

# Heritage Ireland

Issue 13 HALLOWEEN SPECIAL 2020

## Askeaton Castle

OPENS TO THE PUBLIC

## Dunmore Cave Feature

Where mythology and geology merge

*The Puzzlement of Sramore Man*



OPW

Oifig na  
nOibreacha Poiblí  
Office of Public Works

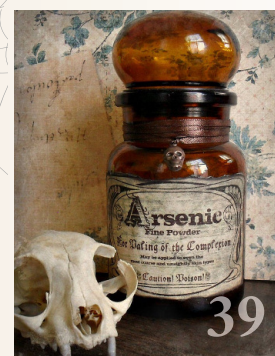


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# Welcome

It's a very different world for all of us at the moment but despite the fact that we can't always welcome you to all of our wonderful sites in the normal way please be assured that we are working away behind the scenes to provide you with engaging online digital content right now and on several exciting infrastructure projects that will make our sites even more exciting places to visit in the future.

For Heritage Week just gone by our sites produced a vast array of online events, videos and worksheets, most of which are still available on the OPW YouTube channel, social media and websites. We will continue to develop further resources to bring the sites to you while you can't visit us. We are particularly focussed on the potential impact on school children and understanding that some visits previously planned under the Educational School Visits Scheme may be not now be possible, our sites are working on outreach to schools and on developing new ways of engaging with students. For example, at Brú na Bóinne, our guides will send teachers a free DVD which is a 20-minute film about the monuments and in particular, the Winter Solstice at Newgrange. They will also send out free school worksheets and invite schools to get in touch by web chat so that students can ask questions and chat to some of the guides. Another example is Glebe House and Gallery in Letterkenny, where the staff have put together an art teachers focus group and are developing a series of blended learning tools for Junior and Leaving Certificate students. OPW guide staff will continue to find new and innovative ways of engaging with this most important segment of our audience.

Now more than ever, it is incredibly important that we develop visitor attractions that stand out in the marketplace and the Fáilte Ireland approved investment of €4.3 million in four key heritage sites along the Wild Atlantic Way is certainly helping us to achieve this. In this issue we offer you a look at what has been achieved so far and a sneak preview of what's to come. When this is all over we guarantee you an experience that is second to none at these fantastic sites. In the meantime, our outdoor playgrounds, play areas and parks all remain open with protective measures in place, as do the outdoor spaces at some National Monuments. Please check the individual site pages on [www.heritageireland.ie](http://www.heritageireland.ie) for individual opening arrangements and adhere to public health guidelines when visiting.

*Oíche Shamhna Shona Daoibh!*

**Maurice Buckley**  
Chairman  
OPW



**John McMahon**  
Commissioner  
OPW Heritage  
Services





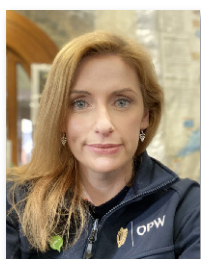
# Heritage Ireland Ezine Contributors



**Dianne Nolan** is a guide at Askeaton Castle. She holds a B.A. in Archaeology and Geography from NUIG and a M.Sc. in Local and Regional Development from DIT. She has worked as a guide with the OPW since 2005 and has particular interest in History of Medieval Women.



**Pádraig Meehan** is a writer and researcher; his field of interest is the Irish Passage Tomb Tradition. As a member of the Human Population Dynamics at Carrowkeel international archaeology research team, he has co-authored a recent series of papers. He has also published articles and a book on the topic of the Listoghil alignment. Pádraig works as a guide in Carrowmore visitor centre, Sligo.



**Annie Timlin** has worked as a guide in Portumna Castle and Gardens since 2019. She specialises in events and craft workshops for children at the castle. Previously she has given a talk for Heritage week 2019. This year for the event she wrote and directed a short video about life downstairs in the kitchens. She also created a video for Culture Night on the 'Life in Still Life' exhibition.



**Thomas Nelligan** has a PhD in ancient Greek literature from the University of Limerick and published his research in 2015. Since 2016 he has been a guide with the OPW, first at Roscrea Heritage and now at the Rock of Cashel. He also runs a blog about heritage sites in Ireland ([www.thestandingstone.ie](http://www.thestandingstone.ie)) on which he has published over 400 articles.



**Siobhán Mc Gowan Loughlin**, a native of Dromahair in Co. Leitrim, started working as a guide in Parke's Castle in 1995 after she completed her studies in Tourism and Business. She was promoted to Head Guide in 1996, a position she had held since. Along with her regular guiding duties she loves to organise events, especially during Heritage Week.



**Jenny Young** holds a BA in Archaeology & Geography and a MA in Landscape Archaeology from NUI Galway. She works at Aughnacore Castle and has developed a passionate and broad interest in medieval Gaelic settlement and society. She is currently undergoing research into the medieval Gaelic lordship of larchonnacht for a future publication.



**Adrian Kelly** has worked at the Glebe House and Gallery for thirty years and he studied Fine Art and Museum Studies.



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**OPW**





# Askeaton Castle

## Opens to the Public

**I**n the very heart of this County Limerick town stand the impressive remains of a medieval fortress. Askeaton Castle dates from 1199, when William de Burgo built it on a rock in the River Deel.

Over the centuries, the castle proved itself key to the history of Munster. It was the power base of the earls of Desmond after 1348. In 1579 it held out against the English general Sir Nicholas Malby, an incident that helped spark the second Desmond Rebellion.

The banqueting hall is one of the finest medieval secular buildings in Ireland. The tower is partly ruined, but some fine windows and an exquisite medieval fireplace have remained.

The early eighteenth-century building nearby was used as a Hellfire Club. These clubs were rumoured to be dens of excess in which wealthy gentlemen indulged in drink, mock ritual and other nefarious activities.

Minister of State at the Office of Public Works Mr. Patrick

O' Donovan TD announced the opening of the Desmond Castle in Askeaton to the public at the start of September – the first time that visitors have been able to access the site and view the ongoing conservation works at the historic Monument, the earliest parts of which date from the 12th century.

*“Askeaton Castle is a magnificent and historic structure right in the middle of the town,” the Minister said, “and the Office of Public Works have been working there for several seasons, gradually conserving significant parts of the structures on the site and making sure that they are preserved for generations to come. I am delighted to announce that starting this week, the public will now be able to access the site in the company of an extremely knowledgeable OPW Guide, view the wonderful heritage of Askeaton and listen to stories of the past.”*

The OPW conservation works have been in progress since approx. 2008 and have involved the painstaking retrieval of significant parts of the buildings on the site, saving elements that were at risk of structural failure and carefully reinstating significant parts of the Castle, the earliest parts



of which were built by William de Burgo in 1199. Work continues at the site and the OPW has provided public access walkways into the heart of the historic site so that visitors can safely walk into the complex and experience the Castle at close range. The public will, as well as having a guided tour around those parts of the site which have already been conserved, be able to see conservation work continuing on other structures, such as the famous Hellfire Club. Visitors will be able to see the

skilled stonemasons and workers of the OPW perform this work and see them apply their craft at close range, adding considerably to their visit and their appreciation of the work being done at Askeaton.

The Minister also paid tribute to the local community, notably Askeaton Civic Trust and Anthony Sheehy, who facilitated excellent tours of parts of the site on a voluntary basis in the past, at weekends and during holidays when the works staff were not present.

*"The Desmond Castle is obviously the centrepiece of the site," the Minister said, "but the public will also be able to enter into the Banqueting Hall built by the 7<sup>th</sup> Earl of Desmond in 1440 and will be able to see the infamous Hellfire Club – still in a fragile state – being conserved by the skilled OPW team at the site. This is the first time that we have placed visitors so close to an ongoing conservation project as it is actually happening and I very much hope that visitors and tourists will appreciate the unique value of what they are seeing here."*

The site is located on the N69 in the centre of Askeaton. The Castle stands on its own island in the middle of the River Deel and is accessible by road bridge. A Guide Service available daily until the end of October.

Tour times: 10am, 11.30am, 1.30pm & 3pm.



## History

TEXT BY DIANNE NOLAN

**T***he area is first mentioned as part of Tuath Geibtni, the clan of Geiphtine or Keating in 651. Later the O'Briens of Thomond, kings of North Munster retain Askeaton for their use. The River Deel becomes tidal at Askeaton and this made a good crossing to County Clare, the O'Brien's stronghold. The site was identified from the Norman period as one of significance. Hamo de Valoignes, Chief Justiciary of Ireland occupied the site in the 1190s and was followed by the Norman families of de Burgo, de Clare and de Welles. The first Earl of Desmond purchased Askeaton as part of the barony of Lystifti in 1348. The Earls of Desmond would remain at Askeaton for more than 230 years and are the family most associated with the site in folk memory.*

Askeaton Castle is a natural island fortress in the River Deel. The stone built defences have been built into the limestone platforms. As you enter the Askeaton Castle complex, the Desmond Tower rises up in front of your eyes from the limestone outcrop of the inner ward. This is still an imposing sight today in its partially ruined condition. The Inner, or Upper Ward, and the Bawn Outer Ward are clearly delineated at Askeaton by their change in elevation with the Inner Ward rising above the Bawn on a further height of limestone outcrop. Walking alongside the outer defensive wall many embrasures are evident with arrow slit windows. These narrow openings also feature circular shapes as they were later modified for use with guns. Steps to the wall walk reveal more defensive positions at a higher level where arrow loop openings are inserted into the merlons of the crenelated parapet.





On the opposite side of the Bawn, beyond the Inner Keep, lies the Walled Garden, enclosing an area of about half an acre. These gardens became a feature of Norman Castles during the Crusades after they encountered the palaces of Moorish Spain and the near East. Their palace gardens had inspired Norman Knights to recreate the idea of 'Paradise' when they returned home to North Western Europe. The word paradise is Persian in origin and means a walled garden. The garden at Askeaton was laid out in typical medieval style with square or rectangular beds. This can be seen clearly in the image of Askeaton Castle from *Pacata Hibernia*, produced during the Elizabethan Wars in Ireland of the sixteenth century.

The Outer Ward or Bawn still retains its most important building. The Great Hall or *Halla Mór* is built on the site of an earlier hall house, the original Hall being greatly expanded in the fifteenth century by the 6th Earl of Desmond, known as James the Builder or James the Usurper! This is one of the finest secular buildings of the fifteenth century and indeed, as Askeaton had become the main centre for the powerful Earls of Desmond, the building had a number of important functions. Often referred to as a Banqueting Hall, it was in fact so much more, it was their Courthouse, their regional political gathering place or *Dáil* and a place to forge alliances with foreign powers. The windows in their delicate tracery style become more elaborate as you reach the dais at the top of the Hall where the Earl, Countess and dignitaries would have been seated. On the wall behind there is a triple arched blind arcading to further emphasise the importance of those attendees positioned here.

The Inner Ward holds the remains of the fifteenth and

sixteenth century Desmond Tower, the earlier Constables' Tower and a groove for a portcullis indicating the presence of a gate tower at the entrance. The Constables' Tower holds the highest ground and accommodated the most powerful people on site at one time. The only remains of another tower opposite the Gate Tower and shown in the image from *Pacata Hibernia* are its garderobes which empty from the walls of the Inner Ward. The later Desmond Tower became the residence of the Earls of Desmond. This castle is where Eleanor, Countess of Desmond would have given hospitality to Bishop Patrick O'Hely and Fr Conn O'Rourke, the Kilmallock Martyrs, before betraying their cause and journey to the Mayor of Limerick, James Goold. The fireplace which still clings to the chimney stack bears the coats of arms of The Earls of Desmond and the Butlers of Dunboyne, Eleanor's family.

After the Desmond Rebellions of the sixteenth century, Askeaton again became a centre of conflict in the mid seventeenth century. In 1642 the Irish Confederacy forces took the Castle but held it for less than ten years as Cromwell's Army under Commander Daniel Axtell marched on Askeaton in 1651. The Confederacy Forces were defeated and their Captain, Patrick Purcell, hanged. Cromwell's Army did not seek to refortify the site but to destroy it and by 1652 had demolished the greater part of Desmond Tower and rendered the other structures onsite indefensible. A cannonball breach can be clearly seen in the north wall of Desmond Tower from this period.

The castle complex was also used during the eighteenth century for more light-hearted purposes. The Askeaton Hellfire Club is built in Georgian style, reusing limestone



◀ Facing page (top):  
The ruin of the Banqueting Hall at Askeaton Castle.

◀ Facing page (bottom):  
Detail of a stone carving.

◀ Left: Minister Patrick O'Donovan and OPW National Monuments Depot crew, Liam Joy, Donal Scanlon, DJ O'Brien, Pat Morris, Edward O'Gorman, Noel Brosnan, Darragh O'Brien, Maurice Fitzgerald and James O'Donoghue, on site at Askeaton Castle.





## Mary Casey of Bridge House, Askeaton Castle

Mary Casey grew up in the Bridge House at the entrance to Askeaton Castle. On the 9th of September 2020, Mary Casey visited the site for a tour and she shared some stories with us of growing up with a castle in her backyard.

"The castle was our playground," said Mary. They played handball in the Halla Mór and had ropes hanging near the Constable's Tower down to the bawn where they "climbed and swung like Tarzan." There was always somewhere to climb, and as well as the outer battlements, the children would climb up the remaining stone steps in Desmond Tower. In one of these chambers there was a large rectangular hole that they called a Murder Hole.

If Mary had done something particularly bold she would hide in one of the holes inside the wall of the Inner Ward. "One of them went right through but the other had concrete at the bottom, so I would hide in there." These holes or shoots were actually garderobes so Mary was essentially hiding out in the Medieval sewers –



▲ Mary Casey

punishment enough for being bold!

rubble from the castle site and also decorative redbrick. There was a bowed section to the front and the back and was used from c.1740 to 1800 as a clubhouse for the new Ascendancy who had been granted lands after the Desmond Rebellions and the Cromwellian Wars. The families associated with the Hellfire Club included the Dennys, the Blennerhassetts, the Crokers, the Creaghs and the Pritties. The Hellfire Club at Askeaton was said to be a less debauched than others and even permitted some female members, such as Margaret, aka Celinda, Blennerhassett. The club was well noted, however, for its insatiable drinking habits as shown in Worsdale's portrait of the group held by the National Gallery of Ireland. Scalteen was a drink associated with this time which was a boiled mixture of whiskey, butter, water, sugar and pepper.

From a den of disorder to upholding law and order, the Hellfire Club building was used as a barracks during part of the nineteenth century. The last time Askeaton is used in conflict is during the twentieth century when the site was occupied by Anti-treaty forces in 1922 and later taken by the Pro-treaty side.

Her father kept a garden behind the Hellfire Club and used the cellars under the Halla Mór for storing hay. Mary's brothers would go through the old Walled Garden at the back and cross the marsh to go poaching. Mary learned to ride a bicycle by using the low stone wall that ran from the Halla Mór to their house as a support alongside her.

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▲ Above and top of page:  
Stone carvings in walls of Askeaton Castle.



*Scaltheen and Satanism***THE LIMERICK  
HELLFIRE CLUB**

In the grounds of the Desmond Castle in Askeaton lie the roofless ruins of an old brick-and-stone edifice. While one nineteenth-century traveller bemoaned its 'unfinished, ugly look' the building itself seems to have been anything other than unremarkable – several distinguishing architectural features suggest its design was notably ostentatious and intended to convey a message about the status of its members. What it may have been perceived to lack in beauty, however, it made up for in notoriety, because it was the meeting place of a mysterious society – the Limerick Hellfire Club.

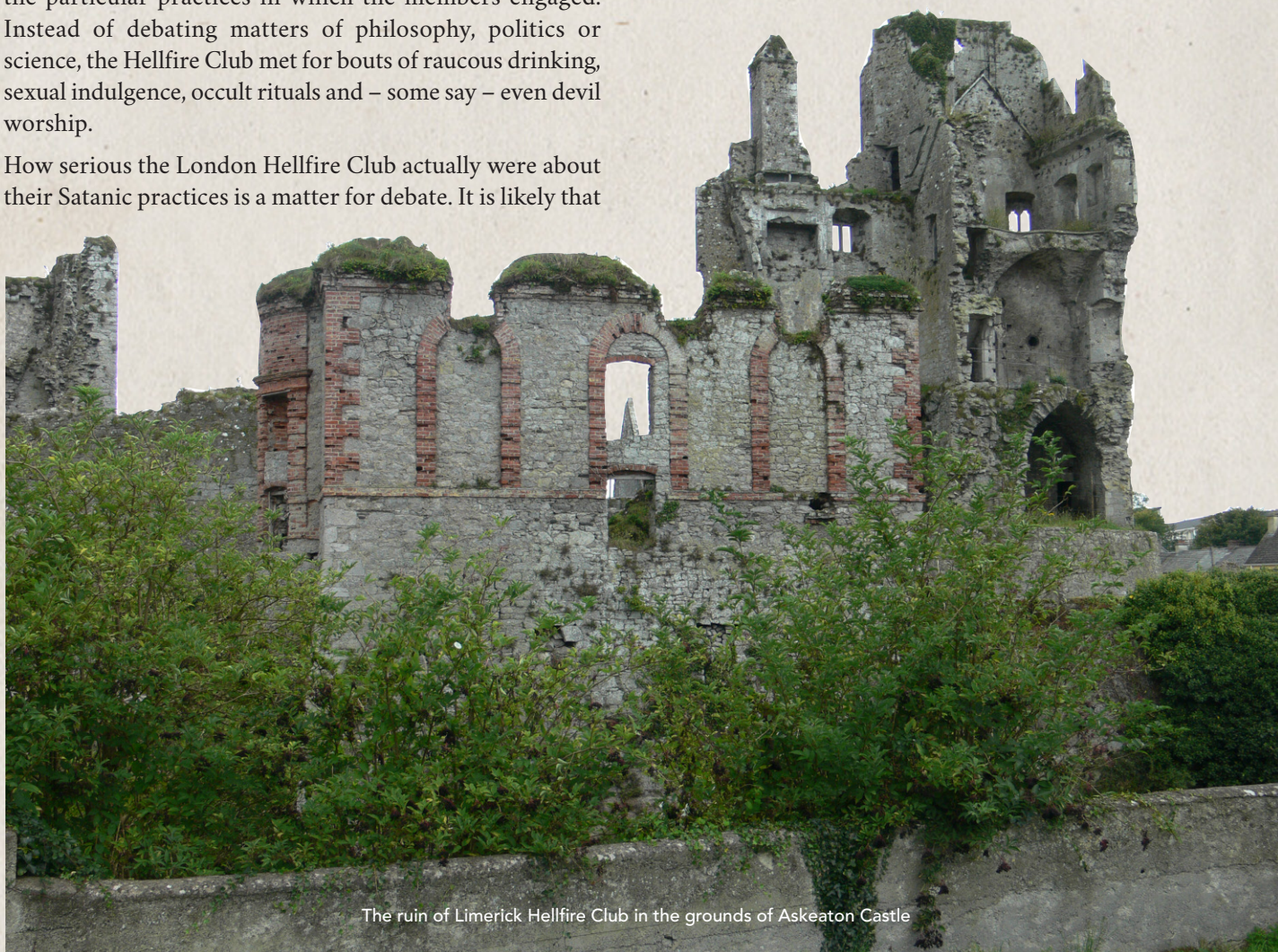
So-called Hellfire Clubs were a phenomenon of the eighteenth century. The first of several societies to attract this name emerged in London around 1720. Its members came from elite positions in English society and included powerful landowners and politicians. Groups of wealthy men who gathered to discuss particular interests or take part in particular activities were far from unusual at the time. What made this association different, however, were the particular practices in which the members engaged. Instead of debating matters of philosophy, politics or science, the Hellfire Club met for bouts of raucous drinking, sexual indulgence, occult rituals and – some say – even devil worship.

