

# A MUSEUM 1974 - 2014 MEMORIES



MONAGHAN  
*Músaem Chontae Mhuineachain*  
COUNTY  
MUSEUM

MONAGHAN COUNTY COUNCIL  
COMHAIRLE CHONTAE MHUINEACHAIN



A PERSONAL COLLECTION OF MEMORIES  
AND STORIES INSPIRED BY THE LIFE AND  
TIMES



#### ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

THIS BOOK OF MEMORIES IS DEDICATED TO  
ALL THE FRIENDS OF MONAGHAN COUNTY MUSEUM  
WE WOULD LIKE TO THANK EACH AND EVERY ONE OF THEM AND  
THEIR FAMILIES FOR THEIR TIRELESS  
SUPPORT THROUGHOUT OUR FIRST 40 YEARS.



CHAPTER ONE

# FOREWORD

BY

MAYOR SEAN CONLON

**I**t is said that a family tree can wither if no one tends to its roots. Similarly that can be said of the artefacts that define our past and that create a pathway to exploring the life journeys of our forebears. It is with that in mind that we take the opportunity over 2014 to celebrate one of the most prolific success stories of our combined Local Authorities achievements, the establishment of the Monaghan County Museum in 1974.

The life story of Monaghan County Council's most treasured institution conveys a dedication to excellence in collecting, collating, preserving and presenting objects that provide tangible definition as to how society existed over a period dating back almost three millennia. Exhibits and presentations have brought to life powerful stories bearing witness to periods of our collective community existence that have enlightened visitors from local and afar, at times creating a multiplicity of emotions from amazement to bewilderment and curiosity but most importantly in enhancing our affinity and identity of person, place and past, particularly from within county Monaghan.

Along with the artefacts, documents and memorabilia themselves, a wealth of invaluable information and detail accompanies the documented inventory of 50,000 items, providing further insight to researchers and historians. Much of all this had, and continues to have, the potential to be lost if it not for the meticulous preservation, to the highest standard of best practice, of all those associated with the museum since its foundation forty years ago. From Presidents and

Ambassadors (and equally as important) to our school children and students, the County Museum has served as a beacon of discovery and education for so many over the passing decades providing an impeccable resource of information and education.

Recognition of the museum's forty years is a laudable endeavour, a timely opportunity to recognise the commitment and loyalty of all those involved in securing and maintaining such high standards and achievement. Most notably being awarded the 1980 Council of Europe Museum Prize and more recently in becoming the first local authority museum to achieve full accreditation under the Heritage Council's Museum Standards Programme for Ireland, a benchmark for all local authority museums to aspire to.

It would be folly for me to attempt to single out the authors and torchbearers of the past forty years that have made immeasurable contributions in ensuring that our County, our Community, Museum has remained in 'safe hands'. Sadly, some are not with us anymore. However, as we enjoy the various events and celebrations associated with this anniversary milestone during 2014, take the time to acknowledge those with us who have played their part, and give encouragement to those today who continue to build on a noble legacy.



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CHAPTER TWO

# A EUROPEAN PROJECT

BY

AIDAN WALSH

**I**t was an exceptionally cold winter in central Europe. Temperatures had reached -20c and as I walked around Strasbourg's historic centre, I could feel the cold coming up through the soles of my shoes. Even locals remarked on how cold it was. The date was 26 January 1981 and the occasion was the presentation of the 1980 Council of Europe Museum Prize to Monaghan County Museum. This European recognition was undoubtedly the high point of the museum's early years.

At a ceremony in the 18<sup>th</sup> century *Chateau des Rohan*, former seat of the Cardinal Bishops of Strasbourg, the award was presented in front of an invited audience of civic leaders, politicians and cultural figures from across Europe. The award itself was modest, consisting of a certificate which the museum still holds, and a diminutive sculpture by the famous Catalan sculptor Joan Miro which was on show in Monaghan for twelve months before its return. The award was presented by Hans De Koster, a Dutch politician and then President of the Assembly of the Council of Europe.

The Council of Europe pre-dates the EU. It was established in 1949 as Europe struggled to rebuild after the horror and destruction of war. Its membership is wider than that of the EU and today comprises 47 member states. It promotes co-operation between all countries of Europe in the areas of legal standards, human rights, democratic development, the rule of law and cultural co-operation.

The European Museum of the Year Award (EMYA) is the longest running and most prestigious museum award in Europe and



**Aidan Walsh**  
Curator |  
1974 - 1989

“*Monaghan people were extremely proud of the European award. After all, the Museum was chosen above 42 museums from across Europe.*”

held under the auspices of the Council of Europe. The scheme was founded in 1977 by the distinguished British journalist, broadcaster, industrial historian and author, Kenneth Hudson.

The award scheme has two strands, the Museum of the Year Award only given to museums which have just opened (which ruled Monaghan out as it opened in 1974) and the Council of Europe Museum Prize, given to museums that contribute to a greater understanding of the rich diversity of European culture. Many factors play a part in the selection of the winner, from concentration on a European subject to co-operation across borders. Monaghan County Museum had developed deep ties with Armagh County Museum exemplified by the 1977 joint exhibition marking the centenary of the Great Northern Railway. It also hosted exhibitions from across the border, often showcasing Monaghan's place within the 9-county historic province of Ulster.

Local heritage was at the core of the Monaghan project. The Council, in particular the remarkable County Manager George Cannon, had the vision to see that heritage builds pride and strengthens local identity and that County Monaghan stood to benefit from increased confidence and knowledge. From the start, the museum relied on the support of local historians, notably the Monaghan Branch of An Taisce and most importantly of all, the Clogher Historical Society. This was noted by the awarding committee.

Monaghan people were extremely proud of the European award. After all, the museum was chosen above 42 museums from across Europe. It was the fourth recipient of the Award, previously given to museums in Norway, France and Germany. So a few months after the award ceremony, Kenneth Hudson led a delegation of European politicians and cultural figures to Monaghan to celebrate the award. It was an exciting time and the community responded by staging an ambitious concert which included Monaghan Comhaltas players and the Truagh Set Dancers, playwrights and performers Tommy and John McArdle and the Studio Opera Group from Belfast, led by composer and conductor, Havelock Nelson.

Amongst the distinguished figures in Monaghan that night was Baron Duncan-Sandys, a son-in-law of Churchill and a former UK government minister. He was joined by Alan Beith, Chief Whip of the UK Liberal Party and Jakob Anno of the Norwegian Christian People's Party among others. It is good to look back at this time as the museum enters its fifth decade. Happy 40th Birthday Monaghan County Museum!



