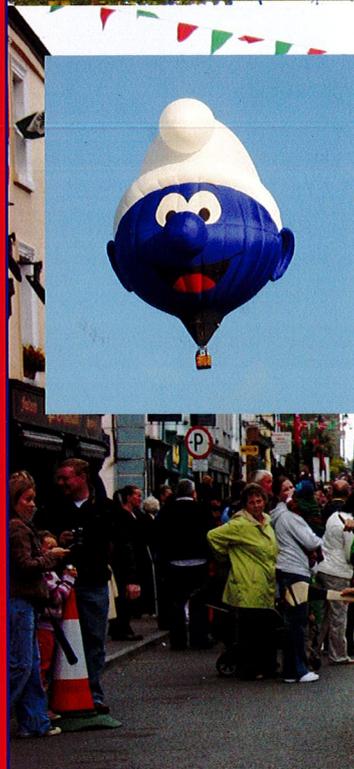


BIRR YEAR REVIEW



BIRR YEAR REVIEW 2009

Volume 9

December 2009

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Cover Photos by Paul Barber

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Birr Review Magazine first began in the year 2001. Its aim was to reflect the activities, interests and talents of the people of the town and the surrounding area over the previous year. The people and activities which feature in the pages of the Review reflect a vibrant, colourful and energetic community. We are deeply appreciative of the loyal support given to the project by the local businesses which support us with advertising revenue in these tough economic times, the many people like you who buy the book and everyone who gives generously of time, talent and energy to contribute to the content. We would also like to thank Fr. Cahir, P.P. and his Parish Council for allowing us the use of the conference room of St. Brendan's for our editorial meetings. We have tried once again this year, to stay true to our original brief as stated above. We hope you get as much enjoyment out of reading Birr Year Review 2009 as we have done in compiling and editing it.

Michael Donegan
Editor



Welcome to the 2009 issue of the Birr Year Review. It is hard to believe that a year has passed since our last publication – how time flies? Here we are just a short few weeks from Christmas 2009.

This edition will no doubt whet your appetites again with its variety of articles from the archives and news of the past year. Birr Lions Club is proud of its association with the Review and greatly appreciates the loyal support of our advertisers, retailers and you, our readers.

The revenue we receive will be used, in co-operation with organisations in the local community, to support the neediest in our society. Publication of this Review would not be possible without the enthusiasm and hard work of our Editor, Michael Donegan and his support staff; Emer Dolphin-Murray; George Manzor and the various sub-committees. All involved with the Birr Year Review wish you a peaceful Christmas and a happy and prosperous New Year.

Michael Coghlan
President
Birr Lions Club



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**Special thanks to Pat Cleary, Camillus King, Sean Hanniffy and The Cotter Family for photographs.
Thanks to Enda Manzor and Tim Walsh for all their help.**

Hector Smyth

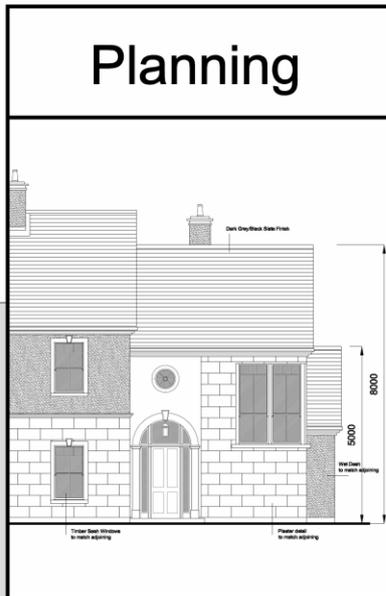
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In its first three years of operation, Hector Smyth has secured planning permissions for projects in Birr and other areas of Offaly such as Rath, Fortal, Banagher, Cloghan, Ballyegan and the Blue Ball, along with applications lodged in North Tipperary,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

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BIRR YEAR IN REVIEW 2008-2009

NOVEMBER 2008

A spate of burglaries occurred during the first week of November. These occurred in Crinkill, Birr, Kilcormac and Shinrone. A male was arrested in connection with the incidents.

Birr Civic Offices won the Heritage Section in the National Architecture awards in Dublin.

A Gala night of entertainment was held in Melba's night club to raise money towards the Christmas lights for 2008. Temperatures plummeted to -7.5° this was the lowest grass minimum during the month of October, rainfall was above average at 143% and sunshine levels were also above average at 132%. Overall the average temperature was 1.2° below average.

Birr under 10s won their away football match against Portumna with the final score Birr 2 – Portumna 0.

Work on a controversial section of a Birr road (Seffin) was put on hold until 2009.

A number of people received Citations at the November meeting of Birr Town Council for their achievements:

- **Brian Whelahan** for his outstanding contribution to the GAA. In addition, he has been an excellent ambassador and role model for generations through his dedication, commitment and sportsmanship.
- The **O'Donoghue family** in honour of the remarkable achievement by the 15 siblings who successfully completed the Dublin Marathon in October 2007.
- **John and Mary Lawlor** who, over decades, have shown a remarkable commitment to the town of Birr through their unselfish and dedicated involvement in Birr Tidy Towns Association.

Birr & District Motor Club celebrated 40 years of Motorsport 1968 – 2008.

Birr Comhaltas 50th anniversary celebrations saw members of the Bru Boru group of traditional entertainers participate in the Annual Concert of Traditional Music in the Birr Theatre and Arts Centre.

A spate of car break-ins occurred during the month of November, people were advised by the Gardai not to leave valuables on show in their cars whilst unattended.

Birr Parish Triduum was held in St. Brendan's church.

Offaly County Council applied to the Environmental Protection Agency to carry out a survey of rivers in the Birr region.

Birr Stage Guild hosted the play "The Field" by John B Keane. This play lived up to the fine reputation that the Guild has built up over the past 50 years.

Birr RFC under 18's won their game in overcast conditions Birr 10 – Swords 5.

Grant Engineering Ireland won an award at the Sustainable Energy Ireland Awards Category D section for Energy Service or Supply Company.

DECEMBER

An information day on the Birr Realm Plan was held in Birr Civic Offices. This plan looks at the quality of the existing public realm and looks at ways to enhance them.

Birr Stage Guild presented Music of the Night, the Magic of Christmas, in the Marian Hall, for a one night presentation. Kilcormac Court is to move all its business to Birr Court with effect from 1st January 2009. Banagher Court was closed earlier in the year and all business amalgamated with Birr Court.

Live Register figures have shown a dramatic increase for Birr. CSO figures show that there are 1,261 people signing on by the end of October this year compared to 376 for this time last year.

Birr was the first place to lead the country as petrol prices dropped below €1 per litre. Flaherty Fuels became the first place to drop their petrol and diesel prices below €1 for three years.

Leinster Club Senior Hurling Semi Finals: Birr 2-19, St. Martins Wexford 2-15

Ballyhale Shamrocks 0-26, Raharney 0-9

Temperatures plummeted to -9.9°C in Birr one Sunday in November, the coldest temperature recorded in the country for the month of November.

The Bethlehem Star Story: An Astronomical Detective Story. This talk took place in Birr Castle Demesne and revealed the Scientific Theories behind the Christmas star. Cinemobile returned to Birr again this month with showings of the James Bond film, "Quantum of Solace", "Mamma Mia", "Angus, Thongs and Perfect Snogging" and "Wall-E".

The Birr Review Magazine was launched. This is Birr's own yearly magazine, produced under Editor, Michael Donegan. All proceeds go to the Lions Club to help with their charity work.

Birr Town Council's December meeting brought positive news for the residents of Seffin. Cllr. John Carroll said that €160,000 had been set aside to complete the safety work needed at the Seffin junction during 2009.

Birr's Mercy Primary School held a choir recital in Birr Library again this year.

BIRR Year Review 2009

Birr Camogie club held their AGM in Doolys Hotel during December.

Birr woman heads The Association of Solicitors in England. Fiona Fitzgerald, nee Gallogly, became the 85th person to hold the title earlier this year. Fiona was educated in the Mercy P.S. and St. Brendan's Community School.

The Goal mile was once again walked, crawled or ran in Birr on Christmas Day.

Scurragh Residents Group recognised residents who had made Outstanding Achievements in the area of sports and recreation during 2008. Recipients included Barry Harding, Dylan Patel, Marek Komandera, Caroline Soupe, Nadia Feehan, Ria Harding, Jasmine and Kirsty Patel.

Workshop for people interested in joining the Birr Stage Guild production of "The Likes of Us" was held at Birr Theatre at the end of December.

Birr and District Motor Club held its 40th AGM at Grants Hotel.

Milnes Food Ltd, Birr was awarded a major government grant of €795,966 under the Government's Capital Investment Scheme.

JANUARY 2009

Birr Town Council decided not to increase Commercial Rates and Local Charges for 2009 at its January meeting.

Kilcormac Court moved all its business to Birr Court with effect from 1st January 2009.

Temperature levels for Birr in 2008 saw the lowest temperature recorded there. Grass temperature was recorded at a chilly -12.8° in February 2008. Birr also had the lowest total of sunshine, with a total of 1249 hours compared to Dublin Airport's 1512 hours.

Derek Fanning presented a cheque for €800 to Liam Butler (Offaly Hospice) from the proceeds of his CD "Voice of Birr". Birr and surrounding area's water supply was affected by the bad weather. Severe frost cracked water pipes and left areas without water.

€4,002 was raised during the festive season in Birr for Bothar by the community of Birr; Buckleys Super Valu held bag packs and raised a huge part of this amount. Then, with the help of Birr Choral Society who took to the streets singing Christmas carols more money was raised.

Birr Film Club screened "Before the Devil Knows You're Dead" directed by Sidney Lumet.

Birr Youth Diversion Project also known as the SUB project, secured funding for a second worker for the Project. The Board of Management said this will enable more work to be carried out with the youth and enhance work carried out by Hazel Fleming.

A high speed chase ensued after criminals gained entry through secure doors at Lidl, Birr with sledgehammers and crow bars. They proceeded to order staff into the office area where they took a sum of coinage from the office area. The Gardaí were on the scene within minutes and tried to block the criminals' car. The raiders rammed the car and

made their escape. The Gardaí followed in pursuit at high speed but lost the raiders.

Birr Skate Park Committee announced that they had raised €14,000 to date. The committee was founded to raise funds for a Skate Park in Birr for teenagers who have outgrown the playground facilities in Birr.

A Traditional Music Workshop was held in Birr as the final part of Birr Comhaltas celebrations.

Wolftrap Cycling Club was back in training on a regular basis, a cycling trip to the Pyrenees is planned for May.

The Student Council of St. Brendan's Community School organised an inspiring talent show on the last day of school before the Christmas break. Proceeds went to Fr. Colm Hogan's Missions in Ecuador and GOAL.

FEBRUARY

Offaly childminders and those thinking of becoming childminders were invited to Birr Playground to meet other childminders and the Childminder Advisory Officer, Fiona McHugh.

Birr GAA Club dinner dance, presentation of Leinster and County Championship medals took place.

The recently-formed Birr Photography Group launched their first exhibition – Winter Scene Photographs of Birr and surrounding areas at the Tin Jug Studio, Birr.

A form of 'speed dating' for existing and potential organic farmers and growers was one of the more unusual aspects of a one day conference by the National Organic Training Skill net (NOTS) – But it's not about looking for love; it's about looking for expertise.

Birr Chamber of Commerce examined the innovative programme for the protection and security of businesses, entitled 'Business Watch'.

Birr Castle applied for the status of UNESCO World Heritage Site.

Students at St. Brendan's Community School provided a kaleidoscope of colour and creative artwork at an exhibition unveiled at Birr Theatre and Arts Centre. .

The 2009 Mid-Ireland Visitors Guide and new Visitor's Card were launched at the County Arms Hotel. .

Led by Tony O'Hanlon of Shannonside Astronomy Club, a series of lectures "Astronomy for Beginners" was given in Birr Castle Demesne.

The Spring Lecture series – Lecture 2 was held in Birr Library – 'Reporting Sport' – a lecture by John McIntyre, Galway's Hurling Manager. .

Six of the country's leading teachers of traditional music lectured at workshops in traditional music and singing, "Cearda Biorra", which was organised by the Birr branch of Comhaltas.

Rejuvenation of the three tennis courts at the Wilmer Club took place at a cost of €13,500.

There was an enthusiastic turnout for the A.G.M. of Birr Vintage Week.

Grant Engineering donated four cutting-edge products to Athlone Institute of Technology.

The investiture of Cubs and Scouts to Birr Scout Troop took place in the Old Folks Hall, Birr after a mass celebrated by Chaplin, Fr. Pat Gilbert.

Over a period of 5 days, the boys of St. Brendan's Boys P.S. designed and planted their new Willow Sculpture piece in the school garden.

Birr man Stephen Grant won his tour card that allows him to play on the Hooters Golf Tour in the United States.

The much postponed drive-in for Captains Tom Rigney and Mary Sullivan and Presidents Tony McCormack and Mary Ryan took place with a huge gathering of members at Birr Golf Club.

MARCH

Transition year student at St. Brendan's Community School, Liam Brady competes in the All Ireland School boys U17 Cross Country, at University of Ulster in Jordanstown.

In a major campaign to promote the importance and value of supporting local businesses, products and services, the "Midland Tribune" launched its 'shop local' initiative.

Five candidates were chosen by Fianna Fail to contest the Birr Town Council elections in June. They were Noel Russell, Alan Loughnane, Denis Tierney, Michael Loughnane and Bernie Fanneran.

Birr Stage Guild began its new season with the Irish premier, "The Likes of Us", which was the first collaboration between Sir Tim Rice and Lord Andrew Lloyd Webber.

Councillor Noel Russell was elected as the new Chairman of the Birr Joint Policing Committee.

Birr were hosts to the Leinster Scoil semi-finals for the first time.

Fine Gael put forward three candidates to contest the County Council elections in June. They were Percy Clendennen, Nigel Craughwell and Brian Whelahan.

An Art Exhibition, 'Street Culture', in aid of the Skate Park Project was officially launched by local artist, Rosalind Fanning in Birr Library.

A hooded man brandishing a knife entered Horan's shop and demanded money from the till. A small amount of cash was taken, but no one was injured.

There was a great finish to the Ladies Winter/Spring Golf League final sponsored by Birr Credit Union. 1st place: Christine Bruce, Doreen McKenna, Jo Cunniffe, Angie Hough and Bernie Meagher, 2nd place: Kathleen Doorley, Rita Enright, Denise O'Hare, Carmel Kelly, Aileen Watkins and Marese Donlon.

A presentation was made to Birr Town Council regarding recommendations for necessary repairs to the Cumberland Column at Emmet Square by James Howley.

Cllr. Denis Shiels announced that he was standing as a candidate for the local elections as an independent.

Birr's U14 Rugby captain Peter Dooley accepted the cup from Mr John Delaney, Leinster Branch Youths after the Birr

side defeated Barnhall by 17-7 in the League final in Portlaoise.

Cllr. Ann Hynes Spain and Cllr. Michael Campbell were selected for Fine Gael to contest the Birr Town Council elections along with Offaly and Millennium hurler, Brian Whelahan.

A recent book entitled "The Shrouds of the Night" revealed astounding insights into the pioneering astronomical drawings undertaken by the Third Earl of Rosse at Birr Castle.

A new Birr Centre to aid cancer patients, The Birr Outreach Centre, was officially opened by Mary Cowen.

APRIL

Birr Tidy Towns held a presentation night in Dooly's Hotel. Category winners were presented with their awards, sponsored by Birr Credit Union.

Up to 20 ash and yew trees and other native woodland species were hacked down by mindless vandals in the grounds of Birr Castle.

Shannon Development, at a specially organised function, told Dublin businesses it is possible to work locally and operate globally from the Birr Technology Centre.

Lorna Middleton, daughter of Mike and Mary Davis, Emmet Street, featured in an episode of "Not Enough Hours" on RTE.

Dr. Frank Dolphin, originally from Birr, was appointed to the position of Board Chairman at the Children's University Hospital, Temple Street.

Cavanagh Foundry Ltd. Birr has won the National Regional Safety Award.

Beginners Knitting Classes started on Saturday mornings at Birr Castle Demesne.

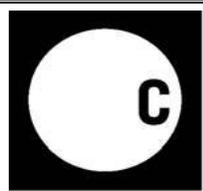
Roger Smith was appointed the new Town Foreman of Birr. Renowned speaker Fr. Barney McHale delivered a homily at a special prayer sermon at St. Brendan's Church, Birr to mark the close of the Year of Vocations.

Recession hits Birr Town Council hard – There has been a huge reduction in the grant for road and path improvements in the town – reduced from €179,000 to €69,000.

An exciting Battle of the Bands competition was held in Birr Theatre and Arts Centre. 1st place went to Reef Stained, 2nd place to Last Drag and 3rd place went to D Bloc.

One of Ireland's best known touring theatre companies, Gare St. Lazare Players, brought Herman Melville's Classic 'Moby Dick' to Birr Theatre & Arts Centre.

Third class of St. Brendan's Boys P.S. worked hard to become perfect puppets in preparation for a performance of 'Pinocchio' in Birr Theater & Arts Centre. The boys worked with professional actor Myles Breen and choreographers Nick Bryson and Cristina Goletti.



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Eight people were convicted of not having a T.V. licence at Birr District Court. They were fined from €250 to €550.

The Birr U14 Rugby team which won the Leinster League were presented with their medals by Munster, Ireland and Lion player, David Wallace.

Billy Mullins and Jim Guilfoyle retained their Emerald Masters title in handball. This All-Ireland Handball Championship is for over 55's. Billy also won the 'A' singles in the same category.

The final 18 holes was played on the old course in The Glens – Birr Golf Club – and the new course opened on the 1st May with Birr's Community School Classic.

MAY

Carrig & Riverstown hurling stalwart Ger Oakley captained the Offaly side that won the NHL Division 2 Final, defeating Wexford 1-13 to 0-13 at Semple Stadium. Birr's Brian Mullins, Paul Cleary, Rory Hanniffy and Michael Verney were also members of the victorious squad. Birr hosted three festivals this month - The Midlands Golf Festival, Benelux Kings of Clubs Angling and The Birr Ballooning Festival.

Offaly minor hurlers, featuring Birr's Johnny Pilkington as manager and Brendan Murphy at full forward, suffered a 1-8 to 4-18 loss away to Kilkenny in the opening round of the ESB Leinster MHC.

The St Brendan's CS debating team, comprising Roisin McCormack, Elaine McAuliffe, Liadhan Kelly and Pdraig Connolly qualified for the All-Ireland quarter-final of the 'Concern Debates'.

It was announced that Dooly's Hotel would host a Don Baker concert in aid of the Haven Haiti project. Birr Town Council members, at their last meeting prior to the local elections, reflected on five successful years of progress. For Cathaoirleach Sean Doorley (Independent), it proved to be his 'last stand' as he failed to secure re-election. Cllr Ann Hynes Spain (Fine Gael) also bowed out at the election, as did Cllr Timmy Molloy (Labour). Members of the Skate Park Committee, held a successful 'Stay Awake Night' fund-raiser in St. Brendan's CS. Sunday, May 10th was designated by the GAA as Lá na gClub, a day for clubs to mark the GAA's 125th Anniversary and clubs throughout the area, including Crinkill and Carrig & Riverstown, organised events to mark the occasion.

During a Fine Gael breakfast meeting in Birr, their spokesperson on finance, Richard Bruton T.D. claimed the government 'has lost the plot'.

St. Brendan's CS juvenile hurlers captured the Leinster Colleges' 'A' Shield with a 4-7 to 2-10 win over Castlecomer CS in Portlaoise.

An Taoiseach Brian Cowen TD was presented with Honorary Life Membership of Birr Golf Club.

GAA President Christy Cooney, Camogie President Joan O'Flynn, Handball President Tony Hannon, former Offaly hurling stars Brian Whelahan and Michael Duignan were

among the guests as the 2009 Coca Cola Feile na nGael Festival, which was officially launched in the County Arms Hotel.

Most Rev. Willie Walsh, Bishop of Killaloe, performed the official opening of the Carrig NS extension.

There were twenty-seven winners in the Birr Tidy Towns competition, while the Crinkill Tidy Villages & Development Association were also busy preparing for the arrival of the Super Valu Tidy Towns' adjudicator. Sufyan Anjum of Birr Community Games won an All-Ireland silver medal in U-10 Art at the National Community Games Finals in AIT. Birr's Laoise Murray finished 4th in the U-10 Model Making event.

JUNE

Set dancing enthusiasts from all corners of the country and overseas converged on Birr's Marian Hall for a Set Dancing Festival organised by the local branch of Comhaltas Ceoltoiri Eireann.

Rath woman Mary Beth O'Brien was crowned Miss Melba's / Miss Offaly 2009.

Fianna Fail, defying the national trend, doubled their representation on Birr Town Council following the June 5th election. Outgoing Councillors Noel Russell and Michael Loughnane Jnr. were successful, as were Denis Tierney and Bernie Fanneran. Independent Tony McLoughlin topped the poll and two other Independents were elected, Denis Sheils and John Carroll. Fine Gael's two elected candidates were Michael Campbell and Brian Whelahan. The Birr TC count was very dramatic with two recounts before the result was finally declared.

In the Offaly County Council election, the Birr Electoral Area returned four outgoing councillors - Independents Tony McLoughlin and John Carroll, along with Cllr. Peter Ormond (FF) and Cllr Percy Clendennen (FG). 6th class pupils from St Brendan's National School, Birr were presented with certificates during an awards ceremony at Birr Library & Civic Offices. A group of leading Chinese Travel Agents, led by Susan Li of Tourism Ireland China, visited Birr Castle Demesne. Retiring St. Brendan's CS teacher Roisin Gilmore made a presentation of 1,000 books to the school library. Cllr. Tony McLoughlin was elected Birr Town Council Cathaoirleach.

Over 10,000 people thronged the streets of Birr for the grand opening parade of the 2009 Coca Cola Feile na nGael National Festival of U-14 Hurling, Camogie and Handball, which was jointly hosted by counties Offaly and Laois. Disappointment was expressed by Birr GAA Club and Birr Town Council following the decision of the National Feile na nGael Executive to switch the finals from St. Brendan's Park to O'Connor Park, Tullamore.

Tommy Lyndon won the Stephen Coleman Trophy for 'Best Supporting Male' at the Association of Irish Musical Societies (AIMS) awards in Killarney for his role as Narrator

in the Birr Stage Guild production of 'The Likes of Us', while the Stage Guild Chorus were runners-up, being pipped for the Eileen Cronin Trophy by Portmarnock Musical & Dramatic Society.

Aoife O'Carroll, past pupil of St Brendan's CS, was presented with a Gold An Gaisce award by President Mary McAleese.

A question about Birr popped up on the Leaving Certificate History Ordinary Level paper. The question coincided with the GAA's 125th Anniversary and the staging of the first All-Ireland SHC Final in Birr on April 1st, 1888. The Offaly U-21 hurling team which featured Birr's Barry Harding on the starting XV and Johnny Cleary as a selector, went down to Kilkenny by 0-15 to 0-18 in the Leinster Championship semi-final at Nowlan Park. A new bronze sculpture located on the site of where the first All-Ireland Hurling Final was played was unveiled by GAA President Christy Cooney and the only hurler of the modern era to be selected on the Hurling Team of the Millennium, Cllr. Brian Whelahan.

A new heritage map of Birr was launched by Shannon Development, Offaly County Council and Birr Town Council. The text on the map was penned by local historian Margaret Hogan.

The AIB Photo Journalism Exhibition was showcased in Dooly's Hotel.

Crinkill National School celebrated its 50th Anniversary on Friday, June 26th.

Majella Gibbons retired as Principal of Seir Kieran NS, Clareen. She spent a total of thirty-three years teaching at the school.

JULY

The local media reported in their first edition of July that 'Birr's intimidation problem has quietened down'. A group calling itself 'Concerned Citizens of Birr' discussed anti-social behaviour during a meeting that followed on from the one held prior to the local elections on June 5th.

Chairperson of the Seffin Residents Association, Willie O'Grady, highlighted with 'despair' the traffic problem at Seffin junction, which has been ongoing for over thirty years.

Loughnane's Centra, Birr was one of seven Offaly Centra stores that were presented with Excellence Ireland National Hygiene Awards.

Tim Bergin, sacristan at St. Brendan's Church, Birr, retired after fifteen years service. A presentation was made to Tim by Fr. Tony Cahir, PP.

Karin Leitner, the renowned Austrian flautist who now resides in Birr, launched her solo CD at Birr Library. St. Cillian's camogie team defeated Naomh Brid by 6-1 to 1-1 in the U-12 county final at Crinkill.

Patrice Delaney, a member of Birr Golf Club, retained her Munster Girls Championship title.

The Offaly County Library Services received a European Award for Languages - the Language Label 2009 - for its involvement in a languages programme at Birr Library.

There was bad news for Birr Town Council members at their July meeting after they were informed that their Local Government Fund allocation was to be reduced by €27,000.

The issue of motorists speeding dangerously through Carrig Village was raised at Nenagh Area Committee meeting by Cllr. Michael O'Meara.

The first 'Team Dakar Ireland' which will endeavour to complete the 10,000km Dakar Rally across Argentina and Chile from January 3rd to 17th, 2010 was officially launched at Birr Castle.

A group of French students stayed at Birr Outdoor Education Centre as part of the Leargas Youth Exchange Programme.

It was reported that The Sue Ryder Foundation is planning to develop a 40 unit scheme in Birr.

An exhibition of paintings by talented Birr artist Nicky Larkin was on display at the Molesworth Gallery, Dublin. Most Rev. Dr Willie Walsh, Bishop of Killaloe, announced that he intended to retire on his 75th birthday, which he'll celebrate on January 16th, 2010.

A special Celebration Week took place at the Community Nursing Unit, Birr from July 13th to 19th.

Birr girl Laura Slattery, a student at The Academy of Music, Tullamore, was chosen out of 40,000 students to receive a 'Permanent TSB High Achiever Award'.

Three Carrig NS girls, Danielle Bond, Laura Hogan and Aisling Brennan, were chosen to play camogie at Croke Park during INTO exhibition games at half time of the All-Ireland SHC semi-final and final.

AUGUST

Birr Boy Scouts were disappointed to find the Log Cabin – their mountain cabin – vandalised once again. Damage estimated at €5,000 was caused.

Birr Historical Society held its annual outing to Redwood Castle and Portumna Castle.

A family picnic and play area was opened at Birr Castle Demesne.

Chesterfield Community Centre received €10,000 from AIB Birr under its Better Ireland programme. The money helps the centre to expand its services to benefit the young people in the area.

Birr's Vintage Week celebrated its 41st anniversary with a programme of over 70 events to cater for all tastes. The parade featured vintage cars, tractors, bicycles, street theatre artists, bands and many floats. A Visual Arts Trail, including exhibitions, artist talks, walking tours and live events took place during the week. As usual, the donkey derby and the fireworks display drew huge crowds.

Rosalind Fanning organised a very successful 'Scissors Thorn – Chops of Charity'. Funds raised went to Offaly Hospice.

Contestants in the Rose of Tralee Competition visited Birr Castle Demesne on route to Tralee.

The Irish Game and Country Fair was hosted by Birr Castle for the third time at the end of August. Over 27,000 visitors attended the fair. Events enjoyed by those present included falconry displays, an American horse whisperer, a dog guru and clay pigeon shooting.

SEPTEMBER

'Pure Mule,' the Irish T.V drama filmed in Birr and surrounding areas returned to our screens in early September.

A commemorative storyboard recounting the first automobile fatality in the world, which occurred in Birr in 1869, was unveiled at the site of the accident. Mary Ward, an eminent Victorian scientist, was fatally injured when thrown from a steam carriage and crushed by its heavy iron wheels.

'Heirs to Nothing', a five piece band from Birr launched their new single at Birr Rugby Club.

Kate Rudd, of the Wolftrap Cycling Club, Birr, was selected for the Irish women's team to take part in Rás na mBan. Teams from the UK, Belgium, Holland, Germany and Ireland take part in this Irish international aid road race for women. A large crowd gathered in Emmet Square to welcome home the victorious Offaly Junior Camogie team when they won the All-Ireland Junior title for the first time. They defeated Waterford in the final.

The Garden of Tranquillity at St. Brendan's Catholic Church has been further enhanced by the addition of beautifully carved Stations of the Cross in slate. The slate used was once from the nearby church. The garden also contains a water feature and a large stone resembling a mass rock.

Birr improved its rating in the Tidy Towns national competition this year. The 'John Farrell Field Monument', commemorating the playing of the first All-Ireland in Birr, was praised. Litter is still a big problem.

An exhibition 'In the Footsteps of Galileo' opened in Birr Castle in September. It displayed some of the most interesting 20th and 21st century astronomical drawings on the planet.

Adrian Haines was elected as the new President of the Birr Chamber of Commerce, a position he will take over from Gary O'Regan.

OCTOBER

After having operated successfully as a Bed and Breakfast for the past six years Townsend House was upgraded to a three star Guesthouse.

Riverstown/Killeen Tidy Towns Committee were very pleased with the marks they received in the national competition, having re-entered it after five years absence. The commitment of those living in the area to various projects was much appreciated.

Birr Job Club relocated to Birr Technology Centre, enabling the staff to provide a more effective service to its customers. The club offers assistance, advice and help to those seeking employment.

One of China's cable T.V networks filmed images of Birr Castle and interviewed Lord Rosse for a programme that will broadcast to 200 million viewers approx. in China.

Birr Theatre and Arts Centre is the venue for an art exhibition showcasing the work of many talented artists in the midlands. The exhibition titled 'Common Ground' will run until the end of December.

The monumental column erected to commemorate the Duke of Cumberland in Emmet Sq. is undergoing restoration work. When complete, new lighting and seating will be installed around the base of the column. However, a new statue will not be erected on the column.

A very informative lecture entitled 'Birr after the Ice Age' was given by Dr. John Feehan at Birr library. The lecture covered the evolution of the bogs and the formation of the eskers and moraines in the area.

A survey of the stained glass windows in St. Brendan's R.C. Church was carried out. Offaly Historical and Archaeological Society funded the survey, which included photographing the windows, recording their detail and assessing their condition.

Congratulations were extended to Micheál O'Brian, Crinkill, when he won the Men's 'C' double title at the World Handball Championships in America. Micheál is a member of Crinkill Handball club. His doubles partner plays with a Kilkenny Club.

In 1918, the town of Ledegem in western Belgium was liberated during World War 1 by an Irish regiment. The regiment involved was the Leinster, whose training barracks were located in Crinkill. During October some Birr councillors travelled to Ledegem. A proposal is being considered to twin Birr with Ledegem.

Carrig N.S. won the choreography award with their film 'Commercial Chaos,' at the National Fís Film Festival.

Birr Junior Special Olympics Club, 'The Camcor Warriors,' held a very enjoyable Halloween party. The club was set up in June to encourage children aged 6-16 with intellectual disabilities to participate in sports.

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

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DEVOTED LIVES- CHRISTY & EVELYN O'DONOGHUE

By Michael Donegan

Christy O'Donoghue was born in 1928 in Leinster Villas in Crinkill. His father was a soldier in the Leinster Regiment and had served in the Boer War in South Africa and later in the First World War in France. He was hit by shrapnel there and walked with a limp for the rest of his life. He had married Bridget Eagleton from Wood Lane. He himself was from Sandymount and came to live in Leinster Villas after the war as these houses were especially allocated to British army pensioners. There were eleven children in all -6 boys and 5 girls. Christy's eldest brother had been born in the old Crinkill barracks. Another brother, Eddie, died as a result of a shooting accident in 1922. He was only 12 years of age and was coming home from saving turf in Clonoghill bog with his uncle, Ned Eagleton. There was a Free State soldier on sentry duty at the old 'Gorm' in Syngefield and he allowed Eddie to examine his rifle. Unfortunately, the gun went off and Eddie was instantly killed. As Eddie was being brought to the graveyard in Clonoghill, his heartbroken mother was giving birth to his sister Bridget. Bridget is still alive and living in England. Crinkill village still carried the strong influence of the barracks, although it was no longer functioning and was just a burnt-out ruin. Many army pensioners lived in the area and Evelyn, Christy's wife remembers hearing old Bob Nixon running by the houses on Armistice Day in 1945 shouting to his fellow army veterans, 'Come out Bull McGuire! Come out Tom Moroney! Andy Harte! Peter Hoare! Dick Bohan! Jim Downes! Dick Moroney! Come Out! Come out! We've won the War!'

The children of the village used the old training grounds in the fourteen acres with its mock up trenches as their playground. They also hunted for rabbits in the fields with ferrets and dogs. Rabbits were an important source of food and also income as dealers came to buy them for their fur. His father brought the discipline of army life into the house. Shoes were lined up to be polished each Saturday night and he regularly gave each of the boys a regulation army haircut. Wednesday morning was army pension day and a group of old soldiers always sat under a particular tree on the Roscrea Road to smoke their pipes and swap stories of battles past.

Christy went down to school in Moorpark Street to the Presentation Brothers with two close pals, Patsy Lawlor and Johnny Kenny, a first cousin of John Gilmartin of John's Mall. This Johnny Kenny was to achieve notoriety later in life as part of the crew of the yacht 'Ituna', which became famous in 1950 for a daredevil voyage across the Atlantic. He later studied under the American architect Frank Lloyd Wright and subsequently became



Evelyn & Christy on honeymoon

the most innovative stage designer of his day in London. School was a harsh place and on one occasion the three boys got a very severe beating from one of the Brothers. Patsy Lawlor's father was enraged and went down to the school. He grabbed the guilty brother and threatened to throw him down the stairs. Patsy left the school and immediately emigrated to England, never to return. Christy himself left school at the age of thirteen and got a job in Milne's shop and pub in Crinkill. Due to his wounds, his father was only fit for light work and the family was dependent on his army pension. Christy was paid 5 shillings per week but he was very lucky to also get three meals a day. Later still, there was an offer of work in Birr Shoes. The pay was better there. Birr Shoes was a thriving business as it had great contracts for making boots for the Irish Army. During his holidays he still returned to work in Milnes and at the end of one such session Mrs. Milne asked him to return to work for her at increased wages. He left Birr Shoes and returned to Milnes. He was to stay with Milnes for the next 15 years.

The thirties were a very difficult time economically and Christy worked for surrounding farmers in his spare time. The work, such as thinning and weeding beet and turnips, was backbreaking and the pay of six pence a day was very poor. On one occasion during the war, Christy and two friends, Jack McLoughlin and Oliver Naylor decided to go to the North of Ireland and enlist in the R.A.F. Only Jack McLoughlin was accepted, however, and Oliver and Christy had to return home again.

The local Junior hurling team in Crinkill was known as the Lily Whites. There was another team called the 'Camcor Rovers' in the Mile Tree area. It was decided to amalgamate the two teams to form a stronger panel. The new team was called 'White Rovers'. Jackie Grennan

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Christy and Evelyn in more recent times

was the trainer. Training was hard and in very inclement weather they used Crinkill Handball Alley as a training venue. As a result of a fracas in Kinnity at a match with Drumcullen, the team found itself suspended. Jackie Grennan appealed the decision to the County Board to no avail. He then brought the case to Central Council in Croke Park and got the decision to suspend overturned. By this time it was too late to re-enter the competition and the club found itself promoted to Intermediate standard. After a draw and a win against Drumcullen, they came up against Ballinamere in the County Final. They drew the first match but won the all important final in 1951. Christy played at either corner forward or wing forward. He remembers an occasion when he was grounded heavily during a match in Birr and his mother got annoyed at the jeering attitude of an opposing spectator as she watched from the bank. She turned her wrath on him and had to be restrained by Dr. Drum. Although they were never promoted to senior level, White Rovers were well able to give Coolderry or Clareen a run for their money whenever the occasion arose. Emigration finally put paid to the team. It would be 1980 when the club would become active again and Christy is proud of the part he played in this with other men like Dinny Parkinson and Tom Cooke, but much was to happen in between.

In 1956, Christy fell in love with a neighbouring girl called Evelyn Jordan. It all started with a cup of tea and quickly escalated to a full blown romance. Neither set of parents approved of the relationship but the couple were not to be undone. Christy cashed in a small insurance policy and the two eloped to England. A friend organised digs and jobs for them and they were married there. Evelyn worked as an office clerk for a while and then as an assistant in a large store called 'George Masons'. Later she worked in a chain of stores called 'The Co-Op'. Christy got work in a light engineering firm called 'Guest, Keen and Nettlefolds'. The skills he had picked up in Milnes stood him in good stead and soon he found himself as chief store man. They were to spend 25 happy years in England, make lots of friends and become involved in the community over there. Christy became a member of the choir in the Church of Our Lady of the Angels in Nuneaton. A son, Chris junior, was born to them. Chris soon began to

show remarkable artistic ability. He would go on to become a very talented and highly acclaimed artist. They had a thrifty attitude to life and, after his mother died in 1978, Christy and Evelyn were in a position to buy the family home in Leinster Villas from the other members of the family.

They came home from England in 1980 and Christy got a job as a caretaker and maintenance man in Grant Engineering. He worked there until the mandatory retirement age of 66. In Christy's and Evelyn's childhood gardening was an essential skill. All the houses had large gardens and these were carefully cultivated to provide food for the table. The grounds of their home in Leinster Villas are evidence of that skill and dedication. They even have a poly-tunnel installed in a corner of it. Christy is at present recovering from a period of illness and is depending on Evelyn and Chris to keep the garden in check. He is very proud and appreciative of the way Chris looks after his and Evelyn's every need.

Last year, Chris went over to Wales to make contact with a branch of the Eagleton family with strong Birr connections. He had been told a story years ago by John Carroll of Knock about a Tom Eagleton, a brother of his grandmother. Tom Eagleton had been a ploughman on the Darby estate at the Leap Castle about the turn of the last century. He had been invited to the wedding of a friend in Birr and had started his ploughing early so that he could finish in time to go. As he came back into the farm yard to untackle his horses, Darby, the landlord, accosted him and accused him of quitting work too early. Eagleton stated his case and explained that he had his work done and was not skiving or avoiding his responsibilities. Darby became aggressive and struck him with a whip and told him to go back to work until he heard the triangle sound out quitting time. Tom took the horses back to the field and in a rage drove the plough against a rock and broke it in bits. He then walked into Birr, went to the wedding

and straight afterwards made his way to the boat to Hollyhead. He joined a Welsh cavalry regiment in



Wales and spent the rest of his life in the army working with horses. Chris discovered that his Eagleton relations in Cardiff had also researched their ancestor. They had discovered that The Rosses of Birr Castle had originally brought the Eagleton family over from England as skilled estate workers in the 1700's. So it was ironic that just as one landlord family had been responsible for the arrival of the Eagletons in Birr, another landlord family had been responsible for their leaving.



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HOLA! FROM ECUADOR

By Fr. Colm Hogan



Fr. Colm Hogan at the church construction site during the rainy season.

My name is Colm Hogan and I come from Rathcabbin near Birr. Although a priest of the Diocese of Killaloe, I am, in fact, working far away from Birr and Offaly on the other side of the world, in Ecuador in South America.

I am a member of the St. James Missionary Society. This society has its head office in Boston in the U.S.A. We work in three countries, Bolivia, Peru and, of course, Ecuador. The Society was founded in 1958 by a man called Cardinal Cushing and its aim is go to places where no priest has been before, establish a parish and serve the poorest of the poor. Many priests from Ireland have served as missionaries with St. James over the years.

The place where I am is a prime example of this vocation. I am the first priest to serve in the area where I am and also the poorest of the poor live there too. I fully realize that Ireland is going through a very difficult recession at the moment. However, the people here don't even understand the word recession, as they are living in a permanent one and have never known anything else. The conditions here are far far worse than anyone could imagine people putting up with at home. In spite of the tough economic situation at home in Ireland, all of you have been extremely generous to the cause in Ecuador and many projects have been successful because of your generous donations.

