

newsletter

Monaghan County Council Museum



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Keys of Clones Workhouse donated to County Museum

While all donations to the museum are gratefully received, there are some that are just that little bit more exciting for the staff. Such was the case recently when the keys of the workhouse in Clones were presented to the museum.

Clones workhouse opened in the winter of 1842. It like all other workhouses came into being on foot of the Poor Relief Act (Ireland) which was enacted in 1838. The country was divided up into 130 Poor Law Unions (later increased to over 160) which would be governed by guardians. Each union was charged with building and running a workhouse to cater for the needs of the destitute

The Northern Standard of September 24th 1842 advertised for suitable candidates to fill the positions of Master, Matron, Porter and Medical Attendant for Clones Workhouse; they would receive annual salaries of £30, £20, £10 and £30 respectively. With the exception of the Medical Attendant all had to provide sureties ranging from £50 to £200 and all had to live in the workhouse. The Medical Attendant was obliged to visit the workhouse each day or more often if required. Tenders were sought for, among other things, the provision of furniture, equipment and clothing for the inmates,¹ 60 frieze jackets for men, 60 moleskin suits for boys, 60 Galway flannel petticoats for women and 60 wrappers for girls. There was also an order for 60 pairs of brogues or shoes for men and women.² Although there is little doubt that admission to the workhouse saved many people who would otherwise have starved to death, they were inhospitable places with rigidly enforced rules. Families were separated, husband from wife and children from their parents.

By the time Clones workhouse was up and running the population of Ireland had reached more than 8.1 million, a huge proportion of which was over depended on the potato as a staple foodstuff. In



Liam Bradley, Museum Curator accepts the donation of the keys for Clones Workhouse from Theo McMahon, Member of the Museum Advisory Committee on behalf of Sean Slowey formally of Clones now Toronto, Canada.

the mid 1840s when the potato crop failed there was widespread hardship. The workhouse was unable to cope with the number of people seeking admission, so much so that the Guardians had to rent a number of houses in the town.³ Even then overcrowding was a problem and the spread of fever added extra pressures on the system.

Although the famine years were the most difficult for the Poor Law Unions it is often forgotten that they and the workhouses remained in existence in this country until the 1920s. Following the closure of the workhouses the buildings were then often used for other purposes. Such was the case in Clones when the building was used as a school for many years. Mr Aodh Mac Ciosa was a teacher in that school from 1924 until 1964 and it was he who came into possession of the keys. He passed them on to his nephew, Sean Slowey, who in turn donated them through Theo McMahon, to the museum.

The keys of Clones workhouse are a welcome addition to the museum's collection. They are a tangible link not only with the workhouse in Clones but with all the workhouses throughout the county. In addition, they will serve as a memorial to all those people so locked into poverty and despair that the only option they had was to knock on the unwelcoming doors of the local workhouse. The keys, which Mr Slowey has had mounted on a specially commissioned piece of Canadian Cherrywood, are currently on display in the museum.



The Friends of Monaghan County Museum is a voluntary body which has a vital role in supporting the work of the museum. In particular it contributes funds to enable the purchase of items which would otherwise be lost to the museum and therefore to the county. One recent example is the Book of the Clermont Estate Maps which was acquired with the aid of a sizable donation from the Friends. This book of beautifully drawn maps is an extremely important item which belongs in the museum where it can be seen and studied. As the work of collecting and preserving artefacts of historical interest to the county is ongoing, the contribution made by the Friends is invaluable and very much appreciated. Members of the Friends pay a small yearly subscription which entitles them to invitations to all events, exhibitions and lectures, outings to places of historical interest, other museums etc., copies of all promotional material produced and a chance to be involved in any future plans for the museum.

For details of how to join, the subscription rates etc. contact the museum. New members will be very welcome.

Patricia Barbour

Patricia Barbour works as administrator and receptionist in the museum and has done for five years. While the administration side of her work is interesting, Patricia really enjoys meeting the public and welcoming them to the museum and her cheerful outgoing personality immediately puts all visitors at ease.

She says she is constantly surprised by the different reactions to the displays and exhibitions. Children, for example, see the exhibited items with fresh eyes and can put their own, sometimes very interesting,

interpretations on things! In contrast a visit to the museum by older people can trigger memories about long forgotten practices or events. Patricia in common with all members of staff finds the information unearthed by such memories both fascinating and informative.