Members of the Council of Europe Committee of Culture and Education were in Monaghan on Monday and Tuesday last to visit the County Museum which won the Council of Europe Museum Prize from forty entries from twenty-one countries. The museum and its curator had already received the award last January and the visiting committee came to view the museum and hold the first ever meeting of a European international body in Monaghan. Pictured above are members of the Council of Europe Committee and are (from left) – Mr Alan Beith, Chairman of the sub-committee on Architectural and Artistic Heritage for the Council as well as Liberal M.P. for Northumbria and British Liberal Party Chief Whip; Mr Aiden Walsh, Curator, Monaghan County Museum; Lord Duncan Sandys, former Minister of Planning and Housing under Sir Antony Eden's Conservative Government; Mr Jakob Anno, of the Norwegian Christian Peoples Party, who chaired the Culture and Education Committee and Mr Brendan O'Riordain, Director of the National Museum.

## CHAPTER THREE

# A LIFETIME OF LEARNING

BY

NOEL BREAKEY

“As far as I’m concerned each and every item is important and has a part to play in the county’s history”



Noel Breakey  
1978 - PRESENT  
Conservator

In September 1978 I started work in Monaghan County Museum as a museum technician. The museum, then only four years old was located in the courthouse and my duties also included acting as a tour guide and museum attendant.

The curator, Aidan Walsh, was very professional and expected the same of his staff. Since I had no relevant qualifications he arranged training for me in different aspects of conservation. In Armagh County Museum I learned basic conservation techniques and in the National Gallery, Dublin, I was instructed in the art of paper conservation and this included working on water colours. I was shown how to conserve archaeological items in the Ulster Museum’s laboratory under Professor Malcolm Fry.

In 1980 we upgraded and refurbished the displays in order to try to win the Council of Europe Museum Prize. Nowadays it is easy to find suitable display cases or stands but then we had to make them ourselves. I made new Perspex display stands and wooden podiums and learned a great deal in the process. All the hard work was worth it as we won the Council of Europe Prize that year and to date Monaghan County Museum is the only Irish museum to have been so honoured.

The presentation was made at a gala event in St Louis’ Convent and was attended by representatives from all the participating European countries. There was very tight security because of the tense political situation in the north of the country.

That political situation had a devastating effect on the museum when the courthouse was set on fire on 30 March 1981 as part of the Hunger Strike Protest. I have to pay tribute to the fire officers attending the scene that night whose expertise ensured that there was minimal fire or water damage to either the store or the actual displays. The fire service had previously carried out drills in the courthouse and so were familiar with the layout. A photographic exhibition *The Arctic Oasis* featuring the wildlife of the Arctic Circle and which was displayed upstairs in the Council Chamber, was also undamaged although some of the storage boxes were slightly scorched.

The artefacts were removed to St Patrick's Hall and later to the army barracks. Conservators from all over the country came to Monaghan to assess any damage and carry out first aid conservation. I also had six post graduate archaeology students for a period of six weeks to help with conservation. The museum stores stayed in the army barracks while the conservation laboratory was set up in the Christian Brothers' school building and a small exhibition was set up there too. The museum took over the old county council office building in Hill Street when it became vacant in the mid 1980s. A purpose built display gallery and store was added to the back of the building and was officially opened in 1986 by an Taoiseach, Garret Fitzgerald. Work was carried out on the rest of the building from 1986 to 1990 to make the display areas as they are now. The completed museum was officially opened by President Hillery in the summer of 1990.

By far the most enjoyable time I spent working in the museum was the summer of 1982 when I was involved in an archaeological dig on the Black Pig's Dyke under the direction of Aidan Walsh. In contrast the day in 2006 when I learned of the sudden death of my friend and colleague, Padraig Clerkin was the saddest by far. He was as close to me as my brother. We had worked together for over 20 years and I still miss him.

My favourite exhibition was the National Roads Authority's *Life and Death in Monaghan*. It was an extremely professional exhibition and because of my (limited) dig experience I was able to appreciate

all the work involved. I really don't have a favourite object in the museum. As far as I'm concerned each and every item is important and has a part to play in the county's history. I am, however, delighted that the museum is now committed to its outreach programme and we have exhibitions throughout the county.

I owe a debt of gratitude to Aidan Walsh who taught me so much and encouraged me to take up all the training I was offered. As a result I was very happy to be able to assist in the setting up of Cavan County Museum in Ballyjamesduff in 1996. Cavan County Council asked its counterparts in Monaghan for assistance in setting up the new museum. Grace Moloney and I were there for about four months. It was a very enjoyable time and there is still a close relationship between both museums. I am also a founder member of Irish Professional Conservators' and Restorers' Association. (IPCRA) which was set up in the early 1980s.

I also have to say thank you to Theo McMahon who has not only been a good friend of the museum since the beginning but who has been a great source of information and advice for me over the years.



CHAPTER FOUR

# A PASSION STILLED

PÁDRAIG CLERKIN

RESEARCHER - 1985 - 2006

**I**t was with great sadness and a deep sense of shock that we, in the museum, learned of the sudden death of our colleague, Padraig Clerkin, on Friday 15<sup>th</sup> September 2006. Padraig had been a member of staff for over twenty-one years and during that time he worked in all sections of the museum. However, his principal role was as a researcher and as such his loss to the museum is incalculable.

Padraig was very much at home in the museum, as indeed he should have been. After all he was born and brought up in the house next door and for many years he lived across the street just yards from the museum. He had a real interest in local history and his knowledge in that area could not be equalled; as such he was the ideal person to assist school children, students and researchers with their projects and he really enjoyed doing so. However, Padraig's real passion was for maps. He could spend hours poring over both editions of the Ordnance Survey Maps and he loved the detail in old estate maps. He really appreciated the artistic skill of the cartographers and was fascinated by the little cartouches included on many estate maps.

With Noel Breakey, Padraig worked on all of the many exhibitions mounted in the museum gallery during his time with us. It would be impossible for us to say which was his favourite but we do know that he was especially proud of *Anno Domino*, which was staged in 2000 to mark the millennium. *Anno Domino* was a collaboration between the museum and all of the churches in Monaghan town. Padraig approached local artist, David Pollock, and



## CHAPTER FIVE

# A STUDENT'S PERSPECTIVE

BY

DARRACH LEE

I can vaguely recall my first visit to Monaghan County Museum sometime in the early nineties with my class from St Mary's Boys School. Many subsequent visits ensued through out the following decade or so up until I finished secondary school in 2002.