As many of you know, I am just over two and a half years now in South America and the process of establishing the parish is well on its way. We have proper mass locations in three sectors now and a principal church is on its way to being built. We have a school operating in another sector as well; presently, we are extending it with three more classrooms. Three nuns from Columbia have come to live in the parish and are running the school. Education is very much lacking in my area, which is called Monte Siro, and the majority of people who teach in the schools in the area are not qualified. As a result, the children are not receiving

a proper education and will not have the opportunity to move out of their situation of poverty.

Monte Sinai is situated outside the second largest city of Ecuador in a place called Guayaquil. There are between 25,000 and 30,000 people living in the parish but it is hard to believe that it is not even marked on a recently published new map of Guayaquil. It is a real sign of how these poor people have been abandoned by the government and city councils. People live in a very small space. Living accommodation consists of square huts made of bamboo. There is no access to running water and electricity is connected to loose cables in the street. Up to ten people could be living in the one small space. The presence of a parish and church and school have given these people great hope and an assurance that, finally, they are being given respect and dignity as real living persons. I could go on and on, but the reality stays the same. They are an abandoned people. Their plight gives real meaning to the political slogan 'a lot done but much more to do'. These poor people desperately need a day care centre, medical facilities, food programs and more opportunities for schooling. It is only with your generosity that this can happen.

I'll finish with two stories- one is a funny one and relates to the language and the difficulties of learning Spanish. There are two words for an older person. One of these is the correct one to use and the other is very insulting. Of course, I didn't know which one was which, so one day a group of us were away for a retreat and one of the older persons was late for the bus. When the bus driver asked were we all on board, I replied, as I thought in Spanish, that 'all except the older person in the back were here'. In fact what I really said was all except that "auld one" in the back. The second story is not funny and sadly puts into context the harsh reality of daily existence for the people here. A fifteen year old boy was reminding me it was his birthday the following week. Birthdays are big for the people in Ecuador, so he asked for a present. I had no idea what he wanted until he told me that he wanted one of the plastic chairs in the church because there were no chairs in his house - a story that truly tells the conditions that young teenagers like Miguel live in here where I am based in Ecuador.



Fr. Colm Hogan with Bishop Willie Walsh outside the new church

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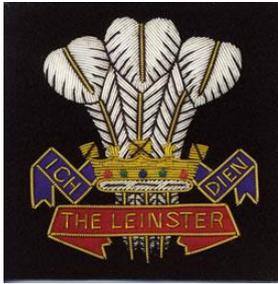
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BIRR'S OWN REGIMENT

THE PRINCE OF WALES' LEINSTER REGIMENT 1881-1922

By Brian T. Kennedy



For a period of thirty one years, Crinkill Barracks was the garrison depot of the Prince of Wales's Leinster Regiment (The Royal Canadians). The barracks was built to the design of Bernard Mullins (also architect of St. Brendan's R.C. Church and

John's Hall) and dated back to 1809. However, it is arguable that its glory days were between 1881 and 1922 when, as headquarters to the Leinster Regiment it was the largest employer in the Birr area. The army was not only one of the biggest sources of employment that ever existed in south Offaly but the reason many of Birr's by now long-established families came to the area. You need to only glance at the Baptismal Registers of the local Churches for the period concerned, to notice the large number of births from Crinkill Barracks. Many of the surnames concerned still exist in the town.

The Leinster Regiment was formed as a result of the 1881 Army Council reforms (Cardwell Reforms). As a consequence of their work they brought together five component parts into one regiment. The 1st Battalion came from the 100th regiment formed in 1857 by officers of the Canadian volunteers to serve in India, (hence 'The Royal Canadian's' in their title). The 2nd Battalion was previously the 109th Regiment. This dated back to 1862 when it was assigned to the 3rd Bombay European Regiment. The 3rd, 4th and 5th Battalions were the King's Co., Queen's Co. and Royal Meath respectively. The 6th and 7th battalions were raised at the beginning of World War I in 1914, in Dublin and Fermoy.

As Regimental Head Quarters, Birr was at the centre of a powerful element of the British Army. Local men who joined this force saw action in the British Empire, and at a time when many people rarely moved more than twenty miles from home, soldiers of the regiment travelled to India, South Africa and the Battle Fields of the Great War. Many of the older generation recall these former soldiers regaling them with stories of their foreign escapades. It is interesting to note that the 2nd Battalion, from 1881 served in England, Malta, Bermuda, Nova Scotia, Jamaica, and Barbados and in 1901 moved to South Africa where they fought in the Boer War. It was here they first encountered 'guerrilla tactics', later to become so common in the Irish War of Independence.

At a time of poor employment, the army provided a secure source of income for many local families. In today's

recessionary times it is once more perhaps easier to understand the charm of the army to generations of local people. The Regiment was also very appealing to local boys as it made its way down Military Road and through Seffin on its way to Sunday Mass. It was often led by its goat mascot, which stepped in tune with the band. Add to that the colourful red tunic of the Regiment and you can see why so many local boys aspired from a young age to join the regiment.

The service of the Leinster Regiment in the First World War was staggering. They were present at all of the great battles of the conflict. Troops of the regiment saw action in Armentiers 1914, Ypres 1915-1917-1918, Somme 1916-18, Guillemont, Vimy 1917, Messines 1917, St. Quentin, Macedonia 1915-1917, Gallipoli 1915 and Jerusalem. During this time four men received the Victoria Cross. They were John Vincent Holland (1916), John Cunningham (1917), John O'Neill and Martin Moffat (1918).

It is interesting that Sergeant O'Neill and Private Moffat received their Victoria Crosses for bravery at Ledegem in Belgium, on October 14th 1918. The name Ledegem may be familiar to Birr people as it awarded the freedom of its town to the Leinster Regiment in 2008. There are now proposals to twin Birr and Ledegem. This goes to prove that, although the Leinster Regiment was disbanded in 1922, its legacy may continue to benefit Birr through tourism and cultural links in the years to come. The origins

of this legacy date back to October 14th 1918 when the 2nd Battalion fought its way through the village of Ledeghem, pushing the German front line back and setting its people free, after they were occupied since 1914. They lost 13 men in the advance, with 77 wounded, some of whom were later to die of their injuries.

Today, there are few visible traces of the regiment in the town. All that remains of the once massive barracks at Crinkill is its perimeter wall. The Crinkill Military Cemetery is the resting place of many of the Regiment and contains the Boer War memorial, which was relocated from the



relocated from the

barracks. However, Michael Dunne's magnificent stain glass window, in St. Brendan's R.C. Church remains a very visible memorial to the presence of the Leinster Regiment, in Birr. Its location on the side gallery makes it a hidden gem of the Church and it is well worth a visit when it gets the morning sun from the east. The window is surmounted by the regimental emblem and is the last place it is visible in the town. This emblem has the German motto 'Ich Dien' (I serve), the motto of the Prince of Wales. It also incorporates his plume of three ostrich feathers, the maple leaves of Canada (from the 100th Regiment) and the laurel wreath and battle honour 'Central India' (from the 109th Regiment).

The Leinster Regiment is a colourful part of who we are and is now being rediscovered by a new generation of Birr people. It will, in time, prove to be a significant tourist attraction as descendants of its soldiers from all over the world investigate family history. Twinning with Ledeghem will cement Birr's military past for generations to come. For anybody interested in a more detailed history of the Regiment, a wonderful collection of the Regimental papers is available at Birr Library. The Leinster Regiment Association also has a great web site www.leinster-regiment-association.org.uk.

BIRR COUNCILLORS COMMEMORATE THE 'LEINSTERS'

On Saturday, October the 10th 2009 the chairman of Birr Town Council, Mr. Tony McLoughlin along with Councillor Michael Loughnane, were special guests of the town council and historical society of the town of Ledegem in Belgium. The occasion was a special commemoration to mark the part played by the Leinster Regiment in the liberation of the town in October 1914. This is the second year that Birr Town Council has participated in the commemoration as last year Councillor Sean Dooley was the invited guest. Councillors McLoughlin and Loughnane flew out to Belgium early on Saturday morning and were brought on a tour of some of the many extensive war cemeteries and battlefields in the vicinity of the town of Ypres. They were struck by the amount of Irish names they found everywhere. They visited the Menin Gate, where the names of the thousands of unidentified dead are commemorated, and were present at 7.00.p.m. to hear the last post being played by a lone trumpeter as it is done each evening at the same time. Later, they were guests of honour at a special dinner in



Nick Soen from Ledegem chats with Cllr Tony McLoughlin

Cllrs. Michael Loughnane (Left) and Tony McLoughlin lay a wreath

Ledegem and were publicly acknowledged as coming from Birr in Ireland, the home of the Leinsters. The great sacrifice of the Leinster Regiment in the liberation of the town after four years occupation by the Germans was also acknowledged. On the



Sunday, the Councillors were guests at a church service and later a parade to a special Garden of Remembrance. Councillors McLoughlin and Loughnane laid a wreath on behalf of the people of Birr. At a function in the local Community Hall, a representative of the Historical Society made a speech outlining the high esteem the people of Ledegem held for the town of Birr and the great contribution it had made to its own liberation. Councillor McLoughlin was presented with a plaque of the Leinster Regiment and both he and Councillor Loughnane were presented with regimental ties. After a gruelling schedule, the two men were then driven back to the airport and flew home to Birr on Sunday night.

MARY WHITE – FIRST LADY OF CARRIG

By Michael Donegan

The village of Carrig lies just over the Tipperary/Offaly border on the road to Nenagh from Birr. It is a very beautiful village with its lovely new school, community hall, recently renovated church and two shops. At the bottom of the village there is a cosy house and shop with a sign over the door which reads **‘T. White General Merchant’**. The proprietor of the shop is in fact Mary ‘Sis’ White and the T stands for Tom, her late husband. Mary has lived in the village since 1944, although her original home was not all that far away. She was born Mary King in Lacca in 1921. Her father was a farmer and she was the eldest sister to one brother and twin sisters. Mary went to school to Ballincor School near Shinrone. The school mistress was a Mrs. Julia Liffey and although there was also an assistant teacher, there was only one classroom so both teachers had to teach in the same space. She had a very happy childhood helping at home on the farm and playing with her friends in school. Mary remembers playing rounders and hide-and-seek and searching for wild birds nests in the hedges as she walked to school. She took a great liking to Irish and that has remained with her all her life. Christian Doctrine was a very important subject in school at that time and woe betide anyone who did not know their prayers. The Parish priest, Fr. Donnellan or the curate, Fr. Delahaunt, might arrive at any time to question them on the contents of the Green Catechism. If you were not good enough there was always the threat of not being allowed to make your confirmation. Life on a farm in the 20’s and 30’s was not easy. Cows were milked by hand and all farm work was done with the aid of horses. Mary has fond memories of walking many a long mile chatting with the ploughman as he trudged behind his plough. Young and old had to pull their weight. Saving the turf in Cloncorrig bog was a team effort. A highlight of the farming year was the arrival of the threshing machine in the autumn. The children were allowed to stay home from school for the day to help around the house. Each farmer earned his neighbours’ labour by helping them when it was their turn to have the thresher. On the morning of the threshing, everyone would be hoping for good weather. Her mother would be up very early preparing food for up to twenty men. Her father would have gone to Birr some days before to buy a firkin of porter. The little barrel had to be carefully tapped and each man was given a mug of porter during the day. There were two threshing mills. One was owned by Seamus Hoctor and the other by Dan Tracy. The children loved the excitement of the day from the moment they were awakened by the sound of the great engine, crunching and clanking its way up the lane to the house. Once the engine was up and running and the men were occupied with the work, the engine men came into

the kitchen and ate their breakfast. Later in the day the workers would all come in to eat a hearty meal cooked by her mother. The barley was bagged and stored in the corn loft. Some weeks later Williams’ lorry came from Banagher to collect the sacks. Sometimes, if the lorry couldn’t take it



all, her father would have to get the horses shod and draw the remaining bags by cart to Banagher. There was a smaller threshing day in the Spring to save the oats. Her mother kept about thirty hens as well as ducks, geese and turkeys. The eggs were sold to Barry’s shop in Birr. Usually, credit was given instead of cash and this went to supply the groceries for the house. Eggs were about one shilling and two pennies a dozen. Although most of the milk was sent to the creamery, some was kept for churning butter at home. Mary’s mother hated a dull downcast day for churning as no matter how many people took their hand at the job the butter simply wouldn’t come. If there was a good supply of butter some of it would also be sold to Barry’s shop. They kept a sow and banbhs. A pig was kept back from the market to be killed at home. The pig killer came to stick and bleed the pig. The blood was kept to make delicious black puddings and the meat was salted in a wooden barrel. Her father took a piece of the bacon and hung it in the kitchen until it got rock hard. Before eating, the bacon had to be soaked for a good while to get the salt out of it. Even after soaking it was still quite salty. The family ate bacon during the week but on Sunday sometimes her mother killed a chicken for boiling or roasting.

As electricity had not yet come, all light came from paraffin oil lamps or candles. They were dirty and smokey and, as oil was expensive and scarce, they had to be spared. They had an old wetcell-drycell battery radio. The battery had to be brought in to Byrnes’ shop in Birr for charging. Her father loved to listen to the hurling matches and got so excited that sometimes she thought he would get into the wireless during the matches. He was always trying to spare the batteries in case he would miss out on an important game from Croke Park.

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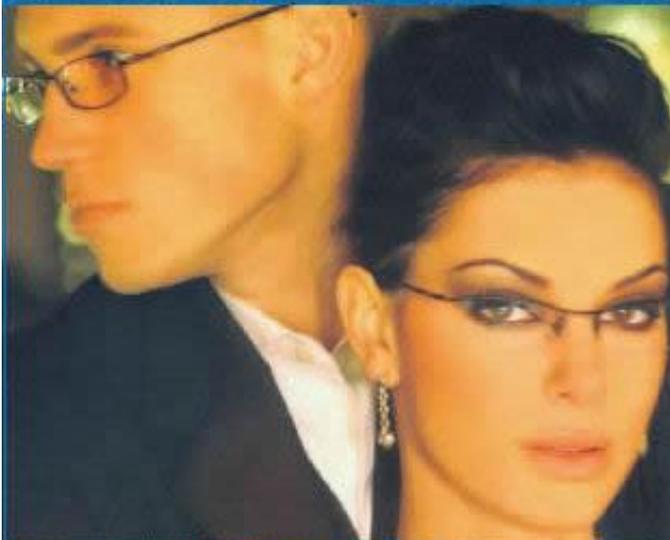
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Mary's shop front – a familiar landmark in Carrig

Unlike today, when it goes on for weeks, Christmas was a one-day affair. Children got very little in the way of presents and anything they did get was treasured very much.

When Mary finished primary school she was sent as a boarder to the Sacred Heart Sisters in Roscrea. She liked playing basketball and tennis and playing piano in the school orchestra. She became friendly with girls from all over the country. They rarely saw boys, except for a few well-chaperoned trips to the monastery to view a play. A nun walked in front and another walked behind and contact was strictly forbidden. Although Roscrea was not very far away, there were few cars and she was not allowed home very often in the year. She can still remember her absolute joy the odd time she heard there were 'visitors in the parlour' to see her.

After finishing in Roscrea, Mary returned home to her family in Lacca. She again helped with the housework and on the farm. Sometimes Carrig G.A.A. club ran fundraising dances in the Oxmantown hall in Birr. Usually Vin Barber's band supplied the music. The dancers from Carrig travelled into Birr by bicycle regardless of the weather and set off for home afterwards at 2 o'clock in the morning. As the war began, rationing was the order of the day. Commodities such as tea, sugar, flour and paraffin were scarce. People were only allowed to buy so much and had to account for what they bought by having their ration book stamped in the shop. One of her favourite chores was to visit Whites shop in the village of Carrig. It was like a general supply store and catered for the needs of the surrounding farms. Soon she had struck up a friendship

with Tom White. The friendship blossomed and in 1944 they were married in Birr Church by her uncle, Fr. Tim Sammon, a curate in Kilrush. They went to Limerick on their honeymoon and stayed for a few nights in the National Hotel near the railway station before returning home to Birr by train. She remembers her husband buying her a present of a clock and a canteen of cutlery. She still has both and the clock still keeps time. She always kept up close contact with her family and regularly cycled over to visit her old home on Sundays. Mary and Tom had four children, Madeline, Gerry, Maretti and Carmel. Sadly, Maretti died young. Tom passed away in 1975.

Mary kept up the shop and pub but in later years she has cut back a lot. She still has her loyal customers who visit her regularly for a chat. She feels a bit nervous lately with all the break-ins that have occurred around and about. She is very proud of her village and her good neighbours. Over the years she has played her part in keeping Carrig beautiful. There is a little stream running by her front door and she has lovingly landscaped its banks and put a little set of steps and a wooden bridge there. She is very disheartened that, in the last few years, there have been several accidents at the bridge. Her beautiful stone walls have been destroyed and only a few weeks ago a car ended up on its roof in the stream. She is hoping that Tipperary County Council will take responsibility for repairing the damage.

Mary has mixed views on the state of modern Ireland. Despite the recession, she feels that people are much better off financially than they were in her youth. There is improved clothing and footwear. Children are better educated and houses are equipped with all types of modern conveniences. She is sad at what she sees as the lack of respect for religion among people. In her young days, the rosary was said every evening in the house and there was much more awareness of right and wrong in people. Now it is as if anything goes and this saddens her. Whatever about the rest of the world, Mary faithfully practises her religion each Sunday in her beloved Carrig church and follows the ceremonies in Birr Church over the radio, although there seems to be a problem with the signal of late. Mary is also a very talented baker as I can well vouch for, having consumed half a delicious apple tart and three cups of very strong tea in the course of our little chat.



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MICHAEL FEEHAN - KEEPING THE PEACE



The sense of the 'uniqueness' of being a 'mush' from Birr and the values learned through growing up in the town through the 1960's and '70's have had a big impact on Mick Feehan the man, in both his professional and personal life, since he left the town to join an Garda Síochána in 1977. Mick

suggests that 'as with many of the lessons in life, it is really only when one looks at them from afar, that one realises their importance'. Mick, who is currently the Garda Assistant Commissioner with responsibility for policing the Dublin Region covering the area from just south of Drogheda to north of Bray, reflects on his memories of Birr and how growing up in the town has left a lasting impression on him.

Perhaps the most important of those values for him has been the sense of 'community' which was an integral part of his upbringing. His earliest memories were of the countless visitors to his home at Townsend Street, coming in to 'have a chat' with his mother Mary. Mary Feehan (nee Scully) had an encyclopaedic knowledge of all things and people relating to the town and liked nothing better than to sit and share her memories with the many neighbours and friends who dropped in on a daily basis. The value of good neighbours and strong community really became apparent in times of adversity, when support for those in difficulty was given freely as a matter of course. In his career in an Garda Síochána, Mick has had the opportunity of being in charge of policing in some of the toughest parts of Dublin City - places where news-making traumatic events were unfortunately all too common. He realised very early on in his career that these areas, though very different to the streets of Birr, were similar in that the people living there also had a strong sense of community and a capacity for supporting each other through adversity. It was that realisation that has led to Mick's strongly-held belief in the need to tap into that community spirit, and for an Garda Síochána to work closely with communities in delivering a policing service which addresses the needs of local people.

Another of his early memories revolves around long summer days spent in and around the Camcor, in Sandymount. Despite all the debate in today's media on 'global warming', looking back it seems that those summers were so much warmer and that it never seemed to rain on those 'Sandymount' days. The sense of adventure on the first time swimming the 'doggy paddle' across Clay's Hole still brings a smile to Mick's face. Having spent many hours swimming in the Camcor, he realised the value of Birr Swimming Pool, when it opened its doors during his teenage years, and allowed the swimming season to be extended to a year-round activity. The tips he received on swimming techniques from his father Johnny and others, have stood Mick in good stead as he has represented an Garda Síochána in Swimming and Lifesaving competitions in far-flung places from Vancouver to Memphis, and back again. He has also completed more than twenty 'Liffey Swims' over the years.

Mick also has developed a realisation of the value of education over the years. Though he admits that he might have been more interested in playing rugby for Birr, or heading to the latest offering in the 'New' cinema, than studying during his formative years, Mick remembers the words of his mother on the need to study and get a 'good' education. That realisation, together with the opportunities for further study afforded by the Garda organisation, has led Mick to a life-long acquaintance with education. Having achieved a B.A. (hons) in Public Management, Mick also holds a M.Sc. Degree in Criminal Justice Studies; together with an MBA (1st hons) from the UCD Smurfit School. He is currently more than half way through a course of study for a Doctorate in Governance at Queens University, Belfast.

Mick has an abiding interest in the outdoors, which he inherited from his late father Johnny. That love of the outdoor life was something he shared on a regular basis with his brothers Jack and Joe, before Joe's tragic death in 2004, whether it was in walking the Slieve Blooms, or boating on Lough Derg. He likes nothing better than walking over the Spink, or the other hills around Kinnitty on visits home. That interest in the outdoors has also passed to the next generation of Feehans, as Mick's son Brendan and his nephew John, are both studying Outdoor Education in college. Indeed, such is his interest in the mountains that Mick has just recently returned from walking up Africa's highest mountain, Kilimanjaro, along with his sister Nancy. In looking back over thirty years in an Garda Síochána, Mick places great store in visiting with family in Birr and in maintaining the friendships he made while growing up in the town. He is very well aware of the value of maintaining those contacts, and of having a place like Birr to call 'home'.

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LE TOUR DE FRANCE – WOLFTRAP STYLE

By Warren Yeates

The mountain roads in France have signs for cyclists at 1-kilometre intervals that show the distance to the summit and the average gradient of the next kilometre. The first sign read 'Altitude 1474 metres, 13 kilometres from the base to the summit, average gradient 7%*'. Nineteen members of the Wolftrap Cycling Club had arrived in Europe and were crawling up the Col du Soulor in the French Pyrenees.

Halfway up this mountain we were wondering what we had let ourselves in for. Most of us had to stop at each gradient sign for a breather. Some wished they had remembered to put on sunblock. Some had to walk for a bit. Some had to walk a lot. One cyclist, who wishes to remain anonymous, suggested we change the name of the club to 'The Wolftrap Hiking Club'. But when the 1-kilometre to go sign appeared it all looked much better. At 500 metres to go we could see the mountaintop café, with a couple of bikes leaning against the wall. And we could see the snow on the next mountain, the Aubisque. The road to its summit was still closed because of avalanche risk from the snow above.

Staggering into the café, we saw the group's leaders, Brian, Gary and Shane, sitting in front of plates of soup, ham and chips. We felt slightly stunned. Willie looked like he'd spent 6 hours in the front row of a Lions scrum. Alan and I just wanted to sit down. But after consuming several hundred calories and admiring the spectacular views, the mood changed. The next 30 kilometres were downhill.

How quickly does a bicycle descend a mountain that is nearly 1500 metres high? Five minutes later, we were at the bottom of a mountain that had taken 90 minutes to climb. Then, a leisurely 20 km back to our accommodation at St. Savin, in a guesthouse run by Paddy and Olive Sweeney, a couple from Cavan. Olive's dinners are reason enough to stay with them – see www.velopeloton.com. It's a perfect base for a walking or cycling holiday in the Lourdes area.

St. Savin is a medieval village in the Argeles Gazost valley, which runs south of Lourdes. This area is in the Hautes Pyrenees, the mountain range that runs along the French-Spanish border. Biarritz is 2 hour's drive to the east.

That night we rested in the local bar and engaged in an intensive re-hydration session. Next morning we weren't quite so gung ho about the day's route. The re-hydration program hadn't worked. Half

the group decided to give the high mountains a miss and chose a rolling route out of the valley and to the north of Lourdes. The rest headed for Luz Ardiden, a ski station often used as a mountaintop stage finish in the Tour de France. This town is famous for its thermal baths, which promise cures for many ailments, particularly aching thighs and calves! The descent was cycling heaven.

That night Leinster won the Heineken Cup and those who did the flat run were 'convinced' that they should do Luz Ardiden the next morning. They all made it up and back safely, even Ray, who didn't train for the trip at all. We were starting to hit our stride.

The rest of us rode up to another mountaintop ski station and Tour de France stage finish called Hautacam. Towering above Lourdes, Hautacam is a relatively recent addition to the Tour de France but it's tough reputation has made it a place of pilgrimage for cyclists. Frank Schleck completed this 14 km climb in 39 minutes in the 2008 Tour. More than half our group did the climb without stopping, in an average time of around 80 minutes.

Next day was the reason we had gone to the Pyrenees, the Tourmalet. If the Pyrenees could be distilled into one mountain, it would be the Tourmalet. Generally, Tour riders hit the Tourmalet after riding for 150 km or so, and have to go over it before climbing another mountain for the stage finish. Given our experience on the first day we decided not to take this approach.

Eight die-hards set off for Tourmalet on a coolish, overcast day. (More than half our group was persuaded to go for another flattish route at an impromptu breakfast conference.) Unlike the other climbs, the road from Luz-Saint-Saveur to the summit has few hairpins, just long, straight sections at a constant gradient. At times it was a struggle just to keep the bike moving. We were into low cloud after a few kilometres. Ten km up the climb we met water from melting snow pouring down the road, and at



Shane Lonergan on Hautacam Summit



Luz Ardiden switchbacks



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12 km (9 km from the summit) the road was closed due to unseasonal snow. See www.youtube.com/watch?v=ouj5-5h0sOw. It was bitterly cold at this point, so we headed straight back down. Four riders reach speeds of 120 kmh on the descent; we were somewhat slower. It was interesting to watch the Tourmalet stage of the Tour de France this year and be able to say 'We did that.'

Five days of superb cycling, great weather, gorgeous landscape and lovely local food meant that the club's first trip abroad was far better than any of us expected it to be.

"Where will we go next year?"

*Gradient percentages: a 10% hill is one that rises 1 metre for every 10 metres travelled. The hill from Kinnitty to the lime kiln in the Slieve Blooms has an average gradient of 3.5%. The steepest section, by the road that leads to the Scout lodge, averages 10%.



Wolftrap Cycling Group in St. Savin.

Back Row (L to R): Ray Walsh, Geraldine Barniville, Cronan Grennan, Jim Houlihan, Shane Lonergan, Pat Mannion, Alan Ryan, MJ Grogan, Liam Butler, Aidan Horan, Warren Yeates.

Front Row: Joe Mannion, Willie Burns, Benny McHugh, Des Mannion, Trevor Digan, Cormac Hoare, Gary Bracken, Brian Fogarty.

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Front Row: Michael Campbell, Tony McLoughlin (Chairperson), Bernie Fannernan, Deirdre Molloy, Brian Whelahan



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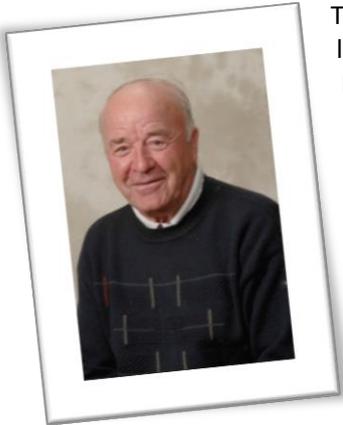
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TOM NESTOR – A WRITING LIFE

By Michael Donegan



Tom Nestor is a writer. He now lives in Riverstown just outside Birr but he was born into a farm in the lush Golden Vale in West Limerick, between Rathkeale and Shanagolden. About that time, Hitler was preparing to launch his campaign of horror and suffering on the world but all was blissful in that place.

His was a loving family of ten, evenly divided between boys and girls. The fields and

lanes were his playground and his classroom all in one. The natural world crowded around him in a great cacophony of farming sounds and smells. As he galloped and ran through this world of hedgerows and meadows and winding brooks, little did he realise that he was filling the deep well of his memory with words and images he would draw on continuously throughout his writing life.

After a stint in his local school, he was sent as a boarder to St. Flannan's Diocesan College in Ennis. To many, in that time of sacrifice and want, a boarding school education might have seemed a great opportunity and privilege but to Tom, it was a sentence to be endured. Cut off from his home and family without any ally, he had to survive in the rough and tumble of a tough college regime. From a very young age, Tom had acquired a great love of books from his mother. Unusual for her time, she had been convent educated and was an avid reader of anything that came her way, from religious magazines to Dickens and Jane Austen. Sometimes, even his reading got him into trouble. Once, after laying his hands on an abridged version of Darwin's *Origin of the Species*, he expressed doubts about the biblical version of creation in a religion class. His suggestion was vehemently rejected by his teacher and he got a few belts for good measure.

Despite all this, when he came to the end of secondary school, he dabbled with the idea that he might have a vocation. He studied for a year in a seminary in Thurles and enjoyed it very much but decided it wasn't for him. Next, he decided that he would learn to type and attended a commercial school in Limerick. The school was run by a Mrs. McNamara. She had a great love of English and quickly spotted a talent for words in Tom. She encouraged him to use this talent. She was to prove an important mentor. The seeds of this urge to write were to lie dormant for a while as Tom's life took another twist.

It was about this time that he was to come into contact with a man who, to this day, Tom considers a true hero of modern Ireland. Brendan O'Regan had come to the

Shannon area as a sales and catering manager to the seaplane base at Foynes in the Shannon Estuary. He transferred to Shannon airport, or Rineanna as it was then known when it opened. This was a time of propeller-driven aircraft and all trans-Atlantic air traffic had to make landfall for refuelling in Ireland. Passengers needed rest and refreshment. There was a market there to be supplied. The government passed the Duty Free Act to encourage commercial activity in Shannon. As well as supplying food, goods and giftware could be marketed. All this was the brainchild of O'Regan. Soon, Tom was working alongside him. Industries were set up to take advantage of the Duty Free status and the air traffic which was coming and going. Tourism was encouraged and developed in the surrounding locality. Old castles were repaired and turned into locations for banquets with an ethnically Gaelic theme. Bunratty Folk Park was developed. The Shannon Free Airport Development Company came on stream. It managed an international training programme, operated in conjunction with the U.N. to assist other small developing countries to set up similar Duty Free Zones. Tom was central to the work. This was an exciting and very busy time but, in the midst of all the frenetic activity Tom managed to meet and marry Mai Carroll from Cadamstown. They married in 1964. Through his work with Shannon Development, he became involved in personnel management. He was head-hunted by a U.S. firm operating in Ennis. Eventually, Tom and Mai bought a house in Ennis and settled there. The firm he worked for produced highly sophisticated servo systems for electrical motor controls and operated successfully until the late 80's

Concurrently with work in Ennis, Tom lectured in a part-time capacity with the Plassey Management and Technology Centre, which had been developed from the facilities of the University of Limerick. This, in turn, led to the setting up of his own training and consultancy business which specialised in front line management training programmes for County Council personnel. He thoroughly enjoyed this work and met many wonderful people until he finally retired in 2002.

Throughout his working life Tom had dabbled in the written word. He remembers reading a magazine called *Biatas* as a young man. The magazine was produced by the Sugar Beet Growers' Association and at that time Tom and two of his brothers were growing 'sticklings'. Sticklings was the seed crop of the sugar beet industry. In the little magazine, he had read a short piece describing a man going out in the fields with his dog and gun. He was struck by how economy of words and evocative description could bring a simple event so much to life. He had some



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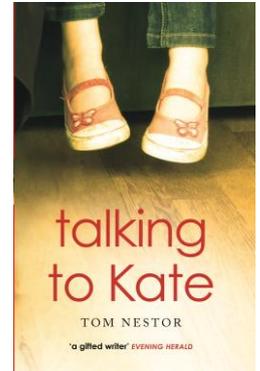
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pieces himself which he had written describing the traditional 'tinker' way of life. The press officer in the company he worked for suggested that he send them to the Manchester Guardian. He did and was thrilled to see them published there. Inspired by this piece, he wrote a story about a day spent ploughing a field with his father which was accepted by a prestigious literary magazine called *Blackwoods*. *Blackwoods* magazine was to be found anywhere in the world where there was a British influence or colony. Tom sent them another story but overdid the attempt by trying to be too sophisticated and inventive. The raw simplicity had gone and David Fletcher, the editor of *Blackwoods*, immediately let him know that and told him to try again. Tom learned a valuable lesson and he did indeed try again. In all, he had about twenty stories published with 'Blackwoods'. Next came a call from Brendan Halligan, the editor of the Limerick Leader. He wanted a piece for the paper. Tom duly sent him one. It was a piece which described a rural Ireland lifestyle which had all but passed for ever. There was huge interest in the piece from the readers and Brendan asked for more. The regular weekly column was to last for 34 years. Writing this regular column sustained Tom through some difficult times and, although for periods he almost gave up writing altogether, he always produced his weekly column. John B Keane filled one half of a Leader page and Tom Nestor filled the other.

In the course of his writing career Tom has had radio plays produced by R.T.E. and the B.B.C. His work has featured regularly in periodicals and magazines, such as *Ireland's Own*, and has been broadcast on the *Sunday Miscellany* programme on R.T.E. Radio. He has had three books published by Collins Press, *The Keeper of Absalom's Island*, a novel called *The Blue Pool*, and his most recent book *Talking to Kate*. This is a deeply philosophical book in which he discusses his life and times with his little granddaughter Kate. In 2002, Tom wrote a history of Birr Golf Club. He is at present in the throes of writing a fourth book titled *Songs for my Father.*,



Despite his success as a writer what comes across when speaking to Tom is his humility. Sensitivity and spirituality run deep in his conversation and writing. He is the first to point out that good writing is a threefold struggle. First, there is the struggle to write. Then there is the struggle to get published and, more often than not the third struggle is the coming to terms with rejection.

Tom's latest book *Talking to Kate* is published by The Collins Press and is widely available.



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FROM BIRR TO ROME AND BACK AGAIN

By Sr. Brenda Dolphin R.S.M., daughter of the late Frank and Betty Dolphin, Moorpark Street

It is exactly thirty years this year since I first left Ireland for Italy, first to Perugia in the province of Umbria in order to learn Italian and after that to Rome. Since that August day in 1979 a lot of water has flowed under the bridge, but one thing has remained the same, the sense of “at homeness” with the Italian people and with all things Italian that I felt when I arrived in Italy for the first time and which I still feel today.

If I were to judge the future by my first day spent on Italian soil, it would not seem to have been a very promising beginning. To start with, the plane leaving Heathrow for Rome was late and I missed my connecting train to Perugia. Leaving home I had felt confident that I would be able to handle the language since I had studied Latin and taught French in a secondary school. The confidence bubble burst very quickly that first day as I struggled with suitcases, milling crowds and a complete blank as regards understanding a single word being said around me in the killing August heat of Termini, the main train station in the heart of Rome. Eventually, somebody with enough English showed me the platform for the train to Perugia as I thought. I clambered onto a packed commuter train, eventually finding a seat and was just getting my breath when the ticket collector came along, scrutinised the ticket I had and with a shrug of the shoulders said, “Perugia, this train No”!! I could hardly believe my ears but, at Orte, the next main junction on the northern bound railway line, I got out of the train, being advised by about six people to catch a train that was stationary at a platform across two or three other tracks and which was just about to pull out of the station. In the heat of the moment, both literally and figuratively, I ran across the tracks towards the train and just about hauled myself and all my bags on to it when I heard shouting behind me. Apparently, I had broken the law by crossing the tracks and there was a hefty policeman waving a gun and shouting after me as I got onto the moving train. Luckily the train had pulled away before he caught up with me. I flopped exhaustedly onto a vacant seat. Once again, the ticket collector came round, scrutinised my ticket in the same way as the other man had done, and once again he shrugged his shoulders and said “Perugia No”! On his advice, I got out of the train in Foligno, this time negotiated the underground passage to cross the track and as I came up on the platform he had indicated, the train that was going to Perugia was simply two red lights disappearing into the gathering darkness. It was now about eight o’clock in the evening and I was tired, thirsty, homesick and frightened as I stood on the empty platform in Foligno, with nobody around and night falling very quickly. Once again, I found out that a train for Perugia would be coming through Foligno at ten o’clock. The two-hour wait seemed interminable but sure enough, the train

Brenda in front of St. Peters Basilica*

chugged into the station on time and we set off for Perugia and, this time at least there was no shrug of the shoulders from the ticket collector. I was on a train that was going directly to Perugia at last! We got to Perugia at about eleven o’clock. I was worried if the hostel where I was staying would open

up for me because I had been warned that they closed doors at 10.00 p.m! I decided to take a chance on it and asked the taxi driver to take me to Piazza del Duomo where the hostel was located. It was the one moment in that fateful day when I believed again that there was a God in heaven because, as the taxi drew up in front of the hostel, I couldn’t believe my luck when I saw that the door was wide open. A group of students who had been out at a concert on the steps of the Duomo were returning just as I arrived and in I went with the rest of them. Strange and all as that first day was, I settled into life in Italy very quickly. One of the advantages of being a student of Italian in Perugia at that time was that, every weekend, excursions were organised at very cheap rates (the lira was the currency of the country at the time) and we explored the Umbrian countryside, visiting places like Assisi, Urbino, Todi and Orvieto and going farther afield to Florence, Siena and Pisa. I was fascinated by the cities perched high on the top of a hill, the lines of stately cypress trees on the shimmering horizon, the big bright sunflowers that smiled and turned their heads to the sun all day long, the tangy smell of goats cheese on Saturday, which was market day and, above all, the smell and taste of cappuccino and cornetti in the morning time.

After two months in Perugia learning the language I came to Rome to start my training in psychology in the Gregorian University. Rome was then, and indeed still is noisy, garrulous and chaotic but ever beautiful and never boring. The intoxicating mixture of the ancient and the new, the religious and the profane, the chaotic and the ordered gives the city a charm that is rarely matched. Living in Rome you can be sure that each time you take a different way home you will see some gem of architecture or art that you will not have seen before. A real joy for me is to walk the streets of the city early on a Sunday



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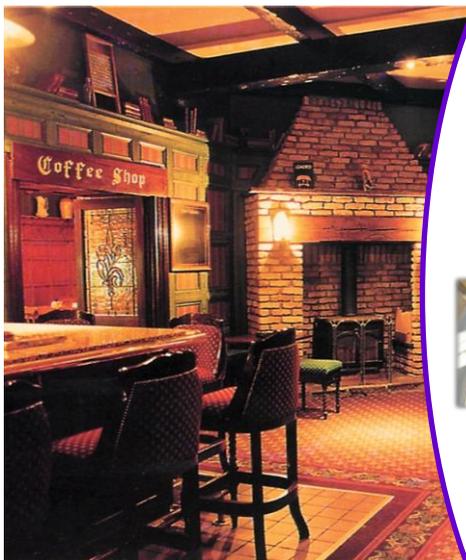
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morning. The bells in the many churches are ringing, there is little traffic, and the perennial beauty of places like the Spanish Steps and the Trevi Fountain can be savoured in all their splendour and loveliness. As is the case in many of the great cities of the world, Rome has its shady side and this is never more evident than in the early morning when the many people who sleep rough are beginning to emerge from the cardboard boxes that are the only protection they have from the chill of the night. During spring, summer and autumn, things are not too bad for them in this climate but the winter wind can be very biting, the Tramontana that comes searing down from the Apennines would *fleece a brass monkey*. It is at that time that my heart goes out to the homeless of the city.

My own Congregation, the Sisters of Mercy, does not have a house in Rome and so I live with the community of another Congregation, the Poor Servants of the Mother of God, during the academic year. I come back to Ireland for three months in the summer and a short time at Christmas. For a religious, Rome is an interesting place to be. There is a very real sense of being part of the universal church. As a teacher in the Gregorian University, I am very aware of the constant changing face of the church. When I was doing my own study from 1979 to 1982, the majority of students in the university, both religious and lay were Caucasian. When I came back to teach here from 1987 to 1994, the majority of the student body came from India, South America and Eastern Europe, especially Poland and nearby countries. I spent twelve years in Ireland on the Central Leadership Team of my congregation and came back in 2006. While there are still many students from India and South America, increasingly the student population is coming from Africa, China and the East.

I was studying here the day that Pope John Paul was shot, May 13th 1982. I remember vividly as I walked back to the pensione where I was staying with another student from Argentina, the hush that lay over the main streets. Everybody was glued to TV monitors, in cafes or shop windows, trying to get some details about what had happened. The other time I remember a hush over the city streets was in 1990 when Ireland was playing Italy in the World Cup. Italy won but the Irish found a place forever in the Italian heart because they were such good losers and had such well-behaved supporters. In the intervening twenty years or so, things have changed with the advent of the Six Nations Cup!

