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## ROSCREA'S HERITAGE CENTRE 1980 - 1987

By George Cunningham

Roscrea Heritage Centre incorporates both Damer House and annex within the courtyard of 13th-century Roscrea Castle, situated in the heart of the town on the main Dublin / Limerick / Shannon / Killarney route — the *Sli Dhala* of early medieval times. The Centre is run by Roscrea Heritage Society (RHS) by a voluntary Board of Directors elected annually, and the property and collections are vested in a Board of Trustees. Membership of the Society is open to all.

Its main objectives are the promotion of heritage and heritage education, particularly in the midlands. The Centre is a member of HITHA (Historic Irish Houses and Gardens Association) and as an important visitor centre attracts up to 8,000 visitors between Easter and November each year. Guided tours of the complex with slide-shows and computer-assisted attractions are available, and also a craft shop and coffee shop.

Since 1980, in liaison with AnCO and now with FAS, over 600 young people have been on training programmes at the Centre. A restoration programme on the early 18th-century Damer House and its peripheral buildings and gardens is in progress.

The heritage movement in Roscrea developed slowly throughout the 1970s. Significant events in the uphill struggle were the formation of the Old Roscrea Society in 1969, the long (and at times vicious) campaign to save Damer House, the revival of the pilgrimage to Monaincha, the publication of *Roscrea People* in the 1970s and a stream of other local publications which helped to create an awareness of an historic town.

Despite its wealth of antiquity, Roscrea's ancient past was far down the concern-list of both population and authorities. Nothing epitomised this shameful neglect more than the appalling condition of the environs and courtyard of the 13th-century castle, used since 1922 as a tar-barrel depot and a store and dump by the county council.

The campaign to save Damer House began in 1970, but during the difficult years of restoration from 1975 on little local involvement was evident. A small group maintained a local presence when the Irish Georgian Society (IGS) was given the building on a 99-year lease from Tipperary County Council and commenced restoration in 1975, European Architectural Heritage Year.

By 1978 the main building had been waterproofed, and some first-floor rooms were officially opened by Mr. Charles Haughey for travelling exhibitions. We also opened the castle for visitors throughout those summers, when Shannonside Tourism provided much help. We received a commitment from the Office of Public Works (OPW) to begin major work on the castle; another milestone was the County Council's decision to end its activities in the precincts.

In 1979, to celebrate his firm's centenary local auctioneer and business man Liam T. Maher sponsored an exhibition in his salesrooms organised by this writer. Almost everyone in Roscrea and district came; the ten days attracted over 4,000 visitors.

Encouraged by this response the idea of a permanent home for such mementos became a plan. The idea was to have a local input into the continuing restoration of Damer House and to provide a centre amalgamating a museum, archival building and reference library for local study — a heritage centre, the first use of this term in Ireland.





*Roscrea Heritage Centre (centre) and Roscrea Castle – an aerial view.*

The Irish Georgian Society passed on its lease of the ruinous Damer annex, and agreed to provide £1 for £1 in the funding of its restoration. Because of the sensitive nature of such work, the IGS also offered to pay the fees of their architect. Unfortunately, as soon as the lease was signed those promises never materialised.

From a public meeting in April 1980, where I articulated my proposals, a committee was formed which, under my chairmanship, guided the centre through its first seven years. A brochure outlining the aims and proposed development of the Heritage Centre was circulated. The response was encouraging.

Our short and long term objectives were —

(a) the restoration of the kitchen area in Damer House and the mounting of heritage exhibitions there; (b) the restoration and equipping of Damer Annex as a Heritage Centre, and (c) the formation of a trust to co-ordinate the overall development of Roscrea Castle Complex. By 1987 all (and many more) had been achieved.

In 1980, a joint approach to the Irish Heritage Trust with Desmond Guinness of the IGS produced a grant of £10,000 by the Trust and an interest-free loan of £5,000 for five years. Ted Stapleton spearheaded the physical side of the restoration which commenced in October 1980 under AnCO. In the following years Roscrea pushed the frontiers of AnCO's heritage involvement at a national level.

The Centre, then housed in the annex, was opened in 1983 by the director-general of AnCO, in the presence of church, state, regional and local dignitaries. Physical work completed by then

included Damer annex rebuilt and refurbished; lean-tos at rear rebuilt; gardens cleared of decades of debris and rubble and seeded; annex courtyard and south yard cobbled; removal of 19th- and 20th-century additions from curtain walls, and gable tower cleaned out.

