

# Heritage Ireland

Issue 15 | Christmas 2021  
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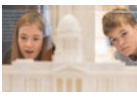

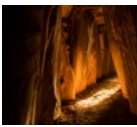
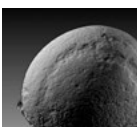












OPW





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## Foreword

Maurice Buckley  
Chairman, OPW



Welcome to the first Christmas issue of the OPW's Heritage Ireland magazine.

The dedicated staff at our heritage sites continue to work diligently to offer safe and enjoyable experiences to keep our visitors entertained this festive season.

The live streaming of the Winter Solstice from Newgrange is fast approaching, so make a date and join us to view this spectacular phenomenon on the 20th, 21st and 22nd December on [www.gov.ie/opw](http://www.gov.ie/opw) or [www.heritageireland.ie](http://www.heritageireland.ie)

Come and join us to experience a cornucopia of festive magic in Dublin Castle at Christmas, or immerse yourself in the exhibitions showing at Rathfarnham Castle, Kilmainham Gaol and Dublin Castle. If you fancy braving the outdoors there's Rian na Nollag - Christmas Trail organised by the guides at the Phoenix Park Visitor Centre or follow the Catwalk Trail in Kilkenny and marvel at our two new oversized feline friends who have taken up residence in the grounds of Kilkenny Castle. Our wonderful parks and gardens remain open as usual and we congratulate the eleven of our sites that were recently awarded Green Flags.

It's exciting times for Cahir Castle, recently shortlisted for the title of Europe's favourite filming location. We ask you to show your support for Cahir Castle as it vies for this

prestigious title. The public winner will be determined by the general public's vote and everyone can vote here:

[www.eufcn.com/location-award-2021](http://www.eufcn.com/location-award-2021)

We are delighted to offer a brand new visitor experience at the Custom House, exploring the building, burning and restoration of one of Dublin's most iconic landmarks. All open OPW sites have free admission until end of 2021 so don't miss out on the opportunity to explore this wonderful new visitor centre for free before the end of the year. For more information on opening times, booking requirements, etc. please check the individual site pages on [www.heritageireland.ie](http://www.heritageireland.ie)

I am pleased to congratulate Rosemary Collier on her recent appointment to the OPW Management Board and the position of Head of OPW Heritage Services and Capital Works Delivery. Rosemary has been a member of the OPW Senior Management Team since December 2016 when she joined the OPW as Head of National Historic Properties. I look forward to working closely with Rosemary as a member of the Management Board, and I am sure you will join me in wishing Rosemary every success in her new post.

On behalf of the OPW's Heritage Services team I wish you all a safe and happy Christmas.

## Contributors



**Robert Hensey** is an archaeological researcher and widely published author. He first began working for the OPW as a guide in 2002 and received his PhD from NUI Galway in 2010. As Chairperson of the Sligo Neolithic Landscapes group, he has been instrumental in the campaign for 'The Passage Tomb Landscape of County Sligo' to be placed on Ireland's World Heritage Tentative List.



**Ken Williams** is an archaeological photographer and researcher from Drogheda. He specialises in photographing the prehistoric art and monuments of Western Europe. His work has featured in National Geographic magazine, the journals Science and Nature, and The New York Times. You can see Ken's work at [www.shadowsandstone.com](http://www.shadowsandstone.com).



**Patricia Mulligan** is an artist, a retired lecturer from I. T. Sligo and a former head guide at the Carrowmore Visitor Centre. She played a major role in organising the Swedish-led excavations at Carrowmore from 1977-1998.



**Pádraig Meehan** served for many years as a guide at the Carrowmore Visitor Centre. As an archaeological researcher, he has contributed to a variety of articles and peer reviewed papers, including important analyses on bone from the Carrowkeel passage tombs. Pádraig published a book on the alignment of Listoghil, the central monument at Carrowmore. He is also a songwriter and musician. Pádraig is a founding member of the Sligo Neolithic Landscapes group.



**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.



**Paul O'Brien** MA, a military historian and author, works for the Office of Public Works and is currently based at the Royal Hospital, Kilmainham. The author of fifteen books, he has written extensively on the 1916 Rising, the British Army in Ireland and a number of local histories. He lives in Santry, Dublin with his wife, daughter, son and two cats. Stay up to date with the author at: [www.paulobrienauthor.ie](http://www.paulobrienauthor.ie)



**Clare Tuffy** works for the OPW in the Boyne Valley. She is based at Brú na Bóinne Visitor Centre, beside the UNESCO World Heritage sites of Newgrange, Knowth and Dowth.



**Brian Crowley** is curator of the archive at the Kilmainham Gaol Museum and has worked on a number of exhibitions for the Office of Public Works. He has contributed essays to 'The Life and After-Life of P.H. Pearse' and 'Making 1916' and is the author of 'Patrick Pearse, A Life in Pictures'.



**Aoife Torpey** holds a degree in History and English Literature from Trinity College Dublin, and an MA in Museum Studies from the University of Leicester. She has worked in Kilmainham Gaol Museum since 2015, where she looks after the Museum's wonderful collection of historical objects.





Dublin in the late 1700s through to the 21st century and giving them the unique and authentic experience of being inside the walls of one of the city's most iconic buildings.

The Custom House Visitor Centre is a flagship visitor experience in the Docklands area of the city, featuring new and interactive exhibits telling the rich history of the building and showcasing its exceptional architecture. The project was funded by the Department of Housing, Local Government & Heritage with additional investment under Fáilte Ireland's Strategic Partnership with the OPW.

The visitor centre, which occupies the entire central area of the building, uses interpretive methods to bring to life the story of the Custom House, which is the longest-serving purpose-built government building in Ireland.

The Custom House has been, and continues to be, a centre for government and policy making since it opened in 1781, and for many years it was a hub for imports and exports.

## New Custom House Visitor Centre to tell the story of 230 years of Irish history, architecture, and trade

On the week that marked the 230th anniversary of the original opening of the Custom House, Minister Darragh O'Brien, Minister Patrick O'Donovan and Paul Kelly, CEO, Fáilte Ireland, officially opened a new visitor experience exploring the building, burning and restoration of Dublin's Custom House. The project has been developed by the Department of Housing, Local Government & Heritage in conjunction with the Office of Public Works (OPW) and in partnership with Fáilte Ireland.

James Gandon's architectural masterpiece houses a fully reimagined exhibition created by award-winning designers whose previous work includes exhibitions at Killarney House and Dublin Castle, with contributions from leading Irish historians and academics, featuring a narrative journey revealing a story with many layers, of people, heritage and history, spanning over 200 years.

The exhibition flows and develops chronologically using each space to tell a chapter in the story, taking visitors from







The new visitor experience will take visitors on a narrative journey through the building itself, highlighting the magnificent architecture and using first-hand accounts, personal stories, and artefacts to tell the story of the building and the city from the 1700s up to the present day.

The exhibition shows how the building witnessed some of the most momentous events in Irish history, from the 1916 Easter Rising to the birth of the Irish Free State and eventually the Republic of Ireland. The fulcrum of this story being the burning of the Custom House in May 1921, which is brought to life through captivating audiovisual interpretation and artefacts from the period.

The Custom House Visitor Centre is open to the public year round. Full details on opening hours, how to book etc. are available on [heritageireland.ie](http://heritageireland.ie)



# Operation Ares

## The Burning of the Custom House: May 1921

A Military Analysis  
By Paul O'Brien

### INTRODUCTION

A military analysis is a method used by armies, historians and students of history throughout the world to provide a systematic approach to the study of battles, campaigns, and other military operations. Battle Analysis provides a method of understanding conflict and the complexity of these operations. Those interested in history must be able to integrate a variety of sources of information, determine the relevance of the information and assess the situation based on the context.

It is designed as a general study guide to ensure that significant actions or factors affecting the outcome of a battle or operation are not overlooked.

At its very core, a Battle Analysis is a tool to help us understand some of the constants which govern military actions, as well as the multitude of variables.

The military suggest that a plan for a special operation should be:

*A simple plan, carefully concealed, realistically rehearsed and executed with surprise, speed and purpose.*

Based on this description, the operation can be divided into a number of phases which enables one to analyse the mission and its outcome.



### ORIGINS

For almost two years, 1919 to 1921, the Irish Republican Army (IRA) had fought a war of insurgency against British rule in Ireland. The British government launched a counter-insurgency campaign which witnessed the bolstering of its police force, the Royal Irish Constabulary, with reinforcements, the deployment of a Specialist Forces unit in the form of the Auxiliary Division, and an increase in military support for the British administration on the island.

While the IRA had achieved a number of successes in the early phases of their insurgency campaign, especially in the area of propaganda, by May 1921, they had suffered a number of setbacks in relation to their military campaign. Many experienced operatives had been killed, captured and imprisoned and many arms caches had been discovered by the British forces. Weapons and ammunition were in short supply, as were those experienced enough to carry out such operations.

At a meeting of the council of the Headquarters Staff of the Irish Republican Army in early 1921, the military situation in Ireland was discussed. At this meeting it was decided that 'the time had come to deliver a smashing blow to England-some bigger military operation than anything yet attempted'. While a number of targets were examined, the Customs House on Custom House Quay was identified as a possible target. The destruction of this building and its contents would reduce the most important branch of British Civil Government in Ireland to virtual impotence and would, in addition, inflict on Britain a huge financial loss of an estimated two million pounds. After careful consideration, senior republican commanders







ordered a reconnaissance of the building and a feasibility study to be carried out, to examine the possibility of conducting a raid. The insurgency campaign would now enter its final phase, that of a large scale military operation, involving hundreds of personnel, against a target within enemy lines, a ‘risk all mission’, that some considered was a last throw of the dice.

In spite of the fact that it was the largest operation undertaken by the Irish Republican Army during the period from 1919 to 1921, its planning and execution caused considerable controversy among those tasked with carrying out the mission. The aftermath of the operation, was somewhat overshadowed by personal opinions of those who planned and took part in the mission. Politics has played a major role in side-lining this military operation and consigning it to the dusty annals of an archive.

A military analysis of the operation reveals the initial strategy, the plan, the actual raid and its outcome, resulting in one of the most compelling and surprising stories in Irish military history.

### THE MISSION

The mission objective was to disrupt and cripple British government administration in Ireland. While a number of small operations against government targets had been carried out throughout the country, senior republican commanders wanted an action that would not only damage British administration, but would also double as a propaganda coup that would highlight their struggle throughout the world.

The Custom House was identified as a target because the following government departments were housed in the building; Inland Revenue, Local Government, Estate Duty Central Registers, Stamp Duty, Income Tax and Joint Stock Company Registers. The intention was the total destruction of this building and its contents, which would reduce an important branch of British Civil Government in Ireland to virtual impotence and would, in addition, inflict on Britain a huge financial loss of an estimated two million pounds.

### THE PLAN

History has left a rather distorted picture of the Custom House raid. Though this military operation took place almost 100 years ago, very little has been written on the subject. The operation and its aftermath have been surrounded by controversy for almost a century. Because of this, the story has been somewhat avoided by many military analysts and historians. Original sources are limited except in Witness Statements held by Military Archives, personal family memoirs and the few articles in papers and journals.

It is perhaps those family memoirs and events like this that have to some extent kept the operation in the public’s eye. So in presenting a military analysis of the operation one must examine what is available, piece together the plan, assess the operation and those that took part and examine the results.

#### The plan was as follows:

At 12.00 hours on the 25th May 1921, a force of 120 men, supported by auxiliary units from other Battalions, were to assemble at

the designated staging area of Oriel Hall in Oriel Street. On arrival, men would be issued with weapons and ammunition and the tools required for the operation. The attacking force was to approach the target in small groups using the run up to the lunch rush hour as cover. Police guards at the target or in the vicinity of the target were to be neutralised. The immediate area would be secured by units of the 1st Battalion. Any approach by enemy forces was to be checked.

The main attack was to commence at 13.00 hours. Having secured the main entrance, no one was to be permitted to enter or leave the building while the operation was in progress. Each separate area of the building was to be secured and all staff were to be brought to the main hall. They were to be searched to make sure that no confidential papers were being hidden or taken from the offices.

