

newsletter



Monaghan County Museum

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MUSEUM OF THE YEAR AWARD CARE OF THE COLLECTION



The Northern Ireland Museums Council in Belfast and the Heritage Council in Kilkenny jointly run the Museum of the Year Awards. This year, the awards ceremony was held in Stormont Castle, Belfast.

There were five categories including the actual Museum of the Year Award. It was because of the excellent work carried out by all of the museum staff that Monaghan County Museum received a commendation in the category, 'Caring for the Collection'. Minister Angela Smith MP presented the award to Curator, Liam Bradley. As a direct result of this success, The Institution for the Conservation of Historic and Artistic Works in Ireland, has invited Monaghan County Museum to host a series of conservation workshops, for staff from other museums in both the Republic and Northern Ireland. The staff is delighted with this award and is looking forward to exchanging ideas with personnel from other museums at the workshops.

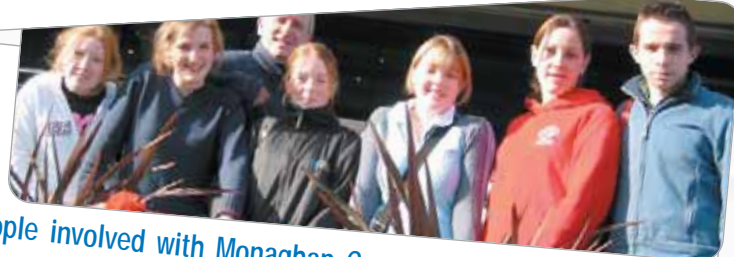
Picture on left: Back: Adge King, Director of Community & Enterprise; Declan Nelson, County Manager; Tony Murphy, Chairman Advisory Committee. Front: Liam Bradley, Curator & Owen Bannigan, Mayor.

30TH ANNIVERSARY CELEBRATIONS

2004 saw the thirtieth anniversary of the opening of Monaghan County Museum, and the year was marked by a series of innovative and exciting events and exhibitions, which portrayed the history of the county.

Since 2004 was also the centenary of his birth, it was decided to base the final exhibition of the year around Patrick Kavanagh. Seven local artists were invited to produce works depicting their impressions of him and his poetry. The result was an interesting exhibition of thirteen very different pieces of art, highlighting aspects of Kavanagh's life and the diversity of his work. It is envisaged that this collection will now tour the country. Overall, 2004 was a very successful year for the museum, as its visitor numbers increased by over 2000. We hope this trend continues as the museum looks toward the next thirty years.

PUBLIC ACHIEVEMENT



The group of young people involved with Monaghan County Museum in the Public Achievement Programme are currently working on a history of the G.A.A. in Ulster.

This will be included in the Century of Sport Exhibition which opens in July. Some members of the Monaghan group together with group members from Belfast, Enniskillen and Cavan were invited to the Annual Conference of the Irish Museums Association held in Cork in February. There they attended workshops and discussed the value of their projects to themselves and to the participating museums. Upcoming events for Public Achievement are a two-day media skills course in March/April and an all Museum Groups residential in the Carlingford Adventure Centre at the beginning of April. (Photo: Monaghan Public Achievement Group at Croke Park)

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Support your county's heritage by joining....



friends
of Monaghan County Museum

In common with many other similar establishments, Monaghan County Museum has its Friends organisation. The Friends of Monaghan County Museum, which was first launched in 1979, was made up of people who cared deeply about the preservation of the county's heritage.

Over the years they have supported the work of the museum by purchasing several expensive pieces of equipment, which greatly assisted the work of the conservator. They also bought some very important artefacts which would have otherwise been lost to the county.

The organisation also has a social side, and in the past several trips to places of historical interest were arranged each year.

The Friends of Monaghan County Museum is seeking new members and anyone who wishes to join should contact museum staff.

The **Annual Subscription** rates are:-

Corporate €50.00

Family €15.00

Individual €10.00

Student/Senior Citizen/Unwaged €5.00



Conservator Noel Breakey and assistant, Andy Hogg working at the air abrasive machine in the new laboratory at Clontibret

POSITIVE AGE

Monaghan County Museum, in conjunction with contacts from Positive Age, staged two events in the gallery recently – a reminiscence day and an afternoon of storytelling with the theme of folklore.

Both these events were extremely successful. A concert of traditional Irish music staged just before St. Patrick's day was equally successful. More events are planned and will be advertised in the local press.