While my knowledge of history up to this point had been dictated by the curriculum for my Junior and Leaving Cert programmes I always found that I came away with something extra having completed a tour of the displays in the museum. The all-encompassing character of the collection allowed me to explore different time periods and various facets of past culture that were inaccessible from the classroom or library.

To actually see the artefacts first hand made the past that bit more tangible. One of the items to stick in my mind from those early visits was the medieval thumbscrew. Its simple form married to its sinister application created a powerful effect and I could never have experienced this through the pages of a history book. This tiny object of torture more than any other item in the collection brought home to me the inhumanity of the previous inhabitants of this landscape.

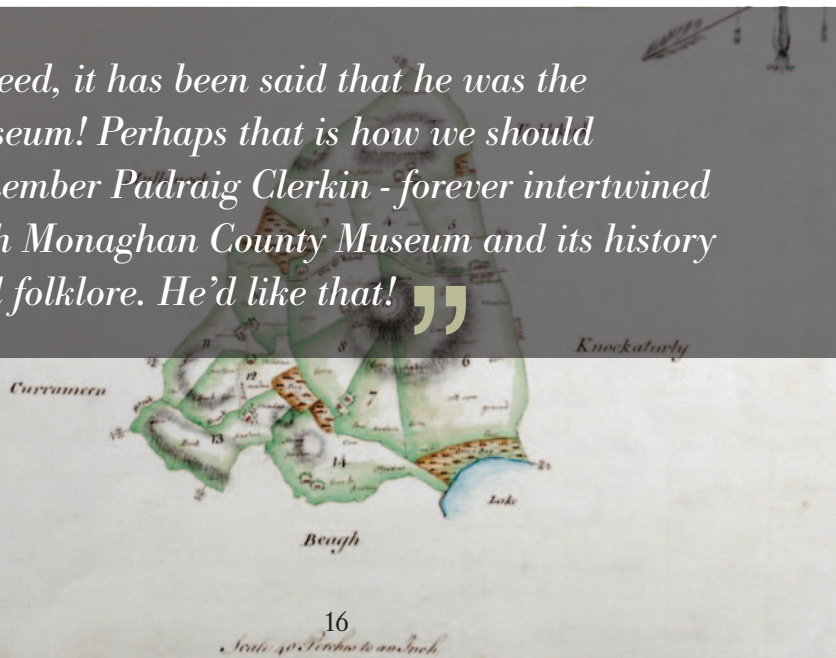
After leaving home to study digital media quite a few years would pass before I darkened the doors of the museum again. That was until I decided I was more fascinated with the ancient technology of my ancestors than with the cutting edge gadgets of the day. When I returned to the museum as an archaeology student I found that every artefact required different consideration. I discovered that as I enhanced my knowledge of different time periods my appreciation of

asked him to produce a drawing of all the participating churches and that picture still hangs in the museum as a reminder of the exhibition and the millennium.

We miss Padraig in so many ways; we miss his infectious childlike enthusiasm for any new item acquired by the museum, or his delight at being able to share newly discovered information and we certainly miss his knowledge of local history. Padraig's passing leaves a huge void in the lives of his family and friends and here in the museum. He was a real character, known by everyone. Although we still struggle to come to terms with his passing, we remember him as an integral part of the museum - of its very fabric. Indeed, it has been said that he was the museum! Perhaps that is how we should remember Padraig Clerkin - forever intertwined with Monaghan County Museum and its history and folklore. He'd like that!

After his death, the museum commissioned Monaghan born artist, Peter Deighan, to paint a portrait of Padraig. It was presented to his family who in turn generously donated it to the museum. It hangs in a prominent position in the display galleries and we feel he'd like that too!

“Indeed, it has been said that he was the museum! Perhaps that is how we should remember Padraig Clerkin - forever intertwined with Monaghan County Museum and its history and folklore. He'd like that!”



## CHAPTER SIX

# CONSERVING OUR FUTURE

BY

ANDY HOGG

I started working in Monaghan County Museum in 1999 on a part time basis, assisting the conservator. This brought me into contact with the items in the collection, their care and display. I became a full time registrar in 2005 meaning I document the collection. Monaghan County Museum is fortunate to have a very extensive collection, having been actively collecting since opening in 1974.

It is a privilege to work with artefacts from many eras of history, some very ancient, such as the earliest known evidence of humans in the Monaghan area (a flint blade), or the Lisdrumturk Cauldron (c. 800 BC) which was found in a bog in County Monaghan. We cannot be certain about much concerning the people who used this item, even what language they spoke, but we can be sure that around 800 BC they enjoyed a good hot broth in the depths of winter!

Part of my job is helping to set up exhibitions, both in the museum and in outreach venues across the county. Objects have to be sourced and researched. This is how I learn about the collection and the stories of the items in it. Often I develop an interest and appreciation for the subject which I didn't have before. It is also a chance to talk to people about the history of the objects, maybe they were used within living memory, such as the Great Northern Railway items, which were put on display in 2008 to mark the 50th anniversary of the closing of the lines. During this exhibition we were able to meet people who had worked on the railway and were able to talk at length on the subject and how the railways operated.

the collection was also changed. Subtle items such as flints, flakes and arrowheads became more meaningful. I realised that your experience of a collection such as this is based on your own conditioning. You will take more value from what is familiar to you. For that reason I enjoy the perceptions of the various visitors as they pass through reception on their way back to the present world relaying their thoughts on the artefacts or items that caught their attention. With every visitor's discussion or query new information is garnered and thus appreciation of the museum's collection is valued further. For example most recently a student friend of mine visited from NUI Galway and pointed out that one of the early modern hunting horns in the collection could well have been used as a drinking vessel in the medieval period. This was judged by the decorated pattern etched into its surface which was similar to that on other prestige drinking vessels of the era. Aside from changing my perception of this extraordinary artefact this only made me wonder what other hidden gems lie unnoticed within the museums' collection. These items are crucial to the story of our past and I hope that people can continue to make use of the museum in order to further unfold this story over the next forty years and beyond.

“To actually see the artefacts first hand made the past that bit more tangible.”



**Darrach Lee**  
**JOB BRIDGE INTERNSHIP**  
**Jan - Sept 2013**

CHAPTER SEVEN

# 40 YEARS ON

BY

MAEVE HACKETT

**M**y involvement with the museum goes back to the early 1980s when the Friends of Monaghan County Museum was very active in supporting and promoting the museum as well as using it as an educational tool. This, I believe, greatly contributed to an understanding and a pride in our place. We may not have had the prominence of national monuments such as Newgrange, Clonmacnoise, Cashel etc., but we learned about and visited our local forts, crannogs, monastic settlements, rock art, towers and the 'Big Houses' and from there went on to visit our National Treasures. All the time we were learning, or indeed relearning, our heritage and I like to think in the process passing this knowledge on to new generations. This was also the time of the launch of the 'Junior Friends' with a comprehensive list of events and activities.