How serious the London Hellfire Club actually were about their Satanic practices is a matter for debate. It is likely that

these arose – at least in part – as a satiric reaction against the restrictive environment of the time. The grotesque mockery of Christian ritual they indulged in was intended, partly at least, to provoke those pious aristocrats who were so keen to promote sobriety and moral rigidity. If provocation was their aim, then they succeeded. The club's practices were deemed so offensive that King George I suppressed it in 1721.

That was not the end of the hellfire phenomenon, however. Other societies sprung up that modelled themselves on the London club – in Great Britain, but also in Ireland. The Dublin Hellfire Club, also known as the Blasters, was founded around 1737. The club met in a hunting lodge on Mountpelier Hill, just south of Dublin. Like its English counterparts, the club drew its members from the most privileged strata of society. This meant the Anglo-Irish landowning classes. Also like its English counterparts, the Dublin Hellfire Club's members were rumoured to engage in boisterous drinking, riotous orgies, gambling and perverse rituals. According to one story, members of the club were once joined in a game of cards by a dark and mysterious stranger. The stranger turned out to be the devil himself.

Perhaps unsurprisingly, the Dublin club was beleaguered by scandal. One member was reported to have uttered a series



The ruin of Limerick Hellfire Club in the grounds of Askeaton Castle



## FEATURE ASKEATON CASTLE

of blasphemous outbursts so shocking that they resulted in his arrest. Another murdered one of his servants in a drunken frenzy. The club was dissolved soon after this member – a peer of the realm – was tried.

By that time, however, several sister societies had sprung up around the country. The Limerick Hellfire Club was one of them. The Limerick club shared at least one member with its Dublin precursor, although in general it was slightly less exclusive. It had more members, for a start, and they tended to be country squires rather than ultra-wealthy Ascendancy luminaries. It may even have counted Catholics among its members.

There is almost nothing in the way of documentary evidence on the Limerick club, which is perhaps the reason why it has attracted such wild speculation over the centuries. Much of what we know about it comes from a painting by the notorious rake James Worsdale, titled *Hell Fire Club, Co. Limerick*. The painting is a group portrait dating from 1738 or thereabouts. It features eleven men, one woman and a young boy. Those depicted are prominent Limerick gentry, likely including Edward Croker of Ballynagarde, who commissioned the painting. The group is arranged around a hunt table; there is a sleeping dog and the young boy is blowing a hunting horn, so it is probable that the thrill of the chase was high on the club's agenda. The group is wearing fashionable clothes and the furniture is elegant – a clear demonstration of wealth, style and sophistication. Of course, drink and drinking vessels abound. There is a huge punchbowl; there are wine bottles on the table and goblets in the members' hands. It is probable that the consumption of 'scaltheen' – a preparation of whiskey, butter, sugar and pepper – was common among them.

Like other Hellfire Clubs, the Limerick incarnation had a reputation for blasphemy and diabolism, carnality and licentiousness. The earliest printed reference to the club, although it dates from 1811, decades after the Worsdale portrait was created, claims that the members 'actually roasted a man, to see how far he could endure the torments of hell'.

Another tradition has it that a member was thrown from one of the windows into the River Deel in the course of a 'drunken frolic'. Onerous initiation rites also passed into local folklore. Any prospective member had to show his prowess by 'drinking a bottle of wine, bottle of brandy, bottle of whiskey and a bottle of rum. Then he should walk along a straight line some twenty yards in length. Failure to comply with the conditions led to the applicant being pushed through a window into the Deel.'

When it comes to the Limerick Hellfire Club, it is difficult to separate fact from hyperbole. We may never know what the band of rakes and libertines who once gathered in an unusual villa in the shadow of Askeaton Castle really got up to. What is certain, though, is that the dark glamour that accompanied their activities – whatever they really were – has secured the club a place in history.



▲ Above: Anthony Sheehy who, for many years, gave wonderful tours of parts of the site on a voluntary basis and Dianne Nolan, current OPW guide

▼ Below: Askeaton Castle's Constable's Tower

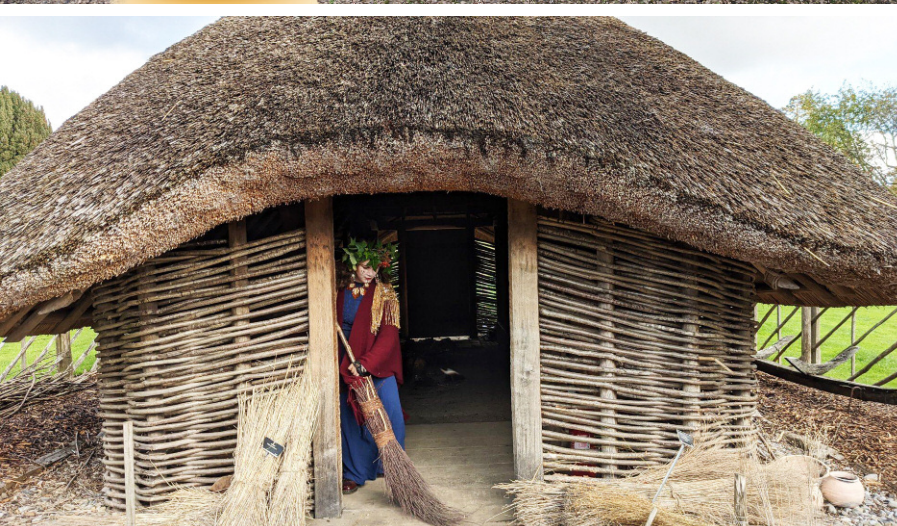






# Preparing for Halloween at the National Botanic Gardens

While we can't hold our usual large pumpkin display or any live shows for kids or fancy dress-up day, as these usually attract large crowds, we've been secretly filming the witches using magical plants. Follow us on Facebook to see what they got up to!



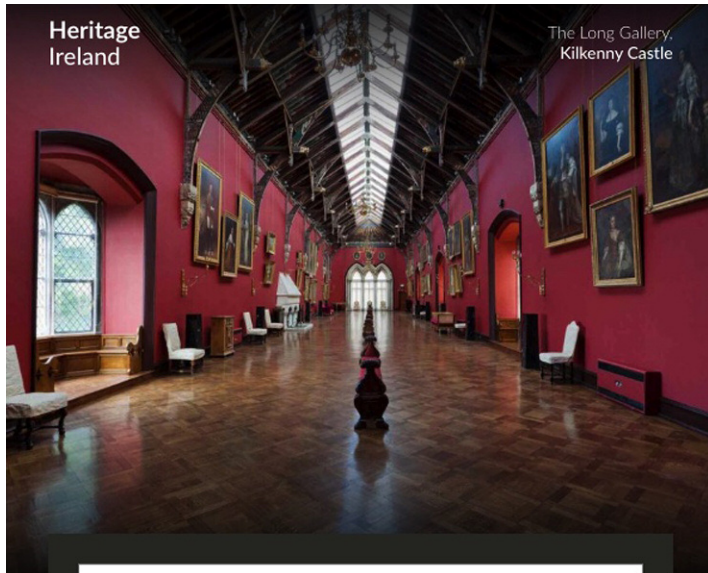


# New Heritage Ireland Website

[www.heritageireland.ie](http://www.heritageireland.ie)

We are delighted to announce the launch of the newly revamped Heritage Ireland website. We finally have a website that does justice to the fabulous sites in our care.



As well as visitor information in relation to the sites, there are also social guides for our autistic visitors, lists of top things to do at each site, historical information, our blog, educational resources, articles about OPW conservation works and so much more. Check out the website at [www.heritageireland.ie](http://www.heritageireland.ie) and find inspiration for your next visit.



Heritage Ireland



The Long Gallery, Kilkenny Castle


Search for a place to visit

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Discover the remains of prehistoric tombs. Imagine the thrill of defending a castle. Wander through medieval halls. Soak up the serenity of old-world gardens and the splendour of great estates.

Menu

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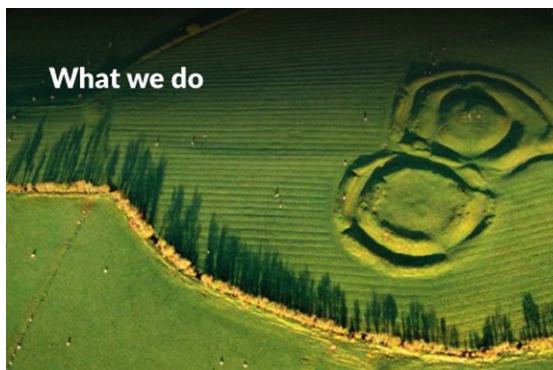
In this section: 

**OPW Heritage Services – caring for the nation's past**

We are responsible for Ireland's most important heritage sites. Iconic sites ranging from the Rock of Cashel in Tipperary to Skellig Michael on a small island off the Kerry coast, are just some of the stunning 780 heritage sites in our care.


Menu


 OPW 



What we do


Our key job is to manage and maintain the most important of Ireland's historic buildings and heritage.

Find out more 



Who we are

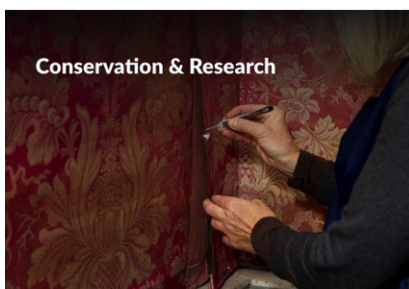
We are the people who manage and take care of many of Ireland's most important historic places.

Find out more 






**Conservation & Research**



Conserving our nation's heritage estate for future generations is a cornerstone of what we do.

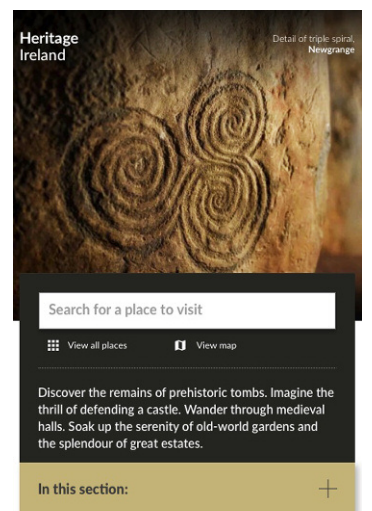
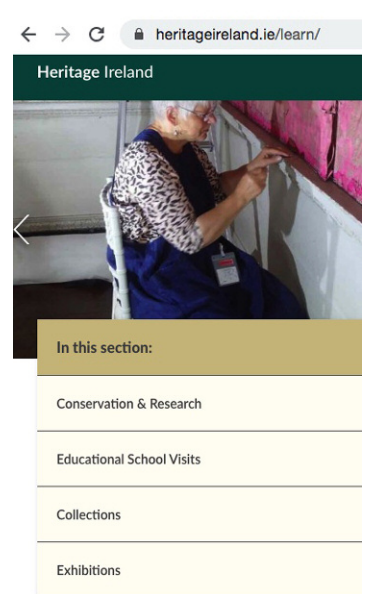
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**Educational School Visits**



Give your students a chance to take a tour of the past with our Free School Educational Visits Scheme.

[Find out more](#) →







# Dunmore Cave

**Where mythology and geology merge**





*Dunmore Cave, not far from Kilkenny town, is a series of limestone chambers formed over millions of years. It contains some of the most impressive calcite formations found in any Irish underground structure and has a wealth of fantastical stories associated with it.*

The cave has been known for many centuries and is first mentioned in the ninth-century Triads of Ireland, where it is referred to as one of the 'darkest places in Ireland'. The most gruesome reference, however, comes from the Annals of the Four Masters, which tells how the Viking leader Guthfrith of Ivar massacred a thousand people there in AD 928. Archaeological investigation has not reliably confirmed that such a massacre took place, but finds within the cave – including human remains – do indicate Viking activity.

According to the Annals of the Four Masters, around A.D. 928, the Vikings of Dublin were marching to attack their rivals in Waterford. On their way to their enemy's place, it is said they raided and pillaged the surrounding countryside. When they arrived at Dunmore Cave, they found a large number of women and children hiding in it. Allegedly hoping to capture them alive so that they could then be sold as slaves, the Vikings devised a plan to drive them out of the cave. They lit large fires at the mouth of the cave in order to force them out of their hiding. The fires grew too large and consumed the oxygen in the cave, resulting in the suffocation of the refugees. It is recorded that a thousand people died in this manner.



▲ Images of Dunmore Cave.  
© Department of the Environment,  
Heritage and Local Government  
Photographic Unit.





from the partially collapsed ceiling above. It is said that fairies sweep the stones away so that they may continue with their dancing.

Dunmore Cave is also said to have been the hiding place of Dame Alice Kyteler, a 14th century woman who was accused of witchcraft and sentenced to death, but managed to escape. After seeking refuge in Dunmore Cave, it is claimed that Alice managed to flee to England.

Dame Alice Kyteler was born in 1280 into a noble Kilkenny family. She was married four times, and each husband died. On the death of her last husband, Sir John le Poer, Alice's children accused her of using poison and sorcery to kill him. They brought their case before the Bishop of Ossory, Richard de Ledrede, in 1324 in the hope that their mother would be arrested and they would gain her fortune.

Bishop de Ledrede investigated these accusations by visiting Alice and speaking to her children. According to the Bishop, Alice and her followers rejected the Christian faith. He claimed that they dismembered animals at crossroads and offered the pieces to demons. He also accused them of making horrible witches' brews, which included the entrails of roosters, worms, dead men's fingernails, and naughty children, which they cooked in the skull of a thief.

The bishop wrote to the Chancellor of Ireland, Roger Outlawe, to have Alice arrested. This backfired on the bishop, as the Chancellor was Alice's brother-in-law and would do nothing against her. Ledrede himself was then imprisoned by Sir Arnold le Poer, the seneschal of Kilkenny and another brother-in-law of Alice's.

After seventeen days in prison, the bishop was released and carried on with his mission to have Alice tried for heresy.

Alice eventually fled to England in 1325 and was

In 1973, the bones of 44 people, mainly belonging to women, children and the elderly, were found in Dunmore Cave, somewhat substantiating the gruesome tale from the Annals.

Further sign of the Viking presence in Dunmore cave is the small hoard of silver and bronze items discovered in 1999. Did the owner not have the chance to reclaim his hoard, or was it left as an offering for the supernatural beings believed to reside in the cave?

Another of the tales associated with the Cave tells of *Aithbel*, an Irish warrior woman, reputed to have fought and killed a cat-like monster there called *Luchtigen*, the "Lord of the Mice". There's also the legend of the Fairy Floor, an area where there are no fallen stones

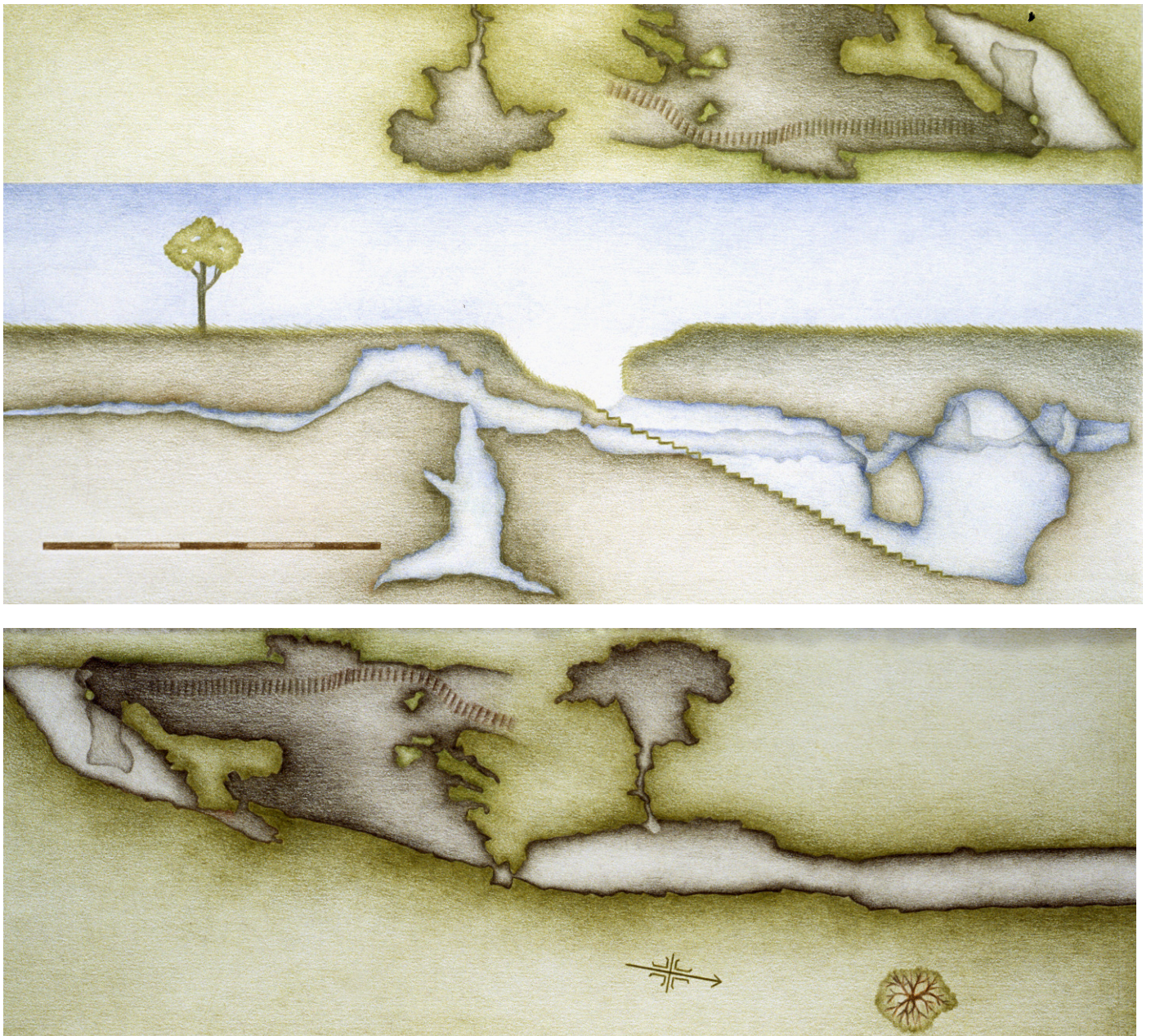




never heard from again. Bishop de Ledrede continued to pursue her followers. He accused Alice's maidservant, Petronella de Meath, of heresy, and had her flogged and burned at the stake in 1324. This was one of the first cases of a person being charged with witchcraft in Europe, and Petronella was the first person in Ireland to be burned at the stake for heresy.

