Jamaican, the appropriately named Bolt, make another world record. We also saw the wonderful final of the pole jump when the Australian won by a whisker. It was incredible to watch as the pole bent almost double then lifted him up and up, to fall as gracefully as water down the other side. Later we were lucky enough also to see the closing ceremonies, this time together with all the family.

Thanks to Patrick we also got to see the inside of the Olympic Village, not easy, as it had incredibly tight security. This was another mind-blowing experience. Village it is certainly not. It had at least 20,000 inhabitants and was at least twice the size of BIRR. It had been beautifully landscaped, the Chinese are adept at planting large trees along the new roads that they make. Here in the village they had grouped ginkgoes and cherries and other species of trees, making the place seem as if it had been there for years. The buildings are blocks of flats, six stories high, which have already been sold, snapped up by buyers ready to move in when the Olympics are

over. The village links up with the Stadia by way of a walk down a beautiful avenue a few kilometres long with elegant lighting all the way. Either side is park-land and lakes.

We ate in the canteen, another amazing experience: food from every nation with counters of food disappearing into the distance. 'Mediterranean', 'Asian', Vegetarian, with steaks and potatoes being patronised by Mongolians, or fruit and yogurt patronised by slender blond Swedes, and lurking in a corner was the inevitable McDonalds. We tried not to stare at the international mix of athletes, with their different coloured jackets showing where they came from: beautiful people of all colours and nationalities, some of them at least seven feet tall. Here too the Volunteers were around, smilingly handing out plastic macs when a heavy thunderstorm flooded the walkways.

Back in the city, one memorable experience was being taken to the top of the tallest building on a beautiful clear evening and seeing the sun set over the Western Hills. Patrick's friends said that due to pollution they had not seen this view for several years and it was wonderful that

the methods taken to reduce the pollution had worked so well. We all hoped some of them will be continued.

The closing ceremony was very moving, as well as being another amazing spectacle. It had been downplayed so we did not expect such a great performance. The hand over to London had the two Lord Mayors, of Beijing and London standing together for the ceremony. The London bus caused a laugh, and the Chinese next to me shouted 'Beckham! Beckham!' as the stadium screens – as well as no doubt- those of the entire world's TVs - showed him standing on the bus, looking handsome in his leather jacket. We were sad that it was ending. A huge cheer was given for the smiling Volunteers who had exhausted themselves over the last three weeks. As we left Patrick handed a group of them the Irish pins that some of them collected. A young girl in her blue shirt thanked him but added in Chinese, 'you know, I just can't smile anymore!'

Experience of a life time? Yes, it probably was. Will we be going to the London Olympics? No, I don't think so. We wouldn't be nearly so well looked after.



Physical Education Class, St. Brendan's Boys Primary School - 1924

*Front Row (L to R): J. Mulhern, M. Barber, M O'Hara, C. Leonard, M. Sammon, J. Cahill, C. Kelly
 Second Row: D. Houlihan, J. Houlihan, G. Pilkington, P. Sammon, J. McCormack, M. Holohan, M. Cleary,
 P. Horan, T. Cleary, G. Sylvester
 Third Row: P. O'Meara, B. Loftus, F. Cumiskey, H. Hart, M. DeForge, T. O'Sullivan, T. Nixon, V. Cleary, J. Hawkins
 Back Row: T. Cahill, P. Murray, G. McGee, P. Horan, W. Hoare, M. O'Sullivan, T. Hinksman,
 P. Moriarty. Instructor M. H. Molloy*

A HELPING HAND TO CHERNOBYL CHILDREN

By Noel Lyons

For the past number of years local tradesmen and building workers give up a week of their time and expertise free to carry out humanitarian work in children's orphanages in Belarus. This year eleven local men from Birr and the surrounding areas went to Karlina Orphanage which is home to 150 children. The Orphanage is located in a rural area of the country, the nearest town being some 10 kilometres away. Benny Beale, Liam Guilfoyle, Seamie Maher, Noel Lyons, Johnny Carroll who had all travelled before and those on their first trip were Kieran Ryan, Seamus Kennedy, Matt Lyons, Pat Carroll, Thomas Carroll & Michael Conneely. The men departed Birr on Sunday the 4th of May and worked for the week from dawn to dusk. The work this year consisted of constructing toilets in the orphanage school, replacing windows, painting and decorating the children's dormitories, and the construction of new showers and toilets to the gymnasium.

A derelict store was re-built to provide storage space for the vegetables which are grown each year by the children on the orphanage land. Most of the orphanages are very run down with little or no toilet or washing facilities and they receive no funding for maintenance so most of the time the children live in very primitive conditions. The aim of the group is to provide better facilities and a little comfort for the children to live in. The children will spend their entire childhood in these facilities twenty four hours a day, seven days a week.

The group departed Shannon on Sunday evening travelling through the night to arrive in Minsk the capital of Belarus. Then they travelled by bus for 3 hours to Karlina and reached their destination at 9.00 a.m. on Monday. Work started straight away with no rest. All the materials were pre-ordered for the works and were already on site thanks to the group's leaders. They organised this by travelling three days prior to the main group to source all of the materials and equipment.



Benny Beale with some of the local children



Benny Beale and Liam Guilfoyle carry out internal work in the orphanage

The volunteer's day generally begins at 7.00 a.m. and lasts until 7.00 p.m. and sometimes until 10 or 11 at night depending on the job on hand for that particular day. Indeed on one day concrete was poured at 10.00 p.m. The group consisted of all trades and labours and most of the workers are prepared to carry out any task. This provides a great bond between the workers. A chef also travels with the group who prepares and cooks for everyone. All of the tasks undertaken must be completed within the week so that children can revert back to their normal routine. It is a source of great satisfaction and pride to the volunteers to see each child's delight at the



Pictured at the Orphanage

Left to Right: Kieran Ryan, David Henshaw, Seamie Maher, Seamus Kennedy, Tony Henshaw, Michael Conneely, in front Tony Corcoran

major changes that have taken place to their home within such a short space of time. Fundraising is ongoing for this annual humanitarian trip and in 2007 the group benefited from the local vintage tractor run by €5,600. In 2008 the main fundraiser was a 70's & 80's night which raised €5000 and another €2500 was donated by the committee of the 'Black Bull Threshing Festival'. Many donations are also given by individuals. The group is planning another 70s & 80s disco night in early 2009 as their main fundraiser for next year and all are welcome. They would like to thank all those who give so generously to support this great work.

Jerry O'Meara

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A SKATE PARK FOR BIRR?

Two years ago Isaac Smith, Luke Garland, Oisín Clarke, Damien Gormley, Scott Finnane, Owen de Forge, David Kennedy, Jack Featherstonhaugh, Nicholas and James Corcoran, Eddie Smith, Una and Hugh Feehan, James Loughrey, Jack Baker and Emer and Aisling Middleton decided to skate on their boards, but there was nowhere to skate..... It was impossible to do so in the Marian Hall car-park with cars coming and going and on the footpaths they were under shoppers feet. Understandably many people were annoyed because they were afraid the skaters might damage their cars or run into someone. In a lot of towns around the country now there are skate parks being built so they decided to draw up a petition just to see what the feedback would be like.

The group went around tirelessly getting signatures from shopkeepers, shoppers, parents, friends, and fellow skaters. In the end they had 500 signatures. Everyone said yes! This was quite an achievement but that was only the beginning. The boys were then invited to make a presentation to the Birr Town Council and all nine councillors agreed in principle to back up the project 100%. Early in the summer of 2008 a committee was set up of young people and adults to do the fund raising and background work. The council very generously agreed to give a site and help with funding.

So now it's fundraising to the fore! We really need help as funding is our priority if we are to have our own skate park

in Birr before the boys and girls are on their Zimmer frames. Soon the skaters were organizing teenage discos, quizzes, concerts and having t-shirts made in order to raise money and awareness for the skate park.

The skaters have taken interviews and written articles for various local newspapers and magazines. Again this was all for the purpose of raising the profile of the group in their fundraising efforts. Many people wonder what attracts people to this sport, but, like everything, you can't judge until you try it! The group, which goes under the title Skate Park 8, (SK8) continues with its fundraising activities so keep an eye out and lend a hand if you can.

We hear so many negative stories about drugs and drink and generally unsociable behaviour, that it is nice to see young people getting out there and doing something positive for themselves. Skateboarding is a healthy outdoor sport and is something teenagers really enjoy especially if they are not into 'team sports'. The committee members are councillor Ann Spain (Chairperson), Aine Brummel (Secretary), Imelda Smith and Fergal Clarke (Joint Treasurers), Isaac Smith, Luke Garland (Joint P .R. Os). These officers are ably assisted by Kathleen Gormley and Majella Featherstonhaugh and other committee members like Fergus Garland, Liam and Donal Spain and all the above mentioned young people. We are always open to new members and new ideas so if anyone has any ideas or suggestions we'd be delighted to hear about them.



Pictured at a fundraiser in the Chestnut Bar wearing t-shirts donated by Celtic Invoice Discounting Ltd. are

Back Row (L to R): Fergus Garland, Fergal Clarke, Liam Spain

Middle Row Ann Hynes-Spain, Áine Brummel, Majella Featherstonhaugh, Kathleen Gormley,

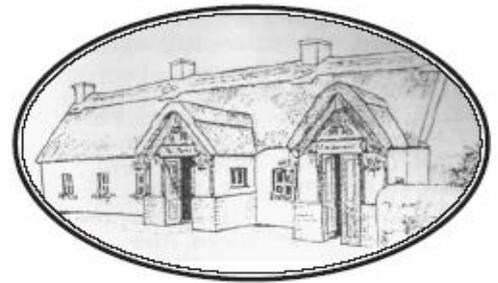
Isaac Smith, Oisín DeForge, Imelda Smith

Front Row: Damien Gormley, Vivienne Maher, Donal Spain, Scott Feenane, Oisín Clarke, Jack Featherstonhaugh, Luke Garland

Missing from photo: Emer & Aisling Middleton, Nicholas & James Corcoran, Eddie Smith, David Kennedy



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STANDING ON THE CORNER.....

Gerry Dolan in conversation with Richard Kennedy

For Gerry Dolan, music, and the stage, have always been an essential part of his life, and for well over 50 years Gerry has generously shared his talents with the people of our town and in doing so has added significantly to the cultural life and legacy of Birr.

Gerry was born at home in Connaught Street, and apart from the years spent in boarding school has lived all of his life in the town.

His family moved into the house in which he now resides in 1935, and it was from this premises that his father ran a second branch of the family motor business, selling cars, bicycles, spare parts, petrol, and also included a thriving Hackney car business. "Very few people had cars in those days. If you had a funeral, people would have to get taxis to go to Clonoghill and maybe even a priest hadn't a car and a taxi would have to be sent out for the priest. It would be a regular kind of thing, you could be asked for 3 cars for a funeral or a wedding."

Gerry went to boarding school in Ballyfin, Co. Laois for four years. "Ballyfin was a typical boarding school of the early 50's and things weren't very plentiful. Food was scarce but at the same time we managed. You wouldn't get any better anywhere else. You just had to live with it and knuckle down and accept it."

After he finished school he went straight into the family business at home. The social calendar in those days was limited. "You had two cinemas going, the Rialto (Murphy's) in the square and the New Cinema in Brendan Street. You went out every night to the cinema, one cinema tonight and the other the next night just to get a change of programme".

Gerry also enjoyed a game of tennis and was actively involved in the local Wilmer Tennis club and went on to be treasurer for a number of years under the chairmanship of Vincent Barber.

Another main social activity was dancing. Before the Marian hall was built, the venue for dancing in Birr was the Oxmantown Hall. The condition of the Oxmantown Hall in these days tested the commitment of the dancers. "They had all the old knotty boards on the floor and God it would kill you dancing on it. Then when we got the Marian Hall with the new floor you wouldn't believe the difference".

Later on as new ballrooms were built it became more common to travel to surrounding towns for dancing, and it was here that a lad with a car came into his own. "If you had a car you see, there would always be a crowd to go to a dance. Athlone had a great ballroom, and there was the Roseland in Moate. In later years, carnivals became very popular. Ferbane had a huge carnival that went on for weeks and there was a priest out there and they used to call him the Carnival King."

The dancing however was only secondary to Gerry's love and appreciation of the gift of music that had been given to him. As a child he had taken piano lessons with Ciss Chisholm on the Oxmantown Mall, next door to Powsie Love. Ciss Chisholm would sometimes hold piano recitals in the Little Theatre in Emmet Street and her students would play there. In his school years he

continued with music, so far as possible. "I did some music at school but not much, we didn't get the time. You might get twenty minutes or half an hour for a practice so many nights a week. Afterwards I did a bit of singing training with a Dan McNulty in Dublin. Dan fell out of a cot as a child, was blinded, but was a brilliant musician."

By the time Gerry had returned to Birr from school there were many opportunities for the music lover, both in terms of participating and also for those who simply liked to listen. A lot of the credit for this goes to Annie Noonan, who for very many years was a mainstay of the musical culture in the town. "Yes, we had so much music going, in the church choir Annie Noonan had all these tenors and basses, and then the choral society started. There was no shortage of music whatsoever. I suppose in those days people were more Churchy as well and got involved more".

His mother loved music and had a glorious singing voice in particular. His father loved films and had even started the first cinema in Birr, the Hippodrome, on the Main Street at the back of where Hedgerows is now. As these films were silent his Aunt Bridie accompanied them on the piano for sound effects. It is no wonder that Gerry developed a similar interest in music and acting. Then there was the famous Little Theatre in Birr. "I used to love going to the Little Theatre. They put on great productions. As kids we were fascinated with the effects. We would see the clouds moving across the backdrop, and be asking "daddy how did that happen, how did they get the clouds to move." Not knowing of course it was all done by machine even in those days. Michael O'Farrell was a schoolmate of mine and lived close by in the Provincial Bank House. His





Ciss Chisholm's Pupils giving a Recital in the Little Theatre

*Back Row (L to R): Veronica Boyd, Audrey Chisholm, Alice McCabe, Anna Pilkington, Gerard Dolan, Marie O'Keefe, Redempta Pilkington, Pauline O'Keefe, Mary Pilkington
Front Row: Rosaleen Power, Ciss Chisholm, Eleanor Butler*

parents, Mab & Gus were deeply interested in the Little Theatre. His sister Bernadette, became a film actress and played a major role in the film 'Captain Boycott' and married film producer, Frank Launder. As youngsters Michael, Dermot Kelly, some other lads and myself would make up our own little plays, like what we had seen at the Little Theatre, and staged them in the loft of the Provincial Bank yard. Without the effects of course"

Gerry's first real involvement with the stage came after Frank MacNamara asked him if he would take part in a play, which he did. Following on from that the players got involved with a couple of drama festivals. "There was one occasion when we went down to Limerick to take part in a Drama festival. My stomach was in knots, frightened what was going to happen and what made it worse was that the other groups were all saying that the adjudicator was a terror. When we arrived there we had some time on our hands and we went for a meal. I wasn't really in the humour for having a meal and I remember Sean Donegan was with us and he ordered a scrambled egg. When I looked at that scrambled egg I thought that out of that restaurant I'd never get. And of course the play went off all right and the poor old adjudicator didn't say too much about it at all really. All nerves"

Shortly after the Marian Hall was built the Stage Guild was set up and Gerry became a committee member of the Guild, including chairperson for eleven years and after that 'it was all go for the next 50 years'. "In the early days we used to run a lot of pantomimes and at that time pantomimes were very novel to a provincial audience. Many of them wouldn't have been to the Gaiety or anywhere in Dublin and the effects could be very impressive. You would have flashes and smoke coming up, sea waves and all of that. They were tremendous. Jimmy Fanning was the man behind that and he would go to town on it. He would get out every effect that he could lay his hands on. He was so creative and could get more creative

as the week went on. He could wake up in the middle of the night thinking of some effect he'd like to get."

"The pantomimes would run for nearly a fortnight and at that time the pantomimes were in January and you'd run into bad weather. I remember one night the roads were so bad I think we played to about 3 people. Playing to an almost empty hall was a bit soul destroying."

"Being involved in the stage Guild was big commitment in terms of time. You have to give a long period of time to rehearsal. Over the years there were so many interesting people involved in the Theatre in Birr. Just to name a few of them that are gone now, you had Paddy Marks, Albert Mee, Tom Shortt, Bert McCoy, Bud Burke, Sean Connatty, William Price, Joe Hernon and of course Jimmy and Isabel Fanning. They were all great characters. There were two great singers, Jim Austin, he was a tailor in the square and of course Bobby Shaw. These were two contemporaries of my mother singing in the Oxmantown Hall. The tradition is carried on with both my brother Gabriel and I were involved and now Gabriel's wife Mary and daughters, Laura and Clodagh, have also tread the boards of the Oxmantown Hall."

"In later years in the Stage Guild, we broadened our horizons a bit. We got involved with the Association of Irish Musical Societies. Both Ann O'Callaghan and I were on the national council of AIMS eventually. I was chairman of the Western Region for a number of years. This involved a lot of travel, not just for me but for the guild also as we put on concerts in Galway, Tuam, Castlebar and other places. We even performed in the Gaiety Theatre in Dublin. President O'Dalaigh was in the audience and afterwards he told us how he loved to come to Birr and especially to the Little Theatre."

"The Choral Festival was set up in Birr and we had our first residential workshop for Musical Societies in Gurteen College".

"The Trench's of course, were very colourful, Patrick and Julia Trench had a big farm at Sopwell. Patrick was educated in Eton, England and came back home, gentry to the last. He'd hardly know the cow from the bull but he was a brilliant engineer. He was big into music and played the flute and harp. He converted part of his stables into a small theatre and he would bring musicians out from Birr to form an orchestra and then they'd give recitals."

"Thinking back I realise that it was another world. I remember we were at some sort of do in Trench's one night many years ago. We had just finished a show in Birr. At the do was a Ms. Murphy from Stada Cona who had travelled the world and was highly intelligent intellectual and she came over to me and she said "That number you did in the show was extremely vulgar. It was appalling". I nearly went through the floor of the place with embarrassment. The song had been "Standing on the corner watching all the girls go by", it was only a curtain filler thing while they were setting up a set. Then it must



Gerry as Beresford Pender in 'Knocknagow'

have been nearly 35 or 40 years later I was in an hotel in Banagher. I saw this man sitting there and I thought to myself 'God I know that face from somewhere' and the next thing I saw him looking across at me and he sang out "Standing on the Corner watching all the girls go by" bloody great number". Then I saw the big ring on his finger and realised it was Archbishop Cassidy from Tuam. In the old days he used to come to a lot of shows in Birr when he was in Ballinasloe college. I thought to myself, "will I never live it down".

For somebody who has lived all of his life in Birr, I wondered if he had ever considered what might have been?

"I've never had any desire to live away from Birr. I went out to America when my brother Brendan was getting married and I said to myself after spending nearly a month in America, 'God, this is not for me'. It was fine and I went to see shows and it was fantastic to see these sort of shows, but the whole life in America was so different, getting up in the morning, out to work, back at night, have their dinner, watch television, back to bed it was no sort of social life for anybody as far as I could see. And I thought to myself at that time in Ireland you could nearly ramble into any house, sit down and drink a mug of tea or something. The life was just so different. Other than that I would not describe myself as an extensive traveller. I've been to France and to Scotland and London, and of course I would know most of Ireland. But I've always been happy here. I suppose I'm lucky to have found enough fulfilment in what I was doing here over the years."

This last statement is said with modesty, and said simply, in a way which is characteristic of Gerry but reveals an inspirational man who has found fulfillment in appreciating his talents and sharing those considerable talents with others.



1978 - Bro. Vincent pictured with his 4 in-a-row Offaly U-14 Hurling Champions.

This team represented Offaly in the Feile Na nGael competition held that year in Kilkenny

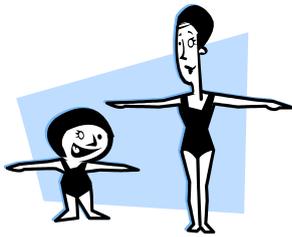
Back Row (L to R): Bro. Vincent, Donal Garvey, John Fallon, Benny Hayes, Ray Landy, John McNamara, Seán Guinan, Adrian Garahy, Mick Cotter

Middle Row: Ollie Nolan, John Kennedy, John Cahill, Val Smyth, Charlie King, Anthony Lawlor, Willie Ryan

Front Row: Billy Delahunt, Paddy Mellsop, Aidan Delaney, Paul Hogan, Michael Butler

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VOCATIONAL SCHOOL REUNION – 40 YEARS ON

There were many fond memories recalled during Birr Vocational School Past Pupils Reunion Held on 21st June 2008 in the County Arms Hotel and many old re-acquaintances made after more than 40 years for some of the past pupils.

The event was the brainchild of Billy Shaw who got in contact with Joe Davis, Michael Hough and Joanne Mann (nee Corboy). At the first meeting on 13th January 2008 a committee was formed as follows: Chairman – Joe Davis, Vice-Chairman – Michael Hough, Secretary – Joanne Mann, Treasurer – Billy Shaw and 4 other members, Eugene King, Sheila Loughnane (nee Kirwan), Michael Sullivan and Patricia Tanner (nee Egan).

A lot of hard work, long hours and many meetings went into the organisation of the event. With the help and advice of Conor Loughnane, County Arms Hotel, the event was brought to fruition. A booklet was put together with some old school photographs, cuttings and snippets of news from as far back as 1964/65. A copy of this was presented to each past pupil and former teachers as a memento of the night. On the night of the event, 211 people came together. These included many past pupils, some partners and former teachers, including, former principals, Mr. Richard Langford his wife, Nuala and Mr. Liam Arundel, former teachers, Mr. Michael McAteer, his wife Bríd, Miss Annie Noonan, Mr. Seamus Donoghue, Mr. Laurence Farrelly and Mr. John Curley. Those present travelled from near and far, some even from the U.S.A. and England, and everyone thoroughly enjoyed the night.

The evening commenced at 6.30pm with everyone meeting in the County Arms Hotel. A visit to the former vocational school, now the Outdoor Education Centre, was arranged with the help of Councillor John Carroll, and this brought back a lot of happy memories for everyone.

