

Newry and Mourne Museum Newsletter

Autumn/Winter 2002

Golden Jubilee Exhibition

Our Jubilee exhibition, which finished at the end of June, was a great success and attracted a large number of new visitors. We were surprised and delighted at the range and quality of artefacts lent by local people for the exhibition, including a large King George V and Queen Mary vase dated 1911 and some local Girl Guide 1977 Silver Jubilee scrapbooks. One of the most interesting artefacts featured in the exhibition was the original paper hand painted banner and gold card crowns that were part of the decorations in Newry in 1953, lent by John Magowan from Rathfriland.

We were delighted to have Alf McCreary, local journalist and author, to launch the exhibition, who shared his own perspectives and impressions of the royal family and the last fifty years in Newry. The audience also greatly enjoyed the video shown of the original cine film of the 1953 Coronation celebrations in Newry. Many well-known local characters were recognised and old stories remembered.

We would like to say thank you especially to Mrs. Margaret McGaffin for the amazing amount of hard work she put into the exhibition, and also to Mr. William McAlpine, who provided the photographs of so much interest to local visitors.

Local Lives Written on the Sea

The latest exhibition the Museum reflects just a small portion of the experiences and events connected with two very different boat builders. Frank Maguiness, from Kilkeel, has recently completed a model of the *Connemara*, to match the model of the *Retriever* already made by him for the Museum. The *Connemara*, a passenger steamer, and the *Retriever*, a coal boat, collided in Carlingford Lough at the height of a fierce gale on the 3rd November 1916. The two boats sank in only ten minutes, killing 97 people. Only one man survived the disaster, James Boyle, from Warrenpoint. The models are displayed alongside newspaper clippings on the tragedy and parts of the two vessels rescued by local divers, Michael McAlinden and Oliver Finnegan. We are also delighted to exhibit material from Bill Quinn's collection of photographs, maritime artefacts and models. Mr Quinn was apprenticed to Harry Mackintosh's boatyard, Kilkeel in 1944 and still keeps his hand in down at the harbour. He has a great knowledge of stories, poems and superstitions from the tight knit fishing community, some of which are also included.

Many people in the local area lost family and friends in the tragedy of the *Connemara* and *Retriever* and its continuing importance in local memory has been shown by the enthusiastic response to the exhibition. At the opening night Sean Patterson, local maritime expert, recounted the story of the disaster, including some very moving accounts of personal loss. Bill Quinn told some stories relating to other tragedies in

Carlingford Lough, as well as some of a lighter nature, which encouraged a few laughs. The exhibition will run until the end of the month. For more information contact Noreen or Gemma at (028) 3026 6232.

New to our Collections

Mrs. Margaret McGaffin has kindly given us a 1914 cream silk and chiffon wedding dress with a matching pair of shoes. The costume is in extremely good condition, though apparently it has been used as fancy dress and lent for many plays over the years. It is now one of our oldest pieces of complete costume and a very welcome addition to our small textile collection.

During her research in Kilkeel, Gemma was lucky to make contact with Gregory Nicholson, who has been responsible for decommissioning the fishing boats in the harbour over the last few years. He very generously gave us the nameplate from his own boat, *Vi-Ray*, which was decommissioned in 1993. We will be keeping in touch with him as we continue to expand our maritime collection.

Peter O'Hanlon continues to drop in to us on a regular basis with all sorts of interesting objects for our inspection. Recently, he has passed onto us a postcard portrait of Thomas Ashe and a mourning card for the death of Michael Collins, both of which belonged to his father.

We have been very lucky to receive a wide variety of objects over the last few months and would like to say thank you to all those who have given us their support and helped improve our collections. We hope local people's generosity will continue to grow.

Research Project

Gemma, our Museum Assistant, has made several visits to Kilkeel over the last few weeks as the first step in a process of improving the Museum's maritime collection and resources. Bill Quinn, a retired boat builder, has generously allowed us to gather local stories, poems and photographs from his own life and career. Gemma has also contacted Gregory Nicholson, who was responsible for decommissioning fishing boats over the last few years and has kindly offered his help in sourcing artefacts. But we are currently concentrating on compiling a complete record of the decommissioned boats, including their names, numbers and history and the perspectives and stories of the families associated with them. We have gained the invaluable assistance of Lenny McLaughlin, who is well known for his amazing photographic record of the local fishing industry over the last century. He has photographed all the decommissioned boats in various stages of being broken up, which is probably the most comprehensive record of the event.

Gemma will be publishing this research in the forthcoming edition of the Down Journal, published by Down County Museum, who are also planning an exhibition on the subject later this year. Down County Museum hold a collection of Bill Quinn's photographic negatives, which is a fascinating record of boat building over the last fifty years. The two

Museums will be working together to ensure this valuable material from along the County Down coast is collected and preserved and made available to the public.

Call for Volunteers

We currently have two volunteers, Sheila Walsh and Nuala Mallon, who continue to provide us with very valuable assistance in collection care and research. But, like most museums, we could always do with more help! If you are interested we will be able to discuss with you a project that suits your own skills and needs. We can also provide full training and support if you have never worked in a museum before, or are interested in a museum career and want to increase your skills. If you would be able to lend a small amount of time working at the Museum, please contact Gemma on (028) 3026 6232 or gemma.reid@newryandmourne.gov.uk.