As each operative entered the target, they were to take with them two two-gallon tins of paraffin from a lorry which would deliver the incendiary to the building. They would then proceed to their designated positions throughout the building and prepare its contents for ignition. Fires were to be started on the top floor and each unit was then to move down through the building, setting fire to offices as they withdrew to the entrance hall. In the event of any problems occurring, the commander would signal a withdrawal by giving a blast on a whistle. Egress from the area would be made using the lunch time rush hour and the evacuating staff as cover. Estimated time for the mission was to be twenty minutes.

There is a military axiom which warns that no plan survives the first contact. Once the Custom House operation commenced, this would seem to have been the case.

#### Area of Operations:

The area of operations was located in the centre of Dublin city, along Custom House Quay on the River Liffey. The Target was a Palladian-styled building designed by James Gandon, consisting of two storeys over a

basement. The building, constructed from Portland stone is 375 feet in length and 205 feet in depth consisting of four different facades linked by pavilions at each corner. The formal south entrance, with its pediment supported by four columns below a narrow dome, is located in the central block that faces the River Liffey.

Beresford Place and Memorial Road circumvent the complex and Custom House Quay fronts the building onto the river Liffey. All roads leading to the complex were and still are busy thoroughfares from the north of the city to the south and from the west to the east. Traffic to and from the docklands would pass through the area as well as the large workforce that serviced the quays, the local retail shops and government buildings.

#### The Right Force:

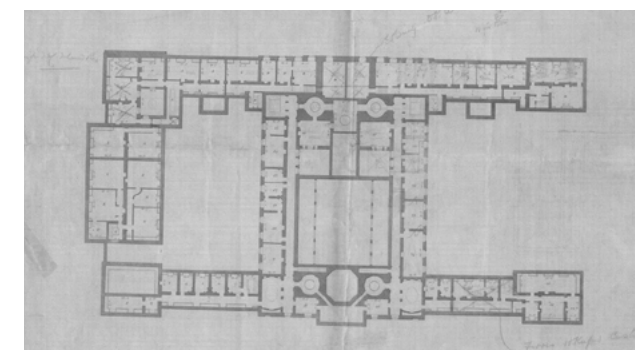
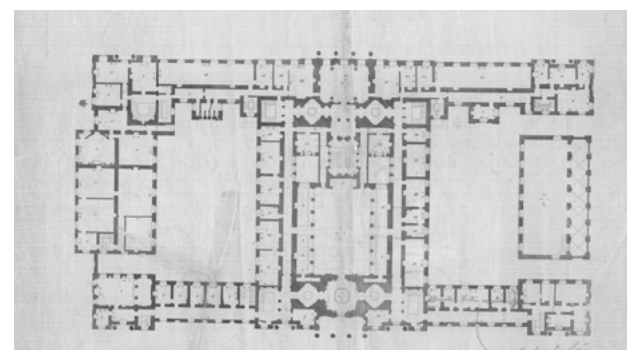
Commandant Tom Ennis, officer commanding the 2nd Battalion, IRA, was appointed in charge of the operation which took three months to plan. Detailed reconnaissance of the building and the area surrounding the target took place regularly while Liam O’ Doherty, O/C 5th Battalion (Engineers), obtained plans of the building from the National Library. This mission was to be a combined operation of all the Battalions in Dublin city and would consist of the following units:

The 1st Battalion would cover approaches to the Custom House and cover surrounding Fire Stations. They would be in positions at Liberty Hall, Lower Abbey Street and Gardiner Street.

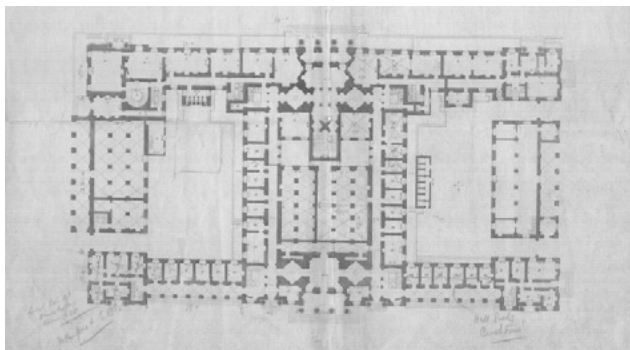
The 2nd Battalion would make up the main raiding party that would carry out the operation. Members of ‘the Squad’ would also take part in the raid on the building.

Members of the 3rd Battalion would occupy Tara Street Fire Station and prevent or delay any response from the Fire Brigade.

The 4th Battalion would prevent or delay any response from the Fire Brigade at Thomas Street.







The 5th Battalion were detailed to sever all telephone communications from the Custom House.

Republican forces were a collection of units that were not conventionally trained. Volunteers did not possess a standard uniform, weapons or equipment. Their techniques in urban guerrilla warfare depended on speed and strike ability and to utilise their knowledge of the urban landscape to evade capture. Each raider was to be armed with a revolver and six rounds of ammunition while those providing over-watch were issued with automatic pistols. A captured Lewis Machine gun would form part of the covering party.

Those tasked with raiding the building were ordered to obtain a hatchet which was to be picked up on the way to the target from shops in the areas in order to avoid detection from enemy forces.

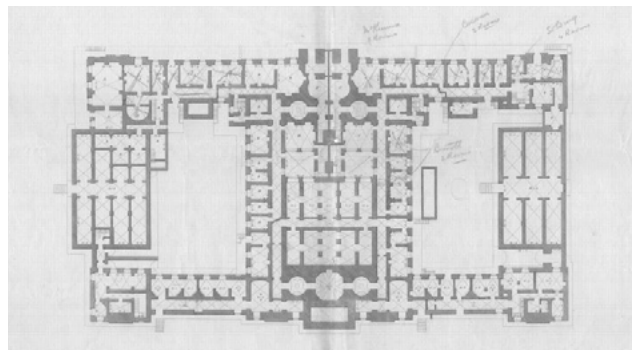
In total there would be an estimated 200 men taking part in the operation, the largest deployment of personnel that had ever participated in a mission in Dublin city.

### CROWN FORCES

Once the mission commenced, republican forces would be faced with a number of British units that were located within the area of operations.

The Dublin Metropolitan Police would have officers outside the target. These more than likely would be unarmed constables. Due to the element of surprise, these officers did not pose a problem and would be taken prisoner.

In the time frame that the operation was to take place, there were two major British units that would react within minutes. They were F & Q Companies of the Auxiliary Division of the Royal Irish Constabulary. F Company was located in Dublin Castle. This rapid reaction unit could be expected to muster within minutes and travel at high speed in Crossly tenders to the target. They would be supported by armoured cars with mounted machine guns.



Q Company was located at the Great North-Western Railway Company Hotel at the North Wall, Dublin. This unit performed dock and harbour security and could also be expected to react within minutes. They too would also be supported by armoured vehicles with superior fire-power.

The Auxiliaries were the British Special Forces unit of the time, comprising of ex-officers from the Army, Air Force and Navy. The unit, though aligned with the police, was a military force that was used as a rapid reaction force by the authorities.

In-lying piquets of British troops would be despatched A.S.A.P. to the target. There were an estimated 10,000 British troops on duty within Dublin city in May 1921. These would come from a number of possible barracks in the city, Ship Street Barracks Dublin Castle, the Royal Barracks, and Marlborough Barracks on Blackhorse Avenue.

British police and army units possessed up to date weaponry and transport. Weapons consisted of Lee Enfield rifles, revolvers and automatic pistols. Squad automatic weapons were .303 Lewis machine guns. Armoured cars carried .303 Vickers water cooled machine guns capable with a capacity of firing 500 rounds per minute. Mobility played a key factor in responding to callouts in the city and the quick reaction of British specialist units had, in the past, played a key factor in the killing or capture of republican operatives.

### THE RAID

Units of the Irish Republican Army began moving into position just after noon on the 25th May 1921. The assembly point of Oriel Hall had to be abandoned due to the fact that a large party of police were overlooking the building from the Great Northern Railway yard. The staging area was relocated to Seán Connolly Hall. This setback did not delay the operation and all personnel were in position by 12.15 hours.

Men of the 2nd Battalion were briefed and weapons and tools were issued to each man.

Engineer units began to cut communications to the Custom House.

At 13.00 hours, raiding units converged on the Custom House.

Their approach remained concealed due to the large number of people in the vicinity as it was lunch hour.

On entering the building, units immediately began herding the staff into the main hall of the building. This task proved time consuming and vital minutes were lost.

Officers and men moved to the various floors and began entering offices and piling papers and documents ready for incineration.

At 13.17 hours, enemy forces arrived on the scene and were engaged by units providing over watch. Sections within the building also engaged the enemy from the windows.

The building was ready for firing at 13.17 hours.

A blast of a whistle was heard and men began to withdraw from the building without having set fire to the various landings. After a rapid assessment of the situation by the Battalion Commander, he realised that an incorrect signal had been sounded by a person unknown and ordered his men to return to set the fires.

Having fired the building, units moved towards the front doors and prepared to egress.

On the 25th May at 13.10 hours, information was received at Dublin Castle from the D.M.P. that the Custom House had been rushed by approximately 100 civilians.

An armoured car was despatched followed by F Company Auxiliary Division, R.I.C. in three Crossley tenders, with another armoured car in support.

The leading armoured car arrived at 13.25 hours, endeavoured to prevent the raiders escaping from the Custom House, and succeeded in covering the southern side of the building.

F Company on arrival made for the northern side, and were heavily fired on and bombed on reaching the railway bridge, suffering four casualties. An intelligence report stated, “As the first two tenders entered Beresford Place and were proceeding in the direction of the front entrance of the Customs House, a heavy hail of fire was opened on them from the windows of the Custom House, the Railway line and the adjoining street corners. The tenders immediately halted to get into action and as the crew dismounted from the second tender bombs were thrown at them from the Railway line overhead. Six cadets sustained

injuries – two slight.”

About 4 minutes later Q Company Auxiliary R.I.C. (from the North Wall), who had also been warned, arrived and covered the eastern side of the Custom House and threw up a cordon around the building. By this time the Custom House was surrounded but in flames.

Having exhausted their supplies of ammunition and with the fire spreading throughout the building, the republican Battalion commander ordered the doors to be opened and operatives mixed with civilian staff and rushed from the front door. A number of men attempted to shoot their way through the cordon. While some succeeded, others were shot and captured

The building had been completely surrounded by enemy forces and those that had rushed from the building were held up. Government officials picked out their own staff while members of the Irish Republican Army were singled out and placed under guard.

The Auxiliaries entered the front door of the Custom House and found many revolvers and petrol tins. Some of these were taken out, but owing to the heat of the flames the Auxiliaries were compelled to withdraw.

Those held in the net were subjected to questioning and examination. On completion of identification, over 100 civilians remained of whom seven showed distinct traces of petrol. These suspects were arrested.

Meanwhile, orders had been issued to troops to move from the Royal Barracks and the Castle, those from the Royal Barracks (Wiltshire Regiment) being in charge of a field officer, who had orders to take over command of the whole operation. This was done, and arrangements were made to withdraw the Auxiliaries and piquet the area with troops.

The Fire Brigade arrived and were assisted in their endeavours to extinguish the fire but the Custom House could not be saved. Intermittent explosions continued, evidently from ammunition and bombs left in the place by the raiders.

For a raid in the centre of Dublin city during lunch time rush hour, the casualties were light.

Five Volunteers and three civilians were killed in the raid. Ten civilians were wounded. Republican units providing over watch managed to withdraw with minimum casualties. Five Auxiliaries were wounded during the raid.

However, over one hundred IRA operatives were captured in the ensuing round-up, a loss of personnel that the organisation could ill afford.



**ANALYSIS:**

One of the most important considerations in military planning is to ground the plan on the probable or plausible operational circumstances that the force in question would face and that the planner must also be aware of the expected manner of each side's conduct of operations. The operation has to be cautiously planned and must have realistically achievable aims and the necessary resources in place to accomplish the mission. In this regard, while the burning of the Custom House had a certain amount of preparatory planning, the operation was loaded with risks, some of which could have been fatal to the operation and did indeed prove fatal to the escape of many of those who participated.

The element of surprise is achieved where the enemy is attacked at a time or place or in a manner for which he is unprepared. The attack on the Custom House achieved this. The raid was launched on a day and at a time when those within the building as well as the authorities did not expect this particular government department to be targeted by republican forces.

Today, there are many who regard the burning of the Custom House as a total military failure. On studying this mission there is, like every military operation, a huge amount of risk.