NOEL BREAKEY MUSEUM CONSERVATOR

The longest serving member of staff at Monaghan County Museum is conservator, Noel Breakey.

Appointed in 1977, Noel began his training in the National Museum, and continued with courses in The National Gallery, The Ulster Museum, Trinity College, Dublin & Queen's University, Belfast, just to name a few.

Although trained to work with many different materials - textiles, paper, wood and metal, Noel always found the conservation of archaeological objects the most satisfying aspect of his work. Therefore he was delighted to be awarded a licence by the National Museum in 2000 allowing him to conserve archaeological material, one of the few people outside of the National Museum of Ireland able to do so.

In 2001, it became obvious that the museum was outgrowing its premises at Hill Street. A large warehouse premises near Clontibret was secured, and it now houses the stores and the conservation laboratory. Noel feels that he is very lucky to have such a well-equipped laboratory to work in. "It is," he says, "one of the best in the country." In addition to the air abrasive machine featured in the photograph, the laboratory also has a fume cabinet, a Polyweld machine, a vacuum chamber and photographic equipment.

Noel is rightly proud of the Museum of the Year award for Care of the Collections, (see page 1) and points to the recently acquired Hanwell Radio Log system which monitors the temperature, humidity and light levels in the display cases. Again Monaghan County Museum is one of the first county museums to have this equipment installed. Noel now imparts his knowledge to others and in the past has advised on the setting up of county museums in Donegal, Louth and Knock. On foot of the Care of the Collections award he will be holding training sessions in September of this year for staff from other county museums and is very much looking forward to that. At present, however, his priority is to clear the backlog of conservation work with the help of his assistant, Andy Hogg.

Monaghan County Museum has, for the past thirty years, set the standard for county museums throughout the country and Noel Breakey has played a very important role in setting, and maintaining, that standard.

THE NEW LOOK MUSEUM DISPLAYS

In March 2004 Monaghan County Museum received €40,000 from Interreg IIIA to redesign the museum's permanent displays. Another €50,000 was added from the annual budget and, following a public tendering process, work began with a Dublin based design company in June.

New seating for visitors was introduced, interactive touch screens were installed and individually lit text boards replaced the old acetate labels. The exhibition space was redecorated, and light-excluding blinds were fitted to minimise outside distractions. Ambient sounds introduced to all sections now add to the general atmosphere. County Mayor Owen Bannigan officially opened the new displays on December 12th 2004.

MAYDAY TRADITIONS OF MONAGHAN

For most of us in the twenty-first century the 1st of May simply marks the beginning of summer. However, until the 1950s and 1960s Mayday, and Mayeve, were extremely important days, especially in rural farming communities.

- At a time when most farm work was done by hand, good weather, and a degree of good luck, was essential. While good weather was something to be hoped for, even prayed for, luck was different. It had to be sought out and actively protected, and a close watch had to be kept on those who could damage or steal it. In particular, steps had to be taken to outwit the fairies who were at their most powerful from sunset on the 30th April to sunset on May 1st.
- The well, which was often used by several households, was of the utmost importance. As the fairies had the power to render the water undrinkable, it was necessary for someone to get there before them. The first woman to draw water from the well on Mayday morning would have the best churn of butter for the next year, unless she had the misfortune of meeting the fairies on her return journey when her luck would be changed!!
- The hearth, as the heart of the house, was also important and on the first of May the ashes would not be put out because to do so would be to put good luck out. For the same reason it was unlucky to sweep the floor.
- In order to outsmart the fairies all entrances to the home had to be protected, so after sunset on Mayeve, Mayflowers were strewn on windowsills and doorsteps, and quite often around the hearth as well. Mayflowers are small and yellow, a little like buttercups, and grow in damp areas. Often flowers were placed at the entrances to byres and barns to ensure the safety of animals. The first of May was also the day when the cattle would be put out to graze for the first time after the long winter months, and to protect them from the fairies, a piece of red ribbon or wool was tied around the horns of the animals.
- Babies and small children were just as vulnerable as animals to the dangers posed by the fairies, as they apparently had the ability to steal a healthy child and leave a sickly one, or a 'changeling', in its place. However, a pin or a piece of metal attached to the child's clothing would be enough to thwart them.
- So great was the need for luck to be protected that no one would borrow or lend anything on Mayday. To borrow would be to take someone else's good luck and to lend anything would mean giving away your own luck.
- The dew on Mayday morning was said to have special properties and young girls would wash their faces in it in an attempt to become more beautiful. Older people felt that it protected against skin diseases and rashes. Shoes were also discarded on the first of May but not clothes – ne'er cast a clout until May is out!

