

Newry and Mourne Museum Newsletter

Autumn/Winter 2004

Storytelling Festival

For two weeks in October, the latest event organized by the successful **Newry and Dundalk Cross-Border Education Programme**, will bring to life an art form enjoyed long before the advent of modern media. Stories have always been used to entertain and educate while storytellers were once valuable members of the community, their skills enabling knowledge and values to be shared from one generation to the next. From **18th to 22nd October** a celebration of this tradition will be hosted by the **Sean Hollywood Arts Centre & Museum**, in **Newry** and from **25th until 29th October** by the **County Museum, Dundalk**. Internationally famous storytellers, from all over Ireland will regale you with legends and original stories, verse, music and riddles. There will be myths and folk tales from the Ulster cycle, and stories from throughout the British Isles and beyond appealing to both young and old.

If you require further information on the schedule and cost of events or wish to book a place, please contact Declan Carroll, on 028 3031 3182 or 00353 42 932 7056 or email museum@newryandmourne.gov.uk

County Down at War

In November, Newry and Mourne Museum will host a travelling exhibition on the experiences of soldiers of County Down in the First World War, previously hosted by the Somme Heritage Centre, Down County Museum and the Royal Ulster Rifles Museum in Belfast.

Men from every section of society and community in Ireland volunteered and fought in the Great War and many recruits came from the Kilkeel, Newry, Banbridge and Rathfriland areas. They volunteered for service in the 13th (County Down) Battalion of the Royal Irish Rifles which formed part of the 108th Brigade of the 36th (Ulster) Division and also for service in Battalions of the 16th and 18th (Irish) Divisions. Men from these divisions fought in a number of famous campaigns, including that of the Somme in 1916. This temporary exhibition will focus on the experiences of men of County Down during the Great War with a particular emphasis on men from the Newry and Mourne area. It is particularly appropriate in this 90th anniversary year of the beginning of the First World War that Newry and Mourne Museum will host the exhibition in the month of Remembrance.

The exhibition will run from 1st-27th November.

(Images from a booklet in the Museum's Collections containing a Memorial Sermon for Captain Reverend Alex Stuart who was killed in action in October, 1917)

New Historical Source for Bagenal's Castle

Staff at the Museum were thrilled to recently discover a previously unknown description of Bagenal's Castle dating from 1846 which further proves the existence and survival of the Castle. In its description of the old castles of Newry, The

Picturesque Handbook to Rosstrevor, Warrenpoint, Carlingford Bay and the Watering Places in the Vicinity, (published in Newry, 1846) states:

“ There was another castle, which still stands in Castle Street, which was probably the Abbot’s house as it has no appearance of a martial pile save its walls, which are of immense thickness. This was the residence of the Bagnals , and is still inhabited, and in the adjoining garden still flourish some yew trees. . . .

Within the last ninety years a massive stair outside the building had to be blown up with gunpowder, as the men employed to take it down could make no impression on the work from its extreme hardness and solidity.”

Further descriptions refer to the “*ruins of the old Abbey*” which “*were removed about fifty-seven years ago*” (c. 1789). Fragments of stones “*with heads and other figures*” survived the Abbey and “*are to be seen in some of the adjacent buildings*”.

(Mediaeval carving similar to those described above, placed within the walls of Bagenal’s Castle when occupied by McCann’s Victoria Bakery.)

This historical source adds significant credence to the body of knowledge already acquired by the Museum concerning Bagenal’s Castle and the site of the Cistercian Abbey upon which it was built.

New to our Collections

The acquisition of objects to the Museum's ever-growing Collections has continued steadily over the last few months. We have been delighted to receive objects from several donors, including Peter O'Hanlon, Pdraig O'Donnell, Oliver McGauley, Seamus King, Aisling Rennick, Anne Campbell and Lennie Taylor.

These donations include: a number of old bottles from the Newry Mineral Water Company; an edition of The Belfast Telegraph from V.E. Day, May 1945; a number of early 20th century postcards from the Newry and Mourne area, an early optician's instrument for checking eye-sight and an ornate candle-snuffer. Other acquisitions include a silver trophy cup from the Newry Hunt dated, 1948; an Edwardian shaving mirror; trophies from the World Angling Championships held in Newry Canal in 1982; a workmen's account book from Newry Urban and District Council dating from 1912-13; a shoemaker's hammer; a preserve pan; a bugle and other artefacts from the British Legion and items relating to the Great Northern Railway. Slightly more unusual donations include a dictaphone and large "mobile" 'phone used approximately 20 years ago and a book on Home Management published in the 1930s amongst whose pages lies beauty advice for young ladies and guidelines on etiquette and regulating servants.

A big **THANK YOU** to all our kind donors! We gratefully appreciate your support.

The Museum has also acquired two works by local artist Russell Reid and a further work has been commissioned. These pieces contain themes relating to conflict and will be of enormous benefit for the Museum's education programme.