By May 1921, the military campaign of the Irish Republican Army was becoming stagnant. The interception by Crown Forces of guns and ammunition, the imprisonment of key personnel and the deaths and executions of leading figures in the organisation, greatly reduced the operational capacity of the group.

On examination the Custom House raid was carried out by an untrained unit of the Irish Republican Army against a target building that was in the centre of Dublin city. This small inexperienced Irish force found itself up against a highly trained, armed, paramilitary police force, supported by superior fire power. Under manned and under resourced for such an operation, I.R.A. command achieved their goal which was the destruction of the building's contents and also its broadcast around the world highlighting the escalating situation in the country. Therefore the mission may be deemed a success.

However, there can be no question that a number of mistakes were made in the planning of the operation.

- Covering parties were too close to the target building. If these had been set up on the approach roads to the target building they would have had much better effect.
- Collecting the staff of the Custom House in the central hall lost vital time for the operatives within the building.
- Weapons and ammunition for such an operation were limited with only 6 rounds per man.
- Was the operation compromised by the blowing of a whistle inside or outside the building?
- The method of egress from the building was not a secure one, resulting in the death and capture of the I.R.A. force.

The Irish Bulletin stated that the destruction of the Custom House, which was ordered by the ministry of Dáil Éireann, was 'an unavoidable military necessity.'

A statement issued by the British Government stated the enormous loss which the government sustained would amount to millions of pounds. 'Thousands of files ready for dispatch to Belfast have been destroyed.'

While British Forces stated that the Dublin Brigade of the Irish Republican Army was completely decimated, later on the night of the 25th May 1921, members of the Dublin Brigade of the I.R.A. launched a number of attacks throughout Dublin city.

The Custom House Raid was possibly a last throw of the dice for the I.R.A. which did damage British Administration in Ireland and was one of many factors that brought the British government to the negotiating table that resulted in the signing of a truce on July 11th 1921.



## Christmas at the Castle 2021

Come and join us this festive season to experience a cornucopia of festive magic of Dublin Castle at Christmas. Set in the heart of the nation's capital, Christmas at the Castle will have something for everyone, with a boutique open-air Christmas Market, with music from the Dublin Gospel Choir, New Dublin Voices, Playlist, Crux Voice Ensemble and others among the festive gatherings.

The historic courtyard of Dublin Castle will be filled with over 30 traditional alpine market stalls featuring an array of decorative crafts and inspiring gift ideas. Come and indulge in traditional fare sold by artisan producers and soak up the festive atmosphere. There will also be a vintage carousel on-site for children.



**Location:** Dublin Castle

**Dates:** 8th – 21st December

**Time:** 2:00pm - 9:30pm

**Website:** [www.dublincastle.ie](http://www.dublincastle.ie)

**Booking is essential**





# The Highlight of the Year

New focus on the Winter Solstice at Newgrange

By Clare Tuffy



**By November 2020, it was clear that for the first time in over 50 years, there would be no public access to Newgrange for sunrise at Winter Solstice. Due to restrictions associated with the ongoing pandemic, which limited outdoor gatherings to a maximum of 15 people, we could not even consider having people on the outside of the monument. There would be no one there to mark the turning of the year and to celebrate the wonderful achievement of the people who built Newgrange over 5000 years ago.**

Despite this disappointment, we chose to be positive and discussed what we could do and as we talked, we became more ambitious. The empty chamber presented a unique opportunity to undertake research and advance our knowledge of how the beam of dawn light interplays with the chamber at Winter Solstice. Over the course of nearly 40 sunrises from early December to mid-January, John Lalor, Senior Photographer with the National Monuments Service, working closely with Dr Frank Prendergast, Ireland's leading archaeoastronomer, photographed the interior of the chamber to scientifically measure, monitor and map the light of the rising sun. This research will continue in 2021 and the results will be published in full when completed. It has already added greatly to our knowledge about Newgrange and ancient astronomy.

Staff from the Office of Public Works facilitated this research. The Senior Conservation Architect and her team ensured the protection of the monument, which is a UNESCO World Heritage Site. A carpenter from the National Monuments Depot in Trim made a door to block the light coming

through the entrance replicating the effect of the original blocking door, made of stone. By blocking the doorway, direct sunlight and the wider beam of ambient light could only enter the chamber via the roof-box. This allowed the chamber to be illuminated as the original builders intended and provided an unprecedented glimpse into the past.

Staff from OPW Events Management team ensured that the pictures from the 5000-year-old chamber reached the computers that were to analyse the results.

As well as conducting research into the sunlight phenomenon, we decided to broadcast the sunrise live from inside the empty burial chamber over three mornings, December 20, 21 and 22.

The OPW team involved in the webcast faced several challenges, all of which were managed with professionalism, dedication and some ingenuity.

These challenges included broadcasting from a 5000-year-old burial chamber as well as beaming the pictures from there around the world via the Internet. The IT section of the OPW managed the technical aspects of the webcast. The host domain was gov.ie, which had never before hosted such a challenging live event.

OPW Events Management team, working with great professionalism under pressure, managed the staging and coordination of the broadcast. The presenters, Clare Tuffy and Frank Prendergast, delivered three live broadcasts without a script, as the outcome each morning was unpredictable as the event was weather dependent. They drew on their long association with the monument, their

Direct sunlight in Newgrange burial chamber on 24 December 2020, 09:00:06 UTC – the moment of culmination; direct sunlight and the wider beam of ambient light can only enter the chamber via the roof-box.  
© Photographic Archive, National Monuments Service, Government of Ireland.

depth of knowledge as well as their friendship with each other to talk viewers through what was happening and the significance of the occasion. The OPW Press Office coordinated and managed the public relations associated with the event.

With the decision to webcast the Winter Solstice live, we knew we would need support from other Departments and State Agencies. We worked very closely with the archaeologists of the Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage not only on the research project but also on the webcast. Their knowledge, advice and encouragement was very important. John Lalor provided invaluable technical expertise.

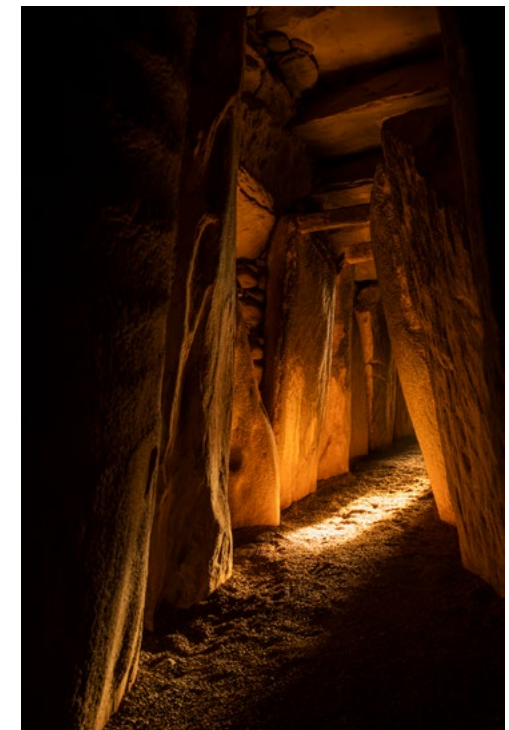
Fáilte Ireland and the Dept. of Foreign Affairs amplified the broadcast and its significance through all their channels to bring the webcast to as wide an audience as possible. This allowed the Irish diaspora, many of whom could not come home for Christmas 2020 due to the pandemic, to share this uniquely Irish event online live with their families at home and around the world.

The different sections within OPW worked together as a team to produce a broadcast to the highest professional standards possible.

The commentary as well as the images from the monument and the sounds of nature in the background received praise from all around the world. The theme of renewal and rebirth associated with the Winter Solstice and the message of hope as the light conquers darkness resonated with viewers as they experienced the end of their first year of the global pandemic.

The hundreds of thousands of letters, emails and comments received from the public were overwhelming in praise of the production and its celebration of Ireland's most iconic monument.

Our innovative approach to the event made it possible, in a pandemic, for many people to witness an exceptional spectacle that is normally only enjoyed by very few lucky lottery winners. At a time when we had to stay apart from one another, it was a very inclusive occasion.



The Winter Solstice light retreats down the passage at Newgrange. © Photographic Archive, National Monuments Service, Government of Ireland.

Newgrange doors. The original stone door and temporary replacement. Michael Boyne, a carpenter from the National Monuments Depot in Trim made a door to block the light coming through the entrance replicating the effect of the original blocking door, made of stone.



## Analytics

The event trended No. 1 on Twitter in Ireland for 3 days in a row. The online channel engagement / analytics for the webcast covering the period of 20 December to 22 December 2020 inclusive showed

**OPW.ie - 2,145,072 page views**

**Heritage Ireland - 51,944 page views**

**YouTube - 289,994 views**

**Livestream.com (CT-Ireland) - 145,000 views**

**OPW Twitter (16 - 22 December) - 169,000 impressions over seven days**

**OPW Facebook (3 - 22 December) - a cumulative reach of 1.75M with 190k reactions/comments**





↖ Clare Tuffy

↑ Dr Frank Prendergast

← View through the Roof Box.  
Direct sunlight can only enter the  
chamber via the roof-box.

#### Selection of comments from emails received after the broadcast:

*‘Hi Clare and everyone, one of the highlights of the year if not THE highlight. Great production all round. Happy solar new year everyone. John’ – Commissioner John McMahon, OPW*

*I have just been watching the last of the livestreaming at Newgrange. So interesting but also unexpectedly moving. Please forward thanks to the wonderful presenters who got the tone perfectly right – a balance of silent moments and interesting chat. I am not a religious person, but I felt a kind of spiritual connection as they focussed on humankind and hope for the future. P.L. Oxfordshire, UK*

*I was watching in the middle of the night. There was something that was very calming and spiritual to be connected with all of you on the solstice. It was worth every minute of lost sleep. Thank you, again. A.M. USA*

*I just wanted to write to say thank you so much for the live stream this morning. I can’t get home to Ireland this year and it felt so lovely to be connected back to our shared heritage this morning. If there is one good thing to come from COVID it was the opportunity to witness this. A heartfelt thanks to all of the team that put this together. B N, Australia*

*The mark of the real professional in my view is the capacity to explain potentially complex things succinctly and accessibly. The pair of you were simply brilliant, particularly in the rain! L Mc C, Scotland*

*It was like a meditation to watch and so uplifting. Tuning in yesterday and today along with two of my friends, who are in Australia, was a wonderful way to celebrate our friendship and the promise of the New Year now begun. SH, Dunboyne, Co Meath*

*Everything about the whole broadcast was just fantastic. Of course, the conditions were perfect, but also the camera angles, the commentary and the silences were simply brilliant. Everything was just as you could dream it would be. I feel both honoured and proud of this morning’s transmission. From the moment the broadcast started and we saw the presenters in weak sunlight I had goosebumps. I’m sitting here in Norway, but I feel so lucky to ‘have been there’ and seen the sunrise this morning at Newgrange with you all. Thank you all very much and congratulations to everyone involved. MC, Trondheim, Norway*

**Thanks to all the following:** Des Swords, Alisha Naughton and Dee Rogers, Event Management Unit, OPW. Sinéad Gargan, Senior Conservation Architect and Tommy Halton, District Works Manager OPW and their staff from Trim National Monuments Depot especially Michael Boyne for making the wooden door that blocked the entrance. Ciaran Murtagh and Fergus Devereux, IT Section, OPW. Barry Nangle and Niall Mc Kenna, Press Office, OPW. Brú na Bóinne staff, OPW. Michael MacDonagh, Chief Archaeologist, Pauline Gleeson, Senior Archaeologist, Claire Breen, Archaeologist, and John Lalor, Senior Photographer, NMS. Frank Prendergast, Emeritus Research Fellow, Technological University Dublin. Robert Shaw, The Discovery Programme, Centre for Archaeology and Innovation Ireland, for provision of their spatial data relating to previous 3D modelling of the tomb by geo-referenced laser scanning.

Carved stone object  
(© National Museum of Ireland)



## A Carved Stone of Probable Neolithic Date

from Carrowmore, Co. Sligo

By Robert Hensey,  
Ken Williams &  
Patricia Mulligan

The role of OPW guides in archaeological discoveries occasionally goes unheralded. The carved stone artefact that is the subject of this piece was discovered by a former Head Guide of the Carrowmore Visitors Centre, Patricia Curran-Mulligan. Patricia was out walking one day along the walled roadsides which surround the Carrowmore tombs, and recalls the object in a fieldwall catching her eye: a stone, dome-like on one side, flat on the other – smooth to the touch.