Pope Benedict had a very hard act to follow when he inherited the "Shoes of the Fisherman" from John Paul II in April 2005. Four years on, however, he has shown himself very equal to the task, having grown into the 'job', as it were. He will probably be remembered as one of the greatest theologian Popes of all time. He has the knack of all truly great minds; he can explain the complex very clearly and to the point, in simple unambiguous language. In 1990, I was in Loreto, on the eastern coast of Italy across the Apennines with some friends. While we were there for the weekend, we met the then Cardinal Ratzinger and his

sister Maria, who died shortly afterwards. My impression was of a very shy, kindly but self-possessed person, who interacted with those he met in a friendly, serene and non-intrusive way.

In 2006, when I finished my term of office on the General Leadership Team of my Congregation, I was asked to come back to Rome as the Postulator for the Cause of the Foundress of the Sisters of Mercy, Catherine McAuley. Catherine, a Dublin woman, founded the Sisters of Mercy in Dublin in 1831. She was an extraordinary woman who was orphaned at 20 years of age and unexpectedly inherited a sizeable fortune when she was 44. She spent her life and every penny of her wealth educating and sheltering poor women in Dublin in the 1830's and 1840's and caring for the sick, especially when cholera hit the city of Dublin in the 1830's. She never intended to be a nun but she always believed that her call was to help the poor of Dublin as a committed lay woman. However, God had a different plan for her, circumstances beyond her control intervened and she founded the Congregation of the Sisters of Mercy which, even in the ten short years of her life as its foundress, had spread far and wide in Ireland and England. Catherine's last foundation in Ireland was in Birr in January 1841. She was asked to make a foundation by the local parish priest of the time because of the Crotty Schism in the town. Catherine was an excellent letter writer and wrote many letters (a number of which were written from Birr) to her sisters and friends in Dublin and around the country. In one letter from Birr, she talked about the cold, as it happened that there was snow on the ground while she was there (December 1840) and she had to soften the butter on a smouldering sod of turf!

This woman, who was so normal, was also very holy. On April 9th 1990 Catherine was declared Venerable by Pope John Paul II. This is the first step on the road to canonisation. The next step is beatification. For this, a miracle, for example a healing that is inexplicable to medical science today and which comes through prayer through Catherine's intercession, is required.

My work here in Rome as the Postulator of her cause is to continue to see that people who wish to know her better have a chance to do so. All over the world people pray for help and favours from God through Catherine's intercession and amazing stories of answers to prayer keep coming in to us. We continue to pray that one day God will grant a miracle through her intercession, which would mean that she would be beatified.

Even though I have been living here in Rome on and off for the past thirty years, and even though I love this city and its people, Birr will always be a special place for me. Many people from Birr have been to Rome, some many times, as the coin in the Trevi Fountain works its magic. While Rome is a city to visit and revisit, Birr is the place to come home to, to touch back into what makes us who we are, which is a wealth to be shared no matter where our journey in life takes us.

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BIRR POST OFFICE – A BRIEF HISTORY

By Jack Ryan

The present post office building was built by John Hickey in 1903. The building was constructed with stone that was transported by horse and cart from Ballinasloe. The site was on waste ground; a swamp in the centre of which was a well. A sorting office was built over this well and access to it still exists from the yard. The Post-Masters residence was upstairs and cost £40 per annum in rent. This was deducted from his salary. A ground rent of 25 shillings per annum was payable to Captain Hackett of Riverstown. Mrs. Cleary was the cleaner and she received 7 shillings per week. John Tierney had a contract for cleaning the windows at 7 shillings per annum, and for this, he had to clean them four times a year. J. Hoare had the contract for cleaning out the ash pit at 10 shillings per annum.

An Roinn Poist agus Telegrafa as it was known was divided into three branches, Postal, Telegraph and Telephony and was controlled locally by the post-master. The maintenance and installation of the phones and telegraph equipment was under the control of the Engineering Branch. A Post Office of a kind existed for centuries, but it may be said to have had commenced when Rowland Hill introduced the penny stamp in 1840. In 1838, the Post Office began to handle money and the savings bank followed in 1861. From 1809 to 1831, Sir Laurence, the 2nd Earl of Rosse, held the joint post of Post Master General with Lord O'Neill.

The first telegraph instrument was invented by Charles Wheatstone in 1836 and Morse perfected the sounder and key. A six penny telegram was adopted by the House of Commons in 1883 and wireless telegraphy was introduced by Marconi in 1905. The telephone was invented by Alexander Graham Bell in 1876 and the first message over the phone was "Come here Mr. Watson I want you". In 1880, the first telephone exchange was opened in Dame Street, Dublin which now houses a branch of Bank of Ireland. A messenger boy was the



Birr Post Office in its current location in Emmet Square

operator but he was dismissed for playing marbles while on duty. A Miss Agnes Duggan was the first woman employed in 1881.

Birr Post Office had a telegraph service operated by the clerks, who had to be competent in sending the messages in Morse code. Upstairs was the Messenger Boy's room whose duty was to deliver telegrams. In 1925, he was known as An Garsún Poist and his wage was 11/5d per week. For that, he worked from 8.00 a.m. to 7.00 p.m. each day except on Sunday, when he worked from 9.00 a.m. to 10.30 p.m. He was supplied with an official bicycle, painted red, for which he got 2 pence per day cleaning allowance. He had to cover a radius of six miles and it was his duty to collect 1 penny per word from the customer on receipt of the telegram. W. Hennessey, who was born on 10th April 1910, joined as a messenger boy on the 6th April 1927 and his weekly pay was 6 shillings per week. Jack Feehan was the telegram boy in 1968 and his weekly wage was £6-9-11 for a 37.5 hours week. Tom Hamilton was the last telegram boy in Birr.

All staff, up until 1922, had to take the oath of allegiance to the king. In 1901, a male clerk earned 14 shillings per week, rising in increments to 30 shillings and his Sunday pay was 2 shillings. Pat Giblin, who was a learner (training to become a clerk), received no pay. The maintenance of the telephone and telegraph equipment was the responsibility of P. Doyle, T. Barry and P. Burke. Peter Burke was killed when he fell off a pole near Laurencetown in 1956. They covered an area from Ballybrophy to Woodford on a bicycle and were also responsible for servicing the electric train signalling equipment from Birr to Ballybrophy

The location of the first post office in Birr was at Post Office Lane off High Street. According to the census of 1821, the area had 23 houses with 111 inhabitants. In 1826, the post office was situated in the Main Street, at the corner with Church Lane. The then postmaster was a



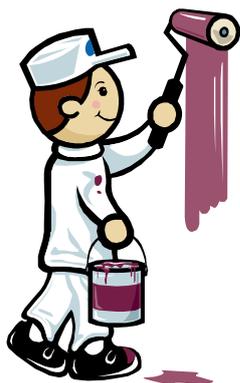
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Mr. Dooley. Incidentally, further down the Main Street was the bank in a run down state with some of its windows broken and it is said that history repeats itself! At the time, it cost 8 pence to post a letter to Dublin and, if dispatched on Monday, a reply could be got by Wednesday. The first telegram of a public nature was sent from Birr on the 5th May 1883 and it was as follows: *"Parsonstown Fair, May 5th. This was the largest and one of the best fairs ever held here. There was an immense supply of both sheep and cattle, and sufficient buyers for all the remunerative prices. Prime sheep sold higher than last year and good cattle at the same rate. Pigs were scarce and dear"*.

The Post Office was located for a period in Johns Place before it was moved to the current site in Emmet Square. The Post Mistress was a Mrs. Shepard and her salary was £37-17-0 per annum. The National Telephone Company installed the telephone switchboard and a Miss Eileen Tooher was employed from 1904 to 1927 at 14 shillings per week. Birr manual telephone exchange continued to expand until 1984 and had a staff of 60. On the 26th July 1984, the Birr telephone system went from manual

operation to automatic and Birr's biggest hidden industry closed down and with it the personal contact between operator and subscriber. In its place, the latest technology, the answering machine took over.



**Past Post Office Workers –
Joe Normoyle (left) & Willie Hennessey**



'Toirneac', acted by pupils of St. Brendan's Secondary School 2nd & 4th years on 11th April 1947
Back Row - Standing (L to R): Liam McGarry, Larry Cullen, John Warden, Dermot Kelly, Joseph Murphy, Patrick Reedy, Francis Tooher, Paschal Cullen, Raymond O'Flaherty
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Front Row: George Sylvester, Francis McNamara

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OFFALY WIN FIRST ALL-IRELAND JUNIOR CAMOGIE TITLE

By Caroline McCarthy

September 13th 2009 will go down in history as the date when the Offaly Junior Camogie Team captured their first ever All-Ireland Title against Waterford in Croke Park. The road to Croke Park was not an easy one and when the Offaly girls played Waterford in Kinnitty back in June, it seemed that returning to an All-Ireland Final might be out of reach, as the team were still recovering from the heartache they had suffered in the 2008 final against Clare. On that day, Offaly had played some excellent camogie and were the better team on the day, but in the final minute, a Clare goal snatched the New Ireland Cup from the fingertips of the Offaly team. That bitter memory was very hard to erase when the panel got together again in early January to resume training.

Training was tough but they had some great fun also and the girls built very strong friendships together. They had one aim all year and that was to get back into an All-Ireland Final and, this time, they would not let the silverware slip from their hands again.

Their first game in the championship was against Waterford with a home venue in Kinnitty. This game was a very tough game and Offaly never got into their strides at all. Siobhan Flannery started at full forward and the first ball she received was beautifully caught and hand passed to the net but the referee disallowed the goal and that set the tone for Offaly's poor display all day. Everything went wrong, frees were missed, passes went to ground and there was no style about the performance at all. Instead, it was Waterford who were flying and turned on the style with a very strong performance and ran out convincing winners on a scoreline of Offaly 0-7, Waterford 3-11. This was the wake-up call for the Offaly girls and they now realised that it was going to be very hard work to get back to an All-Ireland Final.

Offaly regrouped at training, sorted out a few small problems and the next two games were "must win" away to Dublin and Down. Offaly travelled to Dublin and played well and some new players got a chance to show their talent. By half-time, the score read Dublin 0-2, Offaly 2-8. This was a good day's work and an easy victory for Offaly with the final score of Dublin 1-8, Offaly 3-12. The next game was going to be the toughest test for the team to date as Down are a big strong physical team and Offaly would need to be at their best to win. Offaly knew that this was make or break and they put on a fantastic display of camogie and scored a massive 5-20 to Down's 0-6. This set down a marker as to the team's intentions and now they were in the All-Ireland semi-final against Meath in Nowlan Park, Kilkenny. This game was one that everybody expected Offaly to win easily, but Meath were a tough team to break down and they never let Offaly get into their

free-flowing game. Offaly was always in the lead but Meath kept in touch with well-taken frees especially. But the Offaly girls had Croke Park in their sights again and ran out five point winners on a score of Offaly 0-16 Meath 1-8. The other semi-final saw Waterford beat Laois in a hard-fought game by a four point margin. So a place in the final had been achieved and the next few weeks were going to be very hard work for the panel. Lots of practice games were organised and lots of different things tried out. Thankfully, the girls stayed injury-free and everything was set for the final and Waterford were going to be all up for a repeat of the performance they had in Kinnitty. The management team of Joachim Kelly, Ger Fogarty, Mark Corrigan and Catherine Byrne had instilled a belief in the team that this was their year and told them all they had to remember was the performance in Kinnitty and that was not going to happen again.

The stage was ready, conditions were perfect on the day and a perfect display from the Offaly girls was rewarded with a first All-Ireland Junior Camogie Final victory. The celebrations of the girls and a fantastic speech by captain Marion Crean as she received the New Ireland Cup from Camogie Association President Joan O'Flynn was the perfect way to end the season.

The reception the team received from all the clubs within the county and especially when they returned to Birr on the Sunday night was fantastic, the bus was escorted into town by a Garda escort and the girls were thrilled at the support they received from everyone. After the reception on the open truck in the square in Birr, the team arrived at the County Arms Hotel, who is the team sponsor, for a well deserved meal and the dancing and celebrations went on till the early hours of the morning.



**Offaly Team Homecoming in Birr
Captain Marion Crean delivers her speech**

BIRR Year Review 2009

Well done to all the girls and management team, you have reaped the rewards at last and we now look forward to competing in the Intermediate Championship and building on this great success.

On Monday 19th October, six of the Offaly players were rewarded with Soaring Star Awards, which is the first year that the Camogie Association introduced awards for junior players only. The girls are Audrey Kennedy and Arlene

Watkins from the Birr club. Fiona Stephens and Elaine Dermody from the Drumcullen, club. Karen Brady from the St. Sinchills club and Michaela Morkan from the Shinrone club. The awards will be presented at a Banquet in Citywest Hotel, Dublin on Saturday 7th November.

Thanks to Camillus King and Ger Rogers for photos



Birr players on the Offaly team

(L to R): Katie Bergin, Audrey Kennedy, Orlagh Kirwan, Arlene Watkins, Sheila Sullivan

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A KENYAN DIARY

By Olivia Headon, daughter of Patrick and Barbara Ann from Sharavogue.

During the month of June, I was lucky enough to be given the chance to travel to Kenya with a Kenyan Community based organisation called Mafanikio, meaning success in Swahili. The organisation focuses on promoting gender equality, human rights and sustainable development. Their ultimate goal is to combat poverty in the rural regions of Kenya. This fight against poverty consists of school feeding programmes, work camps, women empowerment schemes, clean water projects, AIDs awareness campaigns and a secondary and third-level education fund. As it is a small, relatively unknown charity, it meant that we were really immersed in the community that we were staying with. Our work camp group consisted of five Irish women and five Kenyans. Two great friends of mine, Niamh Garry and Catriona Rigney, both Birr natives, made up the Irish part of the group along with a friend from college, Anna Cosgrave, and a Kildare woman named Pam Southern.

We all flew to Nairobi, Kenya's capital city, as the village of Kiukuni in which the work camp was to take place was only two hours away on dirt roads, in the Makueni District. Although Nairobi is known as one of the most dangerous cities in the world, I feel that it truly does not deserve its horrible reputation. I found all the shop owners and people of the city eager to please and in want of tourism on a larger scale. The worst thing was that the price of everyday goods is nearly the same as any European city, As a result, men from the country who give up farming and move to the city in hope of a better job and money to send home to their family, end up further in debt due to high living costs and low wages.

We spent about 20 days in the small rural village of Kiukuni. There we had two main tasks. The first was to repair a roof and school room which were damaged due to strong winds and the second was to teach and play with the children. Every day we woke up at 6 or 5.30 a.m. depending on whether it was our turn to prepare breakfast. As the area doesn't have electricity or running water, every hot meal was cooked in a smoke house. Luckily, we had access to a gas cooker that we kept in the staff room where we slept and ate. Normally we were awoken by the sound of the children playing or sweeping away rubbish. Every morning at 8 o'clock we took to watching their school assembly. Songs were sung, prayers were said and the Kenyan flag was raised. This was all done through a mixture of English and Swahili. The assembly was also the time when certain children were reminded of outstanding administration fees that were still owed by their family to the school. This was humiliating and embarrassing to some of these athletic, happy and bright children. Although it was a tiny amount,



Olivia Headon, Niamh Garry and Anna Cosgrave among some of the kids just before they were about to head home after school

it was unaffordable for some families. At assembly, the teachers were always alert to the one or two latecomers who tried to sneak in. They faced a caning as punishment. Although outlawed by the government, it is still continued by most schools and encouraged by principals. No excuse would save them from a caning. Watching the children sing during assembly was simply beautiful and the fact that we got the chance to witness it every day was extraordinary. After a very light breakfast of sweet bread we started our physical work. We hauled sacks of rocks and sand and buckets of water up the side of the mountain and compressed rocks by hand and made cement or painted. The work left us so tired we could hardly walk but it was well worth it when we presented the finished school building to the children and saw the look of excitement and gratitude on their faces. At lunch, we ate traditional Kenyan food as was usual at every meal, such as ugali (maize meal mixed with water) or lentils and beans. All the food was grown locally and bought from the women whose children went to the school or one nearby. After lunch we would teach the children maths and English. I taught maths and every time I entered the room I was greeted by the children rising to their feet and reciting "Good afternoon, teacha!" On one occasion I forgot to tell them to be seated and turned around after a while of talking and writing on the blackboard to find them still standing.

My time in Kenya really was a life-changing experience. The children are beautiful and genuinely happy with the very little that they have. Beyond rural Kenyan peoples' kind spirits, they truly know how poor and sick they and their families are. They may not have televisions, due to lack of electricity, but they do not need them to see that there is a world outside their own. Volunteers like myself, Niamh or

BIRR Year Review 2009

Catriona walk in and out of their lives sub-consciously flaunting our relative wealth. The fact that we are white makes us seem extremely wealthy and successful. Kenyan women bleach their skin to look like us. Kenyan children change their accents to sound like us and Kenyan men wear second hand trousers held up by belts done up to last notch to dress like us. They know that there is a completely

different world out there and they want to be a part of it! At the moment the best way any of us can help them do that is to volunteer with, or donate to, organisations like Mafanikio that encourage education and feeding, because education and health are what makes a country sustainably develop. As Mafanikio's maxim states 'change begins with you and me'!

**Congratulations to Joe and Eileen Hynes (right),
Burkes Hill, Birr who celebrated their
Golden Wedding Anniversary on 29th July 2009**



**Congratulations to Michael and Elizabeth Lally (above),
Presentation Place, who celebrated their
Golden Wedding Anniversary on 26th November 2009**



**Pictured left are
the late Pat and Mary Cleary
from Moorpark Street
in 1946. Pat served as
sacristan in St. Brendan's
church for 55 years.**



**Congratulations to Donie and Patsy Carroll, above,
from Bulfin Park, who celebrated their
Golden Wedding Anniversary
on 29th September 2009**

A KIWI COMES HOME

By *David Bergin, son of Tim and Breda from Woodlands Park, Birr.*

Wellington, at 41°17'S, 174°46'E, sits at the southern tip of New Zealand's North Island, and is a small capital city by international standards. The spectacular location around a natural harbour protects it from the worst of the southerly swells that channel through Cook Strait between the Tasman Sea and Pacific Ocean.

It is the main transit point for people journeying between the two main islands by ferry. The antipodean location places it directly opposite Spain on the globe, almost half way between Madrid and Santiago de Compostela. This leads to some mind-boggling considerations: that New Zealand is closer to the North Pole than it is to Ireland or Spain, and, conversely, that Ireland is closer to the South Pole than it is to New Zealand.

A Christmas in Wellington isn't complete without a southerly - the name given to the strong, cold winds that sweep up over the southern ocean from the pole, encountering their first significant landmass in New Zealand's mountainous interior. Although late December is early summer, the weather doesn't usually deliver on its seasonal promise until some time in January. Once it does, Wellington is a magical place to live. The strong winds of spring are gone, the days are long, blue-skied and comfortably warm. Wellington's harbour water sparkles like a million jewels, making "sunnies" mandatory attire. The temperature rarely exceeds 25 degrees, but if you really need some toasting it is possible to drive an hour east, over a pass between the Tararua and Rimutaka Ranges to the wine-growing Wairarapa region. The low thirties are more common here, due to less of a moderating coastal influence, and a rain-shadow from the mountains to the west.

I spent three years living in Wellington, and as a result was afforded many opportunities to discover the joys of the unsurpassed Kiwi wilderness. I indulged in the activity of "tramping" whenever I could.

Going tramping essentially involves a multi-day expedition into the mountains, usually carrying your tent and a stove, even if you use one of the thousand or so backcountry huts and shelters provided by the Department of Conservation and an assortment of mountaineering clubs.

You wear your boots when crossing streams and rivers, which you may do dozens of times a day, learning to live with having wet feet. You go to sleep when it gets dark, get up early and eat vast quantities of food. It's a pleasant and efficient way to feel that you are getting the most you can out of any weekend, really living in the moment.

Three years ago this Christmas, my brother Ray and I spent nine days in the depths of the South Island's Fiordland National Park, walking the Dusky Track. We



David 'tramping' in the mountains

started with two companions on Christmas Eve and walked out again on New Year's Day. It was a punishing ordeal, especially with that many days worth of food and gear on our backs, but it was a unique experience in an untouched landscape that I wouldn't have missed for the world. On Christmas Day 2006 we sat in Lake Roe Hut, tired and sore, sharing a can of beer, a quarter bottle of wine and a slice of Christmas cake that our Scottish companion had brought along. It was barely festive, but these were luxuries hard earned on the walk in. I missed Birr, Christmas Day with family and St. Stephen's Night catching up with friends and acquaintances. The removal from civilisation was complete. The remainder of the trip brought rain and sandflies, river crossings, three-wire bridges, mountain passes, dense forest and the lonely grandeur of Dusky Sound itself. With each passing day we grew fitter and our packs lighter.

There was a new appreciation of the comforts we take for granted these days, which I promptly forgot as soon as I was back amongst them.

Most Wellingtonians have developed a taste for, and an appreciation of, good coffee. I have never seen so many cafes packed into such a small space, all competing for the patronage of the 300,000 or so citizens, many of them actual mom and pop shops. There is a vibrant local coffee roasting trade, supplying the rest of New Zealand and guaranteeing that if you want to, you can buy coffee beans that have literally just left the roasting machine. Coffees served here are small, strong - most having two espresso shots per cup, and are so consistently of a high standard that it is all but impossible to have a bad one. The city is a vibrant, creative and friendly place. It is multi-cultural to an extent not yet seen in Ireland, and integration seems on the surface to be smooth. This is at



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least partly due to the fact that being considered Kiwi has comparatively little to do with where you were born, and much more to do with the attitudes you take on after settling there. Immigrants can feel proud of the culture from which they came, and proud to be Kiwi at the same time. Two universities and a thriving film, music and arts scene balance and complete the economy fostered by the large government presence.

Auckland, with a population almost five times that of Wellington is the real economic centre in the country, but Wellington outclasses it in every way except for climate. At first glance, it's easy to notice the similarities to a familiar

Anglo-Irish culture, but the more time you spend there, the more you discover, and the more different and unique it becomes. You realise a little too late that it's under your skin.

Returning to live in Ireland a few months ago was a strange experience. So much has changed here in three years, in ways both good and bad. I changed in my own way to reflect my surroundings down under, and the re-adjustment to life here is still ongoing. I'm very much looking forward to having Christmas in its proper season again, to spending more time with family and friends, to being in Birr once more and being home.

'Heirs to Nothing' – A Band On The Up



Heirs to Nothing; from left David Maher, T.J. Brewer, Martin Bennet, Stephen Hogan, Mike Maher

Heirs to Nothing are a five-piece band from the Birr area. Even though the band has been in existence for over two years it was during the summer of 2009 that things started to happen very fast for the band. In August, the band decided to release their first single "Lover". This was launched on the 25th September and was very well received, reaching no. 13 in the Irish charts, the highest new entry of that week and the only independent band in the charts at the time. The band are currently working on putting their debut album together and getting ready for their next single, expected to come out early next year.

Martin Bennett grew up in Crinkill and had a keen interest in sport as child, playing hurling for most of his childhood.

He has served with the Irish Army in the Lebanon and Kosovo. TJ Brewer grew up in Clareen, near Birr and is currently living in Birr. Stephen Hogan, also from Crinkill, is in his first year of college, studying Music Technology in Athlone IT. Brothers Mike and David Maher are from Birr. Michael is in his final year of study in University of Limerick, studying Music, Media and Performance Technology. Dave Maher is the youngest member of the band and works in the Birr Theatre and Arts Centre.

The Band has a range of songs from powerful, pumping rock songs, to passionate acoustic ballads. They are currently gigging in Dublin, Limerick and Birr in preparation for their next single release.

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WHEN IN ROME.....

By John Clifford, son of Matt & Ann Glebe Street, Birr

Working as an English teacher in Rome, and for over 12 years now, provides many great experiences as well as a great insight into this eternal city and its people. The Romans are as interesting as the city they inhabit, with a colourful mixture of high fashion, excellent food and great passion in everyday things - even to the point of irritation. It is also a place with unbearable traffic chaos and elements of civic disrespect, but it can leave you (as it does the Romans themselves) either in high spirits or in fuming anger.

Transport and Traffic

Whereas in Ireland or the UK perfect strangers strike up a casual conversation inevitably about the weather (well, it does change very often!) patiently queuing for a bus, in Rome people generally stand anxiously for the next bus to arrive and when it does, scramble to get on. It's first come, first served, and in some cases it's the last to arrive who are first on. Within seconds of pulling up, the doors close unless the bus is jam-packed with the last few stragglers trying to squeeze on. There are just so many people using the service that 'seating only' is impractical. The underground, for a city of some 5 million people, has only two lines. They are building others, but many more are desperately needed. Rome is not an easy city in which to build an underground, with archaeological treasures being constantly discovered. The rule when driving is "be prepared to break the rules"; if not, you get left behind in the rush with everybody behind and beside you gesturing rudely and making unmentionable utterances. Many lose their tempers, with drivers sometimes getting out of their cars and physically striking each other. Amid all the angst in the heat of all this mayhem are the famous mopeds (almost a Roman trademark and surely the fastest means of transport) screeching through the traffic about the city.

The fact is, for pedestrians, there are too many cars in the city. For drivers there are too many red lights. The result of all this is what I call 'traffcabatics'.

Behaviour/Social Interaction

Coupled with a frenetic lifestyle and love of life, it is understandable that this warm people become somewhat hot under the collar with frustration, for no rational reason. Their most noticeable characteristic has to be their enthusiasm for almost everything from food, fashion, and football to everything in life itself. This incredibly energetic and curious people give this beautiful and unique city its vibrancy and soul.

Rome is, after all, home to some of the world's most beautiful monuments, architecture and art treasures that *never* cease to amaze. Apart from the busy city centre and tourist spots, there are always narrow alleyways and lanes that exude grace in their beautiful shades of colour as the

sun finally goes down, leaving you breathless. With the people all rushing about and the traffic, with the splendour of the magnificent architecture and well-preserved Roman ruins ever-present, the smell of Italian cuisine, the striking colours of the buildings dressed in their layers of history, this city undoubtedly has an unparalleled charm and fascination of its own.

Although people rarely speak to or salute those they do not know (even in pubs), children here are considered very special and loved by all. The Romans are particularly good to children. It is common for people on the street to perhaps pat children on the head or speak to them and their parents without knowing them. It is one of the few situations where strangers will actually speak to each other and is a good way to break the ice. Gesturing too and body language is a part of life here and is a language of its own. The Romans will point when giving directions, physically describe things with their hands while talking, and have a store of other and fascinating gestures meaning different things. It's wonderful to watch.

Fashion Compassion and Battle of the Vanities

To be dressed in the latest fashion is vital in the veins of many Romans and they do dress well. It's not just about looking your best, but looking your social part. Romans pay great adherence to their appearance and brand name in clothing is fundamental for many (Italy is home to some of the world's top designers). Fashion among adults is competitive but among teenagers it is war. You may well laugh, but the Romans are a particularly and deliberately well-dressed people and there is a great conscious yearn to express themselves through fashion.

Football

Football is a state religion for many. During the World Cup or important games the streets are empty. The big games are enjoyed by the Romans more at home with family and friends and they *are* passionate about football. Being in somebody's home for an important match means suffering the constant jumping up in excitement and nerves at vital and near-vital moments, the shouts, the crying, the laughter, and the anxiety as they curl up almost in agony in themselves waiting for that moment of glory. No matter how good the match or how better the opposition team played or deserved to win, if the national or local team loses it results in disbelief and some anger. A word of caution, the Romans will remind you that footballers are paid so well they are expected to perform. However, the anger and disappointment does eventually die down, at least until the next game when the sheer excitement begins all over again.

Food, Glorious Food!

Italians will be the first to proudly tell you their food is the best in the world, and with such an explosion in taste, incredible variety and healthy diet, it's difficult to disagree with them. The most noticeable characteristic is that the main dinner time is from 8.00pm onwards when parents return from work. Romans find it unthinkable to have dinner at 6.00 or 7.00 in the evening. Dinner is the golden part of the day for this very much family-orientated people. It is the time for the whole family to sit eating and chatting together and usually for some time. While the Romans do have their own traditional dishes, they nearly always eat the standard Italian food. One of the favoured places to buy fruit and vegetables is at local open markets where clothing at cheaper prices can also be bought.

Feast Days and Holidays

Christmas is different in Rome. For most households the principal meal is held on Christmas Eve night with all the family and usually extended family together eating fish and lots besides. Christmas day dinner is less important, with turkey and ham and good old stuffing unheard of. Santa Claus mysteriously enters the home through the front door of the apartment or window left slightly ajar to help him in his busy schedule. The presents are normally found hiding somewhere and opened on Christmas Eve night sometime after dinner. The crib too, plays a particularly important festive function, and its importance is even more striking in southern Italy. On the 6th of January the Italians celebrate the Epiphany with the Befana, an ugly old lady who visits all the households judging who has been good and who has been bad. If the children have been good they receive

perhaps a stocking of sweets and more presents. If they have been bad or wicked they get chunks of coal (really large sweets coal-shaped and coloured). Italian children understandably love this tradition.

In February, they have Carnival with children dressing up in costume. This usually lasts a week but the city continues to move normally, energetically and chaotically. The Italians, and Romans, also have what they call White Week, meaning a week of holidays skiing or touring with family or friends sometime during January or February.

August is the peculiar month of the year. Outside tourist spots, the city comes to a virtual standstill. Most shops close, there are few cars on the roads, and getting basic supplies or services means walking a bit longer. The city transport system is always easier then, except for the heat. Most Romans are on holiday or go to houses on the beach or mountains to escape the heat and humidity of the city. It's almost surreal!

Afterthought

I think the first three years living here are the most difficult. It is very bureaucratic and quite disorganized to fresh eyes. Naturally, every city has its negative aspects, but Rome and the Romans are special and the city is magnificent no matter what anyone thinks. My relationship with Rome for the first few years was a love-hate affair but now, weathered over time, I have come to accept its inefficiencies and view the people I know as a second family. You might love the city and its people or hate them, but one thing is for certain, there is never a dull moment!



Birr Fire Brigade – circa 1985

*Back Row (L to R): Liam Cooke, Jackie Hehir, Denis Dolan, John Powell, Willie Hough, Arthur Kelly, Mick Kenny
Front Row: Tony Colville, Johnny Feehan, Paddy Mellsop*

CALIFORNIA DREAMING

By Noel O'Donoghue, son of William and the late Adelaide O'Donoghue, Moorpark Street.

It is my tenth year away from home this year. I left Birr in December 1999 for San Jose, California, in the heart of Silicon Valley. I remember as a schoolboy in the eighties hearing about Silicon Valley and all the technological advancements that were being made there. The images I conjured up in my mind back then were a little bit different from the Silicon Valley I landed in, in 1999. The first thing to hit me about Silicon Valley was the amount of traffic. Freeways, highways, crossovers, flyovers, overtaking on both sides, horns, cars changing lanes without any indicators, and the sudden stops. Traffic could be travelling at eighty miles an hour and then you hear breaks screeching and everything comes to a stop. No reason. Anyway, you do get used to this.

So, in November 1999, I was working for LD Intercon in Birr, and in December 1999 I was beginning a new life in Silicon Valley. I was hired as a technical trainer for Wave Technologies, an IT company with their headquarters based in St. Louis, Missouri. My job was teaching Microsoft and Cisco technologies to computer network engineers. I have to admit at first it was a bit intimidating. After all, I was a small town boy from Birr, a place they had never heard of. But then, isn't everybody from somewhere. Anyway, Birr is a great place. Birr housed the world's most powerful telescope for 75 years, Birr was the greatest club hurling team of the twentieth century, the Bronte sisters once lived in Birr, Aidan Quinn (the Hollywood actor) is from Birr, we have great musicians and great sports people from Birr, we even have our own species of trout (*did ya catch an'in mush?*), and a population of only four or five thousand. I always take great pride in relaying this information to any curious American who asks me where I am from.

Since my arrival in the US, my work has involved a lot of travel. I have been to twenty-seven different states at this stage. Each state is different with its own unique features and I love having the opportunity to experience the differences. Some of the states I have visited left vague impressions, I spent a couple of weeks teaching a class and then left, but others created a lasting impression.

On one trip to Washington DC I made a point of visiting the Lincoln Memorial and the White House. While I was there, amid an atmosphere of great excitement three identical presidential helicopters zig zagged around in the sky for a number of minutes and then one of them (*Marine One*), landed on the White House lawn. The other two flew away. The crowds outside the White House railings cheered as the President came down the steps of the helicopter. He waved to the crowd and then disappeared into the White House.

It was quite an impressive sight.

Another time, while teaching a class in Orlando, a discussion arose about a space probe that was due to be launched for Pluto. One of the students went on-line and found out it was to be launched at just about that time. We stopped class and went outside and actually saw the probe rising through the sky and leaving the earth's atmosphere. It is due to pass closest to Pluto around mid-July 2015.

Another state that leaves an impression is Wyoming. It is so vast and really scenic. From the roadside you can see huge red-faced cliffs that rise in the open prairies, rivers that disappear into underground caverns and rise a few miles later, and drive through mountain passes with towering walls of sheer rock. This is before you experience Yellowstone National Park. Yellowstone is not overrated. Bison, Bear, Eagle, Wolf, Elk, Moose, Old Faithful geyser, it really is a beautiful place. Old Faithful erupts approximately every 90 minutes. On one visit to Yellowstone, my wife and I decided to take a walk around the hot springs while waiting for the Geysers to put on their show. Towards the end of the trail I heard the noise of the crowd indicate that Old Faithful was about to blow and I took to running, leaving my wife to catch up. At the end of the trail I ran to the right to get a good viewing point. When Patricia caught up to me she asked if I had seen the Bison. I said no, where? She pointed and I saw it. I had passed within inches of it. If I had turned left instead of right at the end of the trail I would have run right up its arse. Those things are huge.

But of all the states I have visited so far I think California is probably the nicest. There are so many things to see here. One of them is the General Sherman, a Giant Sequoia (*a type of redwood tree*). It is the largest tree in the world. The redwood trees in Kings Canyon are massive. You can't really appreciate their size until you walk right up to them and see their roots rise way above your head, giving you an appreciation of how enormous they are. There is also the Monterey peninsula, with its beautiful coastline where the famous Pebble Beach golf course is located. In 2001, I went to Pebble Beach to watch a fellow Birr man compete in the PGA Tours AT&T pro-am golf tournament. This was very special. There are only about 200 members on the PGA tour in any given year and to watch a Birr man





Noel, left, at the entrance to the Tule River Indian Reservation

compete at this level gave me a real sense of pride in my home town. I would love to see him back there again. California is home to the world famous Yosemite National Park. I have been there all four seasons and it looks

different but equally stunning during each one. Snow-covered in the Winter, flowing waterfalls in the Spring, green meadows and crystal clear lakes in the Summer and full of colour in the Autumn. Then you have Lake Tahoe, which borders California and Nevada. It has 72 miles of shoreline and the most beautiful blue water I have ever seen. Tahoe is home to the Heavenly ski resort. To get to the slopes, there is a Gondola ride that takes you to the mountain top. The view of the vast blue lake contrasted against the pure white snow on the way up, is stunning. In southern California you have San Diego and its beaches. The ocean in San Diego is unbelievably warm and lovely to

swim in. San Diego also has one of the world's most famous zoos.

I no longer work for Wave Technologies but now find myself working a lot with Native American Tribes. I work with tribes from California, Washington State, Idaho, Wyoming, Wisconsin, Minnesota and other states on occasion. The work I do is still computer-related. When Christopher Columbus "discovered" America, some estimates put the indigenous population at 112 million. Today there are about 4 Million.

Native Americans have a very interesting culture and are among the nicest people you could meet. On one occasion I was invited to a traditional birthday ceremony. To sit amongst the people, listen to the ceremonial drumbeat and observe their ancient ritual during which each one of the men individually fanned the smoke of the ceremonial fires with their eagle feathers bestowing heartfelt blessings on the birthday girl and her relations was an experience. Time was not important here. There was no group rendition of "happy birthday" or blowing out of candles at this birthday party.

Anyway, enough. There's none of ye getting Christmas cards from me this year. So here's wishing all you BIRR mashes a peaceful and joyous Christmas and may the Celtic Tiger roar back with a vengeance in 2010. *UP BIRR!!!*

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JOHNNY CARROLL - STONEMASON AND STORYTELLER

By Richard Kennedy

It was about halfway through a very entertaining interview with Johnny Carroll, and the engaging stories of his life were in equal parts witty, robust and forthright, (with, here and there, a dash of scandal). With great reluctance, but remembering my purpose, (and my editor) I had to say, "Johnny, you're going to have to tell me a few stories that I can print". And with regret we left those other stories behind.

He was born on the 21st May 1933 into a family which he can proudly trace back for five generations in Birr and, remarkably, all of these five generations worked in the same trade, as stone-cutters and monumental sculptors.

The business was started by his great-grandfather, Daniel Carroll, sometime around the 1860's and was continued by his grandfather, Tom Carroll, then his father Martin Carroll, and finally, Johnny himself, who took over the business on the death of his father. In later years, his brother Martin (Ducker) joined him in the business.

The family for generations lived in Seffin, which in the early days was almost a separate village outside Birr. There were eight in his family and, while there was some security in a family trade, they, like all of their neighbours, lived a frugal life.

When they were children all entertainment was home made. At a time when there were almost no cars (these were the War years), the street was their playground. They would play hurling on the roadway, when they could find a ball to play with. The usual recourse was to hide behind the bushes at the Ormond tennis club when there was a match in progress and watch for their chance. The one obstacle was a Club caretaker who was fit and agile. "So if it was my turn I'd run in and snatch the ball, then back to the bushes from where we would all disperse in different directions running as fast as we could so the caretaker wouldn't know

which of us had the ball and didn't know who to run after." This turn of speed in a tight corner obviously stood to him, for some years later he hurled as a minor for Offaly in a Leinster final, which to his continuing regret, they lost

Left: Monsignor Quinn's headstone, located in St. Brendan's RC churchyard was sculpted by Johnny in 1966



by a couple of points.

Johnny went to the Brothers school in Birr and then continued on in the secondary school which, at that time was in the adjacent tin shed. His great friend during his school years was Sean Glennon. At one point during their tenure as scholars in the secondary school, Johnny and Sean concluded that they would much prefer to be students of the Technical school. Neither of them, however, was likely to get parental approval for this and so, with a reckless disregard for the inevitable, Johnny wrote a letter to the school principal, supposedly from Sean's father, to say that Sean was leaving secondary school to go to the Technical school. Sean, of course reciprocated with a similar letter for Johnny. The plan, naturally, was doomed to failure and when they were found out, a hiding was administered to each of them in turn, before being returned to the secondary school. Soon afterwards however Johnny got permission to go to the Tech. and it was during that time that he found that he had a flair for the family trade.

"I went out to our yard one day and I cut the word "THE" in a piece of limestone and Mick Flynn, who was working for my father at the time looked at it and he said it wasn't bad at all and he went in to the house and said to my mother "Let that young lad into the yard, he's wasting his time at school."

In these days you had to do seven years apprenticeship to work as a stone-cutter. That involved five years working at home and two years working away with another stone-cutter. "It was always a very secret trade. When my grandfather was working he would stop immediately if anyone came into the yard, for fear that they would pick

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up any of the secrets of the trade. You would never employ someone who wasn't in the trade"

From the moment Johnny started work till the day he retired he always loved his work. He could never really understand how others thought of it as hard work. He loved the skill of what he was doing and was also proud of the fact that they would even forge the very tools of their trade. For this they had their own anvil and bellows. He lists out for me the different types of chisel they would make; punch, square, pitcher, sparrow picking, caliper, combing, each one for a different type of stone-cutting.

Many of the workers in the trade were journeymen, skilled stone-cutters who would only stay three months in one place and then move on. It didn't matter how much you would give them, they would go. Johnny can clearly recollect Jim Corrigan, a journeyman stone-cutter, when he was leaving them to go work in Roscrea. He was getting on in years and Johnny can still see him as he left their house with two walking sticks to walk to Roscrea.