This year on May 1st few will give a thought to the fairyfolk, those elusive creatures whose powers have sadly, in this mechanised age, lost their potency. Perhaps, in abandoning these age-old traditions we, too, have lost something more than our innocence. As our belief in fairies diminished, our belief in our inalienable right to take what we wanted from the land rose, and the result is an environment under pressure. Ringforts, fairy thorns and wells were destroyed to make way for bigger houses, bigger fields and bigger roads and somewhere along the way we have destroyed an enchanting part of our heritage. We have left no place for the fairyfolk in our 'new improved' Irish rural landscape!

In our next issue we will explore some of the traditions associated with Halloween, when spirits, rather than sprites, engage the attention of mortals.

folklore...



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Mayor, Owen Bannigan, receiving the portrait of Don Juan McKenna from Sebastian and Juan McKenna Ferrada

NEW ACQUISITION

In our last newsletter, we expressed our delight at receiving a bust of General Don Juan McKenna, a native of Monaghan, from his direct descendant, Senior Don Luis McKenna Ferrada, former Senator of the Chilean Government.

General McKenna played a pivotal role in Chile's fight for independence from Spanish rule at the beginning of the nineteenth century. Sebastian and Juan, the sons of Senior McKenna Ferrada, are currently studying English in Dublin. Earlier this year they paid a visit to Monaghan and presented a portrait of General McKenna to the County Museum. Both the bust and the picture are welcome additions to the museum's collections and are now on display. We are grateful to the McKenna Ferrada family and hope to continue our friendship with them.

EXHIBITIONS SPRING/SUMMER 2005



- Guided Tours by prior arrangement.
- It is also advisable for schools or large groups to pre-book.

If you wish to book or enquire please contact us at **047 82928** or by email: comuseum@monaghancoco

All the exhibitions and events will be advertised in the local press, or if you require further information check out Monaghan County Council Website at www.monaghan.ie/museum/

OPENING HOURS

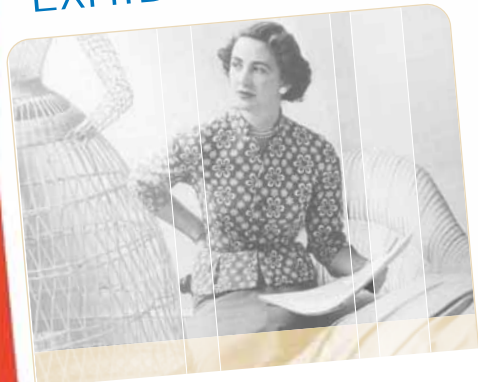
Tuesday - Friday 10am - 5pm
Saturday 11am - 5pm
Closed for Lunch 1pm - 2pm



JUNE - AUGUST

Monday - Saturday 11am - 5pm

If you have any comments about this newsletter, or if there is anything you would like featured in a future edition, please e-mail emckenna2@monaghancoco.ie



Closing at end of April Sybil Connolly Ambassador of Style 1921 - 1998

This touring exhibition, from the Hunt Museum in Limerick, features Sybil's fashion designs as well as some of her work in crystal and ceramics.

Tuesday April 5th to Friday, April 29th



Peatlands

An exhibition by the Irish Peatlands Conservation Council. This exhibition shows the animals, birds, insects, flowers and plants commonly seen in our boglands. Also on display are examples of items, such as bones and wood, often found in bogs. Some of the museum's own natural history pieces, in addition to Peader Morgan's wildlife collection supplements the exhibition. Local conservationists will give presentations to schools and other groups during the exhibition.



Monday May 9th to Friday June 17th THE ROSSMORE PARK SERIES

Local photographic artist, Cliona Harney, will exhibit a series of pictures detailing the seasonal changes observed in Rossmore Park over the course of a year. Cliona will also be giving photography workshops during the exhibition.



First week in September

HERITAGE WEEK

Monaghan County Museum in association with The Border Minority Group will be hosting a lecture. The subject has yet to be decided.

Wednesday July 13th to Friday November 25th

A CENTURY OF SPORT

An in house exhibition celebrating the sporting heritage of County Monaghan.



Our next newsletter will be available in September and will have details of our winter series of lectures plus a full guide to our upcoming programme of events and exhibitions. We will also have an article about our archive and research facilities, some local Halloween traditions and much more.