Why she thought to pick up that stone and not another, as it turns out, is a minor miracle. Perhaps it relates to instincts acquired after several years of working at an OPW managed archaeological site. One can acquire a tacit knowledge, hard to quantify, a feeling for the monuments and the kind of objects associated with them; maybe even a sense for the kinds of places or objects that appealed to the communities that constructed these sites.

The Carrowmore carved stone is an almost perfect hemisphere. Lying with its flat side down, its immediate appearance could call to mind the upper part of the human skull, or perhaps the dome-like cairns that cover many Irish passage tombs. Along the stone, pockmarked bands can easily be observed. The design is simple but striking. One of the bands forms an almost complete circle, just disappearing as it meets the broken edge of the stone. Outside of that design a partial arc was executed, visible at both edges, but with the central portion of the ‘arc’ only barely indicated by loose pecking.

The carving technique is common to megalithic art from the Neolithic period; a pointed hard-tipped stone implement is struck, presumably with a mallet-like tool, and an indentation or peck-mark breaks the skin of the stone. Multiple peck-marks create a line or band. Though we cannot be certain, the indicators, in terms of both design and the technique used, strongly suggest to the authors that the stone was carved in the Neolithic period, approximately 5000 years ago. The design might be compared with the concentric arcs carved on the capstone at the central site at Carrowmore. Notably, Patricia Curran-Mulligan also had an important role in the discovery of that art too – almost thirty years ago (Curran-Mulligan 1994).

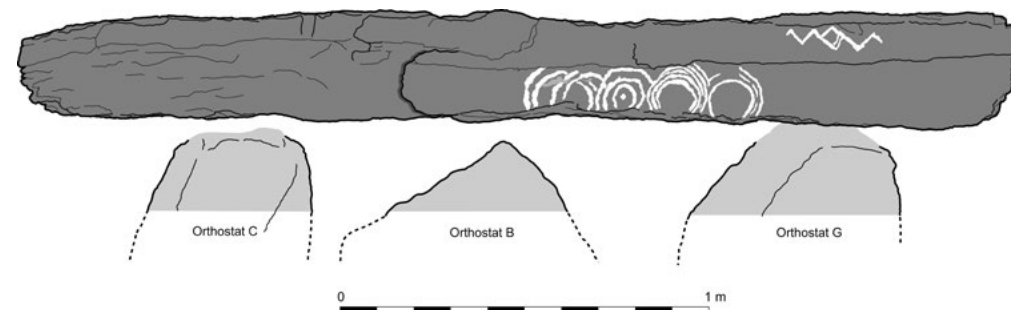


Monument and fieldwall at Carrowmore  
(Photograph: Stefan Bergh)



→ Carrowmore 51 capstone art  
(After Hensey and Robin 2011, Fig. 5)

↓ Megalithic tomb in fieldwall at Carrowmore  
(Photograph: Stefan Bergh)



The find location could indicate that the artefact originated in one of the approximately 30 extant passage tombs at Carrowmore. Alternatively, it could have come from one of the, at least 15, additional dolmens that once existed in those fields; their construction stones – and perhaps the finds from within their chambers – long since scattered.

The stone has been identified as ‘medium grained yellow quartz sandstone’ by Dr Steve Mandal on behalf of the National Museum of Ireland (Mandal 2021). Sandstone is available in the region, in local till etc, and therefore it is possible that the stone was sourced in the vicinity of the site. As it is a water-rolled cobble, a location at a nearby beach nearby is the preferred source.

The petrographical report confirms that the stone was intentionally broken. Several large indentations in its surface reveal where it was struck to induce cracks and eventually breakage. Indeed, a further crack which can still be observed in the stone – together with an obvious percussion point – appears to represent additional attempt to break the stone. One possibility is that the stone was broken before it was carved. This assumes the carver first wanted a hemispherical object on which to work. Another, perhaps more likely scenario, is that a more complete (and already carved) stone was broken immediately

before it was deposited? If the latter scenario, it would increase the chances that the stone originated in a megalithic tomb, probably deposited with human remains as part of funerary rituals at Carrowmore.

Deliberate (or apparently deliberate) breakage of artefacts placed in a grave is a not uncommon occurrence at prehistoric archaeological burial places. Through its breakage the object is ‘decommissioned’, no longer for use in this world. In a way it too is now ‘dead’ – ready for the next world. The breaking of such objects can therefore be an important indication of a belief in an afterlife.

Though we cannot know for sure if it was a fully rounded or oval cobble before it was carved and broken, we do know that spherical objects are not unusual finds in a passage tomb context. Indeed, stone balls are one of the most typical artefacts found in Irish passage tomb chambers. Stones of various geology and colour were deposited, sometimes stones that were quite polished, as well as examples made from chalk or even baked clay too.

Most examples found at Carrowmore are around 1-2cm in diameter. Some larger examples exist however, including a 7cm diameter ball from Loughcrew Cairn L and an 8cm diameter example from Loughcrew, Cairn F. Both were highly polished and show

→ 3D image, oblique angle of carved stone (Graphic: Ken Williams)

↓ Two stone balls from Carrowmore 3  
(© National Museum of Ireland)



no sign of wear. The role of these stone balls is unclear, but theories abound: from weapons, to fertility objects, to items of power or spiritual accoutrement (Herity 1974; MacGregor 1999).

A stone ball with carved decoration has never been found in any Irish passage tomb context, however. Significantly, if it had originally been a full sphere that was carved, additional elements of the current pecked designs may have been lost as the missing part of the stone was cleaved away.

Large stone balls, including carved examples, are a somewhat special and individual category of archaeological object. Such artefacts have a particularly strong association with Neolithic north-east Scotland, especially Aberdeenshire and neighbouring counties. Approximately 75 per cent of the over 520 known examples come from that area. It is not clear if this fashion for sometimes unusually carved stone balls originated in Scotland, or if stone balls were a cultural import from the Irish passage tomb tradition and the fascination with shaping them something that developed later. Notably, two tiny six-knobbed balls from Knowth Site 1, Co. Meath appear to be miniature versions of Scottish examples, so in that case at least it looks like some process of cultural cross-fertilisation was taking place (Sheridan 2014).

Though we cannot say for sure that the carved Carrowmore object was a fully spherical carved stone ball before it was intentionally broken, it is an intriguing find. It may even be a ‘missing link’ between the uncarved carved balls found in funerary contexts in Neolithic Ireland and the more decorated and designed examples that are found in northern Britain. That the artefact was deliberately broken adds another layer of intrigue to its story. Moreover, this important find would likely not have been discovered without the OPW heritage management and its eagle-eyed guide service.

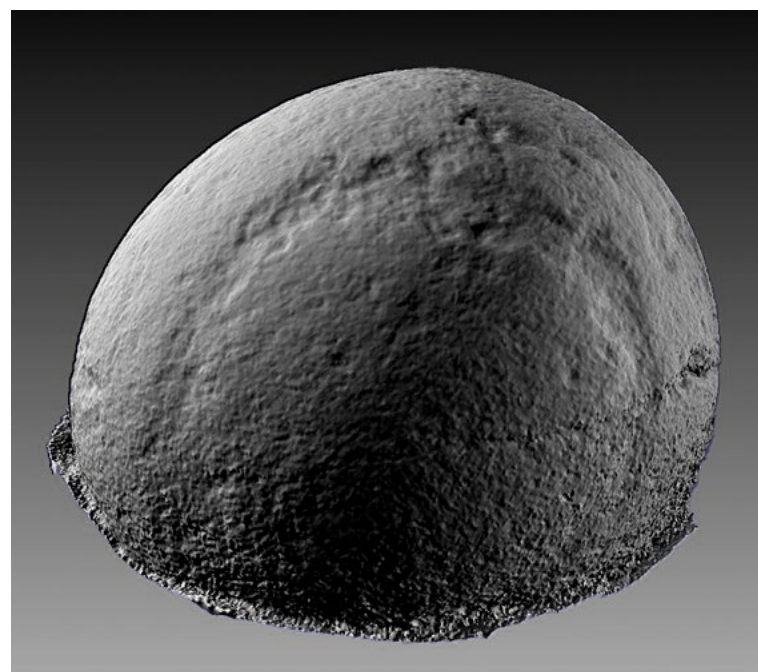
## Acknowledgments

The authors wish to acknowledge the assistance of Matt Seaver, Assistant Keeper, Irish Antiquities Division, National Museum of Ireland for organising additional photographs of the Carrowmore stone and the helpful petrological report cited above. Thanks to Carrowmore guides Lynda Harte, Pádraig Meehan and Austin McTiernan for commenting on an earlier version of this article.

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Photogrammetry of carved stone from Carrowmore  
(Graphic: Ken Williams)







# Kilkenny Catwalk Trail

OPW is delighted to adopt and host two Kilkenny Cats on the grounds of the Castle, as part of the Kilkenny Catwalk Trail, which launched on Sunday 10 October and continues until Easter 2021. This very special exhibition features 21 magnificent cat sculptures, which have been exquisitely decorated and are located in some of Kilkenny's most beautiful public spaces and heritage sites. Visitors are invited to download a special trail app and thus enjoy their trail adventure through town.

The Cat models are 5ft tall fibreglass resin sculptures based on 'The Secret of Kells' character, 'Pangur Bán' which was created by four-time Academy Awards®, Golden

Globe®, BAFTA and Emmy nominated Kilkenny-based Animation Studio – 'Cartoon Saloon'. We are thrilled to announce that this very special original 'Pangur Bán', which was designed by Bonnie Mier from Cartoon Saloon is now a resident of the formal Rose Garden of Kilkenny Castle for the duration. We are also delighted to welcome our second Cat – 'Pangur A la'n which was decorated by Francis Tansey and will sit happily in the courtyard area. This project is a partnership between Kilkenny Civic Trust and Kilkenny County Council and was created by The Art of Tourism who specialise in the delivery of public art trails.

# Famous Faces at Dublin Castle



Visit by Princess Grace, 1961

This exhibition will offer visitors a glimpse of the famous figures who have graced the halls of Dublin Castle since the 1960's. The exhibition will feature the visits of Princess Grace 1961, US President John. F Kennedy 1963, US President Richard Nixon 1970, US President Ronald Reagan 1984, the New Ireland Forum 1983-84, Nelson Mandela 1990, EEC Summit 1990, US President Bill Clinton 1995, Queen Elizabeth II 2011, Vice President Biden 2016, Pope Francis 2018 and Nancy Pelosi 2019.

The exhibition will focus on the impact their visits had for Ireland, their time spent at Dublin Castle and it will also bring to life a few of their visits on screen through a series of archival footage. The exhibition

will feature from mid- October in St Patrick's Hall, Dublin Castle until the end of the year.

**Location:** St Patrick's Hall, Dublin Castle

**Dates:** 13th October – 25th December

**Time:** 9:45 – 17:45  
(last admission 17:15)

**Website:** [www.dublincastle.ie](http://www.dublincastle.ie)



The Nave of Cormac's Chapel

# Kings, Magi, and Cormac's Chapel

By Thomas Nelligan

Between 1127 and 1134 the magnificent Cormac's Chapel was built at the Rock of Cashel. Historical records rarely mention the consecration of churches, but Cormac's Chapel is mentioned in several surviving written texts. The Annals of the Four Masters mentions, "A church which was erected by Cormac, grandson of Carthach, King of Caiseal, was consecrated by a synod of the clergy, assembled in one place." The Annals of Inisfallen mention that in 1134 that, "The church built by Cormac McCarthy at Cashel was consecrated by the archbishop and bishops of Munster, at which ceremony the nobility of Ireland, both clergy and laity, were present." This event, it seems, was something of national importance and one can imagine the scene at Cashel with important clergy and laity, along with their retinues all descending on Cashel. It must have been a spectacle that the people of Cashel would remember for the rest of their lives.