The sourcing of stone and the quality of stone was always a matter of great importance for the family business. In the early years, the family had their own quarry at Scurragh but when the depth of that quarry eventually went below the level of the river the quarry flooded and had to be closed down. From then on they had to get stone which was quarried in Threecastles in Co. Kilkenny. Johnny remembers that particular limestone as lovely to work with. The stone used to come by goods train to Birr, and everyone available would be sent to the station to wheel down the stone on a specially made cart. Because of the weight of the stone there would often be up to twenty men and boys pushing the cart down to the yard.

While the majority of the family work involved the sculpting and inscribing of headstones, one of the most memorable and historic examples of the Carroll family

commissions was the Manchester Martyr monument, pictured left, at Market Square which was unveiled in July 1894 by O'Donovan Rossa. Four generations of the family worked on that monument at different times. The actual sculpting of the monument was carried out by Johnny's great-grandfather, Daniel Carroll and his grandfather



assisted when it was being erected.

However, for political considerations, it was not permitted at that time to put the present inscription on the monument. Then, after the events of 1922, the title "The Manchester Martyrs" was inscribed by Johnny's father. Eventually, in 1967, Johnny himself was commissioned to inscribe the names and details of William Philip Allen, Michael Larkin, and Michael O' Brien on the monument.

Since Johnny had to do this work in public, at the Market Square, he took particular care to ensure that he would not make a mistake, especially since inevitably he would have an audience at his back. To overcome this and to avoid any distractions, he became an early riser for the duration of the work and would commence work at about 7.a.m. each day and work until the local critics began to assemble and he would then leave and take up where he left off at the same time the next morning. The fear of getting an inscription wrong was always a very real fear, and this sometimes did happen with a lapse of concentration. The consequence was that you had to laboriously cut back the stone and start again. If he ever made a mistake Johnny was prepared to admit it, but he certainly wasn't one to keep quiet in the face of unfair criticism.

"I was in the County Arms one night having a drink with Seamus Loughnane, there were a good few people there, when a gentleman that I didn't know piped up "Do you know Carroll's the stone-cutters , I don't think they ever went to school. I was up in the cemetery the other day and every second headstone I saw there had a mis-spelling on it." I asked Seamus "Who is that fellow?" and he told me it was a new doctor in town, Dr. Deery. So I went up to him and said, just as loud , "I've something to tell you Doctor, at least any mistakes I ever made are still above the ground, not like yours". But I'm glad to say we became the best of friends after."

Another doctor of whom he has fond memories was Dr. Ritchie, whom he regarded as a thorough gentleman. At one time many years ago, Dr Ritchie took the view that Johnny was drinking too much and decided that his daily intake should be restricted. At that time Johnny's local was the Thatch pub and Dr. Ritchie advised, and prescribed, that the Thatch would limit Johnny's quota to four pints a day. Johnny didn't argue with this, not wanting to offend Dr Ritchie, so each evening he would go up to Milnes, have about six pints there and then amble down to the Thatch for his permitted four pints, and quite often had them in the company of Dr Ritchie.

All of his life Johnny has been fond of people and good company, and whenever possible has enjoyed life to the full. With his gregarious nature and his very many stories recounting escapades and characters from his past you could be misled into thinking that his life was one of socialising and entertainment. However, the other side of Johnny's nature, which he doesn't emphasise, is that of a man who worked hard for over 50 years at his trade, and who approached and executed that work with the dedication and sensitivity of an artist. As to the durability of his work, at the risk of stating the obvious, his work will still be standing when we are all gone.

And as for those stories we left behind, well, just call out to visit Johnny in the nursing home in Shinrone sometime and maybe, over a glass of whiskey, he might be persuaded to share one or two of them with you.

JOHN BARNWELL

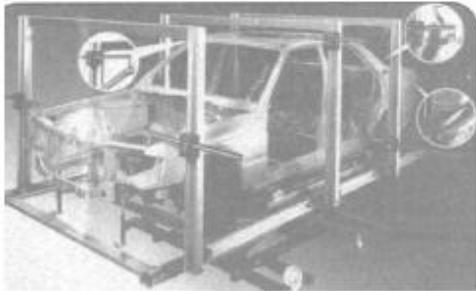
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COLOURFUL FÉILE NA nGAEL PARADE BROUGHT BIRR TO A STANDSTILL

By Alan Walsh

GAA President, Christy Cooney, hailed the 39th Coca Cola Féile na nGael Festival of under 14 hurling, camogie and handball, jointly hosted by midland neighbours Offaly and Laois from Friday, June 19th to Sunday, June 21st, as 'exemplary and memorable'.

Mr. Cooney remarked that, in the year the GAA celebrates its 125th anniversary, it was heartening and encouraging to witness the warmth of the hospitality extended to all Féile visitors and the spirit of enjoyment and participation among the youngsters in all three codes. A massive two hundred and ten teams (92 hurling, 52 camogie and 66 handball) engaged in 354 matches (158 hurling, 90 camogie and 106 handball) on what was a magical celebration of everything that is positive in under-age gaelic games.

An Taoiseach Brian Cowen took time out from his hectic schedule to attend the grand opening parade of Féile na nGael on the Friday evening and this colourful spectacle, featuring almost 4,000 young boys and girls, brought the beautifully decorated streets of Birr to life and attracted almost 8,000 onlookers.

Mr Cowen explained that the huge voluntary effort of the Féile organisers was exceptional and pointed out, "We shouldn't take for granted the role Féile plays in shaping the personal, social and cultural development of young people. It is a fantastic festival."

The parade, led by the world famous Artane Band, was a magnificent spectacle and once, it got underway from St. Brendan's Park, it made its way down Wilmer Road into Emmet Square, down Main Street and into Castle Street, Rosse Row and it concluded along Birr Castle wall at the junction of Oxmantown Mall.

Alongside An Taoiseach and Mr Cooney on the review stand at Emmet Square were Camogie President, Joan O'Flynn, Handball President, Tony Hannon, former GAA President, Joe McDonagh, former Camogie Presidents, Liz Howard and Miriam O'Callaghan, former Leinster Council Chairperson, Liam O'Neill, Offaly GAA Chairperson, Pat Teehan, Birr GAA Chairperson, Brian Colohan, Millennium Man, Brian Whelahan (who addressed all the Féile participants prior to the start of the parade), Féile na nGael National Chairperson, Jerome Conway from Kerry, Féile na nGael National Secretary Pat Doherty from Westmeath, Laois/Offaly Féile na nGael Chairperson, Paddy Scales, Offaly County Council Chairperson, Cllr. Noel Bourke, Birr Town Council Chairperson, Cllr. Tony McLoughlin, Erica Roseingrave of Coca Cola and a host of other local dignitaries.

The 'Voice of the GAA', legendary broadcaster and commentator Micheal O'Muircheartaigh was MC for the parade and his enthusiasm, knowledge and fascinating

one-liners added to the sense of occasion. The Féile na nGael Torch was carried by Offaly Hurling Skill Star winner Peadar Murray (Seir Kieran) and Laois Hurling Skill Star winner Ronan Broderick (Clough/Ballacolla). The distinction of being the first hurling team in the parade fell to Dicksboro of Kilkenny (since James Stephens were the 2008 Division 1 champions) and the first camogie team was St Vincent's of Dublin (Lucan Sarsfields won the 2008 Division 1 Camogie crown).

Birr were the first of the host hurling clubs to pass the review stand and they received a rapturous reception as did their camogie counterparts, and the CRC Gaels hurlers, St. Cillian's camogie team and the Crinkill handballers. Among the other bands that filled the streets with music were the De La Salle Scout Group Band, Waterford, Mountbolus Pipe Band, St. Colmcille Pipe Band, Tullamore, Newbridge Brass and Reed Band, CBS Pipe Band, Limerick, Thomas Francis Meagher Fife and Drum Band, Waterford, Shanahoe School Band, Laois, Thomas McDonagh Pipe Band, Templemore, Tullamore Town Band, St. Joseph's Accordeon Band & Majorettes, Portlaoise and the Sean Treacy Pipe Band, Littleton.

The organisation of the parade was a huge logistical exercise, involving over two hundred voluntary stewards from Birr and throughout the county, along with the Gardai. The Féile na nGael Parade Committee was spearheaded by Joe O'Brien (Chairperson) and Sergeant Michael Dardis.

Mr Cooney, along with local hurling hero Brian Whelahan, unveiled a magnificent bronze statute to commemorate Birr's historic staging of the first ever All-Ireland hurling final on April 1st, 1888.

The crammed programme of Féile activities ran like clockwork and the premier titles went to Kilkenny's Dicksboro in hurling and Douglas of Cork in camogie. Dicksboro sparkled in a one-sided Christy Ring Trophy showdown, defeating Kilcormac/Killoughey, while Douglas were made fight every inch of the way by St. Vincent's. Local clubs figured prominently in the various divisional finals, thereby attracting a large and enthusiastic following to O'Connor Park on the Sunday.

Clare's Dylan Casey was the hurling skill star champion, an event co-ordinated by former All Stars Ger Coughlan and Pat Critchley. The Christy Ring/Nicky Rackard/Lory Meagher skill star winner was Armagh's Francie Short and in camogie, Cork reigned supreme in skills, courtesy of Milford's Grainne Sheehy.

Coca Cola Féile na nGael was hosted by Laois/Offaly for the past two years and the Féile flag was formally handed over to Clare's Ger Hickey as the Banner County has the honour of hosting Féile 2010.



The Crinkill handball team that took part in Féile na nGael
(L to R): Keelan O'Brien, Oisin Corboy, Odhran Dickson, Ian Hoare, Raymond Nolan, Jordan Hart



Birr Camogie Team that took part in Féile na nGael

*Back Row (L to R): Ria Harding, Sinead Garland, Ailbhe Kenny, Dawn Whelahan, Anne Delahun, Philipa Ryan, Sarah Lyons
Middle Row: Revina Murdock, Eimear McMahon, Roisin Watkins, Lisa Maher, Fiona Guinan, Rebecca Corrigan, Ciara Doran
Front Row: Jane Bracken, Gillian Irwin, Ciara Ryan, Deirdre Cashen, Audrey McAuliffe, Ciara Moloney, Amelia Field.*



The Birr Hurling Team that took part in Féile na nGael

*Back Row (L to R): Ronan Murphy, Emmet Nolan, Óran Regan, Marek Komendera, Conor Guinan,
Stefan Carroll, Dylan Patel, Craig Taylor,
Middle Row: Patrick Kelly, Brendan Heffernan, Peter Corbett, Conor Nolan, Scott Feenane,
Stefan Feehan, Aaron Coffey, Michael Cashen
Front Row: Daniel Nevin, Eric Byrne, Ciaran Garahy, Eoghan Cahill, Rian Dempsey*

BIRR CONNECTION DEEP IN THE 'SOUL OF HAITI'

By Stephen Grant

Haiti is an island in the Caribbean with a population of 8.7 million. It is no surprise that Haiti is primarily known for being the dark shadow to the bright sunlight of the rest of the Caribbean, due to its abject poverty and the reputation of its main city Port-au-Prince as being one of the most dangerous cities in the world. Many governments advise against travel to Haiti. Violent crime and kidnapping are everyday occurrences.

One of the main reasons for the appalling state of the country is due to the fact that, in 1697, France gained control of the country. It planted sugar and coffee, supported by an unprecedented increase in the importation of African slaves. Economically, the result was a success, but life as a slave was intolerable, living conditions were squalid, beatings and abuses were universal and the average life expectancy was 21 years. After a dramatic slave uprising and 12 years of war, Haiti finally defeated Napoleon's forces in 1804 and declared independence, but France demanded reparations: 150m francs in gold, which equates to approx \$20 billion in today's terms. For Haiti, this debt did not signify the beginning of freedom but more the end of hope.

By 1900, it was spending 80% of its national budget on repayments and more loans were taken out, mainly from the USA, Germany and France, but, instead of investing in the country's potential, this state produced a parade of nefarious leaders, most of whom gave up the task of trying to fix the country and looted it instead. In 1947, Haiti finally paid off the original reparations, plus interest, but doing so left it destitute, corrupt and politically volatile. Haiti was trapped in a downward spiral, from which it is impossible to escape and it remains hopelessly in debt even today.

My involvement with Haiti started in June 2007 when, as a finalist in the Ernst & Young 'Entrepreneur of the Year' awards, 70 entrepreneurs and business leaders from Ireland travelled to Haiti to exercise their strategic expertise to help improve selected communities and now we have 8 projects in the country.

Haitians are exposed to a life of grinding poverty and without assistance to help the people build a better life for themselves, and as such, this way of life would inevitably continue.

The main projects that I am involved in are based in Abacou/St. Jean de Sud, which is a small fishing village – in a remote yet beautiful location, the project involves the:

- purchase of fishing boats and DECP equipment in April 2008, which enables the local community to create employment by fishing.
- the installation of solar powered freezers in April 2009 to allow storage of fish and creation of ice so

that fish can be transported to markets in other towns.

- the building of a community centre for the village, so that children will have somewhere to go after school to do homework and participate in community activities – none of the homes here would have electricity so, once it gets dark, there is no opportunity to do homework or read.
- as food storage in this area is a major issue, the project aims to start a micro finance project for local women for food silos to improve food security.

Another project is on the island of Ile-a-Vache, just off the coast of Haiti – an orphanage is based here, housing 70 children (of which 22 are disabled) – we have compiled a detailed investment plan, which includes the renovation of existing buildings, completion of new facilities and the provision of improved cooking and health care and the building of a suitable playground.



Picture shows Stephen Grant (on left) helping to install solar panels

Our aims are to empower communities to create their own success through their relationship with the Irish entrepreneurs, to implement some of the technology that we have in our everyday lives and apply it to Haiti. It is essential that the Haitians feel there is a better way of living and by allowing us to help them achieve that goal ultimately their lives will be improved and enriched by it.

The Haven project was launched in January 2009 by Leslie and Carmel Buckley, they have personally donated one million euro to cover the first three years of administration costs. None of the money raised will be spent on administration as the money will go immediately



Stephen with some Haitian fishermen

towards the projects. Haven aims to build 1,000 new homes and upgrade 2,000 more by the end of 2011 and Haven is also implementing simple yet effective community development programmes in each area it is working in to help alleviate poverty.

Haven is achieving its mission in two ways. Firstly it is training, up skilling and employing local Haitian people to

build the homes, thereby creating jobs where unemployment stands at over 50% and opportunities are thin on the ground. Secondly Haven is bringing groups of volunteers from Ireland to Haiti for an intensive Build it Week, on 25th October 2009 and 250 volunteers departed from Ireland to participate in this week and these included myself, Keith Scully (Grant Engineering Ireland), Peter Darcy (Grant Engineering Ireland), Neil Sayers (Grant UK) and John Paul Manning.

The exposure to the life of grinding poverty that is endured by most Haitians that I saw on my two trips to Haiti moved me immensely and made me less focussed on myself and totally committed to helping the people of Haiti to improve their lives.

It is vital that as much publicity as possible is gained for the projects in Haiti and we must continually spread the word about the need for financial assistance to projects in Haiti and hopefully recruit more people to become volunteers, to raise funds and give more expertise to the foundation. Becoming a volunteer is a life-changing rewarding experience. For any details on these projects please contact me.



Birr Urban District Council – Circa 1966

*Back Row (L to R): Eamon McNerney, Jim Callaghan, Pat Grogan, Jack Shanahan, Johnny McCormack, Larry Sheeran
Front Row: Edward M. Murray, Eddie Walsh, Jim Dooley, Mary Connolly, Matt O'Connor*



Cash handing over cash at a Vintage Week fundraiser in the 1970's
(L to R): David Dowley, Herbert Gill, Frank McNamara, Mick Cash and Martin DeForge

REACH FOR THE STARS – AOIFE DWYER

By Tony Hogan

Trainer John Oxx calls her ‘my headman’. In Birr, we know her as Aoife Dwyer, the daughter of Ann and the late John of Hollypark. So how did the Birr girl come to achieve the title of ‘headman’ in the Oxx yard, home to some of the finest horses in Europe? Some of these include the incomparable ‘Sea the Stars’ and the Aga Khan’s thoroughbreds. Aoife’s love of horses stemmed from a young age, when she joined the late Ann McDonnell’s Equestrian School in Birr. She is loud in her praise of Ann, whom she still considers to be one of the best teachers she ever met.



Aoife picture with ‘Sea the Stars’

After Leaving Cert. Aoife decided to study Equine Science at the University of Limerick. During her time there she went on work experience to a horse-breeding farm near Mullingar. There she found the hands-on experience much more interesting than academia and so she applied for and was accepted to do the Thoroughbred Management Course at the National Stud in Kildare town.

Here she mixed with the *crème de la crème* of the racing industry and, as the Stud has so many international connections, every aspect of the industry was on the course. She particularly loved breaking-in the yearlings and being involved with such famous establishments as the Kildangan and Old Connell studs. On completion of the course, she sought a job in the prestigious Oxx stable. After such an intense and high level training, John Oxx hired Aoife on the spot. The harsh reality of work in such a busy yard did not faze her. Belonging to a yard where the Aga Khan was the main owner and which had produced such outstanding horses as the Derby winner Sinndar and Ridgewood Pearl, winner of the 1,000 Guineas and the Breeders’ Cup was exactly what she aimed for.

Clearly, the pride and joy of the Oxx stable has to be Sea the Stars, winner of six consecutive Group 1 races this year,

including the treble of the 2,000 Guineas, the Derby and the Arc. This extraordinary horse is the first to win the treble, something never achieved by such brilliant horses as Ribot, Mill Reef or Montjeu. Aoife pays tribute to John Oxx for his skilful handling of Sea the Stars, especially for having him ready for the Arc after such a gruelling season. As was clear to all racing fans, the Arc was no cakewalk. After two furlongs, it looked as if everything was going completely wrong. He was pulling fiercely and had to be checked off the heels of the horses ahead of him while he found himself pushed back in the field. Half-way up the home straight, he was boxed in but with Mick Kinnane skilfully in charge, he burst through the gaps with an explosive turn of foot. His power and class were too much for the other eighteen runners; he pushed his way past the pacemakers, grabbed the race by the scruff of the neck, sprinted away and won by a comfortable two lengths. As one sports reporter said, ‘By the time the winning post arrived it all looked so easy.’

As he has now been retired to stud, Aoife will no doubt miss having this remarkable horse in her care. She knows that the colt has secured his place in history after a unique season and feels privileged to have been associated with one of the greatest horses of all time.

With the flat season at an end, Aoife will have little time to dwell on the past. There are several other top class horses in the stable and these must be prepared for the coming flat season. Aoife, at the top of her chosen profession, is an inspiration for all young horse lovers. Times being tough, I pleaded for a tip. Aoife tells me to watch out for Arazan, a half brother to Azamour, who was third to Mastercraftsman in the National Stakes at the Curragh. Readers of the Birr Review heard it here first. Long may she succeed in the ‘Sport of Kings.’



Denis Tierney and his daughter ‘congratulating’ Sea the Stars



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THE TROUBLED WORLD OF THE UYGHUR

By David O'Brien



Crinkill man, David O'Brien, pictured left, has lived in Xinjiang for two years. He visited Urumchi in July and November of this year, researching for a PhD. he is undertaking at UCC.

On July 5th, the remote and little known north-western Chinese province of Xinjiang hit the

headlines for all the wrong reasons when riots broke out in the capital Urumchi leaving almost 200 people dead and another 1,700 injured. It was the worst outbreak of violence the country had witnessed since authorities crushed the student protests in Tiananmen Square almost exactly 20 years before.

Chen Zhu is Han Chinese, the ethnic group that makes up 80 per cent of the Chinese population and, like many of the 7.5 million Han Chinese who now live in Xinjiang, he had seen the province as something similar to the American Wild West with all the opportunities and excitement that entailed when he first arrived 25 years ago.

I have known Mr Chen since I first went to Xinjiang in 2002. He is as resilient and optimistic a man as you will ever meet but what happened in July has clearly shocked him to the core.

"The Han and Uyghur will never settle this, despite what the government say, they are just too different to live together and there will always be problems".

Since the Chinese Communist Party first came to power in 1949, millions of Han have flooded into Xinjiang. They came first as settlers sent by Chairman Mao to pacify and strengthen his control over the region. After the reforms and opening up of Deng Xiaoping in 1978, they came as part of a huge movement of economic migrants who were encouraged to travel to the northwest to develop this huge resource-rich region.

Xinjiang is larger than France, Germany and Spain combined, but has a population of just over 20 million. When the Communists came to power, it was about one million. It is a vast and beautiful province of stunning mountain ranges and haunting deserts, through which the old Silk Road once threaded its way, bringing the exquisite products of China to Europe.

To this day the majority of people are Uyghurs, a Turkic Muslim people who have lived around the oases of the Tarim basin in southern Xinjiang for thousands of years. The Uyghurs now number about 8 million. They look different, speak a different language and take great pride in a culture they see as far removed from that of China's.

For many Uyghurs, China is a colonial power which invaded their country and represses their people, while exploiting its wealth. There is a strong feeling, particularly among the

younger generation, that they are discriminated against in their own land, both religiously and culturally, and are subjected to extremely heavy-handed policing.

The Chinese government claim Xinjiang has been an inalienable part of China for 2000 years. In reality, Chinese influence in the region has ebbed and flowed like the sands of the vast Taklamakan desert that covers much of the region.

It was not until the late 17th century that Qing dynasty emperor Qianlong finally took Xinjiang under full Chinese control. Under the Qing the region became known as Xinjiang, which means New Territory in Chinese.

After the fall of the Qing dynasty in 1912, China entered a period of instability, invasion and civil war. Xinjiang was not spared the chaos, with a series of warlords attempting to control the region in the face of numerous uprisings and Soviet interference.

The Communists took control of a province that had almost no roads, few schools and where infant mortality was 420-600 for every 1,000 births and the average life expectancy was below 30 years. According to 2008 statistics, infant mortality now stands at 29.76 per 1,000 births and average life expectancy is 72.

Today Xinjiang, especially Urumchi, a city of two million, is booming. GDP is amongst the highest of any inland Chinese province. The large oil and cotton industries, as well as its key trading position bordering Russia, Mongolia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Pakistan, India and Afghanistan, make it a vital economic region for the Beijing government.



Riot Police on the streets during the fighting

Since 2000, the central government has pumped billions of dollars into the region as part of its *Xibu da kaifa* (Great Western Development Campaign). But, despite declaring Xinjiang an autonomous region in 1955, the province is actually more closely controlled by Beijing than almost any

other. While a Uyghur occupies the position of governor, the real power is in the hands of the Provincial Communist Party secretary and this system is mirrored at all levels of government.

For Uyghurs, this is just the beginning of a long list of discriminations. They argue that it is impossible to get good jobs if you are Uyghur. Uyghurs who work for the government, and most jobs are government jobs, cannot openly practice their religion. Children under 18 are forbidden from attending mosque and all mosque Imams are appointed by and paid by the state. All sermons have to be approved before service, and most Uyghurs cannot get a passport.

Even the time is carefully controlled. Despite being thousands of miles from Beijing, Xinjiang people must use Beijing time, which is three hours ahead of where the sun actually is. The day begins in pitch darkness, as although the clock says it's eight, in reality the time is five.

In the run up to the Beijing Olympics almost 2,000 Uyghur men were detained in a bid to prevent any trouble spoiling the occasion. It didn't work as just before the games opened, 17 police officers were killed in the city of Kashgar while bombs exploded a few days later in Kucha.

It was these detentions, attacks and subsequent further clampdowns that led to a huge increase in tensions. When I visited in June, the atmosphere was electric.

On Sunday July 5, a protest of mostly Uyghur students in the centre of Urumchi rapidly descended into an orgy of bloodletting, with Uyghur mobs attacking Han passer-bys with knives, rocks and anything that came to hand.

The protests appear to have been sparked by an attack on Uyghur migrant workers in the south-east part of China, which became a rallying cry over longstanding discriminatory policies.

The next day the city was flooded with armed police but Han mobs now roamed the streets looking for revenge.

In November, armed police were still on the streets but the situation remained extremely tense. Death sentences were handed down to those accused of taking part.

Over 1,500 people have been detained since the riot. According to the New York based Human Rights group, Human Rights Watch, 43 men and boys, some as young as 12 have disappeared since being detained. The internet has been shut down in the region since the riots while phone and text messages are heavily restricted.

The Communist Party of China celebrated 60 years in control on October 1st 2009. Its superpower status has enabled China to look to the future with extreme confidence and ambition. However, it is an age-old ethnic conflict in its remote northwest that could potentially be its greatest problem.

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WHERE MY LIFE HAS ARRIVED

By Sr. Gemma Doolaghty

I remember the evening well. It was Sunday September 5th 1971, when I was driven from St. Mary's Convent, Nenagh, where I had spent eight very happy years, to St. John's Convent, Birr to take up a teaching post with fourth class. To be honest, parts of the day are just a blur, but I can still 'feel' my numbness, if that's not a contradiction, as the Nenagh community stood in the front cloister to see me off. For the first time in my life I couldn't get a word out. It was my first parting since leaving my Co. Clare home eight years previously.

Birr wasn't entirely a 'foreign land' to me as four of us had lived in St. John's Convent that summer as we prepared to take our Final Vows on August 5th. Little did I realise that day that I would be returning to teach in the Mercy Primary School. I have a vivid memory of Sr. Mary Riordan showing me my classroom after the tea. I remember saying to myself 'American organisation' as she handed me a typed timetable. As well as teaching Fourth Class, I was to have responsibility for Sixth Class cookery, a weekly lesson from 2.30 – 4.00 p.m. in what is now Ms. McDonnell's classroom with Fifth Class. My class were to be taught singing and P.E. by two other teachers in my absence.

I have to say at this stage that I wasn't a newcomer to this teaching game, having spent four years already in Nenagh, where my class numbered 53 on average. I'm not recommending it but we took what was in front of us and got on with the job. Mercy Primary School was mostly staffed by sisters in 1971. I can remember clearly one very young lay teacher who preceded me on the staff by two years and is still there today. Another lay teacher was starting her teaching career with Third Class. Both gave sterling service to Mercy Primary. You know yourselves who you are – take your bow.

It's hard to realise that nearly forty years have elapsed since my life began in Birr, is the past 'another country' where they do things differently? I may not be in the best position to bring to life what early '70s life was like in Birr, as my life in a community of 40 was pretty much sufficient in itself. There you have a statement that requires an explanation if ever there was one! To begin, with we did not attend Mass in the parish church, either on weekdays or on Sundays. Monsignor Hamill and his curates looked after our spiritual needs very well indeed, inside our four walls. I have no recollection of attending any parish funerals in the '70s but perhaps my more senior colleagues in religion did so. I know for certain that we did not frequent the shops after school was over. Instead, we could take to the country roads on our bikes until Evening Prayer at 5.15 p.m. A leisurely walk in our own beautiful grounds was a preferred option for some of the sisters.



Sr. Gemma with Second Class in 1992

Of course, as Sisters of Mercy, we are known as 'the walking nuns' so, in my limited forays down town, I became familiar with the various establishments on either side of the Main Street and Connaught Street. If the names Mollisons, Myles, Gleasons, Pilkingtons, Kavanaghs, Connollys, Maddens, Clearys, Perrys, Hardings, Hernons, Calveys, Hectors, Mahons or Haslams stir your memory, then we can be almost sure that you were in Birr long before the advent of broadband! More than likely I have omitted some premises from that list but you will forgive me, I know. Some of our younger readers could be forgiven for wondering are we talking about the same town of Birr. Making a list like the above goes to show just how many changes there have been in ownership since the '70s.

A very important part of our school life in my early Birr days was the annual concert we produced in the Marian Hall on St. Patrick's night. As someone not gifted either in the music or movement line, I consider that I managed quite well in this area with a lot of support from my more talented colleagues. I can still recall writing my own script for a pageant on St. Patrick. I'm only wondering do the 'Principals' recall the roles they played so very convincingly? My most successful production, to my mind, was 'The Easter Story', with a readymade script this time. There was a lot of labour involved in all of this, not least being the traipsing down to the Marian Hall for rehearsals in the days beforehand. All-in-all six years with fourth class were among the most fulfilling of my teaching career, despite the fact that there was neither Learning Support nor Resource Teaching in being in those days.

All good things come to an end, as happened for me when I was asked to move to First Class in 1977, to forty six of them no less. When I stand in that classroom today in the junior block I can only marvel where we fitted them in. Bear in mind it was dual desks back then, with the little



Sr. Gemma with Claire Nee, Sandra Guinan and Finola Ryan on First Communion Day 1978

space for books in front of the child and a seat that lifted up. This was First Communion class back then, although First Penance took place in Third Class. To this day, I can remember the First Communion Mass, with all the little darlings veiled, with quite a few veils coming undone, having gotten entangled with their neighbours. My sense of powerlessness on observing this from my place maybe a couple of seats behind is something not easily forgotten. A little comparison in the physical conditions of the school then and now might be worth a look. Even though the two main buildings remain unchanged on the outside,

structurally they are much brighter in appearance nowadays. Prefabs came and went in the intervening years, the first one housing Junior Infants in 1974 to be followed later by one down the field for First Class. I have clear memories of girls carrying buckets of water upstairs for the weekly Art class on a Friday afternoon, where great use was made of newsprint from the Midland Tribune office. The pitch pine floors were swept at lunchtime by the senior girls under the principal's supervision. The storage heating, replaced by central heating in the '90s, was inadequate for the cold winters in Birr. The lovely blue uniform of Mercy Primary girls came into being only in 1988, by parental request, just a year before my term as Principal for six years came to an end.

I could go on but I hope you have a flavour of Birr life beginning in the '70s by your perseverance in reading thus far. Now that I have retired from teaching, John O'Donoghue verbalises my hopes and aspirations for myself to perfection:

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FOUR DECADES OF TEACHING IN BIRR

By Tony Fahey

I arrived in Birr in September 1972, to teach in the Vocational School, having taught in CBS Athy and with Co. Cavan VEC over the previous two years. After a rigorous interview at the VEC offices in Tullamore I was appointed to the Vocational School in Birr, not realising then that my career would continue, in Birr until 31st August 2009.

A lot has happened during those years. The single biggest change for me was the amalgamation of the Vocational School, The Mercy Convent Secondary School and The Presentation Brothers College. In January 1980, the teachers and students from those three schools went from small intimate surroundings to the large campus, that we are now proud to call St. Brendan's Community School. A lot of the facilities that today's children take for granted were not in place during the early years. I now marvel at what was achieved during the last three decades. When I was in secondary school, there was no 'free' education, school buses, or grants for third level. I was fortunate to live less than a kilometre from the local CBS School. I sat in class with boys who cycled seven miles each way to school and some even travelled in a small ferry from Valentia Island. The provision of the many facilities of the new school, too many to mention in this article, could only have been achieved with the enthusiasm of all the partners that comprise the family of St. Brendan's. When one asks of oneself, where time has gone, it is one's memories that rekindle this wonderment. The many friends in the community, fellow teachers, family, and the biggest family of all... the generations of students... all have their own special place in such a memory bank.

Some people reading this might remember a famous table tennis table "up in the shed", in the Vocational School Yard. The table was just slightly smaller than the shed! There were many titanic struggles across that net, and probably the greatest challenge of all was to counteract Bernard McGurk's top-spin before the ball hit the wall! The events in that small shed spawned many table tennis exploits later in St. Brendan's.

St. Brendan's Community School has had many memorable achievements, including the Senior Colleges Hurling team, the successes at Table Tennis, Camogie, Soccer, Golf, Athletics; Jane Feehan's Young Scientist victory, The Lough Derg Cycle, to mention a few. Of course, it was all the "near misses" or what should have been won that generated the more prolonged debates in the staff room, not to mention the exuberance of all the managers and their collegial critics!

School is about learning, instruction, guidance, counselling and, as in any family, some admonishment! Throughout the decades there has been a considerable diaspora of past students all over Ireland and throughout many parts of the world. No doubt their learning is continuing. It is fascinating to discover the many and varied achievements of past students.

My long journey in teaching terminated on the 31st of August 2009. For me personally, the happy faces of boys and girls at play on the pitches, during the shows, on trips away from school, during sports days and on the corridors during breaks are what I will treasure mostly from my thirty nine years.



**Staff of the Vocational School
circa 1974**

Photo includes Benny McHugh, Michael Ateer, Irene Houlihan, Des O'Brien, Bernard McGurk, Tom Gavin, John Fealy, John Curley, Liam Arundel, Marian O'Connell, Mrs. Ritchie, Mrs. Gilmartin, Tony Fahey, Bridget Brennan



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COMMEMORATION OF MARY WARD (1827-1869)

By Margaret Hogan

Mary Ward (née King), victim of the world's first automobile fatality, is commemorated by a storyboard near St. Brendan's Church of Ireland, Birr, the site of the accident which took her life on 31 August 1869.

During Mary's short life – she was aged forty-two years when she died – her contribution to science was considerable, despite many difficulties. Her parents apparently rose above the limitations of mid-nineteenth century attitudes to education for girls of her class. The King girls were educated at their home at Ballylin, near Ferbane. Mary was fascinated with the natural world, especially plants, insects and birds and when the gift of a microscope opened up a whole new approach to nature for her, she used her skill of drawing and painting to record its wonders.

Her informal scientific education was influenced by Sir David Brewster FRS, a distinguished Scottish scientist who came to stay with her father at Ballylin and by family outings to her Parsons cousins at Birr Castle, where the Third Earl was building the Great Telescope, while his wife Mary experimented with the earliest cameras. Seldom in those days was the potential of glass lenses put to such diverse use in one place as they gazed into outer space with the telescope, viewed miniature details with a microscope and recorded scenes on glass and paper with cameras. One of the most attractive of Mary Rosse's photographic studies is a portrait of Mary Ward.

Sir David Brewster commissioned her to illustrate some of his scientific papers and his *Life of Newton* (1855). She herself contributed articles, drawings and paintings to scientific journals. Her first book, *Sketches with the microscope*, a private publication of only 250 copies by Shields of Parsonstown in 1857, was republished the following year in London as *The world of wonders revealed by the microscope* (1858). It was reprinted at least eight times and brought the fascinating world of the microscope to thousands of students and other readers. The fifth edition in 1864, revised and named *Microscope teachings* was very influential. In *Telescope teachings* (1859), she wrote about her astronomical studies in Birr and elsewhere and she collaborated with her sister Jane on *Entomology in sport and in earnest* (1858).

She married Henry Ward of Castle Ward, Co. Down in 1854 and had eight children. Henry resigned his commission in the British army in 1855, had no reliable income and the couple lived at Ballylin for three years before they embarked on a series of moves from one rented house to another, mainly in Dublin. The income from Mary's dowry declined in value, the struggle to make ends meet must have been acute and remittances from



At the unveiling of the storyboard

(L to R): Rev. Tony Cahir, P.P., Archdeacon Wayne Carney, Lalla Ward, Rev. Irene Morrow, Rev. Rosemary Lindsay, Alison, Countess of Rosse.

her publishers would have been very welcome. The story of her untimely death is related on the storyboard in Birr. Her first cousin, the Third Earl, and his family had built a steam carriage which must have caused a sensation whenever it made its noisy and smoky way into the streets of the town. She sat on the carriage with her husband, her cousins Clere and Charles Parsons and their tutor Mr. Biggs on such an excursion on 31 August 1869. They passed near the house of Thomas Lalor Cooke, historian of Birr, who would die of 'a long and tedious illness' within a few months. As the carriage rounded the corner near St. Brendan's Church of Ireland, Mary Ward was thrown off the carriage, crushed by its iron wheel and died almost instantly.

Her achievements are celebrated together with those of a small group of Irish women who made significant contributions to science and technology in the nineteenth century: women such as Mary Rosse, Ellen Hutchins, Anne and Mary Ball, Agnes Clerke, Margaret Huggins, Matilda Knowles, Maude Delap and Annie Massy. Universities, research laboratories, learned societies and clubs were not open to them and what they attained owed much to the encouragement of sympathetic male relatives and friends who shared their facilities for research. Most came from gentry or upper middle class backgrounds and there was a tendency to specialise in the study of diminutive topics and to make use of their 'accomplishments' in drawing and painting.

Mary Ward's life work brought the study of microscopy, botany, entomology, ornithology and astronomy to the general public in an attractive format, all in the context of the limited education and research facilities available to her at the time, the anxieties of financial difficulties and the distractions associated with rearing a large family.

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OISIN O'NEILL-'NOTHING HAPPENS WITHOUT ACTION'

By Michael Donegan

Anyone who has followed hurling in Offaly and Birr over the past twenty years will be familiar with the name of Oisín O'Neill. He first came to prominence as a gifted hurler as far back as 1989 when he won a minor All-Ireland medal with Offaly. During the glory years of Birr Hurling he took two more Senior All-Ireland Club medals with Birr. Nowadays, Oisín is known more for his expertise as a Physio and fitness and team-building coach. He has been involved with the Portumna hurlers since 2005 helping them to win two All-Ireland Club titles in 2006 and 2008. Portumna and Oisín found themselves back in Croke Park on St. Patrick's Day, 17th March 2009 defeating De La Salle 2-24 to 1-08 to win their 3rd title in 4 years.

During his time as a player and physio/trainer Oisín realised the need for more diverse methods to promote skills, attitude and motivation in teams at the high level that is expected in today's modern games. The role of the football and hurling manager in the GAA has changed dramatically in the past decade. The modern manager must now direct a multiplicity of disciplines within his management group. Two of the most important aspects of this management area concern physical fitness and medical support. As a result, Oisín has now moved into the area of complete team training. Oisín's speciality is his ability to devise physical fitness programmes which incorporate advanced flexibility, core strength, total speed, ball work and, most importantly, recovery sessions, proactive injury rehabilitation and management. Teams use his training camps to gain the edge over their opponents. Oisín works also as personal

physio to certain high performance players such as Damian Hayes of Portumna. For such players he can plan training programmes and recovery sessions and carry out any physio which may be required on an ongoing basis.

In 2003, Oisín opened a 7,000 square feet Sports Injury Clinic at Boston Lane, Birr, Co. Offaly under the name of 'Offaly Injury Clinic'. The clinic includes treatment rooms, an infra-red thermal system, ice baths and changing rooms. Through his company 'Sportsrec Ireland', Oisín offers a full range of services, including fitness testing, injury management, training and team-building programmes. Whether the activity is GAA, Rugby, Soccer, any other sport or indeed any group, Oisín and his team can put together the ideal package to suit the needs of every team. Facilities at the clinic include Laser therapy, Ultra sound, Infra-red heat therapy, Chryo therapy / Ice baths and Rehab room. He also offers personal fitness programmes and boxing coaching sessions. Fitness Testing includes Height, Weight and Body Fat, Speed, Abdominal Strength, Upper Body Strength and Flexibility assessment. Sessions are arranged over weekends or day sessions. The service comes as a complete package and Oisín organises accommodation in selected hotels and guest houses for visiting groups. For the more adventurous he also organises 'Boot Camps' where endurance, problem solving, team building and fitness programmes are combined to create challenging and enjoyable experiences for the groups that take part. Check out www.sportsrecireland.com to see the full range of services.



The cast from Birr Stage Guild's production of 'The Likes of Us'

BIRR SKATE PARK – AN UPDATE

by Ann Hynes-Spain

The Sk8 Park Committee is continuing to beaver away at providing Birr with a Skate Park facility. The Committee, which was formed in July 2008 has fundraised, to date, €29,000 inclusive of €1,500 which was secured from Offaly VEC Youth Grant Scheme. The Committee is grateful to the Community for its continued support for the project. We had many successful and fun fundraisers throughout the year, which involved both young and old. The success of our Community-based calendar 2009 was a great highlight for the Committee, so much so, we are bringing out a 2010 calendar.

Things are taking off! The site has been agreed with Birr Town Council, free of charge, and it has also agreed to provide some funding. The drawings have been completed and are currently with the Town Council. These were designed by a company called "Concrete Creatures" with input from the Committee.