Recently Patricia together, with colleague Noel Breakey, worked on the museum's 2010 calendar, which features postcard photographs of the five main towns in the county. It was, she says, a really interesting project and she hopes that the finished product will be as popular as previous museum calendars.



Hidden Heritage

Inspired by the success of a previous collaboration, 'Monaghan 40 years Growing' Monaghan County Museum and Monaghan County Library secured funding for another joint project, 'Hidden Heritage'. The purpose of Hidden Heritage is to enable four selected groups from different areas in the county to research and record a previously little known aspect of their local history. Any topic may be chosen, a local person of historical interest, an event, a particular time or a piece of archaeological history may be

further investigated. The participating groups will be mentored by a member of staff from either the museum or the library and further professional assistance will be provided if required. The project is now well underway and the groups have undertaken diverse topics. An exhibition of their findings will be mounted in the museum in December 2010. In addition to stimulating local interest in history and heritage the members of the groups will learn a little of the methods of research, documentation and presentation used by professionals.



The Bulgarian Ambassador and friends visit the museum

Down to Monaghan Farming in Two Counties

Agriculture has been an important activity throughout the island of Ireland since the first farmers began to cultivate the land around 4000 BC. Although agricultural practices adapted continually from those early beginnings the greatest changes, and the greatest speed of change, has taken place within the last hundred years. Both counties, Monaghan and Down, could be described as having a rich agricultural heritage and this exhibition documents the similarities and differences

between the two areas. The staffs of both museums, assisted and guided by Mervyn Watson and Jonathon Bell, previously of the Ulster Folk and Transport Museum, have spent the past year researching and collating local farming history.

Monaghan County Museum has a large number of farming tools and machinery in storage. Conservator Noel Breakey, and his assistant Andy Hogg, have devoted much of the past months to selecting and conserving pieces for the exhibition.

'Down to Monaghan - Farming in Two Counties' is now showing in Down County Museum where it will remain until the middle of April, when it will move to Monaghan. It will remain in the gallery in Monaghan County Museum for the summer months.



Three items from the agricultural exhibition.

Closure of Monaghan Hospital

The people of Monaghan were dismayed when earlier this year acute services were removed from Monaghan County Hospital to Cavan. This signalled the end of a long battle to keep the hospital and all its services intact. A candle which was symbolically extinguished at

the hospital on 22nd July 2009 was formally presented to the museum by the Monaghan Community Alliance, the organisation which had fought so hard to keep acute services in the local hospital



Members of Monaghan Hospital Alliance hand over the symbolic candle which was extinguished at a rally in front of the hospital on July 22nd last to mark the closure of acute services at the site.



Pauline Tilson, Education Officer, in St Mary's NS, Castleblayney with items from the museum's wildlife collection.

Outreach Exhibitions

One of the most successful in-house exhibitions of recent years was the railway exhibition 'Magic Miles in Monaghan' which ran from July 2008 until 2009 in the gallery. A portion of this exhibition can be seen in the Eglish Centre, Broomfield.

In the workhouse in Carrickmacross, sections of another two exhibitions can be viewed. 'Life and Death in Monaghan' showcases archaeological finds made by the National Roads Authority in the county and 'Maps and Mapping' displays different maps of the county from different eras.

'I heard they went to New York' a tale of 20th century local migration to New York, is displayed in Inniskeen.

All of the above exhibitions are interesting and informative and all are continuing to attract large numbers of visitors.

Historical Walking Tours of Monaghan Town

These popular tours are available with prior booking and weather permitting



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

If you wish to book a tour or enquire about an exhibition, event or workshop please contact us at **047 82928** or by email: comuseum@monaghancoco.ie

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

Opening Hours

Monday - Friday 11am – 5pm
Saturday - 12pm – 5pm

Admission Free

We would value **your comments** about this newsletter and would appreciate any **suggestions** for future editions. Email Eileen at emckenna2@monaghancoco.ie or telephone the museum

A Snippet from our Archive

From the Northern Standard Centenary Supplement 1839 - 1939

'For its issue of March 7th 1839, two months after it was founded the Northern Standard found itself requiring an editor and it secured no other than Gavan Duffy the man who was shortly afterwards to become one of the most outstanding Irish men in history.'

'Monaghan had no railway at that period [1839]. The Stage Coach went as far as Drogheda and thence to Dublin by rail. The Ulster Canal had opened and there was quite a hum about the Canal Stores. There were sailings to Belfast every Tuesday, Thursday and Saturday, boats

left for Belturbet on Tuesdays and Clones had its cargo on Saturdays.'