Once the group was back at the hotel, canapés were served and then everyone proceeded to the ballroom for an excellent sit down dinner, followed by some speeches. Then a presentation was made to all former teachers who attended. Music and dancing continued until the early hours.

The chairman Joe Davis, who attended the school from 1965 to 1968, commented that, like many past pupils, his school years were full of happy and fond memories.

Treasurer, Bill Shaw, commented that it didn't seem 40 years since he was a student. He said he had many happy memories such as cycling to school in all weathers. He remembered the subjects he loved and hated the games, the all too few outings and the pranks the students played. He recalled buying sticky buns from Annie Connors during lunch times.

Vice-chairman, Michael Hough, attended the school from 1964 to 1967 and also recounted many happy memories.

Secretary Joanne Mann attended the school from 1965 to 1968 and remembered the time she spent in the kitchen, learning to cook so many different things, under the supervision of Miss Mary Moylette.

The reunion event could not have taken place without sponsorship from local businesses and especially the County Arms Hotel. After the event Joanne Mann and other committee members had fantastic feedback from people who attended the function, saying 'they never enjoyed a night so much and they didn't want it to end'.

When all the finances were finalised members of the committee made a donation of the remaining sponsorship money to the 'Friends of the Birr Community Nursing Unit' at Birr hospital. The event was a resounding success and will hopefully be the first of many in the years to come.



Birr Vocational School Past Pupils Reunion (40 Years)
 Back Row (L to R): Michael Sullivan, Eugene King, Billy Shaw (Treasurer) Michael Hough (Vice-chairman) Joe Davis (Chairman), Joanne Mann (Secretary) Sheila Loughnane, Patricia Tanner
 Front Row: Teresa Fealy (representing her husband John), John Curley, Laurence Farrelly, Annie Noonan, Michael McAteer, Seamus Donoghue, Liam Arundel (Principal), Nuala Langford, Richard Langford (Principal)

ONE HUNDRED YEARS AGO - 1908

By Tony Hogan

The *Midland Tribune* and the *King's County Chronicle* reported consistently on the happenings around Birr and surrounding districts. The *Midland Tribune* showed much interest in land agitation, cattle driving, Home Rule and the Universities Act. The *King's County Chronicle* observed a wider remit and concentrated more on international events, especially those dealing with the British Empire. Events which received prominence included the London Olympics, mass production of the first 'Model T' which rolled off the assembly line in October 1908 and the award by the US War Department of a contract to Orville Wright to build the first military aircraft.

The Old Age Pension

During 1908 an Old Age Pensions Act was passed in the House of Commons by Lloyd George's Government and became law on New Year's Day 1909. This new pension was paid to those who could prove they were over 70 years old and was worth between 1 and 5 shillings per week which equates to a pension of between €11 & €27 in today's terms.

Christmas at Birr Workhouse

Benjamin Budds, Master of the Workhouse made ample arrangements to provide the 270 inmates with a tasty Christmas dinner. He was assisted primarily by the guardians who allowed a special tea breakfast and a tea and cake supper as well as a first rate midday meal. Amongst the kind friends who gave fruit, decorations etc. were Lady Synge, Rev. Dr. and Mrs. Hemphill, Rev. H.S. Searancke and Rev. P. Crowe, assistant R.C. Chaplain. The Rector and Miss Hemphill visited the Protestant ward. To show their appreciation of the special efforts of Lady Synge and the Rev. Mr. Crowe in particular, it may be mentioned that at Saturday's meeting of the Board of Guardians it was resolved to return sincere thanks for the gifts. Mr. Budds assured the meeting that the inmates were pleased by the consideration bestowed upon them, and he added a few words which both interested and gave delight when he said the inmates provided their own music. One veteran in particular, Mr. Edward Kilroy, aged 90, having held forth in Irish and Mrs. D'Arcy, another favourite inhabitant, made a 'speech in dialogue form'. **Birr husband and wife at war** 'Typical ruffian gets well deserved punishment for cruel treatment.' Gross cruelty was alleged against Eugene Payne (not a native of Birr) at Birr Petty Sessions. The prisoner's affection for his wife was shown by the fact that he had amongst other things threatened to cut her throat and had mangled her clothes into shreds. Of course all these allegations were denied by the defendant. His wife, Mary stated that it was impossible to live with the accused and she had left to stay with her mother and father. On the

previous Saturday afternoon he came to their house and cut her face when he struck her. He was arrested by the police and afterwards discharged. This seemed to have no effect on him for between 9 and 10 o'clock on the same evening he paid another visit to the house, took a large black knife off the table and pursued her down the road. He knocked her down and said he would take her life. She believed he was going to cut her throat. Head Constable Deignan, in reply to the bench said the prisoner's character was bad. The prisoner said he would leave Birr if he got a chance but Magistrate Shannon replied that this man was a typical blackguard and Birr would do very well without him. He then sentenced him to two months' imprisonment.

Hurling Contest at the Mile Tree

There were splendid exhibitions of camán wielding in the Offaly Championship contest between Kilcormac and Dunkerrin and between Kinnity and Coolderry (Juniors). During the evening there was nothing to mar the interests of the spectators or to dampen the vigour or good spirit which was amply manifested throughout by the players. Much was due to the keen judgment and admirable impartiality displayed by the referee, Mr. P. Murray, Birr, for the just and disinterested manner in which he conducted the play for both sides. The thanks of the local committee were due to Mr. M.J. Horan, Snipe Villa, who again manifested his generosity by putting a magnificently suitable field at their service. The entry fee was as little as three pence, and the field was liberally lined with bicycles, there being also many ladies present. In the first match, Dunkerrin v Kilcormac, both teams were neatly attired, each wearing a distinctive costume which enabled the onlooker to follow the play with ease.

Bishop Fogarty Visits Birr

Dr. Fogarty, R.C. Bishop of Killaloe visited Birr in June to bestow the sacrament of Confirmation on the children of the parish. He noted that the children were a credit to the mothers and fathers who reared them and to the masters and mistresses who trained them in the Christian doctrine. He had never examined any children who were better trained and they were certainly a great credit to the good and holy sisters in charge of their education. His Lordship also paid a tribute to the teachers of Crinkill, Fortal, Riverstown and Carrig schools. He then spoke about the appropriate manner of burying the dead. He considered it desirable that a priest should always be at the grave side and should read the burial services. The corpse should be brought to the church the evening before.

Thanks

Sincere thanks to Birr Librarian Martina Needham and to her very helpful staff.

CYCLING ON PATROL

In March BIRR Garda Station received 2 official Garda Bicycles which will be manned by specially trained Garda personnel. The bicycle unit is a dedicated unit used mostly for patrolling and policing of events as demonstrated at the visit of an Taoiseach, Brian Cowen to BIRR. A huge benefit of the unit is that it can be used to access areas which cannot be easily accessed by other vehicles like the patrol car and van. This is of special benefit to BIRR which has park areas in its local amenity area.

The station also welcomed its first Public Order Van. This van will be utilized for policing and patrolling duties in the BIRR district. It will also be used to deal with Public Order Incidents.

The addition of the new vehicles to the existing fleet in BIRR District reflects the growing and ever changing policing requirements and the reaction of An Garda Síochána in meeting these demands for provision of a 1st Class Policing Service in this District.



Garda Fergus Hogan at the wheel of the new Public Order Van



Garda Virginia Doonagh about to go on patrol

ENTREPRENEUR OF THE YEAR AWARD



Stephen Grant, founder and Managing Director of Grant Engineering Ireland Limited is the winner of the Industry Category of Ernst & Young 'Entrepreneur of the Year' Awards 2008. This is Stephen's second consecutive year to be shortlisted for this highly acclaimed position.

OPUS ARCHITECTURE & CONSTRUCTION AWARD



McCarthy O'Hora Associates and Frank Murray construction won the OPUS Architecture & Construction Awards 2008 in the Heritage Category for BIRR Civic Offices and Library building.

Featured in the photo - Cllr Sean Doorley (Chairman of BIRR Town Council), Mary Gaughran (Town Clerk), Conor Finnegan (chief architect on the project), Anne Coughlan (County Librarian) and Frank Murray (CEO of Frank Murray Construction)

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BIRR CREDIT UNION 1968-2008

In early 1967 a local study group came together to examine the possibility of starting a Credit Union in Birr. Following almost twelve months of study and with the assistance of the Irish League of Credit Unions, Birr Credit Union was formed in January 1968.

A small one roomed office was rented in Green Street for "10 Shillings" a week and Birr Credit Union opened for business for 2 hours on Friday nights and Sunday mornings. At first, progress was slow and it was over 4 months before the first loan was granted. By the end of the first year Birr Credit Union had 95 members with total savings of IR£2,880.00.

Despite the slow start, membership continued to grow and Birr Credit Union moved to a larger rented office in Emmet Street in 1971. In 1981 a decision was taken to purchase its own permanent premises. The premises, previously owned by Hanly Brothers in O'Connell Street was bought and Birr Credit Union moved to the present location.

Opening hours were extended and part-time staff were recruited to assist in running the office. In 1987 a full-time manager, Matt de Forge, and staff were appointed and shortly afterwards computerisation of accounts was introduced. These developments enabled Birr Credit

Union to further extend opening hours and membership continued to grow. That office was modernised and extended in 1989. Member's savings reached the IR£1 million mark in that year.

The efforts of the board, staff and volunteers were rewarded in 1992 when Birr Credit Union was awarded first place in the Credit Union Cup Competition which is open to Credit Unions in the whole island of Ireland.

In 1994 due to the continuing increase in membership and consequent expansion of business, it was becoming apparent that additional office space was required and an adjoining premises (Quinn's Stationery Shop) was purchased in 1995. 1996 saw the completion of a major extension and refurbishment of the offices which were officially opened in September of that year.

Birr Credit Union continued to grow and with the onset of the new millennium and a further increase in business, it became clear that the back office working space was inadequate for staff to carry out their duties and satisfy the growing demands of members' business.

In 2000 Birr Credit Union purchased the adjoining butcher shop in Connaught Street from Mr. Seamus Farrell. This addition made the Credit Union building an outstanding and significant business premises in the town.



First Board of Directors & Supervisors

Picture Includes: Mrs. K. Barnwell, Mrs. S. Campbell, Mrs. B. Tighe, Miss P. Walsh, Mr. S Kennedy, Mr. B. Bergin, Mr. J. Coffey, Mr. J. Colclough, Mr. S. Corbett, Mr. H Hennessey, Mr. P. Horan, Mr. P. Howley, Mr. G. Kearns, Mr. R. Langford, Mr. P. Murphy, Mr. T Nee, Mr. J. O'Meara, Mr. C. Parkinson

Current Staff in Birr Credit Union

*Back Row (L to R): Marie Marshall, Ursula Thompson, Blaithin Kinsella, Margaret Murphy, Teresa Ryan
Front Row: Patsy Rigney, Ita Morris, Breda Rodgers, Selena Flynn, Una Mellisop*

Missing from picture Dympna Macintosh, Mary Carolan



IDENTIFY THE FACES (ANSWERS ON PAGE 159)



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4



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11



12



LET'S HEAR FROM YOU

Do you have an interesting story to tell or do you know of someone who does? If so contact anyone of the committee or e-mail us on birrreview@gmail.com and tell us about it. We would love to hear from you. If you have any comments or suggestions for the book we would also like to hear from you.

ST. BRENDAN'S CHURCH OF IRELAND

The year 2008 brought both challenges and opportunities for the Church of Ireland community in Birr. We discovered that some of the pinnacles surrounding the roof and tower were cracked and could become dangerous. The Select Vestry arranged for repairs to be undertaken as soon as possible. We received generous help with funding from the Offaly County Council and the Department of the Environment Civic Structures Fund, but much fundraising remains to be done to pay for the work completed, and other ongoing repair work needed for the roof.

We were delighted to have our fundraising effort kicked off by a Coffee Morning on the 6th September, which was very kindly hosted by the Earl and Countess of Rosse in Birr Castle, and was very well supported by people from Birr and from other places near and far.

Baby Charles Yufan William Parsons was baptised in Birr during the morning service of Holy Communion on the 5th October. He is the son of Patrick and Anna and grandson of Lord and Lady Rosse. Bishop Simon Barrington-Ward, former Bishop of Coventry, administered the sacrament of baptism and also preached.

On Trinity Sunday, 18th May, three of our Birr young people were confirmed by retired Bishop Samuel Poyntz in St. Flannan's Cathedral in Killaloe, along with others from the Killaloe and Cloughjordan groups of parishes. Congratulations to Elaine & Alison Fetherstonhaugh and Betty O'Brien on their Confirmation.

Raymond Hayden and Nuala McLaughlin were married on the 10th November, 2007; Nicola Condell and Michael O'Donoghue, on the 4th October, 2008; and June Gill and Aidan Lanigan, on the 10th October, 2008. June is the daughter of our Assistant Priest, the Rev. Ruth Gill, who conducted the ceremony.

Over the summer we lost two well-beloved parishioners, Sven Persson and Ruby Bulfin. Sven passed away in England, where his funeral was held. A Memorial Service was held in St. Brendan's Church in Birr on Saturday, 13th September at 5 pm. Ruby passed away quietly in Tullamore Hospital on the 4th of July. On Sunday, 24th August, Walter Ferguson passed away after several years of declining health. On Saturday, 6th September, Frances Odlum passed away after a long illness.

A concert by NUI Galway Youth Orchestra, the Staff Choir of University College, Cork, and Members of the Birr Choral Society was held in the church in Birr on Sunday, 6th April. The concert was a great success in both musical virtuosity and attendance.

On Sunday, 28th September the Gwalia Singers, from Swansea in Wales, sang at the Harvest Thanksgiving service in the morning. This choir, which has been in existence for over 40 years, had performed in the Oxmantown Theatre on the Saturday night. The preacher for the Harvest was Mr. Martin O'Connor from the Bishops' Appeal aid agency.

METHODIST CHURCH, BIRR

The biggest event in the life of the Methodist Church this year was the arrival of a new minister: the Rev. Rosemary Lindsay, B.A. (Dunelm) B.D. (Q.U.B.) In September she disappeared for the conferring ceremony of the Irish Bible Institute to receive her Masters of Arts degree.

It is difficult to ascertain from Rosemary's accent where she comes from! She was born and brought up in Derby, England and only came to Ireland because she fell in love with an Irishman called Jude.

Other people have Reverend Mothers but we have a Reverend Grandmother! Rosemary and Jude have five children and two grandchildren.

Rosemary does not spend all her time in Birr because as the Americans say "she has a three point charge". She cares for the Methodist cause in Tullamore and also Athlone.

Methodist ministers' comings and goings are a bit of a mystery. Why did Colin leave? Why did Rosemary come? The answer is 'The Stationing Committee'. This body of people is drawn from all parts of Ireland, North and South. They recommend to Conference (that is the ruling body of the Church) where ministers should serve during the coming year. Of course they listen to what the churches and the ministers are saying but they make the decisions. People who attended the Faddenmore Psalter celebration in October heard Rosemary sing Psalm 133 in Hebrew. Her musical talents are greatly appreciated in worship, singing comes as naturally to her as speaking. So we look forward to many happy years with our Reverend Grandmother.



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ST. BRENDAN'S PARISH, BIRR

Birr Parish has experienced a very busy and thankfully a generally rewarding year. With all the talk of recession and global financial crisis, it is wonderful to have experienced the many magnificent liturgies that took place in the Parish over the last twelve months.

One positive story was that work on the Church of the Annunciation, Carrig was completed this year. The Church was officially reopened with Bishop Willie Walsh, the Chief Celebrant at a Mass of Thanksgiving, on October 12th last. The renovations have turned the building into a warm and welcoming liturgical space, which will serve the people of the area for many years to come. It was great to see so many of Birr's former curates back for the occasion.

Another memorable evening was June 21st, when St. Brendan's Church was the setting for the ordination of Fergal O' Neill, to the Diaconate. Fergal has worked in Birr Parish since September 2007 and will continue to work in Birr until his ordination to the priesthood, on December 13th. This will take place in his native Shannon.

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

St. Brendan's Church railings were removed for restoration during the summer and are now back in position, looking better than ever. Also the Church clock face was restored, by local sign writer Brendan Mooney. The Prayer Garden at

the back of the Church continues to mature into a peaceful oasis at heart of our Parish.

The Faddenmore Psalter, found in Birr Parish, was celebrated with an evening tracing the Psalms through the ages, in October.

To make the Parish more accessible to all the Parish Office, increased its opening times during the year. It is open on Monday, Tuesday, Thursday and Friday mornings



Fergal O'Neill being ordained to the Diaconate by Bishop of Killaloe, Willie Walsh.

from 10.30 a.m. to 12.15 p.m. and will deal with requests for certificates, booking of Anniversary Masses, supply Parish Mass Cards and relevant enquiries.

The Parish website is in operation and maybe accessed at 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.

If you wish to become involved in Parish activities do not hesitate to contact any of the clergy, members of the pastoral council or parish office. Our e-mail address is info@stbrendansbirr.ie.

For those who are new to the Parish of Birr weekend Masses are: Vigil on Saturday at 7.30 p.m. Sunday 8.30 a.m., 10.30 a.m. and 12.00 noon. Mass in Carrig at 9.30 a.m.

On behalf of all at St. Brendan's Parish all of the readers of the 'Birr Review' are wished a happy Christmas and all the best for 2009.



Bishop Willie Walsh with the Choir of the Church of the Annunciation, Carrig at the Mass of Thanksgiving for the Renovation of the church

Back Row (L to R): Michael Campbell, Aoife O'Brien, Mary Taylor, Josie Raleigh, Teresa Kennedy, Jean White, Geraldine White, Nell Doorley

Front Row: Ellen Kelly, Lisa Hactor, Ellen Cashen, Darragh O'Brien, Bishop Willie Walsh, Sinead Bergin, Ceola Campbell, Carmel Campbell

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Back Row (L to R) : Ms. A. Hennelly, Clíodhna Donoghue, Latoya Finnerty Stapleton, Megan Behan, Niamh Hogan, Saoirse Campbell, Megan Connors Stapleton, Rebecca Fitzgerald, Samara Hanlon, Ms. E. Hynes

Third Row (L to R): Emmelie Korner, Shannon Clarke, Ciara Hoare, Caoimhe Kinsella, Derbhla Lally, Karolina Maselskyte, Weronika Miedzinska, Ava Walsh, Pola Zalevska.

Second Row (L to R): Cadence Lynskey, Ciara Lenihan, Shanna Kelly, Joanna Przybybcwic, Katie Guilfoyle, Chelsea Dooley, Megan Pardy, Aoibhe Guilfoyle, Tara Mooney

Front Row (L to R): Chloe Tyrrell, Chloe Kearney, Courtney Talbot, Lara Hanlon, Éabha Digan Sullivan, Melissa Szoma
Missing from photo: Sorcha Bergin, Barbara Czerwieniec, Leva Jurkaityte



6th Class

Back Row (L to R): Ms. R. Treaty, Amber Mooney, Dionne Finnerty, Karen Ann Siemonsma Butler, Zoe Talbot, Anna Barry, Amy Pardy, Aoife Behan, Sally Murphy, Elizabeth Lally, Imelda Noonan, Christine McDonagh

Middle Row (L to R): Megan Byrne, Sandra Hutchinson, Jane Reddin, Sarah Bracken, Laura Keighery, Janine Donoghue, Laura Kearns, Amy Camon, Helena Kelly, Leah Kelly, Kim Murdock

Front Row (L to R): Kerrie Byrne, Emma Ryan, Megan Shiels, Gillian Irwin, Jane Bracken, Ciara Maloney, Siobhan Heffernan, Eva Buckley, Aimee Maloney



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Junior Infants

Back Row (L to R): Ms Kennedy, Becky Sampson, Sean Cooke, Daniel Vaughan, Dawid Zielezny, Patrick O'Connor, Paul Hutchinson, Jason Maughan, James Hayes

Middle Row (L to R): Caoimhe Nevin Corboy, Leanne Bradley, Emma D'arcy, Sarah Cooke, Hannah Murphy, Meabh Hassett, Ruth Lyons, Evie Cloonan, Brenna Connolly

Front Row (L to R): Colin Farrelly, Ruairi Mc Cormack, Lorcan Dunican, Simon Bracken, Cathal Loughrey, Barry Connole, Jędrzej Romanowski



6th Class

Back Row (L to R): Cathal Guilfoyle, Mrs. C. Kelly, Darragh Nolan, Dillon Delaney, Ciaran Garaghy, Ronan Murphy, Patrick Parsons, Jack Regan, Peter Corbett, Jordan Hart, Ian Hoare, Andrew Ryan, Rian McGovern Dempsey

Front Row (L to R): Edwina Ward, Fiona Guinan, Fiona Mc Cormack, Ciara Ryan, Sarah Lyons, Ciara Doran, Chloe Delaney, Sarah Jane Hehir

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Infants

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Middle Row (L to R): Elaine Hanlon, Nessa O'Neill, Ella Dempsey, Eden Raper, Rebecca Watson, Chloe Kelly, Ava Molloy, Moya Larkin
Front Row (L to R): Anna Morris, Lizzie Burns, Caoimhe Rice, Edel Daly, Ciara Carty, Emily Mullarkey, Sarah O'Rourke, Rachel Parkinson, Kacey Larkin



6th Class

Back Row (L to R): Philippa Ryan, Brian Hogan, Conor Lavin, Aaron Dolan, Stephen O'Rourke, Alex Sarin, Billy Guilfoyle, Sheena Bermingham, Caoimhe Cleary, Mrs. B. Connolly
Front Row (L to R): Fatimah Anjum, Katie Harding, Colleen Mullarkey, Aislinn Fox, Deirdre Cashen, Aileen Ryan, Lauren King, Aoife Plunkett

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ST. BRENDAN'S BOYS PRIMARY SCHOOL



Junior Infants

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Front Row (L to R): Óran Digan, Samuel Kane, Michael McCarthy, Jack Kennedy, Lee Loonam, Aurimos Ozelus, Jack O'Rourke, Shane Rasheed, Paul Heather, Seosamh McAteer, Liam Talbot, Michael Lally, Darren Mooney, Leon McDonagh Morrissey, Ivan Daly, Kevin Murphy, Mateusz Klata, Ben Pardy, Sean Dwyer, Lee Moloney
Missing from the picture were Umberto Grimaldi and Kuba Nowick



6th Class

Back Row (L to R): Oscar Slowikowski, Gareth Talbot, Niall Dolphin-Murray, Nemanja Petkovic, Stefan Shalloe, Ruairi Claffey, Cormac Kenny, Daniel Nevin-Liebmann, Brandon McEvoy, Marek Komendera, Gytis Stankus, Jeremy Alexander, Mr. Niall Crofton (Class teacher)
Front Row (L to R): Leon McDonagh, Hubert Doyle, Jamie Doonan, Denis Resu, Mark Nolan, Mathew Walker, Kenneth Taylor, James Coyne, Cian Dolphin-Murray, Darragh Pilkington, Conor Carry, Josh McDonald, Craig Taylor
Miss from the picture are Ryan Hanlon, Josh Pardy, John McCarthy, Conor Daly

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Infants

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Front Row (L to R): George Markham, Patrick Cleary, Kelly Watson, Katie Moran, Catarina Ryan, Cara Hoare, Lucy Butler, Ben Fogarty

Teachers standing (L to R): Miss N. Casey, Mrs. A. Hanniffy.