During the winter months we had a variety of lectures and talks given by experts in their fields e.g. the late Dr Marie de Paor on her work on the excavation of Lough Gur, Joan Trimble an expert on the history of Carolan, John Field and John McCormack and who gave a remarkable performance on the harpiscord. Best remembered will be the Seamus Heaney lecture prior to his Nobel Prize award.

We were very fortunate in those early years to be supported by a wide range of people with an innate sense of pride in the history of our locality. As a result, our acquisitions donated soared as the museum was seen to be a repository for local artefacts, costumes, banners and objects representing the diversity of the locality and its people. All of this was done under the most professional guidance of the then curator,

It was gratifying to hear how much they appreciated seeing this history on display.

A museum is much more than a display of old stuff in cases. It is a place of storage, conservation, recording, interpretation and education. As technology changes and consumers dispose, it is important to keep samples of representative items of the times. A poster or flyer is soon out of date, but in 40 years or more it may be a valuable clue to researchers. Over the years I have enjoyed dealing with, and learning from, other museum workers and members of the public. The vast majority of the museum's collection consists of donations from the public, so it is important to get the message across that the museum is always adding to its collection. I would like to think this will still be happening long after I'm gone.

“ *A museum is much more than a display of old stuff in cases. It is a place of storage, conservation, recording, interpretation and education.* ”



Aidan Walsh, and culminated in 1980 with the award of the Council of Europe Museum Prize. It is well worth noting and recording part of the words of the committee at the prize presentation.

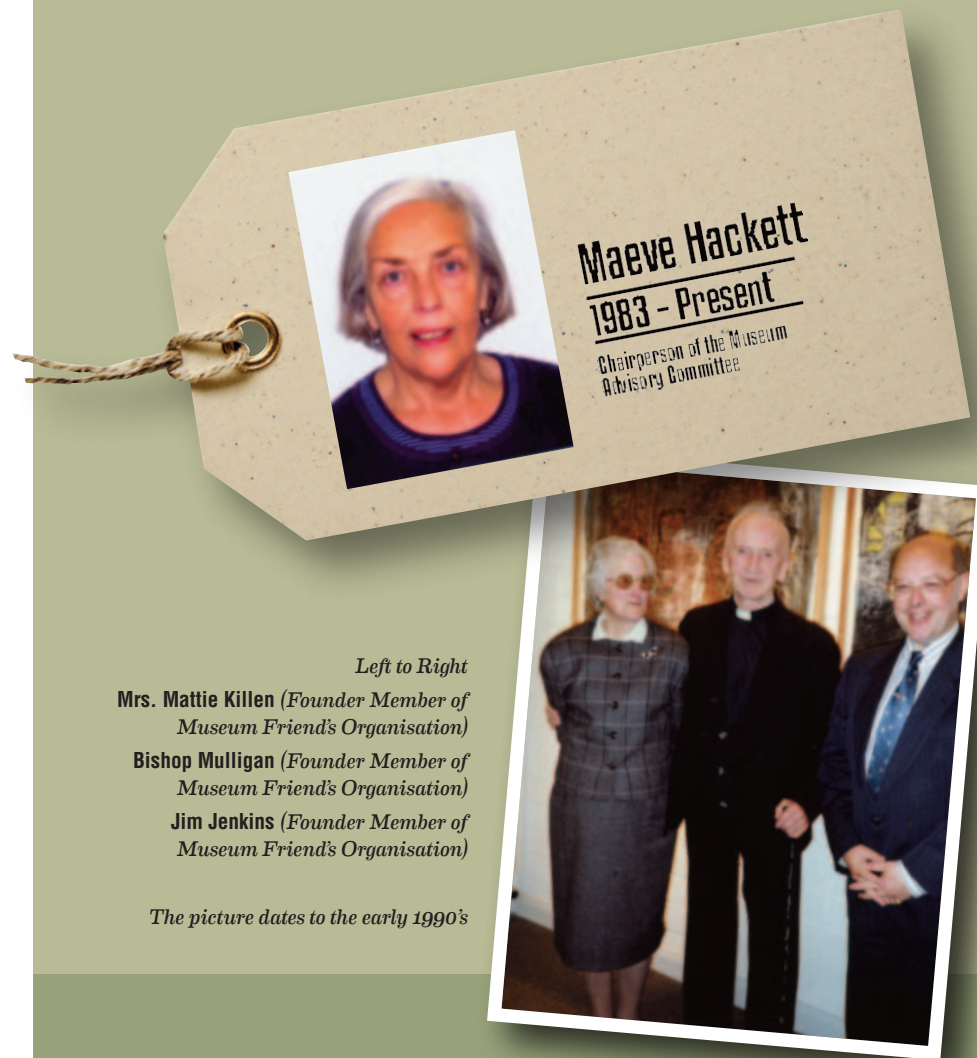
“The reason is not only the breadth and quality of Monaghan Museum’s collections or their presentation: but we were particularly impressed by the intensity of the museum’s co-operation with local groups from both sides of the border.”

Further acknowledgement of the quality of work undertaken by the museum was the Gulbenkian Foundation Best Collections Care Award for the quality of its conservation work in 1993.

Forty years on and it is fitting to acknowledge and pay tribute to those many people who made a contribution, in particular to those ‘Friends’ no longer with us. The late Rosemary Crawford was the first secretary of the Friends and her notes are still being used to-day. One of the most memorable evenings for me in the museum was when our then Chairman Dr Patrick Mulligan retired and rather than an ‘event’ he expressed a preference for a quiet evening with just a few ‘friends’ in the museum, ( think there were six?) The attached photograph of the late Mrs Mattie Killen, the late Dr Mulligan and his incoming replacement as chair the late Mr Jim Jenkins was an evening filled with laughter, quips and great joy in the company of dear friends.

To all those departed and to those who supported the museum down through the years, be that actively or indeed just by their presence, it was indeed a pleasure to work with you and you greatly enriched and contributed to the museum as it is to-day.

The later stage of the museum’s development is well documented thanks in no small way to the attention to detail which is a hallmark of our curator Liam Bradley’s role. We continue to be at the forefront of local museum development and are proud to be the first county museum to be given full accreditation under The Heritage Council Museum Standards Programme. None of this would have been possible without the leadership and commitment of Liam and his staff and it is very good to be able to publicly acknowledge their contribution. Indeed the next forty years are in good hands.



