

NEWRY AND MOURNE NEWSLETTER Spring/Summer 2002

Registration The Museum has recently received full Registration from Re:source, the Council for Museums Archives and Libraries. The award is recognition of the long-term commitment of Museum staff to quality public service. The Registration Scheme sets out minimum standards for museums in collection care, public services and museum management. Newry and Mourne Museum has achieved improved standards in these areas, making it a suitable home for our common heritage and worthy to receive support from public sources.

We are delighted to receive the award, which comes at an exciting time in the Museums' development when we are preparing for relocation to Bagenal's Castle. Registration will greatly boost our efforts to improve and expand our collections, resources and facilities and provide a quality and dynamic resource for the whole community.

Noreen Cunningham, Curator and Mrs. Marie O'Donnell, Museum Committee Chair formally accepted the Registration certificate from Chris Bailey, Northern Ireland Museum Council Director at an evening event on 13th February. Mr Bailey praised the efforts of Museum staff and the commitment of Newry and Mourne District Council to a service which is not statutory, but which he regards as essential for every community. Also attending the presentation were Gerard McGivern, Director of District Development. Mr McGivern drew attention to the central role that Bagenal's Castle will play in the Council's community and tourism plans. Mr. William McAlpine presented a slide show on the changing face of the area around Bagenal's Castle, which was very well received.

New Appointment

The Museum is delighted to announce the appointment of Gemma Reid to the post of Museum Assistant in December last year. Gemma has just completed an MA in Museum Studies at the Textile Conservation Centre, University of Southampton, Winchester. She also has work experience with The National Trust, The Irish Linen Centre/Lisburn Museum and The Ulster Folk and Transport Museum. The training and practical experience she has received in collection care, curatorship, research, exhibition design and education will be an asset to the Museum, particularly as we prepare for the move to Bagenal's Castle.

From Object to Artefact

A new exhibition, *From Object to Artefact*, gives a glimpse behind the scenes at Newry and Mourne Museum. The display explains the processes involved in accepting an object into the Museum collection to be preserved for the learning and enjoyment of future generations. The objects displayed have all been donated by local people during the last

year. They include every-day household objects, political material and some rather odd medical equipment! The Museum is actively looking for new material as they prepare for the move to bigger and better premises at Bagenal's Castle in 2004. The move represents a fantastic opportunity and the exhibition invites visitors to become part of it by donating their own objects and helping make history in Newry and Mourne.

The exhibition is open now from 10.30 – 1.00 and 2.00 – 4.30 Monday to Friday. Admission is free. For further information contact Gemma Reid on 028 3026 6232.
Volunteers

As well as our full time staff, the Museum is lucky to have the assistance of two volunteers. Sheila Walsh has been working with us for over a year, identifying and recording the ? collection of slides. The collection is a fascinating record of changes in the local landscape around Newry and Mourne through ? own photographs as well as copies of old postcards and other images.

Nuala Mallon has recently started working with us after volunteering with Dundalk County Museum as part of the conservation team there. She will be assisting Gemma, the Museum Assistant, to improve documentation of the collections as well as carrying out some artefact conservation as part of our continuing efforts to improve standards of preservation and care.

Recent Donations

Our current exhibition, *From Object to Artefact*, has already been successful in attracting new donors. The Museum is grateful to have received a wide variety of material over the past year which have been valuable additions to our existing collections. We are currently seeking to acquire twentieth century political material in particular while many objects will help develop our handling collection.

One of our most valuable donors and supporters is Fergus Hanna Bell and his wife Angelique. Mr. Bell worked for Fisher and Fisher Solicitors in Newry for many years. They have very generously donated a wide variety of material belonging to Mr. Bell's uncle the architect Major G. W. Reside and his wife Margaret Alexis Fisher. Major Reside's collection includes diverse original documents, plans and maps relating to housing, shipping, railways and other development in Newry and the surrounding area. Also donated are several dresses belonging to Margaret Alexis, including an original tweed suit by Ib Jorgenson, a well-known Dublin designer who also had a shop in Bond St., London and traded through Liberty's. We are extremely grateful to have received such a valuable and comprehensive collection and will post information on the results of our research on the artefacts in forthcoming issues.

We are also grateful to Mr. Peter O'Hanlon, an avid local collector who has kindly donated a wealth of material over the past few months. The objects range from domestic and medical equipment to decorative buttons and medals to a fully equipped World War II soldier's ammunition box. Some of these are currently on display in *Object to Artefact*

and many will be valuable additions to our handling collections.
Bagenal's Castle Project

The rediscovery of the castle has been described as one of the most interesting archaeological finds in Ireland in recent years. Written sources such as *An Archaeological Survey of County Down (1966)* described the castle as demolished, but in 1996 it was discovered enveloped within the McCann's Bakery premises on Abbey Way, Newry. The castle has been altered for a variety of uses, and while some original detail has been lost, there are substantial surviving remains. This part of the town has a long and illustrious history and was the site of Newry's Cistercian Abbey. Murtagh Mac Loughlin who called himself "King of all Ireland" famously granted the Abbey extensive lands in a Royal Charter of 1157. In 1550, the lands and rights of Newry's Abbey were granted to Nicholas Bagenal. When Nicholas first came to Newry he is described as living in the "Abbots House", but soon after he built his own castle, described in a 1570 map as "The New Castell". It is the surviving parts of this castle which will form one of Newry and Mourne District Council's most ambitious projects to date.

The Council intends to restore the castle and adjoining 19th century warehouse as a new location for Newry and Mourne Museum, and the Tourist Office. An application for grant aid was submitted in 2001 to the Heritage Lottery Fund, and has received a Stage 1 approval. This is conditional on the final proposals being informed by further archaeological investigations and the preparation of a Conservation Plan. A further key aspect is an education programme to be delivered by the museum staff. Over the next 2 years a number of exciting events are planned to inform the public of the project. A travelling exhibition will tour local community centers in Newry and Mourne and there will be a series of lectures in the autumn of 2002. More immediate, there are plans to launch a Bagenal's Castle website and to suspend an information banner from the McCann's building.