Missing from picture: Grace Cashen, Jade O'Meara, Anna Dickson



6th Class

Back Row (L to R): Niamh Cleary, Laura Hogan, Paul Kennedy, Dale Hayes, Joseph Curran, Damien Maher, Liam Pingree, Liam Larkin, Cian Cashen, Tim Hogan.

Front row (L to R): Stephanie Maher, Clara Hctor, Siobhan Killeen, Emily O'Brien, Niamh Collins, Rachel Brennan, Danielle Bond, Leanne Maher

Standing in back row: Teacher Mr. Tony Sampson

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ST. BRENDAN'S COMMUNITY SCHOOL

St. Brendan's Community School has experienced another busy year since the 2007 'Birr Review'. At the time of last going to press the students were presenting the acclaimed 'We will Rock You' to packed houses. This year the students are busy with their production of 'Honk', the musical based on the endearing Hans Christen Andersen tale of 'The Ugly Duckling'. This is a tremendous opportunity for students to develop their confidence and talents in a creative way. Last May Bishop Willie Walsh opened "St. Mary's", a valuable extension to the school's oratory. This facility is useful for counselling and other student services. It allows the Oratory to remain an oasis of calm in a busy school. On the academic front the school was delighted with the fabulous exam results of the class of 2008. The Leaving Certificate students really produced among the highest scores achieved by any year group, in the school's history. The Junior Certificate results in September and the Leaving Certificate Applied results also lived up to expectations. Great credit is due to the students and teachers involved. We were delighted when Elaine McAuliffe, currently in 5th Year received a scholarship to

study in Germany, during the summer break. Elaine was among the top German Students in Ireland, in the 2007 Junior Certificate.

In preparation for the 2009 exams the evening study facility provided by the school is fully prescribed. Large numbers of third and sixth year students avail of supervised study each evening.

The Transition Year option continues to be popular with full three classes participating in the course this year. Generally enrolment is also greatly increased with seven classes in 1st Year, for the first time since the early 1990's.

On a sad note the school community said farewell to long serving teachers Mary Burke (nee Francis) and John Curley. They are wished many years of healthy and happy retirement.

To our past pupils wherever you may read this article all at St. Brendan's wish you a very happy Christmas and peaceful 2009.



Silver Gaisce award winners Sharon Mc Bride, Caoimhe Kennedy and Oisin O' Carroll being congratulated on their achievement, by Mr. T. Foley (Principal).



2nd Year 'Cool School (anti-bullying) Programme' poster winners Aaron Bailey, Laura Sheils, Julie Fanneran and Mary Kinsella pictured with Ms. B. Mc Dermott, Ms. S. Mc Connell, Ms. Y. Claffey and Mr. T. Foley (Principal).



Pictured at the presentation of Academic Excellence Awards are Minehane Cup winners Brian Lonergan, Katie Fanneran and Diarmuid Horan.



David Maher, Martin Mellsop and Mark Harding enjoying the Transition Year Presentation Night



Elaine Mc Auliffe who won a scholarship to Germany with Mr. T. Foley (Principal), Ms. R. Gilmore (German teacher) and Mrs. M. Loughnane (Deputy Principal).



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Aine Boyd & Noel O'Brien



Ann Hardiman & Adrian Hoare



Ruth Lynch & Cormac O'hEadhra



Elizabeth Tierney & Damien Moley



Nuala McLaughlin & Raymond Hayden



Deirdre Hassett & Sean Finn



Eimear Fitzgerald & Robert O'Brien



Elaine O'Connor & Brian Hunt



Donna Doyle & Daniel Cleary



Aine Oakley & Ross Christofferson



Claire Reamsbottom & John Paul O'Meara



Jessica Hayden & Simon Whelehan



Claire Smyth & Liam Gorman



Margaret Tierney & Stephen O'Leary



Michelle Dunne & Darren Cuskelly



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Janine Wilson & Des O'Connor





Priscilla Kiely & Hughie Doyle



Caroline Cavanagh & Ronan O'Hare



Samantha Grainger & Leonard Kennedy



Audrey Enright & Lloyd Semple



Sarah Smith & Jon Ryan



Sinead Kehoe & Robert Barber



Amy Lawlor & Jason Hough



Jonathan Kelly & Catriona Corrigan



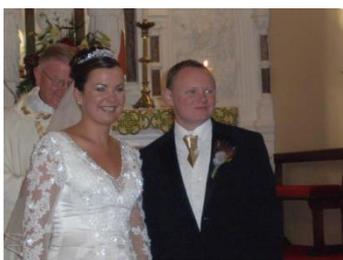
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Gillian Lally & Niall O'Brien



Sophia Power & Michael Larkin



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NEWS

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AUGUST 1984

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Birr
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PROGRAMME

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to Sunday 24th August 1997

the 32nd annual
Birr
Vintage
Week
PROGRAMME

Fri 11th -
Sun 20th
August

Birr
Vintage
Week
1977

Aug. 14 - 21

PROGRAMME OF THE
TWENTY-EIGHTH ANNUAL
BIRR VINTAGE WEEK
Friday 18th August to Sunday 25th August 1996

Ireland

BIRR
Vintage Week
Aug. 20th—Aug. 29th
1971

LAKE ISLAND
FOR HOLIDAYS



Birr Vintage Week Aug 20-27 1978

BIRR SOCIAL CLUB

Once again we had a successful sporting year. On the darts front, 'Bulldogs' from Belmont won this years tournament that was kindly sponsored by Brian Whelehan. The proceeds of the tournament went to the I.C.H.P.T. All taking part in the tournament considered this a very worthy cause.

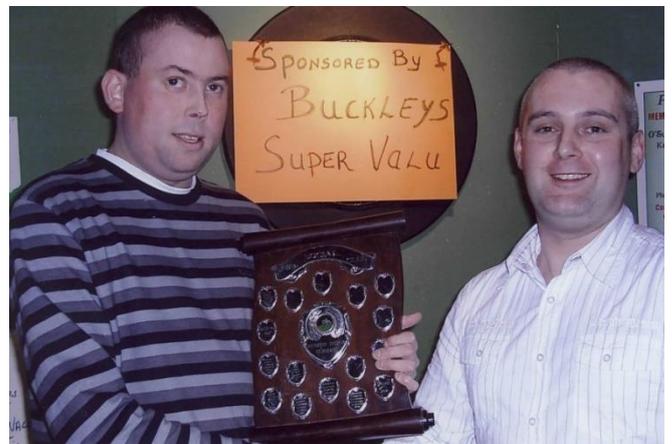
On the snooker front John Ryland's Britvic team won this tournament. This was sponsored by Buckley's Supervalu with the proceeds going to our local Birr Voluntary

Nursing Unit. The Ned Farrell trophy, which was sponsored by Threads, Main Street, was won by Declan Murray who beat Barry Kennedy in a very close run final. The Banner Scratch Cup, sponsored by Britvic was won by Brian Nolan who beat Barry Kennedy in the final.

On the golf front, the club would like to offer its congratulations to captain, John Carroll on his year of office. Due to inclement weather the captain's prize was postponed until November when Tony McCormack emerged victorious.



Birr Social Club Captains Prize 2008
Captain John Carroll (right) presenting the cup to winner Tony McCormack



Birr Social Club Snooker Tournament (Teams)
Chairman Derek Kelly (right) presenting the shield to John Ryland, captain 'Britvic Team'



Banner Scratch Cup
L to R: John Ryland, Britvic presenting cup to Brian Nolan, Pat Dunphy acting chairperson.



Ned Farrell Trophy
L to R: Chairman, Derek Kelly, Brian Guinan semi-finalist, Barry Kennedy runner-up, John Ryland semi-finalist, Brian Stephens sponsor, Declan Murray, winner

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SUB PROJECT

(L to R): Frankie Hanlon, Patrick O'Leary with Galway Garda

The SUB Project stands for Saol ur Biorra or New Life in Birr. It engages young people, aged 12-17, from the Birr area in Co. Offaly in a range of positive and constructive activities to facilitate personal development and promote civic responsibility. The wide range of activities includes sports, fishing, arts and crafts, computers, community awareness projects, a variety of workshops and other special interest groups.

The SUB was officially opened by Mr. Brian Cowen on the 5th November 2007. The launch of the Project was a star-studded event with local role models like musician, Mundy and hurler, Brian Whelahan in attendance.

The SUB is a Garda Youth Diversion Project, managed by Fóroige, a national youth development organisation, which is community-based and aimed at early intervention against anti-social behaviour. It provides a focus for local youth to get involved in productive and rewarding programmes and activities. The project is funded by the Irish Youth Justice Service in the Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform and operated in conjunction with the Garda Community Relations Section of An Garda Síochána. Fóroige currently operates and manages 28 Garda Youth Diversion Projects.

The Copping-On Programme, a crime awareness initiative, has been delivered in-house in the SUB on Connaught Street and in local schools, in conjunction with the local School Completion Officer. The In-house programme concluded with a trip to Limerick Prison where Prison Officer, Damien Whyte showed the young SUBs around and informed them about the reality of prison life for convicted criminals.



Birr Winners at Orienteering Camp in Galway



Pictured at the launch of SUB

(L to R): Mark Jennings, Niall Brewer, Ryan Morrissey, Brian Cowen and Ricky Hanlon

Recreationally, and athletically, this has been a great year for youth involved with the SUB project. Our newly established soccer team took on the local Gardaí in a friendly game of soccer late last year. Even though the SUBs team was defeated, the event brokered a vibrant sense of community spirit and respect for members of the Gardaí. Months later, after much hard work and persistence, the SUBs team walked away victorious from their second competitive encounter with the Garda team.

Birr youths also competed in the Galway World Cup, coming third in the competition, a two-day National Fun Soccer Tournament for young people aged between 14-16. The aim of this project was to promote teamwork and friendship, assist in building self-esteem, social, personal and educational skills, and of course sportsmanship through the opportunity to meet and compete with youth from around the country.

SUBs competed in the annual GYDP orienteering competition and came third. It was an action-packed weekend filled with canoeing, bouldering, hiking and a chance for Birr youth to socialise with others.

Other accomplishments include the successful completion by some members of the SUB of the "Introduction to Coaching Certificate," awarded by the GAA. Others passed the examination for "Introduction to Refereeing," awarded by Basketball Ireland. The youths have enjoyed many new experiences, and have had the opportunity to learn more about future job careers, their community and their heritage, with trips to the Army Barracks, Clonmacnoise, Birr Theatre and helping out in local activities such as clean ups and the Birr vintage week parade. The SUB, only a year in existence, is at the start of a wonderful journey.

If you would like to find out more about the SUB or would like to volunteer, please contact the Project Co-ordinator, Hazel Fleming, on 086 3845645.



The SUB Soccer Team that won the Galway Plate

*Back Row (L to R): Hazel Fleming (Project Coordinator) Garda Jamie Donnelly, Jordan Parsons, David Downey, Brendan Daly, Shane Kerins, Garda Brendan Mulvey
Front Row: Willie Hanlon, David Guidera, Keith Hoare, Darragh Lennighan, Michael Spain*

SHANNON DEVELOPMENT BRINGS TUBRIDY TO TOWN

On a cold January morning, RTE Radio One's Ryan Tubridy presented his radio programme from Emma's Café on Birr's Main Street. As part of his trip to Birr, which was arranged and facilitated by Shannon Development's Birr Regional Office, Ryan launched the "Birr Programme of Events 2008". The programme of events is a calendar of activities happening in and around Birr during 2008. The "Birr Programme of Events 2008" is a project of Meitheal Bhorra, which is a collaborative group to promote Birr. Members of Meitheal Bhorra include Shannon Development, Birr Town Council, Birr Castle Demesne, Birr Chamber of Commerce, Mid-Ireland Tourism and representatives from the hotels and restaurants. The purpose of the programme of events and the main aim of Meitheal Bhorra is to enhance and promote Birr as a tourist destination.



With Ryan Tubridy are Bernie Leonard, and Denis Duggan



Ryan Tubridy with some young readers in Birr Library

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BIRR LEISURE CENTRE

Over a year has passed since Birr Leisure Centre was officially reopened. Since then, thousands of customers have come through our doors for swimming, aqua aerobics, children and adult lessons, one to one swim lessons, lifeguard and swim teachers' courses and Swim Club.

On the second floor, our air-conditioned Class Studio accommodates Pilates classes, circuit training, bums and tums, step aerobics, and spinning. We have a state of the art air-conditioned gymnasium where customers can work out, and have a personal programme tailored to their fitness levels by one of our qualified Gym Instructors. In our tranquil Treatment Room we provide holistic treatments (Hot stone massage, plus sport injury massage).

Our customers are made up of young and old, men and women. Special efforts are made to facilitate patrons with any type of disability. We employ a Manager and 25 fully qualified Staff to operate the centre which is open for 99 hours per week. It is very much a people's leisure centre, owned by the community and managed by the community. As many of you are aware, the final cost of the refurbishment project was just over €2.6 million. In spite of this huge investment the committee is now confident that with almost all invoices furnished, Birr Leisure Centre will be in a position to announce a Debt Free facility at our A.G.M. in February.

This was a massive undertaking by a voluntary committee, raising and managing an investment of €2.6 million but they will never forget the generosity shown by so many.

After many years of campaigning for council and government funding, the project kick started in October 2004 when Offaly County Council prioritised Birr Pool for refurbishment and set aside €280,000 in the December budget and, by doing so, put the wheels in motion for the Department of Sport to provide €1.4 million under the pools refurbishment programme. €300,000 was then secured from Sport Capital Fund (Lottery Fund) for the gymnasium section and the Birr Town Council agreed to provide €115,000 from Development charges.

Birr Credit Union, with a contribution of €50,000 was inspirational as we set out to raise a local target of €350,000. This was followed by the Lions Club committing €20,000 and the generous response to our appeal to the public brought in €185,000. We successfully secured an extra €100,000 from the Department of Sport and also received a second lottery grant of €65,000 towards purchase of gym equipment.

We believe we spent carefully and wisely and the committee wishes to thank everyone who contributed in any way towards making the project a success. We look forward to seeing the people of Birr and district continuing to use and enjoy the facility.

We look forward to welcoming our customers to our A.G.M. in February 2009.



The Board of Management of Birr Leisure Centre

Front row (L to R): Pat Connolly (Chairman), Rita Frawley, Marian Carter (Manager), Ann Spain, Cronan Grennan (Treasurer) Back Row: John Carroll (PRO), Liam Spain, MJ Grogan (Swim Coach), Charlie Delahunt (Treasurer)

Missing from photo Helena Kennedy Company Secretary

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BIRR CHAPTER, IRISH GEORGIAN SOCIETY

This year, like many other organisations, there was havoc caused by unseasonable weather when cancellations happened. The BIRR Chapter of the Irish Georgian Society did not escape either.

However, on Midsummer's Day as our contribution to the Irish Georgian Society's 50th celebrations, the BIRR Chapter had a Thes Dansant, in Tullanisk, the home of Lord and Lady Rosse's daughter, Alicia and her husband Nat Clements. They very kindly let us have free run of their beautiful home. It was a most pleasant afternoon, despite

the showery weather. Many members and guests arrived suitably dressed in Georgian period attire and looked very much the part as they strolled about in the garden chatting. Our caterers, Dooly's Hotel, served lavish food, while many danced to the beautiful music of Sean Ryan and his daughter who played on the Irish harp.

Later in the evening the reluctant guests departed in their carriages having spent a few hours down the times past lane, when everyday pressures were not so demanding.

BIRR APOSTOLIC WORK GROUP

We had a very successful year. We made seven sets of vestments for the missions. We also made two reversible stoles, three altar cloths, two albs, one dozen purificators, one dozen finger towels, six corporals, two palls and a large quantity of knitwear. There were two mass boxes, one anointing set and several sacred vessels donated to the group for the missions. The annual display and raffle were held in April and proved very successful. There were also three fund raising events during the year and over €8,000 was donated to the Apostolic Work diocesan headquarters in Ennis for distribution amongst the neediest missions. Sr. Evangelist Quinlan, whose sister Mrs. Mona Micks lives in Carrig, was home from South Africa recently. She expressed

her gratitude for the help received from BIRR towards their Mercy Mission in Johannesburg in South Africa. The sisters and trained catechists teach in schools. The nurses and social workers work in clinics trying to treat patients with HIV, AIDS and other diseases. They also give counselling sessions and try to build the confidence of people trapped in poverty and hopeless situations. It makes the members of the Apostolic group very happy that their efforts help in some way towards improving the lives of people suffering from poverty and injustice. New members are always welcome as the current members are not getting any younger!



The Current Apostolic Work Committee

*Back Row (L to R): Mrs. Mona Micks, Mrs. Ann Hough, Mrs. Mary Nolan, Mrs. Catherine Murphy, Mrs. Imelda King
Front Row: Sr. Roberta, Mrs. Maureen Dunphy, Sr. Nora Ryan*

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Birr Apostolic Work at the time of their Silver Jubilee (1994)

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Middle Row: Mrs. Feehan, Mrs. Taite, Mrs. Delaney, Mrs. Egan, Mrs. Callaghan, Mrs. Kennedy, Mrs. Nolan, Mrs. Hough
Front Row: Mrs. Calvey, Mrs. Pey, Mrs. Grogan, Canon Shalloo, Mrs. Saunders, Mrs. Barrett, Miss O'Brien, Sr. Nora Ryan, Fr. Anthony Finnegan, Mrs. Hogan, Mrs. Kennedy

RIVERSTOWN COMMUNITY CENTRE

Carrig/Riverstown and Killeen Community Centre is a busy place with many activities in progress throughout the year. Monday evenings begin the week with Badminton for the long winter evenings. Also the Ladies' Club and Active Retirement meet one Monday a month.

Tuesday is card night, which is a great way to pass an evening and maybe win a few euros as well.

Wednesday evening has the local children stepping it out with Phil Corcoran in her Irish dancing class.

Thursday nights the Active Retirement group plays indoor bowling and other various activities. Also social dancing takes place on the 4th Thursday of each month.

Friday evenings in the winter months see indoor hurling for the under 8s.

The local school uses the centre for Physical Education, Christmas Concerts and Speech and Drama classes.

The First Holy Communion class and their families also enjoy a communion breakfast annually.

Many other groups use the centre for meetings such as the GAA, Active Retirement Group, Ladies Club and Tidy Towns. Every Christmas we have our parish party which is a great success. The hall is available for private functions and meetings. Funerals are also catered for.

The hall and grounds are well maintained with thanks to the Committee (present and past). Without help from these people we would not be able to continue to run the centre and offer this facility for the enjoyment and development of the community. The Present Committee is as follows: Chairperson; Geraldine Connaughton, Secretary; Ann Kennedy, Treasurer; Tony Dugan and many other active members. A big thank you to everybody involved and a special thanks to its founder members whose determination, fund raising and hard work enabled the community and surrounding areas of Carrig, Riverstown and Killeen to have such a valuable asset.

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BIRR BOYS SCOUTS

This year, 2008 marked Catholic Scouting's 100th birthday and it was another successful year in scouting for Birr Boy Scouts. We had some very successful camping trips such as old favourites like the log-cabin and Portumna Forest Park, as well as new campsites, such as Waterford's Glenshelane. The cubs enjoyed outings to Glenbarrow, Tullamore and Portumna as well as trips to the log-cabin.

In May the unit camped in Portumna Forest Park on a training camp for annual camp. This is the most popular of all sites for the Scouts and since 1970 we have camped there every year without fail. We pitched our tents near where the marina is now situated. Pier diving and swimming were two activities that were thoroughly enjoyed by all.

Also in May a survival night was organised in which the Scouts had to hike to a set location which was selected by the leaders. Once there, the Scouts had to build their own shelters and cook their own food. Needless to say there was not much sleep got that night. Once again it was thoroughly enjoyed by all who took part in the outing.



Christopher Guilfoyle being encouraged up and over by leader, Padraic Connaughton

Annual Camp this year was a big hit. We went to Glenshelane, Cappoquin, in the sunny south-east. This quiet market town lies beneath the southern slopes of the Knockmealdown Mountains at the head of the tidal waters of the Blackwater estuary. The surrounding country is well wooded and very beautiful. It was one of our most successful camping years especially as we had no rain during our stay there in July. One of the highlights of our camp was a hike to Mount Melleray Cistercian Abbey where we enjoyed a lovely meal provided by the monks. They have been very generous to scouting over the years providing us with our National Scout Centre. The challenge of the assault course was enjoyed by all. Another memorable journey was to Clonea Strand where



Colm Cahill and Donncha Carroll enjoying Annual Camp

we had canoeing, swimming and bowling. The outing concluded with a tour of the south-east coast. Another visit was to Lismore on a photographic outing. For our readers, it is well worth a visit especially the Heritage Centre and the beautiful gardens. We have many happy memories of the Glenshelane Camp, the people we met in Cappoquin, Clonea and the Gold Coast and of course the caterers at Mount Melleray.

We are very grateful to our Parents Committee for their continuous support. We would like to thank them for organising Santa Claus, fund-raising and cleaning up the log cabin, especially after it was flooded. We would also like to thank the Marian Hall Committee for providing accommodation and financial assistance and the people of Birr for all their support throughout the years.