*Left to Right*  
**Mrs. Mattie Killen** (*Founder Member of  
Museum Friend's Organisation*)  
**Bishop Mulligan** (*Founder Member of  
Museum Friend's Organisation*)  
**Jim Jenkins** (*Founder Member of  
Museum Friend's Organisation*)

*The picture dates to the early 1990's*

“ We were very fortunate in those early years to be supported by a wide range of people with an innate sense of pride in the history of our locality. ”

CHAPTER EIGHT

# A DECADE OF ACHIEVEMENT

BY

PATRICK LONG



Patrick Long  
Curator |  
1990 - 2000

“Among the most significant historical and archaeological exhibitions drawn from the County Museum’s growing permanent collections and from institutional loans in my time as curator were those which marked commemorative themes and anniversaries”

I started my calendar decade as curator of Monaghan County Museum in January 1990 by meeting the three council staff who had worked with my predecessor Aidan Walsh: clerical officer Iris Allen (succeeded in later years by Deirdre McSkeane and Donna Macklin), conservator/technician Noel Breakey and attendant, the late Pádraig ‘Chucks’ Clerkin, were complemented then and throughout my tenure by a succession of invaluable and tireless support staff provided under the FAS community employment scheme (CES) latterly co-ordinated by Elizabeth Murphy, and with all of whom it was an honour to work. In further support, the Clogher Historical Society, and the Friends of Monaghan County Museum chaired by the late, literally indefatigable, Jim Jenkins, were consistently the flying buttresses of an institution whose high profile among Irish museums was already well established since winning the 1980 Council of Europe prize that had first brought Monaghan County Museum to my attention years before I ever undertook museum studies.

Coming from previous - and formative museum experience at Kilmainham Gaol, Dublin, curating Monaghan was my first management appointment, and portal to all regional, cross-border and national heritage authorities, bodies and interest groups to which a typical local authority museum service must respond. From the outset, my first major task as curator was to supervise refurbishment by

architect Orna Hanly of the museum's permanent display galleries for their official reopening by the late President Patrick Hillery in the summer of 1990. Extraordinary team effort ensured the work was completed on time, while staff somehow maintained their composure and answered the day-to-day demands of the ongoing museum service. The museum's purpose-built temporary exhibition gallery remained in use throughout and, with the almost-simultaneous appointment of Somhairle MacConghail as Monaghan's first County arts officer, it subsequently hosted additional events with his co-operation.

In the limited space of my brief contribution to a collective 40th anniversary memoir, it is impossible to highlight more than a few of the more outstanding impressions, events and landmark occasions which made my ten years as the second curator in Monaghan stand out in the continuity of the heritage service since the County Museum's foundation. Major exhibitions by living local artists such as the celebrated Peter Deighan, and by key national painters such as Tony O'Malley and others year on year, were of obvious cultural importance. Institutional milestones included Monaghan's Gulbenkian/Norwich Union Museum Award for collections care in 1993 (recognition for the conservation and back-up staff's personal commitment to excellence), and the County Museum's gala 25th anniversary celebration in 1999.

Among the most significant historical and archaeological exhibitions drawn from the County Museum's growing permanent collections and from institutional loans in my time as curator were those which marked commemorative themes and anniversaries: *'Kings in Conflict'* (1990), a tercentenary cross-border exhibition on the Battle of the Boyne, was shared by the museums of Ulster north and south, and prompted donations to the County Museum of important local Orange material; *'Roads to 1916'* (1997), a Monaghan-generated exhibition in local and world context linking the 'twin 1916s' of the Easter Rising and the Somme traditions, saw Easter lilies and Flanders poppies form a symbolic backdrop to the displays; *'Monaghan Gold'* (1999) was a unique loan by the National Museum of Ireland of bronze-age and early Christian objects from the Tydavnet

area; *'Anno Domini'* (2000), the particular brainchild of Pádraig Clerkin, Noel Breakey and Jim Jenkins to commemorate the second millennium with a grand exhibition by all the local Christian churches, and launched by President Mary McAleese, began a series of talks, tours and events to showcase Christian diversity in local history and contemporary life. Bishops, priests, nuns and pastors contributed time and materials. Like the 'Kings' exhibition of 1990, important donations of historic objects accrued and a memorable (perhaps remarkable) 'ecumenical' dinner formally closed proceedings.

Much else, in the way of friendships (notably the McArdles, my original 1990 B&B family, and some Canadian counterparts of the 1999 twinning exchange with PEI and New Brunswick!), professional relationships and years of sterling support from the county management 'dream team' of Joe Gavin and Tony Murphy, has endured with me since an unforgettably warm and generous send-off to pastures new in March 2000.

“ *'Monaghan Gold' (1999) was a unique loan by the National Museum of Ireland of bronze-age and early Christian objects from the Tydavnet area.* ”



Tydavnet Sun Disc and St Dymphna's Crozier, courtesy of the National Museum of Ireland

CHAPTER NINE

# SETTING THE STANDARD


BY  
ROISIN DOHERTY

I first remember hearing about Monaghan County Museum when I was working as a Museum Researcher in Donegal County Museum in 1997. As an award winning museum it was highly thought of within the museum world. My background was Archaeology and I was interested in conservation and I had heard about the reputation of the museum for conservation in Ireland. The history of Monaghan always fascinated me with its crannogs, lakes and ancient houses. I knew without a doubt that I wanted to work there.

I joined as curator in May 2000 and I will always remember the first day that I stood at the front entrance of the museum. Behind the door was a world full of archaeological treasure and history. A museum full of many curiosities.

I have several memories which are particularly strong. The first was when we were designing a logo and brand for the museum. The brief was to come up with a logo that would represent the museum. Our staff meetings were creative and there were many 'brain storming' sessions and ideas passed around. It was felt by all of the staff that it would be important that the museum was represented by an artefact from the collections. There were various suggestions but it was Padraig Clerkin, the museum researcher, who came up with the idea of the bronze pin. The designer using this artefact designed it in a contemporary graphic and this represented the link with past and present.

“*Monaghan County Museum, the people who I have met and worked with, I will always remember, and I am proud to be part of the making of this 40 year old history.*”



**Roisin Doherty**  
Curator  
2000 - 2004

CHAPTER TEN

# A MUSEUM FOR EVERYONE

BY

PATRICIA BARBOUR

**I**n 2005, I was quite happy in The Market House working with the Arts Officer when I got a phone call from HR telling me that I was being transferred to the museum. Because I really enjoyed working in the Arts Office I was extremely apprehensive about the move – I didn't think museums were my thing. However, that was nine years ago and I have absolutely no regrets, in fact, I would say that I love coming to work every day!