Major national and international awards were won. Carmel Cunningham, professional photographers, Theresa and Brian Redmond, and Coll and Brendan Carmody gave unstintingly of their talents and time. Following the retirement of this writer as chairman in 1987, Brian Redmond became acting chairman.

In late 1983 the IGS decided to relinquish its lease on the main house in favour of the Heritage Society. No one can deny the part played by the IGS in saving Damer House. The magnificent staircase was restored by them at a cost of £8,000. However, all its lovingly restored features (the work of Killaloe man Jim Foley, in the early 1980s) were in imminent danger of collapse because of dry rot throughout the building.

New lintels were crumbling. The electrics and plumbing were antiquated. The basement had a perennial floor of two feet of water. Other basic structural work needed to be tackled immediately. Again promises to help from the IGS were not kept.

In August 1984, another AnCO project got under way, principally on the house itself, to eliminate dry and wet rot and deal with the flooding. The costs were crippling but, thanks mainly to Bord Failte, we saved the house. By June 1986 work had to stop to allow the dry rot treatment to permeate the structure.

During the summer of 1982 we developed the Centre as AnCO agreed to the recruitment of an archivist and a computer programmer. Michael Byrne the Offaly historian became our first archivist. He catalogued many of the collections and directed the operation of indexing the parish registers in its initial stages. This was the first time in Ireland that the vast store of unemployed talent was used on such a scheme; soon the idea spread nationwide.

Among the parish registers (baptism, marriage and death for all denominations) indexed at the Centre are Roscrea, Shinrone, Kilcolman, Bournea, Kyle and Knock. Also available at the centre are the tithe lists, Griffiths valuations, directory entries, local entries in the Civil Survey of 1654 and in the Patent Rolls of James 1, and a census of 1659. The minute and letter books of Roscrea Board of Guardians (1839-1860) have been calendared, as have the minute books of Roscrea Rural District Council. (1899-1923); indexed also are the issues of *Roscrea People*. (1974-1978) and *Midland Tribune* (1913-1914).

Trainees from the Centre have researched Roscrea and district material in the Public Record and State Paper Offices in Dublin. Sources copied included agrarian outrages, rebellion, education and Roscrea Bacon Factory.

From 1983 to 1987 six baronies, representing in size an average Irish county, were surveyed for archaeological sites. This survey commenced under the direction of archaeologist Ms Geraldine Stout in the barony of Ikerrin. In concept and execution it followed the pattern of the national survey, all O.S. maps and relevant sources being searched for sites. *Ikerrin*, the volume of the survey, was published in 1984 and launched by the President of Ireland.

The south Offaly baronies of Clonlisk (1984) and Ballybritt (1985) were next surveyed; preliminary reports are expected shortly. In 1985 Ms. Stout became co-director of the Sites and Monuments survey at the OPW. Anthony Candon of the Cork Survey became the new archaeological director at the Centre.

After completing Ballybritt it was a logical step to move east of Roscrea into Ossory in Laois where the three baronies of Upper Ossory (Clandonagh, Clarmallagh and Upperwoods) were surveyed in 1986-87. Anyone interested in individual plans, sections or details of any sites should contact the archaeologist in question. Anthony Candon has now left Roscrea and is



directing the new Heritage Park at Omagh.

The value of these surveys cannot be exaggerated. For the young people involved they give an intimate feel for their own heath. For the local communities they brought welcomed and timely attention to long neglected open-air museums. For the nation we added our large piece to the archaeological jig-saw.

Under the auspices of the Centre two excavations have been carried out, both with the co-operation and assistance of the OPW. In 1982 an exploratory excavation under the direction of Ms Stout was completed in the south-west corner of the castle courtyard, and at the south-west tower. The original moat was revealed; but finds were few. A full report appears in *Eile II*.

During the archaeological survey of Clandonagh in Laois in 1985-86 the Centre facilitated the conservation work at Aghaboe Abbey by excavating at the Dominican Priory there under the direction of Anthony Candon. Only the wall foundation was found to be medieval; the artefacts and the burials discovered were all likely to be 18th- or 19th-century.

On his return to Ireland from Malawi, Dr. John Feehan joined the Heritage Centre's team in September, 1984, to direct an ambitious new project — an Environmental Survey of Tipperary North and its peripheral areas. In the following year with his young surveyors he walked and recorded every field in the Barony of Ikerrin, producing detailed maps and reports of land-use and human and natural landmarks in each townland.