Cormac's Chapel was something new in Ireland, a complete departure from the plainer ecclesiastical buildings of earlier centuries. With its blind arcades, multi-ordered doorways, and grotesques looking down on all who entered, it must have deserved

its grand opening. The inside was no less ornate, with a high barrel vault, and colourful frescoes adorning the chancel – a royal chapel befitting the Kings of Munster. However, it was another king that would have a lasting impact on the decoration of Cormac's Chapel. The Norman King Henry II arrived in Ireland in October 1171, and made his way to Lismore, where he established a castle. From here he moved onto Cashel where, at his behest, a Synod was convened. The scheme of frescoes that we can still see fragments of in Cormac's Chapel were painted around this time, either in anticipation of this Synod, or shortly after it. The scenes depicted are suffused with the imagery of kingship. On the ceiling of the chancel, scenes from the infancy narrative of Jesus are skilfully painted. The Magi before Herod is the scene that survives to the greatest extent on the western quadrant, on the south side are fragments of the adoration of the shepherds. The north quadrant is the hardest to identify, but likely depicts the journey of the Magi, while the eastern quadrant probably depicts the Adoration of the Christ child. The paintings are less about telling the infancy narrative of Christ, but rather underscoring that Cormac's Chapel is a place of kingship.



Built for the Kings of Munster, and now redecorated to legitimise the new Norman King Henry II. The message is clear, like Jesus, Henry's kingship is divinely ordained – a message that Cormac McCarthy was also clearly trying to send with the construction of the chapel. This is further confirmed by the depiction of the baptism of Christ on the south wall of the chancel. The biblical accounts of the baptism of Christ follow closely the Old Testament accounts of the anointing of David and Saul by God – divinely ordained kingship. The message was surely not lost on the clergy and people of Cashel of the day. The fact that a similar arrangement of frescoes appear in Henry's personal chapel in St. Julien's Petit-Quevilly, near Rouen in France only serves to confirm this.

Yet, while the arrangement of frescoes are loaded with political messages it is also a simple telling of the Christmas story, and must have held special significance for people at Christmas time. However, Christmas was extremely different from what we experience today. Many of our Christmas traditions are relatively modern in origin. For example, the decorating of trees began in Germany in the 16th century, and it was centuries later before the tradition reached Ireland. Christmas

was also not the biggest Christian festival in the calendar, rather Easter took precedence. This is not to say that it did not have special significance. In pre-Norman Ireland there were even laws determining certain elements of Christmas such as what breads could be consumed. Christmas Day was also not the biggest day of the festival, but rather marked the beginning of the festive period which ran until January 6th (the Feast of the Epiphany) which was seen as the more important day, and both served as bookends to the celebrations.

Like today, however, certain elements of Christmas were the same. Eating and drinking were definitely normal parts of Christmas, although the fare would have been somewhat different. Turkey, roast potatoes, and cranberry sauce would not have appeared on anyone's table, as these were all later introductions to Europe after the discovery of the New World. Traditional Christmas food would have included, for the rich at least, lamb, beef, fowl, larks, and geese. These could be roasted, or served in pastry and flavoured with cinnamon, cloves, and garlic. More expensive import items such as ginger, saffron, and olive oil would also be available to the wealthy. To the poorer people of society stews and fish were the order of the day.



↑ The Magi before Herod

← The Baptism of Christ on the south wall of the chancel

→ The ceiling of the chancel of Cormac's Chapel



Cormac's Chapel, built between 1127 and 1134



Everyone, it seems, appeared to have partaken in alcohol. Wealthy people would often spend Christmas at important monasteries around the country and abbots would relax the rules for monks at these times. However, several medieval texts complain about the drunkenness of monks during the Christmas season. The Archbishop of Dublin, Thomas Minot, complained in 1367 that people were more concerned with “taverns and drunkenness and other illicit acts of pleasure,” than they were with religious observance. It wasn't just the monks, it seems!

Returning to Cormac's Chapel, despite their obvious political overtones, the frescoes tell the story of the birth of Christ. Did the chapel, therefore, have special significance during the Christmas period? Would clerics and laity around Cashel come and look at the telling of the Nativity, before returning to their homes to feast? We will never know the answer to these questions – we are too disconnected from the time in which they were painted, but we are fortunate enough to be able to still see these paintings that carried so much meaning to people nearly nine-hundred years ago.

Merry Christmas.

#### Further reading:

Wycherley, N, “Christmas in Medieval Ireland,” [MaynoothUniversity.ie](http://MaynoothUniversity.ie)

Dwyer, F, “A Christmas Feast in Medieval Ireland,” *Irish History Podcast*

Stalley, R, “Solving a Mystery at Cashel: The Romanesque Painting in Cormac's Chapel,” in *Irish Arts Review Yearbook*. Vol 18 (2002), pp. 25-29.



## Gentleman Johnny

By Paul O'Brien



*“Burgoyne’s battles and speeches will be forgotten but his delicious comedy, ‘The Heiress’, still continues to delight the stage and is one of the most pleasing domestic compositions.”*

Horace Walpole

In 1782 Lieutenant General John Burgoyne became Master of the Royal Hospital at Kilmainham and Commander-in-Chief of British Forces in Ireland. He was also a Privy Councillor and a Colonel in the 4th Regiment. Considered by many as an officer who acquired his rank through political connections rather than ability, Burgoyne was an officer who led an extraordinary life not only as a soldier but also as a writer.

As a successful author, Burgoyne was responsible for a number of popular comedies that included *The Maid of the Oaks* (1774) and *The Heiress* (1786). He also wrote the libretto for William Jackson’s successful opera *The Lord of the Manor* (1780).

However, he is chiefly remembered today for his disastrous military career. Burgoyne purchased his commission in the 11th Dragoons and as a junior officer he took part in a number of campaigns in Europe.

In 1743 he eloped with Lady Charlotte Stanley, the daughter of the 11th Earl of Derby. Because of this Lord Derby cut his daughter off and Burgoyne was forced to sell his commission to raise funds. In 1751, in order to escape his creditors, Burgoyne and his wife moved to continental Europe and travelled throughout France and Italy.

When he returned to England he received an appointment as a lieutenant in the Coldstream Guards.

Known as ‘Gentleman Johnny’ Burgoyne is principally remembered as the British General who was forced to surrender his army of 5,000

men to the Americans at Saratoga during the American War of Independence in 1777. The vastly overconfident Burgoyne advanced from Canada but soon found himself surrounded and outnumbered by American forces. He fought two battles at Saratoga but was forced into negotiations with American General Horatio Gates. On the 17th October 1777 he agreed to a convention that permitted his troops to withdraw and return home. However, this agreement was revoked and Burgoyne’s army were taken as prisoners of war. General Burgoyne faced severe criticism when he returned to Britain and never held another field command – fortunately.

His flamboyant character made him a popular figure in London society and he was believed to have been the model for the Devil’s Disciple in George Bernard Shaw’s play of that name. He attended the Haymarket Theatre on 3rd June 1793 and died suddenly the following day. He is buried in Westminster Abbey, England.

After Burgoyne left the Royal Hospital a bell known as ‘Burgoyne’s Bell’ was cast in Dublin in June 1783 and housed in the bell tower of the Royal Hospital. It was manufactured by Pounders and Heavside foundry with a business address at Old Church Street and 9 Luke Street, Dublin.

The bell was removed from the tower because of its weight and may be found on display within the Royal Hospital building.

**For guided tours or further information contact** [rhktours@opw.ie](mailto:rhktours@opw.ie)



## All Creatures Great and Small

‘All Creatures Great and Small’ is a collaborative collection from the Office of Public Works (OPW) and the Department of Finance, Northern Ireland (DoF) and is on exhibition at Rathfarnham Castle from 15th December.

Since the late 1990s, the OPW and the DoF have worked in partnership organising an annual touring art exhibition. The purpose of this cross-border initiative is to create public awareness and access to artworks in both public-owned collections. The exhibitions have toured numerous venues across the island bringing both collections to new audiences. The exhibitions are based on different themes every year. The exhibition All Creatures Great and Small is focused on artworks from both collections that depict birds, animals, fish and insects and their interaction with humanity. Each artist brings their own individual approach to the depiction of living creatures and this diversity makes for a thoughtful and interesting exhibition. A free catalogue accompanies the exhibition.

Artists included: Corrina Askin, Bono et al., Thomas Carr OBE, Gabhann Dunne, Ivan Frew, Rebecca Homfray, Pen Jones, Rachel Joynt, Atsushi Kaga, John Kindness, Gavin Lavelle, Aoife Layton, Sarah Longley, Maura Lynch, James MacIntyre, Cecil Maguire, Kelvin Mann, Bruce C. Marshall, Colin Martin, Joanna Martin, Eamonn McCrory, Linda McWha, Frieda Meaney, Yvette Monahan, Jeffrey Morgan, Janet Mullarney, Tighe O'Donoghue/Ross, Barbara Rae, Sven Sandberg, Felicity Shun, Dara Vallely.

**Location:** Rathfarnham Castle

**Dates:** Wednesday-Sunday from 15th December – end of January. Closed 24th – 28th December 2021 and 1st January 2022.

**Times:** 10:30–17:00

**Website:** [www.rathfarnhamcastle.ie](http://www.rathfarnhamcastle.ie)

**Admission:** Free





← Carrowkeel cairns  
(Photograph: Sligo Neolithic Landscapes)

In a joint initiative in the summer of 2021 the OPW and the National Monuments Service launched the *Protect Our Past* campaign. Several monuments across the country had been damaged or vandalised over the course of the pandemic. This threat was brought home to people in County Sligo with damage to several Neolithic monuments. Notably, many of the cairns in the bid are unopened and unexcavated. These sites are also an enormous archaeological resource for the future, with recent investigations at these monuments already adding much to the national story.

On the 10th November 2021, Minister Noonan recommended Sligo's bid for Ireland's World Heritage Tentative List. The UNESCO World Heritage bid has received enormous support from the local community, local landowners and farming organisations. Many people and local organisations have the protection of the monuments at heart, but a co-ordinated approach and management are now required. It is essential that landowners benefit from this process, that their guardianship of the monuments be properly respected and rewarded.

# County Sligo's Passage Tomb Landscapes recommended for Ireland's World Heritage Tentative List

By Robert Hensey & Pádraig Meehan

County Sligo possesses a great abundance of archaeological remains but is particularly rich when it comes to monuments from the passage tomb tradition. The level of preservation of these Neolithic tombs and the landscapes in which they were constructed is extraordinary. For many of us, these cairn-topped hills and landscapes are recognised through their association with our mythology and legends. In the summer of 2020 these monuments were submitted for consideration to Ireland's World Heritage Tentative List.

'The Passage Tomb Landscape of County Sligo' bid is spearheaded by the Sligo Neolithic Landscapes group, a Public Participation Network group established in 2015 with a mission to protect and promote Sligo's Neolithic Heritage, and Sligo County Council, together with key national and local organisations and groups.

The proposed WHS site is centred – to the north – on the Carrowmore megalithic complex at the heart of the Cúil Iorra peninsula, and surrounded by such storied places such as Knocknarea, Carrowmore, Cairns Hill and the Ox Mountains, and – to

the south – represented by a series of cairns and surrounding sites from Carrowkeel and Keash. The northern and southern clusters are connected in many ways; culturally, temporally and not least by the snaking route of the Unshin River. The monuments are found in all types of contexts: in dramatic mountainous landscapes such as the cairns at Carrowkeel; hidden in forestry such as at Cairns Hill; or in the lowlands, like the impossibly huge Heapstown Cairn.

One of the most unusual locations is at Abbeyquarter North, the monument serving as a roundabout in the middle of a 1940s housing estate in Sligo town.

Approximately one hundred passage tomb tradition sites and their landscapes form this bid. Over half the monuments are in State ownership, many managed by the Office of Public Works (OPW). Seeing these sites as part of a single 'fabric' is key to understanding these landscapes, and the communities who constructed them. Viewed as a whole, they provide a rare window into the world of Neolithic people.