The most important aspect of any museum is the visitors. Usually, as I'm the first person that visitors meet when they arrive I feel that it is very important to make them feel welcome. Sometimes I sense that some visitors feel as I did all those years ago – that museums are not for them. I find that a cheerful greeting and some general chit chat makes them relax and enjoy their visit. It's a part of my job that I really enjoy.

Although there have been many interesting exhibitions in the museum since I have worked here, I would have to choose the *Magic Miles in Monaghan* exhibition which showcased the GNR (Great Northern Railway) in 2008 as being my favourite. As someone who has no memory of the railways in Monaghan I found it fascinating. As it was an in-house exhibition there was a lot of work for everybody; a platform was built, murals were painted on the walls and mannequins were dressed in the fashions of the 1950s. I found this exhibition very

Another memory was when we joined the Heritage Council of Ireland Standards and Accreditation Pilot Study Programme. We were part of the pilot phase and went on to achieve Full Museum Accreditation. Everything that we did in the museum was reviewed from documentation, collection care, exhibitions and conservation. Museum standards were raised and we were one of the first museums in Ireland to achieve this accolade. This would not have been possible without the team work of all of the staff, Noel, Donna, Eileen, Andy, Padraig and Liam.

I also remember the numerous exhibitions and events we held in the museum gallery. The interest, support and dedication from the Advisory Committee especially Theo, Jim and June was appreciated. We also moved the small conservation lab from Hill Street to Clontibret to a fit for purpose store and we launched our Strategic Plan and were moving in one direction – what an example of museum excellence!

I left Monaghan in May 2004 to take up a senior museum post for Derry City Council. I do believe that the four years that I spent in Monaghan has influenced and shaped me as a person. Monaghan County Museum, the people who I have met and worked with I will always remember and I am proud to be part of the making of this 40 year old history.

**“** *We were part of the pilot phase and went on to achieve full Museum Accreditation. Everything that we did in the museum was reviewed from Documentation, Collection Care, Exhibitions and Conservation. Museum standards were raised and we were one of the first museums in Ireland to achieve this accolade.* **”**

CHAPTER ELEVEN

# HISTORY IN STYLE

BY

THERESA LOFTUS

When I started work in Monaghan County Museum in March 2004 preparations were being made for the 30th anniversary celebrations. It is timely that I have been asked about my memories of the museum as we approach the 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary.

Two members of staff that I worked closely with initially were Stephanie McMenamin and Padraig Clerkin who both made me feel very welcome. Padraig was especially helpful as he was able to answer my many questions regarding where to find artefacts, documents, maps and old files. Often he could also tell me the background of how an artefact came to be in the museum and who the donor had been. This was a great way of learning about the ‘behind the scenes’ story of the museum collection.

My job was originally Education / Outreach Officer. This was quite daunting as history was not my strongest subject. I set about building up relationships with the schools and the education centre as well as the community forum and older people’s networks. Once I had established the themes that interested people, I devised and delivered events, workshops and tours tailored to the specific requirements of the many groups and schools that are now regular museum service users.

So much has happened in the intervening years. I discovered that I love history and in order to learn more about it I commenced further education. I studied Local History through NUI Maynooth and Museum Practice and Management through the University of Ulster.

interesting and informative, especially the fashions of the time. I think that fashion, especially ladies’ fashion, would be a great exhibition in the future

One of the storerooms in the museum is dedicated to uniforms and costumes and as someone who loves fashion I find this section fascinating. And so I was delighted to accept a special donation on behalf of the museum in the last year. It was a navy velvet court dress exquisitely made with jewelled buttons in perfect condition and would have been worn by a court official in the 19th century.

Continuing on the fashion theme I absolutely love the lace collection, especially Clones, Carrickmacross and linen. I love the texture of it, the variety of patterns and admire the work involved in producing such fabulous pieces. And since I have been working in the museum I have even learned a little of its history.

So I have discovered museums are for everyone, even me!

“ *One of the storerooms in the museum is dedicated to uniforms and costumes and as someone who loves fashion I find this section fascinating.* ”



Patricia Barbour  
2005 – PRESENT  
Marketing & Admin

I was so lucky to have Pádraig as a colleague in the early years as he was the researcher and had so much knowledge.

During my first year the museum was invited by Public Achievement to become involved in a project promoting citizenship in Northern and Southern Ireland through the medium of museums. My part in the project was to facilitate an after school youth group on a weekly basis during term-time. The group was made up of students from three secondary schools in Monaghan town area. The project which ran from 2004 to 2007 was a resounding success. The Public Achievement group contributed to three exhibitions in the museum; *Monaghan's Sporting Century*, *Monaghan a Border County 40 years growing* and *Monaghan in your eyes*. Members of the group often call in to visit the museum when they are home or doing research for college and it is always lovely to see them again.

My favourite exhibition was the *Sybil Connolly – Ambassador of Style* exhibition as it was so varied with wonderfully designed ceramics, crystal and textiles. I learnt so much about Sybil Connolly and her trademark designs when working with this exhibition; she truly brought Irish design and craftsmanship to the international stage as so many famous people wore her clothes. Irish textiles such as tweed, linen and lace were important in her high fashion garments and she was famous for her pleated linen and use of Carrickmacross Lace.

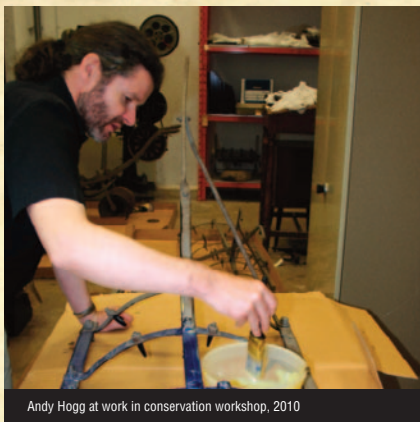
The walking tour of Monaghan town is something that I have loved doing from the first day I began my research for it. My job was made easier by the fact that a tour had been published in 1982; prepared by the then curator – Aiden Walsh and Theo McMahon. No two tours are the same as different groups are interested in different aspects of Monaghan town's history. It is often the case that people will share a story they know about the town. Every story that someone has told me over the years while on a walking tour has added another piece to the jigsaw. It is great that Monaghan town has so much original architecture and such a rich history; it makes my job a lot easier.

My current position of Exhibition / Research Officer gives me the opportunity to do a job I love everyday. When preparing for exhibitions I research our collection for relevant information and artefacts. I examine files, archives, maps, books and images in an effort to respond to the many questions that people pose. My work is varied and fascinating. The cure for boredom is curiosity; thankfully there is no cure for curiosity!