As part of the visit to Dunmore Cave you can see the mysterious rock formation within the cave which some say resembles the shape of a witch...

*Images and illustrations of Dunmore Cave.*  
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# Halloween Without End: The Puzzlement of Sramore Man

In memoriam: David Graeber, 1961 – 2020

TEXT BY PADRAIG MEEHAN



Figure 1: David Graeber (Wiki Commons)

**O**n September twentieth, 2020 in a hospital in Venice, Italy, the life of an American man was slipping away. He was of Jewish ancestry, with unruly brown hair and blue eyes. He had been admitted as an emergency after briefly feeling unwell. His name was David Graeber; the *New York Times* obituary would describe him as a public intellectual, professor, political activist and author. He had lived through 59 Halloween's. Themes of inequality had suffused his thinking; his 1998 thesis concerned topics of magic, slavery and politics. Graeber's supervisor was Marshall Sahlins, a giant figure in the world of anthropology and outside-the-box thinking, especially regarding the exploration and colonisation of the Pacific. Graeber's last book was a collection of essays by himself and Sahlins, called 'On Kings'.

## Sramore Man

Sometime about 6100 years ago and roughly two and a half thousand kilometres west-northwest of Venice, another adult male passed away. He was dark-skinned, with blue eyes and thick

black hair. His bones eventually rested inside a narrow cave, possibly placed there deliberately by those who knew him. It might have been the summer season when he died; he was inland, up in the hilly country, a maze of low bluffs and limestone cliffs at the foothills of the Darty range. The place in the distant future would be called Sramore (*Srath* means a river-meadow, or valley bottom) north Leitrim, not far from the village of Fivemilebourne, and close to Doon Lough. The area is a ten-minute drive from my home. Cavers came upon his bones in the final decade of the twentieth century, lying on the cave floor; taken to the National Museum of Ireland, samples were later carbon dated. More tests were planned. Dublin—and in particular the Trinity College genetics lab of Professor Dan Bradley—was building itself a reputation at this time, having made momentous breakthroughs in their specialism; ancient genetics. Papers by Bradley and Lara Cassidy were making world headlines and reshaping the story of Irish and world origins. Like anthropology theorists, geneticists are not averse to large sweeping generalities and an affection for the big picture. The story of how we got to where we are now.

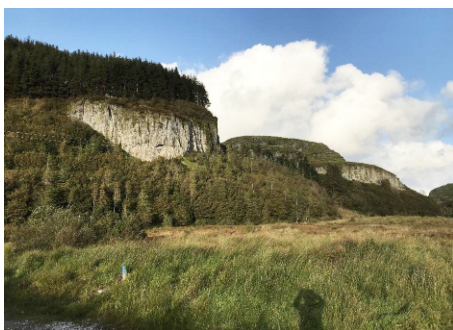


Figure 2: Sramore, County Leitrim, 2020

The Trinity College researchers were eagerly seeking ancient bones, especially that rarest thing, a well-preserved human sample from before the time of agriculture, that might reveal the genetic code of the first Irish, the Mesolithic Irish. There were arguments about just how many of them (for they were few) were sustainable as an island community. They were elusive, left little trace on the earth, and too often overlooked. There was only one problem. Sramore Man, most likely, lived *after* the arrival of agriculture to Ireland. He may even have witnessed the arrival of the New People; puzzled at the energy they expended clearing primeval forest. He noted their different clothing, with different (perhaps dyed) colours, their dark eyes and lighter skin colouring.

He was curious about their new breeds of dogs (different to his hunting dog), and even more so regarding the entirely novel animals of the New People; red deer; cows and goats. He may have reconnoitred their large palisaded enclosure (styled a causewayed enclosure by archaeologists) under construction at Maugheraboy, Sligo, just less than 20km away to the northwest.

Once the various studies of the Sramore bones commenced, the original researchers (Marion Dowd and Thorsten Kahlert) set about rediscovering the cave. There were a handful of potential candidates in the area, but the original caver had passed away, and short of a new set of excavations, it has proved impossible—so far—to pinpoint the location where Sramore Man lay for



six millennia. Meanwhile, in the Trinity College lab, Lara Cassidy was giving him a comrade; another high-resolution Irish Mesolithic sample from one who lived about six hundred years before Sramore Man, and had somehow wound up inside another cave, 250 km to the south, in Killurragh, County Limerick, high on a limestone escarpment above the Mulkear River. Killurragh Man had never seen a cow—or a deer.

The subsequent comparisons (having two Mesolithic samples from different locations and eras was invaluable) told researchers that Irish Mesolithic populations were island-isolated; that Killurragh Man and Sramore Man were quite close in genetic profile, unlike—for example—British Mesolithic samples where prolonged contact with Europe had created greater variation.

## The Hollywood View

Sramore Man and Killurragh Man would have known about ‘Halloween’. Not as a name, but as a time of year, a moment of transition. As would—it appeared from their behaviour—the creatures they hunted, the wild boar, the ptarmigan, and the salmon. But the faunae did not consciously know, did not symbolise and anticipate, as humans did. Knowledge and memory of ‘Halloween’ bespoke a loss of innocence.

Even today ‘undiscovered’ tribes are still encountered in the Amazon or remote parts of the Pacific. There is a popular tendency to romanticise these communities, untouched as they are by modern disease, technology and values. We may be tempted to patronise them, or to imagine them as primitive, socially simple and egalitarian; innocent, or even child-like. The ‘Hollywood’ perspective tends to view ‘natives’ (including Mesolithic people) through the eyes of a benevolent colonist, wishing to rescue or guard them from modernity, like children too young to watch TV past the watershed. But tribal people already knew Halloween (in some shape or form) too.

David Graeber and his colleague David Wengrow set about debunking patronising ideas of tribal communities in a 2015 paper called *“Farewell to the Childhood of Man”*. They reminded us that since the emergence of *homo sapiens sapiens* over 300,000 years ago in Africa, we have always been socially complex. From the evidence of anthropology, archaeology and various modern accounts they proposed a new way of looking at humans, one arguably less burdened by ideas of progress and colonialism. They described a kind of duality that permeated the pre-industrial and pre-agricultural worlds. People (in repeated instances) had *two* identities, *two* names, *two* societal structures. They alternated between these via *seasonal* pivots or swings. The sub-heading to their paper was *“ritual, seasonality, and the origins of inequality”*. They used examples from the ancient Asiatic Steppes, Aboriginal Australia, Inuit and Native American groups. In summary, their description goes like this.

## The bonds of Halloween



Figure 3: A South Australian Corroboree, W.R. Thomas (1864) Art Gallery of South Australia (Wikipedia Commons)

When winter came, there was a coming together of people. In the cold months, the tribes huddled around the campfire at various centres in sheltered places. Winter was a very different time. The close proximity of many people gave rise to fun, and to creative planning and social interaction. Great ideas were mooted and sometimes acted upon. Works of art were made, as well as inventions, elaborate rituals, feasts and jokes. Hierarchy could be



Figure 4: Göbekli Tepe (Tourism Turkey)

quite pronounced. Leaders emerged and even police (sometimes “clown police”). Émile Durkheim described in 1912 the *effervescence* of the festive sacred gatherings of the Australian aboriginal people. In the excitement of the *corroboree* “the power to create society appeared to them, as if it were an alien force projected into totemic spirits and their emblems”. Palaeolithic remnants of winter assemblies survive—Wengrow and Graeber proposed—which have long puzzled researchers with their precocity and sophistication; the elaborate rituals and emergent artistry of—for example—Sungir (northern Russia), Göbekli Tepe (Turkey) and Dolní Věstonice (in Moravia).

But winter, inevitably, would end. When the growing season returned, the camps would break up. Every hunter would gather their weapons and tools, and go walkabout. Now they would answer to a different name. A simpler, more individualistic, social structure came into play over the summer months of hunting and exploration.

The key moment, however, for this dualistic lifeway was the time of reversal, the time when summer ended and the nights grew long again. The time that Sramore Man knew as the time when the Whooper Swans started to arrive to the lake near where he hunted. The time of reversal was that



seasonal turn that rain forest people know (in some form or other); that we all know. The door to their complex selves was the time we call Halloween.

When this time arrived—according to Wengrow and Graeber—communities had in place a set of well-worn strategies to ensure the same people didn't get to be in charge at every year's campfire. This may all have been encoded in a late summer seasonal feast lasting multiple days, a time of invoking the dead, shades, spirits and divination. Of mockery and satire of the greatest hunters. They played tricks, they bullied and cajoled and inverted and subverted authority. In this way (the theory went) humans managed to contain the tendency towards inequality and hierarchy and complexity. They found a rhythm inside which they could be both complex and simple, both hierarchical and egalitarian, across at least two Ice Ages.

## Repulsed and Attracted

Then, around 11 thousand years ago, as the last Ice Age faded, humans invented agriculture. Someone noticed that when you threw down the husks and uneaten seeds of your favourite cereal, new plants grew. It was an era in which the bigger the feast you could throw, the more prestige your community would earn. Techniques like sowing plants to feed the masses became of vital community interest. Sramore Man saw the first hints of this at the palisade at Maugheraboy. The New People cut down trees, built villages, and tilled the ground. How did their lifeways appear to Sramore Man? Was he both repulsed (at the squalor of the settlement, the murder of trees, the grinding manual labour of agriculture), and strangely attracted? The New People cooked strange food and brews with enticing smells. Their feasts were generous, raucous and ostentatious.

The New People appeared young to him; he might not have realised that their life expectancy was shorter than his own, especially that of their women. Neolithic farmer women would have had many babies, many more than the hunter gatherer people. The diet of the new farmers was both more limited

(and possibly more reliable) than his, and they suffered more and different diseases. Agriculture, you could argue (extending on Wengrow and Graeber), had just freed society of the bonds of Halloween, of the curtailment of hierarchy and complexity. It had started humanity on a spiral of innovation, stratification and increasing population that—in the long run—led us to the wonders and horrors of the modern world.

How Sramore Man looked at the causewayed enclosure of the New People, therefore, might have depended on the season in which he first encountered it. It might not have been as big a surprise to him if he came upon it in winter; the

extensive wooden palisade and ditch enclosure may have seemed like a typical excessive outcome of a night of dreaming and loud talk. His greater puzzlement was perhaps that the New People stayed there over winter, and continued to stay even when summer came. They never went walkabout, but continued to hunker by the smouldering embers inside huts and houses, as if, addicted to the effervescence of the corroboree, they could not bear to leave the campfire.

## The case of Deer

It must have been terribly tempting for Sramore Man to hunt the sacred deer. Red deer had died out in Ireland sometime in the late Ice Age. Then, in the Neolithic, they re-appeared, not as prey animals, but as antler pins in the context of passage tomb burials. These pins—with mushroom heads and sharp points—are a key element in the set of grave goods that make passage tombs part of a very particular tradition of belief and ritual in Neolithic Ireland. They are as distinctive to that tradition as Carrowkeel Ware, a reddish, dusty coil pot with an open top and a rounded base, stabbed and dragged

with an instrument that might have been an antler pin. It's a bit different in Neolithic England; antlers appear there as tools, and sometimes deer carcasses are butchered. But in Ireland and Scotland there exists in the archaeological record—as yet—no known examples of butchered deer bones. Ruth Carden proposed that Neolithic people brought red deer here, imported them as they did cows and pigs and goats. But, if not for food, why?



Figure 3: Passage Tomb assemblage from The Mound of the Hostages, including Antler Pins (Photo: M. O'Sullivan)

The deer question seemed an important part of the jigsaw; what was the role of red deer in that society? It seemed the antlers were of critical importance, even more so than the top-quality food value of these animals. In Carrowkeel the oldest dates from the chambers are not human remains, but antler pins. These pins are found in almost all Irish passage tomb tradition burials; in Carrowkeel Cairn K, parts of the antler skull were found attached to the antlers, evidence perhaps of the animal being placed on the ritual funeral pyre.

## Deer and snakes

One clue was the tie-in to seasonality. Antlers are not horns, which—once grown on a young animal—are permanent. Antlers are *re-grown seasonally*. They are at their finest at Halloween, when the rutting season peaks, as the herds come down from the hills and the stags do battle over the does. Over the course of the winter, the antlers show signs of wear and tear, and by February, as spring begins to





Figure 4: Left—Detail of St. Eustace from the Paumgartner Altar (c. 1503), Albrecht Dürer. Right—Detail of the (Iron Age) Gundestrup Cauldron (After Suarez Lopez).

emerge, the deer are sometimes seen sporting lopsided looks, with one missing antler; gradually they shed the tines, and the discarded remains are sometimes spotted on trails or in forest clearings. But the shed antlers do not lie for long. The deer are known to eat the fallen antlers in a desperate quest for phosphate as they seek fuel to regrow their impressive headgear for the rut of the following year. There is hardly a better symbol of the cycle of the seasons, or of the dying and renewing world.

In 2007 Jesus Suarez Lopez (*Museu del Pueblu d'Asturies*) wrote an article which accounted the long-lived and rich symbolic tradition of the 'good' deer defeating the 'evil' serpent, a conflict acted out under the Tree of Life, and in Christian iconography, the Cross. But the story becomes even more curious when it moves to the pre-Christian era, for example in the *Natural History* of Pliny the Elder in the first century, or Claudio Aelian's third century *History of Animals*. The central theme of these allegorical accounts is of the deer eating the snake in a kind of double rejuvenation. The deer drives the snake out of its cave with its breath, swallows the occupant, goes thirsty to a water source, and, after drinking the water, regains youth. The snake—who sheds its skin seasonally—may have been seen as a kind of equivalent or competitor to the deer in respect of seasonal rejuvenation. The snake-

swallowing deer, symbolically, is on some kind of supercharged, if tortuous, road to eternal life.

### Deer and the Sun

In some archaic traditions, deer are associated with the gradual disappearance of the Sun in the late autumn and his new year resurrection, according to Suarez Lopez. Devoid of antlers, the deer is an image of the summer sun, while adorned with its head of tines, it represents the image of the Sun in its fullness. This deer symbolism was shared by the Scythians of the Altai region, and was one of the most common motifs in their works of jewellery, especially in funerary monuments. The "mother of the Sun" was imagined as a big doe with flamboyant antlers. This great deer was depicted carrying the Sun between her horns and, in some cases, the same sun was symbolized as the son of this great cosmogonic doe deer.

Tattoos of deer were inscribed on the bodies of mummies of the Pazyryk culture (c. 600-400 BC), in the Altai Mountains. Burials dated to between 1350 and 1500 BC in Khanlar (Azerbaijan) contain complete skeletons of slaughtered deer, goats, dogs and snakes. These accompanied the remains of funeral pyres and wooden carts used to "transfer" the dead to the other world. At one burial, Kurgan 150, the burial appears to have been laid out with the intention of representing some

sort of funeral procession—a journey to the afterlife on a funerary sledge pulled by two deer, probably playing the role of psychopomps.

All this gives a useful (if broad) general context to the presence of red deer antlers on the pyres and in the chambers of the Irish passage tomb tradition. We may contemplate the key role played by deer in kingship traditions from Neolithic Assyria to ancient India. In ancient Indian kingship, the corn is the people, and the deer represents royal power. Takashi Osawa asserts that the deer can be regarded not only as a symbol of fertility since the Old Stone Ages, but also as one of sovereignty.

### Twenty Minutes to sunrise Listoghil and Tara

In 2007 I surveyed Listoghil, Carrowmore, County Sligo, and observed how multiple of the characteristics associated with ancient Gaelic kingship—listed carefully by Elizabeth Fitzpatrick—were mysteriously present at this Neolithic site; a footprint stone, a nearby hill called Croaghaun and the local presence of not one but two sovereignty goddesses (Queen Maeve and the Cailleach Bhéara), both tied to passage tombs in hills overlooking Listoghil (The ties of the Cailleach to sovereignty and renewal are discussed elsewhere). Furthermore, Listoghil had an alignment of the chamber with the rising sun twice yearly: at Halloween, and again on February 10, the latter an end-of-winter alignment, the time of shedding of deer antler and coming into milk of sheep.

The alignment was shared in an astonishing double event, separated by twenty minutes and 150 kilometres, between Listoghil and *Dumha na nGiall*, the Mound of the Hostages at Tara, a place at the centre of kingly Gaelic mythology. I witnessed this at Tara while on the phone to a colleague in Sligo in 2017, a day before perfect alignment. Tara admitted the sun first, at 7.25; it rose close to the distant coast, near the estuary of the Broadmeadow River, while a pinkish square of light, centred, illuminated the vegetation-



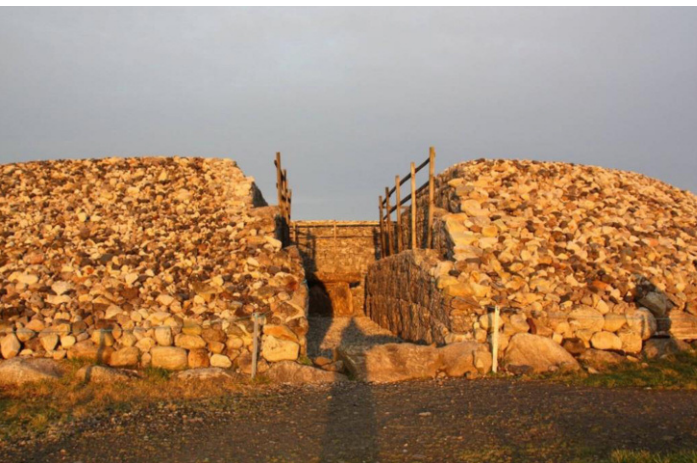


Figure 5: Listoghil, a day past perfect alignment, 2014. The outer cairn is reconstructed, but the original chamber is preserved.

covered backstone. Gradually as the sun rose, the square dipped and moved right, on to the side walls. At 7.45 the first sliver of golden light glowed from a gentle saddle in the Ballygawley Mountains, and illuminated the central chamber of Listoghil, casting a spear-shadow on the underside of the capstone. The words of Yeats, voicing the Cailleach Bhéara, rang in my ears; “I am much older than the Eagle Cock (that blinks and blinks on Ballygawley Hill...)”