The writer also observed that Monaghan town had no fewer than 42 porter dealers for a population of 4,130 inhabitants. There was no mental hospital as 'mental defectives did not form the portion of the population as they do today [1939]'. Could there have been a link between the lack of mental illness and the apparent ready availability of porter? Just a thought!

More from the N S Centenary Supplement in a later issue.

The Civic Collection

Monaghan County Museum has built up a diverse collection of artworks in its thirty-plus year history. It is mainly composed of pieces from local, national and international artists who have had exhibitions of their work in the museum. The different artistic styles and variety of media used in the pieces, which includes portraiture, landscapes, townscapes, abstract art, ceramics and sculptures, make up a truly unique collection.

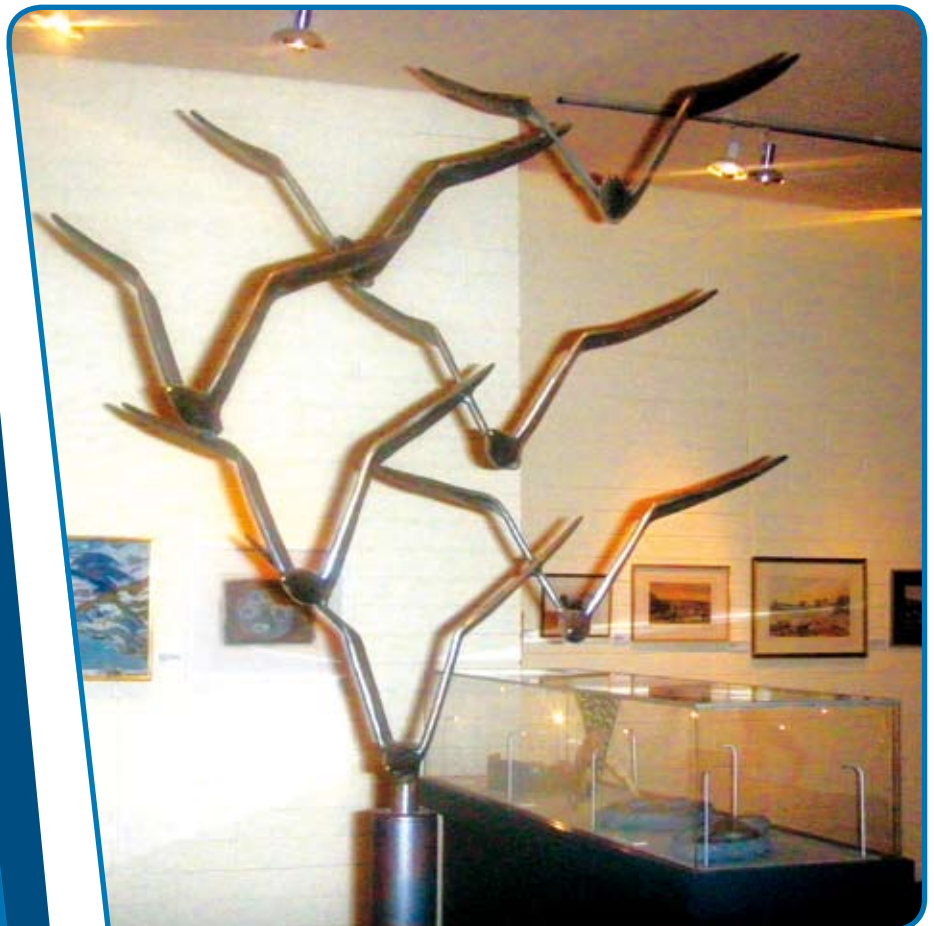
Pieces selected for this exhibition include works of art in oils, watercolours and textiles both framed and unframed. Sculptures in bronze and stone are also featured.

The works span a period of almost 200 years.

The oldest 'Castleblayney Castle' by John Nixon dated 1818, depicts the earliest known image of handball in Ireland; Henry McManus' famous painting of a market day in Monaghan is from the 1830s; the abstract 'Chaplin in a Ghetto' by Martin J. Forker is of a more recent date as is the majestic bronze sculpture 'Seven Geese in Flight' by Bernadette ni Ghalloir.

'The Civic Collection' offers a unique opportunity to view an interesting variety of works which are rarely displayed and to revisit others that have become firm favourites through the years. The range of media used and the artists displayed combine to make this an exhibition not to be missed.

The exhibition runs to mid-April.



'Seven Geese in Flight' by Bernadette ni Ghalloir