Monaghan County Museum has achieved so much in forty years and I sincerely hope that this will continue in the decades to come.



“ My work is varied and fascinating. The cure for boredom is curiosity; thankfully there is no cure for curiosity! ”





Public talk in connection with Walking the Banners exhibition 2013



Presentation of restored Coolshannagh graveyard map to the museum 2009



Halloween at the Museum 2011



Students involved in archaeological surveys as part of museum project Students on Site 2010



Museum aided Steam Around the Lough event in Monaghan Town 2013



Barry McGuigan launches Monaghan, a Sporting Century exhibition 2005



Senator David Norris tours the museum with Conservator Noel



Launch of Irish Sign Language (ISL) exhibition 2011



Museum Heritage Day 2011



Heritage Week event at the museum 2006



School girls view 8 Artists exhibition in the Courthouse 1981



Conservation workshop in the museum store 2014



Presentation to Tony Murphy upon his retirement from the Advisory Committee 2009



Conservation team of Andy Hogg and Noel Breakey at work on a marching banner from the museum collection 2013



Car from Bambino exhibition on display outside the museum 1994



Monaghan County Museum Public Achievement group at the launch of their exhibition on the GAA, 2005



Monaghan Comhaltas group perform in the museum during Seachtain na Gaeilge 2014

JUST A VERY SMALL COLLECTION OF PHOTO MEMORIES FROM  
OUR FIRST 40 YEARS AT MONAGHAN COUNTY MUSEUM

CHAPTER TWELVE

# THE FUTURE THROUGH THE PAST

BY

LIAM BRADLEY

Growing up in Monaghan, I had been on tours of our local museum with my school and had spent time myself strolling around the displays, looking at all the wonderful items that had a connection to my story, my history. I had always harboured a deep love of history and in particular the investigation of the past through archaeology. It was this love that brought me to Queen's University where I completed a degree in archaeology. As I researched my final dissertation, I once again found myself in the County Museum rummaging through their records with the very able help of the then curator; Mr. Pat Long. When I qualified, I spent time working on archaeological sites but always wanted to work in the museum I had grown up with.

The opportunity to fulfil this ambition was given to me by another curator Roisin Doherty who offered me a short term contract as Exhibitions Officer. The contract was only to last three months and I knew I would have to make the most of it. I remember standing on the steps on my first day, steps that I had walked up many times in the past but now I was crossing that threshold as a member of staff. The saying goes, 'If you love your job then you'll never work a day in your life' and this was certainly true for me. I enjoyed every minute of it, helping people with their queries, researching local history, planning exhibitions based on the rich history of the county and my



**Liam Bradley**  
Curator |  
2004 – PRESENT

“*We became the first local authority museum to achieve full accreditation under the Heritage Council's Museum Standard's Programme for Ireland.*”

personal favourite, getting to handle some of the beautiful archaeological pieces in the collection. I thought this was an incredible job and I really wanted to stay beyond my three month tenure. Once again, I have to thank Roisin Doherty for putting my case to the council so that I was able to extend my contract.

Two years later Roisin told us that she had decided to take on the post of Director of Museums and Heritage in Derry. I wasn't sure whether I should go for the vacant post of Monaghan County Museum Curator but I knew I would always regret it if I didn't try. So I applied, was called for interview and despite all my concerns I was offered the job. I was very young and inexperienced, the learning curve was extremely steep and I made plenty of mistakes along the way but I learned from them and it eventually helped me grow into the museum professional I am today. None of this would have been possible without the opportunity afforded me by Roisin Doherty and the support of Monaghan County Council and its management team, in particular Mr Adge King.

This job has allowed me to work on the programmes I thought were important, in particular, education. I knew that the people of Monaghan were interested in their heritage, they just needed a way to get involved and the comprehensive exhibition, education and outreach programmes that have been instigated have seen the numbers using the museum services quadruple. We became the first local authority museum to achieve full accreditation under the Heritage Council's Museum Standards Programme for Ireland and I have mentored other museums on their way to achieving this award.

I have had the pleasure of working with some truly unique, intelligent and dedicated professionals over the years. As a team we have dealt with our fair share of successes and challenges, and have lived through happy times and sad. Certainly the saddest day I spent in Monaghan County Museum was the day I received the phone call informing me that our longtime Research Officer, Pdraig Clerkin had died. His family asked me to speak at his graveside and I remember thinking that day about how all things and all people eventually pass into memory. The place was never the same without him.

Looking to the future, I once again gaze at the past. We are a museum at the centre of the community and I want Monaghan County Museum to continue to grow as a service, as a collection, as a centre for professional excellence but most importantly as a place of learning and fun. I want the museum to be able to reach out to all users and potential users of our service and give them a reason to take the time out of their busy lives to find out about the history of this remarkable county. I look forward to next forty years of innovation and exploration who knows what we might find?

*“I knew that the people of Monaghan were interested in their heritage, they just needed a way to get involved and the comprehensive exhibition, education and outreach programmes that have been instigated have seen the numbers using the museum services quadruple.”*



## CHAPTER THIRTEEN

# WORDS THROUGH TIME

BY

EILEEN M<sup>C</sup>KENNA

**A**s Monaghan County Museum celebrates its 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary, and I begin my retirement, my thoughts turn to a snowy January morning in 1991 when I first walked through the doors to begin work. I was, and still am, amazed by the sheer volume and diversity of artefacts on display and was even more astounded to learn that the vast majority of the collection had to remain in storage due to lack of space. My introduction to the work of the museum was cleaning a banner with a cotton bud dipped in white spirit while sitting on the floor of the gallery. Uncomfortable and time consuming but ultimately rewarding as the bright colours reappeared from under decades of grime.

Over the twenty one years that I have been associated with it, Monaghan County Museum has staged many interesting and informative exhibitions and it would be difficult to choose a favourite one. One which sticks in my memory featured Fiat Bambino cars. The artist had altered the vehicles to depict what he felt were the current areas of worship; one with stained glass windows represented the church while another covered in white leather was designed to show our obsession with luxury. However, a really special exhibition which was curated by Patrick Long, concentrated on the emergency. Although I wasn't around during WW2, I had listened to so many stories about it growing up and read so much about it that at times I felt that I had really lived through it. And so for me the exhibition with its sandbags, gas masks, ration books and dried egg cartons was strangely nostalgic and very atmospheric. It was also very informative and attracted many visitors.