Last but not least we would like to say a huge 'thank you' to our leaders for their time and help over the year. Without their enthusiasm and commitment we would not have any scouting activities. If anyone would like to become a scout leader, then please contact one of the scout leaders. New volunteers are always welcome.



Birr Scouts hanging tough on Annual Camp!

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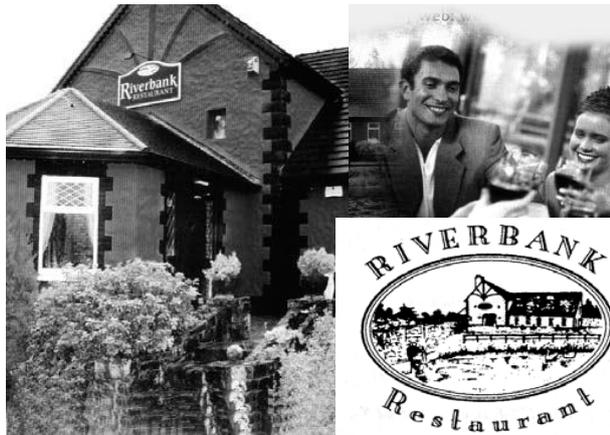
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CHESTERFIELD COMMUNITY CHILDCARE CENTRE

Chesterfield Community Pre-school and After School is run in conjunction with Respond! Housing Association who seeks to create a positive future for people by alleviating poverty and creating vibrant, socially integrated communities.

The centre provides a quality and affordable Childcare Service to all. 2008 saw great improvements in the centre. A high quality Pre-school is now running full time from Monday to Friday by highly qualified and skilled staff members. Both care and education is given to the children thus preparing each child for starting school.

The After school is a great service which offers homework support to the children and provides opportunities to engage in various activities. The children took part in the following during 2007 and 2008:

- An Agility Challenge (3 month period of sporting activities)
- African Drumming sessions

- Dance sessions
- A Christmas Variety Show
- Summer Camp, trips to Dublin Zoo, Turoe Pet Farm, U.L. Activity Centre, Athlone Leisure Centre.

This year saw Chesterfield Community Childcare in conjunction with the local housing organisation C.A.M.P. win the AIB Better Ireland Award where they received €10,000 after a voting competition. This was a great achievement for the centre and sparked great enthusiasm within the area!! This prize has ensured new furniture and equipment could be purchased for the children to ensure they are comfortable and entertained. It's exciting times at Chesterfield Community Centre and they are going from strength to strength and will continue to provide a quality service to the children and families of the town of Birr. During the year Jacinta Talbot was appointed Childcare Manager.



Getting ready for the sack race

(L to R): Zac Gallagher, Christopher Kelly, Thomas Byrne, Luke Nolan, James Taylor



Mask Display

(L to R): Zoe Cahill, Thomas Byrne, Niall Cunningham & companions



Run for your life!

(L to R): Luke Nolan, Thomas Byrne



Egg and Spoon Racers in action

(L to R): Kim Lynam, Niall Lenihan, Chloe Walsh, Helena Kelly, Darrell Lally

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BIRR GIRL GUIDES

Girl Guiding has a long history in Birr going back to the 1920s. The Irish Girl Guides will celebrate its Centenary in 2011. Guiding in Birr has lasted almost as long. Birr now has Ladybird Guides who are 5 to 7 year old girls, Brownie Guides who are 7 to 10 year olds, Girl Guides who are 10 to 15 year olds and there are now Senior Branch Guides who are 14.5 plus. Our programme is designed for the girls to learn through fun activities and games suitable for each age group. We encourage a respect for the environment, each other and ourselves. The outdoors plays a big part of our programme and we take the girls out as much as possible. The Ladybird Guides have a fun day out each year towards the end of the year. The Brownie Guides this year had an overnight stay in a local hostel joining Brownie Guides from Rathdowney and Borris-in-Ossary. The Girl Guides go camping every year and this year attended a regional camp in Cashel with other Guides from all over the Mid-West Region. Next year's plans include taking the Guides to the Isle of Man for 1 weeks camp and fundraising ideas are being worked on to help fund the trip. We are very grateful to the



Girl Guides enjoying the Great Outdoors

leaders, Girl Guides (Linda Dowling), Young Leaders (Aisling Guinan and Leonie Harte), Brownies (Ronnie Donovan and Donna Kelly), Ladybirds (Martina Cooke and Sandra Guilfoyle) who give up their time and energy to lead the girls.

Gold Award winner Aisling Guinan tells her story of being involved with Guiding in Birr



My name is Aisling Guinan (left), I'm a Senior Girl Guide, and I achieved the Gold Award in May this year.

Don't mistake us for girly girls. We get to camp in rain, mud and not very often, sun. Most summers, you leave home with

your bedding roll, bag of essentials and wellies and return home after days and nights full of laughs with old and new friends. We do, however, still swap stories late at night in our tents, and sing songs over a campfire while toasting marshmallows. I've camped a few times in Limerick, Sligo, Meath, Cashel and Birr. I've met girls from all over the country and all over the world. In 2007, Ireland hosted the Guides International Camp – Camp le Ceile - I met girls from Canada, the U.S, Kenya and even Singapore! I've been to a Senior Branch National Conference as part of the Action Team, and took part in the Activity Staff on our Regional Camp! (Muddy, yet fun!)

That's just the Summer. Each week we work towards badges while having a laugh doing it. We hold a few fund raising nights and a party at Halloween, Christmas, and Easter. I have earned 22 badges, 3 awards and my Gold Award. Badges can be fun like Pop Music, Camp Fire Leader, and Writer, educational like Irish, Irish Legends, and local history, or even life skills, such as First Aid, Cooking, or Swimming and even Car Maintenance I can now change a tyre & a lightbulb!

Now, about my Gold Award, and why it's such a big deal. First of all it's the highest award a Guide can get. Second, I'm the first girl from Birr in about fifty years to win it.

The Gold Award is hard work, but with my Unit and friends, my brilliant Guider, Linda Dowling, and my Mom, I got it done. So, on the 17th of May 2008, I was invited to Dublin to receive my award. There were Guides of all ages, from all parts of Ireland there, who'd worked hard and were receiving their certificates. The day seemed to drag on forever, but soon I was called to receive my certificate and pin from the Chief Commissioner Dilys Lindsey. She told me she herself spent some of her childhood in Birr, in fact she was born in the Rectory. I was so excited, I nearly forgot to shake hands with my left hand, as all girl guides and girl scouts should do. I won't be the last from Birr to receive the Gold Award. Leonie and Kahlia Hart will be receiving their Awards in May 2009.

I'm nearly finished my next award, the Siorglas Award which is mostly community based challenges, which will signal the end of my time at Guides.

Guiding has taught me a lot of things in life, from first aid, to why wellies and waterproof trousers should always be brought to camp. I've learned to cook on a campfire, start a campfire, how to put a tent up in the rain and what tired REALLY means. Who knows what my guiding future holds – by Christmas this year, when I have reached the ripe old age of 14, I will be enrolled as a Ranger or a Young Leader. Watch out Senior Branch here I come!

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BIRR ACTIVE RETIREMENT GROUP

Many of our members took part in the Bealtaine Festival which took place in Birr Library on each Thursday of May. The members shared memories of traditional customs, old cures, poetry readings, etc. There was also embroidery and craft displays. Choirs from the local Primary Schools also provided entertainment. They also enjoyed the cup of tea and goodies supplied by library staff.

The group had a very enjoyable day at the Punchestown races on 29th October. Thirty people, from both Birr and Banagher, set out on the coldest morning so far this year. However, it was a truly memorable day. They saw all the races which were shown indoors on close circuit TV. Some of the more hardy members ventured out to the racecourse arena. Aengus McNally hosted the event. There were over 1,000 Active Retirement members at the event that day. There was even a fancy dress parade and top prize went to 'The Celtic Tiger R.I.P.' On the return journey home a meal was had in the Killashee House Hotel.



Pictured on an outing to Birr Castle were
*Back Row (L to R): Brid Callaghan, Anna Corboy,
 Mary Coffey, Nancy Treacy*
*Front Row: Mary Nolan, Lily Tait, Betty Dwyer, Mary
 McLoughlin, Fidelma Clavin*



Pictured at the Bealtaine Festival
*Back Row (L to R): Sr. Roberta, Sr. Maeve, Agnes O'Brien,
 Bernie Kirwan, Sheila O'Meara*
Front Row: Brid Callaghan, Sr. Nora



Poetry Reading at the Bealtaine Festival in May
*L to R: Lily Tait, Sheila O'Meara, Teresa Shea, Mary O'Connor,
 Aileen Anderson, Clare Grimes, Betty Dwyer*

BIRR LIONS CLUB

During the past twelve months Birr Lions Club has been extremely active and raised in excess of €30,000. The funds were raised from projects such as the Birr Annual Review Magazine, the Christmas Fast, Church Gate Collection, Table Quiz and a two day collection at the Irish Game and Country Fair held in Birr Castle Demesne.

Following much deliberation, the funds were duly distributed to various Clubs, Organisations and Individuals. Among those to benefit were: St. Vincent De Paul, Northside Bus Service, St. Brendan's Boys School Garden, Irish Girl Guides (Birr Branch), Birr Active Retirement Group, Chesterfield Summer Camp, Simon Community, Birr New Dimensions, ASIST Suicide Awareness, World Sight First Campaign, Pro-Active Cancer Service, Children's

Opera Project as well as numerous other deserving causes. Birr Lions Club was also involved in the purchase of the new car for the Birr Community Nursing Unit.

In December, we hosted a very successful Christmas Party for the Senior Citizens in the Day Care Centre – a great day was had by all.

Our Crib which was upgraded last year greatly enhanced the Christmas spirit around the town.

We also gave our support to Birr Vintage Week and Arts Festival in helping them to organise the Camcor Capers.

Finally we would like to take this opportunity to thank our supporters – **YOU**, the general public from Birr and the surrounding area for your continued support throughout the year and to assure you of our continued commitment to helping the youth, the underprivileged and the aged. Your generosity is very much appreciated.

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SOCIETY OF ST. VINCENT DE PAUL

The Society of St. Vincent de Paul is a voluntary Christian Society, whose membership is open to all who support its ethos. In Paris, 1833, the society was founded by a 20 year old university student, Frederic Ozanam. Today, the SVP operates in 120 countries, with over one million members worldwide. The name "Society of St. Vincent de Paul" was given to the movement as Vincent de Paul is the Patron Saint of the poor.

The aims of the society are – to bring the love of Christ to the poor and the under privileged, to promote self-sufficiency, to share the burden of the deprived and to try and make a difference to society. In St. Brendan's Conference, Birr, there are full time and auxiliary members. The Conference has a Spiritual Director, as spirituality is at the core of SVP. Each member is a trained volunteer. During training, the confidentiality of the work of the Society is emphasised. Members attend seminars on justice, visitation and shop work, at SVP headquarters, Sean McDermott St, Dublin. The Conference in Birr provides various types of assistance to those in need locally – subsidising school buses, Summer camp, grinds, primary,

secondary and third level education, day trips, summer holidays, food vouchers, fuel, trips to Knock, holidays for the elderly, home visitations, hospital and nursing home visitations.

Funding comes from a variety of sources, the main source being the Annual Church Gate collection and the proceeds of the shop. Occasionally, the Conference receives donations and bequests. An annual golf classic raises substantial money for the area's underprivileged. A Christmas bingo raffle is another source of funding.

The SVP Birr, work in close co-operation with some statutory bodies including social workers, social welfare officers, school liaison officers, M.A.B.S., Lions Club, Clergy and the Gardaí.

The Society of St. Vincent de Paul, Birr, would like to take this opportunity of thanking most sincerely, all those who give so generously to help alleviate the hardship and burden of the underprivileged in the Birr area and who enable SVP to - 'make love accomplish what justice and law alone can never do" (*Frederic Ozanam*).

BIRR LEGION OF MARY

The members of Birr Legion of Mary, Our Lady Queen of Peace Praesidium, meet every Tuesday at 8.15 p.m. in the basement of the curate's house in John's Mall, Birr. There are twelve active members and twenty four auxiliaries.

Their main ministry is to promote devotion to Jesus and Mary through the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass and the faithful, frequent recitation of the rosary. The members visit the local hospitals and nursing homes almost weekly. They bring holy water, miraculous medals and leaflets explaining about Frank Duff, Edel Quinn and Alfie Lambe. They also do house visitation of the elderly.

Members organised a Rosary Rally in St. Brendan's Church in October. This was a great success, with children from each of the primary schools participating. The group also takes turns at Eucharistic Adoration and sells copies of the Irish Catholic Newspapers each week. They also distribute copies of the 'Far East' and the Legionary magazine, 'Maria Legionis'.

The group is very grateful to Fr. Tony Cahir and the rest of the clergy for their encouragement and co-operation. They send greetings and good wishes to their former spiritual director, Sr. Ignatius, who is incapacitated at the moment.

Member of the Legion of Mary who attended the Alfie Lambe celebrations in Tullamore

Back Row (L to R): Agnes O'Brien, Cecily Dolan, Maureen Reedy, Maura Sherlock, Sheila Delahunty, Maura Wrafter, Mary Torpey, Fidelma Clavin
Front Row: Maureen Dunphy, Bernie Bolger





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BIRR COMMUNITY & FAMILY RESOURCE CENTRE



Birr Community & Family Resource Centre is a community facility, funded by the Midland HSE, located in Londis car park.

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 a hearing clinic is 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 Bazaar event in December where work from the various groups will be on sale to the public. There are also subsidised summer camps and various other activities throughout the year.



Kidz Kraft with Mary Trimarco and Majella Hehir



Art Class with Michelle Guidera and Nora Leahy

BIRR BRIDGE CLUBS

Birr '66 and **Camcor** bridge clubs are both continuing to thrive, playing on Monday, Wednesday and Thursday nights in the County Arms Hotel.

Our playing season is generally from September to May. Both clubs actively encourage new members to join their clubs and, to this end, owe a debt of gratitude to Joe Kerins, who has in the past run bridge classes which have been a great success and have provided a pool of new members. His enthusiasm for the game is very catching which makes it a joy to learn. We hope that these classes will continue in the future.

Both clubs run their own competitions, such as the president's prize, pairs competition, and play for turkeys at Christmas and Easter eggs in the spring. Being affiliated to the Irish Contract Bridge Association, and through the regional organisation, the clubs are eligible for qualification to play in regional and national tournaments.

Bridge is a challenging and a very enjoyable game and provides a social outlet as well as some 'brain exercise' and is a game where age and experience can be a definite advantage, though it can be enjoyed by most age groups and at every level of play.

If you would like to know more about either of the above clubs, how to join etc, please contact Mary Byrne - Birr '66 Club – 0872431865 or Ann Ritchie - Camcor Club – 0861951906.

Bridge in 'The Glens' - which is now entering its sixth season, caters for all players who enjoy the morning game of bridge. Over the years, a number of local charities have benefited from the end-of-year balance. This year, Sarahgene Loughnane was the recipient as she headed for Mombasa with a group of volunteers with the 'Maintain Hope's' venture to help build classrooms, teaching the poorest of the poor children of the World, ending with a special holiday treat for all, children and volunteers alike.

Every season brings its changes, and this year we remember with great affection Bill Owens, a regular competitor at the bridge table. Bill was laid to rest in August, and we extend our sincere sympathy to the Owens family.

Bridge in 'The Glens' is on Tuesdays at 10.30 a.m. The session takes just two hours and all bridge players are most welcome.

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BIRR CHAMBER OF COMMERCE

The Birr Chamber Of Commerce is a voluntary organisation that was established in the mid 1960s. Our goal is to represent the views and aspirations of the local business community through representation, lobbying and dialogue. The Birr Chamber is managed by an elected committee of a President, Treasurer and Secretary who, in turn are aided by representatives from varying business concerns who form the action groups.

This past year has seen the Birr Chamber of Commerce publish the Business Investment Brochure that was launched by An Taoiseach, Brian Cowen T.D., in conjunction with Shannon Development. This year also saw the local website www.Birrnet.com repositioned as the

quintessential business and information directory for the locality. Turning on of the lights last Christmas was the start of what we hope will become an annual event when local musician, Mundy, threw the antique switch from Birr Castle, in Emmet Square to signify the start of the Christmas Festivities in Birr.

We would like to take this opportunity to thank everyone for their dedication and commitment throughout the past year.

The Committee of Birr Chamber of Commerce includes: President-Nigel Craughwell, Treasurer-Greg Smyth, Secretary-Sinead Ryan. Contact Number: 086-0784632.

CARRIG, RIVERSTOWN, KILLEEN ACTIVE RETIREMENT GROUP

Our group enjoyed yet another busy and active year with our usual outings and get-togethers. However, the highlight of our year has to be a trip to Wales which took place at the end of April. This was our first trip outside of Ireland as a group. On Monday, April 28th, we set out from Carrig and headed for the ferry, stopping on the way for our 'Full Irish'. We got the ferry from Dublin, arriving in Holyhead 90 minutes later. We had a couple of hours travel through some spectacular Welsh scenery until we reached our hotel in Mold.

Dorothy had a full itinerary planned for our trip. Some of

the more pleasurable outings included reaching the top of Snowdon, by train and a trip to historic Chester with its famous cathedral and quaint streets.

On our last night, the hotel put on a traditional Welsh night for us. We dined on Welsh lamb whilst being serenaded by a Welsh harpist. Afterwards, we were entertained with a Welsh male choir.

Friday saw us on our way home with everyone agreeing that it was a trip to remember and vowing that next year we should perhaps widen our experience.



Waiting for the bus in Chester

(L to R): Cissy Kearns, John Duncan, Betty Burns, Cecily Dolan, Lily Greene, Susan Delahunt, Margo Regan, Frances Delahunt, Helen Kennedy, Nora Brereton, Tom Regan, Tim Carey, Marge Carey, Olive Duncan, Chris King, Geoff Harding

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CRINKILL TIDY VILLAGES

Tidy Towns is community spirit in action and this year the Tidy Towns competition was 50 years old and it duly celebrated in style. Local and national media paid more attention to the competition this year and amongst hard working committees up and down the country there was a renewed sense of purpose and a feeling that maybe “we are not toiling in vain”.

This is the sixth year in a row (since rejoining the competition in 2003) for Crinkill to participate in Tidy Towns and the committee felt that the gain in points this year was a fair assessment of progress made. Crinkill village was awarded 231 points this year – a gain of 6 points on the previous year.

A number of projects, such as the resurfacing of Barrack (Main) Street and landscaping on Grove Street, were started but unfinished when judging took place and so the village did not look its best over the summer months. The committee has an ambitious plan for Barrack Street and hopes to erect Georgian style lampposts here which will give a great lift to this focal point of the village.

This year again, the Association sowed over 500 bedding plants, which brightened up the approach on Military Road. Flowers were also sown in Hawthorn Drive, Cribben Terrace, Barrack Street, Grove Street and Whiteford Cross. The summer was not particularly kind to flowers and there was no need to get the watering cans out!

The Tidy Towns competition has a strong emphasis on involving the local school children and the Association is delighted to learn that Crinkill National School is going for the Green Flag school status. The Association is looking forward to working with the school on this project.

The Association organised a number of events this year to raise funds for the planned works on Barrack (Main) Street. There was a very successful Barbeque in Milne’s Pub in August and a great Halloween Party in the Thatch in October. Both events received tremendous support from local people. More social events are planned for the New Year!

The Tidy Villages and Development Association would like to thank all those who supported our activities this year.



Whiteford Cross

In particular we wish to thank:

- Des and Anne Connole, The Thatch, for generous sponsorship of the Halloween Party
- John and Marita Milne, Milne’s Pub, for generously hosting the Barbeque in August
- Local residents for supporting our fundraising events and coming out to “lend a hand” on our work nights during the Spring and Summer
- Geraghty’s Superstore for sponsoring Santa Claus on his visit to Crinkill and other sponsorship prizes
- Grennan’s Post Office, Hasset’s Topline Hardware and Brian Hart, Taxi Services, for generous sponsorship of prizes.
- RSS team who did a great job over the summer keeping the grass under control
- Offaly County Council – Local Management and Team for co-operation and assistance

As mentioned above, the Association has ambitious plans for Barrack Street which will give a huge lift to the centre of the village. However, whilst we have our eye fixed on the bigger plan, we will also have to continue to look after the routine matters such as picking up litter and replacing broken or damaged trees. This is the bread and butter stuff of Tidy Towns as anyone who has been involved in the competition will agree.



Military Road looking great

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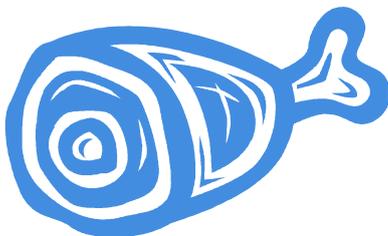
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BIRR BRANCH, COMHALTAS CEOLTÓIRÍ ÉIREANN

This year the Birr Branch of Comhaltas Ceoltóirí Éireann celebrated its 50th anniversary. A number of functions are being arranged to commemorate the event and one of these, an awards night, was held in the County Arms Hotel on Sunday 12th October. Musicians and singers from over a wide area joined locals for a tremendous session of music and song with the younger performers particularly to the fore. The organisers took the opportunity to acknowledge the contribution made by a number of people to the promotion of Comhaltas and traditional music over the years. First to receive recognition were Frank McNamara and Gerry Dolan, who were members of the committee which organised the first ever Fleadh Cheoil in Offaly in 1958, which led to the setting up of a branch of Comhaltas in the area. The awards, Comhaltas 50 year medallion, were presented by Attracta Brady, chairperson of the committee

organising Fleadh Cheoil na h-Éireann in Tullamore, emphasising the manner in which the fleadh has developed over the years. Among others honoured was Pat Barton, Lusmagh, and formerly of Killeen, who won the All-Ireland senior accordion title in 1969 having graduated from the music class with the late Johnny Roe in the early '60s. As he demonstrated on the night he is still playing as well as ever. The principal organiser of the event Pádraig O'Dúfaigh, Branch PRO had the tables turned on him towards the end of the night when branch chairman, Joe Kinsella stated the branch wished to acknowledge Paddy's contribution to Comhaltas at local and national level by presenting him with an award and a very comprehensive citation. Relatives of the founding members who had passed away in the meantime were also acknowledged.