↖ Heapstown Cairn  
(Photograph: Sligo Neolithic Landscapes)

↑ Abbeyquarter North  
(Balloon photography: Thorsten Kahlert)

← Robert Hensey, Chair of the Sligo Neolithic Landscapes group at Carrowmore 7  
(Photograph: Brian Farrell)

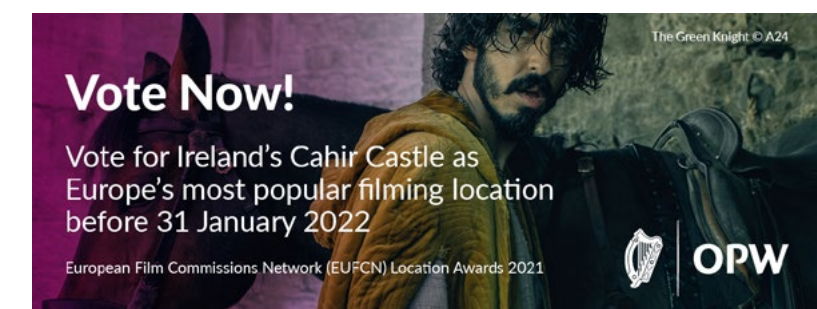




The public winner of the EUFCN Location Award 2021 will be determined by the general public's vote. Everyone can vote here: [www.eufcn.com/location-award-2021](http://www.eufcn.com/location-award-2021)

The award will be handed out to the winning location and film commission in February at the European Film Market – EFM 2022.

Find out more about the awards here: [www.eufcn.com/eufcn-location-award-2021-the-finalists](http://www.eufcn.com/eufcn-location-award-2021-the-finalists)



## Cahir Castle

vies for title  
of Europe's  
favourite filming  
location



**The Irish public are being asked to show their support for one of Ireland's largest and best-preserved castles as it vies for the prestigious title of Europe's favourite filming location.**

OPW-managed Cahir Castle, which has starred in multiple film and TV blockbusters, has been shortlisted for the European Film Commissions Network (EUFCN) Location Award 2021.

Every year, the European Film Commissions Network (EUFCN) chooses a shortlist of five European locations for the prestigious EUFCN Location Award. Nominated by Screen Ireland as the location for *The Green Knight*, Cahir Castle has captured the imagination of multiple film-makers thanks to its defensive castle design, which was at the cutting edge in the thirteenth century.


Minister of State with responsibility for the Office of Public Works (OPW), Patrick O'Donovan, T.D. said: "The OPW cares for 780 of Ireland's most iconic heritage sites.


As part of its mission, it is proud to offer access to its sites to filmmakers from all over the world, working closely with film crews to maintain the highest standards of safety, integrity and authenticity.

"Cahir Castle stands proudly on a rocky island on the River Suir and much of the original structure remains, so it is no surprise that film-makers are drawn to this unique and impressive location.

"Being shortlisted for this esteemed award helps to showcase Cahir Castle to a wider audience. The general public now has the chance to vote and support Cahir Castle in bringing home the gong.




"Winning this award will help to secure deserved recognition for one of Ireland's stunning locations, plus the dedicated OPW team of heritage and conservation experts committed to restoring, preserving and promoting Ireland's cultural heritage for present and future generations to enjoy."





## Time is running out!

Free admission to OPW  
visitor sites until 31/12/21



## Rian na Nollag Christmas Trail

Why not drop in and collect your trail map from the Phoenix Park Visitor Centre anytime between 9.30am and 4.45pm, seven days a week?

In your own time, allow this map to bring you around the site to discover our traditions and wonderful winter wildlife.

**Location:** Phoenix Park Visitor Centre

**Dates:** 3rd December – 2nd January.

**Times:** 09:30–16:45

**Website:** [www.phoenixpark.ie](http://www.phoenixpark.ie)

**Admission:** Free



## Conifers Evergreen Giants of the Ancient World

### Themed tour at the National Botanic Gardens

The conifers and their allies have long been overshadowed by their upstart flowering cousins, but these ancient plants still flourish as some of the largest and oldest of all living things. Meet living fossils and lethal killers, giants of fire and ice and the plants that fed the dinosaurs. From the mysteries of the taiga forest, the greatest and coldest of earth's land ecosystems, to the humble Christmas tree that graces our homes, conifers are part of all our lives in ways we may not even realise.



### BOOKING ESSENTIAL

[www.conifertour.eventbrite.ie](http://www.conifertour.eventbrite.ie)

**Location:** National Botanic Gardens, Glasnevin

**Dates:** Wednesdays 1st, 8th, 15th, 22nd and Saturdays 4th, 11th, 18th December

**Time:** 14:00

**Website:** [www.botanicgardens.ie](http://www.botanicgardens.ie)

**Admission:** Free

## A Very Fashionable Marriage in the Chapel, Royal Hospital, Kilmainham, 4th June 1896

*By Paul O'Brien*

Throughout its history the Royal Hospital Kilmainham, Dublin, has hosted numerous events that have seen royalty and world presidents enter its magnificent hall and chapel. An account of one such event, that of the wedding of the Rev. A Godolphin Pentreath MA., Chaplain HM Forces, and Miss Helen Guy Carleton, is described in detail in the papers and periodicals of 1896.

On Thursday afternoon, by permission of Field Marshal Lord Roberts VC, Commanding the Forces in Ireland, who had hoped to be present, the marriage of the Rev. A Godolphin Pentreath, MA, Chaplain HM Forces Portobello Barracks, Dublin, eldest son of the late Rev. FR. Pentreath, DD Oxon, and Helen G. eldest daughter of C Guv Carleton Esq. Co. Cork, and great grand-daughter of the late Christopher Carleton Esq. of Beechmont, JP for Co. Cork, and great grand-daughter of the late George Guy Carleton, formerly of Blarney Castle, Co. Cork, Captain 18th Royal Irish, and of John Tracey Reilly, of Kilguada House, JP for County Wicklow, Captain 5th Dragoon Guards, and who at one time contested the Co. Waterford in the conservative interest, was solemnised, by special licence, in the Chapel of the Royal Hospital, Kilmainham. The

Very Rev The Dean of St. Patrick's Officiated, assisted by the Rev. Maurice Day MA, Vicar of St. Matthia's, Dublin, and the Rev Charles Saunders Graham. The Archbishop of Dublin was unavoidably prevented from officiating, as also the Dean of Tuam and the Arch deacon of Dublin.

A celebration of the Holy Communion took place at 8 o'clock in the morning, in Portobello garrison church, The Rev Goodwin, Senior Chaplain HM Forces in Ireland and the Rev C Baines CF officiating, at which the bride and bridegroom and members of each family attended, and other friends.

The wedding took place at 2.30. A guard of honour was furnished by the 1st Battalion Sherwood Foresters (the Derbyshire Regiment) drawn up near the entrance to the chapel, under the command of Captain England.

While the guests were assembling, the band of the Sherwood Foresters under the popular Bandmaster, Mr. Bradley, played a selection of sacred music.

The six bridesmaids were, Miss Mary Pentreath, Miss Annie Pentreath, Miss Edith







Pentreath, (sisters of the bridegroom) and Miss Ethel Guy Carleton, Miss Olive Beatrice Carleton (sisters of the bride) and Miss Evelvn Boxwell, cousin of the bride.

The best man was Rev F. Jones, Vicar of Llanrnos, Llanduudno.

The bride arrived at the church at half past two o'clock accompanied by her father, who gave her away. Her gown was of ivory white duchesse satin bodice trimmed with old Limerick lace and orange blossoms – full court train from shoulder of richest brocade, lined with duchesse satin to match gown. As the bridal procession passed up the aisle, the hymn, 'The Voice that Breathed o'er Eden' was sung. The Service was fully choral throughout -128th Psalm, chant 381. Sir J. Goss responses as set in the Cathedral prayer-book. Hymns 'Thine for ever' and 'oh, perfect love', this last one being a setting by Miss M. Birch, organist of the Portobello Garrison Church. The harmonies were added by the Bandmaster Bradley, Sherwood Foresters.

After the blessing the band played 'The Wedding March' by Mendelsohn, assisted by the church choir, all under the conductor, Mr. Bradley.

The bride and bridegroom were warmly congratulated by Captain Fielding, of the Royal Hospital.

After the ceremony a reception was held at Hildon Park, Terenure, the residence of George Vanston, Esq., LLD. The band of the 15th Kings Hussars played a choice selection of music during the afternoon and subsequently the newly married pair started for London, en route for the Engadine and the Tyrol, where the honeymoon will be spent. The bride's tailor made costume de voyage of grey Venetian cloth, with white corded silk vest, and hat of white fancy straw trimmed with satin ribbon and chiffon.

The presents were numerous and handsome. There were hundreds of important guests, too numerous to mention here.

Another report of the wedding goes,

I jotted at Miss Guy Carleton's pretty wedding at the Royal Hospital, Kilmainham, that the punctuality of bride and bridegroom ensured for them a lengthy wait at the altar, because the clergy and choir were either not ready, or did not receive or comprehend their 'cue'. At any rate they were long in getting into processional order ... An earnest official at the door, too, who had got promiscuous instructions not to admit anybody 'without a ticket' peremptorily declined to let in several of the guests, which created much amusement.

However all is well that ends well; the bride looked genuinely charming, the day was fine, the company was immense and interesting, the grounds at Hildon Park proved sufficiently extensive to accommodate all comers, the band of the 15th Hussars played a choice programme on the lawn, the catering was as good as I have ever seen on a similar occasion, which is saying a vast deal in praise of it, and the wedding-cake rivalled in dimensions the famous one which Bolland, of Chester, had to transport in separate sections, in cabs, from Buckingham Palace to Marlborough House on the occasion of an important official misdirection. The bridegroom, Mr Pentreath, Army Chaplain, is a fine tall young fellow, with a straight slim figure, a clean-shaven and agreeable face, and a keenness of humour, as was evidenced by his running remarks during the ordeal of being photographed.

It goes to show you that weddings have changed very little. Dresses, guests and having a few military bands still play an important role in this important ceremony.

For further information or to book a tour contact: [rhktours@opw.ie](mailto:rhktours@opw.ie)



Battle of the Boyne - Aerial shot of Walled Garden



Irish National War Memorial Gardens

## 11 Green Flag Awards for OPW Parks

The Office of Public Works (OPW) welcomed the news that 11 OPW sites were among a group of over 100 Irish public parks, gardens and voluntary run green community sites across the Republic of Ireland who received their 2021 Green Flags. These were Altamont House & Gardens in Co. Carlow, Battle of the Boyne Visitor Centre in Co. Meath, Castletown Demesne in Co. Kildare, Derrynane Historic Park in Co. Kerry, Fota Arboretum & Gardens and Garinish Island in Co. Cork, Grangegorman Military Cemetery, Irish National War Memorial Gardens, St. Stephen's Green Park, The Iveagh Gardens and The Phoenix Park in Dublin.

This year, An Taisce implemented the national roll out of the Green Heritage Accreditation Award with the support of the NPWS and the Department of Housing, Local Government, and Heritage. These accreditation awards are given to green spaces of specific historic significance, with 7 Green Heritage Sites in Ireland receiving this merit in 2021. Among the recipients of this inaugural award are the Irish National War Memorial Gardens and the Battle of the Boyne Visitor Centre, two exceptional sites with their own unique cultural significance and historic importance.

Patrick O'Donovan TD, Minister of State with responsibility for the Office of Public Works said

*"I am delighted to see that the OPW has been awarded these flags which highlights the wonderfully diverse parks in our care. Over the last 18 months, these beautiful green spaces have been a lifeline for the Irish public, as places to escape to and help with our wellbeing and mindfulness during this testing time. I particularly would like to congratulate all the OPW staff whose dedicated work and commitment to each property has contributed towards these Awards. The OPW places great importance on the sustainable environmental management and conservation of the State's Heritage sites, and the Green Flag Awards scheme is a wonderful way of recognising and celebrating these high standards."*

The Green Flag Awards, administered by An Taisce in the Republic of Ireland, recognise and encourage the provision of good quality parks and green spaces that are managed in environmentally sustainable ways. The awards are marked on eight criteria, including horticultural standards, cleanliness, sustainability and community involvement. This International Scheme is in place across England, Wales, Scotland, Northern Ireland, Netherlands, Belgium, Germany, Australia and New Zealand, and has been running in Ireland since 2015.



Derrynane Green Flag 2021



# What Colour is Metal?

Susan Holland,  
Curator at National Design  
& Craft Gallery



Koji Hatakeyama

**What Colour is Metal?** is a new exhibition of innovative master-metalsmiths from across 10 countries, exploring the intriguing relationship between metal and colour in contemporary silversmithing and jewellery.

*What Colour is Metal?* exhibition captures a vital time in studio metalsmithing and patination. Long-time leaders who have wholly altered the terrain continue to push boundaries of their materials, as the mid-career metalsmiths whom they trained forge new directions, and new generations of makers bring fresh approaches to the conversation.