It was decided to opt for a concrete skate park. This had three main advantages over the modular skating equipment. Firstly, it was the preferred option of all of the skateboarders we consulted because of the smooth seamless riding surface. Secondly, concrete skate parks are far more durable and require much less maintenance than modular skateboarding equipment. Finally, concrete skate parks are much quieter than modular equipment. What is skateboarding? Is it an art form? Is it entertainment? Is it an impressive display of athletic achievement? Or, is it nothing more than a daredevil exercise? Skateboarding is unique in that, at one and the same time, it's athletic and artistic. In order to be an excellent skateboarder, or even a professional rider, you have to have a certain degree of athletic talent, which

needs to be harnessed and honed. Balance, strength and speed are all part and parcel of learning how to master all the tricks and moves which skateboarders daringly perform and execute on a regular basis. While many people won't look at skateboarding in this way, riding on a skateboard is, in fact, a great way to get exercise and to stay in shape. That's because of all the balancing and shifting of body weight and position that's required to safely and properly operate and get around on a skateboard. While, at first, the physical and health benefits of riding a skateboard may not be seen, over a prolonged period of time, as boarding skills improve and grow, you'll quickly be able to see just how balanced and co-ordinated a person has actually become. Concentration and hand/eye coordination improves when a person skateboards. It can help a person to be able to focus their attention for a longer span of time on other activities in their life as well.

Skateboarding is an incredibly popular activity that children and adults from all walks of life can participate in. Skateboard parks are a great opportunity for skaters and the perfect alternative to makeshift ramps or alleys, curbs, and other places not designed for skating. The finished facility will be viewed by the Committee as a major success for the community of Birr. The skate park is providing a much needed facility for young people in the area. It gets the skaters off the streets, supports new-comers, and encourages a healthy social scene. The skateboarders in turn will bring extra colour and life to the park, as well as a sense of fun, and gives them a state of the art facility to pursue their sport.



Back Row(L to R): Fergal Clarke, Imelda Smith, Liam Spain, Kathleen Gormley, Majella Fetherstonhaugh, Steven Dwyer, Ann Spain
Front Row: Donal Spain, Eddie Smyth, Isaac Smyth, Jack Fetherstonhaugh, Damien Gormley, Viveanne Maher, Oisín Clarke
Owen Deforge and Luke Garland are part of committee and are missing from the main picture but are in surrounding pictures.

CRINKILL N. S. 50TH ANNIVERSARY CELEBRATION

1958-59 - 2008-09

By Mrs. Mary Dolan, Principal

On Friday June 26th Crinkill School Community celebrated 50 years of education in the present school, which opened on the 22nd of September 1958 when pupils moved from the site on School Road where a school had been established in 1851. Celebrations included an exhibition of photographs roll books and memorabilia, followed by a commemorative Mass and refreshments.

Many past pupils, parents and members of the community attended the event and, much to the delight of the organising committee lingered long and browsed the photographs which covered every available wall-space.

Past pupils renewed acquaintance with former classmates and teachers and there was much mirth, sometimes tinged with sadness as people reflected on how they and their lives had changed in the years that elapsed since their school photographs had been taken.

Former teacher Mrs. Joan Walsh, nee O'Donoghue made the journey from Kerry to join the celebration and as she had taught in both the old and new school she was a very popular guest.

Mass was celebrated in the school yard to accommodate the large congregation. The sun shone at the end of a day when the constant threat of rain had frayed the nerves of

all who were responsible for the arrangements. Mr. John Bergin, chairman of the Board of Management delivered a welcoming address and celebrant Fr David Carroll spoke some words of wisdom and encouragement to the departing sixth class pupils. Councillor John Carroll gave an entertaining and informative account of his time as a past pupil of both old and new schools and rejoiced at the prosperity which has come to Crinkill in recent times. Principal Mrs Dolan commended the people of Crinkill for creating a community where children were raised with good example and sound values. The process of putting on the celebration had been an enriching experience for the present pupils and had awakened in them an interest in the history of their community. Loitering in the school corridor had become a productive exercise as they searched old photographs to find parents and grandparents and often to giggle at the fashions and hairstyles of past decades.

After mass, refreshments were provided by Lavender House and the long queues bore testimony to the delicious menu. The evening concluded with the cutting of a beautiful celebration cake made by parent and Board member, Mrs. Ethna Garahy. Pupils who may have come reluctantly to school in times past were reluctant to leave on this historic occasion.

Pictured at the 50th Celebrations are Current Staff Members

(L to R): John O'Gorman, Fr. David Carroll (Chaplain), Patricia Connors, Fiona Guilfoyle, Cora Kenny, Claire Kelly, Lisa Kennedy, Mary Dolan (Principal), Fiona Guinan, Aileen Quaid, Lorraine Power, Conor Darcy



Pictured Left are Joan O'Donoghue, who taught at the school from 1955-1970, Mary Dolan, Principal, and Helen Costello, who taught at the school from 1963 to 1966.

MEMORIES OF CRINKILL N.S. IN 1958

by Mrs. Joan O Donoghue N.T.

It was lovely moving into a new school in September 1958 with storage heaters, flush toilets, hand basins, concrete yard and playing field. I taught for three years in the old school where Mr Patrick Quigley and I worked in the same room with a fire at the top for heating. We must have been very placid teachers and taught very obedient children as we never experienced any problems. Miss Mai Ryan, RIP, a very gracious lady with a beautiful voice taught in the other room, also with a fire for heating. I cannot remember who delivered the turf but it was always there and the senior boys lit the fires.

I spent eleven and a half very happy years in the new school with Mr. Tom O'Donnell, Principal, Helen Costello (Conway) and later replaced by Mrs Mary Burns RIP and Mrs. Sally Nugent, who became Principal.

Dean Quinn was very keen that cookery be taught and he equipped one of the school rooms for it. We did not have many utensils but the girls and myself provided what was missing for the day and we managed. The girls loved the subject and at Christmas they made fruit cakes. The cookery inspector examined them every year and then I got a bonus of £18. When she came, she also examined the sewing and knitting and embroidery garments. We often knitted garments for the Sale of Work in Birr with wool provided by the Dean. We did not have the benefit of TV

programmes like Rachel Allen, Nevin Maguire or the larger than life Richard Corrigan. There is no need now for Cookery classes – young men are great cooks now as a result.

We prepared circus children and traveller children who wintered near Birr for Confirmation. The girls in the Legion of Mary in Birr were very generous and provided suits, hats and bags for the traveller children.

There was a comprehensive religious programme and the Religious Examiner, a priest from the Diocese of Killaloe, came every year to examine and issued a result of Excellent, Very Good or Fair. We generally obtained the first. The children were examined several times before Confirmation and the list of Prayers was very long to recite. I don't know how the children remembered them and the Bible Books, etc.

Gregorian Chant Choir was prepared by Helen Costelloe and Mrs Mary Burns and later Mrs Sally Nugent. There was a special day for all the choirs to assemble.

I must say there was great co-operation between the teachers and we helped out one another. I never remember having to supervise the year. I guess the Principal did that while we, the lady teachers, had our cup of tea.



Past Pupils of Crinkill N.S.

(L to R): Pat Milne, Irene Parsons, Peter Grennan, Sean Cooke, Pat O'Toole (nee Keogh), Jimmy Grennan, John Carrroll, Ray Leonard, Ralph Parsons, Carol McDermott (nee Keogh), Catherine Milne, Joe Milne, Marion Keogh, Jim Murray, Christy Finnerty

Right: Sean & Concepta Cooke at Crinkill's N.S. 50 Year celebrations.



CARRIG N.S. EXTENSION – OFFICIAL OPENING

By Tony Sampson, Principal

The official opening of the extension to Carrig N.S. took place on 22nd May 2009.

The opening was performed by Bishop Willie Walsh. Also present were members of the Board of Management, Parents Association, local politicians, members of the local clergy, parents, pupils, staff and guests.

Food was provided afterwards in the Parish Hall by Kieran Campbell, who did a wonderful job on the day.

The extension was undertaken under a devolved grant scheme whereby the Department of Education and Science were presented with plans and costings by the school and then grant-aided the project in stages.

The builders were Paddy McIntyre and Sons and the architect was Derek Coulter. The extension consists of a new classroom, learning support room, Resource Room, foyer, offices, renovation of the old part of the school, extension to staffroom and a G.P. Room.

A hard-working Board of Management took on the onerous task of running this project and indeed did so very efficiently, i.e. on time and within budget. The current building is a testament to a lot of hard work put in by a lot of people, including many parents who volunteered to help prepare for the official opening and at other times. In fact, the whole project typified the spirit of co-operation that exists in the school and indeed in the community as a whole. The boys and girls and the teachers had a trying year while the building was going on but are now delighted with their new building and comfortable surroundings.

Local politicians and their staff also put their shoulders to the wheel regarding this project from the start.

There are a great number of people who made very significant contributions to the school extension. A sincere thanks to all.



Carrig N.S. Staff – June 2009

Back Row (L to R): Teresa Smyth, Ita Houlihan, Angie Hanniffy, Geraldine Fox, Niamh Casey, Tony Sampson (principal), Laura Ryan, Dina Kennedy, Ann O'Meara, Anna Hogan.

Front Row: Siobhan Broderick, Bishop Willie Walsh, Miriam Burke

Bishop Willie Walsh plants a tree to mark the occasion
(L to R): Conor Noonan, Tony Sampson, John Gibbons, Caoimhe Molloy, Claire Hogan, Joe Curran, Emma Cleary, Aoife Bond, Bishop Willie Walsh



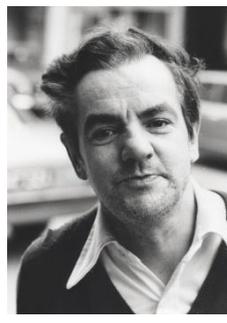
FACES FROM THE PAST (ANSWERS ON PAGE 103)



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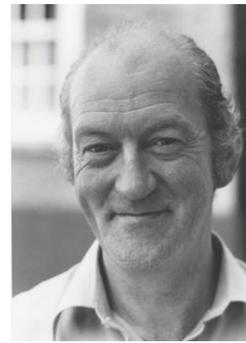
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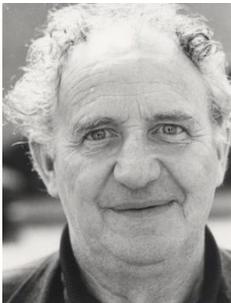
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LET'S HEAR FROM YOU

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 at 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.

BRONZE STATUE COMMEMORATES HOLDING OF FIRST ALL-IRELAND FINAL IN BIRR

By Jonathan Fanning

The official unveiling of an 11-foot bronze statue of a hurler commemorating Birr's hosting of the first All-Ireland hurling final on the 1st April 1888 took place in front of Tesco's store amidst blustery weather on 19th June 2009. The statue represents a typical hurler of the period, complete with authentic style clothing and shorts. The anonymous hurler aptly appears with a moustache - another fashionable style of players in that period.

The Statue was expertly sculpted by Mark Rode from Brisbane, Australia, who remarked, 'This statue, including its pedestal, stands at a height of 15 feet and weighs in at about 300 kilos. I originally sculpted the statue in clay which was then cast in bronze from a mould by a foundry in Mayo. The stone pedestal was sourced from Wicklow.' He added that the entire project cost in the region of €140,000 to complete.



Present on behalf of Tesco's was Michael Sullivan, who officially unveiled the statue, along with newly elected Town Councillor and hurling legend, Brian Whelahan and the President of the GAA, Mr Christy Cooney (pictured left). Other GAA dignitaries present included Chairman of Offaly GAA County Board, Mr.

Pat Teehan, and the Chairman of the local Birr GAA Club, Mr Brian Colohan. An information area with billboard detailed some of the extraordinary history associated with the hosting of the first All-Ireland hurling final in Birr. The statue marks the site on John Farrell's field where the first All-Ireland was contested on a Sunday, April 1st 1888 between Thurles (champions of Tipperary) and Meelick, a team drawn from the East Galway banks of the river Shannon.

Birr was chosen as the venue for the game because it was the most central point between the two finalists and because the GAA was already well-established in the town.

The history indicated that, prior to the match, the players had paraded through the streets of Birr as far as the field which was rented by St. Brendan's GAA club from local man John Farrell.

Accounts of the period indicate that it was a level and grassy field at which more than 3,000 spectators arrived. Most notably, and indicative of the period, all the hurlers played the match in their bare feet. Both teams wore green jerseys in the final. There was little confusion, however, due to the fact that the Thurles jerseys were very distinctive due to the galaxy of stars emblazoned on their fronts as part of their crest.

When Patrick White, the referee and a native of Toomevara in Co. Tipperary, called full time the score line read Thurles 1-2, Meelick no score. And so it was that Thurles were crowned the first All-Ireland hurling champions. The teams then marched back, military-fashion, to Cunningham's hotel in the centre of town where they were served dinner. The Thurles team was finally presented with their All-Ireland winning medals some 25 years later.

To mark the occasion of the unveiling of the commemorative statue, Michael Sullivan, a representative on behalf of Tesco's, invited the President of the GAA, Mr. Christy Cooney to speak a few words. Mr. Cooney remarked, 'this is truly a wonderful gesture by Tesco's in unveiling a statue here today of a hurler, in recognition of the first All-Ireland that was played here. It is important also on occasion such as this one to remember those who initiated this Association, which is currently celebrating 125 years'.

Mr Cooney added, 'we want to thank Tesco again and I think it is particularly appropriate to have the unveiling of this statue which coincides with the Feile na nGael, which is been hosted here in Offaly and Laois. It is a wonderful occasion for the young people and gives them the opportunity to display their skills that they have learnt at club level and in their schools. I thank both the clubs and school for ensuring the development of our wonderful game.'

Pat Teehan, the Chairman of the County Board of Offaly GAA, re-iterated the sentiments of Mr. Cooney adding, 'It is a great pleasure for me as Chairman of the GAA Offaly County Board to be here this evening. And, as Christy has said, we can be very proud of the long association that Offaly has with both the history and the game of hurling'.

The Chairman of Birr GAA Club, Brian Colohan, joined his colleagues in acknowledging Tesco, 'this is a great pleasure for Birr to unveil a bronze statue to commemorate this historic site'.

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BIRR G.O.A.L MILE - A RUNAWAY SUCCESS

by John McArdle

The fourth annual Goal Mile will again take place in Birr on Christmas Day at 1.00 p.m. Over the past three years, the people of Birr and surrounding districts have made this event popular, since it offers the opportunity for friends and neighbours to meet and exchange festive wishes, while also helping to raise money for a worthwhile cause. The people of the Birr region can feel very proud of their efforts, as they have raised a whopping €40, 090 in the three years so far. In fact John O'Shea, Chief Executive of Goal, has personally written to the people of Birr to thank them for their generous donation to Goal. In tribute to the Birr Goal Mile, John said that he was astounded, that per head of population, the Birr Goal Mile had raised more money than any other town in the country.

Goal is an international humanitarian organisation, dedicated to the attention of suffering among the poorest in the developing world. It was founded in 1977 by John O'Shea, who was then a sports journalist. Goal works towards ensuring that the poorest and most vulnerable in our world and those affected by humanitarian crises have access to the fundamental needs and rights of life, i.e. to food, water, shelter, medical attention and primary education. Goal works in 50 countries around the world and has responded to every major and man-made disaster in the past 32 years.

John O'Shea said recently "In good times and bad, two things have been constant in Ireland: the generosity of the Irish people and our unstinting commitment of our workers in the Third World."

John was speaking about the safe return of volunteer Sharon Cummins from her ordeal kidnapping in Darfur, and

of the dedication of all GOAL volunteers, people like our own Darren Hanniffy who is currently working in Honduras and whom we hope to welcome home for Christmas day in Birr. Patrons of GOAL included top athletes from all sports numbering among them Birr's Olympic 200 and 400 meter runner, Gordon Kennedy, and millennium hurler Brian Whelahan, both of whom have run in the last 3 GOAL miles. This year it is hoped that Olympic marathon runner Pauline Curley will run in Birr so let's all be prepared to give Pauline a warm welcome.

For anyone who may not have taken part in the Birr Goal Mile, it is a joyous, fun occasion where many people dress up in festive costume to walk or run the event. Adding to the festive spirit are the hot refreshing beverages so generously provided by the County Arms Hotel each year and the wonderful music provided by Birr Choir and folk musicians MacDara Deery, Timmy Fogarty, Mundy and friends. A special thanks also to the members of Birr Gardai who have been most helpful in ensuring the event is run in an orderly and safe manner.

A strong relationship has built up over the years between Karen O'Shea, daughter of GOAL founder John, and the students of St. Brendan's Community School, whom Karen comes to visit each year to assist them with their CSPE projects. In return, the students have generously given up their time and effort to promote the event around Birr town and all surrounding parishes.

It is already anticipated that a huge crowd will come out in Dublin in solidarity with GOAL worker Shannon Cummins, while in Birr the students of St. Brendan's will be hoping for great support for the work of goalie Darren Hanniffy. Their slogan is this year 'Let's do it for Darren'.



The line-up for the 2008 GOAL Mile with Birr's first lady, Mary Cowen (far right), ready to blow the starting whistle

ONE HUNDRED YEARS AGO - 1909

By Tony Hogan

The Old Age Pension Act of August 1908 became an exciting reality on New Year's Day 1909. Men and women over seventy could claim five shillings per week while married couples were entitled to seven shillings and sixpence, though there were restrictions and exceptions. It was then a major development in the history of social welfare. Thousands queued at post offices and police had to be called to restore order at Ennis. Sadly, in Birr a 93-year old woman died soon after collecting her money 'not having been out of doors for many years before.'

Temperance in Birr

A large and enthusiastic gathering in the Oxmantown Hall in March paid rapt attention to an address on temperance by Rev. Edward Gibbings. 'Being a well beaten-out subject it is not easy to introduce anything novel but the lecturer's versatile talents as a public speaker made all the difference'. The title was 'God, Home and Country'. He noted that in Birr there were thirty-seven public houses and he put the question: What would be their opinion if these were chemists' shops in the town? They would answer that the people were very sick indeed. He argued that the people of any locality ought to have the right to choose whether or not a public house should be placed in their midst. He concluded a powerful address by giving utterance to his settled conviction that there was growing feeling in that direction. (*King's County Chronicle*)

Twelve cottages to be built in Birr

Birr Urban Council took advantage of a new Housing Bill which provided houses for the working classes. Mr. John Dooly J.P. presided at the meeting. The matter was discussed at great length and the financial aspects of the question carefully debated, after which it was decided on the proposition of Mr. P. Cleary, seconded by Mr. William Morrison that the houses be built. The council decided that the houses would be built in blocks of not less than four and sites would be selected within the township, where they would replace houses in a tumble-town condition. An amendment was proposed by Mr. J.J. Byrne, seconded by Mr. Daly that twenty houses be built. This motion was rejected, no one voting for it except the proposer and seconder. (*Midland Tribune*)

Birr Sports

The Cycling and Athletic Sports were held in the Recreation Ground, Wilmer Road in July. 'With a lovely day and a large gathering of country folk, a nice proportion being rosy-faced young women with all the healthy colour that is produced by rural life and plenty of fresh air and wholesome food, the attraction was such as to lend an air of pleasure all round'. To assist the general liveliness, Mr. Feehan's band comprising gratuitously co-operating

amateurs, was a welcome extra. There was a record entry and good fields for the many events. The Old Age Pensioners' race drew the largest measure of interest, so much so that the course was intruded on so that the event had to be delayed. In this race J. Darcy of Birr beat James McCormack, also of Birr, by a yard. Among the many winners were cyclist J.J. Kinahan from Clareen, M. Scully who won the hurdle race and sprinter F. Moran who won the 100 yards. Carrig beat Riverstown in the tug-of-war. Very Rev. Dean Scanlon very kindly distributed the prizes and the look on the features of the winners plainly denoted their pride and gratitude. (*King's County Chronicle*)

Fever in Birr

A report spoke highly of Birr Workhouse officials while referring to fever in the institution: 'Apart from the suffering, there would be the expense should an epidemic break out. This, he said, may be estimated from the rather alarming fact that during the week, owing chiefly to their different classification it requires three trained nurses and three ward maids to take charge of seven fever patients, but happily none of these are in a very serious state, though some were in that condition until a few days ago. On this outbreak of fever occurring it was found to be virulent, nearly the same in every case coming from different districts. The Birr Hospital was, however, so up to date in its equipment and the medical staff so efficient, that a few of the patients show signs of convalescence before their time. Some of the trained nurses requisitioned by wire are credited with the remark that the hospital arrangements for the treatment of typhus could scarcely be rivalled for excellence. Special praise was given for the completeness of the plans for disinfecting; and not one instance of the infection spreading has occurred.' (*Midland Tribune*)

Entertainment

Duffy's Grand Circus visited Birr in July with all school children admitted to the day performance at two pence each. The performers included Sensational Acrobats from Brooklin, Patrick Flanagan the great Irish One-Legged Strong Man, the Alton Trio of Marvellous Demon Contortionists and Clowns of all sorts and sizes who could be seen and heard at each performance. Also appearing in Birr for five nights was the Elster Grime Opera Co. with thirty-five travelling artistes. Their repertoire consisted of *Maritana*, *The Bohemian Girl*, *Paul Jones*, *Shamus O'Brien* and *Rigoletto*. This was their ninth appearance in Birr.

Thanks

Many thanks to Birr Librarian Martina Needham and her helpful staff for the use of the library facilities. The *Midland Tribune* and the *King's County Chronicle* are now available on microfilm in the beautiful Birr Library.

ST. BRENDAN'S PARISH, BIRR

This year saw another busy year in the life of Birr Parish. Thankfully, the Christmas and Easter liturgies were celebrated with packed congregations. It was great to see so many involved in the ceremonies, in particular the youth. Over 100 6th Class students were confirmed by Bishop Willie Walsh in May. There were two First Holy Communions in Birr and one in Carrig. We also celebrated numerous weddings. However, on a sad note, we also celebrated the funeral liturgies of over sixty parishioners through the course of the year.

Much planning this year went into the Solemn Novena planned for late November. The Novena was conducted by the Redemptorist Fathers from Limerick. Preparation for this major event included visitation of all houses in the parish by members of the Pastoral Council.

The Pastoral Council prioritised Child Safety. It also set up working groups to advance the areas of faith education, youth and compilation of a Mission Statement. These groups will report following the Novena.

During 2009, the 'Garden of Tranquillity' at the rear of the Church came to fruition with the erection of open air Stations of the Cross. They were sculpted on slates removed from the Church roof during the 2001 restoration of St. Brendan's. The Stations are dedicated to the memory of our late P.P., Canon John Shalloo, who died in 2006. The

'Garden of Tranquillity' is an oasis of peace and prayer at the heart of the town and parishioners are encouraged to visit it. The garden was a fitting setting for the Corpus Christi Procession and Benediction in June.



June also saw the retirement of our sacristan Tim Bergin. He had given over fifteen years of dedicated service to St. Brendan's Church. This was remembered with a special Mass of thanksgiving. The Parish was lucky to obtain the services of Ger Roberts, who has assumed the duties of sacristan at St. Brendan's.

We are happy that our parishioner, Mike Geraghty, has commenced his studies for the priesthood, at St. Patrick's College, Maynooth. We ask you to keep Mike and all of our seminarians in your prayers.

Anybody wishing to contact the Parish office may do so on Monday, Tuesday, Thursday and Friday from 10.30 a.m. to 12.15 p.m. by calling in person or phoning 9122028. You may access the parish web site at www.stbrendansbirr.ie or e-mail info@stbrendansbirr.ie.

Tim Bergin being presented with a gift to mark his retirement as sacristan after 15 years

(L to R): Fr. Pat Gilbert, Fr. Tony Cahir, P.P., Mr. Tim Bergin, Fr. Michael Reddan, Fr. David Carroll



Pictured left are the Easter basket offerings which were presented for blessing at the altar during Easter Saturday Mass in Birr.

The beautifully decorated baskets contain eggs, ham, spiced beetroot, salami, sweets and other traditional treats which are consumed during the Easter festival in most Eastern European countries, such as Poland, Czech Republic, Latvia and Lithuania.

ST. BRENDAN'S CHURCH OF IRELAND

2009 is nearly over and St. Brendan's Church of Ireland Parish in Birr has had a busy year. Many in the community will be aware of our major fundraising efforts to pay for repairs to the pinnacles on our roof, which were in a perilous state. We would like to thank all who worked so hard to raise funds, and all who contributed time and money to this effort.

Among the fundraising events over the past year was a flower-arranging demonstration last November, led by the ever-popular Richard Haslam. Richard returned in August for another magnificent Flower Festival, which opened with a special ceremony with the Birr Choral Society and the Virtuoso Singers.

Other successful fundraising events were a Coffee Morning in Birr Castle, a sale of firewood, and, more recently, a great Parish Dance in September in Dooly's Hotel. We also received generous donations from the Birr Lions Club and the Georgian Society, also grants from the Offaly County Council and the Department of the Environment. Many thanks to all; we have more repairs still to do, so more funds will be needed in the future.

We had a number of baptisms in the parish in 2009. On Sunday 22nd February Henry John Hawke Clements and Charlotte Anne Eléanore Clements, twin children of Alicia and Nat Clements, were baptised in Birr Church by Bishop Trevor Williams, assisted by the Rev. Michael Thompson of the Parish of Youghal, the Archdeacon and the Rev. Ruth. On Sunday, 30th August, Bobby Samuel Finney Kennedy, son of Michael and Sylvia, was baptised in St. Brendan's Church, Birr, by the Rev. Ruth.

Bishop Trevor Williams came back to Birr on Sunday, 28th June to confirm Dara and Karen Bulfin and Lucy Reid. James Corcoran, who was unavoidably away on the 28th, was confirmed in Lorrha Church in September.

At this writing, we have only had one funeral during the year. Christina (Tina) Bracken, a long-time resident of Ely

House and Birr Hospital Sandymount, died peacefully on the 22nd of October; after the funeral service in Birr Church, she was buried in the churchyard of St. Paul's, Banagher. The ashes of Phyllis Bridge (nee Kinkead), a sister of Millie Bruce, were buried in Clonoghil Cemetery on the 28th of April.

On Sunday, 26th April, Susan Jackson and Peter Whyte presented a Garden Question Time, held in Oxmantown School. Peter and Susan shared their gardening expertise and answered some difficult questions from both experienced and 'budding' gardeners.

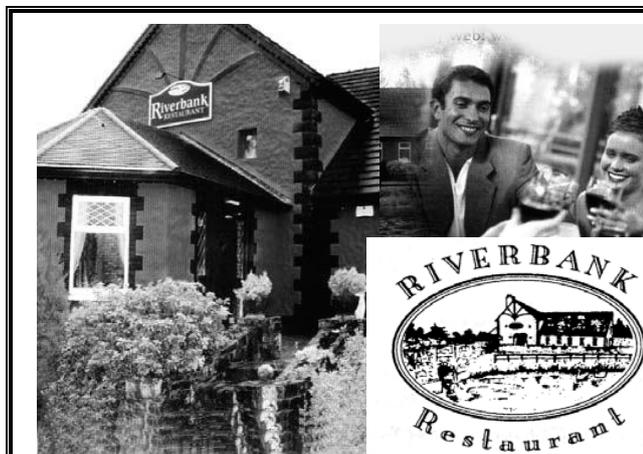
Our annual Parish Fete was held on Thursday 18th June and attracted a good crowd of parishioners and visitors. A mixture of sunny and rainy weather didn't dampen enthusiasm, both spirits and funds were raised by the happy event. Many thanks to all who supported the Fete in so many ways.

During 2009 we held two successful lunch gatherings for the young families of the parish, in March and September. Both were great occasions for the young parents and children of the parish to meet informally.

Mrs. Ruth Elmes, daughter of our former Rector, Archdeacon Donald Keegan and his wife Janet, was ordained Deacon in Christ Church Cathedral in Dublin on the 21st of June. She is serving as Curate in St Brigid's Parish, Stillorgan.

Oxmantown School continues to flourish, having expanded to four classroom teachers. A number of parents have set up a Garden Club for the students which grows all manner of interesting things in a formerly overgrown part of the property.

Many thanks to all who contributed to the life of the Parish in 2009 in so many ways, both among our parishioners and the wider community. May we wish everyone in Birr a holy Christmas and a more prosperous and optimistic year in 2010.



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METHODIST CHURCH, BIRR

It has always been said that Methodists are the friends of all and the enemies of none. The Methodists in Birr are always pleased to be able to welcome the friends they haven't met yet, and to do things with the friends they know!

Since the publication of the last *Review*, it fell to the lot of the Methodist church to host the Carol Service. 'Hosting' in this instance meant asking for a loan of St. Brendan's Church of Ireland, since it was feared that the little Methodist church might not cope with the numbers attending. This proved to be a wise move!

We were, however, delighted to be able to hold the Women's World Day of Prayer service in our own premises at the beginning of March.

Also in March, the church hosted the District Synod. Over the ensuing tea, Rev. Dr. John Parkin, a previous minister here, had a chance to catch up with all the people whom he remembered from his time here.

Another event to which people came from around the District was the Methodist Women's Day Conference, held in early September. Around 30 women arrived to share in morning worship and to participate in the afternoon session led by Rev. Rosemary Lindsay.

December and May always include Sales, generously supported by so many people around the town. Both of these were held in vacant shops on the Main Street. The December one was particularly atmospheric, being a candle-lit event. This was not a publicity stunt or a way to make the goods on sale look more attractive; it was a matter of necessity, because the shop had no electricity! In August, a children's party was held. Wendy Gill, joined by Colette Reynolds from Tullamore church, organized a programme which ensured that a good time was had by all. During October, our Harvest services were held morning and evening. The evening one was very much a joint effort! Rev. Bill Olmsted came from Mountmellick to preach and to present the Scriptures very innovatively. Music was provided alternately by Rev. Irene Morrow at the organ and an assortment of clergy, including Rev. Ruth Gill, Archdeacon Wayne Carney, Father Michael Reddan and Rev. Rosemary Lindsay, grouped around Ruth's guitar. 'Audience participation' was encouraged and participate they did! It was decided to hold other evening services from time to time. The first one was held at the end of August, when an Athlone Praise Group came to lead the worship. It is hoped that these occasional services will take place at the end of every month which has five Sundays.



Pictured at the October Harvest Service were (L to R)

Rev. Bill Olmsted, Rev. Ruth Gill, Rev. Rosemary Lindsay, Archdeacon Wayne Carney, Rev. Irene Morrow, Fr. Michael Reddan.

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CARRIG NATIONAL SCHOOL



Infants

Back Row (L to R): Jack Bond, George Markham, Ben Fogarty, Patrick Cleary, Cathal Molloy, Liam Fogarty, Adam O'Connor
3rd Row: Clodagh Hayden, Colm Delahunty, Cara Hoare, Lucy Butler, Kelly Watson, Caoimhe O'Donovan, Katie Moran, Leanne Bond, Emma-Jane Mulrooney.
2nd Row: Rosie Mannion-O'Brien, Catarina Ryan.
Front Row: Chloe Egan, Aoife O'Donovan, Harry Whelehan, Ciaran Brophy, Orey Higgins, Lee Hogan, Robbie Byrne, Roisin Pinches.



6th Class

Back Row (L to R): John Ralph, Odhran Kelly, David Broderick, Tony Sampson (principal).
Front Row: Darragh O'Brien, Samantha O'Sullivan, Aisling Brennan, Cailin Fitzgerald, Peter Curran.

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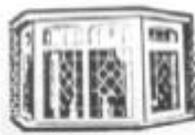
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Junior Infants

Back Row (L to R): Megan Ward, Pola Zalewska, Barbara Czerwieniec, Hannah Riley, Leanne Carroll, Nanny Marie Doyle, Shona Darcy, Maja Ubowska, Aoife McMahon, Danielle Cosgrove, Ms. A. Hennelly

Middle Row: Simona Latuskeviciute, Tara Mooney, Katie Nevin McEvoy, Sky Wild, Megan Lally, Ella Grainger, Aimee Murdock, Makalah Emaiike, Kayleigh Talbot.

Front Row: Kayleigh Corrigan, Aoife Carroll, Carina Donoghue, Ella Fox, Grace Kennedy, Rebecca Pardy



6th Class

Back Row (L to R): Alanna McEvoy, Jamie Spain, Sorcha Hand, Breanne Thompson, Alaina Duffy, Klaudija Nowobilska, Patrycia Kluga, Ms. R. Treacy

Middle Row: Lavinia Bennett, Margaret Lily Doyle, Courtney Shortt, Clodagh Hanniffy, Erin O'Meara, Ellen Kelly, Aimee Wells, Caitlin Murdock.

Front Row: Caitlin Byrne, Aoife M. Hogan, Aoife G. Hogan, Avril Fleury, Chanelle Keegan, Sarah McLoughlin, Aisling Garland, Leah McDonald

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Junior Infants

*Back Row (L to R): Hubert Zakrzewski, Lorraine Harty, Karolina Rodzon, Niah Spain, Simon Feehan, Oisín Cooke, Orna Curley, Brody Larkin, Ciaran Brennan, Clodagh Lennon, Meg Delaney, Megan Kinsella Bergin
Front Row: Hannah Feenane, Shauna Molloy, Megan Kearns, Chloe Conroy, Alex Kinahan, Claire Kennedy, Rebecca Casey, Nicole Maughan, Ella King, with teacher, Ms. Lisa Kennedy*



6th Class

*Back Row (L to R): Odhrán Dickson, Dylan Murphy, Eimear Guinan, Aoife Spain, Allana Connolly, Alison Lyons, Rory Loughrey
Second Row: Mrs. Claire Kelly, Class Teacher, Kenneth Cahill, Stephen Guilfoyle, Christopher Reddin, Becky Cordial, Tara Connolly, Audrey McAuliffe, Amy Lyons, Laura Kealey, Conor Carroll, Mrs. Mary Dolan, Principal
Third Row: Keelan O' Brien, Kerry Farrelly, Chantelle Heffernan, Megan Larkin, Aisling Ryan, Paul Matthew, Mark Cloonan, Ali Cloonan, Nikita Kane, Oisín Corboy
Front: Michael Carroll, Dermot Sheils*

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Front Row: Sarah Freeman, Victorija Pecukonyte, Aoibhinn Rice, Patrick Bergin, Peter King, Charlie Raper, Liam Daly, Sinead Fallon, Colin Kelly, Evan Carroll Tully.



6th Class

Back Row (L to R): Mrs. Brid Connolly (Principal), Luke Fox, Danyal Anjum, Ryan England, Lorcan Conn, Patrick Scully, James Delahunt
Front Row: John Hanlon, Vivienne Fitzgerald, Kiera Brady, Rachel Dolan, Aideen Freeman, Kenny Cooke

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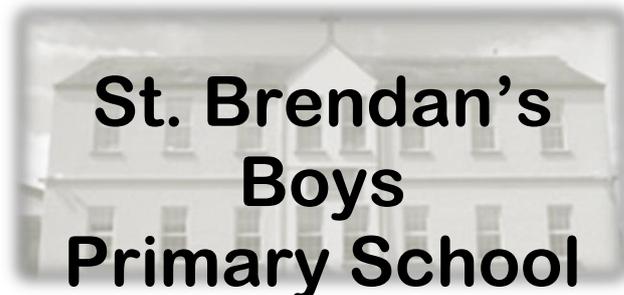
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ST. BRENDAN'S BOYS PRIMARY SCHOOL



Junior Infants

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Front Row: Jack Kirwan, Ciarán Abbott, Charlie Gallagher, Alex Byrne, Darragh Mooney, Alesio Szoma, Darragh Tierney, Brian Hutchinson, Kristian Bodik, Joe Hutchinson, Aran Corcoran, Nangyal Khan



6th Class

Back Row (L to R): David Mullins, Sean Revill, Paul Seporatis, Mark Haines, Steven Bracken, Dannilo Hansbury, Daniel O'Meara, Alex Sadowski, Tomek Reclaw, Darragh Stapleton, Conor Sampson, Rory Bergin, Mr. Niall Crofton (Class teacher)
Front Row (L to R): Eoghan Cahill, Shane Donovan, Dylan Quegan, Cathal Kirwan, T.J. Talbot, Hugh Doyle, Evan Lynskey
Missing from picture are Anthony Kinsella, Martin Mongan, Ian Kelly

Aisling Photography



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"Last Day at St. Brendan's": Pictured on their last day of teaching at St. Brendan's Community School with Principal Mr. Tom Foley and Deputy Principal Mrs. Ming Loughnane are retiring teachers Ms. Roisin Gilmore, Mr. Tony Fahey, Mr. John Fealy, Ms. Anne Joyce, Mr. Adrian Jackson and Mr. Bernard McGurk.



Silver Gaisce (President's Award) Winners
Front Row (L to R): Una Feehan, Aoife Cotter, Amy Ryan, Sarah Teehan
Back Row: Martin Mellisop, Meghan Corrigan, Pdraig Connolly and Liadhan Kelly



Liam Brady being presented with his singlet by Gordon Kennedy prior to the Leinster Schools Cross Country Championships. Also present are Mr. Tom Foley (Principal) and Mr. Jimmy Dunne (P.E. Department). Liam went on to win silver in the All-Ireland track & field 3,000m final.



Emma Milne and Gillian Molloy during the interval of the school musical 'Honk'



St. Brendan's 5th Year Debating Team reached the All-Ireland quarter-finals of the Concern Debates. The Team pictured with mentor Ms. Maria Holden are Liadhan Kelly, Roisin McCormack, Pdraig Connolly and Elaine McAuliffe.



Deputy Olwyn Enright T.D. (Past Pupil) pictured with Peadar Murray, Emmet Nolan, Erin Byrne, Christopher Pingree, Shauna Byrne and Ceola Campbell during her visit to mark the school's C.S.P.E. week.



Denise Carty & Gerard Gleeson



Deirdre Gath & Shane Hollywood



Wanda Hayes & Brendan Dwane



Gemma Ely & Derek McLoughlin



Lorna Russell & Eric Shannon



Julie Cornwell & David Fitzpatrick



Grace Kelly & Eoghan O'Regan



Sinead Mooney & Emmet Larkin



Lavinia Gleeson & Galvin Johnson



Pauline O'Meara & David O'Grady



Stephanie Keogh & Denis Shine



Neasa O'Brien & Eoin Daly



Marie Conroy & Ciaran Bonner



Melanie Kennedy & David Brien



Naoibh Larkin & Darren Gleeson



Ann Pardy & John McKeon



Nicola Mitchell & Nigel Wrafter



Anne Quinlan & Jonathan Fanning



Margaret Doyle & Patrick Delaney



Brenda Keogh & Niall Murphy



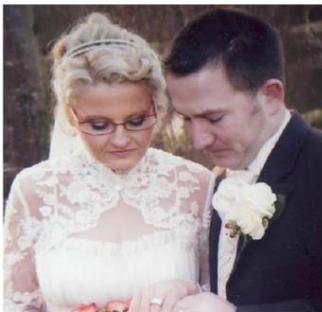
Michelle Byrne & Paul Gallagher



Lorna O'Sullivan & Simon Kiernan



Vivian Cuddy & Garrett Barry



Mairead Moylan & Patrick Egan



Clara Russell & Micheál Doran



Lisa Smyth & Michael Hogan



Fiona Fitzpatrick & Alan Townsend



Christine O'Meara & Patrick van de Scheur



Margaret Ryan & John Kelly



Catherine Finnegan & Paul McGlone



PEOPLE OF BIRR 2009

BIRR ORDER OF MALTA

2009 was a very busy year for the Birr unit of the Order of Malta. As we now comply with all the regulations set out under PHECC (Pre Hospital Emergency Care Council), the governing body of all ambulances in Ireland, there was a strong emphasis on training in the Birr Unit. All our members are trained in First Aid & CPR, Manual & Patient Handling, Home Nursing and Occupational First Aid. Additionally, four of our members went on to become Certified Emergency First Responders and are scheduled to take the Emergency Medical Technician Course in the near future. With this high standard of training, the unit has gone from strength to strength. Providing ambulances and First Aid cover at local and national events, this training has been put into action several times this year. We also purchased a variety of new equipment to ensure our ambulances are fully equipped to deal with all emergencies we might encounter while on duty.