(L to R): Mary Darcy, Virginia Duffy, Paddy Duffy, Jim Kinsella



(L to R) : Frank McNamara, Phil McNamara, Attracta Brady



(L to R): Attracta Brady, Gerry Dolan, Paddy Duffy

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CAMCOR PARK/SCURRAGH COMMUNITY CENTRE



Recently, Camcor Park/Scurragh residential estate has hit the media headlines for the wrong reasons. Like anywhere you live, the positives of an area largely out-weigh the negatives. Just like any other residential estate, the residents are trying to improve their community. They have organised events and functions that suit all ages. The local community centre is being used to adapt to residents needs in the area. It constantly has meetings that involve the residents with what they would like to see here for both themselves and their children. The centre has events and functions that clearly are of benefit to everyone. These include Playschool, Yoga, Afterschool Club, and English Language for Non-nationals. Both councillors and residents of the area are trying to get other educational courses held in the community centre, such as First Aid, Parenting, Food and Nutrition, Back to School, etc. These courses can be a great experience for everyone who attends, on the basis that you better your education, meet new people and have more qualifications to help improve career prospects or change career paths. The community centre has just completed a computer course with the attendants finding it a great success. In July, Camcor Park/ Scurragh organised a fun day with lots of activities, such as bouncing castles, face-painting and a Jumble Sale. There was a large selection of refreshments and sweets for the children that attended. Some of the adults organised and took part in races with the local children. There was a great attendance and a good time was had by all. Everyone was greeted with fine weather for the occasion. Camcor Park/Scurragh After school programme - the junior group recently went on an overnight trip to Srahan scout centre on the 16th July. They enjoyed activities such as

fishing at the Laois Angling centre and they visited Kilvahan Pet farm. The senior group enjoyed a few days in Delphi Adventure centre from the 21st July to 23rd July. They participated in various different activities; many of them were water based. All the children who went had an excellent time.

Councillors and residents in the area held a meeting recently looking at areas in the community that need to be improved, residents would like to see more in the area for young children and teenagers, such as a youth club, Sports clubs, Music classes, Summer Camps, All weather pitch, etc. There will be a meeting in the near future to see what the local teenagers would like and they would be able to voice this for themselves.

Other topics that are brought up regularly in the meetings, residents would like to see a committee set up, that would be able to organise events, functions and fundraising in the area. They would like to see pedestrian crossings and speed ramps to ensure the safety of the young and old. Also, they have discussed signs being placed at the entrance to each estate as people that are not used to the area get confused between Camcor and Scurragh.

Overall, residents are working together with government bodies to ensure that the area is maintained regularly. Only recently they organised a clean-up in conjunction with Birr Tidy towns where the local children went around their local area and cleaned up scattered litter. Birr Tidy Towns committee relayed their appreciation to the residents' children who took part in the clean-up of Camcor Park/Scurragh.

Recently, Padraig Connaughton, from Birr Garda station was appointed as Community Liaison Officer for Camcor Park/Scurragh residential estate, to help improve the area and the people who live in it. With the help of councillors, Gardaí, the Council and, most of all, the residents and their families, everyone will continue to improve the local community.

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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, whose aims are to help the mentally ill and their families and 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 05791-20576/20540.

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.

2008 was another successful year for our Association. Again we took a number of people on holiday to Kilkee, Co. Clare. There were a number of very enjoyable parties organised by our own and other Mental Health Associations.

Mental Health Association members took a number of people to the Kilbeggan Races and Knock during the summer months. Visits were made to Clonfert and local areas of historical interest. Transport is provided to all events by the Mental Health Association's minibus. Deserving cases are catered for in times of financial difficulties and at Christmas, by the provision of hampers, fuel etc. Practical help is also provided in the area of home

improvements. The Association is always available to support people with mental health difficulties.

We aim to educate the younger generation by organising quizzes and involving secondary schools in the National Public Speaking Competition. We were also associated with other projects held in the Community Mental Health Centre, including the Annual Physical Activities and Fun Day in August.

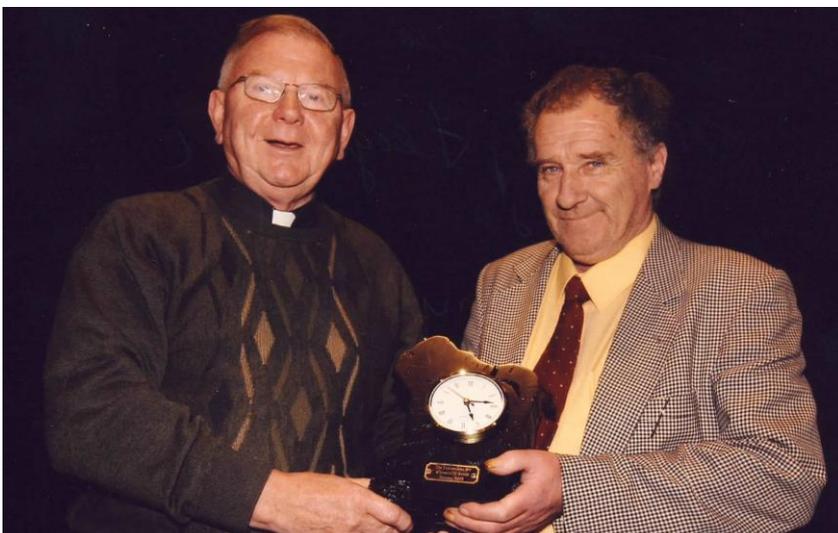
One of our major projects this year was organising an inaugural art exhibition, "Expressions", which took place in Birr Theatre and Arts Centre on 17th October, 2008 and which was officially opened by Fr. Tony Cahir, P. P.

The Arts and Creativity group, who are based in the Community Mental Health Centre, Birr, contributed all of the works for the exhibition. About 25 artists took part, including ten painters, nine creative writers and six crafts people. Many family members of the artists turned up and were very proud of the high level of skill shown by their loved ones. Many of the works of art were bought at the exhibition. A 2009 calendar was also launched on the same day comprising of the above works of art and these are on sale in local shops and at the Community Mental Health Centre, Wilmer Road, Birr.

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 be held in a local hotel. Anyone wishing to contact us may do so by telephoning (05791) 20576 or 20540 or call in person to Community Mental Health Centre, (Old Convent) Wilmer Road, Birr. New members are always welcome.



Fr. Tony Cahir P.P. (left) being presented with a clock by Michael Feighery at the 'Expressions' Art Exhibition

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HISTORICAL SOCIETY

The Birr Historical Society is an active, lively group headed by Rev. Irene Morrow. We meet on the 3rd Monday of the month from September to May in Dooly's Hotel.

Topics of interest from the programme 2007—2008 included an illustrated talk from Margaret Hogan on the Birr Union Workhouse. The Workhouse is of particular interest as, although in a deteriorating state, it is still the only workhouse in the country in its original layout and it is still possible to imagine the day to day lives of the men, women and children who lived and died there.

Other topics discussed were the Newspapers in Birr presented by Jeff Oakley who having had a long association with the Midland Tribune had a terrific selection of old newspapers and photographs reminding us of yesterdays. Brian Kennedy spoke with great historical detail of the events leading up to and resulting from the Crotty Schism in the 1840's. Father Crotty's Church which is in Castle Street has recently been sold.

To commemorate the opening of the new library in Birr, Mr. Conor Finegan guided us through the corridors of the

old Pugin designed Convent. Mr. Finegan was the architect involved in the transformation of the Convent of Mercy to a wonderful library and new civic offices for the Town Council.

To celebrate National Heritage Week, we organised a walking tour of the stained glass windows of Birr. Lord Rosse spoke to us about the large window behind the altar in the Church of Ireland and Salter Sterling showed us the beautiful patens and chalice and very old wooden collecting boxes of the church. We proceeded on foot to the library where Margaret Hogan explained the lovely stained glass windows of the old convent chapel and then walking next door, Brian Kennedy outlined the history of the beautiful windows of St. Brendan's Church on Wilmer Road.

Finally, we would all like to pay tribute to Philomena Neavyn who has retired after many years as secretary to the society. For more information visit our website on www.birrhistsoc.com

BABÓG MOTHER & TODDLER GROUP

BabÓg was set up in 2001, to provide support and advice for parents in an informal setting; also to give babies and toddlers their first experience of social interaction. This is very important for their development. After three different venues and in our 7th year BabÓg has gone from strength to strength. With invaluable funding from the Health Board, support from Offaly County Childcare Committee and staff in Birr Resource Centre, BabÓg is run by a voluntary committee elected from parents who attend the group. BabÓg meets every Tuesday morning from 10.15 a.m. – 12.30 p.m. in the Family Resource Centre Glebe Street, Birr. We are lucky to have a large number of babies and toddlers attend this group along with their mothers, fathers, grandparents or minders. Age appropriate toys, mats and chairs are provided for the children to play with, giving the adults the chance to enjoy a chat over a cup of tea or coffee. BabÓg employ a play facilitator to encourage the children to enjoy activities such as crafts, jigsaws, colouring and painting. A break of fruit, juice and a biscuit is provided mid morning for the children. This helps them socialise and learn to share with others

A warm welcome is extended to all the parents who attend, especially more recently the ones who have moved here from outside of Ireland. It has found that the newcomers have made new friends and also improved



Enjoying the party with facilitator Majella Hehir

their English, as well as the children mixing with other cultures.

Social activities are also organised such as day trips to Indoor Play Centres, Pet Farms. Musical movement classes with Gymboree held on our Tuesday mornings are also very popular. Besides these activities we have also held fundraising mornings and parent only evening dinners. Seasonal dinners and our annual visit from the man in the red suit always create a great deal of excitement. We would like to thank everyone for the great support that we have received in 2008 and look forward to 2009.



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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. Donations from the public to assist the service are also welcomed.

Our AGM is held annually in October. At the 2008 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 one of the above. Ideally, each area of our town should have representation and all interested persons are invited to attend our monthly meetings.

BIRR TIDY TOWNS

Regrettably this year we dropped one point from the previous year. The adjudication was carried out in mid-July and the comments received were very positive and encouraging. A number of people must be thanked for helping us this year. These include Tadgh Cox (West Offaly Instructor) and course participants who made the furniture on Bridge St., Birr Town Council staff with particular attention to the improvements made at the Brendan Street entrance to Mill Island, the management and staff of Super Valu who provided bibs and refuse sacks as well as labour and the children of Scurragh. Particular thanks is given to John and Teresa Lawlor, the McDonagh family, Noel Kelly,

Lesley Farrar, Tony McLoughlin and Gina Hehir. We would also like to say thanks to Tom O'Reilly, litter warden, for providing us with litter pickers, Birr Credit Union for sponsoring the prizes of various categories. Thanks are due, too, to people who took part in our sponsored walk and to those who sponsored them. We very much appreciated the use of the castle gardens for our walk, many thanks to Lord and Lady Rosse. We would also like to thank the Order of Malta for their attendance on the day. We now look forward to 2009 and sincerely hope we will improve our marks.

Pictured Below

The children of Camcor Park/Scurragh on clean up duty with coordinators Judy O'Neill, Tony McLoughlin, Noel Kelly



Pictured above

(L to R): Gary King, Tony McLoughlin, Teresa Lawlor, Pierce Gordon, Trevor Askin, Darren McLoughlin, Konrad Lewandowski, Tracy Kinsella, Gina Hehir, Ita Breslin, Megan Kinsella, Chanelle Murphy



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BIRR STAGE GUILD 1958-2008



Being the 50th Anniversary year, 2008 proved to be an extremely busy one for Birr Stage Guild. In January, the year kicked off with something we haven't done in many years, a good old panto! All the weeks of preparation, both on stage and back stage, paid off. "Cinderella" was a resounding success, thoroughly enjoyed by the cast and the audience alike, with one critic saying "Local talent was seen at its best and the professional pantos in Dublin and elsewhere would have been hard

pressed to match this" (Midland Tribune, January 2008).

Throughout the first week in March, the boys and girls from 4th class in St. Brendan's Boys Primary School and Mercy Primary School in Birr teamed up with Opera Theatre Company and Birr baritone, John Molloy, to produce the wonderful and colourful opera *Bug Off!!* written and composed by Stephen Deazley. As a new venture for Birr Stage Guild it was extremely successful.

On the weekend of Saturday 24th and Sunday 25th May we presented A GALA WEEKEND of events to celebrate the 50th Anniversary. The weekend opened with a wine and cheese reception at Dooly's Hotel and the opening of an exhibition of Archives of Birr Stage Guild 1958 – 2008. It was at this event that the Official Souvenir Programme was launched. On the Saturday and Sunday evening we presented The Best of Gilbert and Sullivan with Ann Hogan, John Molloy, Naoise Stuart-Kelly, Oliver White, the Gilbert & Sullivan Orchestra with a Birr Stage Guild chorus. The musical director on this occasion was Enda O'Connor. Suffice to say a great weekend was had by all and there were many stories exchanged, many memories recalled, sadness for all those lost to us over the years, many laughs from countless anecdotes and the well known sing songs. Here's to another 50 years!

During the month of July, Birr Stage Guild ran their 5th Children's Theatre Summer Camp, a week of Drama, Dance, Music and Mime for 7 to 12 years olds. The children worked with Nick Bryson and Christina Goletti, actor Damien Punch and mezzo soprano Ann Hogan.

In August during The Birr Vintage Week & Arts Festival, we once again put on our very popular lunchtime play. This year's play *The Trial of Mr. Punch*, by Campbell Black was a huge success with packed houses. The play was presented by Birr Stage Guild and was commissioned by the Birr Vintage Week & Arts Festival.

Also during the Festival we hosted *Songs for a Summer Night* with Gerard O'Connor and Sandra Oman, accompanied by Mairead Hurley. Gerard was the first music teacher in St Brendan's Community School and he has gone on to make an international career on the Operatic and Concert stages. Another sell out performance!

In September we hosted the Gwalia Singers, a Welsh Male Voice Choir. The choir and their families enjoyed the famous Birr hospitality for the weekend. They performed in the Theatre and also joined the congregation of St. Brendan's Church of Ireland for Sunday service.

On October 24th, 25th and 26th, we presented our second *One Act Drama Festival*. Over the weekend, nine drama groups performed from such diverse places as Shannonside, Cavan, Wicklow, Kilbarrack, Naas, Tullamore, Cork and Galway. This year's winners were: in the Open Section: Tullamore ADS with '*Ashes to Ashes*' and in the Confined section, Shannonside with '*Less than a Year*'. Perpetual trophies were presented by the Fanning Family, in memory of James Fanning and Isobel Fanning and by the Lucey Family, in memory of Dr. John Lucey, founder members of Birr Stage Guild. Local woman, Fiona Breen, took the Premier Acting award of the festival.

Our autumn play was J.B Keane's, '*The Field*', which was directed by Eamon O'Donoghue and performed on 13th - 16th November. With a very strong cast, this popular play was enjoyed by all.

Bringing to a close a full and frantic year, on 6th December was *The Magic of Christmas III*, with musical director Enda O'Connor, along with chorus and soloists from Birr Stage Guild. This brought the Birr Stage Guild back to The Marian Hall where it all began 50 years ago.

Birr Stage Guild would like to say a big thank you to all who helped to make the recent 50th Anniversary Year Celebrations so memorable and enjoyable. To patrons, sponsors and advertisers, both on this occasion and through the years, who enable the Guild to meet the high costs of productions, to committee members, sub-committees, past and present members, friends, and well-wishers, to all who gave their time and talents to the celebratory mass, the exhibition, and the G&S production, to all who contributed to the 50th Anniversary Magazine, in particular Tony Hogan, editor, and Sean Hanniffy, photo archivist, to all from near and far who attended the events throughout the year, to the special guests of the 50th Anniversary year, Annie Noonan, Gerry Dolan and Frank McNamara, we would like to state our deepest appreciation for celebrating with us and passing the legacy of **BIRR STAGE GUILD** on to the next generation.



The cast of Bug-Off with 4th Class children from Mercy P.S. and St. Brendan's Boys P.S. with John Molloy



A scene from the Trial of Mr. Punch



Gilbert and Sullivan



Birr Lions Club made a presentation to Birr Stage Guild

*Front Row (L to R): Noreen Davis, Patt Grogan, Noelle Brummel, Dawn Legace, Lisa Byrne
Back Row: George Manzor, Fred Boulton, Maureen DeForge, Denis Tierney, David Baker, Michael Coghlan, Tony Hogan*

40TH ANNUAL BIRR VINTAGE WEEK & ARTS FESTIVAL

In 2008, the organisers continued to strive to achieve their goal of delivering a professional and diverse programme of arts events and entertainment to the people of Birr & locality and the many visitors attracted to the area at Festival time.

One of the most popular, biggest and brightest events at the annual Festival is without doubt, the Vintage Sunday Parade. Once again this year, the invited street theatre companies & performers proved top class and inspired dozens of local children aged 8-18 to volunteer to participate. The throngs of colourful, costumed, face-painted youngsters paraded and performed to thousands of locals and visitors lining the main streets of the town. They joined marching bands, floats, steam engines, vintage cars and bikes in creating a carnival atmosphere across the town throughout the afternoon. The Festival was delighted to welcome An Taoiseach, Brian Cowen to officially open the 40th Anniversary Parade. Special guests at the parade included many past committee members who were commended on keeping the Vintage tradition alive, and it was great to see so many of them and the general public in period costume.



Though the weather threatened to dampen the atmosphere at the Fair Green Day, all went ahead including the competition for the dozens of children in Vintage costume. This year, the Festival welcomed Le Marché de France European Market whose bright colours and enticing aromas spilled across Emmet Square over the weekend.

The Festival's programme of music represented many genres and appealed to many tastes with commercial and alternative turns. Meteor Award winning Cathy Davey set the standard high with a blistering gig on opening night at Birr Theatre & Arts Centre. Top class classical music was provided at the same venue later in the week. Gerard O'Connor, bass, now performing with Opera Ireland, ENO and other international companies, formerly a member of Birr Stage Guild and a music teacher at St. Brendan's Community School, made a welcome return to the Birr stage, joined by soprano Sandra Oman and Mairead Hurley

on piano for 'Songs for a Summers Evening'. This enchanting evening of classical arias and popular songs was hosted by Birr Stage Guild as part of their 50th Anniversary celebrations.

Younger music fans enjoyed percussion workshops with David Day, and the BandSlam competition for teenage bands hosted by Dooly's Hotel, the winner of which earned a support slot on the Gig Rig at the heavily attended Camcor Capers event, which, thankfully found an alternative venue at the County Arms grounds, as the dangerously flooded Camcor ruled out use of the Park.



The two bands proved a hugely popular choice as they performed into the evening which was rounded off by a fabulous fireworks display.

The Festival commissioned a new play entitled 'The Trial of Mr. Punch' by Campbell Black, and this was brought to life with great energy by Birr Stage Guild.

Legitimate Bodies Dance Company contributed a number of performances and workshops during the Festival. Ranging from an adults early morning yoga based 'Feel Good' workout in Birr Castle Demesne to fun summer dance games for children at Birr Playground with a fantastic showcase of Offaly Youth Dance in between. These public classes and performances proved interesting for participants and audiences alike, particularly the excerpts of The Rite of Summer performed by OYD at Camcor Capers and the Pavement Art Competition to a mostly new-to-dance audience.

Nick Bryson and Damian Punch brought their clever and thought provoking comedy/drama/dance duet 'Hanging in There' straight from a successful run at the Edinburgh Festival. With dialogue lifted from the Good Friday Agreement, this impressive political satire proved a hit with Birr audiences too.

Local clubs and societies annual and once off events featured, as ever, in the festival programme, this year including the Camogie Club's Fun Evening as part of their 30th Anniversary celebrations. Sports fans also enjoyed

Vintage Tennis and Heritage Cycles to name but a few events.

Birr's hospitable pubs put on fantastic musical entertainment nightly, held candlelit evenings and enjoyed hotly contested inter-pub competitions through the week. Free daily children's events were inundated with enthusiastic participants.

The Festival once again benefited hugely from the wealth of gifted locally based artists who featured in the Visual Arts Trail.



Over a dozen independent exhibitions were housed across town, from the wonderful Tin Jug Studio to a variety of non-traditional venues, showcasing local & visiting, professional & amateur artists through a range of media. These were joined by 20 invited

and selected artists in 'About 100 Experiments', a curated show of work by emerging and established contemporary artists.

The 40th Anniversary Vintage Ball at Dooly's Hotel proved to be a truly grand finale and was an ideal opportunity to see out the Festival in style for the about 200 attendees who wined & dined and thoroughly enjoyed the fantastic music into the wee hours.

This year local, national and international musicians, artists and entertainers were hosted, and thousands of visitors from the locality, nationwide and abroad were welcomed to help celebrate Birr's unique heritage & culture through an all inclusive programme of events for the whole community. This year's bigger-than-ever Vintage Parade, Donkey Derby, Camcor Capers and Vintage Ball had record attendances. Furthermore, large numbers were also evident at the historical walking tours, lunchtime play, nightly pub entertainment, the 39th Annual Antique & Fine Art Fair, the extensive Visual Arts Trail, live music & theatre, the daily free children's events and the many club & society events throughout the week. This showed tremendous support for its 40th year, and bodes well for the continuation and development in the Festival into the future.

The Organising Committee of the 40th Annual Birr Vintage Week & Arts Festival wish to thank all those who supported the Festival in any way; all Venues, Societies, Clubs, Groups and Individuals who helped organise, facilitate & run fundraisers and Festival events; All Sponsors and Patrons; and all those who attended Festival events.

Congratulations, once again, on your part in the success of this year's Festival. We look forward to your involvement in the 41st Annual Birr Vintage Week & Arts Festival!

Please note: dates for the 41st Annual Birr Vintage Week & Arts Festival have been set for Friday 14th to Friday 21st August 2009.



Many members of the Festival Committee pictured enjoying the Vintage Ball at Dooly's Hotel on the final night of the Festival.

BIRR MILITARY HISTORY GROUP

Armistice Day 90th Anniversary Tour, Ypres, Belgium.