Metal colouration techniques have been built on experimentation, in the meeting of science, curiosity and craft. Processes, developed in a time when chemicals could be accessed freely, have more recently been supplanted by non-toxic and natural applications – including, in this exhibition, the use of seaweed and bread. Early trailblazers and their generous sharing of knowledge in formal education, as well as peer support, have been crucial to the development of this lively discipline. Experimentation has continued unbounded, as evidenced here in complex forms, challenging techniques, innovative use of industrial processes and even the melding of media (such as the combination of metal and glass in the *Material Dialogues* collaboration).

*What Colour is Metal?* confronts us with a direct question: what do we understand of metal and its innate properties? In European culture the value of precious metal traditionally correlates with its fineness. While makers have long been experimental, innovating with patination and colour application, only since 2019 have changes in the Irish Hallmarking Act allowed the marking of mixed metals in Ireland. This has extended the creative possibilities for makers, allowing them to combine base and precious metals more freely. While this may be a divergence for European makers, in Japanese practice the combination of metals and the application of compounds to alter metal colour is a tradition spanning many centuries.

In Ireland we have a long history of ambitious silversmithing and innovation in metal construction, from ancient torcs and brooches to ecclesiastical objects and chalices. Skilled work in precious metals continues, with Kilkenny as home to more fine jewellers per capita than anywhere else in Europe. Yet the processes of colouration of metals, while practised by a few to exceptional standards, is not a wide phenomenon. This exhibition celebrates international best practice and simultaneously has the educational intention of sharing techniques, inspiring innovation and spurring on the next generation of experimental metalsmiths.

Curators Sara Roberts and C  il  n    Dubhghaill: are both passionate advocates of innovative metal practice and craft education. They have committed years to the realisation of this project, which builds on Sara's 1993 exhibition *The Chemistry Set*, produced by Crafts Council UK and The Southern Arts Touring Exhibition Service. Nearly thirty years later this exhibition takes a fresh look at colouration in metal as it stands in the 2020s, bringing together exceptional works by master metalsmiths from ten countries and three continents, to demonstrate the vitality, diversity and complexity of this discipline.

*What Colour is Metal?* is produced by Design & Crafts Council Ireland, with support of the Office of Public Works, Sheffield Hallam University, Arts Council UK and National College of Art & Design.

[www.ndcg.ie/exhibitions/what-colour-is-metal](http://www.ndcg.ie/exhibitions/what-colour-is-metal)

**Location:** State Apartments, Dublin Castle

**Dates:** 13th October 2021 – 6th February 2022

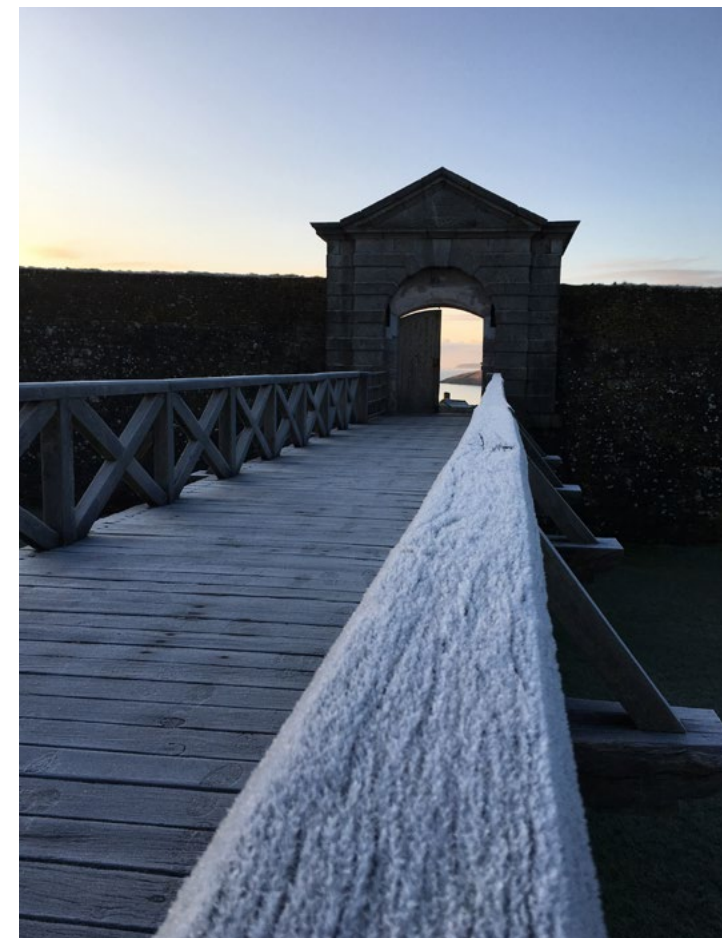
**Time:** 9:45 – 17:45  
(last admission 17:15)

**Website:** [www.dublincastle.ie](http://www.dublincastle.ie)

## An OPW Winter



Hill of Tara in the Snow by Ken Williams



Kilkenny Castle

Winter comes to Charles Fort



# In the Footsteps of an Old Soldier

By Paul O'Brien



Robert Money Penny



Robert Money Penny headstone

Throughout the history of the Royal Hospital Kilmainham, thousands of old soldiers have entered through its gates and have walked its corridors. One just has to retrace their steps to travel back in time and feel what it was like to be a soldier-pensioner. Those old soldiers came from near and far and were witness to some of the greatest battles in British military history. One such soldier was Robert Money Penny.

Born in the Parish of St. Peter's Drogheda, Ireland in 1825, Robert Money Penny enlisted in the 8th Hussars from the 18th March 1846 to the 11th October 1856, serving a total of ten years and five months in the military.

On enlistment at the age of eighteen, he was described as being of fresh complexion, 5ft. 7.25 inches in height, brown hair and blue eyes.

The 8th Hussars, along with Robert Money Penny were deployed to the Crimea in 1854 as war erupted. He embarked to the region on the ship H.T. Echunga on the 15th May 1854.

The war fought between Russia and the fading Ottoman Empire in 1853 was the latest in a long-running series of disputes between the two empires. In 1854 Britain and France went to the aid of the Ottoman Empire to protect it from Russian territorial claims. It was to be Britain's first major conflict since 1815 and would be a precursor for the mass warfare of the twentieth century. This conflict was also the first to be covered by the press and was a global conflict with campaigns being fought not just in the Crimea but also in the Baltic and Pacific.

The Battle of Balaclava was distinguished by three cavalry charges. A Russian charge towards Balaclava that was met by the 'Thin Red Line,' consisting of two rows of British infantry from the 93rd Highland Regiment, who stopped the charge with three volleys. Another Russian cavalry advance was repelled by the British Heavy Cavalry Brigade, charging uphill against advised military practice.

In the final charge Robert Money Penny rode in what was to become one of the most infamous engagements of the Crimean War, the Charge of the Light Brigade at Balaclava. The British Light Cavalry misunderstood its instructions and charged down a valley towards a Russian field battery of guns. They came under intense fire from both sides of the valley from other Russian gun emplacements. They rode up and down the valley suffering heavy casualties in what was a futile and costly charge.

Robert Money Penny survived the ill fated charge and was awarded the Distinguished Conduct Medal for 'praise worthy and gallant service throughout the campaign...'. This was the only time that such a reason has been documented for the D.C.M. during the campaign.

On returning to Ireland, he was discharged from the Army in 1856 suffering from bronchitis and varicose veins. He was admitted as an out-pensioner to the Royal Hospital in December 1856.

His papers reveal that he was married with three children and resided at lodgings at 12 Hanover Lane, in the Liberties of Dublin city. However, his return to civilian life after such traumatic military service was problematic.

He was convicted on the 23 September 1876 at the Metropolitan Police Court, Dublin, for 'assault with a stick upon two women.' Sentenced to 6 months imprisonment with a further two months imprisonment in default of finding securities for 'keeping the peace.' Pension suspended during his term of imprisonment.

An extract from the Irish Times dated 25 September 1876 reads,

**A servant named Robert Money Penny, residing at 12 Hanover Lane, was brought up on a charge of having violently assaulted a woman named Bridget Millars and Letitia Darling, his sister, between five and six o'clock on Friday evening by violently striking them. He was sentenced to be imprisoned for six months with hard labour, and at the expiration of that time to find surety in £20 for his good behaviour, or to be imprisoned for a further term of two months.**

On his release from prison, it seems that the old soldier was destitute and applied to the Royal Hospital for assistance. He was admitted as an In-Pensioner to Kilmainham Hospital on the 1st October 1878.

Robert Money Penny lived within the confines of the Royal Hospital Kilmainham until his death in 1906. He was interred in the small cemetery within the grounds, a simple headstone with his name, date of death, his regiment, the 8th Hussars and the inscription 'He rode at Balaclava.'

For Tour information contact [rhktours@opw.ie](mailto:rhktours@opw.ie)

Special thanks to Vivian Igoe and Michael Wardick for information on Robert Money Penny.



## Conserving the Pearse Family Crib

By Brian Crowley

Exhibiting the Pearse Family Christmas crib every December has become something of a Christmas festive tradition at the Pearse Museum. This year however, it will be a little bit more special as we will display the crib figures for the first time since they underwent a significant programme of conservation. This delicate and nuanced work was carried out by sculpture conservator Jason Ellis, and was completed just in time for Christmas. Jason is also a distinguished sculptor in his own right, so in addition to conserving and repairing the set, he was also commissioned to produce a piece which could replace the lost figure of the Virgin Mary which has not survived. These nativity figures were among the contents of the Pearse Family home and were left to the State by Senator Margaret Pearse prior to her death in 1968. She was the sister of Patrick and William Pearse, both executed for their roles in the 1916 Rising. The crib figures were found in the house stored in a small tin trunk which bore the initials 'MBP', presumably those of Mary Brigid Pearse, the youngest of the Pearse siblings.

Images of the nativity dating back to the early Christian period have been found in the catacombs in Rome, but the origin of the Christmas crib is traditionally traced back to St. Francis of Assisi who recreated the scene of the birth of Jesus, featuring real animals, in the town of Greccio in Italy in 1223. Crib became popular in churches and homes throughout Italy and from there spread across Europe.

By the time of Patrick Pearse's childhood in Dublin in the 1880s and 1890s, cribs were a popular tradition among the city's largely Catholic population. The newspapers of the time published many reports of large-scale Christmas cribs in churches and at charity bazaars, while new methods of production and increasing consumerism meant that many families could also have a crib in their own homes. The December newspapers also contained many notices advertising sets of crib figures. A church ornament warehouse at 8 Essex Bridge run by a Miss Dowling took out an advertisement in *The Freeman's Journal* of 8 December 1881 to invite 'early inspection' of, among other things, her 'variety of Wax Bambinas, Christmas cribs and pictures of every size'. Many of the adverts for cribs were placed by booksellers and publishers, including M.H. Gill and Sons of Sackville (now O'Connell) Street and James Duffy of Wellington Quay. While they sold books of all types, prayer books, devotional works and statues accounted for a big part of their business. For those who did not have the means to afford wax or plaster figures, J.J. Lalor of North Earl Street advertised a variety of folding paper cribs in December 1897 which ranged in price from a penny to three shillings and sixpence.

It is not possible to know exactly where the Pearses purchased their crib or exactly how much it cost. In 1896 M.H. Gill and Sons advertised a similar set of eleven 18-inch (45.7cms) figures at a price of £4, a considerable sum at the time. While the Pearse





Before restoration



After restoration



Crib with trunk

The Pearse children c. 1880s, (left to right) William, Patrick, Margaret and Mary Brigid Pearse.



Before restoration



After restoration

figures are significantly smaller, the tallest figure stands at approximately 28cms, and it is likely they paid a similar amount for their set. The presence of such an elaborate crib in the Pearse household is a reflection of the family's growing prosperity at the time. Their father, James, was a successful businessman and had one of the largest monumental sculpture businesses in Ireland by the end of the 19th century. While the crib figures are mass-produced plaster casts, they were carefully and delicately hand-painted. The original set is also quite extensive and contains figures of St. Joseph and Infant Jesus as well as a donkey, a sheep and two shepherds, the Three Wise Men or Kings, and a camel. There would, of course, also have originally been a figure of the Virgin Mary. Two small robins were stored in the tin trunk with the figures as well but, unlike the other plaster figures, they are made from what appears to be a form of *papier maché* or shellac, and stand on tiny legs made of lead. The fact they are made from a different material may mean they were a later addition. There are also three toy figures which were definitely added to the group by the Pearse family. These toy figures consist of two sheep that seem to be manufactured from an early form of plastic or vinyl, as well as a dog which was made from a kind of wooden composite and then painted.