I posed the question in my 2013 book, *Listoghil: A Seasonal Alignment?*—were we confronting evidence of some form of Neolithic kingship? Could this Tara/Listoghil double event have presaged the Newgrange solstice alignment, halfway dividing the two festivals, at the middle of winter? The combined elements were very suggestive; the alignment; the antlers; the footprint stone. There were other clues, too; in the clustering of small monuments around the central focus of Listoghil, for example. But I stopped short. It was too early at that juncture, I felt, to be definitive.

I thought of other possibilities, but did not record them, then. Could early kingship have been a kind of Neolithic hijacking of the traditions of Mesolithic people, who had known the temptations of the winter camp, and resisted? Could the new kings, turning sacred glacial boulder fields into megalithic cemeteries, have retained certain of the traditions of the old, temporary leaders, such as clown

police, satirists, ceremonial hunts and feasts? Might the deer have been introduced as symbolic totems by Graeber and Sahlins’ stranger kings, or even sacral kings, such as envisioned by Eamonn P. Kelly in his richly detailed theoretical explanation of bog bodies?

## The ceremonial entrance of Hardtooth



Figure 6: Dr. Lara Cassidy

I met Lara Cassidy first—in the real world—in the lobby of the Gresham Hotel. It was the first face to face meeting of the full *Human Population Dynamics at Carrowkeel* team. She was in her mid-twenties. I knew her already from working electronically on various academic papers with the Carrowkeel project, of which we were both members. Carrowkeel had turned up 17kg of human bone from a well-sealed passage tomb context, excavated in 1911 and stored since in Cambridge, England. Applying a now large number of Neolithic remains sequenced to high coverage (and the two Mesolithic samples), Lara was overturning sacred cows at a rate of knots (and confirming other well-treaded archaeological theories). The new farmers came from Anatolia. Their cows were imports, as were their cereals. Their nearest living relatives live today in Sardinia. They came in large numbers, and show evidence of outbreeding. You could not distinguish the general population of ancient Britain and Ireland, except for one group; those buried in Irish passage tomb contexts. These were both dietically (based on stable isotope

analysis) and genetically distinct. The passage tomb dead ate a more terrestrial and richer diet.

Another group, working in Uppsala, Sweden retrieved genetic material from bones excavated at Listoghil in the 1990’s. Cassidy was able to compare the Swedish sequence to her growing set of Irish high-resolution genomes. The outworking of all this was published in a headline-grabbing paper in early 2020, *A dynastic elite in monumental Neolithic society* (*Nature*). The Listoghil male “Hardtooth” (perhaps in his 20’s) was closer than a sixth-degree relative (that’s closer than a second cousin) to a male buried c. 350 years later in the right-hand recess of Newgrange, probably in a basin stone. Hardtooth had a similar relationship to another male (contemporary in time with Newgrange Man) buried in Millin Bay near Strangford Lough in Northern Ireland. And also, to someone buried perhaps 500-600 years after his time in Carrowkeel, just 25km southeast along the Unshin River from Listoghil. Newgrange Man, in turn, was related to a different individual placed in the right-hand recess of Cairn K in Carrowkeel. And Newgrange Man was inbred. His parents were either parent-child or brother-sister. The story made the cover of *Nature* magazine, the RTÉ News, and the *New York Times*. I interviewed Lara during lockdown, she reported on a celebratory lockdown glass of champagne with her mother, at the family home in Ballinasloe, County Galway.

## God kings

So where did this genetic bombshell leave us? It was a new, strange time in the world. Covid 19 was ravaging the planet. Archaeologists were talking about the first indications of world-wide epidemics in the Neolithic era, from Sweden; a variant on Bubonic plague, the disorder called *blefed* in ancient Gaelic texts. Lara and Dan Bradley had written up the results from Carrowmore, Carrowkeel and Newgrange as an indication of an ancient dynasty, something akin to the tribal structures of ancient Hawaii, where incest was a key part of maintaining the myth of god-kings.



I thought of the work of Amy Bogaard, who in the early oughties had argued that ancient agriculture (Europe-wide) started off intensive, with small garden-type plots which were static, renewable, manured and weeded, based close to village settlements. The Neolithic came to Ireland fully formed, after 3000 years of movement out from the centres of invention in the Fertile Crescent and Anatolia, along two main routes, the Mediterranean and the Danubian.

The strategies of expansion and colony were well-practiced. Clearing forest, setting up a causewayed enclosure. Dealing with the local hunter gatherers. The Irish Neolithic soon established a trajectory of perhaps repeating cycles of boom and bust. Capricious gods (perhaps living and dead) were assuaged within the tenets of a conservative and rigid set of codes of ritual practice. Devotees polished antler pins and stone balls and stabbed and dragged the Carrowkeel ware, and placed it to be hardened and reborn on the pyre which—simultaneously—transformed the dead to light whitened skeletal fragments. The causewayed enclosure at Maugheraboy represented the opening chapter in a thousand-year story of emergent hierarchy. That story only ended when the arrival of a fresh set of New People, whose origins lay in the Pontic Steppes, marked the debut of the Bronze Age. This ingression also may have signalled the demise of the passage tomb God-kings.

The Neolithic passage tombs represented, it appears, the first flush of runaway complexity. It was a multi-layered, multi-dimensional society, with elites at the top whose remains would be placed inside passage tombs, located in the most striking sites in the landscape (The ancient monuments here were once about people, people who were remembered for a long time, but their names were not as long-lived as the mounds that contained their bones). The regions of Counties Sligo and Meath played a very important part here. Newgrange has often been spoken of as unique, but the new insights help provide a wider cultural context. Seen in this setting, the wonders of the Boyne Valley took the

stage in the final act in a thousand-year adventure.

Listoghil, and Carrowmore, could now take its place as a true ancestor of Newgrange, in ritual, in tradition and by virtue of kin. The light shone in Sligo first, in Listoghil; the god-kings were laid to rest there, perhaps four centuries before the creation of the super-monuments of the East.

## Transcending physical boundaries

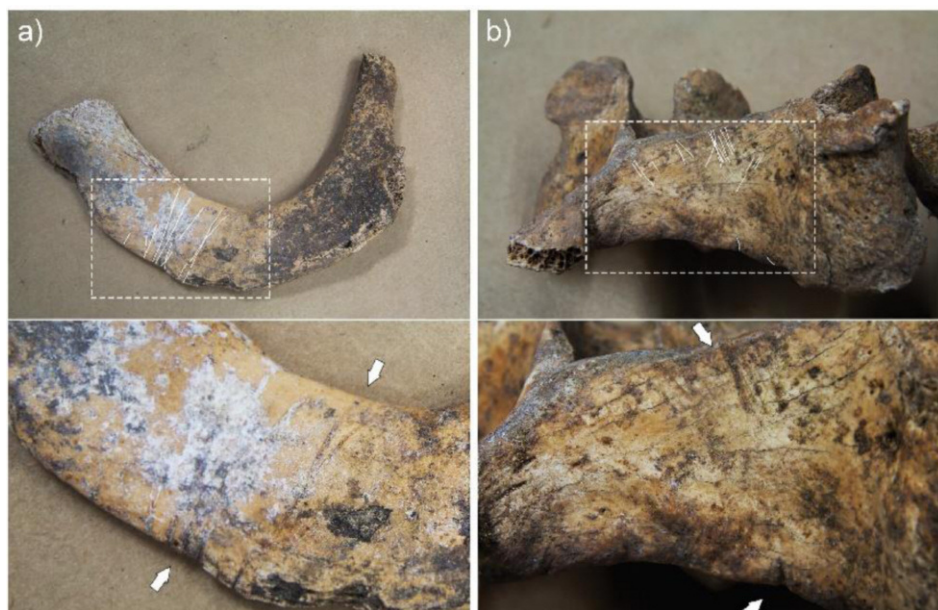


Figure 7: Cutmarks on Carrowkeel bones. Photo: Jonny Geber

The emergence of kingship and hierarchy was tied closely to seasonality and seasonal rituals. It highlighted the bridge between hunters and kings; indeed, kings—even today—are associated with behaviour reminiscent of some kind of ‘super hunter-gatherer’, a primal nature-hero. Expansion and conquest help mortals become gods; it may be easier to become immortal in a new place.

Some key features of Ancient Egyptian cosmology (as pointed out by John Waddell in *Archaeology and Celtic Myth: An Exploration*) might have been in play in prehistoric Ireland. Their cows are genetically the same, and Ancient Egypt grew from a rich engagement with the seat of agriculture in Mesopotamia. We think of the mythology of the ship of the dead, the barque of Ra, and of the sun goddess, Isis. The discovery of cut-marked,

unburnt bones at the Listoghil, Carrowkeel and Millin Bay passage tombs are reminiscent of early experiments in mummification conducted in the pre-Pharonic era in Egypt. Dismemberment was also seen in Carrowkeel and in other Irish passage tomb contexts; Gabriel Cooney theorised on the possibility of different body parts ending up inside different monuments. In an Egyptian context David Wengrow described dismemberment of human remains in funerary rites.

(Ritual commemoration) was a way of presenting the person as transcending the physical boundaries of the skin, allowing relations of equivalence between internal objects, bones, objects worn on the body surface, combs, ornaments etc. and objects that mediated the passage of substances between the body and other kinds of containers, ceramics, woven and stone vessels (D. Wengrow, *The Archaeology of Early Egypt; social transformations in North East Africa, 10,000 to 2,650 BC*).

Wood-Martin (in 1888) suggested that the Carrowmore antler pins might have been tools for weaving, like spindles on which a whorl was set. They look functional, and objects interpreted as whorls have been found in passage tomb contexts. Or maybe they were weapons, he wondered, especially the bigger ones? Or binders for clothes or hair? As Wengrow shows



in the preceding quote, objects could serve both practical and symbolic function. The work of deep analysis of the passage tomb assemblage (which also includes polished stone balls, drilled pendants, pieces of quartz, Carrowkeel ware pottery, etc) which began with the likes of Wood-Martin at the advent of archaeology has still some distance to go, hand in hand with newer avenues of research.

Perhaps the next step will be to begin to try to understand better various particular strata of fourth millennial society; the different roles played by crafts people, ritual specialists, poets and satirists, farmers, servants and maybe even slaves. There is an archaeology of Neolithic women, children, and of hunter gatherers who survived, like the fellow from Sramore, and witnessed their transformative impact on his world; surely his was a very different experience to the colonists. Perhaps at the end of that fateful fourth millennium BC, the next

stage, the Bronze Age, was no more stratified, no more complex than what went before. Perhaps it was markedly less so that the first Neolithic blossoming. The coming of farming in a fleet of heavy-laden ships was the first step on a path to great things, to technological wonders; it was the advent of sea voyaging, cargo, animal breeding and husbandry, the construction of long-lasting architecture, but also a step towards some of the ills that beset our world now; over-population, over-exploitation of resources, monoculture, inequality and disease epidemics in plants, animals and humans. It was the beginning of a Halloween that never ends.

What became of 'Halloween'? As a festival of drumming and dancing, body painting and dressing up, it may have become a key interface in the confrontation between farmer groups and hunter-fishers in Neolithic Europe. It survived as a seasonal

festival in many places across the globe; in ancient China and India and Europe. It became a time of witches, of the Deer God, of seasonal feasting and a time for the making and unmaking of kings.

Even if Halloween could no longer rein in the drive towards complexity and hierarchy, it now assumed a vital function in the great chess match, the power struggle between ruled and rulers, the living and the immortals described by Graeber and Sahlins in 'On Kings'. In the Gaelic world it became Samhain, the cornerstone of the Gaelic texts, a time of plot twists, battles and prophecies. It gave rise to ancient theatre, to the feast days of saints and—even to this day—to games of chance, trick or treat.

*Thanks to: Dr. Marion Dowd, and my Colleagues in the Human Population Dynamics at Carrowkeel team, Drs. Robert Hensey, Thomas Kador, Lara Cassidy, Sam Moore and Jonny Geber.*

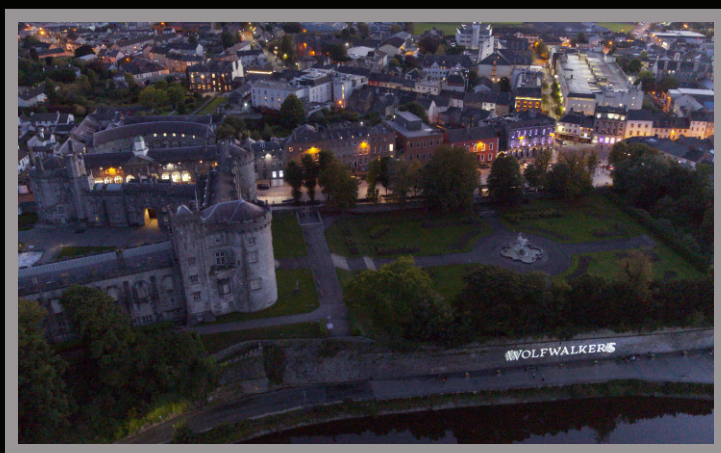


St. Kevin's Church, Visitor Centre and 6th Century Round Tower at Glendalough, Co. Wicklow.

Image © Chris Hill Photographic 2010/Ireland's Content Pool



The stunning WOLFWALKERS projections will be running nightly throughout the month of October on the walls of Kilkenny Castle. The fabulous projections on Kilkenny Castle are funded by Fáilte Ireland and made by Algorithm and Cartoon Saloon as part of Kilkenny Animated festival celebrating the hometown premiere of Cartoon Saloon's latest feature WOLFWALKERS. You can view them from the terrace of Kilkenny River Court Hotel, canal walk and John's Bridge every evening.





# Developments along the Wild Atlantic Way



*All of our sites are unique and impressive but some are also set in areas of outstanding beauty, providing a breath-taking experience for you.*

**We** can boast of ancient monuments and stunning visitor centres set on hilltops and dramatic cliffs offering stunning ocean views, or nestled within remarkable valleys. Our sites along the Wild Atlantic Way offer a unique opportunity to appreciate our heritage while enjoying some of the most scenic areas to be found anywhere.

In recognition of the significance and potential of these sites Fáilte Ireland approved investment of €4.3 million in four key heritage sites along the Wild Atlantic Way and here we offer you a look at what has been achieved so far and a sneak preview of what's to come

for the remaining projects.

The investment, which forms part of Fáilte Ireland's strategic partnership with the OPW, will significantly enhance the visitor experience and views at key locations, with new exhibitions and major upgrades. Fáilte Ireland is providing up to 75% of the funding for the projects from its Capital Grants budget, with the remainder of the funding being provided by the OPW.

*The four heritage sites to benefit from this investment are:*

- **The Blasket Centre**, located on the mainland in Dún Chaoin on the tip of the Dingle Peninsula, tells the story of the unique community who lived on the remote Blasket Islands until their

▲ Patrick O'Donovan T.D., Minister of State with responsibility for the Office of Public Works (OPW) officially opened the spectacular Wild Atlantic Way Viewing point at the clifftop site of the OPW run Ionad an Bhlascaoid (Blasket Centre) in Dún Chaoin in the West Kerry Gaeltacht, July 2020.

This new and exciting addition to the tourism infrastructure of the Dingle Peninsula, designed by Paul Arnold Architects was built by the Office of Public Works under a strategic partnership with Fáilte Ireland. Photo: Valerie O'Sullivan

evacuation in 1953. The location has been designated as a Wild Atlantic Way Signature Discovery Point due to its cultural richness. The Blasket Centre tells of island life, subsistence fishing and farming, traditional life including modes of work and transport, home life, housing and entertainment. The Centre details the community's struggle for existence, their language and culture, and the extraordinary literary legacy they left behind - classics such as 'The Islandman', 'Twenty Years A-Growing'





Aerial image of the viewing platform at the Blasket Centre

and 'Peig'. Their story is told using a variety of means - exhibitions, interactive displays, artefacts, audio visual presentations and artworks. The total investment of €2.25 million, with Fáilte Ireland grant support of €1.69 million, has seen the development of a fantastic new signature viewing point, the first phase of a major re-development of the Blasket Centre which will also see a major upgrade of the exhibitions at the centre.

• **The Céide Fields Visitor Centre** stands in a remote and scenic clifftop location at Ballycastle on the North Mayo coast. It is located beside some of the most spectacular cliffs and rock formations in Ireland and a viewing platform is positioned on the edge of the 110m high cliff.

It highlights the archaeological history of the Neolithic period and celebrates in particular the hugely complex and extensive remains of ancient field systems and habitations. The stone walled fields, extending over thousands



of acres are almost 6,000 years old, the oldest known in the world. They are covered by a natural blanket bog with its own unique vegetation and wildlife. The Visitor Centre has won a number of awards, including the RIAI Gold Medal for architecture and a Europa Nostra Diploma of Merit. Most recently, the Céide Fields was awarded the prestigious

▲ Visualisation of the new exhibition and interpretation space at the Céide Fields Visitor Centre.

Carlo Scarpa international landscape award. The total investment of €1.15 million, with Fáilte Ireland grant support of €862,000, will see the Visitor Centre enhanced with a brand new exhibition and interpretation space to showcase new archaeological material and





▲ Visualisations of the new exhibition and interpretation spaces at the Céide Fields Visitor Centre (above) and at Carrowmore (right).

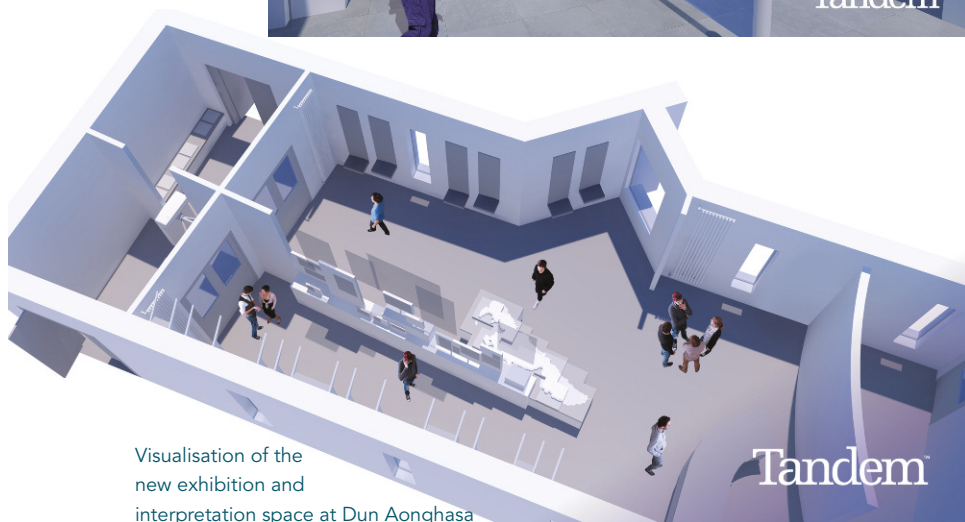
knowledge about the site and the surrounding area. Here are some impressions of how the refurbished Visitor Centre will present to the public.