This year, we were involved in a wide variety of activities. As always, we supported Vintage Week in Birr and provided First Aid cover for the Camcor Capers, Donkey Derby, the Street Fair, the Bed Push in Crinkill and, of course, the Parade itself. We were very happy to be part of the Feile na nGael which was held in Birr and the surrounding areas this year. From providing First Aid cover at the opening Parade to being there for all the games, it was a proud time for the Birr Unit. Another of our local duties, which we were very proud to be part of, was the Country Game Fair at Birr Castle. Whenever the Blood Bank comes to town, we support them by putting up the posters in advance, and being there during the donor sessions to assist the Blood Bank staff. We also provided transport to Clonfert Church, for members of the public, who were unable to get there by themselves, during the month of May. Our members gave talks on First Aid to local Active Retirement Groups and schools. Any local groups interested in availing of these talks should contact us at the number below. We provided First Aid Courses to members of the public. At the end of the course each participant received an internationally recognised qualification and certificate. Along with all of this, we provided First Aid cover to local groups collecting for charity, such as, the Wolftrap Sponsored cycle, Clareen Traditional Day and John Grant's Annual Tractor run. We would like to give a special mention to John Grant who made a significant donation to the Birr Unit.

Other duties that we have participated in this year have included the Point to Point in Ballingarry, Hunter Trials and Eventing at Gurteen College, the Tullamore Show, Fleadh Ceoil in Tullamore, Hunter Trials in AnaHarvery Tullamore, Indoor Athletics in Nenagh, Athletics events at the Harriers,

Racing in Kilbeggan, Car Rallies and local ploughing competitions. Several members of our unit were also involved in providing First Aid at major events including Oxygen, the AC/DC concert and the annual pilgrimage to Croagh Patrick in July. The Birr Unit provided ambulances and First Aid cover at the National Ploughing Championships, as it has done almost every year since 1997 when the competition was held in Rath. Not content with just being there this year, two of our longer serving members, Johnny Kennedy and Anne Corcoran managed to get themselves featured on RTE 1's 'Nationwide'.

This year, the unit organised fund-raising Race Night in the County Arms Hotel. This was a very successful night. Our annual church gate collection was, as always, very well supported by the Birr community as was our bag-packing at Tesco's. Monies raised by these activities and from doing duties goes towards training members and equipping and maintaining the ambulances. All in the Birr Order of Malta, would like to say a huge 'thank you' to everyone who has contributed this year. We know times are tough and your help was greatly appreciated.

The Order of Malta recognises that all its members are unpaid volunteers who give very freely of their time. To that end, we would like to acknowledge all the hard work they put into the Birr Unit and send them our sincere thanks.

Anyone wishing to become a member of the Birr Unit of the Order of Malta can contact us on 087-9079617. Similarly anyone who would like to avail of our services including Ambulance/First Aid Cover at an event, First Aid Training or talks is welcome to contact us.

We look forward to serving our community once again in 2010.



Johnny Kennedy being wished a Happy Birthday by Comdt. John Walsh Regional Director of the Order of Malta

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MIDLAND MODEL FLYING CLUB

by David McIntyre

The Midland Model Flying Club was setup in the early 90's by a handful of enthusiasts from in and around Cloghan, Birr, Rahan and Screggan - people who had been bitten by this bug. The Club site is located in the beautiful Boora Parklands outside Kilcormac. The site was purchased reasonably from Bord Na Mona and they helped the members to develop the club site and facilities into what is, arguably, the finest site for model aircraft in the country. The absence of any overhead power-lines, large trees, houses and public roads are key to the location of a flying site. The flat surrounding bog and agricultural land and a great line of sight or horizon are the icing on the cake. The club site is approximately four acres with a converted steel container as a clubhouse, large open shed as a kind of hanger, an ample fenced car-park area and excellent runway surface. All the facilities are a testament to the hard work and love for flying of the club members.

The number of members has varied over the years between twenty and thirty, from ages under sixteen to over seventy. Models range from twelve inches in size to twelve feet across the wings, to helicopters and miniature jet turbines that sound and even smell like the real jet exhaust. The club regularly holds events such as Scale and Aerobic competitions, Helicopter Free-style flying, Jet flying, open days, BBQ's, etc. Training of new members is at the heart of the MMFC. Once you become a member, you will be given all the help, advice and training you could possibly need to become as good a 'pilot' as you can. There is no charge for this service – it is offered by the more experienced members who mostly enjoy the process of training a 'newbie' who gets bitten by the bug. There are many training aids now which help to make the initial training much safer, faster and more enjoyable. The most notable of these is the 'Buddy Lead' system. This is where the trainer and trainee have their radio-controls linked by an electrical cable or 'Buddy-Lead'. The trainer has full control of the trainee's plane, and can do the tricky take-off and get it flying properly, and when ready, can flick a switch to pass control to the trainee. If at any point the trainee makes a mistake and loses control of the model, then a simple flick and the trainer again has full control and can save the model. We would also offer visitors to the club the chance to fly a plane using this same system – just for that extra thrill!

Personally, my first introduction to RC flying was "The Late Late Toy Show". I remember a man with a radio-controlled model helicopter. He hovered it in the studio and they also showed him hovering outside where he was able to balance the landing skids on a fence! I was instantly hooked. It would be years later when I bought a model glider, which I built myself, and installed an electric



David McIntyre, with 33% Extra 260

motor with a propeller and test-flights were promptly carried out in Knockshegowna among other dubious sites! I found a wing-man in Declan Milne and he parted with some hard-earned cash to join me in my aeronautical adventures. It would be some time and several crash-and-repair cycles before we made contact with local men Ger Carter and Des Talbot, who took us under their vastly more experienced wings and introduced us to the Midland MFC, where we found more friendly faces from Birr like Martin Roberts – we were home! Some good advice and some intensive training followed over the next few months. Within no time, we had our first solo flights and were let loose.

Anyone who is interested in learning more can contact us through our website www.midlandmfc.ie. You can also find detailed directions to the flying site and phone numbers. We generally try to get out flying at the weekend – particularly on Sundays. You are welcome to have a look around and talk to the members present.

Answers to 'Faces from the Past' – were you correct?

1. Albert Mee
2. Eamon Connolly
3. Eamon Hacket
4. Birdie Hayes
5. Dilly Hanniffy
6. George Harding
7. Leo Cullinane
8. Frank Egan
9. Larry Hartnett
10. Mrs. Kelly
11. Martin Hoystead
12. Martin Yeates

BIRR CHAPTER, IRISH GEORGIAN SOCIETY

A group of very keen members boarded a coach on Oxmantown Mall in Birr and took off for a day trip to South Tipperary and Waterford during the month of June, organised by Gerry Browne and Joe Breen. Our first port of call was to the home of Margie and Cyril Cullen at Farney Castle, Holycross. This is a multi-talented family. Cyril, a man of many parts, international fashion designer, whose Jacob's sheep fleeces are used in his knitwear and designs and are much sought after as far away as New York, London and Tokyo. We saw the Jacob's sheep grazing in the pasture as we arrived. There is a collection of antique Irish harps on which their four daughters, known as the Cullen Harpers, have performed in European cities and Carnegie Hall, New York. Cyril is also a sculptor and has his workshop in the stable yard. Visitors to the castle can purchase many of their items in the ancient kitchen, now used as a shop for tourists.

There is a wonderful round tower, with twelve-foot-thick walls with a staircase built into the thickness of the walls off which, it appears, secret rooms are still in existence undiscovered.

After lunch, we drove to Carrick-on-Suir to see the Ormond Castle which is the best example of an Elizabethan manor house in Ireland. It was built by Thomas, the 10th Earl of Ormond, in the 1560s. Closely integrated into the manor house are two 15th century towers. It is the country's only major unfortified dwelling from that turbulent period. The state rooms contain some of the finest decorative plasterwork in the country, including plasterwork portraits. We also visited Curraghmore House, courtesy of the 8th Marquis of Waterford. In his historic home, we were shown some of the finest neo-classical rooms in Ireland, which featured the magnificent plaster work of James Wyatt and grisaille panels by Peter de Gree.



Celebrating 80th Anniversary of foundation of Birr Pioneer Centre in 1992

*Back Row (L to R): Joe Short, Joan White, Michael Quealy, Brian Kennedy, Rita O'Brien, Fr. John Kelly, CC
Middle Row: Gerry Dolan, Msgr. P.J. Hamell, Helen Keogh, Sr. Anne, Mary O'Grady, Bessie Loughnane, Mary Pyne,
Mary O'Connor, Maura Carroll, Sr. Gemma, Sheila Delahunty
Front Row: Fr. J. McGuckian SJ, Bro. Denis, Liam Ryan, Nell Doorley, Canon John Shalloo, Helen Hogan,
Margaret Kearns, Detta Hayes*

BIRR BOY SCOUTS

The year 2009 marked a further improvement in scouting, with new groups forming and an increase in membership. Scouting in Birr resumes in September after the school holidays, when new members are taken on. The Birr unit consists of cubs, scouts and venturers. We cater for boys and girls from eight years of age to twenty. Recruitment this year was restricted, due to a shortage of adult leaders. Any adults interested in the great outdoors who wish to help out can contact the leaders at the scout hall or Mary Hayes at 087-9529327 or Jack Ryan at 057-9120036.

One of the highlights of our activities every year is the visit of Santa to the log cabin. On the 19th December this year he will again visit the cabin and all are welcome. In



Donncha Carroll on the Camcor Waterfall

February this year, the scouts had their first week-end away in the cabin. Despite the inclement weather our programme for pioneering and hill-walking was completed. In May, canoeing resumed on the Camcor river under the supervision of the Birr Outdoor Education Centre and it was in flood, so the boys were able to "shoot the rapids" at the bridge.

In May, the group participated in the Slieve Bloom regional camp and went through an intensive programme of pioneering, orienteering, and hill-walking. The second visit to the cabin was for a survival weekend where the scouts spent the night in the mountains. Despite the inclement weather, it did not deter the group from enjoying themselves. In June, it was off to Portumna for the bank holiday week-end in training for our annual camp. This now has become an annual event as we have camped there since the 1970's. It turned out to be a great weekend as we got good weather and a large part of our programme was water activities, under the supervision of Pdraig Connaughton, Mary Hayes and Maureen Corrigan.

In July, we were off to Lough Key Forest Park, Boyle, Co Roscommon for our annual camp, where we joined other groups from Dublin, Sligo and France. The highlight of the event was the outing to Sligo where we had a go at surfing at Strand hill. The camp inter-patrol competition was won by the "Snake Patrol" led by their leader Eoin Reddin. For the first time in the region, history was made when Sean Stone and Donncha Carroll completed the National Venture challenge. The two were dropped off at Mallow Co. Cork on the 16th August and they had to get to Killarney by the 24th August on foot and on a limited budget. They had to write up a diary on a daily basis; cook their own food and camp out; no small task as they had to cover 100kms a day. The cubs were in the Trailing and Tracking regional event and secured their badges.

This year placed a heavy burden on our finances, as the log cabin was broken into and vandalised causing damage in the region of €5,000. The parents committee is presently fund-raising for the cabin and wishes to place on record their appreciation to the people of the area for their moral and financial support.

Presentation of a piece of artwork to Mary Horan by Roesy who donated the piece for a raffle to raise funds for the Log Cabin

Back Row (L to R): S. Lyons, M. Corrigan, J. Ryan, A. 'Roesy' Roe, M. Horan, M. Hayes, R. Duff
Front Row: T. J. Talbot, C. Guilfoyle, L. Barry, A. Duff, L. Duff, S. Guilfoyle



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BIRR ACTIVE RETIREMENT GROUP

Our members meet once a fortnight – every second Thursday from 7.30 p.m. – 9.30 p.m. in the Resource Centre in Glebe St. There are thirty to forty ladies in the group. We are still waiting for some brave retired men to join as our group is open to male and female members. The age category is 50+. Events during 2009 included entertainment by a group of Lusmagh dancers and a talk on the topic of the care of plants and shrubs by Tony Murphy from Birr Town Council. We visited Birr Castle on 'Open Day'. Some of our members joined the Lorrha group for Christmas dinner in January 2009. We had a visit from Sergeant Padraic Farrelly and local Community Garda, Michelle O'Carroll, in February. They gave a very informative talk on safety and security which was very helpful to members living alone.

On 14th May, four members of our group, Mary Coffey, Mary McDermott, Sr. Maeve and Lily Tait, were invited to the County Council Chairman's Award launch in Tullamore. The president was presented with a €100 cheque, which was given to each group that had sent in a successful application.

Twenty-one members travelled by coach to Dáil Éireann in May. On arrival, they were greeted by Deputy Olwyn Enright. They enjoyed a lovely lunch at the Dáil restaurant and were shown around afterwards. They were also present for a session of questions and answers.

Earlier in May, some members of the Active Retirement Group participated in an Art Course in Birr Library. A course in Art, Pottery and Digital Photography took place in Birr Theatre and Arts Centre on 19th May.

Thirty-eight of our members had dinner in the Riverbank restaurant in June. In July, there was an outing to both Redwood and Portumna castles. We joined forces with Birr

Historical Society for this outing and it proved to be a very informative and enjoyable occasion.

The group held their AGM before breaking up for the summer holidays. Mary Coffey agreed to continue as president. The other committee members are Sr. Maeve (vice-president), Brid Ryan (treasurer), Mary McDermott (assistant treasurer), Sr. Roberta (secretary), Mary McLoughlin (assistant secretary) and Lily Tait (PRO).

The Birr Active Retirement Group joined the Carrig Group to celebrate the official launch of the calendar produced in memory of their founder member, Mary Keeshan, R.I.P.

We attended an information day in the Marian Hall in September. The availability of rural transport services and house services for the elderly were the two main topics discussed. We were also invited to a H.S.E. meeting to hear about Home-Fix services for elderly home owners.

Yvonne Ryan, student of Mary Immaculate College of Education, spoke to us about her experiences of working in an orphanage in Mombasa, Kenya. She had qualified as an architect but was unable to find work so she and five others volunteered to go to Africa for three months. They stayed with two families while working in a children's home. There were 60 orphans aged between 1 and 20. The living conditions were so poor that it was a huge culture shock at first. Gradually, it became a rewarding and worthwhile experience.

We held a raffle and raised €140 for Birr Hospice. Sr. Roberta and Lily Tait represented Birr at the AGM of Active Retirement Ireland, which was held in Dublin.

The group would like to thank our supporters and sponsors especially H.S.E., Birr Lions Club, Offaly County Council, Offaly Partnership and the S.V.P..



On the steps of Dail Eireann, where Mary Coffey presented a copy of 'Open Doors' to Olwyn Enright

Back Row (L to R): Noel Coonan, Mary McDermott, Nancy Buckley, Jean Larkin, Sarah Ryan, Maire King, Bridget Sullivan, Sarah Murphy

Middle Row: Gerry White, Margaret White, Teresa O'Shea, Mary Johnston, Carmel Brummell, Imelda King,

Front Row: Fidelma Clavin, Lily Tait, Evelyn Newton, Sr. Roberta Delaney, Mary Coffey, Olwyn Enright, Bríd Ryan.

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BIRR SOCIAL CLUB

In this, the 40th year as the Birr Social Club, we once again enjoyed a very sporting year. Our annual Darts Tournament, in aid of the I.H.C.P.T was divided to include a town championship, which proved very enjoyable and was won by 'The Swan Bar'. The main tournament was won by Paschal Ryan's, Roscrea.

Our team Snooker tournament, in aid of the Birr Community Nursing Unit and sponsored by Buckley's Super-Valu, was won by Whelahan's, beating Corrigan's in a very tight final by 3 to 2. Brian Whelahan won the 'Ned Farrell Trophy' by beating John Ryland in the final. In the Summer Tournament, sponsored by Costcutters, Michael Verney beat Pat Dunphy, 2-0.



The 'Swan Bar' team who were winners of the inaugural Town Championship, sponsored by Pat Scully
Back Row (L to R): Charlie Brophy, Peter Parady, Speedy Harte, Shane Coughlan
Front Row: Ray Hynes, Paul Coffey, Ann Hogan (Prop.), Eamon Coughlan (Capt.)



Prizewinners in the Summer Snooker Tournament – Sponsored by Costcutters

Back Row (L to R): Pat Dunphy (Runner-up), Ger Nevin (Semi-finalist), Sean Cullen (Semi-finalist)
Front Row: Michael Verney (Winner), Derek Kelly (Chairman)

Ned Farrell Snooker Tournament
Brian Whelahan (Winner) receiving his prize from Derek Kelly (Chairman)



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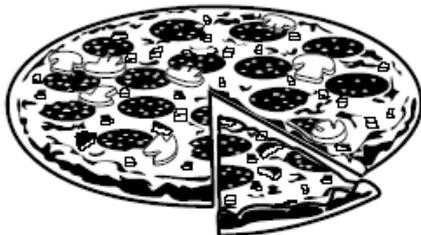
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ORMAND FLYING CLUB

The Ormand Flying Club are a group of aviation enthusiasts and are renowned in Irish aviation for their welcoming of visiting pilots. We are also an RTF (registered training facility) and provide instruction on Group A (aeroplane) and Microlight training to student pilots. The club has an active Private Pilot membership, who flies for recreation and fun, whenever the weather allows! The majority of these members base their aircraft in our newly finished hangar on the airfield.

2009 was another good year for Ormand Flying Club. April was the highlight of the year for the club, when we hosted our "Breakfast Fly In", the first event of the aviation calendar. This is an event where general aviation pilots from all over the country fly in and have breakfast and spend the rest of the morning talking about everything from aviation, weather, the economy and the quality of the sausages. We had 49 visiting aircraft that morning and the club was a hive of activity. There was a lot of praise for the club on aviation forums and 'Flying In Ireland' magazine for the organisation of the event and the welcome that each pilot got.

After two summers of bad weather, where we had to cancel our vintage week fly-in, we had hoped our bad luck was going to change in 2009 but, alas, while it didn't rain the wind was too strong for most light aircraft. While we did have a limited number of airplanes visit, it wasn't what the club would have hoped for. The model flying club from Boora did put on some spectacular displays over the two days to keep everyone entertained. We look forward to 2010 and returning to the glory fly-ins of the past. If you have ever wondered what it's like to fly in a light



Kevin McGrath (right) after completing his first solo flight with his instructor John Mulkerins

aircraft for an introductory flying lesson or are interested in gaining your PPL (Private Pilots Licence) then you can get all the information you need by contacting our central booking number on 087-7479555. You can also visit our website on www.ormandflyingclub.com Congratulations to Kevin McGrath, Martin Fallon and Stephen Mooney who all completed their first solo flights this year. Congratulations also to Past-Pupil, Conor Moran who successfully completed his Commercial Pilot's licence.

The club would like to extend a warm welcome to all of its new members who joined this year, and wish all its members and neighbours a Happy Christmas and peaceful New Year.

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 Síochána. We raise funds voluntarily with a Church Gate collection in December and an Easter Raffle, permits

are obtained for these activities from An Garda Síochána. *Donations from the public to assist the service are also welcomed.*

Our AGM is held in October each year and at the 2009 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.

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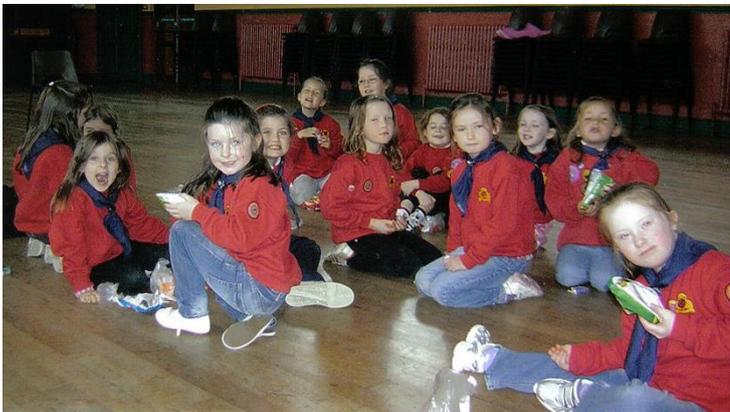
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BIRR GIRL GUIDES

The Girl Guides had a very busy year. We had a bag pack in Tesco in February, to fund-raise for our Annual Summer Camp. Thank you to everyone who supported us and especially to the staff of Tesco for their kindness on the day. We went on an overnight camping trip in May. We went to the Isle of Man on annual camp for a week in July. We travelled by bus and ferry. We had a great time taking part in water sports and activities. We were very impressed with the Isle of Man. The people are very friendly and the island is spotless. We were very tired when we got home but it was a great experience and we have memories to last us a lifetime.

The Ladybirds celebrated their 20th Birthday (20 years in Ireland) in May. Birr Ladybirds took part by attending a

Birthday Party at Turoe Pet Farm in Loughrea. There we met up with other Ladybird Units in the region. We had a brilliant day learning about all of the different animals. We had a tour of the Pet Farm, met a crocodile under the bridge and made a wish at the Turoe Stone. The day ended with a sing song and we cut the birthday cake. We all received a special issue t-shirt and birthday badge. A big **THANK YOU** to our brilliant leaders who give their time voluntarily. They include Linda Dowling, Zara Cordial, Bernadette Lyons, Sandra Guilfoyle, Ronnie Donovan, Martina Cooke and Bernie Cahill. If anyone would like to find out more about Guiding please contact Martina Cooke (District Commissioner) on 057 9125382.



(Right) Birr Ladybirds at Turoe Pet Farm

(Left) Birr Ladybirds at their end of year meeting



Members of Carrig and Ballyloughnane GAA club at their annual dinner dance

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BIRR LIONS CLUB

The Lions Club over the past twelve months has helped a number of clubs and organisations in Birr and the surrounding area. Among those to benefit are St. Vincent De Paul; Sight Awareness Support; Chesterfield Summer Camp; Birr Stage Guild; Assist Suicide Prevention; Birr Church of Ireland; Streetwise Project (P. McIntyre); Birr Active Retirement; St. Brendan's Boys PS and many more well-deserving causes.

The Club organised the usual Christmas Party for the Senior Citizens, in the day-care centre on Sunday 7th December and a most enjoyable day was had by all. We were also involved in the erection of the crib in Emmet Square over the Christmas Period. As a club, we also lent a helping hand

to the Birr Vintage Week Committee in organising the "Capers" night in the County Arms Hotel grounds, on fireworks night.

The funds were all raised by various hard-working sub-committees under the guidance of the President for last year, Mr. Denis Tierney – at fund-raising activities such as – The Annual Fast, Church Gate Collection, Country Fair Collection, Table Quiz and the Annual Review Magazine.

Finally a 'Big Thanks' to you, the general public, and most especially, to the business community for all your generous support throughout the year. As a club, through our activities, we intend to continue to support the youth, the elderly and the underprivileged in the Birr District Area.

BIRR CONFERENCE OF ST. VINCENT DE PAUL

In our 2008 report in the Birr Year Review we outlined very comprehensively the ethos and aims of the society. This year, we would like to stress the spiritual aspect of the society. We, the members, aim to bring the love of Christ to all, especially to needy citizens in the Birr area.

During this period of recession, many are out of work and need material help. Our Conference provides some assistance to local people in need, such as subsidising school buses, summer camp costs, primary, secondary and third level education, day trips, summer holidays for the elderly, food vouchers, fuel and travel to Knock. Our members visit homes, Community Care Units and Nursing Homes.

During 2009, our funding came from the Annual Church Gate collection, proceeds of the shop, the Annual Golf Classic, the Christmas Bingo Raffle, donations and bequests. We are very grateful to all who organised the Golf Classic, to Ronan and the pupils of Birr Community

School who helped on the bingo night in the Marian Hall, to all who donated prizes and all who contribute in any way to "make love accomplish what justice and law can never do" (Frederick Ozanam).

We extend our sincere thanks to Owen O'Neill, who is retiring as President but will still remain a member of our conference. Congratulations to Pat Pilkington, who is now our Regional President.

We regret that Sr. Nora Ryan, who was our spiritual directress and a loyal and dedicated member of St. Brendan's Conference, has gone to Nenagh Convent. We had a little celebration before she left for Nenagh. We wish her every success and many blessings. A wise person once said 'great people pass on and we try to carry on'. May the Good Lord enable us all. We would like to wish all our readers a very Happy Christmas and many blessings in the New Year, 2010.

Sr. Nora cuts the cake at her farewell party

L to R: Sarah Murphy, Monica Boyd, Sr. Nora Ryan, Philomena Kavanagh Neavyn, Maire Purcell, Frances Colclough, John Tierney





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BIRR LEGION OF MARY

A Rosary Rally was held in St. Brendan's church on Wednesday 7th October. This was very special, as it was led by the children from the five primary schools of the Parish. Pope John Paul II, at the Shrine of Our Lady of Knock, in September 1979 said, in the course of his homily "every generation with its own mentality and characteristics, is like a new continent to be won for Christ". The Legion of

Mary, reaching out to these young people, hoped in some small way to follow that advice.

The success of the Rosary Rally was due to the wonderful help and co-operation of many people in the parish, especially Fr. Cahir, Fr. Reddan, the principals of the five primary schools, Gerry Dolan and the choir, Carmel Campbell on the organ, Brian Kennedy and last, but not least, our sacristan, Ger Roberts.



Members of the Legion of Mary enjoying a trip to Glenstal Abbey

(L to R): Mary McGee, Maura Sherlock, Bernie Bolger, Fidelma Clavin, Maura Wrafter, Mary O'Meara

BIRR COMHALTAS ACTIVITIES

The activities of the local branch of Comhaltas vary little from year to year. The most important work of the organisation is the passing on of the tradition to the next generation and this continues to be done through the regular classes in instrumental music and ceili and set dancing. On the music front, the biggest obstacle the branch members have is the absence of a strong musical tradition in the town itself and most of its support comes from the rural areas. However, it is encouraging to note that, of late, an increasing number of parents are recognising the importance of having Irish music taught to their children and, as a result, there has been a notable increase in enrolment for the weekly class.

On the dancing front, there has been an increased interest in the weekly set-dancing classes. These are both instructional and recreational for adults and teenagers alike and the organisers are anxious to attract those who have gone through the various dancing schools to make them aware of the great social attraction of Irish set and figure-dancing. The annual Set Dancing Festival held in Birr

annually at the June Bank Holiday Week-end attracts large crowds from Ireland and abroad.

The branch provides an opportunity annually to experience the best in Irish music, singing, dancing and story-telling at their annual concert held each November in the Birr Theatre and Arts Centre. Less formal functions are held in The County Arms Hotel on a regular basis, with a special youth session in December and An Oiche Cheoil during the Christmas holidays.

Members of the branch played a leading role in organising the hugely successful Fleadh Cheoil na hEireann in Tullamore and also assisted with the Offaly County Fleadh in Rahan. They also participate in the weekly Comhaltas radio programme on Midlands 103.

Most of this work is done by a small but enthusiastic group of people and the committee is anxious to contact anyone interested in any aspect of Irish culture who would like to assist in the work. For further information on Comhaltas activities, contact branch secretary, Donal Morrissey, Seffin, Birr on 0879347968.

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BIRR BRIDGE CLUBS

Birr '66 Club is in its 43rd year and is continuing to thrive, playing on Monday nights in the County Arms Hotel. The club entered a team in the 'Team of Four' competition in the Midland League this year. The 'Intermediate B' team won their section, which was some accomplishment, given the opposition. We congratulate them.

The Camcor Bridge Club also goes from strength to strength, playing on Wednesday nights, in the County Arms Hotel. We were pleased to welcome several new members this year who, inevitably, will be an asset to the club. Two of our members, Margaret Feehan and Colette O'Brien, were successful in winning the 'Novice Section' of the competition in the Regional President's Prize in Mullingar. Well done to both of them.

The club had a very enjoyable social outing in September to the greyhound racing stadium in Galway, where we had an excellent meal and an opportunity to watch and bet on 8 races, with varying degrees of success! We also had the unexpected bonus of seeing the Connaught rugby team beating the Cardiff Blues.

The club will run its usual in-house competitions this year, culminating in the President's Prize, which is held towards the end of our season. Our president for the 2009/2010 season is Michael Dolan, who has taken on the job with great enthusiasm.

Joe Kerins, our bridge mentor, has kindly agreed to provide some refresher lessons for the club members this season. This will be a welcome event.

Bridge is a very enjoyable, challenging game, and differs from many card games in that the player must try to make the correct bid on his hand, taking into account what he believes is in his partner's hand, and, from the bidding, determine what is likely to be in the opposition's hands. He

must also try to remember what cards have been discarded during play to enable him to make his contract. It can be a frustrating game at times but can also prove to be a very happy experience.

Anyone interested in taking up the game should contact our Regional Development Officer, Frank Kelly at 057-9327045 to check if there are any beginners' classes being planned for their area.

Together with 'Golfing in the Glens', we also host '**Bridge in the Glens**' which is now entering its seventh season. The Bridge Club commences on the 1st Tuesday in November, with play starting at 10.30 a.m., continues for the winter months, and caters for all. Players who look forward to the morning game of bridge. Each year a donation is given to a local charity and this season, it was the turn of 'The Streetwise Renovation Project' in South Africa, under the guidance of local builder, Paddy McIntyre. This year we also acknowledge, and salute, the wonderful guidance given by the Birr Bridge Club, one of the oldest Bridge Clubs in the Midlands. It was founded in 1940. In its initial years, the Club had its home in the premises of Birr Golf Club, 'The Glens', before moving to the King's County and Ormond Club, in Emmet Square, and finally to the County Arms Hotel when the Kings County and Ormond Club ceased to exist.

As we commence our 2009/2010 season we remember with great affection Conor Finnegan, Sheila O'Brien and Kevin Delaney, all enthusiastic members of our Bridge Club, who were laid to rest during the year, and we extend sincere sympathies to their families.

Bridge in 'The Glens' is open, and welcomes all bridge players. We look forward to yet another new season as we endeavour to 'master' the intrigues of the game of Bridge.



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Tullamore	6.00 6.30 6.45 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 6.55 7.10 7.40 9.45 14.45	9.45 14.45	9.45 14.35 19.40	18.10
Tyrellspass	6.15 6.45 7.00 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 7.05 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 7.10 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 7.20 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 7.25 7.40 8.10 10.15 15.15	10.15 15.15	10.10 15.15 20.10	18.40
Enfield	6.55 7.25 7.40 7.55 8.25 10.25 15.25	10.25 15.25	10.25 15.25 20.20	18.50

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Baggot St, Leeson St, Harcourt St.

Extra service on Fridays @ 13.00 from Cathal Brugha Street & 13.10 from Ha'penny Bridge

Departing Dublin to Birr	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 17.00 17.15 17.30 17.45 18.15		

Departing Cathal Brugha St.	Monday to Thursday	Friday	Saturday	Sunday
To Portumna	18.00	13.00 18.00	13.00 18.00	15.00 17.15
To Banagher	18.00	18.00	18.00	-----

Note: There are no coaches from Ha'penny Bridge at weekends.
Some changes apply to Bank Holidays

Valid from 01/11/2009 until further notice.

Timetable subject to change without notice.

CARRIG, RIVERSTOWN & KILLEEN ACTIVE RETIREMENT GROUP

We have had yet another very busy and successful year of fun and entertainment. The year started, as usual, with our November Mass in remembrance of our deceased members, relatives and friends, followed by our social evening which included members of neighbouring Active Retirement Groups.

Our outings this year included a very enjoyable day trip to Croke Park, with a guided tour of the stadium followed by lunch. Naturally, we stopped off on the way home at the Newbridge Centre for the ladies to do their shopping!

Our annual holiday was spent in Scotland, with the highlight being a cruise on Loch Ness looking for 'Nessie', who decided to stay in-hiding that day.

Other trips included a night of entertainment at Bru Boru and visits to our neighbouring groups for tea-dances and social interaction.

In the winter, we enjoy our weekly session of indoor bowling and table games and, in summer our Pitch & Putt evenings.

Some of our members have successfully completed and received certificates for computer and horticultural courses.

Our greatest achievement this year was, of course, the launch of our Calendar which was produced by our own art class.



Pictured at the launch of the Calendar

Back Row (L to R): Tommy Moody, Mary Keavney, Chrissie Hough, Maura Wrafter, Padraig Nolan, Dilly Martin, Una O'Brien, Steve Martin, Dorothy Nolan

Front Row: Pat Ryan, Margaret White, Damas Morin, Joan White, Mary Taylor

BIRR APOSTOLIC WORKERS GROUP

The members held their usual events during 2009. They had a very successful missionary effort. Fund-raising events included a church gate collection, Christmas raffle, Bingo raffle and a raffle during their Mission display in April. They raised €8,000 for the needy foreign missions. Members do the embroidery and knitting at home and meet to organise fund-raising events and visits to the Diocesan headquarters in Ennis.

Sr. Nora had been a dedicated member of the Birr Apostolic group for many years and she has now moved to Nenagh. The members here miss her greatly, but they know that she still has an interest in the Missionary effort and is supporting by her prayers and stamp collecting. The active members in Birr are Ann Hough (President), Catherine Murphy, Mary Nolan, Imelda King, Mona Micks and Sr.

Roberta. The prayers and contributions of the honorary members are very beneficial. Fr. Tony Cahir and Fr. Michael Reddan have both spent time on the missions, in Zimbabwe and South America respectively, so there is great support for our missionary effort. The recent visit home of Fr. Colm Hogan and his sharing of experience in Ecuador raised great mission awareness and the generosity of the people of Birr was quite extraordinary. We always welcome new members, both honorary and active. The active members pray and do sewing and embroidery and fund-raising for the missions. The honorary members pray daily for the missions and assist by a yearly contribution. One can also help by donating a sacred vessel, sick call set or a Mass box. If you are interested, you should contact 057-9120084 or 057-9120920 for more details.

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(Dip. Civ. Eng.)

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CRINKILL TIDY VILLAGES AND DEVELOPMENT ASSOCIATION

The Association continued to make progress in the Tidy Towns Competition. This year, we achieved a total of 251 points, an increase of 20 points on the previous year.

Whilst the judge obviously saw a lot of improvement in the village, he/she also pointed out a number of areas where marks were lost. The committee will be studying the report carefully to see where we can improve our performance in the 2010 contest.

If everything goes according to plan, seven new heritage style lampposts will be erected on Barrack Street before the end of this year. This will complete phase one of enhancement works in the village centre. Phase two will be the removal of existing ESB poles and all overhead wiring. The completion of this project will greatly improve this streetscape, which is such a focal point of the village.

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 has made great progress towards the attainment of Green Flag status. Hopefully, the Green Flag will be awarded in the very near future.

The Association could not continue its work without the support of the broader community and we were very encouraged by the generous response to our fund-raising events this year. Thank you to all residents who bought tickets and attended our social nights in Milne's Pub and The Thatch.

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

- Des and Anne Connole, The Thatch for generous sponsorship and hosting the Barbeque and Halloween Party.
- John and Marita Milne, Milne's Pub, for generously hosting our music night.
- 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, Hassett's Topline Hardware and Brian Hart Taxi Services for generous sponsorship of prizes.
- RSS team who continue to play a vital role in maintaining green areas and keeping on top of the litter.
- Offaly County Council – Local Management and Team for co-operation and assistance
- Offaly Local Development Company for advice and support.

The Crinkill Tidy Villages and Development Association will celebrate its tenth birthday in 2010 and it will be our eighth year to take part in the Tidy Towns Competition. Since first entering the competition, our marks have gone from 182 to 251. The emphasis has moved very much towards nurturing wildlife, sustainability and looking after the natural environment. Undoubtedly, there is plenty of scope for Crinkill to continue to progress in this competition.



Children and adults who took part in a litter pick-up to mark National Volunteering Day
 Back Row (L to R): Margaret Hutchinson, Chloe Gorman, Moya Dickson, Kahlia Hart, Chloe Delaney, Emma Kinsella, Jordan Hart, Patrick O'Connor.
 Front Row: Tara Connolly, Olive Connolly, Roisin O'Connor, Bernie Grennan

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SCHOOL COMPLETION PROGRAMME (SCP)

The Roscrea/Birr School Completion Programme (SCP) was introduced to the Mercy Primary School and St. Brendan's Boys Primary School in June 2007. The School Completion Programme is a Department of Education and Science project which aims to encourage children to remain in school and engage in school activities. The Roscrea/Birr School Completion Programme works with three schools in Roscrea: Scoil Eoin Naofa, Scoil Iosef Naofa and Sacred Heart Primary, and two schools in Birr; Mercy Primary and St. Brendan's Boys School.

The Roscrea/Birr SCP strives to use a 'Whole School Approach'. This means that we like to include as many children as possible in our programmes, e.g. the Copping-On Programme for all sixth class students.

Throughout the last school year SCP has facilitated two Community Based After School Groups, individual and small group sessions, Copping-On Programme, Summer Programmes to Delphi, and linking in with students who have transferred in to both the Mercy P.S. and St. Brendan's Boys P.S.. It has also facilitated a preparation for secondary programme in St. Brendan's Community School. This programme explored the difference between primary and secondary school, and new friendships.

There were two community based After School Groups running in the Scurragh area. These groups were divided according to the participant's age and their school class. First, second and third class students attended on Thursday afternoons while fourth, fifth and sixth class students attended on Tuesdays. The sessions were activity-based with a focus on social skills. This gave each participant support with personal and social development, along with developing their interests and individual talents. Along with SCP staff, the groups were co-facilitated by Elaine Eastwood, Dani Dunne, Annette Ryan & Rachel McMahon from the Mercy P.S. and Alicia Ryan from St. Brendan's Boy's P.S.



6th Class from St. Brendan's Boys P.S. in Kilmainham Gaol

The Copping-On Programme focuses on crime awareness and covers subjects such as communication, relationships, right and wrong, awareness of criminal behaviour, drug sense and the judicial system. This programme was supported and facilitated by School Completion staff, Garda Padraic Connaughton from Birr Gardai and Hazel Fleming from the SUB, Youth Diversion Project. To mark each student's participation in the Copping-On Programme, the children were presented with Certificates at their end-of-school celebration. Thirty participants from St. Brendan's Boys P.S. also had an opportunity to visit Kilmainham Gaol.

The School Completion team would like to extend to all of 2008/2009 6th Class pupils their best wishes as they start out in secondary school.

The Scurragh Junior After School Group participants spent a lovely day in Salthill on 24th July. This trip included a visit to the Leisure Centre, some time at the beach and tea in McDonalds.



Megan, Holly and Dionne enjoying their day at Salthill beach

25 of The Scurragh Senior After-School Group participants made a return journey to Delphi adventure centre on Monday 21st July until Wednesday 23rd July. They participated in various activities such as archery, orienteering, surfing and kayaking. Both the children and staff were delighted to be joined by Mr. Michael Carroll from St. Brendan's P.S.

The Scurragh Summer Programme was made possible by the support from the parents and Scurragh committee, particularly with raising funds for these trips. We are delighted to have linked in with Foróige's Big Brother/Big Sister Mentoring Programme and SUB Garda Youth Diversion Project.

The Roscrea/Birr School Completion Programme staff would like to take this opportunity to thank the School Principals, Mrs. Anne Heffernan and Mr. Michael Donegan, Home School and Community Liaison Co-ordinator, Ms. Margaret Teehan, all the staff in the Mercy P.S. and St. Brendan's Boys P.S. and the agencies that worked with us throughout the year for their interest and support. Their input has been invaluable.



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BIRR THEATRE & ARTS CENTRE

2009 has been another hugely successful year for Birr Theatre & Arts Centre. With great numbers attending the wide and varied programme of events hosted throughout the year, the importance of this venue is firmly established in the community and its environs.

There was no shortage of professional theatre throughout the year, with companies from around the country treading the boards in Birr. Some of the highlights included *Life Shop Till You Drop!*, Cecilia Ahern's *Mrs. Whippy*, and Talisman Theatre Company's *Little Red Riding Hood*. As always, Birr Stage Guild made a huge contribution with the Irish première of *The Likes of Us* in March, along with their lunchtime play *Hello He Lied* during the 41st Annual Birr Vintage Week & Arts Festival and their hosting of the One Act Drama Festival recently. PricewaterhouseCoopers Players also returned for their 9th year with their production of *Sleeping Beauty*.