It would appear that there was a somewhat permeable boundary between the Pearse Family toy box and the Christmas crib. As well as adding figures to the set, there is evidence to suggest that the children may have often played with some of the figures. One of the interesting discoveries made during the process of conserving the set was that two figures were significantly dirtier than the rest, namely the figures of the donkey and the Infant Jesus. It is easy to imagine that both of these would have been particular favourites with the Pearse children, and therefore handled more. Toys played an important in the lives of the Pearse children, and they feature prominently in Patrick Pearse's vivid memoir of his childhood,

*We always tried to persuade ourselves that our toys had life... we felt that they had a kind of mystic toy life, and we thought it probable that at night, when the house was still, they disported silently on the carpet: that the dolls rode frantic races on the London Horse, that the cows (I had a fawn and a brindled cow) browsed in secret pastures under the furniture, that my white goat climbed the back of the sofa as if it were a crag. Once I crept out of bed and downstairs (although some afraid) to see these esoteric gambols: but all the toys were very quiet. I hoped then that I had come too soon or too late, for I could not bring myself to believe that they were merely wooden, without any quickening of joy anywhere within them.*

The particular reference Pearse makes to his collection of toy cows highlights the surprising absence of a cow or an ox among the crib figures. Given the variety of animals represented in the set, it is curious that one of the most popular traditional figures is not present. Perhaps the original cow figure became such a favourite with the Pearse children that it did not make it back to the tin trunk one year and became permanently separated, or maybe it was a victim of the imaginary "crag" at the back of the sofa and was broken!

Given their age, the figures that have survived are in relatively good condition. The conservation of the pieces began with specialist cleaning which revealed the original vibrant paint colours under layers of accumulated surface dirt. It was clear that a degree of restoration and repair was also needed, but from the beginning we were clear that the aim of the project was not to restore the figures to look as they did when they were first purchased. The losses and damage sustained by these objects are part of their history and are testimony to their long use by the Pearse Family in their celebration of Christmas.

Before carrying out any intervention, the first consideration was to determine whether or not intervention was in fact necessary. If it was

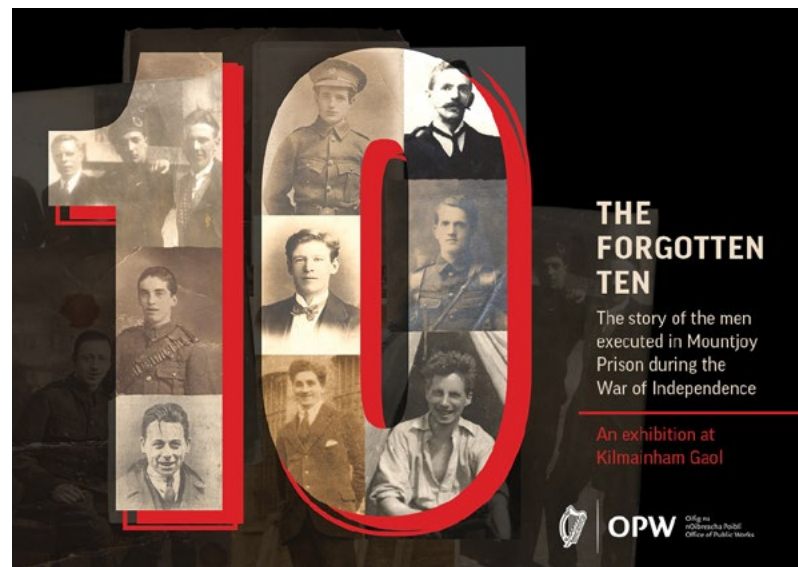
decided some restoration work was required, the next criteria was whether sufficient evidence existed to carry this out in a faithful and historically accurate way. The majority of the damage consisted of chips to the surface paint which exposed the white plaster beneath. Although relatively superficial, these losses were very distracting and detracted from viewers' appreciation of the crib; it was also possible to cover the areas of loss using an appropriate matching paint colour. By far the most serious damage had been sustained by the figure of the camel whose head had broken off. Luckily the broken piece had survived and it was possible to successfully reattach it. One of the robins had also lost its tail, though in this case we did not have the missing piece. Its absence was not a problem aesthetically, but it meant it was physically unbalanced and constantly fell over. The toy dog had a similar issue due to the loss of part of its back leg. In order that both figures could stand independently once more, a new tail was reconstructed for the robin and the missing part of the dog's leg was discreetly replaced. In contrast, in the case of the loss of both of the donkey's ears, it was felt that the figure was still able to function successfully without them and any replacements would involve too much guesswork in trying to imagine how they had once looked. The Infant Jesus figure has lost one of its hands, and while an accurate reproduction based on the surviving one would have been possible, it was not essential. Also, a residue of glue which survives where the hand broke away suggests that the Pearses may have attempted to repair this in the past, and we were anxious to preserve this detail of its history. In contrast, we did feel it was important to repair the damage to the face of one of the Wise Men which had left it badly disfigured due to loss of part of its nose and forehead.

Perhaps the biggest challenge of the project was how to address the absence of the figure of the Virgin Mary. The Virgin and Child are the central focus of any crib and the Christmas

story. Whenever the Museum has displayed the set in the past, no arrangement of them was able to compensate for the absence of this key figure. After much discussion and thought, Jason Ellis was commissioned to sculpt a new replacement Virgin Mary figure. Other than its relative scale, we have no information about what the original piece looked like. While it would have been possible to create a generic figure in a convincingly late-Victorian style, it was felt that such an approach would detract from the authenticity of the original pieces; it needed to be clear to anyone looking at the crib that the new figure was a modern addition. The piece Jason created is a simplified version of the Virgin Mary in a traditional pose appropriate for a nativity scene. The figure's features have been deliberately left blank and it is largely unpainted, with just a light off-white wash to tone down the brilliant white plaster. By adding this piece it is now finally possible to create a recognisable nativity scene while also acknowledging that one of the original pieces has been replaced. Jason also created a simple manger in a similar minimalist style in which the figure of the Infant Jesus can lie.

The newly conserved crib will be on exhibition in the Pearse Museum throughout the Christmas season and we hope it will continue to delight our visitors for many Christmases to come!





# ‘The Forgotten Ten’ A War of Independence centenary exhibition at Kilmainham Gaol Museum

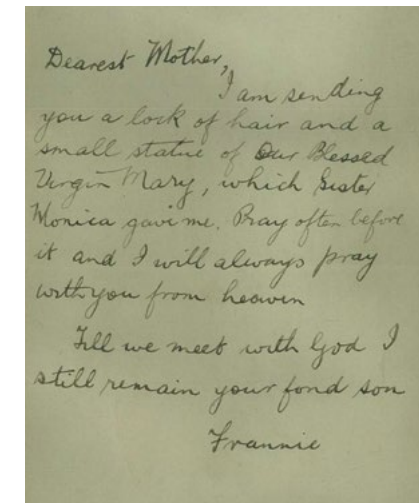
By Brian Crowley  
& Aoife Torpey

As the War of Independence progressed throughout 1920 and 1921, twenty-four men were executed in Ireland by the British Administration. Fourteen were shot by military firing squad in counties Cork and Limerick, as both counties were under martial law at the time. In Dublin however, where martial law did not apply, ten men were hanged in Mountjoy, which was a civilian prison. Although it was still closed to visitors due to the Covid-19 Lockdown, on 7 June 2021 Kilmainham Gaol Museum launched a special exhibition which looked at the Mountjoy executions and the men who would become known as ‘The Forgotten Ten.’

‘The Forgotten Ten’ were: Kevin Barry (executed 1 November 1920), Patrick Moran, Thomas Whelan, Francis Flood, Bernard Ryan, Thomas Bryan and Patrick Doyle (executed 14 March 1921), Thomas Traynor (executed 25 April 1921) and Patrick Maher and Edmond Foley (executed 7 June 1921). Ranging in age from 18 to 40 years old, ‘The Forgotten Ten’ came from all over Ireland and from all sections of Irish society. Many had wives and children, while others were young

men starting out in life. All had been court-martialled by the British military, charged with crimes such as murder, treason and levying war, and were sentenced to death. Their executions made international news and some would become household names. The description of them as ‘The Forgotten Ten’ did not refer to how they were remembered, but rather that they remained buried behind the high walls of Mountjoy Prison until 2001. In October of that year all ten men were exhumed and then reinterred with full State honours. Nine of the men now lie together in a plot in Glasnevin Cemetery, while Patrick Maher is buried in his native home of Ballylanders, County Limerick.

Kilmainham Gaol holds some very significant, and often very poignant, material related to the stories of the ten men. In addition to some of their last letters to loved ones and historic photographs, the Museum’s collection also contains some deeply personal items connected with the executed men. These include a statue of the Virgin Mary given to Frank Flood by a Sister of Charity nun named Sister Monica who visited him in prison. He



← ← Frank Flood’s letter to his Mother



← Frank Flood’s Statue of the Virgin Mary

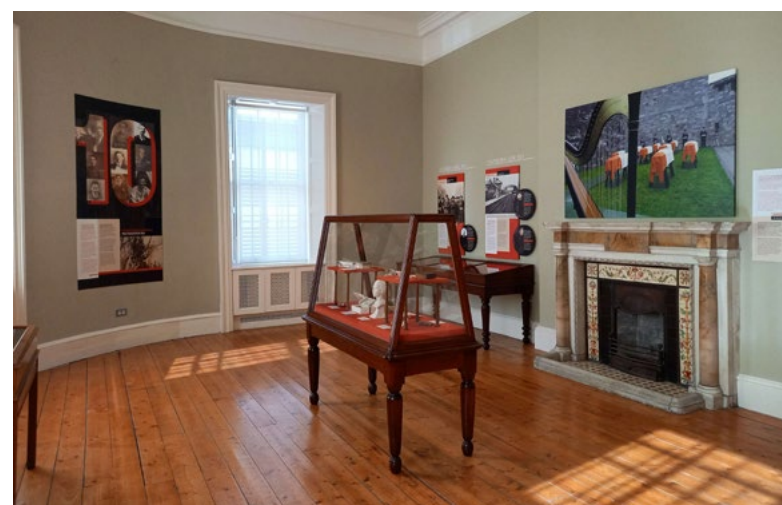
is believed to have held it at the time of his execution and, in a letter on display in the exhibition, he specifically asked that it be sent to his mother. Everyday items used by the men became precious mementoes after their death. Among the exhibits are a shirt and collar returned to Thomas Traynor’s family by the prison authorities along with a box containing sixteen unsmoked cigarettes. One of the most moving artefacts is a box of chocolates originally given to Thomas Whelan by Lester Collins, one of the Black and Tans guarding him in Mountjoy. Whelan gave them in turn to his landlady’s young daughter, Alicia Mann, with a message that they would eat them together if he was reprieved. Tragically, a reprieve never came and the box of chocolates remains unopened.

The exhibition also includes many letters and poems written by the men in the run-up to their execution. Writing to his father-in-law, Dick Glynn, on 25 February 1921, Thomas Bryan expressed his worry about how his wife, who was pregnant with their first child, would take the news of his upcoming execution. He wrote “its [sic] our women who suffer the most.”

Bryan had been held in Kilmainham Gaol prior to being transferred to Mountjoy, as had some of the other men, including Patrick Moran. Moran was part of the group who planned the famous escape from Kilmainham on 14 February 1921, but decided to stay behind at the last minute and face his trial. Included in the exhibition is the razor he used in Kilmainham and Mountjoy. He gave it to a fellow prisoner before he was hanged, saying “I don’t want this where I am going.”

**The Museum re-opened to the public in July 2021 and since then visitors have been able to visit the exhibition and learn of the tragic story of The Forgotten Ten. The exhibition will run until the end of March 2021.**

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



Patrick Moran’s Razor →

Thomas Traynor’s shirt → →







A Winter Scene at Cahir Castle

# Heritage Ireland

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