In 1986 the scheme was extended to the parishes of Lorrha and Terryglass, and then (under the direction of Zena Hctor) to Borrisokane and Cloughjordan. Inroads have also been made into Eliogarty, the Silvermines and the south Offaly area of Ely O'Carroll in ancient Munster. This survey work will form the basis for a major publication, and the maps, reports and records will be housed in the Heritage Centre.

This survey also formed part of a satellite project carried out during 1985-86 — remote sensing for land-use, environment and soil moisture monitoring in the North Tipperary and Slieve Bloom area. Our surveyors provided data for its integration with remote sensing as co-ordinated by the National Board for Science and Technology, and involving scientists in Trinity and University Colleges, Dublin.

The survey teams initiated many school projects and exhibitions at primary and post-primary level. Dr. Feehan also brought together a team of leading botanists to produce a census of the flora of the midlands. He is now working from T.C.D.

In early 1984 the Centre engaged on a folklore survey of Ikerrin. Its aim was to collect the oral traditions of the area, the customs and beliefs of every facet of life. Topics included the 'banshee', bogs, music, dance and folk medicine. A survey of vernacular shopfronts was undertaken leading to a book entitled *The Shopfronts of Roscrea*.

Bound typescripts of the folklore collected were presented to Professor Bo Amquist of the Department of Folklore, U.C.D. A regular column entitled 'Recording Roscrea's Past' in the *Tipperary Star* featured much of the material. Local collector, Kathleen Moloughney, who acted as consultant to the survey team published in 1987 her own *Roscrea Me Darlin'* a social history.

Permanent and temporary exhibitions are a feature of the Centre; they fall into four main categories.

(A) Showpieces of Midland Heritage.

Two outstanding exhibitions on midland themes have been mounted. The first of these, *The Midlands in Prehistory*, in 1983, won the Irish Museum Trust's national award, open to



museums in all 32 counties. This was followed by the current one, The Monastic Midlands, telling the story of the glories of these parts in manuscript, stone and metal.

(B) Local history exhibits.

Two of the most popular displays have dealt with the immediate locality. A sporting exhibition mounted by some 21 clubs and societies of the town attracted over 1,000 visitors, many of whom came to the centre for the first time. As we know, sport is almost a way of life in Ireland, and its combination with heritage proved extremely successful. 'People, Places and Pieces', a *pot pourri* of the recent past in the locality, allowing people to browse and touch was also a winner.

(C) Exhibitions of modern local and regional work, particularly art and childrens' projects on aspects of heritage. In these instances the Centre acts as a virtual gallery.

(D) Travelling exhibitions from the Arts Council, the National Library, and National Museum and similar bodies.

All aspects of life in the locality are depicted, and worksheets and relevant documentation prepared for schools. The National Museum co-operates in mounting exhibits and advising on artefacts. Excellent relationships are enjoyed with all state and semi-state institutions of culture, education and technology.

As the Centre strives to be a focal point for local and regional heritage study, its holdings continue to grow. Some major archival collections are now housed there and are available for research purposes. Regarding artefacts, it is the Centre's policy to register any of note with the National Museum.

The very existence of the Centre creates an awareness of the need to save such material. Short notices of three major holdings may illustrate their extent.

One of the most interesting collections, part of which is on display, is based on the former homestead of the Kelly family, farmers at Ardcroney, near Cloughjordan. After the death in 1981 of the last of the family, Hubert, the contents of the homestead were given on loan to RHS by Mount St. Joseph's Abbey, the inheritors of the property. Unlike most families the Kellys hoarded personal, household and farmyard items, providing an insight into rural life in Tipperary for the first half of this century.

What makes this collection unique are the journals, written at first by the father, Thomas (died in 1950) and then by his son Hubert: not personal diaries but 15 volumes of everyday events on the farm, spanning the years 1900 to 1974, thus presenting us with a succinct but invaluable record of daily life on the middle sized Tipperary holding. Dick Taatgen, a Netherlands anthropologist spent a year researching the Kelly family's journals.

Quite different are the manuscripts acquired on conditions by this writer for the Centre in 1983 and known as the O'Brien Collection. This comprises over 4,000 manuscripts, mainly 18th- and 19th-centuries, but dating from the 16th. Most of these were saved by Mr. O'Brien from a bonfire in Abbeyleix in the late 1940s, and pertain largely to the De Vesci estate holdings in many parts of Ireland.