Music lovers were well catered for, with undoubtedly a performance for all tastes. Local musicians, *Mundy* and *Roesy* each held very successful concerts in the course of the past year, whilst the cream of Irish talent was represented by *Michael English*, *Jimmy MacCarthy*, *Tommy Fleming*, *Mick Flannery* and *The Fureys & Davy Arthur*, to name but a few. Opera and classical lovers were entertained with outstanding performances from The Rastrelli Quartet, Opera UK's "A Night at the Opera" and



Neiman Dance Company

"*The Barber of Seville*" and the German soprano *Kerstin Doelle*. One of the most popular of these events was "Vintage Classics" which took place during the 41st Annual Birr Vintage Week & Arts Festival and featured both

John Molloy and Ann Hogan from Birr amongst its line-up. Dance continued to increase its profile this year with Legitimate Bodies Dance Company holding a series of classes for all ages and fitness levels, along with a number of performances. *Pinocchio – The Dance of a Long Nose* took place in April; a joint venture between this dance company and boys from St. Brendan's Boys P.S., Birr, whilst in May the end-of-year performance from the Offaly Youth Dance and First Footing groups demonstrated the talent of these young dancers. A first for Birr, the Neiman Dance Company's appearance in November and Legitimate Bodies' production of *Nutcracker* in December rounded off the year in style.

The Film Club continues to go from strength to strength, its wide genre of films showcasing presentations from around

the world. *Silver Screen*; Access Cinema's programme of films for older people was a great addition to this year's line-up, with a number of classics shown. A series of Movie Nights were held where the audience were encouraged to dress up and sing along to their musical favourites.

In our dedicated exhibition space, "Suas an Staighre", a number of exhibitions were hosted during the year. *Common Ground* - a professionally curated exhibition of local artists ran twice, whilst a group from St. Brendan's Community School occupied this space in February and March, giving these young artists of the future a fantastic opportunity to showcase their talents. Individual showings from *Páraic Leahy*, *Lucy McKenna* and *Eve Parnell* added to the growing reputation of Birr Theatre & Arts Centre as a centre for visual arts. A Sculpture Trail of Birr by the Roscrea artist, Werner Groll, was officially opened in the Theatre in July, with his installations located in a number of local venues. Indeed, so great was the interest in this display that its run was extended.

Hullabaloo! – the 3rd Offaly's Children's Arts Festival took place during the October mid-term, with over 35 workshops and live performances in 8 venues throughout the town. This was a highly entertaining event for all participants, children and parents alike with sessions in dance, art, crafts, circus skills, story-telling, photography, story-writing, and puppet workshops along with a number of live performances. This Festival was kindly supported by Offaly County Council, Birr Theatre & Arts Centre and the Arts Council and it also acknowledged the assistance of Birr Town Council and Access Cinema.

In April, the *Birr Battle of the Bands* took place, whilst the summer months were extremely busy with *Lights Up – Youth Theatre Week*, a *Children's Theatre Summer Camp*, *The Reel World – Filmmaking for Young People* and the *Summer School of Rock* taking place. December sees *Brake Thru*, the opportunity to hear emerging talent before they break through onto the national scene.

There was no shortage of comedy as *Jon Kenny* got 2009 off to a great start. The star of RTE's *The Panel*, *Neil Delamere*, kept audiences laughing with his live show, *Crème Delamere*, as did *Colin Murphy* during his performance in May. A different style of comedy was on stage in August, with Limerick's first comedy improv troupe *Choke Comedy Improv*.



Colin Murphy

Birr Theatre & Arts Centre looks forward to 2010 with great excitement and to welcoming you to this top class venue for some great entertainment.

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41ST ANNUAL BIRR VINTAGE WEEK & ARTS FESTIVAL

On Friday 14th August the Georgian Heritage town of Birr turned back time as the 41st Annual Birr Vintage Week & Arts Festival began. The highlight of the Festival for many people is undoubtedly the Opening Parade and the thousands of people thronged the streets of the town and were in agreement that this was one of the best Parades ever seen. The spectacular display of both the vintage and modern created its own special brand of atmosphere. Marching bands, floats, steam engines, vintage cars, bicycles, tractors, machinery, along with street theatre performers and equine entries, ensured there was something of interest for all ages, and these, along with beautiful autumn sunshine, made sure that this was a highly enjoyable and entertaining family day out.

The Opening Weekend saw a number of other exciting events take place. The Birr Flower Festival "Celebrations", the Ormand Flying Club's Annual Fly-In, the sights and aromatic smells of Le Marché de France European Market, the ever popular Olde Time Traditional Fair on Green Street, with its large range of stalls, and the Children's Vintage Costume Competition, which proved to be as big a hit as ever with a great number of children taking part.

The Festival was delighted to be able to hold a number of free Children's Events including Scooter & Go-Kart Races, Pavement Art competition, Kids Treasure Hunt, along with opportunities to take part in the Festival parade. Sporting enthusiasts had a choice of Vintage Tennis, Mixed Tag Rugby, Walking Tours, Golfing at the Glens, Pilates, a Swim Competition and an U-16 Penalty Shoot-Out. The Donkey Derby once again proved to be a huge family favourite, with a large crowd turning out to participate in a range of competitions and activities, including fantastic live music on the Gig Rig from a number of local bands and the winners of "Birr's Got Talent". The grand finale of this evening was the spectacular fireworks display, which illuminated the skies above the town.

Music lovers were well-catered for with a wide and varied programme of events. Birr Theatre & Arts Centre hosted 'Vintage Classics'; a stunning night of music and song, with John Molloy, Ann Hogan, Vladimir Jablovok and members of the Slovak Festival Orchestra, along with Claudia Boyle and Mairéad Hurley. Later in the week Birr-born singer/songwriter Roesy performed to a hugely enthusiastic audience in the same venue. Aspiring musicians of the future competed in the Michael (Dom) Egan Busking Competition on the streets of Birr, whilst the "Birr's Got Talent" competition showcased the wonderful wealth of talent in the town. There was also nightly entertainment in local pubs, with live music, candlelit nights and inter-pub competitions all adding to the atmosphere of the Festival Week. The Organising Committee were delighted to welcome back Eilis Lavelle as Curator of the Visual Arts Trail 2009, along with



Veteran parade participant Anthony Conroy in 'Nellie'

Carl Giffney and Ruth Lyons. The role of the Arts in the Festival is ever-increasing and the series of exhibitions, events and artists' talks which took place throughout the town bore testament to this. A number of independent exhibitions were also housed across the town, including an exhibition of 21 local artists in The Maltings, a Childrens Exhibition in Birr Library, a group exhibition "Broken Beauty" in Tin Jug Studio, a Sculpture Trail of Birr by Werner Groll, Crinkill National School's exhibition of its past 50 years, whilst local artist Roesy was to be found in The Chestnut. The Antique & Fine Art Fair was, as always, a central part of the Festival and the wonderful array of goods on display and for sale delighted the great numbers of people who visited it.

The Vintage Festival Ball, which drew this year's celebrations to a close, was a rousing success, and all those who attended agreed that this fabulous night was the perfect way to see out the 41st Annual Birr Vintage Week & Arts Festival.

With annual favourites, new events, vintage flavour and modern entertainment, the 41st Annual Birr Vintage Week & Arts Festival proved to be an exciting and vibrant festival which celebrated Birr's remarkable heritage and culture, inspiring participation and enjoyment in everyone who made the effort to come out and sample the events.

The importance of sponsorship, organisation and manpower has greatly increased in recent years as the Festival has expanded. The wonderful local support and wide participation is the key to the continued success of this Festival and the Organising Committee would like to express its thanks to all those who supported the Festival in any way, to all our sponsors for their generous financial contributions and to the clubs, societies, venues, groups and individuals for their vital volunteering spirit and enthusiasm both before and during the Festival.

If you would like to become involved in next year's Festival, please come along to the AGM (see local press for details). For further information check out www.birrvintageweek.com.



The Vintage Week Organising Committee at the Annual Vintage Week Ball

Back Row (L to R): Orla Watkins, Alan Watkins, Liam Spain, Brendan Fogarty, DJ Wilson, Gerri Hynes

Middle Row: Ann Spain, Gillian Pierce, Finula Regan

Front Row: Orla Gibbons, Janine Wilson, Emma Nee Haslam, Dawn Lagace, Laura de Forge, Michelle de Forge

(Missing from the photo: Denis Hoctor, Cyril Stanley, Hazel Greene)



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BIRR COMMUNITY & FAMILY RESOURCE CENTRE

Birr Community & Family Resource Centre is a non-profit making community facility funded by the Midland HSE.

We provide meeting space for voluntary and community groups. We are home to Bá Bóg parent and toddler group, Birr Active Retirement Group, Kidz Kraftz, Literacy groups, Art classes with Tatiana. Discreet Hearing meets here once a month. The Centre is also available to people for childrens parties and other events. 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.

Computer courses are available for specific groups. This year, we held a Foundation Computers course for the Mental Health Group from Wilmer Road and a Traveller Group. Both groups were very well attended and all obtained FETAC Certificates.

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, with a car boot sale. Work from Kidz Kraftz will be on sale to the public in the bazaar. It is hoped that this

will raise much-needed funds for the Centre. There are also subsidised summer camps and various other activities throughout the year. This year, we secured funding from Offaly Arts Council which enabled us to provide two courses for the Kidz Kraftz groups. We facilitated a photography course with Pat Mc Keown for the older age group. This included a field trip to Lough Boora and a Numskulls workshop with Rowena Keaveny for the younger age group. A great time was had by all.

This year, we held a Mega Halloween party for both Kidz Kraftz groups. All the children were asked to come as Street Urchins. This was to get them into making costumes and recycling, rather than buying them. The adults helping, dressed as the Witches. There were games galore and all the decorations, from drawings to Giant Spiders, were made by the children themselves. A 'big thanks' go to all the volunteers who work with the Kidz Kraftz groups.

For more information, contact Mary on 057-9121912 or email her at birrresourcecentre@eircom.

KidzKraftz



Enjoying the Halloween Party are Ivan Daly & Ella Feenane (pictured above)



Pictured above is Ciara Murtagh and left Brandon Corboy



Making Potions are (L-R) Andrea Cooke, Stephen Guilfoyle, Gavin Daly, Megan Larkin



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CHESTERFIELD COMMUNITY CHILDCARE CENTRE

2009 was a very good year for the Chesterfield Community Childcare Centre. The Pre-school is full for this term and has already started a waiting list for next September. Children have a variety of activities each day, some of which include; arts and crafts, make and do, cooking, messy play, sand and water play. The After-school has been a great success this year with full attendance every day. Children will do their homework and then take part in a variety of activities, which include; arts and crafts, various games, cooking, outdoor games, trips to Swimming Pool and Library. The centre also runs a Summer Camp each year. It runs the first week for children aged 5 to 8 years and the second week for children aged between 9 and 12 years. Each week consists of arts and crafts day, sports day, day trips which

have included Lullymore Heritage Park, Avon Ri Outdoor Activities Centre, Roll and Bowl and the cinema.

A new Childcare Leader, Catherine Ferncombe, was appointed in October. She has been working at the centre for two years.

It was a great year for the Youth Club and Foróige Club as well. The children attend on Tuesday and Thursday nights and take part in various activities, which include table tennis, pool, cookery classes, boxing training and demonstrations of applying make-up from a local beautician. The children also attended discos, day trips, bowling and an overnight trip to Mayo, where they went to see a concert.

The Youth Club is run by Kathleen Gallagher and Bridget Lynskey. Kathleen also works in the Pre-school and After-school as a Childcare Assistant.



Chesterfield Summer Camp

Picture includes Jake Hansbury, Christopher Kelly, Niall Cunningham, Megan Pardy, Zac Gallagher, Lauren Kelly, Emmy Hynes, Cliodhna Donoghue, Thomas Byrne, James O'Brien, James Taylor, Ciara Lenihan, Ava Walsh, Josh Gallagher, Roisin Byrne, Leah Byrne, Mia Byrne, Bronagh Byrne



After-school Children enjoying their Halloween Party

Back Row (L to R): Niall Cunningham, Abby Woods, Jordan McKenna, Chloe Walsh
 Middle Row: Josh Gallagher, Ava Walsh, Jakub Stanskiewi, Filip Plonka, Filip Swigon
 Front Row: Lara Hanlon, Aoife McMahan, Chloe Murdock

BIRR MENTAL HEALTH ASSOCIATION

Birr Mental Health Association (MHA) is a local voluntary group whose two aims are to help the mentally ill and their families and to promote positive mental health. Our members comprise 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.

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.

Birr MHA 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, a parenting course and free information leaflets. 2009 was another successful year for our Association. This year we took a number of people on holiday to Youghal, Co. Cork. There were a number of very enjoyable parties organised by our own and other MHAs.

A number of members went 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 MHA'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.

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. Each year, we purchase a pass to Birr Castle. This is a lovely amenity for service users at the Community Mental Health Centre to avail of. The beautiful grounds can provide inspiration for the art group which takes place weekly in the Centre. This year, the group exhibited their work at a National exhibition in Thomastown, Kilkenny. One member obtained 1st prize in his category.

Through the National Lottery Funds, the Association secured funding for computers, projectors, etc., thus allowing clients enhance their computer skills.

As part of our plans for next year, the Association is hoping to launch a collection of books pertaining to mental health issues, which will be made available to the public. All the above events were provided as a result of the generosity of people who contributed to our fund-raising efforts during the year, which included Church Gate Collections, 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.



Olden Days (Late 1960s)
*(L to R): Paddy Donoghue, Jimmy Carter,
Paddy Brady, Tom Lawlor*

BIRR MILITARY HISTORY GROUP TOUR 2009

It was decided early in the year that our trip for 2009 would be to Central/Southern Italy to visit some of the more important WWII sites, which would also allow trips to museums and geographical sites of cultural and historic significance.

We flew into Rome on September 15th and, after taking in the usual beautiful sights, we set off for Anzio to visit the beachhead where the Allies landed behind the German lines in an attempt to break the Gustav Line – a line of German defences that ran across the Italian peninsula at its narrowest point, a distance of 150km. At the Anzio Beachhead Cemetery, we placed memorial crosses at the graves of some Irish members of Irish Battalions and laid crosses at the Anzio War Cemetery. We visited the Anzio Museum which contains remains of Greek, Etruscan and Roman artefacts on exhibit from the British Museum and the Capitolini Museum. Anzio, apart from its military significance was the birthplace of the Roman Emperors, Nero and Caligula and was the site of numerous wealthy Roman villas.

The Tor Caldera Nature Reserve was of interest for its natural sulphur springs, plants, wildlife and viewing tower. After lunch, we visited the Sicily Rome American Cemetery and Memorial, which is one of the best-kept cemeteries we have seen. We met a large group from Clare also on tour. After our guides left us, some headed for the nearby German Cemetery, whilst others remained at the beach before meeting up later. The contrast between how the Germans and Americans look after their cemeteries is quite startling

Next day, we headed for Cassino and visited Monte Cassino, founded by St. Benedict in 529. This most famous Christian Monastery is a massive building perched on, and covering, an entire mountain peak, which made it of great strategic significance during WWII. It had been destroyed on three previous occasions, the last in 1349 after which it remained intact for 600 years until totally destroyed by the Allies on February 15, 1944. They believed, wrongly, that it contained German military defences. In fact, the only casualties were the local people who had taken refuge there because they believed it would be a safe haven. Although utterly destroyed, earlier monks had prepared plans and drawings of the original buildings which have been faithfully rebuilt with some of the materials recovered from the ruins. The reconstruction was funded entirely by the Italian Government, and re-dedicated by Pope Paul VI in 1964. We then visited the Polish Cemetery, where their leader, General Anders, is buried. Although he died in London after the War, he insisted that he be interred alongside his troops. During the week, we also visited the Commonwealth Cemetery, with separate sections for each of the Commonwealth



The group at Anzio Beachhead Cemetery

David Wilson, Ger O'Meara, Brendan Mooney, Oliver Craughwell, Derek Coulter, Val Johnson, John Joyce, Martin Horan, Joe Breen, Martin Hynes, Eamon Coonan.

nationalities who are buried here. We laid crosses at graves of Irish soldiers.

After the visit, we had a long drive on the Autostrada to Sorrento, south of Naples. We dined at the Syrecuse Restaurant and were entertained by local musicians. We had drinks later in an "Irish" bar.

Next morning, we drove to historic Pompeii. After some searching, Joe Breen located an English-speaking guide, who had actually learnt her English in Bray. She turned out to be excellent and took us around the excavations for approximately 2 hours and explained the architecture of the buildings, the businesses that were carried on (some more bawdy than others) and the art that is still visible on the walls of the houses that have been excavated. On Monday, we toured the beautiful Amalfi coast and celebrated Oliver Craughwell's birthday with a drink.

On Tuesday 22nd, the day of our homecoming, we started the morning with some shopping and headed off to Cassino. This time we did a guided tour around the Municipal Multimedia Museum. This had a most impressive presentation of the battle around Cassino and Monte Cassino. Here, movies and three-dimensional special effects are blended with art to create a sense of being in the middle of the action. Our final stop was at a German cemetery in Anzio before driving up the Autostrada back to Rome to catch our flight home.

Thanks as usual to those who planned the trip, organised the flights, hotels and guides and to Brendan Mooney, our Treasurer, who kept a rein on the purse strings. A special thank you to the drivers and navigators, and all who helped in making 2009 a trip to remember.

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SAOL ÚR BIORRA – THE SUB PROJECT

It has been an exciting, fun and challenging year where the SUB project has grown and has worked hard to try and promote active citizenship and personal development. During the course of 2009, we have had many successes. Firstly, we have appointed an additional youth worker, which creates fantastic opportunities, as two heads are always better than one. We have continued to work in partnership with other local agencies, thereby creating a more unified approach to working with youths within the community.

It is difficult to put a year's work on one page so we have decided to highlight a snapshot of some of the projects and programmes completed in 2009.

Kickstart 1 – the FAI introduction to coaching, which resulted in one of the members completing the course and proceeding to work for the FAI during the Summer Camps. A fantastic result all round!!

Soccer Programme – We participated in the midlands league and the team performed very well. We also had our annual match with the Guards, which they won 11-10 so the Garda Youth Challenge Plate is with the local Gardai for another year ... but watch out we will be back with a new and improved strategy next year!

Summer Programme – we work in conjunction with Birr theatre and Gary Hooctor's film school and 5 youths participated in a short production. One lucky youth even appeared in Fair City!! We also worked in partnership with Grove Street residents committee and Crinkill Tidy towns to paint the Basketball court and we intend to plant some lovely bluebells during the autumn. The fruits of our labour will be seen in spring 2010 ... hopefully!

Our orienteering team climbed mountains high and low and came in a whopping 4th with a time of 2hr. 09min. in the orienteering competition held in Wicklow. The mountainous terrain and poor weather conditions did not dampen the lads' spirits and we hope to improve on our time next year, perhaps even bring the competition to Birr!!

Participants in Comhairle na nÓg worked diligently with other youths from around the county to develop a website for young people promoting positive mental health. You can see our team effort, on-line, at www.ohyp.ie

The SUB project, which stands for Saol úr Biorra, and translates into New Life in Birr, is a community based and supported youth development project. It engages young people aged 12 – 18 from the Birr area in a range of positive and constructive activities to facilitate their own personal development and promote civic responsibility.

The SUB is part of a network of Garda youth diversion projects, which are multi-agency crime-prevention initiatives that seek to divert young people from crime and anti-social behaviour. The Project is operated by Foróige and funded by the department of Justice, through Garda Community Relations, the Irish Youth Justice Service and the European Social Fund and supported by the local community.

If you have any further queries or would be willing to volunteer a few hours a week, please do not hesitate to contact the project workers, Hazel & Claire on 086 3845646 / 0867805243 or drop in to 15 Connaught Street and say "hello".

Happy Christmas and a prosperous 2010 from all in the SUB project!!!



Right - Ondrej Turtak with SUB Co-ordinator Claire Fox on RTE's Fair City set

Garda Youth Challenge - Local Gardai play SUB
 Back Row (L to R): Kieran Staed, Brendan Mulvey, Ed Meaney, Brian Small, Fergal O'Toole, Jamie Donnelly, Damien Barron
 Front Row: Shane Kerins, Mark Jennings, Paddy Spain, Willie Hanlon, Michael Lally, Michael Spain



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BIRR LIBRARY

Birr Library, located in the former chapel of St. John's Convent on Wilmer Road plays host to a large number of events during the year. 2009 was one such year.

Offaly County Library Service has always been involved in promoting and participating in the following festivals: Seachtain na nGaelige, National Tree Week, Bealtaine, Birr Vintage Festival, Heritage Week, Children's Book Festival, Hullabaloo Children's Art Festival and Science Week.

The library also has regular events, such as Children's Book Club, Story-Time, author's visits and various exhibitions by local artists located in the atrium.

This year, the lecture Series featured John Quinn (Author), John McIntyre (Journalist & Manager of the Galway hurling team), Susan Chadwick (Genealogical Research) and John Feehan (Senior Lecturer, UCD). These lectures were well attended and show the variety of stock and resources available in the library.

The Boys into Book reading initiative was a new project undertaken by the library and the 6th class students of St. Brendan's Boys P.S.. On the 5th June 2009, 26 boys from 6th class received a special award of achievement in the council chambers of Birr Civic Offices and Library. The awards were presented by Olwyn Enright T.D. and the County Librarian Mary Stuart. In total, the boys read 456 books in the 16-week period. This achievement is more astonishing, considering that the boys were preparing for their confirmation and other local commitments including preparation for the Féile na nGael, which took place in Birr on June 20th.



Karin Leitner (seated) with Derek Fanning, Emma Nee Haslam and Paddy Quigley

Karin Leitner is a renowned flautist from Vienna, Austria, performing worldwide Solo and Chamber Music Concerts. She was a resident in Birr for many years and composed an album – "Earthmagic", during her stay. Karin returned to Birr to launch her CD in July in Birr Library.

Birr Library was the setting for a wonderful afternoon of story-telling on July 4th. Carol Drinkwater captivated her audience with tales of romance, heartache and the search



Carol Drinkwater, pictured with Paddy Quigley

to find the source of the original Olive tree. She told us how her books began as a result of buying an abandoned olive farm in Provence over 20 years ago. She spoke of her travels in Algeria, Tunisia, Egypt, Lebanon, Syria, Iraq, Turkey, Crete, Italy, and Spain - all in search of the oldest living olive tree.



Students who took part in the European Cultural morning from Rath NS, Lusmagh NS, Mercy P.S. and Shinrone N.S.

Offaly County Library Service and the Modern Languages in Primary Schools Initiative (MLPSI) won the prestigious European Award for Languages (EAL), also known as the European Language Label for a joint language project which involved the participation of four Offaly primary schools (Scoil Náisiúnta Naomh Eoin - Rath, Mercy P.S. - Birr, St. Cronan's N.S.- Lusmagh and Shinrone Mixed N.S.). The award ceremony took place on Friday 25th September in Farmleigh. This is the first occasion that a joint initiative between these two organisations has won the award. The support and supply of resources, from Offaly County Council and the MLPSI have ensured that library staff can organise more community-based projects.

A special thanks to Erin Horticulture Ltd., who sponsored our Science Week Gardening workshops.

Last but not least, the building also won the 'Best Heritage Project' in the Zurich LAMA (Local Authority Members Association) Awards 2009.

No doubt, 2010 will have a packed schedule so keep a watch in the local papers for news of forthcoming events.

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BIRR TIDY TOWNS

Thankfully, in the aftermath of a decrease in 2007-2008, we increased our points from 226 to 242, an increase of 16 points. We are delighted for Crinkill and Riverstown/Killeen who respectively increased their marks by 20 and 40. Well done to both groups. Our progress can be attributed to the collective planning of Birr Town Council and Birr Tidy Towns. It is very difficult to increase our marks; it requires a major effort by everyone. Thanks to St. Brendan's Environmental Group, particularly Liam Moran, and to Tadhg Cox of Offaly Local Development Company, who made the planters and flower boxes. Thanks also to all the hard work and planning undertaken by our volunteers, Joe Rigney, Liam Reilly, Bernie Fannernan, Anne Finnane, John and Mary Lawlor and Tony McLoughlin. We would like to thank all the local residents who keep their areas clean and tidy. Going forward, in conjunction with Birr Town Council, we will endeavour to carry out the Birr Town Realm Plan over the coming years. We are also encouraging other groups to keep their areas free of litter and maintain their estates. The private estates work very hard on their maintenance programme. This was very evident in the Local Horticulturist report on the Tidy Towns Competition, which highlighted major improvements in these estates. Congratulations to the winners in the local 'Front and Rear Gardens' competition.



Making a clean sweep (L to R): Ann Finnane, Tony McLoughlin, Bernie Fannernan, Joe Rigney

Sincere thanks to Birr Credit Union for sponsoring the prizes and providing refreshments.

It was a good year overall. A special thanks to all the outdoor staff at Birr Town Council, Roger Smith, Sarah Delahunty, Willie Ryan, Mary Gaughran, Tim Reilly, Caroline Monteith, Pat and Margaret Guinan, Joe and Mary Kerins, Patricia Kennedy, John McDonald, the Midland Tribune and the people who help us financially and physically. Thanks to everyone who keeps their own area clean and tidy...every little helps!

BIRR HISTORICAL SOCIETY

The Birr Historical Society had a great year, with many interesting talks and lectures. These included images of Birr – old photographs from Paul Barber's collection, comparing Birr Past and Present. This was a lovely evening with many recollections of people and places long forgotten. Other talks included the Sterlings of Whigsborough, the history of Cloghan Castle and the Masonic Order in Birr. Jack Ryan recalled the history of the Post Office in Birr from the early days of telegraphy (1836 to 1962) to the transfer of the telephone exchange to Glebe Street in 1984.

Brian Pey finished our series of talks in May with a most interesting lecture on the history of the O'Molloys and the parish of Eglisish and Drumcullen. Sadly, one of our oldest members Tadhg Pey, died in August this year. Tadhg was very involved with the Society, having great local knowledge. He was also a major contributor to the book "Eglisish and Drumcullen, A Parish in Firceall", which was published in 2003 and edited by Brian Pey. In July, Bridget Sullivan organised a very interesting tour to Portumna Castle and also Redwood Castle near Rathcabbin.

The highlight of the year during Heritage Week in August was the unveiling of the Mary Ward storyboard on Emmet

Street. The board commemorates the death of Mary Ward in the world's first motoring fatality, which happened in Birr on the 31st August 1869.

To mark 140 years since the accident, the society organised a mini seminar. We had three speakers in Birr Theatre on the afternoon of Saturday 29th August. Lady Rosse spoke with great insight on the life of Mary Ward, who was a cousin of the 3rd Earl of Rosse. Mary Ward (1836 – 1869) was a remarkable woman, who became famous for her work on the microscope, publishing three science books and many scientific articles.

Dr. Isobelle Fallon spoke about the medical traumas associated with modern day car accidents and then Mr. Denis Dowdall, who is the chairman of the Gordon Bennett Vintage Car Rally, spoke about the safety improvements in the manufacture of cars over the past 140 years. We were also delighted to have with us Lalla Ward, who is the great granddaughter of Mary Ward, to unveil the storyboard. Birr Historical Society meets on the third Monday of the month from September to May at 8pm in Doolys Hotel.

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BIRR STAGE GUILD

Following a hugely successful Christmas concert in the Marian Hall to round off our 50th anniversary year, news came through that Birr Stage Guild, thanks to our wonderful musical director Enda O'Connor, had secured the rights to perform the Irish Premiere of Andrew Lloyd Webber and Tim Rice's "The Likes of Us". Birr Theatre and Arts Centre was packed each night to watch a wonderfully talented cast, including eight brilliant children, sing and dance their hearts out under the watchful eye of director Michael Donegan and choreographer Lisa Byrne.

Having received word of two AIMS nominations for "The Likes of Us", seven of our members travelled to Killarney in June for the awards ceremony. Hopes were high that trophies would be brought back to Birr and there was no one disappointed when Enda O'Connor collected runners up trophy in the "Best Chorus" category and Tommy Lyndon received the Stephen Coleman Trophy and the "Best Supporting Actor" award for his role as The Narrator in 'The Likes of Us'.

The annual Children's Summer Camp took place from July 6th - 10th. Participants enjoyed a fun-filled week of dance,

drama and music with their professional tutors.

During Vintage Week this year we had a lunchtime play, 'Hello He Lied', written and produced by Campbell Black. On August 18th there was a wonderful night of "Vintage Classics" with Ann Hogan, John Molloy, Claudia Boyle, Mairead Hurley and the Slovak Orchestra.

Our 3rd annual One Act Drama Festival ran from October 23rd - 25th. Nine excellent plays were performed over 3 nights and were adjudicated by well-known ADA member Tom Doherty from Derry.

In the open section, Bradan Players, Leixlip won Best Play with "The Quality of Boiled Water". In the confined section the honours went to Backstage Theatre Group, Longford for their performance of "Small Box Psychosis". Two new perpetual awards were presented this year by Ann O'Meara and Tony and Margaret Hogan for Best Actor in both sections.

With lots of ideas for the year ahead, hopefully 2010 will see many great performances from young, not so young, old and new members.



At the Awards Ceremony

(L to R): Tina Ryan, Lisa Byrne, Michael Bermingham, Dawn Lagace, Tommy Lyndon, Mary Lyndon, Enda O'Connor.



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ST. BRENDAN'S ENVIRONMENTAL GROUP

St. Brendan's Environmental Group is a community employment scheme sponsored by FAS. The umbrella organisation was founded in 1995 and since then, many projects have been completed by people in the group. These include works in Birr Town Football Club, Birr GAA, Marian Hall, Birr Rugby Club, Wilmer Tennis Club, Carrig GAA, Carrig Hall, St. Brendan's Church of Ireland, Sue Ryder,

Crinkill Recreation Centre, St. Brendan's R.C. Church, Clareen Church and Birr Citizens Information Centre. The group has also worked with Birr, Crinkill, Carrig, Riverstown/Killeen and Clareen Tidy Towns/Villages committees. 2009 was a very successful year for the group, with many new projects completed.



Pictures show work carried out by the Group during 2009

Clockwise from top left

A supporting wall at Birr Town Fotball Club

The dressing rooms in St. Brendan's Park

The Garden of Tranquility in St. Brendan's R.C. Church



Birr Handball Team 1959-1960

Back Row (L to R): Martin Loughnane, Jimmy Carter, Jim Egan, Pat Sheeran

Front Row: Jimmy O'Brien, Niall Cahill, Joe Coughlan, Jackie Cahill



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The Community Centre in Carrig, plays host to a wide variety of activities throughout the year, and has become integral to the fabric of community life in the Carrig, Riverstown and Killeen areas. From Monday to Sunday there is a constant flow of people in and out of the centre. Sports activities include badminton on Monday evenings during the winter. The young hurlers of the area meet every Friday night, when the evenings are darker, for hurling training with John and Martin.

The active retirement group holds their monthly meeting on the first Monday of the month. Every Thursday sees their members enjoying bowling and a wide array of activities that fill their program throughout the year. Anyone interested in spotting some sharks can come along on Tuesday to card night. While you may not win the jackpot, you can be sure of a cup of tea and some nice buns, thanks to the dedicated ladies. Tuesday also sees some High School Musical wannabes at Hip-Hop classes. The local wildcats dance to the instruction of Grace and her boom box. Those of you who read the last sentence, and had no idea what it was about, may be more interested in the Social Dancing which takes place once a month in the hall. So polish up your dancing shoes and give it a try. On Wednesday mornings, the parent and toddler group fill the hall with laughter and fun, and judging by the numbers present, love must be in the air in Carrig.

What promises to be one of the most interesting and exciting groups has just commenced, with the formation of a Carrig and Riverstown Foroige club. These young people between 12 and 18 hold their meeting on Monday nights during the school term and carry out a wide range of activities.

Carrig N.S. uses the hall for speech and drama and school concerts. The local children who receive First Holy Communion in Carrig Church also enjoy a Communion breakfast in the hall each year when the parents all chip in to make it a day to remember.

The Tidy Towns Committee, the IFA, the GAA and the Community Alert Group also hold meetings in the hall. Every December the local area holds a delicious Christmas dinner for the elder members of the community. Everyone eats well, meets up with old friends and dances the evening away into the early hours. The Carrig and Riverstown Community Centre is indebted to a very dedicated number of volunteers, who give of their time and energy so freely, to help keep the hall at the centre of the community in the Carrig, Riverstown and Killeen area. The hall is a very useful building, but without the people who give freely of their time, during good times and bad, we would not have either this asset or the wonderful array of outlets for Community development and enjoyment that exists.

LEAVING CERT CLASS OF PRESENTATION BROTHERS BIRR 1978



Back Row (L to R): Paul Swarbrick, Noel Teehan, Jim Troy, Martin O'Reilly, Pat Normoyle, Michael Quinlan, Eugene Fleury, Mario Sherlock, Brian Pey, John Carroll, John O'Brien, Joe Verney, Michael Ryan, Eamonn Regan
Middle Row: John Joe Poole, John Byrne, John Reidy, Francis Kearns, Eoin O'Riordan, Brian Hogan, Robert Young, John Hoare, Eugene Wynne, Noel Purcell, Joe Guinan, Pat Teehan, Declan Fogarty, Tommy Nolan, Kieran Scully, Michael Qualely
Seated: Seamus Kennedy, Pat O'Donoghue, Brendan Fitzgerald, Kevin Moloney, Gary De Cleir, Joe Kennedy, Jerry Carey, Paul Flynn, Michael Kinsella, Br Denis
Front: Sean Guinan, Brendan Vaughan, Tiernan Martin, Pat Madden, John Teehan

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Bernadette Owens

B.A. Dip. L.S.

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BIRR**

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CARRIG/RIVERSTOWN PARENT TODDLER GROUP

This group was set up in Carrig Hall nine years ago, in February 2000. The group meets for two hours on a Wednesday morning. It was set up by the parents of the area at the time, with the help of District Nurse, Joan Keane. The group is very popular amongst local parents, grandparents, childminders and of course the children themselves. It is attended by children from Carrig, Killeen, Riverstown, Birr, Rathcabbin and other areas. The group is funded by grants from the HSE, Katharine Howard Fund and membership paid by parents. As a group, we get great support from the Offaly County Childcare Committee,

through courses, support workshops and a morning in Birr Castle, in the summer.

The group enjoys one outing yearly in the summer. We attend 'Jump and Gymns' in Nenagh from time to time. We hold gymborees and parties at Christmas, Easter and Halloween. The present committee includes Amanda Rice, chairperson, Ruth Pinches, treasurer and Geraldine Connaughton, secretary. We are grateful to all who attend and support our group in any way. We encourage new members and will make everyone feel very welcome.



The Toddler group enjoying their Halloween party with their siblings who helped to dress up and create a great atmosphere

BIRR TOWN COUNCIL JOINT POLICING COMMITTEE

In 2006, Birr Town Council was one of 22 locations in the country selected to pilot a Government Joint Policing Committee (JPC) Initiative. The programme was supported by both the Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform, as well as the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government.

The main aim of the Joint Policing Committees is to provide a forum where a local authority and the senior Garda officers responsible for the policing of that area, with the participation of the Oireachtas members and local community interests, can consult, discuss and make recommendations on matters affecting the policing of the area.

The following is a breakdown of the representation on the Committee which was set out in the guidelines issued by the Ministers :-

- 9 Elected Members of Birr Town Council
- Oireachtas Representatives (Deputy O. Enright and Senator P. Moylan)
- Birr Town Manager and Town Clerk and other senior staff as required
- Garda Superintendent, Birr Garda Officers
- 3 community and voluntary representatives (Messrs. B. Harte and C. Carter & Ms. G. Hynes)

The inaugural meeting of the Birr JPC took place in December, 2006. From the outset the committee took the view that its work would be based on an ethos of collaboration and co-operation, with formalities kept to a minimum.

The JPC is chaired by Cllr. Noel Russell and meets on a quarterly basis to discuss issues of mutual concern.



St. Brendan's Community School Senior Hurling Panel 2009/2010

Back Row (L-R): Mr. Michael Lyons, Eoin Hayes, Craig Pardy, Paul McCarthy, Jimmy Irwin, Brendan Murphy, Cathal Parlon, Joe Connors, William Gleeson, Donal Regan, Adrian Hynes, Aodhán Kealey, Michael Kennedy, Christopher Guilfoyle, Mr. Alan Franks
Front Row: Paddy Mullins, Phillip Hogan, Seanie Carroll, Damien Maher, Tom Carroll, Cathal Murray, Kevin Connolly, Kevin O'Connor, Noel Larkin



Presentation made to Liam and Margaret O'Callaghan by Wilmer Tennis Club on the occasion of their move to Boyle in 1980

Back Row (L to R): Mrs. Caffrey, Oliver Craughwell, Ada Cobbe, Michael Delaney, M. Murray, Marcella Grogan, Anne Kenny, Frank Kenny, Mona Collins, Trudy Lynch, Anne Delaney
Front Row: Maura Daly, John Joe Sheeran, Margaret O'Callaghan, Liam O'Callaghan, Miriam Craughwell, Phil McDowell



St. Cillian's Camogie Team that took part in Féile na nGael

Back Row (L to R): Emily O'Brien, Katie Harding, Aoife Plunkett, Siobhan Killeen, Laura Hogan, Rebecca Egan, Cailín Fitzgerald, Stephanie Maher, Charlotte Cavanagh, Niamh Cleary, Ciara Hoctor, Leanne Maher, Danielle Bond, Niamh Collins
Front Row: Aisling Brennan, Sarah Harding, Niamh Killeen, Aideen Freeman, Rachel Dolan, Rachel Brennan, Siofra Ryan

BIRR COMMUNITY GAMES

Another year has passed, and Birr Community Games is going from strength to strength. We built on last year's success, and achieved an outstanding 3 national medal winners in 2009! Well done to Michael Kenny (2nd Boys Discus U16), Sufyan Anjum (2nd Boys Art U10) and Laoise Murray (4th Girls Model-Making U10). The numbers taking part increased at a local level, proving that Community Games is alive and well in Birr.

The Boys U11 Hurling Team had a great victory over Kilcormac-Killoughey to retain the county title. However, they were beaten in the Leinster Semi-final by a strong team from Kilkenny. Many thanks to the team manager and trainers – Johnny Kelly, Tom Carty and Michael Collins. Well done to the panel – Shane Collins, Aaron Talbot, Ben Russell, Mark O'Brien, Morgan Watkins, Rory Carty, Conor Hynes, Michael Milne, Aaron Dickson, Brandon Beale, Jack Pardy, Aidan King, Oisín Murphy, Ryan Kelly, Campbell Boyd, Ryan Hogan, Donal Coughlan, Brendan Hoctor, Dean Cahill and Jack Carroll.

The interest in swimming in Birr continues to grow. This was evident by the number of children competing in the local competition. The county finals were held in Clara and the standard here was high. Nine children progressed to the national finals, which were held for the first time in Athlone. Congratulations to Kieran Riley (U10 Backstroke), Liam Pingree (U14 Backstroke), Christopher Pingree (U16 Backstroke), Sam Pearson (U16 Boys Freestyle), Conor Hickson (U12 Breaststroke), Niamh Heffernan (U14 Breaststroke), Robyn Killackey (U8 Freestyle), and the U13 squad – Conor Hickson, Stephen Guilfoyle, Liam Pingree and William Dwyer. Thanks to MJ Grogan and Margaret Irwin for their time and to Birr Swimming Pool for providing us with such fabulous facilities.

Well done to the boys U16 table tennis team who managed to win the county title by defeating Clareen. Unfortunately, they were defeated by Westmeath in the Leinster competition. Well done to the team – Sean T. O'Connor, Fionn O'Carroll, Gary O'Brien, Thomas Bailey and Aaron Flanagan. This was the first table-tennis team entered by Birr for the last few years and, hopefully this interest will continue into 2010. Thanks to Bernard McGuirk, who acted as team manager and co-ordinator.