If you have an object which you would like to donate or would like a copy of our guide "Donating Objects to the Museum", please drop in to the Museum or contact us on (028) 3031 3182 or at museum@newryandmourne.gov.uk

Letter of life during the Great Famine

The Museum is delighted to have acquired a fascinating letter dating from 1847. The 4-page document written by one Samuel Reid to Lady Garvagh details some of the effects of the Great Famine on the Newry and Mourne area.

Several weeks of laborious deciphering of the Victorian handwriting and research of the Museum's archive has yielded some interesting information. Lord and Lady Garvagh (the Canning family) owned substantial land in the Newry and Mourne area and their son, Alfred Stratford George Canning, lived in Rostrevor until his death in 1916. It is probable that Samuel Reid was the family's land agent. A solicitor named Samuel Reid is known to have lived in Canal Street in the 1840s and to have owned substantial property in the vicinity. A memorial to "Samuel Reid: solicitor" who died in 1863 exists in St Mary's Church of Ireland. The name also appears on a number of leases from the Kilmorey estate currently on loan to the Museum from the Anley family.

In the letter, Lady Garvagh is informed of the soup kitchens and relief committees established in Warrenpoint, Kilkeel and Newry to assist those most affected by the onset of famine following the failure of the potato crop. Samuel Reid assures her that he has donated substantial funds on her behalf to these institutions and that he is working “*in conjunction with the other Landlords*” to provide employment and with “*the Farmers in this district*” to give out meal and supply other vegetables “*as little potatoes will be planted*”. He presents a harrowing picture of the death of “*a Poor Cottier and his wife*” from “*want & fever*” And states that the Poor House in Newry “*is more than full*” and has “*to reject about 50 each week*”. He criticises the government claiming it “*has much to answer for by allowing prices to be so raised*” but is full of praise for another local landlord, Lord Downshire, who he describes as “*a truly Noble Fellow . . . setting an example to the Landlords of Ireland he never has a days rest.*”

This immensely significant letter yielding a crucial insight into life during the “hungry ‘forties” will soon be placed on display in the Museum along with associated documents and artefacts.

Bagenal's Castle – The Story So Far

Restoration work at the castle is due to commence in the next few months, following further excavation at the site. In the meantime, with relocation to Bagenal's Castle looming closer on the horizon, attention has been focused on the exhibitions planned for the new Museum. In addition to tracing the development of Newry, exhibitions reflecting the whole Newry and Mourne area are also planned. We are particularly interested in the following topics:

- *objects related to hearth & home and school life*
- *local customs & folklore*
- *farming techniques and traditions*
- *the history of the Irish language in the local area*

We would eagerly welcome donations or loans of material which reflect the culture, society and economy of South Down and South Armagh.

ARCHAEOLOGY DAY – June 2004

Public tours of Bagenal's Castle, conducted by archaeologists and draughts people from the Environment & Heritage Service and Museum Staff, proved to be popular and well attended. The Museum also ran a very successful day of workshops for schools, with pupils creating their own Bronze-age style coil pot and digging for buried artefacts. In the run up to the opening of Bagenal's Castle, we will be developing other such workshops and activities on archaeological and 16th century themes.

(Amateur archaeologists at work during the Museum's "Bin Detectives" workshop)

BORDER TOWN PROJECT UPDATE

The past few months of research have witnessed some exciting results for our forthcoming Border Town Exhibition for Bagenal's Castle. Project Research Officer, Dr. Ken Abraham has discovered a plethora of relevant documents at the Public Record Office in Belfast. These include material from Connor's Chemists relating to the boycotting of local businesses and the dissolution of Newry Urban District Council c.1921. Documents from Collins & Collins, a legal firm established in Newry in 1910, have been found to include representations made by local residents to the Boundary Commission in the 1920s, providing a revealing insight into the attitudes to Partition in the local area and the perceived impact on the local economy.

(Extract from a hand-drawn map of the electoral boundaries of County Down, c.1920)

A number of local people have kindly permitted us to record their memories and recollections of day-to-day life in the Newry area. Some of these recordings relate to the Second World War and have been added by Museum staff to the BBC's "People's War" website. These can be read by logging onto www.bbc.uk/ww2. If you have any wartime

memories which you would like us to add to this website for you, please do not hesitate to contact the Museum.

A wide range of artefacts has also been donated for use in the Exhibition. These include 20th century domestic objects, photographs and archival material. The local branches of the Royal British Legion have been particularly generous and the Newry branch has allowed us to copy a number of rare photographs relating to the history of the Legion in Newry. The photograph reproduced below is one example. Taken in front of Newry Town Hall on 22nd February 1929, it shows the delegates at the Royal British Legion Area Conference. Many of the individuals photographed were doubtless well known and influential in the area and we hope that our readers will be able to identify at least some of them.