The third major collection at the Centre is on long-term loan from this writer, and deals mainly with Roscrea and to a certain extent the midlands and Thurles; leases, rentals (including the Sale of Roscrea in the 1850s), posters, photographs, the archive of *Roscrea Poepie*, memorabilia of Roscrea Operatic Society, Roscrea Bacon Factory, newspapers, newspaper cuttings, copies of historical documents, a major collection of billheads, invoices and such-like farrago dealing with social conditions in the area over the last 200 years.

Roscrea Heritage Centre won a European Museum of the Year Award for 1983 — the same



award that Fota Island was later to win. This was a remarkable achievement by any standards; in the context of the quality and standing of the other entrants it was almost miraculous. Kenneth Hudson, the international museum consultant, remarked in the awards brochure: "The Heritage Centre blend of original museum, local history and archive base, training establishment and meeting place for a wide range of societies and clubs, produces an atmosphere of activity and experiment which is particularly well suited to Ireland".

Funding for the restoration work and research activities at the complex has come from a variety of sources. Some fifteen AnCO projects with over 600 trainees have supplied all the manpower, at a cost of over £750,000. This motley assortment of trainees has included administrators, anthropologists, archaeologists, archivists, artists, botanists, carpenters, clerks, computer programmers, curators, draughtsmen, geologists, historians, masons, painters, plumbers, secretaries, surveyors, teachers and zoologists. Without AnCO the Centre would not be there.

Bord Failte/Shannonside Tourism has contributed just under £50,000 towards the development of tourist facilities and services. In 1980 the Heritage Trust granted £10,000 and an interest-free loan of £5,000. Other benefactors include Tipperary (N.R.) Co. Council, Roinn an Taoisigh, OPW, Irish Museums Trust, Lions Club of Roscrea and Roscrea Credit Union.

Our own fund-raising activities were particularly vital in the early years. Now membership, sponsorship, admissions, craft and book sales and the coffee shop are beginning to create a sound commercial base. But, because of the size of the complex and the relatively small population of Roscrea and its hinterland, it is improbable that the Centre will ever be self-financing.

In June 1988, a new scheme, under the aegis of FAS, commenced with a grant of £30,000 for materials from the National Lottery. Perhaps this will prove to be the final stage of the initial restoration. Negotiations are in progress with a major sponsor to landscape the gardens and courtyard, and to re-erect the obsolete fire station building as a small hall or theatre.

## PUBLICATIONS

*Eile*, the journal of the Roscrea Heritage Society. Vol I, (1982); Vol. II 1983-84; (ed.) George Cunningham and John Feehan.

*Archaeological Survey of Ikerrin*, Geraldine Stout (1984)

*Shopfronts of Roscrea*, (ed) James O'Connor and Maureen Doddy (1984).

*Rathnaveoge civil parish memoirs*, (ed) John Feehan (1985).

Summary reports on the Archaeological surveys of Clandonagh (1986) and Clarmallagh (1987); (ed) Anthony Candon.

*The Folklore of Ikerrin*, (ed. Geraldine Stout 1984; not for sale). Bound typescript of this survey are available for study at the Centre and in the Folklore Department of U.C.D..



## Tipperary S.R. County Museum

By Patrick Holland, M.A.

Tipperary S.R. County Museum is one of three full-time professional county museum services maintained by county councils in this country. The function of the Museum is to collect, record, preserve and display objects which show the natural history, archaeology and local history of the South Riding.

The Museum was established in 1974 when the Council assumed responsibility for the Clonmel Museum, which had been in existence since 1948. The Museum was refurbished and re-opened, and an advisory committee was set up. Several exhibitions were hosted and many items of interest acquired.

In 1983 a re-examination of the Museum took place. A report recommending the appointment of a full-time curator was adopted by the Council and the other local authorities in the county.

Since then the Museum has been under a continuous process of development. A completely new display system was designed and built; and a display, showing the history of the country from prehistoric to modern times, has been set up. A new store-room was created and a complete overhaul of the Museum's administration took place, with all information regarding acquisitions being systematically recorded in a register.

The public response to these developments has been very positive and encouraging. Over 14,000 persons, both local people and tourists, have visited the Museum since it re-opened. Our work received welcome acknowledgement when we were specially commended in the Irish Museums Trust *Museum of the Year* award in 1985.