11 November 1918-2008

**On the eleventh hour
Of the eleventh day
Of the eleventh month
The guns fell silent.**



Picture of tour group at Menin Gate, Ieper with official Irish Government wreath

Left to Right: Oliver Craughwell, Martin Hynes, Eamonn Coonan, Martin Horan, John Joyce, Val Johnson, Derek Coulter, Joe Breen, Billy Gleeson, Ger O Meara.

This year is the 90th anniversary of Armistice Day, the end of the First World War on 11 November 1918. For 2008 The Birr Military History Group travelled to Ypres in Belgium via two days at The Somme Battlefields. This year Oliver Craughwell, Val Johnson, Derek Coulter, Joe Breen, Billy Gleeson, Eamonn Coonan, Ger O Meara, Martin Horan, Martin Hynes and John Joyce travelled. Brendan Mooney was unable to join us.

On the 90th anniversary of the armistice, a special ceremony was held in the Belgian city of Ieper, better known to soldiers by its English name, Wipers. As the skirl of the pipes echoed around the streets, crowds gathered at the nearby Menin Gate, which bears the names of 55,000 soldiers whose remains have never been found, to hear the Last Post being played. Ieper, which was destroyed during the battle, was the scene of some of the worst fighting during WW1; thousands of British and Irish troops lost their lives in the town. Belgium saw some of the fiercest and bloodiest trench warfare on the Western Front, mostly across Flanders' Fields. The battle of Passchendaele, a village near Ieper, was one of the worst. It left 500,000 British and German soldiers dead in 1917-18. When the Armistice was signed on November 11 1918, 10 million men had died out of a total of 65 million who had signed up since hostilities broke out in 1914. Most of them were aged

between 18 and 25.

The Poppy Parade and parade of bands, including the Charles Kickham band from Tipperary, and Standards arrived at The Menin Gate for the special Last Post ceremony. The ceremony included speeches, prayers, hymns, a choir, wreath laying, Last Post and Reveille. Wreaths were layed by the Irish , Canadian, American, Indian governments among others. During a minute's silence the Poppy Petals, which were carried to The Menin Gate by the members of The Poppy Parade, fell from the roof of the memorial.

Ypres is a Belgian town that was the site of many battles and the inspiration for the poem In Flanders Fields, penned by Canadian soldier Lt.-Col. John McCrae on May 3, 1915.

In Flanders Fields

In Flanders fields the poppies blow
Between the crosses, row on row,
That mark our place; and in the sky
The larks, still bravely singing, fly
Scarce heard amid the guns below.
We are the Dead. Short days ago
We lived, felt dawn, saw sunset glow,
Loved and were loved, and now we lie
In Flanders fields.

Take up our quarrel with the foe:
To you from failing hands we throw
The torch; be yours to hold it high.
If ye break faith with us who die
We shall not sleep,
though poppies grow
In Flanders fields.

The following names are fallen members, of the Leinster and other regiments, from the Birr area, whos graves and memorials we visited in France and Flanders; *Patrick Gleeson, James Hegerty, John Naylor, James Nixon, Patrick Parsons, Henry Barret, Joseph Boyer, Peter Brophy, Richard Clarke, Robert Cole, Joseph Curran, John Dea, Thomas Howard, Garrett Lavell, Joseph Melsop, James Mooney, Denis New, Thomas Norris, John Quirk, James Robbins, Charles Sheehan, Timothy Sullivan, William Walshe, Thomas Watson, John Eades and Robert Eades.*

The group visited numerous battlefields and the Island of Ireland Peace Park and Round Tower, at Messines on its tenth anniversary. We also visited the new Leinster Regiment Memorial at Ledegem, which was liberated by the Leinsters after four years of German occupation. We toured the medieval city of Bruges and appreciated its beauty character and architecture.

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LEGITIMATE BODIES



Legitimate Bodies Dance Company is the newest addition to Birr's artistic landscape. Led by artistic duo Nick Bryson and Cristina Goletti, the company is one of the most

thrilling new dance initiatives in Ireland. Nick and Cristina, who are both highly regarded dance artists, met on the Daghdha Dance Company's mentoring programme in Limerick and started a choreographic collaboration that ended up with an invitation to perform at the international dance festival "Performatica" in Mexico. Consequently their second piece was performed as part of the Dublin Fringe Festival 2007 at the Dance House to great success of audience and public. At the beginning of October 2007 they founded the company and became resident at the Birr Theatre and Arts Centre. With the support of Offaly County

Council and The Arts Council, they furthered their artistic practise and initiated different dance, educational and outreach programmes for children, youth and community, creating a momentum for contemporary dance in the Midlands.

In May, *The Rite of Summer* saw a cast of 35 children and young people from County Offaly perform and was attended by around 160 people. The company also commenced a programme of outreach work in Chesterfield Community Centre in Birr and classes for senior citizens as part of Bealtaine Festival in Birr Theatre.

Since their establishment, they toured to various venues in Ireland, Italy and Northern Ireland and they received support from Culture Ireland and the Irish Embassy to return to Mexico this year for a series of performances and workshops. The company had a considerable input into Vintage Week this year and have just presented their first full-length work '*Touching Distance*' that has now toured nationally. Everyone is very welcome into this new contemporary dance reality here in Birr and do look out for the programme of classes. The company is on the up!

TIN JUG STUDIOS



One of a number of seasonal highlights at Tin Jug Studio this year was the unwrapping of Granny Thompson's Rag Dolls (see left). Looking anything but 'raggedy',

they got a nice October airing in Birr, during the Hullabaloo Children's Art Festival.

Earlier in the year, there was the annual Irish Language Short Films screening at the studio, during Seachtain na Gaeilge in March. Other events this year at the studio and gallery on Brendan Street, included the annual group art exhibition during Birr Vintage Week & Arts Festival in August. The theme was 'Reflections' (literal and spiritual) and included a variety of high quality artworks by local and regional artists; Jerry Cahir, Tim Quinlan, Margaret Maher, Joachim Hein, Ian Keaveny, Alison Rosse, John Gillen, Rosemary Langtry, Frankie Gallagher, Nick Miller, Nigel Meaby, Michael Devaney, Michael Thatcher, Rosalind Fanning, Rowena Keaveny and Jackie Lynch. The opening night of the exhibition also saw the launch by John Molloy, of Derek Fanning's new CD, 'A Voice of Birr'. The CD raised €600 for the Offaly Hospice.

The Tin Jug Studio parade entry in the Vintage Parade involved a lot of recycled materials and had the environmental theme called 'Something Fishy'.



Children get ready for the Vintage Parade

The costumes were the product of the children's art/craft workshops held in the lead up to Vintage Week.

At special workshops called Chocolate Fridays and Chocolate Saturdays, children and adults are encouraged to experience art in a pleasant and relaxing way. Delicious hand-made chocolates, made by Grainne Yeates, are served afterwards. Grainne has also supplied goodies for other occasions, such as Ghosts and Spider cookies for the Ghost Story Telling by Brian Thompson, cookies for decorating at the 'Be a Passing Artist' table, and a Truffle-making workshop for Foróige kids and adults around Christmas time.

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BIRR THEATRE & ARTS CENTRE

After almost 10 years of fundraising for the restoration and refurbishment of Birr Theatre & Arts Centre, 2008 started on a very positive note when Offaly County Council cleared the outstanding debt of €30,000, for which we are extremely grateful. This endorsement from the Council encourages the Board and Management of Birr Theatre & Arts Centre going forward in the development of the Arts in Birr, county of Offaly and surrounding area.

Birr Theatre & Arts Centre are extremely grateful to all our staff and those who voluntarily give their time to welcome you to the theatre and take you to your seat. The people at the "front of house" are always willing to help and their contribution, together with the time given voluntarily by the Board and all who have worked over the past 10 years, is vital to the success of the Theatre. It is with true community spirit that this time is given. 2008 saw Birr Stage Guild celebrate their 50th anniversary. At Birr Theatre & Arts Centre they produced/facilitated 9 events (*Cinderella*, *Bug Off!!!*, *The Best of Gilbert & Sullivan*, *Children's Theatre Summer Camp*, *The Trial of Mr. Punch*, *Songs for a Summer Night*, *the Gwalia Singers*, *a One Act Drama Festival and The Field*), together with other events in the town during the year. Birr Theatre & Arts Centre greatly acknowledges the support of Birr Stage Guild for without their time, effort and support we would not have a Theatre. We look forward to many more years of entertainment on our stage.

As ever, there was no shortage of professional theatre throughout the year with Des Keogh in John B Keane's *The Love Hungry Farmer* in January, *The Telephone Exchange*



and *Corner Boys* in February, *What Men Want* in April, *The Tailor and Ansty* in May and, what will probably be one of the highlight's of the theatre's programme since opening the doors, the Gate Theatre's *Waiting for Godot* (left) in October. The evening was a great success with An Taoiseach,

Brian Cowen and his wife in attendance together with members of The Arts Council, Offaly County Council, Birr Town Council and those who were fortunate to get tickets for an event that sold out two months previous!

There was plenty of laughter throughout the year with some of Ireland's top comedians performing: Jon Kenny

and Brendan Grace, while Pat Shortt and Des Bishop performed twice in the year.

Other highlights in the year included Pricewaterhouse Coopers Players 8th annual pantomime with *Babes in the Wood*, Opera Theatre Company's *Bastien & Bastienne* (right) (an enchanting one-act singspiel written by Mozart at the tender



age of 12), singer/songwriter *Cathy Davey*, Spanish guitarist and composer *Edward Niebla*, *Summer School of Rock 08* (below) and numerous classical music performances during the year.

The October mid-term break saw the second *Hullabaloo! Offaly's Children's Arts Festival* with over 30 workshops in 8 venues throughout the town and attended by almost 330 children together with live performances, storytelling and film. The Festival was kindly supported by Offaly County Council, The Arts Council and Birr Lions Club.

Dance continued to play an important role in the development of Birr Theatre & Arts Centre. Legitimate Bodies Dance Company (Nick Bryson and Cristina Goletti) produced a year round programme of dance classes and performances (*The Rite of Summer*, *Hanging in There*, *Touching Distance*). Classes were run for children age 3 upwards and for adults (ballet and contemporary dance). Nick and Cristina were far from idle during the year with performances in Mexico, Edinburgh, Liverpool. Cristina was fortunate to win a five week dance scholarship to Vienna during the summer.

When Birr Stage Guild established a limited company at the end of the 1990's to run Birr Theatre & Art Centre did they imagine that by 2008 they would see over 80,000 people come through the doors, that the company would provide employment for 8 people, that touring companies would see Birr Theatre & Arts Centre as a key venue on their touring schedule, that they would have a resident dance company and that the tradition of theatre in the venue would be stronger than



ever? We look forward to 2009 with great excitement!

Full programme of events on www.birrtheatre.com or call the box office on 057 9122911.



St John's Secondary School – Class of 1968 pictured at a class reunion held in October

*Back Row (L to R): Rena Moylan, Jo O'Brien, Pauline Fleury, Geraldine Kinsella, Patsy Egan, Ann Cleary, Kathleen Feighery
Front Row: Ann Loughnane, Therese Dermody, Sr. Nora Hartigan, Sr. Nora Quinn, Rosemary Oates, Mary Cahill*



Pupils at Busy Bodies Montessori School performing in the End of Year Sing-Song



The Scurragh Junior and Senior After-School Groups enjoying a spot of Angling and Surfing as part of the School Completion Programme

BIRR FLYING CLUB

2008 will be remembered more for the bad weather than anything else. Nearly all events that were organised during the year were affected by the weather.

Our breakfast Fly-In had to be re-scheduled to April and even though the weather wasn't great on the second date, it went ahead.

The Microlight Island Hop was originally scheduled for July, but again, was postponed due to weather. It was re-scheduled to coincide with the Annual Fly-In on 9th and 10th August this year. Unfortunately, the weather proved to be too bad for a lot of the pilots who were travelling from the UK and the Island Hop was cancelled the day before. Saturday night was the Fly-In 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 Johnny Madden (Roscrea), David Corboy (Crinkill) and Seamus Mac Sweeney (Roscrea).

The Club featured in the RTE programme 'Consuming Passions' that was shown over the summer months. A camera and sound crew and reporter filmed part of the programme at the airfield during April.

The major task this year was the completion of the new hangar. The building had been completed, but doors had still to be built. After much consultation on the type of

doors, hydraulic doors were decided upon. Although built outside the club, the computer program for operating the doors was written by a club member. Many Saturdays were spent building the panel and putting the finishing touches on these doors. While popular in America, very few of these have been built in Ireland, so Birr is justly proud of its achievement.



David Corboy being congratulated after his first solo flight



Highfield United - 2008 Cup Finalists (Div) 4

Back Row (L to R): Michael Donoghue, A.J., Wayne Cooney, Conor O'Callaghan,
Geoffrey Pardy, Steven Kelly, Cian O'Callaghan

Front Row: Thomasz, Billy McGarry, Colin Bennett, Patrick O'Rourke, David Byrne,
James Gallagher, Pdraig Grainger

Missing from photo: Sebastian, Michael Dunne, Shane Guinan, Dylan Hayden

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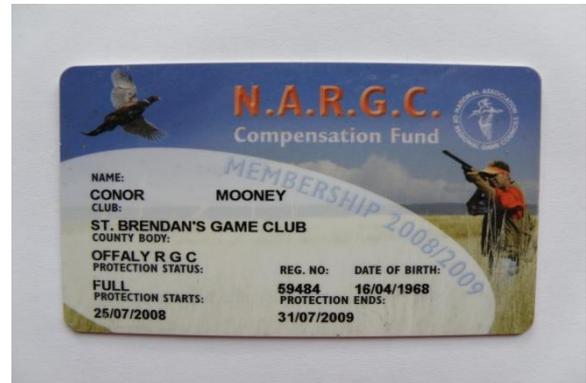
ST. BRENDAN'S GAME CONSERVATION CLUB

St. Brendan's GCC or better known as the "Birr Gun Club", is your local parish based club for those men and women interested in game shooting and conservation.

Our principal aim is to promote the conservation of wildlife and habitat on club lands. Club members actively practices conservation through the rearing and release of game species such as pheasant, partridge, mallard, etc. They also control pest species which cause crop damage and predators which prey on livestock, game and other wildlife species.

St. Brendan's GCC is an affiliated member of a national body, the NARGC (National Association of Regional Game Councils). In fact, the NARGC is the second largest sporting organisation in the country next to the GAA, boasting a membership just under 27,000 members. At county level the gun clubs in Offaly, 33 in number, come together to form our county board known as the ORGC (Offaly Regional Game Council). Our membership of the NARGC provides our members with access to seminars and safety courses relating to shooting and game management, funding mechanisms for game and game development, and most important, protection of our members in respect of legal liability to third parties and fellow members arising from the sport of shooting with shotgun or rifle, day or night, through membership of the NARGC Compensation Fund. In addition, landowners who grant St. Brendan's GCC permission to shoot on their property will automatically enjoy fund protection for legal liability in the event of injury or damage being caused or sustained by a fund member while on a landowner's property and for which legal liability might attach or might be deemed to attach to that landowner. Full defence of any action taken against the landowner will be handled by the fund in the same way as if the landowner was a member of the fund. Landowners

are also protected by the fund if a fund member injures himself or causes injury to another on the landowners property and the landowner is alleged to have been culpable in some way.



Current membership card.

It is compulsory for all St. Brendan's GCC members to be fully paid members of the NARGC Compensation Fund and therefore, all our members will have a membership card which they should have on them at all times. We would welcome all landowners to request this card from any persons entering onto their lands or any person claiming membership of St. Brendan's GCC ensuring the landowner has protection.

Finally, I would like to take this opportunity to sincerely thank all our landowners who have generously provided St. Brendan's GCC access to their lands, the entire farming community of Birr and its surrounds and the Birr community as a whole for your continuing support of St. Brendan's GCC.



L to R: David O'Grady, Chairman John Kirwan; Secretary Conor Mooney; Darragh Mooney; Treasurer Aidan Rush.



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THE LITTLE BROSNA AND CAMCOR FISHING CLUB



When Jim Phelan phoned me in early October and said 'Seamie, it's that time of year again', I couldn't quite believe it. Surely it couldn't be that time? Could it? I think we could all be forgiven for not really noticing that winter time had officially arrived. The awful wet summer that we had again this year has resulted in our seasons having blended one into the other and so to my mind at least, summer rain and winter rain pretty much look and feel the same. A bit like Groundhog Day, we have certainly been here before!

Despite all of this though, we merrily plodded along (literally) in the Little Brosna and Camcor Fishing Club and I am delighted to report to you all that we have had a very productive and active season.

Our now annual and highly enjoyable work night with the Birr Tidy Towns Committee resulted in a very substantial amount of clearance work being undertaken at the Chapel Bridge this summer. We had a great turnout of members and we all got stuck in. This joint committee initiative is very important and the summer work that is done here helps stave off potential problems for both our respective committees as the year progresses.

The club would like to say farewell and thank you to Fisheries Officer, Brendan Mundy, who left our Division earlier this year and we wish to extend a warm Birr *céad míle fáilte* to his replacement, Fisheries Officer, Pat McDonnell. Pat has been appointed along with two other colleagues to this area and all three have been very busy since their arrival. You will note that official 'fly fishing only' signs have been erected on the appropriate stretches of the river and they have also been very active, since their appointment, policing the river. The club greatly appreciates their work in this regard. Also the ESB are continuing their good work on the river and we welcome their proposed schedule of works for the coming season.

Our involvement, as members, in the scientific research that is on-going into the Croneen species is very interesting and we are delighted to be able to assist the researchers in their data collection by bagging and tagging fish fin samples.

Regrettably, the sport overall was poor in 2008 due mainly to the continuing high water levels throughout the season. However, a few wily fishermen, I am reliably told, did manage to catch some nice bags of fish despite the adverse conditions. Fair play to them! There was a huge run of fish coming over the Falls at the end of October owing to the flood. Hopefully we will all reap the benefits



Christy Brummel with a 4lb7oz Croneen Trout

of this in future years as the stocks keep plentiful. Indeed it would be remiss of me not to extend the club's congratulations to our membership officer, Christy Brummel, who landed a croneen weighing 4lbs 7oz at Palmers during the season now what was that I was saying a few moments ago about wily fishermen, well done Christy, good catch!

Speaking of membership, I am happy to report that ours shows a steady increase again this year which is not only encouraging but is vitally important as a strong club going forward is essential for the future of the river. Our club is only ever as good as we are ourselves as members and so to my annual appeal (which obviously hasn't been falling on deaf ears!) for new members. To all men and women out there who fancy taking up a challenging sport, yet one that is not particularly strenuous, to those of you who love a bit of peace and quiet but who appreciate the buzz and excitement of a chase, might I suggest that you look no further, as fishing just might be your sport of choice. It's not the most glamorous or the most high profile, but it is family friendly and the set-up costs are minimal. Any one of our members would only be too happy to cast a line with you to get you started and show you the ropes and once you get hooked sure there is no going back! Keep a regular watch out in the Midland Tribune, in the Birr Notes section, for our activity and seminar up-dates as the year unfolds.

Lastly, may I extend a very big thank you to our officers, committee and members for their hard work, energy and enthusiasm over the last year. They do what they do, on all of our behalves, to ensure that the river and the catchment area are maintained in good order for our current use and for future generations.

Keep fishing, love the sport, tight lines!

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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:** Liam Hogan, **Youth Co-Ordinator:** Paul Kelly, **Mini Co-Ordinator:** Brian Hogan, **Youth Development Officer:** Peter Swanepole, **Childrens Officer:** Mick Kenny, **Referee Liason Officer:** Brian Hogan.

Seniors: This was a good season for our senior side, who finished the season mid-table. The number of senior players training resulted in a second team being formed.

Youth and Minis: The club fielded teams from under 8 to under 16. The under 14's won the Midland League, reached the semi-final of the Leinster League and the quarter final of the Leinster Cup. The under 16 team reached the quarter final of the Leinster League.



Under-14 Team

Back Row (L to R): Eoin Loughman, Cathal Hogan, Mark Pardy, Fionn Feehan, Eoin Hayes, Kevin O'Connor, Jordan Parsons, Philip Hogan, Peter Dooley, Billy Connors, Mick Kenny, Isaac Smith, David Shields, Maurice Guinan
Front Row: Michael Kennedy, Joseph O'Connor, Ronan Murphy, Sean O'Connor, Brendan Heffernan, Graham Lynch, Jack Kennedy, Gary O'Brien, David Kearns, Rafael Slowikowski, Conor Fitzgerald, Pdraig O'Brien.



Senior Team

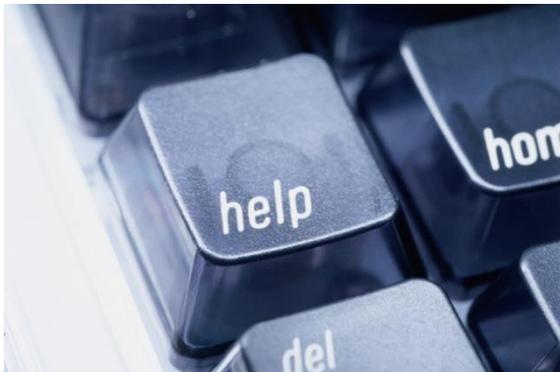
Back Row (L to R) Andrew Lally, David Niland, Dermot O'Shea, Jamie Flynn, Evan Williams, Ciaran Campbell, Kevin Purcell, Christy Hogan, Mick Keogh, Conor Larkin, Liam Hogan (Coach)
Front Row: Garech Doorley, Alan Guinan, Emmet Scully, Joey O'Loughlin, Simon Loughnane, Cronan Kennedy



Under-16 Team

Back Row (L to R): Michael Hough, Liam Grimes, Thomas Bortolozzo, Niall Maher, David Dooley, Dean Bracken, Eoin O'Shea, Sean Claffey, Adam Burke, Richard Grogan

Front Row: Colm McEvoy, Peter Kelly, Pat Camon, Kealan Moran, David Horan, Mark Guinan, Donal Spain



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WILMER TENNIS CLUB

The Wilmer Tennis Club is an active and busy club that operates all year round. Tennis has been a popular sport in Birr for well over a century and it continues to thrive. The club has an active membership and organises a variety of events throughout the year. Members participate in tournaments and open weeks organised by other clubs. This year's miserable weather did impact somewhat on activities during the summer when the cricket term 'rain stopped play' was heard on more than one occasion. Despite that, there was still plenty of activity during the year and the club ran all of its regular tournaments and events.