BORDER TOWN EXHIBITION PREVIEW

As a 'taster', a small exhibition will open in January 2005 at the present Museum in the Arts Centre presenting a preview of the Border Town Exhibition planned for Bagenal's Castle. It will display the principal themes of the Exhibition and allow the public to view some of the artefacts we have received so far. We hope this will engender further interest in the Border Town Project and encourage increased involvement by local people.

REMINDER! CALLING ALL SPORTS FANS:

Research continues for the temporary exhibition on Sport in the Newry and Mourne area which will be displayed in Bagenal's Castle. Donations and loans of sporting memorabilia along with sporting stories/memories are warmly encouraged!

We are keen to hear from YOU! If you would like to make your own contribution to the Border Town or Sport exhibition by donating an artefact or allowing us to record your memories, please contact the Museum on (028) 3031 3182.

Conservation News : Facelift for Town Commissioner

When you get to a certain age sometimes a little ‘nip and tuck’ is required. For a prominent nineteenth century Newry citizen, James McGeorge, this will become a reality thanks to a grant from the Northern Ireland Museums Council. These conservation funds will enable the cleaning of a bust of this eminent gentleman from Newry’s past along with restoration of areas where plaster has been lost from the base.

James McGeorge made an important contribution to Newry’s commercial development. He was involved in the Newry Gas Company, the local railways, improved the town’s sanitary arrangements, fostered educational provision, built a scutch mill on his farm in Carnmeen and had a haberdashery shop in North Street, Newry. He is probably best known for his role in local government, agitating for the establishment of elected Town Commissioners and serving as one himself from 1838 to 1870. The Museum is grateful to the NIMC for this opportunity to restore the bust of such an esteemed man of old Newry.

Collecting Hidden History

Newry and Mourne Museum collects and preserves not just objects but also the less tangible aspects of history, culture and society, often hidden in people’s memories and experiences. With this end in mind, many Oral History interviews and recordings for the Museum’s archive have taken place in recent months.

Cross Border Education Officer, Declan Carroll is continuing with his visits to schools and community groups for the education programme’s Oral History Project which involves pupils questioning pensioners about their memories of life in days gone by. **Museum Curator Noreen Cunningham** has interviewed and recorded a range of people with **Archive Officer, Dr. Ken Abraham** for the new Museum’s Border Town Project on subjects ranging from memories of American GIs in Warrenpoint to trade unionism in Newry and the Ancient Order of Hibernians. **Museum Assistant, Emma Wilson** has made several trips to Kilkeel where retired boat builder Bill Quinn has shared his wealth of knowledge of shipping and fishing in the area, while Alastair McBride permitted Emma to film him repairing his fishing nets by hand, using traditional techniques. Further interviews in Kilkeel and beyond are planned in the following months with subjects including the Armagh rail disaster and the experience of Bessbrook men and women in the Second World War.

If you would like to share your memories of the past, of traditional techniques relating to fishing and agriculture or local folklore, please contact the Museum on (028) 3031 3182 or email museum@newryandmourne.gov.uk

Dates For Your Diary

18th-29th October/ STORYTELLING FESTIVAL

Storytellers from all over Ireland will celebrate the ancient art of “spinning a yarn” in venues in both Newry and Dundalk . Morning, afternoon and evening sessions are available. Pre-booking is essential.

8th November/ GENEALOGY EVENING AND BOOK LAUNCH

7.30-9.30pm – Dr. Ian Maxwell, Dr. William Roulston and Dr. Brian Trainor from the Ulster Historical Foundation will give a talk on family history research specific to the Newry and Mourne area and launch Dr. Maxwell’s new book *Researching Down Ancestors*. Numbers are restricted and pre booking is advisable.

EXHIBITIONS

1st-27th November/ COUNTY DOWN AT WAR

This travelling exhibition focuses on the experiences of soldiers of County Down during the First World War, with particular emphasis on men from the Newry and Mourne area.

January 2005/ BORDER TOWN PREVIEW

A foretaste of the Border Town Exhibition planned for Bagenal’s Castle, illustrating the themes of the exhibition and displaying some of the Exhibition artefacts gathered so far.

UPCOMING EVENTS & EXHIBITIONS FOR 2005

As part of the Cross Border Education Programme, a lecture and seminar series will take place for schools and the general public on the **Politics of Reconciliation and Conflict Resolution**. Themes will include the development of Sinn Fein since 1905.

September/ ALL CHANGE – THE SOCIAL IMPACT OF THE RAILWAYS

This travelling exhibition organised by the Northern Ireland Regional Curator’s Group will focus on the impact of the railways on life in Ulster. Each participating museum will focus on its own geographical area. However, **we need your help!** Donations or loan of objects and photographs relating to the railways in the Newry and Mourne area are warmly encouraged. We would also love to hear your own memories of the railway age.

For further information, to contribute to or make a booking for any of the above events, contact Noreen or Emma on (028) 3031 3182 or email museum@newryandmourne.gov.uk