#### • **Dún Aonghasa Visitor Centre**

in Inis Mór is the largest of the prehistoric stone forts of the Aran Islands. The fort consists of three massive dry-stone walls and a chevaux-de-frise, a dense band of jagged, upright stones, surrounding the fort from cliff to cliff, designed to impede attackers. Originally constructed c.1100BC, it was re-fortified around 700-800 AD. Excavations revealed significant evidence of prehistoric metalworking, as well as several houses and burials.

The total investment of €600,000, with Fáilte Ireland grant support of €450,000, will fund a major upgrade of the existing Visitor Interpretation Centre at Dún Aonghasa and the introduction of interpretative information at other key sites on the Island under the guardianship of the OPW, such as Dún Duchathair.

• **Carrowmore Megalithic Cemetery** is the largest cemetery of megalithic tombs in Ireland and is also among the oldest, with monuments ranging from five thousand years to six thousand years old. It is a visitor site within easy driving distance (approx. 6 km) of Sligo Town which celebrates the history of the largest collection (30 visible) of megalithic tombs in Ireland, representing some of the country's oldest monuments dating from up to 5,800 years ago. The total investment of €350,000, with Fáilte Ireland grant support of €262,500, will see the visitor exhibition improved and updated with information about the monuments at Carrowmore, as well as the nearby ancient sites at Knocknarea and Carrowkeel. This will enable visitors to use the Carrowmore Centre as a hub to explore the archaeology of the area.



Visualisation of the new exhibition and interpretation space at Dun Aonghasa

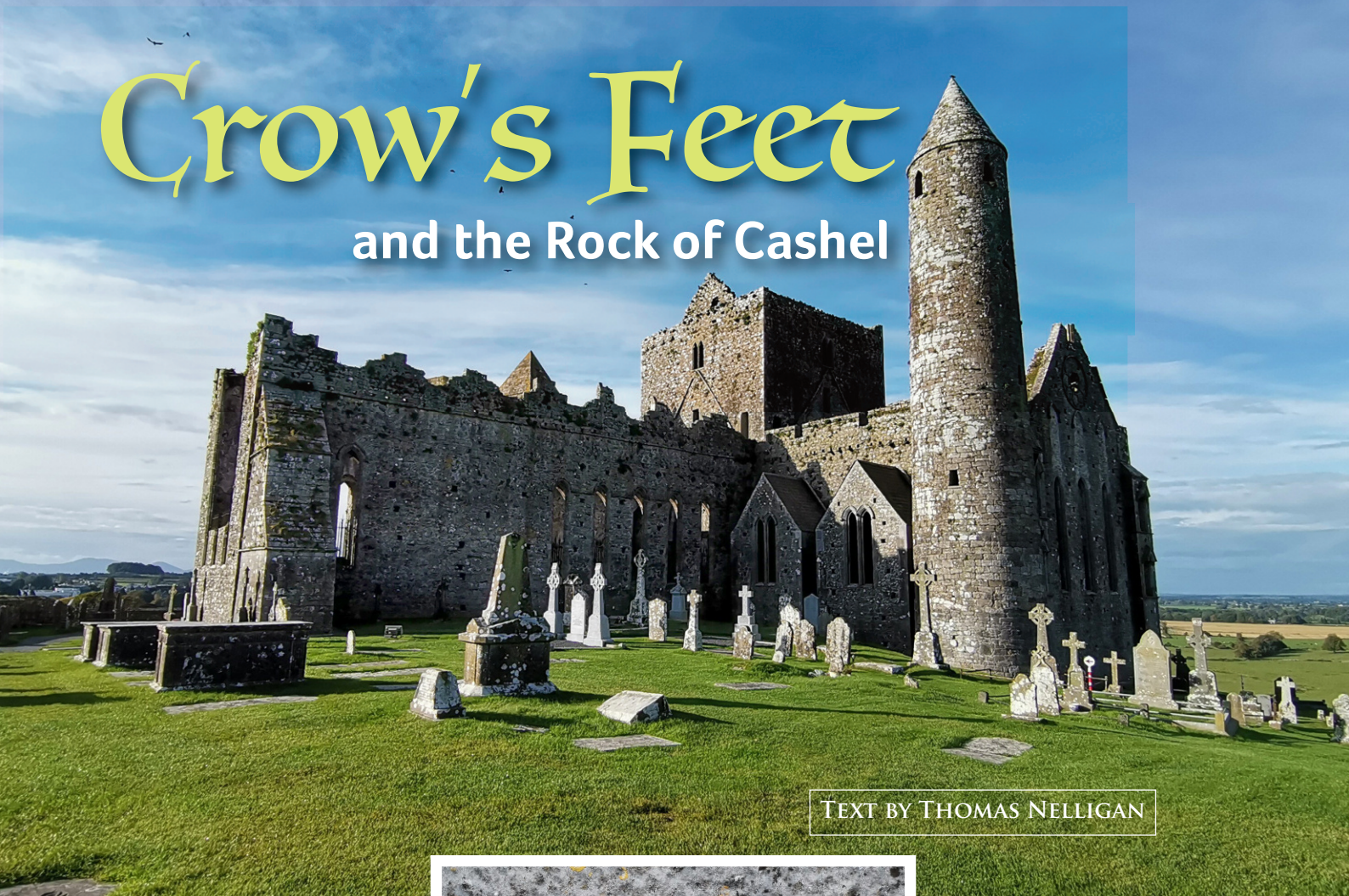


▲ Patrick O'Donovan T.D., Minister of State with responsibility for the Office of Public Works (OPW) officially opened the spectacular Wild Atlantic Way Viewing point at the clifftop site of the OPW run Ionad an Bhlascaoid (Blasket Centre) in Dún Chaoin in the West Kerry Gaeltacht. This new and exciting addition to the tourism infrastructure of the Dingle Peninsula, designed by Paul Arnold Architects was built by the Office of Public Works under a strategic partnership with Fáilte Ireland. Lorcán Ó Cinnéide Manager, Ionad an Bhlascaoid Mhóir and Rosemary Collier, OPW, Principal Officer, National Historic Properties. Photo: Valerie O'Sullivan



# Crow's Feet

## and the Rock of Cashel



TEXT BY THOMAS NELLIGAN

**T**hey are ubiquitous across the Irish landscape, found on mountain trails and old buildings alike, distinctive with their three lines meeting at a point topped with a horizontal line, but what are they? They are commonly mistaken as being representative of the three nails of the cross used in Christ's crucifixion, others have speculated that they are modern neo-pagan symbols of the goddess Awen, a muse for poets and artists. However, the truth, as it often is, is far less mysterious. These enigmatic symbols are ordnance survey benchmarks, more commonly known as crow's feet owing to their shape. While they most certainly are not symbols revealing the spiritual inclinations of those who carved them, they are, nevertheless, revealing about a period of Irish history in the 19th century.



▲ Above: *The Rock of Cashel*

◀ Left: Benchmark carved into the entrance to the Vicars Choral

Beginning in 1824 the British government decided to fully map Ireland in order to aid the creation of a rateable valuation and taxation system. These were produced in a series of six-inch maps and it was, at the time, the most comprehensive mapping project in the world. The work was overseen by the British Board of Ordnance who gave the responsibility of the project to Col. Thomas Colby who

was closely aided by Capt. Thomas Larcom. The series of maps was based on existing townland divisions and a study was carried out on these under the supervision of Richard Griffith – this was known as the boundary survey.

The project was ambitious and comprehensive. Scholars of the Irish language were hired to ensure the correct Irish spellings were used, and the history of place names known, and they kept a detailed record of the correct spellings of townland names. Everything from local history and traditions, the historical remains of buildings and





▲ Above: Benchmark carved into the 12th Century Round Tower

monuments were recorded and archived. The original aim was to produce all the collected information into a series of books, but only one volume was ever produced. Their methods transformed the study of history in Ireland and introduced the scientific method into archaeology, literature, and language.

The public reaction to the project was mixed, with many perceiving the creation of the maps as a tool of imperialism to be used to further oppress an already downtrodden people. Many feared it was a merely the beginnings of a larger military operation in Ireland. For this reason, Thomas Colby insisted that the project be kept a civil project despite calls for making the Ordnance Survey an armed force. Colby recognised the need for good public relations in order to bring the mapping to completion (the public reaction to the history of this project has been explored in further detail by Gillian Smith, *An Eye on the Survey*, History Ireland Vol. 9.2. 2001). The total cost of the Irish Ordnance Survey was £860,000.

The practical aspect of this mapping saw benchmarks, or crow's feet, carved into buildings, and natural rock formations around Ireland. These were not just simple markers of a location, but a place where surveyors would sit their bench in order to determine the location's height above sea level. A baseline benchmark was located at Poolbeg Lighthouse in Dublin, and this was used to calculate all heights above sea level in Ireland for over one hundred years. With the advent of new technologies in the 1970s it was discovered that the Poolbeg baseline was

inaccurate by 2.7m meaning that all measurements taken from this baseline are also inaccurate making calculated heights too tall.

Anywhere a crow's foot or benchmark was carved was considered a protected structure as it was important to ensure that they were never moved or destroyed. It made sense, therefore, to carve them into well-known and important landmarks where they would have been considered safe – Ireland's important historical sites were the perfect place to carve them.

The distinctive crow's foot symbol also has an interesting history that has its roots in medieval heraldry. The symbol is a variant of the popular broad-arrow symbol commonly used as a heraldic device on medieval coats of arms. The arrow normally faces in a downwards direction and is formed by a tang (the central portion where the shaft of the arrow would be fixed) and two barbs which formed the arrow shape. If the inner edge of the barbs were jagged then this was known as a pheon. On the crow's foot symbol the arrow is inversed.

From as early as the 14th century the symbol also began to be used to mark objects purchased with the monarch's money, or to indicate government property. As the symbol later came to be associated with the Board of Ordnance many have speculated that the symbol was adopted because of Sir Philip Sidney, who served as Joint Master-General of the Ordnance in 1585-86. The broad-arrow is prominent on the Sidney family coat of arms and may have been adopted for that reason. However, this is unlikely to be the reason of the symbol's adoption as the first recorded use comes from 1330 on an official seal used by Richard de la Pole, the butler of King Edward III.

From the 18th century onwards the symbol was adopted by the Board of Ordnance. While we mainly associate this with map making, it was primarily a military body responsible for the supply of guns, ammunition, and equipment to the King's Navy. All equipment would be stamped with the broad-arrow symbol. It was also used on British prison uniforms from the 1830s onwards. In 1855 the Board of Ordnance became part of the War Department, which later became the Ministry of Defence in 1964. The symbol was finally dropped from official use in the 1980s, although it remains an offence to use the symbol in Britain without government permission.

Therefore, this ubiquitous symbol has a long and colourful history, and they can be found all over Ireland. At the Rock of Cashel, there are several such examples carved into the monument. Four are carved within the walls; one each facing to a cardinal point. The north facing benchmark has been carved into the 12th century round tower, with the other three being carved into the 13th century cathedral. The highest of the four marks is located on the external east wall of the cathedral and is recorded as being 459.7m above sea level. Interestingly, the benchmark on the south porch of the cathedral is not recorded on the historic map editions. Two further benchmarks are located on the outside of the main walls. One is located on the south side of the Hall of the Vicar's



Choral, and another on the north face of the south-west tower in the boundary wall. It is possible there are others yet to be found. All benchmarks marked on the historic OS maps on the summit of the Rock of Cashel are all accounted for.

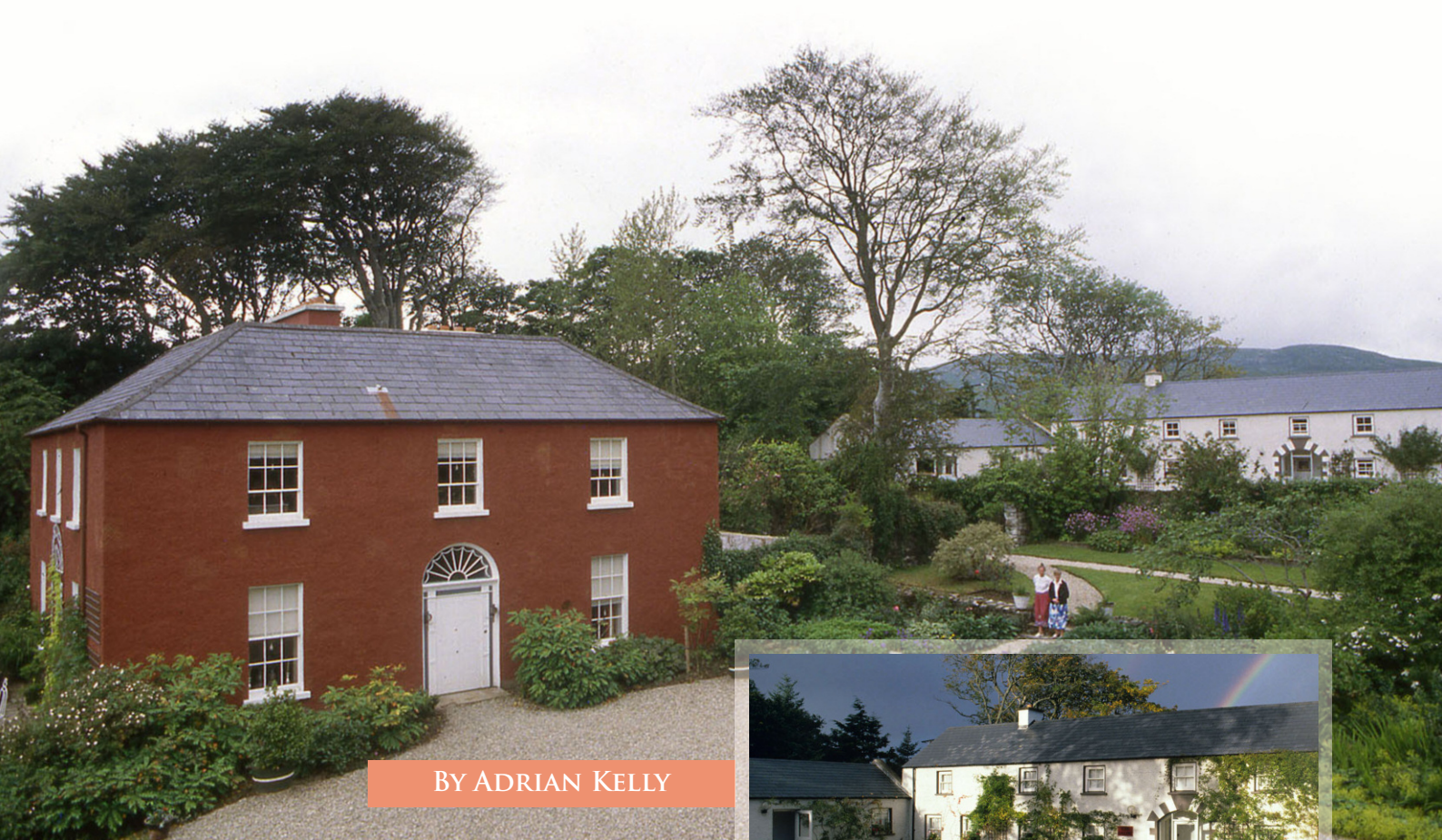
There are also several others marked on the maps in close proximity to the buildings at the Rock of Cashel. One is carved into the natural rock face to the north-east of the site. This could not be located as the area is now substantially overgrown. Another is carved into the Rock House at the base of the hill, and several others are dotted around in close proximity, and at least two are carved into Hore Abbey.

With modern technologies and satellites these marks are now obsolete but they remind us of the arduous task of map-making in the 19th century and add another chapter to the rich history of the Rock of Cashel.



- ▲ *Above:* Benchmark carved into the east wall of the Cathedral.
- ▲ *Top right:* Benchmark on the west wall of the residential tower.
- ▶ *Bottom right:* Benchmark located at the south porch into the Cathedral.





BY ADRIAN KELLY

# Glebe Gallery Educational Resources

**C**oronavirus restrictions limit us greatly in what we can do at our sites but in other areas they have been very liberating. We found this at the Glebe Gallery when it came to developing certain elements of our formal education programme for 2020/21.

Education forms the cornerstone of museum programmes therefore art education is the perfect fit for an Artist's Home Museum like the Glebe House and Gallery. Normally at this time of the year we have four weeks when we can bring schools to the Glebe and we work through a recurring question that appears in one form or another in the Leaving Certificate Art History exam. The question requires students to have visited an exhibition and our aim is to enable them to attempt this question effectively. Realistically we can only work with twenty classes at the very most and in the past few years we have squeezed

those students in and delivered a programme that we feel benefited them.

Many more students and their teachers are not in a position to access this resource as we have only worked with students who could physically visit the gallery, and while Art Teachers sometimes bring younger students along with their Leaving Cert class, the programme is designed specifically for final year students. There are forty art teachers in County Donegal second level institutions alone so we are only reaching a fraction of their classes and, even then, only their final year students. There is clearly a missed opportunity.

We have for years wanted to work with all secondary school art classes in Donegal and further afield but realistically did not have the time to design or deliver any kind of effective programme to them. This year is different. It's different because we are not limited to that short window of a few weeks between when the schools

► Glebe House, an elegant Regency house, dating from 1828, is set in woodland gardens near the town of Letterkenny in County Donegal. Inset image: Glebe Gallery.

reopen and are in a position to bring their students to us on day trips and when we close for the winter. This year we have been impacted by the restrictions on group sizes and our museum buildings are now closed completely to the public while at level 3. The net result is that we're no longer limited by our physical space and remote location and we're no longer limited to those art teachers who manage to navigate the logistics of bringing their students to the gallery in that short window of time.

So this year we took that time to set up a focus group with five art teachers from the Donegal Art Teachers Network - a group of energetic and dedicated teachers. We meet online every Monday night and discuss how the programme is progressing. We review the content produced that week and crucially the teachers tell us here at



the Glebe what they need from our programme and convey to us the learning opportunities that we are better placed than them to deliver. Museums are fantastic classrooms after all; it's in the name - a museum is a place to muse.

Along with this group of teachers and our colleagues in the Regional Cultural Centre in Letterkenny we have been able to examine exactly what students need most from this element of the Glebe Gallery education programme and are working to develop and test a set of blended learning tools. As restrictions continue to bite, those learning opportunities will certainly be more online than physical but we remain ever optimistic.

Crucially though we're not under the same time pressure to get as many students as possible through the doors before we close for winter. We have more time to plan, research, produce and interact with students and their teachers, more time to design tools and try them out, fail and try again, more time to get it right.