## CHAPTER FOURTEEN

# 'LAUGHING & LEARNING'

BY

PAULINE TILSON

**M**y name is Pauline Tilson. I am Education and Outreach Officer with Monaghan County Museum. I first came to work here in November 2007. Having only been in a museum once or twice before, I felt I was stepping into the unknown and away from my usual type of employment.

On discovering that the museum was housed in two three-story townhouses built in 1860 I thought that it must be very small. When I came through the door on my first day I was amazed at how big the display areas were and how well Monaghan's rich culture and heritage was displayed. I was so nervous that I was shaking, but my new colleagues quickly made me feel at ease. The curator, Liam Bradley, took me aside that afternoon to explain what my role within the museum would be. As Education and Outreach officer, my role is to liaise with various schools, community groups and other target audiences throughout the county to arrange a programme of events, a role that I have truly enjoyed since, as I have met people of all ages and backgrounds.

Since I have been working here, Monaghan County Museum has hosted many interesting and memorable exhibitions. It's hard to pick a favourite but the two that really caught my attention were *Down to Monaghan – Farming in two Counties*, and *Seen but not Heard*. Coming from a farming background *Down to Monaghan – Farming in two Counties* was right up my street. It was interesting to see how my grandparents and my father would have completed the jobs like cutting the grass to make hay and bringing it home for the winter before farm machinery became commonplace.

Everyone who has ever worked in a museum has a favourite item or type of item that excites them more than any other. For me anything that deals with the lives and work of women; domestic objects, lace, washday accoutrements, bread irons, butter churns etc.; workaday items that reflect a time when women's work was so undervalued and under recorded is of great interest. However, it is old documents, chiefly letters that I dream about. The handwriting, the grammar, the formal language of even personal letters and of course the content. There is also the paraphernalia associated with it too; the paper, so precious that every millimetre was used, the quill pen, the blotting paper, the sepia coloured ink, the seal impressed in wax and Victorian writing desks with their intriguing secret compartments. If given the chance I would happily spend all day reading and transcribing such documents. Over the years I have learned a lot from my colleagues and from curators, Patrick Long, Roisin Doherty and Liam Bradley. I am especially grateful to Pat Long for giving me a job in the first place. I will be sad to leave the museum but I hope I will be associated with it for many years to come.

“ *It is old documents, chiefly letters that I dream about. The handwriting, the grammar, the formal language of even personal letters and of course the content.* ”



**Eileen McKenna**  
1991 – 2013  
Researcher & Newsletter Editor

## CHAPTER FIFTEEN

# CHILDREN WILL ALWAYS REMEMBER

BY

THEO MCMAHON

**O**n 30 April 2013 I visited Monaghan County Museum with my granddaughter Suzanne Van Elk, from Holland, to see the exhibition of *Walking the Colours* - exploring our community traditions and marches. I have had an active interest in Monaghan County Museum since its commencements in 1974 and I have walked through its doors to view many different heritage displays.

It is always a memorable and informative time to view such a well-presented and colourful display. When it was my granddaughter, who accompanied me, it was especially nostalgic and I was so glad to see her looking, examining and questioning many of the exhibits and their relevance. We took pictures and I know that it will be something that she will remember and cherish and lead her to see the way that history and tradition opens up a passage through a carefully laid selection of real banners sashes, flags, photographs and other ephemera representing insights into the customs of the community at large and their relevance and significance.

I wish to congratulate the curator and all his talented and expert staff who put together such an excellent display in this professional display. This is only one of many varied exhibitions that the Museum has hosted over the years.

I noticed that there were some 40 children with teachers and a museum member talking to them about the varied items in the

Being an 80's child *Seen but not Heard* brought me back once again to my childhood. Within this exhibition there were toys that I remembered having played with; My Little Pony, the Cabbage Patch Dolls and the doll's house. Television programmes such as Little House on the Prairie, The Waltons and Rainbow all brought back pleasant memories to me. I enjoyed talking about the games and pasttimes from my childhood and comparing them to the games and pasttimes of my grandparents.

Working in the role of Education and Outreach Officer, I have lots of memories of working with groups, particularly some of the questions asked! One particular memory that made me smile all day and still does was when I was giving a group a tour of our *Soundtracks exhibition*. I was explaining that before everyone had cars people had to walk or cycle to the local town or village for entertainment. I told them about my father cycling to local carnivals and dances on a push bike. When I had finished speaking I asked the group if they had any questions one little hand rose and asked me, 'Please Miss, what is a push bike?'

**“** *Coming from a farming background Down to Monaghan, it was interesting to see how my grandparents and my father would have completed the jobs like cutting the grass to make hay and bringing it home..* **”**



**Pauline Tilson**  
**2007 - PRESENT**  
**Education & Events**

exhibition and I enjoyed seeing their excitement at seeing something displayed from their own or an adjoining parish. I heard one little boy say, 'wasn't it great and now we can go for the ice cream.' So hopefully he will record it on the film of memory and when the ice cream is gone he will in later life recall his visit to the museum and the wonder of it all.

I know that it was such early trips to museums at local level that created my lifetime interest in museum work. Here we have an easily accessible repository where all kinds of things take on a meaning that hopefully will be carried with them through life and they will realise that when they begin to study certain topics that there is a location of excellence that will be able to keep them informed and guided in their academic studies. They will also know that this is the place to conserve and display important objects that should be saved for the community at large.

I had wondered what I might say here but it was really wonderful to see young and older people enjoying their visit to the exhibition. For many it will be a place to visit on a constant basis or even occasionally and where they will always add to their memories.

Although all these thoughts cover the planning of different curators and their knowledgeable staff over the 39 years of its existence it is wonderful that it is so widely used by children who will carry these memories and recollections into the future. What better can any community and County Council provide for the ever questioning minds and curiosity of the young.

May the future remain bright as they continue their great work in the years that ahead.



“What better can any community and County Council provide for the ever questioning minds and curiosity of the young.”



Students involved in workshops during Science Week 2011



The Topley brothers during their visit to the museum's exhibition on the Great Northern Railway Magic Miles in Monaghan 2008



Community event at St. Patrick's Accommodation Centre 2009



Members of the public enjoying Down to Monaghan exhibition, a cross border project with Down County Museum 2008



Living history workshop 2007



Museum walking tour of Monaghan Town 2010



Musical storytelling workshop in connection with Soundtracks exhibition 2012



Curator Liam Bradley giving a tour of the Magic Miles in Monaghan exhibition on the Great Northern Railway 2009



Museum staff at the Monaghan County Museum Heritage Day 2011

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# A MUSEUM 1974 ~~OF~~ 2014 MEMORIES