This year's Senior Open Week proved to be a great success. There was a good entry for all competitions and some excellent tennis being played throughout the week, culminating in the eight finals on the Saturday night. Wilmer members did very well, keeping five of the eight titles at home. Chris Collins won the men's singles title while Tory Baker was successful in the ladies' singles. Both ladies doubles titles were won by Wilmer members, Claire Nee and Csilla Varga winning the 'A' competition and Noeleen Harding and Karen Smith winning the 'B' doubles. Claire Nee collected a second title when she teamed up with Michael Costello to win the mixed doubles 'A'. Congratulations to all the winners and to everyone who took part in the Open Week.

The prizes were presented in the Clubhouse after the finals on the Saturday night by Club President, Kathleen Roe. Club chairman John O'Callaghan thanked all their sponsors for their continued support and also thanked the other clubs who supported the Open Week, as without their participation it wouldn't be the success that it is. The Club also staged a Junior Open Week in early August and



Winners and runners up in the singles during Open Week.

*Front Row (L to R): Amanda Luttrell (runner up ladies), Kathleen Roe President), Tory Baker (winner ladies).
Back Row: John O'Callaghan (Chairman), Jean Pierre Savy (runner up mens), Chris Collins (winner mens), Pat O'Gorman (tournament organiser).*



Finalists in the men's doubles events at the Open Week
*Front Row (L to R): Paul Flanagan & Derrick Cleary (winners Men's 'B' Doubles) Kathleen Roe (Club President), Aidan Delaney & Martin Ryan (winners men's 'A' doubles)
Back Row: John O'Callaghan (Club Chairman), Chris Collins & Michael Costello (runners up men's 'A' doubles), Paul O'Meara (runner-up men's 'B' doubles with Joe Murphy), Pat O'Gorman (tournament organiser)*

players travelled from Dublin, Limerick, Athlone and Tullamore, among other places, to join the local players. It was a very enjoyable week and luckily the finals were completed before the heavens opened. Well done to Brendan Mullins and his helpers for ensuring everything ran to plan during the week.

Once again the Kit Kat Parks Tennis week attracted a huge number of children to the club for a week of fun activity. This event has proved to be a great success since it first started and it is great to see so many youngsters coming back every year and enjoying the fun. Hopefully, they will continue to play tennis for many years to come. The Club had enjoyed unprecedented success in the Midland League in 2007 when they captured three titles so it was always going to be hard to emulate that success this year. The club was represented by teams in all five divisions from Division 1 to Division 5. They were very competitive. Teams in Division 4 and Division 5 both reached semi-finals and were unlucky to lose on both occasions in a reverse mixed after the initial matches had finished tied at 2-2. At the time of writing, the Division 1 team is still involved in their division and is still in contention to make the knock out phase.

Participation in the Midland League takes time and dedication on behalf of members and thanks to everyone who represents the club so well every year. Their efforts portray the club in a positive light. The league is also a good way of building good relationships with other clubs and the club often benefits from that when Open Week comes around. There is also a very important social element to the league, which is just as important as the tennis. The social aspect of tennis is something the



Prizewinners in the ladies' doubles competition

Front Row: (L to R) Karen Smith & Noeleen Harding (winners ladies 'B' doubles) Kathleen Roe (Club President), Claire Nee & Csilla Varga (winners ladies 'A' doubles).

Back Row: John O'Callaghan (Club Chairman), Valerie Cotter (runners up ladies 'a' doubles with Ber Daly), Therese Haverty & Catherine Barry (runners up ladies 'B' doubles)

Wilmer Tennis Club is keen to promote. Over the last couple of years, a Friday night social tennis night has been organised on a regular basis. The rain impacted on these nights this year, probably more than any other event, but they went ahead whenever possible. They are a great way of welcoming new members, attracting old members back and helping people get to know one another more. The tennis has a fun element to it and players of different standards, who wouldn't normally meet on court, get to play together. It's all helped by a glass of wine and some refreshments. So, if you have played tennis in the past and want to get back playing again or want to take up the game, watch out for the notices of the social nights in the months ahead, you will get a great welcome at the Wilmer. BIRR Vintage Week celebrated its 40th anniversary this year and the Wilmer Tennis Club has been an active participant in the festival since the early years. Once again this year it

staged the Vintage Tennis Tournament and there was a very good turnout for this fun event. The wooden racquets make their annual appearance for this event when players dress in whites, long trousers and flowing dresses, and underarm serving is the order of the day. Thanks to Ann O'Meara for her continued support of this event, judging the best dressed competition and sponsoring a beautiful prize for the best dressed lady. Tennis was once a summer game but it's played all year round now at the Wilmer thanks to the power of light. All three courts have floodlights and many dedicated souls play weekly right through the winter. It's a great form of exercise, you're out in the fresh air and it's a chance to mix with other people and enjoy a night of fun. New members are always welcome at the club, so if you're looking to take up a sport, drop in and join in the fun.



Winners and runners up in the mixed doubles events

Front Row (L to R): Paul O'Meara & Fidelma Seymour (winners mixed doubles 'B') Kathleen Roe (Club President), Claire Nee & Michael Costello (winners mixed doubles 'A').

Back Row: John O'Callaghan (Club Chairman), Therese Haverty & Brendan Mullins (runners up mixed doubles 'B'), Csilla Varga & Chris Collins (runners up mixed doubles 'A').

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BIRR CRICKET CLUB

There was only ever going to be one winner this cricket season, the weather, the awful and wickedly inhospitable weather. Relentless summer rains flooded pitches and made the fixture list a meagre one all over the country. Ballyeighan played eight games and won only three. The rest were cancelled, which might have been a disguised blessing, given the fact that the Pike team was frequently deprived, for one reason or another, of several key players. Reliable performers weren't always available – Graham Kenny, Peter Swanepole, Patrick Headon, to name a few. This meant that less experienced players, some of them very young, had to be drafted into the team, with the consequent loss of form. Mark Shakespeare, who has become an increasingly important member of the team, and an agile wicket-keeper, was ever-present.

It's a summer best forgotten. As one player said to me, "The season was brutal." Matt Dudley, who has captained the side skilfully for three seasons, often found himself with too many late call-offs from players who'd said they were available, but changed their minds at the last minute. Other obligations entered the picture – domestic, work-related. Whatever, these call-offs make a captain's life more than difficult than it has to be.

In any sport, there's always next season to look forward to. Things are always going to be better then, right? In Ballyeighan's case, the team seriously needs an infusion of younger players who have had some experience and show



At the crease

aptitude, but these kids are not just hanging around to be discovered. In fact, it may be the case that whatever surge of interest created by Ireland in the last cricket World Cup has lost its impact on young players. Besides, there are no real training facilities for young cricketers anyway in local schools.

The club also needs a stronger commitment to coaching any youngsters that *can* be found. And it might be a positive step to have weekly practice sessions from the regulars. Equally important, the team needs selection consistency from the pool of the best players.

Maybe the sun will shine more frequently in 2009. Let's hope. Or perhaps global warming will turn cricket from a summer game to a winter one played under floodlights on early dark, dry afternoons.



Birr Cricket Club Team

Left to Right: T. Smith, C. Sterling, D. Walker, J. Kenny, A. Sterling, C. Black, R. Kenny, M. Shakespeare, M. Dudley (captain), L. Wing, P. Swanepole



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BIRR GOLF CLUB

In February a large gathering of members welcomed incoming Captains, Paddy and Colette O'Brien to the traditional drive-in chauffeured by gorgeously attired Tony Conroy driving 'Nelly', his vintage car. Captain Paddy stepped out in plus fours while his wife Captain Colette amazed the onlookers when she alighted in a fitted bodice over a ruffled blouse, long skirt with swirling ruches, her ensemble topped off with a Harrovian boater hat. The Captains and Presidents, Michael Liffey and Bernadette McTague, drove off at 1.30 pm with members following later with a shotgun start.

The finals of the Birr Credit Union sponsored Winter Leagues took place in April when Lena Guinan's team H raced home six points ahead of Team O, captained by Maura Flannery. In the Men's Final, Francie Horan's stalwarts were expected to romp in but Seamie Breen's men had other ideas and took the honours on the day. Margaret Murphy, representing Birr Credit Union, presented the prizes. The Bennett and Dooley Cups were also presented to the winners, Billy Donlon and Hubert Rigney, while Charlie Brophy won the Spring Cup.

A memorial seat, dedicated to the memory of Michael Loughnane was presented by his family to the club in early May. The seat is positioned on the new fourth tee facing the Club which Michael loved so well. He devoted many hours of his time to the running of the Glens and contributed most generously towards the dozens of developments over the years.

In late June the news that all members had been waiting for arrived: the newly developed lands would be open for the fourth annual classic over the August Bank Holiday weekend. The Michael Horan sponsored Classic attracted a huge entry with all who played loud in their praise of the newly developed lands. While much work still remains to be completed, it is hoped to have the new course ready by April 2009. This development is a landmark in the long history of the Club.



Tuddenham Cup Winners

Back Row (L to R): Pat Madden, Paddy Kirwan, Robbie Shiels, Jonathan Yates, Billy Donlon, Seamus Breen, Roger Byrne, Jonathan Kelly, Joe Slevin, Pat Molloy, Declan Gath
Front Row: Michael Yates, Tony McTague (Manager) Pat Keenaghan (Captain, Mullingar), Paddy O'Brien (Captain, Birr) Michael Liffey (President, Birr), Tom Rigney (Manager)



Pictured at the opening of the new course

(L to R): Mary Sullivan, Michael Liffey (President), David McDowell, Captains Colette & Paddy O'Brien, Billy Donlon, Michael Stephens, Joan Grimes, Michael Ashe

Captains' Day

Captains Paddy and Colette had the best of summer weather for their big day. The ladies teed off in the morning with the men following on in the afternoon - a break with tradition to honour the husband and wife captaincy. Aileen Watkins captured the ladies' prize while Jonathan Yates collected the men's.

President Michael Liffey's prize was won by Albert Kelly while Christine Bruce, playing off a handicap of 28 was the very popular winner of President Bernie McTague's prize. Despite being restricted by the course developments, Birr entered all the traditional competitions. In the Mixed Heineken we were pipped by Templemore but the Tudenham and Offaly Inter Club brought home the silverware. The Tudenham, under managers Tony McTague, Michael Liffey and Tom Rigney, had a close battle with Delvin Castle in the final, eventually winning by 3/2. The Loughnane Trophy for the Offaly Inter Club was won by Birr for the first time. Much credit is due to Francie Horan and Michael Ashe who selected and managed the winning team.

The finals of the various club competitions were held on Sunday 26 October. Gavin Young won the Loughnane Cup (Juniors) while the Kenny Cup was won by Billy Donlon. Roger Byrne won the Hackett Cup, Declan Gath the Club Championship while Pat Molloy and Maura Flannery won the Austin Gleeson Mixed. Golfers of the year were Billy Donlon and Siobhan Tynan.

Despite the horrendous weather over the summer and autumn and the fact that many holes were closed over the season, all competitions were completed with minimum disruption. As 2009 beckons we look forward to a busy and successful season.

The club lost a number of very distinguished members during the year: Brian Graham (Captain 1986), Eileen Walshe (Lady Captain 1939), Des O'Donnell (Captain 1981) and Bill Owens. Ar dheis Dé go raibh siad.

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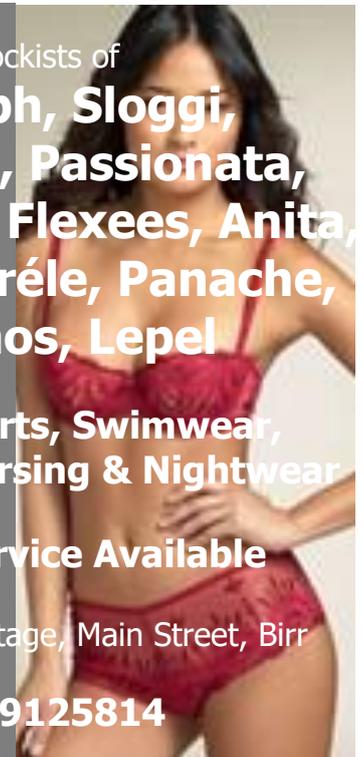
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BIRR COMMUNITY GAMES



2008 proved to be another successful year for Birr Community Games. The highlight of the year was, without doubt, Sufyan Anjum (left) winning a national bronze medal in Mosney in the Boys U-10 Art competition. Birr participated in all the usual events, with Tag Rugby being a new event for 2008.

Numbers were back up this year in the swimming competition

due to the fantastic facilities available now on our doorstep. Birr hosted the county final this year and many children won county medals. Seven children progressed to the national finals in the National Aquatic Centre. Congratulations to Clodagh Bergin (U-16 Backstroke), Sam Pearson (U-16 Freestyle) and Niamh Heffernan, Rachel Spain, Ava Haines, Kara Sampson, Niamh Hogan (U-13 Squad). Many thanks to Margaret Irwin and M.J. Grogan for their time, in both training the children and organising the county final, and to Birr Swimming Pool for providing a venue for training and the county final.

There was a huge entry for the local heats of the Art and Model-making competitions this year. This event would be impossible to run without the help and cooperation of our teachers and schools, so many thanks to them all. The county final was held in Clara, and Birr featured high up in the medal-table. Seven children went on to represent Offaly in Mosney. Well done to Elizabeth Harding (U-10 Model-making), Leah Kelly (U-12 Model-making), Kara Sampson (U-14 Model-making), Emily O'Brien (U-12 Girls Art), Conor Sampson (U-12 Boys Art), Aaron Murtagh (U-14 Boys Art) and Sufyan Anjum (U-10 Boys Art). A special word of congratulations goes to Sufyan who managed to win a bronze medal in Mosney in his age group. This was a huge achievement as the standard in Mosney is very high.

The Birr U-11 Rugby team did themselves proud, by claiming the county title this year. The team was: Michael Milne, Donncha Purcell, Conor Molloy, Eoin Bergin, Jack Delahunt, Shane Hogan, Barry O'Meara, Sean Kinsella, Conor Smith, Jack Pardy, Ryan England and Oisín Murphy. Many thanks to managers, Brian Hogan and Tony Murphy. Tag-Rugby was a new event for Birr Community Games this year. This is a mixed team event and there was huge interest from both boys and girls from the area. Birr fielded a team in both categories, in the county finals, held in Ferbane. The U-14 team were just outside the medals, whereas the U-10 team played terrifically and secured the silver medal. Well done.

The Chess county final was held in the Marian Hall this year. The U-12 team did very well and managed to win the gold medal. Unfortunately, they were unable to progress any further in the competition. Birr had 3 teams in the county Draughts competition. The U-10 team were just out of the medals and the U-12 team were joint 3^d place medalists. The U-14 team won the gold medal. Well done to Cathal Guilfoyle, Darragh Harte, Peter Horan, Emmet Hart, James Guinan and Megan Lavin. Unfortunately, the Westmeath champions put a stop to their progress.

The Boys U-11 Hurling team had a great competition this year under their coaches/managers Gary Cahill, Johnny Kelly and Noel Russell. They managed to retain their county title and progressed with ease through the Leinster competition. Unfortunately, in the final they came up against strong opponents from Gorey, Wexford. They were bitterly disappointed not to achieve that elusive Leinster title but came away with silver medals. Congratulations to Aaron Talbot, Oisín Murphy, Ryan Kelly, Brian Hynes, Eoghan Cahill, Dean Cahill, Daniel O'Meara, Dylan Watkins, Cathal Kirwan, Niall Hehir, Michael Gleeson, Shane Collins, Rhys Culbert, Ryan Hogan, Raymond Nolan, David Mullins, Keelan O'Brien, TJ Talbot and Ben Russell.

There was unprecedented interest in athletics this year, as was evident by the numbers of children turning up for training, on our newly renovated pitch in Scurragh. A very successful sports day was held, and Birr featured high on the medals table at the county finals, held in the Tullamore Harriers. 16 children went on to represent Offaly in Mosney. Indeed, this was a very special occasion for them all, as it was the last year that the national finals were being held there. Well done to Frances Hoare (U-10 Hurdles), Oisín Murphy (U-10 200M), Ronan Murphy (U-12 600M), Michael Kenny (U-16 Discus), Craig Taylor (U-12 Long Puck), Oisín Clarke (U-14 Long Jump), Kayleigh Shiels (U-14 100M), Joseph Kennedy, Oisín Murphy, Moya Dickson, Grace Gorman, Laura Maloney, Patrick Kwestarz (U-10 Mixed Relay) and Amelia Field, Kayleigh Shiels, Aine Delahunt, Emily O'Brien, Shannon Quegan (U-14 Girls Relay). Many of them qualified for semi-finals/finals, so well done. Thanks to all who helped out at training and Mosney including Valerie Reynolds, Margaret Irwin, Catherine Barry, Michael Kenny and Marie Brady.

So we look forward to 2009. The national finals will be in Athlone, so no more early-morning wake up calls for Mosney! If anyone would like to volunteer their time with an existing event or perhaps a new one, please contact any member of the committee. The present committee members are: Josephine Rigney (Chairperson), Catherine Barry (Secretary), John Gleeson (Treasurer), Valerie Reynolds, Noel Coughlan, Tony Murphy, Margaret Irwin and Geraldine Pingree.

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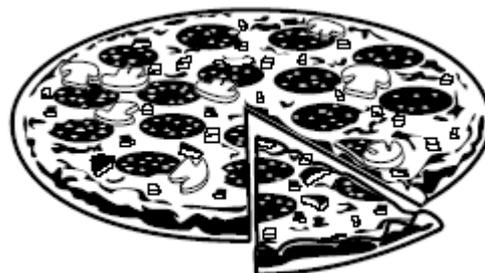
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BIRR CAMOGIE CLUB

Birr Camogie Club is in very good shape at the moment and 2008 has been a year of mixed fortune for the teams this year. The club fielded teams at every age group again this year, which is great news. We had teams at U8, 10,12, 14, 16, 18 and Senior. Underage camogie is very strong at the moment and Gail Spain, Deirdre Cahill along with Mick Hough have worked really hard with these young girls all year. Girls as young as 4 years old are now coming down to the field to play. Our U-8's and 10's played in Blitz in Rath organized by the Drumcullen club. Our U-10's played in the championship and did very well in all their games but were unlucky not to get to the semi finals. We have some lovely players coming along at this level. Our U-12 team had a great year, they reached the 'B' final against Kilcormac/Killoughey and played some wonderful camogie in the final in Shinrone. These girls have been together for the last two years and they have worked really hard and it all paid off in the final. This is the youngest grade in which Birr has ever won a championship to date and the future for these girls looks very good. The U-14 team took part in Féile na nGael this year and they trained really hard with some good sessions by Brian and Simon Whelahan, Gary Cahill, Tony Murphy and Tony Keegan which were a great help to the girls. We hosted a team from Westmeath from the Loughlin Gaels club. Thanks to all the parents who took girls into their homes for the weekend and we hope to have another team next June as the Feile will be hosted by Offaly/Laois in 2009. We competed in Div 3 this year and girls did well for such a young team. This team played in the championship also and did well in most of the games but didn't qualify for the final stages. Many thanks to all the parents who helped out during the year and who travelled to the games also, which is so important for the young players.

The U-16's had a wonderful year and topped it all off with a great victory in the 'A' final against Tullamore in Rath. This was a fantastic achievement for these girls. They had good victories over Lusmagh, Tullamore and Drumcullen to qualify for the semi-final against Kinnitty and they played a wonderful game to win a place in the final against Tullamore. It had been 28 years since Birr last won the U-16 championship and many of these girls are now making their place on the senior team.

The U-18 team are currently playing their championship and have qualified for the 'A' semi final against Tullamore. We hope they can add to the silverware won by the under 12 and under 16 team. They lost to Kinnitty in their first game and then had victories over St. Rynaghs and Shinrone to reach the 'A' semi-final.

The senior team had a disappointing year as they failed to reach the senior 'A' semi-final and lost to Kinnitty in the Senior 'B' final by 10 points. They started well and the highlight was beating Drumcullen in Crinkill in a great game as it was many years since Birr beat Drumcullen. Drawn games against Naomh Brid and Kilcormac/Killoughey cost us dearly and the team seemed to lose confidence from then on. We have some wonderful players at this level and we just lacked that bit extra especially in front of goals and missed too many scores in many of the games. The young girls are really fighting for places on the first fifteen of the Senior team and maybe next season they will get their chance to take over from the more senior players.

The senior team entered a Seven-a-side tournament in Lorrha and they did really well in terrible weather conditions and the ten players who took part gave everything and won the shield competition.



Birr Under 16A Panel

*Back Row (L to R) : Emer Teehan, Rebecca Hctor, Jessica Spain, Ria Harding, Emily Quinlan, Siobhan Rogers, Dearbhaile Sheils, Laura Roddy, Katie Dooley, Tracy Milne, Jane Ryan, Kelly Ann Milne, Gillian Molloy.
Front Row: Nadia Feehan, Orlagh Kirwan, Shauna Carroll, Caroline Soupe, Jane McCarthy (capt), Sarah Pilkington, Julie Stephens, Angela Ryan.*

These girls played some wonderful camogie and were totally exhausted by the end of the competition. They got lovely trophies for winning the shield competition. The U-16, 18 and senior teams were trained by Mick Hough, Pat Ryan, Martin McCarthy, Des Ryan and Patrick Hoctor, many thanks to them.

Off the playing field, the committee have worked hard to keep the club going. Fundraising events were organized such as bag packing, bingo raffles and a church gate collection. Many thanks to everyone who helped at these events. Thanks to all our players who gave us great entertainment during the year.

We had six girls on the Offaly U-16 team who reached the U-16B All Ireland Final but lost to Derry. They were Shauna Carroll, Emily Quinlan, Jane McCarthy, Julie Stephens, Caroline Soupe and Rebecca Hoctor. Five girls were on the Offaly Minor team that won All Ireland 'B' medals when they beat Waterford in Athy. They were Michelle Gleeson, Jane McCarthy, Julie Stephens, Emily Quinlan and Shauna

Carroll. Well done on this wonderful achievement. Sheila Sullivan, Arlene Watkins and Audrey Kennedy represented the club on the Offaly Junior team that reached the National League final and the All Ireland final in Croke Park. This was a heartbreaking day for everyone involved in Offaly camogie, losing by a single point in the dying minutes of the game. Our three girls played fantastic on the day and represented our club with skill and determination. Well done girls!!