One point that the teachers in the focus group made early on in this process was that beginning to work with students in their final year was a little bit late for some of them and they asked us for something specifically for Junior Cycle students. They particularly wanted us to walk students through looking at art; to provide them with a set of tools for looking at and analysing art, to help them become more comfortable using descriptive language and to help them become more comfortable just looking. At the heart of this is fostering a love of art and an ability to connect with it, something that will long outlast standardised testing and serve them throughout their adult life.

So here we are now at the beginning of October when we would normally be doing our last couple of school visits, typically at the point where we're perfecting those tours and leading the discussions most effectively - just in time to close our doors for another year and carry out reviews but this year we're still at the beginning.

We produced a set of five videos during the earlier part of this year that looked at a permanent exhibition here in anticipation that students would not be able to visit an exhibition before sitting their Leaving Certificate. We finished them just as it was announced that the exams had been cancelled this year. We now live in a wicked learning environment, one where goals move,

where feedback is not timely or accurate, where everything is in a state of change, where next year is surely going to be different from last year. Wicked learning environments are very healthy, far more so than standardised testing environments, they make us more resilient and better equipped for life. And while our videos for the 2020 exams were not useful for their intended purpose we learned a lot from them and expect our next work to be better.

Nothing replaces the experience of standing in a gallery and looking at art, nothing replaces discussing that art in a group, nothing compares to the real thing, but we are ambitious; we hope that this year's programme will inspire students and better prepare them for that real experience that is certainly waiting for them.

Education is deeply rooted in the ethos here at the Glebe House and Gallery. Our Education Policy identifies many areas in which we are

normally very active. Each year we work with pre-school children, organised groups, families, primary school groups, community groups, senior citizens, third level students and academic researchers, adults, specialists, young people, people with physical disabilities, groups with learning disabilities, teachers, and ethnic minorities, all of course along with tourists. This year we met almost none of our targets. A programme for people with autism, which took a huge effort to develop, sits staring back at us. The review of our annual action plan will be swift but painful.

Every other area of our education work suffered as a result of Coronavirus, this is the only element that had benefited so we want it to be as effective as possible and with that in mind...



► Images: Interior rooms of Glebe House  
© Department of the Environment  
Heritage, & Local Government  
Photographic Unit



Videos for the Junior Cycle Looking at Art series are available to view at the links below but they are as yet unpublished as we're still working on the full programme. If you do get a chance to view them we would greatly appreciate any feedback - everything helps.

We work as a team here, as everywhere throughout our organisation, and while I have used 'we' throughout this, our colleague Jean Kearney developed our strategies and wrote the Education Policy. She is the person with the most passion and determination at the Glebe House and Gallery. A quick look back through our Facebook page will give you a flavour of our engagement programmes and the work she leads.



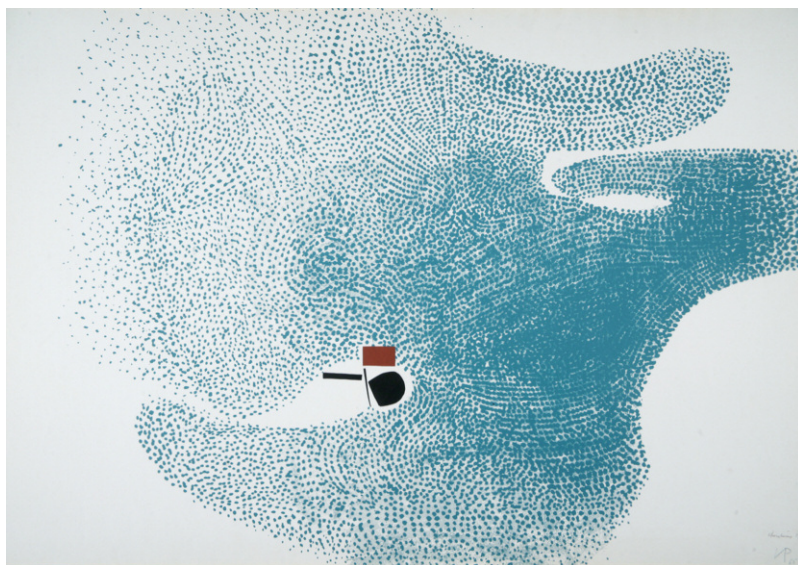
Looking at Art 1 - Find Wind, Clear Morning  
by Katsushika Hokusai  
[https://youtu.be/JNP\\_4wa2v10](https://youtu.be/JNP_4wa2v10)



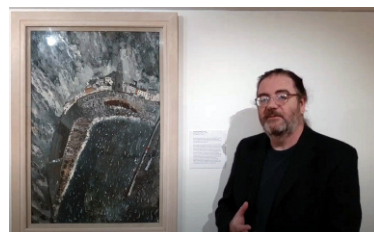
Looking At Art 2 - Jean in Bed with Jaundice  
by John Bratby  
[https://youtu.be/dZ\\_aLmmkwdQ](https://youtu.be/dZ_aLmmkwdQ)



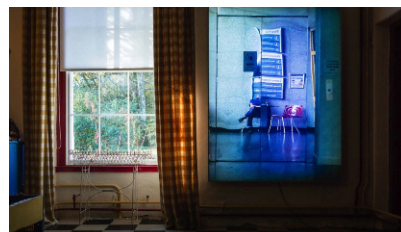
Looking at Art 3 - Points of Contact no 2  
by Victor Pasmore  
<https://youtu.be/tD9rmwxU0Z8>



Looking at Art 4 - The Mill by Norah McGuinness  
<https://youtu.be/weEltnaA1qY>



Looking at Art 5 - West End Village by James Dixon  
<https://youtu.be/d660wICNm60>



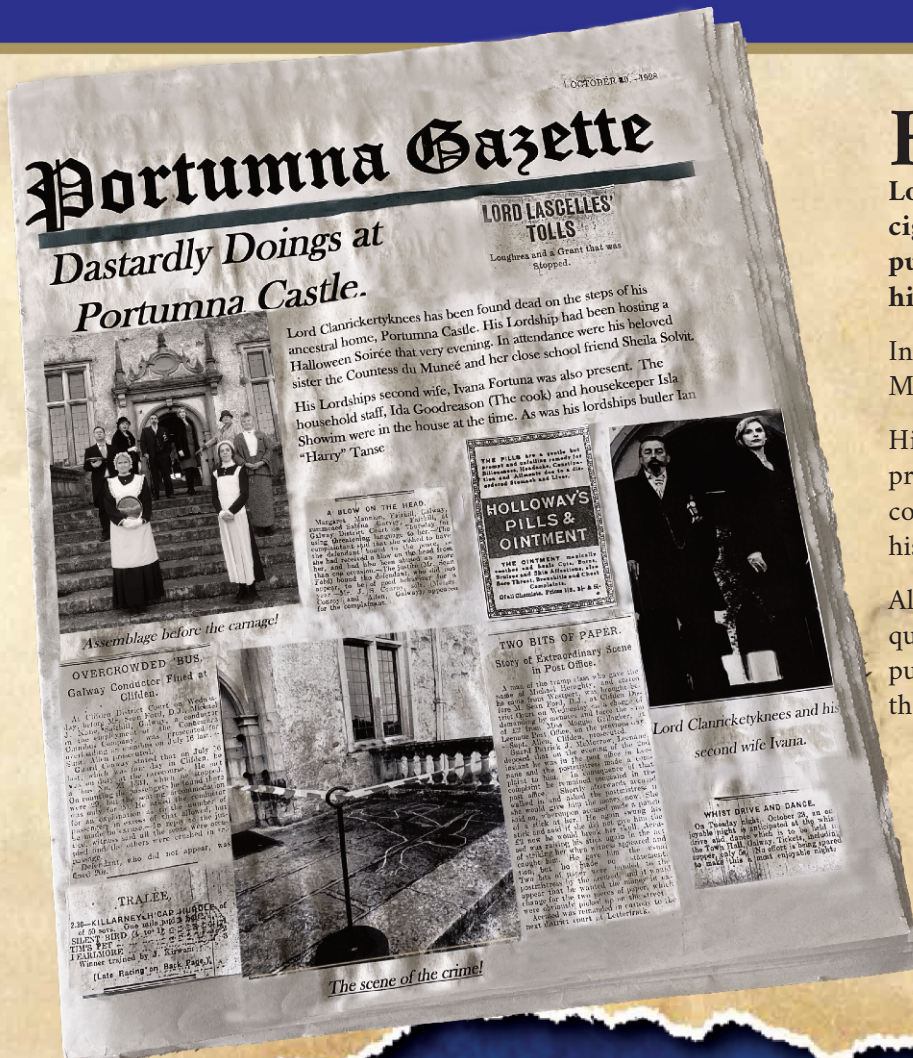
Looking at Art 6 - La tête disparaît by Locky Morris  
[https://youtu.be/kZu5RR\\_mrPo](https://youtu.be/kZu5RR_mrPo)



# Murder at The Castle!

**"LORD CLANRICKETYKNEES HAS BEEN FOUND DEAD ON THE STEPS OF HIS ANCESTRAL HOME, PORTUMNA CASTLE".**

October 1928



His Lordship had been hosting a Halloween Soirée that very evening. It is alleged that Lord Clanricketyknees had stepped outside for a cigar at some stage during the evening when a pumpkin fell from the battlements above, killing him instantly.

In attendance were his beloved sister the Countess du Monée and her close school friend, Sheila Solvit.

His Lordship's second wife Ivana Fortuna was also present. The household staff on duty that night were cook Ida Goodreason, housekeeper, Isla Showim and his Lordship's butler Ian "Harry" Tanse.

All are being treated as suspects and are being questioned by local police who are appealing to the public to help by coming to Portumna Castle to see the murder weapon and guess its weight.

Lord Clanricketyknees and his second wife Ivana.



Right: The scene of the crime  
Above: 'The Portumna Gazette' newspaper  
Below: Portumna Castle



PORTUMNA CASTLE





# PARKE'S CASTLE

## Celebrates 30 Years of Welcoming Visitors

BY SIOBHAN MCGOWAN LOUGHLIN

**Parke's Castle in Co. Leitrim is truly a hidden gem, situated on the shores of Lough Gill 11km from Sligo town and 5km from the picturesque village of Dromahair. It is one of the best examples of a restored Plantation Manor House of the 17th style in the North West region.**

The castle comprises of a gatehouse, Manor house, two large corner towers and bawn walls. Excavations in the courtyard in the 1970's revealed the foundations of an earlier 16th O'Rourke tower house. This tower house was owned by Sir Brian O'Rourke who was executed at Tyburn in London in 1591.

The castle was home to the Parke's family in the 1600's and abandoned in the early 1700's. It was restored in the 1980's using traditional Irish oak and local craftsmanship.

The Office of Public Works celebrated the 30th anniversary of the official opening of Parke's Castle on the 8th June 2020. To coincide with this year's Heritage Week theme *Heritage and Education: Learning from our Heritage*, Parke's Castle marked this anniversary with a short video entitled *Parke's Castle: Reeling in the Years 1990-2020*. This short video gives the viewer an insight into the history and heritage of one of Leitrim's finest visitor attractions and is available to view on the OPW's YouTube channel.

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## Leitrim 100 Observer

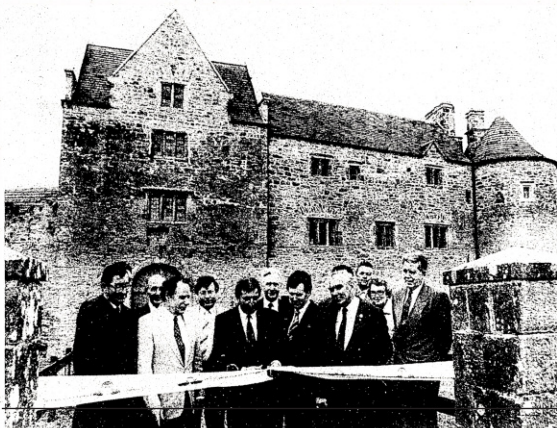
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Minister of State, Brendan Daly T.D., cuts the tape at Parke's Castle, Dromahair last Friday watched by the assembled dignitaries.

## Parke's Castle opening to boost Tourism — says Minister

The opening of Parke's Castle in picturesque Dromahair last Friday will open up the Leitrim Sligo area as a tourism base Minister for State at the Department of Finance, Brendan Daly, confidently predicted.

Minister Daly was speaking at the Official Opening of the Castle which cost £750,000 to restore and re-open. He said that the opening of the 17th century castle was the first step in realising the enormous potential of the area. We are not only opening up a Castle, but we are opening up the prospect of enhancing the whole tourism potential of the area," he said.

"It is important that we open up the potential of many of our dormant resources, which have been for many years stagnant and underused. It is very important for us to attract and keep people in the area."

The Castle is situated on the shores of Lough Gill on the Sligo/Dromahair road and features a Manor House, a tower, a tea house and the foundations of the original O'Rourke's of Breffne Castle which dates back to the 16th century.

about 1,600 acres in mortgage from Co. O'Rourke and it is evidently from the Parke, or his family, that that plantation castle, built on the O'Rourke site, got its present name. Captain Parke's daughter married Sir Francis Gore of Arklow, County Sligo, an ancestor of the Gore-Booth family of Lisnadel and their son was the last resident of the Castle. The archaeological excavations also revealed the foundations of a Blacksmith's Forge, a Well and a Sallport (or scullery) in the lake.

"From the results of the archaeological excavations, it was considered that a valid restoration of the Castle would be feasible. The work began with a detailed photographic survey of the ruins, using stereoscopic, photographic techniques. Following this in 1984, excavations from O.P.W. National Monuments Depot at Dromahair commenced the painstaking excavation work. The project involved the careful conservation of the stonework of the Castle, reconstruction of the roof, excavation of the great wall to its prime glory, the construction of a wooden spiral staircase in 17th century style and the adaptation of the entrance and ground floor area to accommodate a visitor reception area and an audio-visual presentation.

"The timber on the roof and the use of native Irish oak and were fastened in place without the use of a single nail. Skilful craftsmanship is displayed in the gable staircase. Overall, the courtyard has been fully restored, with cobblestones in the style of the original period. A series of out-buildings have also been restored, open foundations revealed in the archaeological excavations. I am very pleased to see that the restoration of the work involved can be gauged and there is also an imaginative model on display which depicts the archaeological excavations in

progress and the setting up of scaffolding for the restoration work. Parke's Castle is seen, not only as a major visitor attraction in itself, but also as an interpretative centre for National Monuments in the hinterland of Lough Gill. An initial guide service for the Castle started in 1988, when over 5,000 people visited it.

Numbers doubled last year and I have every expectation of apparently increasing numbers now that further visitor interpretative services are in place. These added attractions are, of course, the very fine audio visual show and exhibitions which will introduce the visitor to the rich store of archaeological sites within a half day drive of the Castle. To mention but a few, there is, firstly, Knocknaree, Sligo's major monument, overlooking Lough Gill, on the crest of which is the most prominent megalithic mound in the area, the great Mongan Maes which, according to tradition, holds the body of the legendary Queen Maeve standing upright and facing her enemies.

For 5,000 years, Queen Maeve has looked down on Lough Gill, on Sligo and on the largest passage tomb cemetery in Ireland located at Carranmore, where I might mention, the Office of Public Works are opening a visitor information point, this year. (Continued on Page 10)



# Parke's Castle opened by Minister

(Continued from Page 1)

the hinterland of Lough Gill are the ecclesiastical remains of the Franciscan Priory at Creevelea, the Dominican Friary in Sligo town and the High Cross and Round Tower at Drumcliff. These are just some of the fine collection of about 30 groups of National Monuments cared for by the Office of Public Works in Counties Leitrim and Sligo. You may be interested to know that in all, over 6,000 monuments and sites of archaeological importance of pre 1700 A.D. date were located in these two counties during the compilation of the Office of Public Works, Sites and Monuments Records. These records are available for general viewing in the County Libraries and Local Authority's Offices. In fact, my last visit to the Sligo/Leitrim region was in March this year for the launching of the Sligo Sites and Monuments Record, the exhibition of which, can be seen here today on the 2nd floor.

The primary objective of the

Office of Public Works under the National Monuments Acts is the protection and conservation of the National Monuments in its care. Major restoration of the magnificence we see here today at Parke's Castle can only be undertaken when research validates it, and when funds are available. The European Community Border Area Programme gave the initial funding impetus, with a contribution of £200,000 towards the project. The overall cost of the work was almost £700,000 and represents tangible proof of the commitment of the Government to the preservation and interpretation of Ireland's built heritage and a tribute to the craftsmen of the Office of Public Works. They are the stonecutters, stone masons, carpenters, joiners and other craftspeople who worked on every aspect of the Castle restoration from the complicated roof of the Manor House to the cobbles of the

Courtyard. I am very pleased to see a number of them here today. All of the people associated with this project are too numerous to mention. If I single out the Architect, Mr. Paul McMahon, the Clerk of Works, Mr. John Corcoran and Mr. Frank O'Connor, Senior Clerk of Works now retired and in thinking them for their commitment, I hope everyone will accept this as appreciation for a job well done. I have no doubt that their tremendous efforts will greatly benefit our appreciation of our built heritage and at the same time have a very positive effect on tourism in this very scenic and historic area around Lough Gill.

The restoration has produced an outstanding attraction for North County Leitrim and its entire hinterland. The cost of the work will prove to be an investment not only in our heritage but in the tourism infrastructure of this area and will be of benefit many times over to the people of this region.

"In conclusion I would like to ask you, to join me, at a viewing of the audio-visual presentation on the ground floor and of the exhibitions on this and on the second floor. The Guides whom you can see around the building are also available to give guided tours and to provide you with any information you may require", added Minister Daly.

OPW Chairman, John O'Mahoney said "A lot of patience and perseverance have gone into making this building as you see it today and when it was finished, it seemed like a very central location of an OPW Interpretive Centre and we hope this will make a contribution to the area and local tourism interests."

However, he did call for help from the local business community - "We are looking for some local initiative to help us finish off the project with us - a landing facility would be a great opportunity for an entrepreneur with boats trips for Sligo taking in a beautiful area and the Castle".

Paul McMahon, an architect on the project and in the National Monuments Branch of the OPW - welcomed everyone to the opening. "It is a pleasure to welcome you here today. The real story of the renovation and restoration is very hard to tell but an awful lot of blood, sweat and tears have gone into it".

"There is four hundred years of history in the Castle and we have done one important thing in salvaging the reputation of Robert Parke. In our old information we described him as a Cromwellian Officer but he predated the period and was in fact an Elizabethan Officer", he said.



Minister Brendan Daly with Senator's Paschal Mooney and Willie Farrell and O.P.W. Clerk of Works, John Corcoran in front of the renovated Parke's Castle.