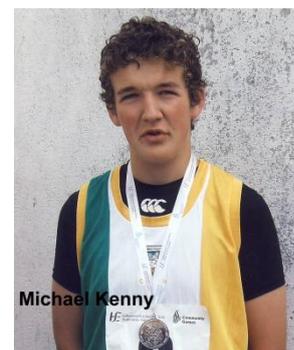
Once again, the interest in athletics was enormous. We were lucky with the weather for both local and county competitions. Birr did very well at county level and, in total, 12 children progressed to the national finals in AIT. The highlight of this event was, without doubt, Michael Kenny's silver medal in the U16 discus competition. Michael (pictured) was leading all the way and was just beaten in the last throw, in horrendous weather conditions. It has been a long time since Birr won an individual medal in a field event and we are all very proud of Michael on this fine achievement. Congratulations to all our competitors who

competed nationally – Aoibheann Carty (U10 Girls Hurdles), Nicky Turtak (U12 Boys Ball Throw), Daniel O'Meara (U12 Boys Long Puck), Oisín Murphy (U12 Boys 600M), Kayleigh Shiels (U14 Girls 100M), Shauna Byrne (U16 Girls 1500M) and the Girls U12 Relay – Gillian Irwin, Frances Hoare, Moya Dickson, Laura Maloney and Aisling Garland. Many of them qualified for semi-finals/finals, so well done. Thanks to all who helped out at training – Margaret Irwin, Valerie Reynolds, Catherine Barry, Marie Brady, Michael Kenny, Tom Carty, Ronan Coughlan and Tracy Milne.

The Birr U11 Rugby Team managed to retain the county title again this year, fighting off both Brosna and Ferbane. Unfortunately, they didn't progress any further in the Leinster competition. Squad – Michael Milne, Oisín Murphy, Conor O'Meara, Robert Haines, Laura Sampson, Eoin Stapleton, Doireann Errity, Luke Barry, Conor Guilfoyle, Ben Russell, Conor Hynes and Jack Pardy. Many thanks to their coaches Tony Murphy, Eamonn O'Meara and Catherine Barry.

Well done to the U11 Mixed Tag Rugby who took the silver medal at the county finals and to the U14 Mixed Team, who took home the bronze medal. Hopefully, Birr can build on this and aim for gold in 2010! Thanks to Pieter Swanepoel, Eamonn O'Meara and Catherine Barry for their time with both teams.

Once again, the entry in the Art and Model-Making competition was enormous and great credit must go to the children and their teachers for promoting this event. Birr hosted the county final in the Marian Hall. In total, 6 children went forward to represent Birr nationally. The major highlights this year were Sufyan Anjum, pictured, who won a silver medal in the Boys U10 Art, an improvement on his bronze medal last year in the same category, and Laoise Murray who came 4th in the Girls U10 Model-Making competition. The standard in these events is outstanding, so well done to them both and to all our competitors- Laura Hogan (U14 Girls Model-Making), Emily O'Brien (U14 Girls Art), Luke Barry (U10 Boys Model-Making) and Stephen Guilfoyle (U12 Boys Art). Thanks to all who assisted at



Michael Kenny



Sufyan Anjum

BIRR Year Review 2009

making this event possible –Margaret O'Brien, Serina McGovern Dempsey, Margaret Irwin, Catherine Barry and Valerie Reynolds.

The interest in Chess and Draughts was down on last year, perhaps a sign of our changing times! The U12 Chess team won the county title, but came up against a very strong team from Westmeath in the Leinster competition, who ran out the winners on the day. Well done to Michael Carroll, Andrea Cooke, Aoibhe Whelehan, Conor Fleury, Clodagh Carroll, Frances Hoare and Dillion Heffernan. Thanks to Dooley's Hotel for providing us so kindly with a venue for this event.

Birr entered a team in the group dance competition for the first time, and the girls won the county title. They then competed nationally in Athlone, which was a great experience for them. They choreographed all their own moves and put in an energetic performance. Well done to Gillian Irwin, Laura Keigher, Ciara Maloney, Jane Bracken, Anna Barry and Megan Shiels.

Birr were unfortunate not to claim the county title in the Boys U13 Handball competition. They had home

advantage, but Rhode proved too strong. Thanks to Kevin Cooke for training the teams and, hopefully, they will be back again to compete in 2010.

The Girls U-14 Camogie team came up against a strong team from Shinrone at the semi-final stage and were unable to overcome them.

Keep up the hard work, girls, and better luck next year. Thanks to their team managers of Mick Hough and Denis Hctor.

So as you can see Birr Community Games is going strong. If you feel you could help out, or have an

interest in an event that we don't participate in (there are many!), please don't hesitate to contact any member of the 2009 committee –Tony Murphy (chairman), Catherine Barry (secretary), John Gleeson (treasurer), Margaret Irwin, Valerie Reynolds, Noel Coughlan, Margaret O'Brien, Serina McGovern-Dempsey and Frank Higgins.



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Olwyn Enright T.D.

Laois/Offaly Fine Gael TD
Spokesperson on Social & Family Affairs

*Should you wish to get in touch
with me, I can be contacted at:*

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BIRR TOWN FOOTBALL CLUB

The season 2008-2009 proved to be a successful one on the playing fields for Birr Town. However, it was tinged with sadness with the untimely passing of club chairman Frank O'Connell. Frank held the office of chairman for over twenty years and was instrumental in all the success the club enjoyed, both on and off the field, in that period. Frank both played and coached for the club for over thirty years and was widely respected both at local and national level. Under Frank's chairmanship the club rose to be one of the top clubs in the midlands and was one of the first rural clubs to host an international match when in 1999, the Republic of Ireland hosted Sweden at U-21 level in Woodfield Park. The void left by Frank's passing will never be filled and we will always cherish his memory.

Birr Town also mourned the passing of Eugene Niland and Michael Pardy. Eugene coached at schoolboy level and was also coach to the first ladies team to represent Birr at senior level. Michael played on the first Birr Town team to bring honours to the club in the early 1970's and indeed was top scorer for the club in that season. They both will also be fondly remembered.

On the playing fields, after the disappointment of relegation in the previous season, the Birr Town First Team bounced back in great style by winning the First Division and, thus, claiming their place back in the Senior Division. They also had successful runs in cup competitions, reaching two semi-finals. On the Schoolboy/Schoolgirl front, pride of place must go to our U-14 girls squad, who clinched their third trophy on the trot. There was also success for the U-10 boy's team, who won their division. The club continues to field teams at all levels from U-8's to senior sides. The welcome addition of girls at U-12 for the coming season and the return of the



Birr Town Senior Captain, S. Ryan, receiving the Division I trophy from Liam Lennon, C.C.F.L

ladies at Senior Level show how the club continues to strengthen. This year is the 40th anniversary of the club's founding and in those 40 years the club has grown in strength. This, in no small way, is due to all the people who worked so hard for the club in that time.

The people of Birr must also take credit for their support down through the years and the club will always be eternally grateful for that support. The club remains self-financing and is very grateful to the people of Birr for their support of the weekly lotto. This remains the club's major source of income. Anyone wishing to help in any way with the running of the club, whether it be in coaching or organisation, can do so by contacting any of the following club officers : Chairman PJ Hoctor on 087 2432513, Secretary John Kenny on 086 8892429, PRO Liam Lennon on 086 8879508.



Birr Town Senior Team 2008/2009

*Back Row (L to R): R. Mitchell, D. Loughnane, P.J. Hoctor, P. Fitzgerald, A. Corboy, R. Cordial, M. McGrath, B. McEvoy, M. Cordial, S. Corboy, S. Noonan, H. Kearns, W. Coughlan, S. Maher
Front Row: B. Harding, P. Egan, S. Ryan (Capt), D. McLoughlin, S. Byrne, J. Joyce*

THOMAS W. ENRIGHT

SOLICITORS

JOHN'S PLACE, BIRR

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Fax: 057-9120802

Email: twenrightsol@eircom.net

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BIRR RUGBY CLUB

Birr fielded three youth teams this season, under 14, under 16 and under 18. The under 18 team competed in Midland League, Leinster League and Culliton Cup reaching the quarter final of the Leinster League. The under-16's competed in Midland League, Leinster League and McAuley Cup. The highlight of their season was reaching the last eight in the Leinster Cup (McAuley Cup) competition. The under-14 team had a very successful season, winning the Midland League and the Leinster League. They also reached the final of the McGowan cup, losing narrowly to Kilkenny in Donnybrook. Coached by Jerry Dooley and John Heffernan, they were undefeated up to the Leinster Cup (McGowan Cup) Final.



Under 14 Panel

Jack Kennedy, Sam Eaton, Raphael Slowikowski, David Kearns, Billy Connors, Aaron Dolan, Cathal Hogan, Peter Dooley, Graham Lynch, Conor Fitzgerald, Conor Doughan, Seamus O'Connor, Peter Horan, Bryan Donnelly, Conor Guinan, Brendan Heffernan, David Kearns, Oisin Clarke, Jack Cleary, Oscar Slowikowski, Ryan O'Meara, Andrew Browne, Brendan Bergin



Under 16 Team

*Back Row (L to R): Dean Bracken, Garry Drought, Chris Dooley, Mark Guinan, David Doughan, Dean Nagle, David O'Neill, Damien Gormley, Thomas Bailey, Issac Smith, Maurice Guinan
Front Row: Gearoid de Cleir, Peter Kelly, David Horan, Donal Spain, Seamus Hcctor, Kealan Moran, Mick Kenny*

BIRR LEPRECHAUN AND MINI-RUGBY

We have a thriving Mini-Rugby division in Birr Rugby Club, thanks in no small measure to tremendous work being done by many parents and rugby enthusiasts over the past decade. Mini-Rugby covers all ages from 5 to 12 years of age and is open to girls and boys alike.

In 2007, we introduced teams playing at less than 7 years of age. This is under the rules of Leprechaun Rugby where this is a non-contact game. As part of the IRFU long-term player development programme, the rules of Mini-Rugby vary according to the various age groups, in order to match the child's natural mental and physical development.

In the 2009/2010 season we have over 100 players participating in Mini-Rugby in Birr. We have fielded teams in Leprechaun, U'8, U'9, U'10, U'11 and U'12 age categories. We train on Saturday mornings at our Moorpark grounds at 11 am. Please come along and introduce yourselves if you are interested in playing or helping out. Brian Hogan (087 6833760) is the current

contact as Mini-Rugby coordinator. The ethos of Mini-Rugby is to introduce the game of rugby in a safe and enjoyable manner, ensuring participation and inclusion. In line with the IRFU Long-Term Player Development (LTPD) Pathway, the principle of players first applies at all times.

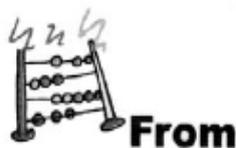
In Birr Mini-Rugby, we strive to make this a place where all children can feel safe, have fun and learn the game of Rugby. There are three main rules: Respect your coaches and team-mates, Good behavior is expected and Everyone is equal.

All participants in Birr Mini-Rugby adhere to all aspects of the IRFU Code of Conduct for Players / Coaches / Parents and Spectators. Our coaches have and continue to attend the regular coaching seminars organised by the Leinster Branch, and we strive to instill in our players a respect for the game and all those involved in it, with a special emphasis on referees, who are only human after all!!



Birr Rugby Football Club U'12 Squad – Picture includes

Shane Hogan, Conor Guilfoyle, Oisín Murphy, Callum Dempsey, Ashton Conn, Conor Meaney, Robert Haines, Conor Hickson, Eoin Bergin, Mike Milne, Martyn Hynes, Jack Parry, Mark Dunne, Jamie Grimes, Sean Kinsella, Oisín Hickey, Conor O'Sullivan, Donnacha Purcell, Conor Davis, Thomas Kennedy, Sam Baker, Gordon Shannon, Philip Gee, Aaron Dixon, Aidan King



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WILMER TENNIS CLUB

The past year has been a very busy one at the Wilmer Tennis Club. Major work was undertaken on improving the courts, there was plenty of competitive activity throughout the year and the club enjoyed more success in the Midland League.

The club was delighted to welcome a lot of newcomers to tennis this year. The number of members playing regularly was definitely up on previous years and it was encouraging to see so much activity on the courts right through the year. Early in the year, the club had to undertake major work on the courts. In recent years, flooding had become a regular problem and action had to be taken to remedy this. This involved a process called rejuvenation, which entailed the removal of all the sand from the courts, cleaning them, restoring the carpet and putting new sand back in. The process completely restored the surface back to its original condition and playing characteristics. It proved to be very successful and members were delighted with the results. The courts were like new again and that encouraged a lot more people back into playing.

It did cost a lot of money, and along with the installation of new light meters for the club's floodlights, over €14,000 was invested by the club in the early months of the year. The club ran a series of table quizzes to help raise funds for the project, which were a great success, and thanks to Dermot Horan for all his work in helping to make these quizzes the success that they were.

On the playing front, the club was very active in the Midland League this year and collected one title. This went to the Division 4 team of Karen Smith, Sinead Watkins, Jim Bob O'Donoghue and Donie Corrigan.

After victories over two Templemore teams in the quarter finals and semi-finals, they had to travel to Nenagh to take on Nenagh in the final. The Wilmer team won the men's doubles but lost the ladies doubles, while the two mixed games were shared, which meant the match was all square at 2-2 at the end of the regular games. So it went to a reverse mixed (the tennis equivalent of extra time), which the Wilmer team won by 6-2 to clinch the title.

The club also had teams in action in Division 1, Division 3, Division 5 and Division 6 and they all qualified through their groups and early knock-out games to reach the semi-finals. Unfortunately, they all lost at that stage, with both the Division 3 and Division 6 teams losing in extra time in reverse mixed.

The club's senior open week in July attracted one of the biggest entries of recent years. Along with a large entry from local players, there was great support from surrounding clubs with good entries from Nenagh, Puckane, Roscrea, Templemore, Abbeyleix and Tullamore, to name a few.

Tennis was played to a high standard throughout the



Winners & Runners-up - the ladies doubles competitions

Back Row (L to R): Brendan Mullins, Therese Cadell, Kathleen Pardy, Karen Smith, John O'Callaghan
Front Row: Samantha Horan, Catherine Gibson, Lily Gibbons, Betty Hunt, Bernie Maher

week, culminating in nine finals on the Saturday night.

Because of the big entry, organisers had to schedule lots of matches each night and with many of them running to three sets, there were some very late night finishes. On the Thursday night, play didn't finish until 2.45a.m. but that was surpassed on the Friday night, when the last match came off court at 3.10a.m.! Despite the late hours, plenty of spectators stayed on to the end watching these matches, such was the standard on display.

At the presentation after the finals, club chairman John O'Callaghan thanked everyone who had supported Open Week and made it one of the best weeks in years. He thanked all the players who had shown great patience and understanding with the scheduling and stayed on late to play their matches.

The chairman also extended thanks to their sponsors, including AIB, Birr Credit Union, Grant Engineering, Paul Barber, Hedgerows and GK Sports, for their support.

There was a fabulous array of prizes on display and Club President, Lily Gibbons, then presented them to the winners and runners up.

The club did manage to keep a few of the titles at home. Catherine Barry defeated Margaret Feeney in an all-Wilmer Ladies Singles Final, while John O'Callaghan and Mary Horan won the Mixed Doubles 'B'. The club was also represented in five of the other seven finals.

A number of club players also travelled to Open events around the country during the year and it is good to see that Wilmer players can match the best at a competitive level. The club entered a float in the Vintage Parade again this year. Thanks to Peter Eastwood for organising the float and to everyone who helped to put it together and those who were on the float in the parade. It was a great



Prize-winners in the Handicapped Mixed Doubles Championships at the Open Week

Back Row (L to R): Catherine Barry, Brendan Mullins, Betty Hunt, Eoin Seymour

Front Row: John O'Callaghan, Mary Horan, Lily Gibbons, Ger McKenna, Samantha Horan

effort, so well done all round. Also during that festival week, the club held its annual Vintage Tennis tournament. There was a very big turnout and most people put in a great effort in dressing in vintage gear for the occasion. Congratulations to Mary Horan, who was judged best-dressed lady, and Pat O'Gorman, who was judged best-dressed man, on the night. Thanks to Anne O'Meara, who judged the competition and sponsored the prize for the best dressed lady. A very enjoyable vintage tennis tournament followed. As we head towards the end of the year, there is still plenty of activity ongoing at the club. At the time of writing, the club championships are ongoing and once again there has been a huge entry, which is very encouraging. Tennis will continue throughout the Winter months and is a great way to keep fit during the long dark evenings. The club has a very good social side as well, and it's a great way of developing new friendships. New members are always welcome, so if you're looking for a good healthy sport that you can play all year round, drop in to the Wilmer Tennis Club, You will be more than welcome.

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BIRR CAMOGIE CLUB

This year was another year of mixed fortune for the Birr club. The highlights were winning the 'Junior' title against St. Sinchills in September and the 'Minor B' title against Kilcormac/Killoughey in October. It is great to have some silverware at the end of the year.

We entered teams at Under 10, 12, 14, 16, Minor and Senior grades again this year and our membership numbers are up on last year. This is a very good sign of things to come in the future if all these girls continue to play up along the age groups. We have girls as young as six years coming to the training sessions and they are so eager to learn the skills of the game. We had some new parents helping out at underage level and many thanks to them for giving their time to help the club develop. It is very much appreciated.

The under 8's and 10's played in some blitz competitions and did very well in them. They won out the blitz organised by our own club in both under 8 and 10 age groups, beating teams from Drumcullen, St. Rynaghs and Kilruane. Well done to all involved with these great groups of girls. Our under 12s and 14s took part in the championships and played some lovely camogie. They were very unlucky not to have got to semi-final stages. These girls are gaining great experience from their coaches and are sure to be winning titles in the not so distant future. Most of these girls also took part in Feile na nGael this year. They all had a great week-end in June as we entertained Kiltale from Co. Meath. The girls made new friends over the week-end and they all took part in an excellent parade through the town on the Friday evening. They looked fantastic walking under the beautiful new banner. The team did not reach any final but Kiltale reached the division 3 final but lost to the Kerry team. Kiltale have invited the Birr team to visit them and the plans for this are in progress at the moment.

Our under 16 team did really well this year. They played in the 'A Competition' reached the semi-final against Drumcullen, whom they beat in their first game by a single point in Crinkill. Birr played some excellent camogie and some of these girls will definitely be stars of the club in a few more years at senior level. They were very unlucky in the semi-final as they had at least three balls cleared off the line in the final few minutes of the game and were bitterly disappointed in the end. But this is a very young team with girls as young as eleven years making the panel.

The Minor Championship didn't start until September and we were unlucky to lose our first game against Naomh Brid by two points. Therefore, we qualified for the 'B Competition' and a game against Kinnitty, which ended in a draw. The girls did very well to come back from four points down in the second half and could easily have won this game. The replay for set for Crinkill but on the morning of the game, Kinnitty gave us a walkover as they couldn't

field a team and so we played Kilcormac/Killoughey in the 'Minor B' final. That final was played in Banagher and Birr won well by a seven-point margin after a great team performance on the day. This was very important for the development of the club as most of this team have been together for the past four years. All of the girls on the panel are underage again next year. Every girl gave excellent displays of skill and determination to win this final and it was the perfect way to end the season for the club as this was the last final to be played this year.

The Senior team were in a tough group in the Championship with Kinnitty, St. Sinchills, Tullamore and Shinrone. We drew with Kinnitty in our first game. We lost heavily to Tullamore and also to Shinrone before a narrow victory against St Sinchills. This meant that we were out of the running for the Senior title and qualified for a Junior Championship Semi-Final against Lusmagh. This game was won easily, with some fine individual displays on the day. We were now in the Junior final against St Sinchills. The final was played in Lusmagh and an excellent display of camogie by all the team saw them win easily in the end and, once again, the Junior Championship was back in Birr. Many thanks to manager Mick Mulrooney and selector Patrick Hctor for their work with this team.

On the county teams we were well represented at all levels. Dawn Whelahan, Aine Delahun, Ciara Ryan and Ria Harding were on the Under 14 panel. At Under 16 we had Caroline Soupe, Shauna Carroll, Emily Quinlan and Orlagh Kirwan. At Minor level, we had Shauna Carroll, Emily Quinlan, Jane McCarthy and Julie Stephens. Our Junior players of Audrey Kennedy, Arlene Watkins, Sheila Sullivan, Katie Bergin and Orlagh Kirwan did us all proud on the 13th September in Croke Park picking up an All-Ireland Junior Camogie Medal as they beat Waterford in the final. This was a great honour for our club, as we had the biggest representation from any club in the county which shows the talent that we have within the teams. Audrey and Arlene were then announced among the fifteen players named as Soaring Stars 2009, which are Camogie Association Awards for players from the Junior Championship. Offaly players received six of the fifteen awards and it was fantastic that Birr players got two of them. Very well done to all who represented the Birr club at county level.





Minor 'B' Team

Back Row (L to R): Eimear Teehan, Jane Ryan, Jane McCarthy, Julie Stephens, Sarah Pilkington, Dearbhaile Sheils, Kelly Ann Milne, Angela Ryan, Jessica Spain, Orlagh Kirwan.

Front Row: Fiona Guinan, Ria Harding, Nadia Feehan, Gillian Molloy (capt), Caroline Soupe, Rebecca Hctor, Emily Quinlan, Shauna Carroll. (Missing from photo is Laura Roddy).

BIRR LEISURE CENTRE

The past year has been a successful year for Birr Leisure Centre. Despite the current economic climate, we have continued to enjoy the support of the Community, Local Clubs and Schools, and it is through this support that our job of running the Centre is made that much easier. It is with great pleasure that we, as a Board, can announce that we are Debt Free. It took a lot of time, hard work and effort by current and past committee members to get a fully refurbished state-of-the-art Leisure Centre. Now our job, on a day-to-day basis is to run it as efficiently as possible, while still keeping our prices affordable.

The Centre is a non-profit making facility, our un-official motto is "Owned by the Community, Run by the Community for the Community". It is with this motto in mind that we strive to keep our prices as low as possible. We are confident to say our prices compare very favorably with those of other centres in the midlands and beyond.

We provide Public Swims, Aqua Aerobics, Children and Adult Lessons, One-to-One Swim Lessons, Swim Club, School Swim Lessons, Lifeguard and Swim Teachers Courses. On the second floor, our air conditioned Class Studio accommodates Pilates, Circuit Training, Bums and Tums, Step Aerobics, Spin Classes, and Gymnastics. We also have a fully equipped Gymnasium.

One major aim in the coming year is to cut the energy costs of running the centre, so we have started to explore the possibility of using some green energy sources which, while reducing our energy costs will make us more

environmentally friendly, and reduce our carbon footprint. It is to this end that we have enlisted the help of a local Company "Grant Engineering", who have been good friends of the centre through the years; working together we hope to attain a more eco-friendly facility.

This year, we were nominated as a finalist in the L.A.M.A. Awards for best Recreational Facility. We didn't win but to be nominated was an achievement in itself.

We are very lucky in the centre to have a dedicated staff (both full and part-time) and a hard working Manager. It is with their help and the continued support of the Community that we hope the coming year will be just as rewarding as the one gone by.



Picture shows Staff at the Leisure Centre

Back Row (L to R): Csilla Varga, Valerie Meagher, Marian Carter (Manager) Ellen Cashin, Yvonne Cochran.

Front Row: Paddy McDonnell (Gym Instructor), Brendan Fogarty

CRINKILL SPORTS AND RECREATION CENTRE

Crinkill Handball Club has once again taken centre stage on the national handball circuit with 76 All-Ireland fixtures being decided at the venue from juvenile to over 65's. In addition to these games, 32 Leinster matches were played there throughout the year. Due to our geographical location and top class alleys, Crinkill has been the most used facility outside of Croke Park for national handball fixtures.

After a 21-year gap, Crinkill once again played host to the 2009 Féile na nGael handball championships. A total of 64 teams from around the country took part in 10 different divisions breaking all past records for the event.

Crinkill had teams competing in both the 40x20 and 60x30 codes and, though they didn't win any team honours, Ian Hoare and Conor Smith won silver medals in the individual skills event.

Currently there are over 30 juveniles playing the game, with new players joining our club every year. Hopefully this trend will continue and All-Ireland success will follow in due course. On the adult scene handballers Billy Mullins and Jim Guilfoyle are still at the top of their game having taken victories in the Leinster and All-Ireland Emerald Masters Doubles Championships. Also Billy (*pictured above right*) secured the singles title in the same grade.

This pairing has dominated the master's for the last number of years and, with handball being a game for life, these players will enjoy success for many years to come.

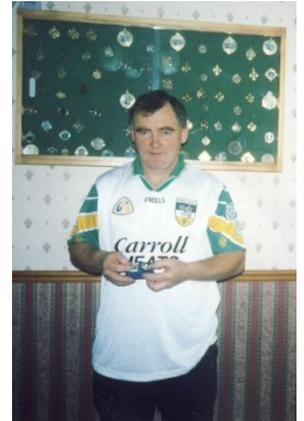
Another one of the clubs talented players is Conor O'Brien who partnered fellow county man, David Hope from Rhode in the Junior Championship, where they won the Leinster title. They reached the All-Ireland final but werenarrowly defeated in the tie-breaker.

The club team also reached the final of the Leinster Interclub 60x30 championship, where they were beaten by St. Canice's of Kilkenny in a thrilling encounter.

The team on this occasion was Noel O'Brien, Séan Ryan, John Mullins, Stephen Kane and Kevin Cooke.

With regard to development, the club has secured three part-time employees through Pobal's Community Service Program. This will allow us to offer a greater variety of sport and fitness programs for all ages. Some of the options open to the public include adult and juvenile Handball, Badminton, Boxercise, Pilates and Kickboxing.

We would like to take this opportunity to thank the community for their valued support, without which the club would be unable to function at the level at which it does.



Crinkill 60x30 Handball Team 2009

(L to R): Kevin Cooke, Sean Ryan, Noel O'Brien, Stephen Kane, John Mullins



Pictured Below

Crinkill Handball Team prepare to take part in the Féile na nGael Parade





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BIRR GAA



Birr hurling team taking part in the Féile na nGael parade

The Féile na nGael National Finals were hosted by Offaly/Laois for a second year in a row. The finals were due to be held in St. Brendan's Park but the week before the finals were due to take place, they were moved to Tullamore. Although this caused huge disappointment, everyone worked on to prepare for the finals parade. This took place on Friday 19th June and proved to be a spectacular event. Over 200 hurling and camogie teams marched from St. Brendan's Park, through Emmet Square where a review stand was based, and on to the Main Street and around Castle Street. The parade brought thousands to the streets of Birr and brought many people to the Birr area for the weekend. Birr hosted Thurles Sarsfields for the weekend and a big 'thank you' is extended to all who helped out over the weekend.

On the playing front, the year wasn't as successful as Birr



Birr Camogie team taking part in the Féile na nGael parade

supporters have come to expect. At underage level, the U-12 and U-16 hurlers both reached their county finals before falling to Ferbane/Belmont and St. Rynaghs respectively. Birr senior hurlers reached the semi-finals before being beaten by the eventual county winners, Tullamore. While, at intermediate level, the team reached the county final before losing to Brosna Gaels. The Birr U-12 hurlers won the Billy Nevin Cup, defeating neighbours, Kinnitty. The Birr area Community Games hurlers won the county final for the third year in a row. They lost in the Leinster semi-final to the Kilkenny champions who went on to win the All-Ireland title. St. Brendan's Boys P.S. won the Offaly Cumman na mBunscoil seven-a-side title in October. The Boys School also won the Cuman na mBunscoil Football title in early November, defeating Coolderry in the final. The victorious panels were Daniel O'Meara, Shane Donovan, Dylan Watkins, Mark Haines, Eoin Cahill, Cathal Kirwan, Dylan Quegan, David Mullins, Conor Guilfoyle and Morgan Watkins.



Ryan Kelly with the Billy Nevin Cup

The Birr players who represented Offaly this year were:
 Senior Hurling: Brian Mullins, Paul Cleary, Michael Verney, Rory Hanniffy, Dylan Hayden
 Senior Football: Sean Ryan, Stephen Lonergan
 U-21 Hurling: Barry Harding, Donal Ryan, Mick Mulrooney
 U-21 Football: Donal Ryan
 Minor Hurling: Brendan Murphy, John McIntyre, Tomas Bolger
 Minor Football: Tomas Bolger
 U-16 Hurling: Kevin Donovan, Colm Mulrooney, Eoin Hayes, Peter Dooley, Patrick Mullins
 U-15 Hurling: Peter Dooley, Patrick Mullins, Cathal Hogan, Sean T. O'Connor, Eoin Pilkington
 U-14 Hurling: Emmet Nolan, Conor Nolan, Stefan Feehan
 U-14 Football: Aaron Coffey.



Under 10 Hurling Team, with mentors Johnny Kelly, Tom Carty, Pat Thompson

Back Row (L to R): Rian Digan-Sullivan, Campbell Boyd, Sean Thompson, Donal Coughlan, Jack Parady, Morgan Watkins, Richie Camon, Conor Brummell, Nichols Cordial, Rory Carty
Front Row: Shane Maloney, Darragh Coffey, Jack Ryan, Mathew Molloy, Ryan Kelly, Oisín Murphy, Michael Milne, Dylan Murdock, Kieran Riley, Alex Smith, Finn Dempsey, Mark Reddin

WOLFTRAP CYCLING CLUB

Membership: Cycling is a growing activity in Ireland at present and Wolftrap Cycling Club has benefitted from this interest in cycling. In 2009, our membership grew to a total of 60, with new members of all ages joining throughout the year. 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

Beginners Group: The club ran a Beginners Group on Monday nights, during the summer, which allowed people to try out cycling at a leisurely pace, under supervision of club members. Those who took part were very enthusiastic about the joys of cycling and the majority have continued to cycle. Some have moved on to a more advanced level and are now cycling regularly with the club.

Club Handicap League: This year saw the second running of the 'Butler's Pharmacy Club League'. The league was run on a handicapped basis, with a total of nine rounds divided up between road races, time trials and hill climbs. Points were awarded for the best six finishes out of the nine rounds. A total of 23 riders took part in the league, with 5 different people winning a round. MJ Grogan finished well ahead of the rest of the competitors, with an excellent five wins and one second place. In second place was last year's winner Gary Bracken at fifteen points behind and early league

leader Aidan Horan was third, only two points further back. Top five places: MJ Grogan 70 points, Gary Bracken 55, Aidan Horan 53, Joe Mallowney 40, Brian Fogarty 39.



Colm Brophy at the end of his 600 km Irish Hospice Dublin to Paris charity cycle.

Colm, from Gloster, and Ronan Clarke from Coolderry completed the four-day event in July. Both cyclists joined the Wolftrap Cycling Club in early 2009 to train for the event.

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 practice 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.



Brian Smith, winner of the Oliver Clarke Memorial Perpetual Cup, presented by Fergal Clarke.

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.

Landowners and farmers 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.

This year, the club successfully reared and released to the wild 450 pheasants, with plans already underway to double this number for next year, starting with the construction of a permanent pen to hold the birds in a safe environment, which will be free of predators, to give them the best chance of survival.

The club also ran a fundraising draw this year, with first prize being a Burren dog trailer valued at €2,000 which was won by Mr. Joe McDonagh from Co. Kildare. Second prize, a day's pheasant shooting sponsored by the Derrinsallow Shoot Syndicate, was won by Mr. Ciaran Claffey from Banagher. Third prize, a Ginnell dog box sponsored by John Ginnell, was won by Mr. Damian Sellers from Portumna. Mr. Seamus Glennon won fourth prize, which is a day's fishing on the Blackwater River sponsored by Mr. Michael Bowes. Fifth prize, a pair of Tasco Binoculars sponsored by Peter Fox's Pharmacy, went to Mr. Ruairi Gleeson from Cloughjordan.

The club would like to sincerely thank all the people and surrounding clubs who supported our fundraiser and especially our sponsors who kindly donated prizes.

The club also ran a members-only clay shoot this year, with members fighting it out to win the Oliver Clarke Memorial Perpetual Cup, with Brian Smith eventually beating John Hehir by one single point to claim the cup in its inaugural year. Oliver was a founding and long time member of the Birr gun club. His son Fergal is a current member and presented the Cup on the night.

Finally, we 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.

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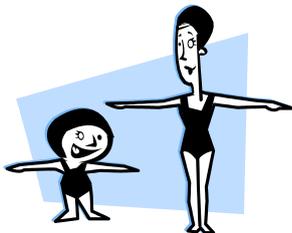
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BIRR GOLF CLUB



Left: At Birr Golf Club Development Classic in August
Back Row(L to R): Capt. Tom Rigney, Emer Hanniffy, Mona Collins, Tom Enright, Rita Enright, Pres. Tony McCormack.
Front Row: Pres. Mary Ryan, Capt. Mary Sullivan, Michael Horan (sponsor), Gary Daly (sponsor).



Right: Presentation to Birr Vincent de Paul Society
(L to R): Capt. Tom Rigney, Owen O'Neill (Pres. Vincent de Paul, Birr), Sé Pardy (Organiser, Aviation Golf Society).

One hundred and sixteen years ago in August 1893 the *King's County Chronicle* published an account of a golf match between teams from Birr and Roscrea. This was the first match played on the new course at Baronne Court, Carrig, home of the Kennedy Marshall family. Thus was born the King's County and Ormond Golf Links with Baronne Court its home for the next sixteen years. A century ago, in 1909, it was decided to relocate to 'The Glenns' at Ross, Birr where the lands were drier and winter golf became a possibility.

In 1909 a lease for 114 acres was drawn up with the Earl of Rosse at a fee of one shilling per year payable in two half-yearly installments! This agreement remained in place until 1992, when the Club purchased the lands from the Rosse Estate for €75,000. In August 1997, the Club purchased 49 acres adjoining the course with the intention of extending the playing area. The development of these lands commenced over two years ago and, after 100 years in 'The Glenns', three new holes were brought to fruition in addition to six new sand-based greens. Interestingly, this was the first major development in the history of 'The Glenns'.

Despite the third wet summer in a row, all competitions were run with few hitches. Captains Tom Rigney and Mary Sullivan held their prize days in July, with Roger Byrne collecting the men's and Frances Ashe the ladies' prizes. President Tony McCormack's prize was won by John Murphy and Lady Captain Mary Sullivan won President

Mary Ryan's prize.

A very successful Club Development Classic was held in early August, with strong support from the members. To mark the centenary of 'The Glenns', the entrance fee was suspended for the year. It may be reintroduced at a later date. The club took part in several inter-club competitions but, as some of the greens were not ready, we had to play several of our matches away. We will return to normal for 2010.

In the men's section, the Kenny Cup was won by Enda Carroll, the Hackett Cup by Seamas Breen, the Club Championship by Declan Gath and the Loughnane Cup by Conor Slevin. Golfer of the Year was Michael Lyons, a golfer who has figured prominently over the years.

In the ladies' section, Patrice Delaney won the Munster Girls at Mallow and was selected on the Leinster Interprovincial team. With her sister Eimear, she was selected on the ILGU training panel. Lena Guinan won Golfer of the Year. 'The Glenns' trophy attracted a large entry from across the country.

With all the new greens and fairways now in play, it is encouraging to see visitor numbers increasing. We can look forward to another one hundred successful years in 'The Glenns'.

During the year we lost Margaret Gleeson, Sheila O'Brien, Gerry Meagher, Stan Hayes and Fintan Dolan. We remember with much affection these dedicated members and we extend sincere sympathies to their families.



John Dewane



Annie Harte



Gerry Ryan



Helen Hogan



Joan Curley



Gerard Fitzpatrick



Ivy Graham



Gerry Meagher



Eugene Niland



Agnes Pearson



Andy Tierney



Eileen O'Regan



Ethel Jackson



J.J. Hart



Nancy O'Callaghan



Brendan Cooke

MAY THEY REST IN PEACE



Con Phelan



Christine Wims



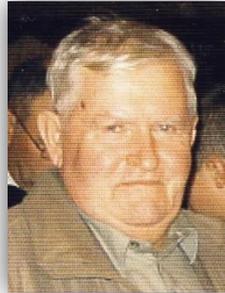
Robert Ingram



Kathleen Cassidy



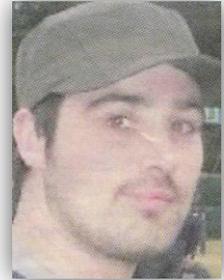
Elenor O'Neill



Michael Clery



Dilly McAteer



Brendan Donnelly



Michael Halvey



Margaret Gleeson



John Neilan



Pauline Mellsop



Mary Keeshan



Joe Delaney



Sheila O'Brien





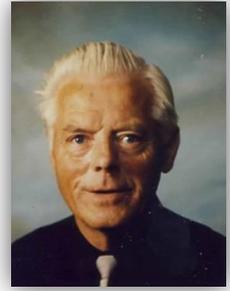
Mary Kennedy



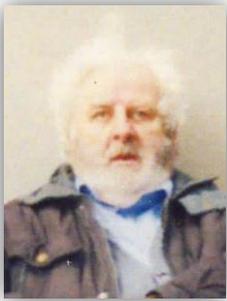
Conor Finnegan



Kate Clougher Murdock



Peter McEvoy



Stephen Sherlock



Sophia Hutchinson



James Hutchinson



Maureen Cotter



Sophie Hogan



Thomas White



Addie O'Donoghue



Pat Fox



Winnifred Kinsella



Tom Ryan



Christina Bracken

MAY THEY REST IN PEACE



Kevin Delaney



Stan Hayes



Phyllis Bridge



Michael Pardy



William Coughlan



Moira Hayden



Camillus Byrne



Kathleen Breen



Bro. David Morrissey



Maisie Finnerty



Raymond Larkin



Derek Larkin



Johnny Kenny



Paul Kennedy



Philomena Clavin



TO LISTEN IN A DIFFERENT WAY

by Raymond M. Flanagan

Before the great noon tide a
Spiral conch glistens on the shore –
The suns ebullience illuminates
Its star speckled cortex
Glistening like the constellations
Whispering-listen again men

A trumpet flower bows gracefully to natures whisper
She seems to listen without explanation -
A gentle melodic breeze responds in unison
She too seems to listen in a less than ordinary way –
For every earthly acrimony there is a heavenly melody
Listening in a different way.

There is a strange metaphysical conviviality to listening
That energetic inner engagement-
A mysterious sacred autism -
Secretive, reverential -
An inner harvest seeking outward festivity.

Consider the trumpet flowers courteous bow -
The frenetic appreciative applause of the hummingbird
–
Suspended in trance like hypnotic rapture –
Her flowers with there odours strong -
Perhaps the chorus to her song!

Witness the may fly caress the limpid water –
Does she dance and whisper her invocation?
Feel the gentle melodic breeze respond in unison
Listening is that gentle melodic breeze-
Deliverance, reconciliation
Nexus of heart and mind

A robins bold cajoling presence –
Awakens sleeping wonder -
Reverence is perched upon a tree -

Singing its melancholy -
Faithful doxology -
A foil against the surging abyss –

All listening begins with wonder -
Illuminates beyond thinking -
Matures like an emerging flower -
Responding to natures call -
Refines to some inaudible expression -
Even silence must listen in a different way –

Silence is a ruby perhaps a diamond bright –
Stillness is a waterfall glittering at her sight –
Moments are suspended like a dewdrop on a blade –
Time it was upended and lay upon its rage –
Nothing is forlorn - day and night are one -
As the wealth of weight beneath our feet sinks beneath
The Sun.

As innocence should accompany desire
So too grace is listening bedfellow
That mysterious inner susurrus -
Can we translate those inner incriptions?
Can we awaken the eternal within?

Redemption and reconciliation -
Pulsate through listening veins
As the definitive seems to beg for
Renewed expression - renewed clarity –
The absolute truth begs for absolution -
To be absolved from its rigorous definition –
Listening is that absolution.
Beyond the atom -
Beyond the vibrating super strings
Implosive - Imploring -
Then joyous surrender -