Many thanks to Crinkill GAA for the use of their facilities all season for training and games and to Birr GAA for their facilities for our underage teams especially.

We look forward to another year in 2009 and hope that we can bring the club forward another step along the road to many victories. With the number of girls wanting to play camogie increasing all the time, the committee will continue to work in providing all that is required to bring success to all our teams.

Birr Under 12B Panel

Back Row (L to R): Gillian Irwin, Linda Tyrrell, Roisin Watkins, Amelia Field, Emer Grimes, Dawn Whelahan, Larah Brady, Laura Kealy, Ciara Ryan, Phillippa Ryan, Ciara Doran.

Front Row: Avril Fleury, Aoife Hogan, Clodagh Hanniffy, Jamie Spain, Fiona Guinan (capt), Jane Bracken, Audrey McAuliffe, Sarah Lyons, Ciara Maloney, Amy Lyons.



Birr Town Football Club

Under 12 Boys League Winners

Back Row (Left - Right) Colin Gath, Michael Cashen, Emmet Nolan (Capt), Jonathon Burke, Sean Dunne, Conor Nolan, Conor Freeman, Thomas Hough. Front Row (Left - Right) Ciaran Connaughton, Scott Finane, Joseph Mc Carthy, Jake Jones, Val Feeney, Shane Ryan, Cian Harte, Aaron Murtagh.

Missing from photograph - Aaron Flanagan, Dylan Kennedy, Ruairi Claffey, Damien Maher, Joseph King, Diarmuid Carroll, Joseph Gilligan

BIRR TOWN FOOTBALL CLUB

Birr Town F.C. had a poor year at senior level last season. With the team in transition they ended the season with relegation from the Senior Division. A new management team was put in place and a lot of hard work was undertaken by this squad of players in the off-season. Birr now play in the first division and have started this season brightly and with the addition of some new players to last season's squad, things look to be going in the right direction.

During the past year Birr Town has installed and opened a new artificial playing area in the club grounds. This has its own lighting system and is a big boost to the clubs training facilities. This is used by all club teams from Senior right down to Under-8s. Members of the local community also benefit from this. They avail of the clubs facilities for training or for just a fun game of football under the lights.

Once again, it was our under-age divisions that made most of the headlines last season. We fielded a number of teams in the Midland Schoolboys/Schoolgirls league. We fielded six boys' teams and two girls' teams. We had a lot of success with our U-10 and U-12 teams winning silverware. Our girls' team also weighed in with a great win in the Shield final. This was the first time in three years at under-age that one of our girls' teams won a trophy in their division. Well done and keep up the good work.

At under age there has been an increase in numbers with over 200 children registering this season. Whilst the club is delighted with this, they desperately need more coaches. More teams could be fielded giving more children a chance to play regularly. If anyone is interested in coaching then please do not hesitate to contact any member of the club.

The club would like to thank all those who help transport players to matches during the season. Thanks are also due to people who support the lotto each week and to the sponsors. Special thanks go to the town council for the footpath and lights leading out to the grounds enabling players to go to training safely.

The Birr Town U-12 had another good season winning their league, unbeaten for the third year running. They won this with a game to go, pushed all the way by Portumna. They played their closest rivals in their last game at home, and won 2-0 with captain, Emmet Nolan, scoring both goals. Emmet accepted the league trophy after the game, to the delight of the players' parents and coaches. They narrowly missed out on a cup final when they were beaten 2-1 by Abbeyleix in the semi final.

According to the coach "This is an honest, hard working group of players and they deserve all the success they have achieved to date; the lads have won three league titles without losing a single game and that should be recognized . We had five players on the emerging talent programme,

including player of the year, Colin Gath, Emmet Nolan, Val Feeney, Aaron Flanagan and Conor Nolan. Congratulations also to Val Feeney on his great achievement of making the U-12 league representative team. We would like to thank Frawley's Superstore for sponsoring the team jackets and Macari's for sponsoring a set of gear. It was a great to see the players looking so well! We would also like to thank Sean Maher and John Corboy for all the help with training and matches. Lastly, to the parents for their help and support over the last few years".

U-12 Girls 2007/08

This enthusiastic squad had a very good year. They won the Midland Shield for the 2nd time in 3 seasons and won it in style. They came up against arch rivals, Bealnamulla, on a warm evening and produced a fantastic display of soccer, team work being the important factor on the day. They won 6-2 and had a great evening in Macari's takeaway kindly sponsored by Kevin Mahon (Alpha Fashions).

The squad included Emma Hart, Grace King, Maeve Monaghan, Sinéad Garland, Ria Harding, Erin Byrne, Leanne Madden, Jessica Mahon, Kayleigh Shiels, Leona Tyrrell, Shauna Byrne (capt.), Laura Keigher, Megan Shiels, Kerrie Byrne, Megan Lavin, Laura Shiels, Maura Bruce.

Coach – Lisa Byrne, Player of the year – Kayleigh Shiels, Top goalscorer – Leanne Madden.

The girls have started this season well and with a couple of brilliant new signings, are sitting on top of the league table with 17 goals scored in 3 matches. Here's to the rest of 2008/09.

ANSWERS TO IDENTIFY THE FACES ON PAGE 74

1. Breda Connolly
2. Shane Hall
3. Jacinta Quealy
4. Michael Pardy
5. Jill Tully
6. Denis Sheils
7. Geraldine Hynes
8. Paddy Nugent
9. Ray Landy
10. Ann Molloy-Coughlan
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WOLFTRAP CYCLING CLUB

Wolftrap Cycling Club recently celebrated its third birthday. The club had another successful year and is now firmly established in the Birr area in the sporting/leisure category. The club has forty five members, ranging in age from early twenties to early seventies. A quarter of the club members are women.

This year, for the first time, the club organised a number of competitive events. It hosted two events in the Midland Interclub League and also organised a Summer Handicap League for Wolftrap members. These events included a time trial, a hill climb and a road race. Overall winner in the Handicap League was Gary Bracken, who also came second in the Midland Interclub League. This was a great achievement as this competition attracted the best cyclists from clubs in Offaly, Westmeath, Roscommon, Kildare, Laois and Meath.

The club organised an "away" weekend in Cong, where we cycled to Westport and back amongst stunning landscapes of sea, lake and mountain. Club members also took part in non-competitive cycles in Dundalk – the Border Trek, Dungarvan – the Sean Kelly Tour of Waterford, Tullamore, Athlone and Nenagh. Some members wanted a bigger challenge and did a charity cycle from Mizen to Malin. Others took part in a two day charity event from Mullingar to Galway and back.

The Triathlon event is gaining in popularity as a demanding physical and personal challenge. Quite a few Wolftrap members are not happy just to cycle, but also want to run and swim. Triathlon events come in all sizes and distances. However, the Iron Man Triathlon is the ultimate in endurance sport. This event consists of 3.8km swim, 180km cycle and 42km run. Most people would be very proud to complete one of these events in one day. However, club member Patrick Grealy completed all three events in the Iron Man in Zurich last Summer in a remarkable time of just over 12 hours.

Just for a bit of variety the club took a few trips to Ballyhoura to try out the world class mountain bike trail there. Mountain biking is a very different sport but very exhilarating as one bumps up and down over stones, tree stumps and other obstacles. The Ballyhoura trail is worth a visit but closer to home is the trail in Portumna which is also quite demanding.

The club is using the great facility at Birr Leisure Centre for the winter months to keep fit. It has organised weekly spinning sessions for members.

The aim of the club is to promote cycling as an activity which can be enjoyed at all levels. We are always seeking new members and welcome anyone to join us for a training spin on Sunday mornings. If you would like further information please contact Bernie at 085-1500519.



Getting Ready To Race

Left to Right: Joe Mannion (steward), Ian George, John Grennan, Brian Fogarty, Warren Yeates, Cian Hogan, Aidan Horan (hidden), Willie Burns (steward), Liam Butler, Gary Bracken, Alan Ryan, and Paddy O'Brien (steward).

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ST. CILLIAN'S CAMOGIE CLUB

It was a very good year for St. Cillian's with both the U-10 and U-12 teams winning the county final. The U-12 team beat Tullamore on a beautiful July evening in St. Rynagh's hurling field in Banagher. The girls put in a great effort all year with everyone coming to training and playing each match with great pride and determination. It was a just reward to win their first county final.

The U-10 girls also beat Tullamore in September in Rath. This was a great victory as Tullamore had beaten the girls

in a previous championship match. Under the watchful eye of Paul, Debbie, Donie and Margaret the girls put in a big effort and came away with the county title.

The girls from Carrig N.S. also won their schools county final and the Mini-7's county final. Three girls went on to play in Croke Park. Rachel Brennan and Niamh Collins played on All-Ireland semi-final day and Cailín Fitzgerald played on All-Ireland final day.



U-10 County Final Winners

Back Row (L to R): Aisling Brennan, Orla Killeen, Sarah Harding, Aideen Freeman, Rachel Dolan, Lisa Hocht, Niamh Killeen, Siofra Ryan, Chloe Costello, Ellen Cashen, Samantha O'Sullivan, Emma Cleary
Front Row: Megan King, Katie Corrigan, Sarah Pingree, Aisling Larkin, Isobel Cavanagh, Aoife Plunkett, Michelle Maher, Ciara Brennan, Bríd Ryan, Aoife Bond



U-12 County Final Winners

Back Row (L to R): Aoife Plunkett, Danielle Bond, Niamh Cleary, Rebecca Egan, Niamh Collins, Laura Hogan, Leanne Maher (capt), Siobhán Killeen, Stephanie Maher, Emily O'Brien, Charlotte Cavanagh
Front Row: Kiera Brady, Rachel Dolan, Siofra Ryan, Sarah Harding, Rachel Brennan, Ciara Hocht, Cailín Fitzgerald, Aisling Brennan, Niamh Killeen



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CRINKILL SPORTS AND RECREATION CENTRE

It was another busy year for the club with the official opening of the facility by An Taoiseach Brian Cowen.

An Taoiseach, Mr. Brian Cowen officially opened the upgraded handball alley at Crinkill Handball Club last September. The Taoiseach unveiled a plaque to commemorate the official opening and also a plaque to the memory of Jimmy Cahill (RIP).

Mr. Cowen commented that this new facility testified to the importance of the game to the local community. 'Handball is synonymous with Crinkill, having been played here since the Army Barracks was built at the turn of the 19th century. He remember the great successes of the club in the 1980s and he was delighted to see that tradition was revived earlier this year when Laois and Offaly hosted Féile na nGael 2008, with the Boys Division 3 challenge being held here in Crinkill. Mr. Cowen remarked upon the tremendous sport of handball, demanding in both skill and dexterity, it enhances both the physical, mental and social well-being of its participants. It is a lifelong sport for men and women that can be played at all levels, from the elite to recreational.

Certainly, there can be no doubting the strength of local support for the Crinkill Handball Alley. The Taoiseach commented upon the commitment of the various Committees that were formed at various stages in the 60s, 70s and 80s in order to raise funds to upgrade and maintain the facilities. Most recently, in 2003, a new committee was elected which raised funds locally and also secured Sports Capital Funding. The result was the fine refurbishment and upgrading of this club.

Mr. Cowen noted that the Handball club in Crinkill has become one of the most important venues outside of Croke Park for staging inter county Handball competitions in all grades. So far to date this year the club has held over 20 All Ireland finals as well as in excess of 40 preliminary rounds in the All Ireland and Leinster Championships. Upwards of 80 children have been attending coaching sessions here over the past couple of years. Boys and girls teams of all grades have competed in the Offaly Championship, with many going forward to represent the county in the Leinster Championship.

Mr. Cowen expressed his delight that the meeting room at the Crinkill Handball Club had been made available for other purposes, such as education and development activities run by the HSE, West Offaly Partnership, St. Cronan's and Birr Centre for Education and Development. Racquetball, tennis and basketball facilities are also available and last winter, in cooperation with West Offaly's Partnership and Offaly Sport Partnership, introductory courses in kickboxing and badminton were offered.

Adult handball in the club had its successes with Billy Mullins and Jim Guilfoyle taking gold in the all Ireland Emerald Masters Doubles Final. This was the first year that

this duo entered this grade and to come out victorious was a great achievement for them. We have no doubt that these two fine athletes will dominate this grade for the next few years.

Another great sports man is Conor O'Brien who partnered David Hope in the Junior Doubles 60x30 Championship. Both players had a tough battle in the Leinster Championship but Leinster's best couldn't stop them and they advanced to the all Ireland final where they were beaten by last year's finalists, Galway.

On the Juvenile front we had Fionn Carroll (right) make it through to the Leinster final of the Under 15 Boys Singles. Fionn had seen off tough opposition from Carlow and Kilkenny but he was unable to overcome a very talented Kildare player in the final. It was not for the lack of courage or skill that he was defeated but experience, something he will gain with time and there is no doubt that he will be one of the County's finest in a few years. This year the club was host to the Boys division 3 of the Féile na Gael competition. With the Féile being hosted by Laois and Offaly again next year Crinkill will be at the helm of activities.

We would like to thank our Members, Sponsors, FÁS, West Offaly Partnership, Offaly Sports Partnership and Offaly/Leinster and Irish Handball Councils and the public for their continued support.



Crinkill Handball Club Committee

Michéal O'Brien, Adrian Hoare, Kevin Cooke, An Taoiseach Brian Cowen TD, Cllr John Carroll, Johnny Carroll, Des Connole, Noel O'Brien, David Corboy, Sean Cooke
 Missing from the photo were Tony Grainger, Damien Deegan, Michael Ryan, Aidan Larkin, Conor O'Brien, Zara Cordial

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BIRR GAA

By Alan Walsh

The good times continued to roll for Birr GAA Club during 2008. The senior hurlers secured their fourth county title in succession, a ninth in ten years and their 22nd in all when they defeated Kinnitty in the county final by 1-15 to 0-15 in O'Connor Park, Tullamore. This achievement came after Birr contested the All-Ireland Club Final on St. Patrick's Day only to lose out to a powerful Portumna side by 3-9 to 3-19 at Croke Park. It is never easy to bounce back from a setback like this but Birr, seven time Leinster club champions and four time All-Ireland kingpins, showed they are made of stern stuff.

At intermediate level, Birr crossed sticks with Ballyskenach in the IHC Final at Shinrone but they lost a hard fought showdown by 0-12 to 0-9. This final saw brothers in opposition, Donal Franks hurled for Birr and his brother Aidan captained Ballyskenach.

Birr's intermediate footballers also performed steadily throughout the 2008 championship and they reached the semi-final where they went down narrowly to Walsh Island. There was a sizeable measure of compensation for football enthusiasts in the club when Birr minors produced a master class to defeat Gracefield by 2-16 to 0-5 in the minor 'B' football championship showdown.

Birr U-16 hurlers reached the championship final but they succumbed to an excellent Shinrone side by 1-4 to 1-10 in Rath. While Birr U-10 hurlers were extremely unlucky to suffer defeat in the U-10 'A' Competition Final, losing narrowly to Coolderry following a thrilling replay.

2008 was the year that saw Feile na nGael return to Laois/Offaly and Birr operated out of Division 1 where they hosted Kilmacud Crokes of Dublin. Birr went down to Kilmacud in their opening game and the following morning they pushed eventual champions James Stephens of Kilkenny all the way but were pipped at the post. Birr did defeat Roscrea and no doubt the experience garnered this year will stand the young players in good stead as Laois/Offaly also plays host to Feile na nGael in 2009.



Birr captain Rory Hanniffy with the Sean Robbins Cup after his side defeated Kinnitty in the SHC Final



Birr's James Roddy in action against Ballyskenach during the IHC Final. (Picture: Ger Rogers 087 2246878)

While silverware eluded the U-14's in the Feile, they emerged as the all conquering force in the championship and in the final they overcame a physically strong Ferbane/Belmont side by 3-10 to 0-9 in Lusmagh.

Birr fielded teams in all grades from U-10 up to adult level in hurling and Gaelic football, and the club supplied many representatives for county panels. With senior hurling team captain Rory Hanniffy also enjoying the distinction of winning an Inter-provincial Medal with Leinster.

In terms of the re-development of St. Brendan's Park, the project encountered a setback during 2008 and it is the club's intention to rectify this as quickly as possible.

Senior Hurling

The All-Ireland Club Final was a doubly disappointing day for Birr's 2007/'08 captain Brian Whelahan as he picked up a red card late on against Portumna following an incident he said he 'was stupid' to get involved in. Brian said Birr didn't build sufficiently on their great start against Portumna and they paid the price.

Team - Brian Mullins; John Paul O'Meara, Niall Claffey, Michael Verney; Brian Watkins, Paul Cleary, Dylan Hayden; Barry Whelahan, Rory Hanniffy; Gary Hanniffy, Brian Whelahan (Captain), Sean Ryan; Paul O'Meara, Simon Whelahan, Stephen Brown.

Subs.: Michael Dwane for S Ryan (half time), Paul Molloy for P O'Meara (37 mins), Barry Harding for Dylan Hayden (51 mins).

Birr had to re-group for the start of the local championship and it began on a bad note as they lost to Tullamore. Victories over Lusmagh and Drumcullen saw them get back on track and in the knockout stages of the championship they registered wins over Shinrone,



Birr U-16 hurling team captain Trevor Dolan pictured in action during the county final against Shinrone. (Picture: Ger Rogers 087 2246878)

Kilcormac/Killoughey and Kinnitty to retain the Sean Robbins Cup. The loss to Tullamore was the wakeup call Birr badly needed and the return of the wily Pat Joe Whelahan to manage the side after a health scare also had a significant impact.

Birr captain Rory Hanniffy said afterwards the players never tire of winning. "It's always easier to keep going when you're winning, it keeps the younger lads involved and it drives everyone on that bit further." Rory added, "The general theory is that we're an old team but we don't see it like that. Brian Watkins was man of the match today and Dylan Hayden could have been either. Paul Cleary, Mick Verney, these are the main players on the team now and none of them are over 25.

"Every year is very difficult and Kinnitty are undoubtedly coming and Coolderry will no doubt be back with a serious challenge in the coming years as well. When you introduce a few new lads it adds a bit of extra impetus."

The Birr team that got over Kinnitty in the SHC Final were Brian Mullins; John Paul O'Meara, Niall Claffey, Michael Verney; Brian Watkins, Paul Cleary, Barry Harding; Rory Hanniffy (capt.), Barry Whelahan; Dylan Hayden, Simon Whelahan, Gary Hanniffy; Sean Ryan, Brian Whelahan, Bryan Lonergan.

Subs.: Stephen Brown for Barry Harding (46 mins), Paul O'Meara for Brian Whelahan (52 mins).

At the time of writing this article Birr had just trounced Ballyboden St Enda's in their opening game of the Leinster club campaign and perhaps there is more silverware in the

offing?

Intermediate Hurling

Birr intermediate hurlers booked their place in the final by defeating Clara, however, they failed to perform up to expectation against a fancied Ballyskenach in the final. Birr won the IHC in 2007 and after losing many players to the senior ranks, it was a great achievement to get back to an intermediate showdown.

The team from the IHC final were Michael Mulrooney; Paddy Ryan, Garech Doorley (capt.), Donal Franks; Conor Egan, Barry Ryan, Clifford Colohan; Michael Cleere, James Roddy; Darragh Molloy, Kenneth Spillane, Declan Pilkington; Thomas Bolger, Liam Power, Keith Hehir.

Subs.: Brian Nolan for J Roddy (42 mins), Donal Ryan for M Cleere (45 mins), Ger Teehan for K Spillane (48 mins), Gary O'Meara for L Power (59 mins).

Minor Football

Birr minor footballers produced some top class football to win the 'B' championship. The team from the 2-16 to 0-5 final win over Gracefield were Craig Shortt; Oisin O'Carroll, Michael Mulrooney, Darren Madden; David Egan, Brendan Murphy, Brian Kelly; James Roddy, Donal Ryan (capt.); Darragh O'Meara, Barry Harding, Thomas Bolger; Daryl Nolan, Oisin McCormack, Shane Kinsella.

Subs.: Brian Dunne for D Egan (44 mins), Hugh Connolly for S Kinsella (51 mins), Simon Beale for D Nolan (56 mins), Leon Joyce for D Madden (59 mins), David Kelly for O O'Carroll (60 mins).

U-16 Hurling

Things just didn't go according to plan for Birr U-16 hurlers, who hadn't the services of the injured Kevin, and the team from the county final were Cathal Hogan, Colm Mulrooney, John McIntyre, Jimmy Irwin, Peter Dooley, Craig Pardy, Cory Parsons; Simon Hogan, Stephen Guinan; Kevin Brummell, Trevor Dolan (capt.), Mark Guinan; Ronan Murphy, Brendan Murphy, Paddy Mullins.

Subs.: Eoin Hayes for J Irwin (16 mins), Sean T O'Connor for R Murphy (19 mins), Stephen Lyons for S Hogan (55 mins), Donal Spain for M Guinan (58 mins).

U-14 Hurling

Birr U-14's captured a 16th championship title at this level by defeating Ferbane/Belmont 3-10 to 0-9.

Team - Conor Grimes; Stefan Feehan, Cathal Hogan, Conor Guinan; Darren Cahill, Peter Dooley, Eoin Pilkington; Sean T O'Connor, Emmet Nolan; Aaron Coffey, Patrick Mullins, Conor Nolan; Stefan Carroll, Peter Horan, David Shiels. Subs: Scott Feenane for D Shiels, Marek Komendera for S Carroll.

2008 was another year of progress and triumph for Birr underage and adult teams and here's hoping that the good times continue to roll during 2009.

**Birr U-14 Hurlers
County Champions 2008.
(Picture: Ger Rogers 087 2246878)**



**Birr, Offaly Senior Hurling
Champions 2008.
(Picture: Ger Rogers 087-2246878)**

**Birr Minor Footballers
pictured prior to their
MFC 'B' Final win over
Gracefield. (Picture:
Kevin Byrne - 087
6271313)**



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Mary Feehan



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