Minister Brendan Daly addresses the crowd at the opening of Parke's Castle, Dromshanah.



The 16th Century foundations of the O'Rourke's Stronghold in the foreground while the forge and stables are in the background.



Minister Brendan Daly opens the door to Parke's Castle with Paul McMahon (O.P.W.), Senator Willie Farrell, N. Lynch (Principal Officer O.P.W.), Paschal Mooney and John O'Mahoney (Chairman O.P.W.).



Paschal Mooney examines the 16th Century foundations in the Castle Yard watched by Minister Daly, John O'Mahoney (Chairman O.P.W.), Gerry Reynolds and Senator Willie Farrell.



Now, here's the problem! Paschal Mooney explains a problem at Acres, Drumshanbo to Minister Brendan Daly while County Manager, Brendan Daly looks on.



Gerry Reynolds tries his hand at the Old Forge in Parke's Castle.



## FEATURE PARKE'S CASTLE



- ▲ Above: Banqueting Hall at the Official opening (2nd from the left Tommie Boles). Photo courtesy of Imelda Boles.
- ▼ Below, L-R: Betty O'Connor, John Warren, Seamus Lynam, Paul McMahon, Frank O'Connor RIP, John O'Brien, Ann Grady, Noel Lynch RIP, Chris Flynn, Jim Dillion RIP, John Corcoran, Mairead Sheehan RIP and June Thompson. Copyright and photo credit:- © National Monuments Service.



Image courtesy of Barry Mulligan (OPW Guide)



- ▲ Centre right: OPW Guides 2019 Margaret Byrne, Colleen O'Hara, Siobhán McGowan Loughlin (Head Guide) and Eibhlín Nic Eochaidh.
- ▲ Left: Emma Timoney (OPW Guide 2018) in costume for 'Wild Child Day'.
- ▲ Above: Guides 2008 Heritage Week. Far right: Mark Keane (OPW Guide 2018).



# How to Get Away with Murder *18th Century Style*

TEXT BY JENNY YOUNG

St. Mary's Church,  
Gowran, Co. Kilkenny

In the heart of the neat village of Gowran in Co. Kilkenny stands an elaborate thirteenth century Collegiate church called St. Mary's. Among the numerous intricate carvings, effigies and memorials, countless tombstones lie preserved within its walls, recounting the stories of the many individuals who graced the region during its long history. The large, sophisticated tombs are testament to the upper classes - earls, lords, ladies and gentlemen rest here alongside the more modest graves of the foresters, teachers and post office clerks.





Indeed, St. Mary's transcended the social and class divide, providing a serene place of rest for all walks of life for centuries.

But one memorial in particular

doesn't quite fit in among the others. At first glance, nothing unusual is obvious - a mural stone broken in three pieces, two pieces with an inscription, the other carved in high relief with an armorial plaque. On closer inspection, the coat of arms appears to represent the O'Flaherty family. A family far-removed from the lush, pasture-rich swathes of south-eastern Ireland. This broken, forgotten memorial holds a chilling connection to a noble family in the far western corner of the island and to a grisly crime perpetrated in the most sinister fashion during the late-eighteenth century.

▲ Above left and right:  
Memorial Stones to Thomas  
O'Flaherty, St. Mary's Church  
(Photo by Dr. Breda Lynch)

The story begins with a wedding. In the summer of 1760 twenty-six year old Thomas O'Flaherty married his twenty-one year old bride, Susannah Bourke, daughter of Richard Bourke, Esq. of Dromsally, Co. Limerick. Thomas, the third son<sup>1</sup> of a former Catholic gentry family from western Co. Galway, was descended from Gaelic royalty.<sup>2</sup> During the eleventh century his distinguished forbearers had been contenders for the Kingship of Connacht and from the late-thirteenth century, had ruled the medieval lordship of Iarchonnacht for over four hundred years from their network of stone towerhouses that dotted the Atlantic coastline and the western shores of Lough Corrib. Thomas was the third generation to live at Lemonfield after his grandfather's family had been forced to leave their ancestral home of nearby Aughnacore Castle in the late seventeenth century, following the upheavals of the 1640s. Through the policy of confiscation and transplantation under the Cromwellian regime of the 1650s, the O'Flahertys lost the greater part of their ancestral estates. But the astute political

manoeuvrings of Thomas's grandfather Bryan O'Flaherty, guaranteed the retention of lands around Lemonfield on the boggy shores of Lough Corrib where he built temporary but comfortable cabins to accommodate his family. It was here Thomas grew up, a far cry from his grandfather's austere medieval towerhouse at Aughnacore. It was Thomas's brother, Sir John O'Flaherty who was in a position to replace the temporary cabins with a large, country residence in 1750, just a stone's throw from his family's earlier castle at Aughnacore. Yet the castle remained an ever-present reminder of the family's illustrious past and of the legacy that they had left behind.

At twenty-one, Susannah Bourke was already widowed and on the lookout for her next husband, which was hardly a daunting task for a young woman of means and shrewd disposition. She had endeavoured to select suitors who could provide her with the kind of comfortable life she had grown accustomed to and in which she could mingle with the cream of eighteenth century high society. Enter firstly Mr. Francis Drew. The elderly gentleman from Drew's Court, Co. Limerick was hardly a romantic match for the teenage Susannah, but what he lacked in youth he made up for in wealth and breeding.<sup>3</sup> For women in particular, money was the leading motivation to marry, perpetuated by a society that placed excessive worth on superficial values, and not enough on love. Without marriage,





women had little to no prospects; therefore a decent suitor was deemed essential. Mr. Drew had inherited a considerable property, esteemed lineage and most importantly, a substantial annual income, and they immediately began a courtship. Within weeks, the couple were married when Miss Bourke was just shy of her eighteenth birthday. Undoubtedly, the match must have raised some eyebrows but nevertheless, the couple settled into married life. But storm clouds soon gathered on the horizon that would prevent the sun from shining on their union. Just two years later, old Mr. Drew died suddenly and his grieving widow was left to look for a new husband. Not wasting any time, she chose a new suitor and was married again within a year, this time to Galway man, Thomas O'Flaherty, a "gentleman in every way, worthy of her hand"<sup>4</sup>. From the outside, their marriage appeared to have been a fitting one, and Thomas remained unperturbed by her somewhat questionable past.

Ever the astute operator, Susannah must have been well informed of her new husband's family's prominent position within society. The O'Flahertys were well connected. Thomas's uncle, Theobald Burke, the 7<sup>th</sup> Viscount Mayo, married Ellis Agar, the Countess of Brandon of Gowran Castle, Co. Kilkenny in 1725, who was reputedly a mistress to King George III!<sup>5</sup> The Agar family were some of the most prominent landowners in the county during the eighteenth century and it was through this marriage that lands in Kilkenny eventually became available to the O'Flahertys in the late eighteenth century.<sup>6</sup> But it was the opportunities of Dublin City and the glamour of its society that attracted the young couple to the capital during the first decade of their marriage. The slower pace of agrarian country life among the fertile plains of Kilkenny would have to wait for now.

The newlyweds moved to the newly developed Clare Street on the south side of Dublin city following their nuptials in the late eighteenth century.<sup>7</sup> This period witnessed the spectacular expansion of the city, which had become one of the largest and most prestigious capitals in Europe. Clare Street was designed and constructed to the aesthetic sensibilities of Georgian architects with rows of symmetrical terraces adorned with elegant doorways, ironwork and bow windows. Here in this fashionable district they rubbed shoulders with the aristocracy,

wealthy merchants and professionals and where they settled into urban life, starting their large family with the birth of their son, John Bourke O'Flaherty in 1762. Susannah must have been content to mix with Dublin society and accompany her husband to the various dinner parties and events of the neighbourhood. Records show they had relocated to nearby and equally prestigious Merrion Square by the early 1770s, the move possibly motivated by the accompanying large, private enclosed park there, which would have provided a safe and secure



◀ Facing page: Aughnanure Castle, Oughterard, Co. Galway



▲ Top:  
Lemonfield House,  
Oughterard,  
Co. Galway  
(from William  
Wilde's "Lough  
Corrib: Its Shores  
& Islands",  
published 1867)



◀ Left:  
Ellis Agar, Countess  
of Brandon  
by Phillip Hussey  
(1713-1783)

space for the young O'Flaherty children. It was during this time in Dublin that aspects of Susannah's dubious personality were revealed by their neighbours, high-court judge Jonah Barrington and his father, who described Susannah as a woman who "*had certainly no charms either of appearance or address which might be thought calculated to captivate any one; and there was a something indescribably repulsive in her general manners*".<sup>8</sup> Thomas seemingly overlooked such traits, or perhaps was blind to them and nothing extraordinary appeared to upset their early years of marriage, which passed without incident.

By 1773 Thomas was acting as an agent for his aunt Ellis's nephew, George Agar, selling and letting lands and woods in Co. Kilkenny and it is through this business that the O'Flahertys came to settle in the county.<sup>9</sup> Thomas also took a keen interest in country pursuits and indulged in a passion for racehorses, one of which ran in the Tullow Races in October of 1773.<sup>10</sup> After more than a decade spent in the capital, the O'Flahertys made the decision to move to Co. Kilkenny and in the autumn of 1774, amidst of the fertile plains of Tullaherin and Gowran, Thomas leased Castlefield House and estate from George Agar.

Constructed during the 1730s, Castlefield was a large two-story, five bay gabled building with classic, aesthetic proportions; the typical stylish country house of the emerging middle-class<sup>11</sup>. Equipped with a servant's wing to the rear, two kitchens, two reception rooms and a large adjacent ballroom, with a number of bedrooms laid out above on the first floor. Above that again





were more attic bedrooms. Outside laid an array of barns, coach houses, stables and outbuildings. Castlefield

▲ Above: Georgian Dublin  
View of College Green,  
Dublin by Samuel Frederick  
Brocas (1792-1847)

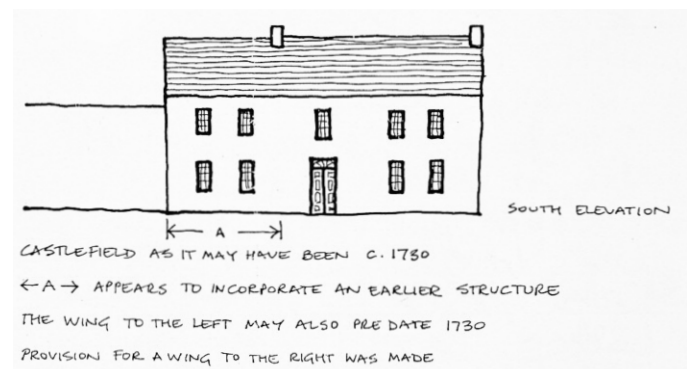
provided the O'Flahertys with the comfortable surrounds and considerable style suited to the needs of a country gentleman farmer and his family. Servants, coachmen, cooks, kitchen maids, nurses and farmhands, mostly brought from Co. Galway, tended to the family's every need. It was here where they would raise their family, entertain friends and where Thomas would manage and transform the estate of eighty acres that surrounded the house. His investment was significant and commendable – horses, cattle and sheep grazed the open parklands while potatoes, wheat, oats and apples grew in the fields.<sup>12</sup> Hay was saved and fields were ploughed and fertilised; the bountiful farm had all the trademarks of being a financial success. But management of the estate was not the only string to Thomas's bow. He also continued to act as an agent for local landowners as well as a Justice for the Peace for Kilkenny. A regular visitor to his brother's estate at Lemonfield, he would deliver letters and messages from his servants to their families in Galway. Thus, his many responsibilities consumed so much of his time that little was left to spend at home with his wife and children. In contrast to her husband's busy and eventful life, Susannah's was devoid of any purposeful political activity or intellectual engagement but was instead, devoted to the care of her children, the domestic management of the house and the genteel social and artistic pursuits deemed appropriate for a woman in her position. The lives of eighteenth century women in general were invariably shaped by a legal, institutional and ideological context, restrained by excessive notions of decorum.<sup>13</sup> Was this life to be enough for the restless Mrs O'Flaherty?

The 1770s witnessed much agrarian unrest and a general unsettled state of the Irish countryside persisted. The Whiteboy Movement used violent tactics to defend tenant farmer land rights for subsistence farming. Landlords and tithe collectors were targeted by the Whiteboys in nightly raids in both Co. Kilkenny and South Tipperary in an effort to secure a substantial reduction in all tithes payable by the peasant population. In the early summer of 1775 George Agar and a number of his

servants with the help of Thomas O'Flaherty, apprehended a Whiteboy during the height of their activities, who had during the night, burned down a farmer's house in the county just a month before.<sup>14</sup> Given this unsettled nature of the countryside, Thomas may have armed himself with an array of weapons to protect his family. Duelling pistols and fowling pieces were part of a gentleman's armoury, which were not necessarily used but often put on display inside the house. Castlefield House was not blatantly fortified

but defensive measures against Whiteboys and other marauders were provided by a solid door, equipped with sturdy boltholes.<sup>15</sup> Behind these doors, Thomas could rest well in the belief that his family were safe. Unbeknownst to Thomas, the real danger lurked within the walls of the family home.

Two years later, in the autumn of 1777 twenty-one year old Trinity graduate and Kilkenny native, Thomas Lonergan took up residence with the O'Flahertys to tutor their eldest son, fifteen year old John Bourke O'Flaherty. Thomas Lonergan was the son of a Kilkenny baker and had been educated at a school in Raheny in Dublin, under the supervision of Rev. Eugene McKenna. On successfully gaining entry to study at Trinity College, Lonergan resided with Mr. McKenna and kept up a close friendship with the man, and it was through McKenna's connections that Lonergan came to be employed by the O'Flahertys back in his home county of Kilkenny. Little could Mr. O'Flaherty have realised that his decision to engage the services of a tutor would ultimately devastate his future and the entire household at Castlefield was about to be hurled into the eye of an impending storm with fatal consequences.



▲ Castlefield House c. 1730s (By Seamus Corballis)

By the time Susannah was thirty-eight years old, she had competently presided over her husband's household and given him seven children.<sup>16</sup> In return, Thomas had provided her with a very comfortable life and all the trappings of such that she could have desired. Nevertheless, her head was turned by the young tutor suddenly living among the family, and almost







for and arrived early the following morning, but it was too late and Thomas O'Flaherty died of an agonising death later the following night. Susannah became a widow for the second time, again, with her husband dying in strange, sudden circumstances. Was it all one big coincidence, or was there something more sinister afoot?

The sudden death of a healthy forty-four year old family man must have caused suspicion but any evidence of wrongdoing was concealed and staff were quickly dismissed. Yet rumours of poisoning soon began to circulate through the local community. Such misgivings were generated from the strange appearance of the body, which apparently had swelled and exhibited black spots, while the fingernails and hair reputedly fell out. As a result, the body was carried to a barn behind the house and covered with sods, apparently to prevent further swelling. Word of Thomas's death was sent to his elder brother, Sir John O'Flaherty at Lemonfield but Thomas was buried before Sir John ever received the news, and never had the opportunity to pay his respects to his younger brother. Thomas was laid to rest in St. Mary's church, Gowran, his gravestone testament to his excellent character: *"...in this church are deposited the remains of Thomas O'Flaherty Esq. late of Castlefield in the county of Kilkenny. A man that possessed such endless...lustre as his noble ancestry. He passed through life unblemished, honoured, beloved and esteemed. He departed this life on the 26<sup>th</sup> of June 1778 in the 44<sup>th</sup> year of his age much lamented by all who knew him. He was esteemed and respected as a lover of virtue and friend of mankind"*.<sup>19</sup> At her husband's graveside, Susannah undoubtedly put on a convincing performance of the grieving widow. After all, practice makes perfect; this was not the first time she had buried a spouse.

In the following weeks rumours of Mr. O'Flaherty's sudden and unexplained demise continued to generate through the parish. Susannah must have suspected that she was in a precarious situation and three months later in a panicked move, auctioned off all the furniture of the house as well as the farm animals and implements, and advertised the house and lands for rent.<sup>20</sup> Were these the actions of a guilty woman in fear of being apprehended by the law? The exact location of where she moved with her family is unknown but Susannah and Lonergan were seen walking arm in arm a year later in Portarlinton, Co. Laois.<sup>21</sup> It is even alleged that they shared a house there together and that Susannah bore Lonergan's child.<sup>22</sup> In some records she is even referred to as Mrs. Lonergan.<sup>23</sup> This all points to one obvious question - did she and Lonergan plot together to poison Thomas O'Flaherty for their own selfish gains? Or perhaps, it was Susannah who was the mastermind behind the entire scheme and that Lonergan was merely her unfortunate pawn, someone who was both convenient and expendable.



▲ Barn, Castlefield House. The body of Thomas O'Flaherty was placed in this barn behind the house immediately following his death in June 1778. (Photo by Caroline Corballis)

By 1781, the rumours of poisoning had reached such a level they could no longer be ignored by the authorities. As a result, in May of that year a warrant was issued for the arrest of Lonergan. He obediently surrendered and following an initial investigation in Kilkenny, was escorted to Dublin to stand trial at the next assizes. Susannah however, had no intention of standing by her man for fear of being implicated herself and promptly fled the country, leaving her young lover to take the blame. Thomas Lonergan was abandoned and faced a very worrying charge of murder in the first degree. His freedom and his life hung in the balance.

The following autumn the Dublin Evening Post reported that Lonergan was charged with O'Flaherty's murder on November 9<sup>th</sup> 1781, more than three years after the death had occurred. The following day he was escorted under a heavy guard of Naas Volunteers from Kilkenny to Dublin to await trial. During the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, the anxious public followed a series of similar, celebrated murder trials with morbid fascination so it was no surprise that this case aroused considerable national interest. This was the era of the high-profile poisoner, and one that witnessed the growth of Irish newspapers, which devoted increasing amounts of space to domestic events, of which criminal activity featured prominently. Due to the intrigue and sinister nature of this case it was extensively detailed in the newspapers and received substantially more coverage than other murders. Susannah's alleged involvement only exacerbated the sensation. Female murderers were often given almost double the average coverage afforded to other offenders in the late eighteenth-century press. Poisoning was long regarded as being the *modus operandi* of *women* who committed murder, not men. Women who used violence in the commission of their crime were subject to greater censure by the courts due to their straying from their more traditional and domestic contemporary roles.<sup>24</sup>



These women had not only committed a murder but they had also tapped into the recurring contemporary fear that poisoning was a difficult crime to guard against, particularly in a domestic context, and it fundamentally violated the trust in a marital relationship. This thought would have shook any eighteenth century Irish man to the core.

Just three days later, Lonergan stood trial in a Dublin court in front of a jury of twelve Kilkenny gentlemen with a charge of being “*moved and seduced by the instigation of the devil*” in the killing of Thomas O’Flaherty by poison.<sup>25</sup> In more specific terms, this was petit treason – the murder of a superior by a subordinate and in this case, one’s employer; an offence considered at the time, more aggravated than the murder of any other individual. Lonergan pleaded not guilty to the charge. As he sat in court, listening to the evidence presented and the compelling accounts of several witnesses, Susannah was nowhere to be seen, though her guilt was “*generally considered the greater of the two*”.<sup>26</sup> In fact, she was never seen or heard from ever again. All murder charges fell to Lonergan and him alone. In his closing statement that evoked the many peculiar horrors of poison murder, the Solicitor General for the prosecution recounted all the facts of the case, and reiterated that Lonergan, although charged with having perpetrated the crime, was indeed seduced by Mrs. O’Flaherty into killing her husband by stating that “*in many instances, an unbounded lust has made men guilty of the most enormous crimes, in order to effect their vicious purposes*”.<sup>27</sup>

Despite the complete lack of forensic evidence, the weight of circumstantial evidence was overwhelming. A guilty verdict was imminent, although Lonergan vehemently maintained his innocence throughout the trial. After retiring for just an hour, the jury returned and delivered the guilty verdict. After five days spent languishing in a Dublin jail, Lonergan appeared before the court again and was sentenced to be hanged and quartered on November 24th. On a cold, blustery morning at the city gallows on Lower Baggot Street in front of a large gathered crowd of

boisterous spectators, the grim sentence was duly carried out. In the moments before his execution, Lonergan produced a piece of paper and handed it to one of the sheriffs at the gallows. In it, he again humbly proclaimed his innocence but most surprisingly, vindicated Susannah entirely, believing that she was completely innocent of the crime and declared: “*of this I do not entertain the least shadow of a doubt*”.<sup>28</sup> With that, a black cap was pulled over his head, the noose was tied around his neck and a cart was withdrawn from beneath his feet. Accounts of the time record he almost immediately ceased to struggle, and was removed to Raheny for burial by the Rev. Eugene McKenna, who had given much-needed support to his young friend throughout the entire trial.

However, another version of events relays that Lonergan survived his execution, was nursed back to life by the Rev. Eugene McKenna and escaped to America where he worked as a schoolmaster under the pseudonym James Fennel.<sup>29</sup> Another story recounts of his escape to a French monastery where he lived out the remainder of his life. Either way, it appears that through a bizarre series of extraordinary events, Lonergan, though tried, convicted and sentenced for murder, miraculously got away scot-free. It was the unfortunate Thomas O’Flaherty who paid the ultimate price in this twisted affair with his life, cut short before his time, not to mention his children who were left without their father or mother. Eighteenth century criminal justice it seems could be a precarious thing.

Some anecdotes tell of Susannah O’Flaherty’s escape “*beyond sea*”, beginning a new life in a new place, but what became of her after that is largely unknown.<sup>30</sup> As is her motive for the murder of her husband who had provided her with the kind of lifestyle that most eighteenth century women would envy. She was fortunate that fate did not deal her a cruel hand in the matrimonial stakes but perhaps she felt her destiny was more than being a wife and mother and sought to escape to a new life in the only way she knew how. Naturally, this brings into question the sudden death of her first husband, Mr. Francis

Drew. Did he meet his untimely end in a similar, disturbing fashion as Thomas O’Flaherty? Without evidence it is impossible to establish such notions with certainty. The same can be said for Lonergan’s role in the murder. Was he a willing participant or was he indeed, innocent of all crimes, which he so gallantly asserted? This is a story that asks more questions than it answers. Today, the only visible reminder of this tragic tale lies among the yew trees in the grounds of St. Mary’s Church in Gowran, in that broken memorial to a man who became a victim of lust and betrayal in the most sinister fashion in that golden age of poisoners. Another reminder lies within the walls of Castlefield House itself, where numerous eerie night-time



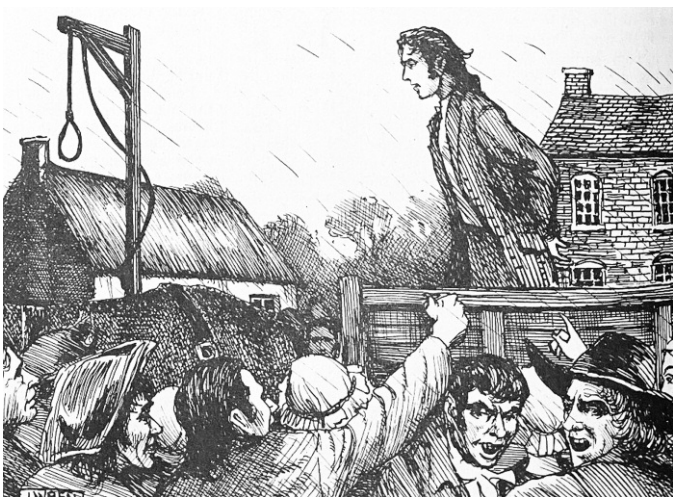
Coachhouse, Castlefield House  
(Photo by Caroline Corballis)





▲ Castlefield House, Early 20th Century (Courtesy of Caroline Corballis)

disturbances have troubled many an occupant. Local legends recount of Thomas's aimless wanderings through the halls of Castlefield into the 1950s.<sup>31</sup> Such lore also relates to the continuous hauntings in the months after his death, which neither Lonergan nor Susannah could tolerate, and it was this that prompted their decision to leave the house. Perhaps this was Thomas' attempt to exact revenge on his killers. Perhaps in some obscure way, justice prevailed after all.



▲ Artist's Impression of Thomas Lonergan's Hanging (from Ireland's Own St. Valentine's Day Annual, 1994)

### Acknowledgements

Great thanks are due to Caroline Corballis of Castlefield House who kindly provided vital local information and photos.

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<sup>1</sup> *The second son, Bryan, died young.*

<sup>2</sup> *Many of the O'Flahertys of Lemonfield renounced the Catholic faith during enforcement of the Penal Laws during the 18<sup>th</sup> century. The decision to convert to the Church of Ireland ensured that they would qualify for full rights under the law. Thomas's father Murrough was probably the first of the O'Flahertys to convert to the established church in order retain what was left the family's lands and estates.*

<sup>3</sup> *Hibernian Magazine (1781) 564.*

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>5</sup> *Evan, C.M. & M.M. (2009) 10.*

<sup>6</sup> *A portion of Theobald Burke's Kilkenny estate may have fallen into the hands of his sister Jane due to his and his brother's failure to produce an heir. Jane married Thomas's father Murrough O'Flaherty and on his death in 1759, Lemonfield was passed to his eldest son and heir Sir John O'Flaherty, while Thomas may have inherited some lands of the Agar estate in Co. Kilkenny.*

<sup>7</sup> *Corballis, C (1996) 109.*

<sup>8</sup> *Barrington, J (1830) 97.*

<sup>9</sup> *The Leinster Journal, September 29<sup>th</sup> 1773.*

<sup>10</sup> *Corballis, C (1996) 110.*

<sup>11</sup> *It appears that Castlefield house incorporates fabric of an earlier structure, possibly the late medieval 'house of Naushistowne (Nashtown) of the Manor of Bishopslough' as stated in an indenture of 1640. Evidence of this was revealed during renovation works in the 1990s including the thick walls and exposed arrow loop of a front reception room, which may represent the ground floor of a towerhouse.*

<sup>12</sup> *Finn's Leinster Journal, Sep. 9<sup>th</sup> & 23<sup>rd</sup> 1778.*

<sup>13</sup> *Connolly, S.J. (2000) 451.*

<sup>14</sup> *Hibernian Magazine Vol. 5 (1775) 319.*

<sup>15</sup> *Corballis, C (1996) 109.*

<sup>16</sup> *Eight children were born but the first, a son called Bryan who born in early of 1762, appears to have died young.*



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<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, 594 & 596.  
<sup>19</sup> Casteleyn, M & Kirwan, B (2015) 53.  
<sup>20</sup> *Finn's Leinster Journal*, September 9<sup>th</sup> & 23<sup>rd</sup> 1778.  
<sup>21</sup> *Hibernian Magazine* (1781) 595.  
<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, 564.  
<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*  
<sup>24</sup> Bennett, R (2019) 100.  
<sup>25</sup> *Hibernian Magazine* (1781) 593.  
<sup>26</sup> Pilsworth, W.J. (???)  
<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, 598.  
<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, 600.  
<sup>29</sup> Porter, F.T. (1875) 5.  
<sup>30</sup> Barrington, J (1830) 100.  
<sup>31</sup> Hogan, R (1996) 124.

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▲ Livery Button from Castlefield House, discovered during renovations in the 1990s. These silver plated livery buttons engraved with a lizard from the O'Flaherty coat of arms, were worn by the servants of Castlefield House.  
(Photo by Caroline Corballis)

## heritage card



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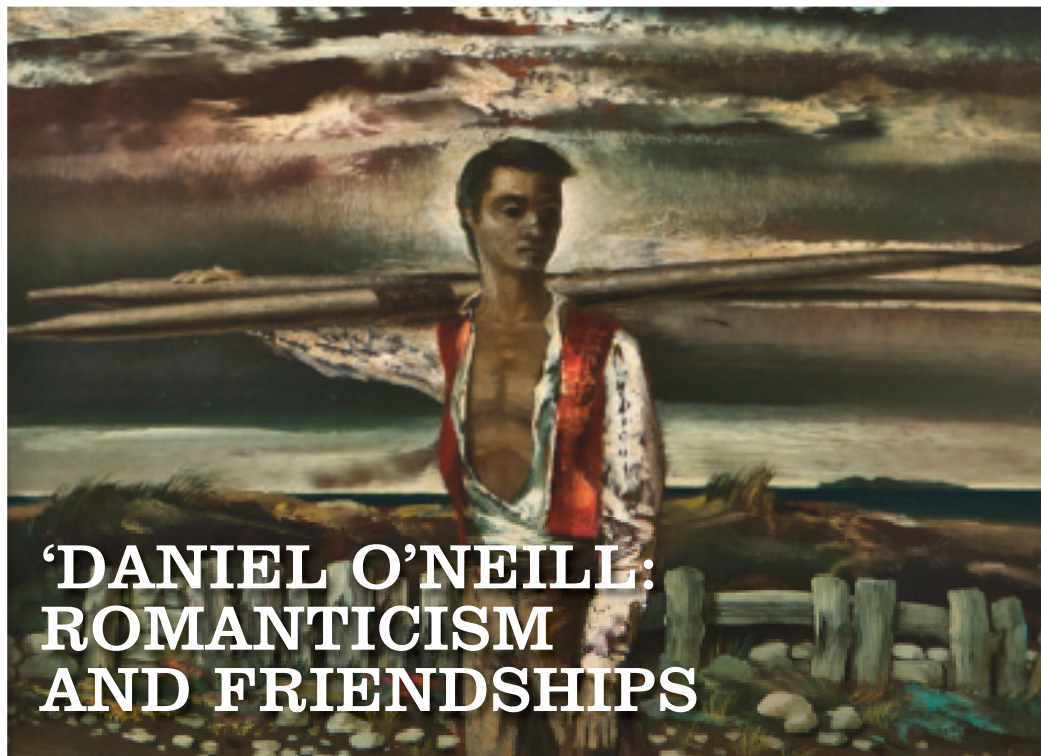
# EXHIBITION

FarmleighGallery  
November 2020

**T**o mark the centenary of the artist Daniel O'Neill's birth, the Office of Public Works (OPW) are presenting a retrospective of his work at the Farmleigh Gallery. The exhibition is being curated by art historian Karen Reihill with the majority of the works being borrowed from private collections, many unseen in public in over 50 years, as well as paintings from the collections of IMMA, University of Limerick and the Ulster Museum.

This exhibition will be Daniel O'Neill's first retrospective since 1952 which was held at the Belfast Museum and Art Gallery (Ulster Museum) which then recorded a record attendance for the time. It is hoped that this exhibition will be an opportunity for the public to reexamine the life and work of this artist, who was highly regarded by the critics in the post war years and whose works were in popular demand until his death in 1974.

Paintings by Daniel O'Neill  
1. 'Self on Western Shore'  
2. 'Two Bouquets'  
3. 'Knockalla Hills'



## 'DANIEL O'NEILL: ROMANTICISM AND FRIENDSHIPS

Born in Belfast, O'Neill had little orthodox training except for a few classes at the College of Art, Belfast. He started painting with watercolours at the age of fifteen and when possible spent all his spare time in the Belfast Reference Library studying the Italian renaissance painters. Working as an electrical engineer in the Belfast Corporation Transport Department, he worked on the night shift so he could paint during the day. This continued for over five years until he was taken up by the Dublin dealer, Victor Waddington, in 1945 where several one man shows followed. In 1948 he spent six months in France, mostly staying in Paris, where he was given the opportunity to study the painters he

admired, such as Watteau, Rouault, Vlaminck, Utrillo and the Impressionists. During the late 1940's/1950's Daniel O'Neill was selected to participate in over twenty overseas exhibitions of Irish Art that toured Britain, Europe and the USA. Many of these exhibitions were sponsored by the Irish Department of External Affairs and they were intended to showcase the very best of Irish art abroad.

O'Neill moved to London in 1958 to start a new life. His paintings were then mainly sent to The Waddington Galleries in Montreal where he gained a new International market. His work was also shown at The Dawson Gallery in Dublin up until 1963 where it





continued to be in demand but after that date his work was not seen in Dublin for another eight years which caused his work, and name, to fade in to the background. Throughout this period O'Neill struggled with personal problems. However an opportunity arose on a visit home when he was persuaded to return to Belfast and hold an exhibition there which opened in 1970. After an eighteen year absence from exhibiting in his native city critics expressed surprise at the new bright strong colours which was a move away from the sombre romantic style they had last seen in the 1950's. Following this successful exhibition in Belfast, he held his last solo exhibition in Dublin in 1971 at the Dawson gallery and his future looked promising. Unfortunately due to a combination of events in Belfast his health deteriorated and he died tragically in March 1974 at the early age of 54.

This exhibition will be accompanied by an extensive catalogue detailing the life of Daniel O'Neill and that of his other innovative friends that make up the Belfast Boys, Gerard Dillon and George Campbell among others. It is hoped this publication along with the exhibition will lead to a reassessment of Daniel O'Neill's place in the history of Irish art by a new audience and generation of critics, students and enthusiasts.

[www.farmleigh.ie](http://www.farmleigh.ie)

Gallery open Tues – Sun 10am – 1pm



## OPW Gardens open for people who are Cocooning, including the Over-70s and the medically vulnerable



The following OPW sites have been reserved between 10am and 1pm for people who are cocooning. This includes the over-70s and the medically vulnerable. Thank you for your co-operation.

<b>Site Location</b>	<b>Reserved Area</b>
Battle of the Boyne, Co. Meath	Walled Garden
Emo Court, Co. Laois	Formal Gardens
Fota Arboretum, Co. Cork	Pleasure Garden and Walled Garden
Irish National War Memorial Gardens, Islandbridge, Dublin	Rose Garden
Iveagh Gardens, Dublin	Full Garden
Kilkenny Castle, Co. Kilkenny	Rose Garden
Phoenix Park, Dublin	Visitor Centre Walled Garden
St. Enda's Park, Rathfarnham	Walled Garden



# New Educational Resources at Brú na Bóinne

Office of Public Works heritage sites are featured prominently in school curricula and we understand how valuable site visits are to students of all levels. The OPW has always welcomed and encouraged schools visits and recognises its responsibility to education. In 2000, the Free Educational Visits for Schools scheme was introduced, allowing complimentary admission for primary and secondary schools to heritage sites. In 2019, 90,472 students availed of this scheme.

For third level institutions, student rates have always been kept low to minimise cost to colleges and the students. The OPW's guides are always happy to facilitate research and over many years have helped hundreds of post-graduate students complete the research necessary for their dissertations.

As schools and colleges reopen and sites visits are not possible at present for large classes, OPW heritage sites are looking at new and intuitive ways to try and engage with educational institutions in order to assist their students.

Guide teams around the country are working hard to open up sites to students in the digital world so they still have access to the sites they are studying.

At Brú na Bóinne we are now offering a number of educational resources including:

1. A free 21-minute DVD or digital file on the Brú na Bóinne World Heritage Site.
2. Educational packs with classroom activities and worksheets.
3. A free web chat service using the free Starleaf app.

Email [brunaboinne@opw.ie](mailto:brunaboinne@opw.ie) for further information or to arrange some of these services for your class.

## FREE WEB CHAT SERVICE

### TEACHERS


Can't visit Brú na Bóinne, Newgrange and Knowth due to Covid-19 restrictions??

Why not bring the monuments to your classroom?!

Pick the brains of our friendly & knowledgeable guides.

Ask questions about the monuments and the people who built them.

Show us the projects, models or artworks you have made in class.




### Who is it for?

Students who are studying the


- Stone Age and Newgrange,
- Knowth and Dowth
- (Primary, Post Primary and
- Third Level Colleges)

### What do you need?

- A classroom device with a web cam, speakers, microphone +
- the free Starleaf App 

### How can it be booked?

Email [brunaboinne@opw.ie](mailto:brunaboinne@opw.ie) for an appointment

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# HERITAGE CARD NOW AVAILABLE FOR PURCHASE ONLINE



## Unlock Ireland's history with the Heritage Card.

The Heritage Card gives you free admission to every OPW-run heritage site in the country for a year.

Whether you're into beautiful gardens, ancient churches or magnificent castles, here's your chance to explore them all. Even better news is that the Heritage Card can now be bought online at <https://opwheritagecards.com>

Don't forget, a Heritage Card makes an amazing gift. If you know someone who's passionate about Ireland's past, consider gifting them a whole year's worth of incredible days out.

### Annual Heritage Card Prices:

**Adult:** €40

**Senior** (60 and over): €30

**Student** (valid student ID required)/**Child** (12–18): €10

**Family** €90 (max. 2 adults & 5 children aged 12–18)

**Annual Heritage Cards** are valid for 1 year from date of first use.

## Holiday Heritage Card coming soon

The Holiday Heritage Card offers you the same great access to our Heritage sites for a four-week period from date of first use and will soon also be available to purchase online or at the sites.

**Holiday Heritage Card Prices:** **Adult:** €30; **Senior** (60 and over): €22; **Student** (valid student ID required)/**Child** (12–18): €7; **Family** €67 (max. 2 adults & 5 children aged 12–18)

Heritage Cards are non-transferable and not replaceable if lost or stolen. Free admission to historic sites excludes Muckross Traditional Farms, Killarney. You may have to pay for parking facilities or ancillary services at some locations.





Passage Tomb at Newgrange. Photo Brian Morrison © Fáilte Ireland / Tourism Ireland

Discover the remains of prehistoric tombs.  
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Wander through medieval halls.  
Soak up the serenity of old-world gardens  
and the splendour of great estates.

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