An active collection policy is being followed; as a result, the number of specimens in the collection has trebled since 1983. We acquire an average of 500 or so items a year, nearly all of which are donations. A growing number of interested persons around the county are helping us with the acquisition of objects, and we are always interested in hearing of objects which might become available to us.

The types of objects donated range from prehistoric artifacts, through many types of documents associated with major estates or historical events, to collections of posters produced by local printers in recent years. Both the quality and quantity of objects being donated to the Museum make it clear that in a comparatively few years we shall have a very fine and interesting display.

Future plans for the County Museum include the development of the ground floor of the building to create an exhibition gallery, as well as additional storage and office space. The exhibition gallery will allow us to host a number of visiting exhibitions.

We will thus act as a cultural centre in the county, as well as providing space to hang works of art from our own collection. This includes pieces by Charles Lamb, John B. Yeats, and Grace Henry, as well as more recent artists such as Robert Ballagh and Patrick Pye.

The work of the County Museum Service involves not only collecting and displaying objects, but also advising and encouraging all those in the county who have an interest in the past. The Museum has strong links with the local historical societies and local historians.

It provides advice, when requested, to local museums in the county. Archaeological advice is also provided, for those doing field-work and for those supervising graveyard "clean-up" schemes.





The County Museum, situated in Parnell Street, Clonmel is open from Tuesday to Saturday, 10.00 a.m. — 1.00 p.m., 2.00 p.m. — 5.00 p.m. all the year round. Admission is free and all are welcome — especially members of the Co. Tipperary Historical Society.

Cashel Museum, situated, in the City Hall, Cashel, is part of the County Museum Service. It displays, for the most part, items associated with the history of Cashel. It is open from 2 — 5 p.m. Monday to Friday.

*Patrick Holland, M.A., Curator*

### Tipperary's Heritage — 3

## Tipperary Heritage Unit

*By Anne P. Moloney*

At a special meeting, held on 11 October, 1985, of Tipperary Community Council it was decided to form a sub-committee to be known as Tipperary Heritage Unit. This sub-committee consisted of the late Archdeacon Francis Ryan, P.P., Rev. Thomas Breen, C.C. and Mr. Thomas Fitzgerald of Muintir na Tire.

The first project of Tipperary Heritage Unit, on which it is still engaged, is the extraction and indexing of the Catholic baptismal and marriage records of Tipperary town parish. This has since been extended to cover the adjoining parishes of Anacarty-Donohill, Bansha-Kilmoyler, Golden, Solohead-Oola, Drangan, Mullinahone and Cahir. When completed this will mean that an area of some 25 miles around Tipperary covering eight parishes will have these vital records computerised.

Tipperary Heritage Unit is based in Marian Hall, St. Michael Street, Tipperary, thanks to the co-operation of Muintir na Tire. The first project of the Unit is funded by FAS, the state training and employment authority, from its centre at the Industrial Estate, Waterford.

Normally a team comprising thirteen young people is employed daily working on the registers, extracting the entries and putting them on to record-cards, feeding the data into computers and doing the necessary checking — first of the cards, and later of the computerised print-outs. A member of the team is usually employed for a period of six months, and so far the rate of success in obtaining full-time employment for team-members as their term ends has been remarkably high.

The trainees are under the direction of a project co-ordinator. The first co-ordinator was Marina Cooney-Honan. The present co-ordinator is the author of this article, who had previously been co-ordinator for a similar project at Lough Gur, Co. Limerick. The idea of tackling church records is, of course, the brainchild of Archbishop Morris of Cashel and Emly, who has also been responsible for a third project in Thurles. It is his hope that eventually all the registers in the entire archdiocese will be put on computer, and so made available for bona fide research workers.

Enquiries relating to the Tipperary Heritage Unit may be addressed to  
The Project Co-ordinator — Mrs. Anne Moloney, Tipperary Heritage Unit, Marian Hall, St. Michael's Street, Tipperary  
(Telephone 062-52725), preferably between 10.00 a.m. and 12.30 p.m. and 2.00 p.m. to 4.00 p.m. on week-days.



## Nenagh District Heritage Centre

*By Donal A. Murphy*

Nenagh District Heritage Centre is located in two limestone buildings of historical and architectural interest. These are the octagonal Governor's House and the Gatehouse of an extensive goal erected 1840-2 to cater for law-breakers in the North Riding of Tipperary after the county was divided into two in 1838. Hitherto the goal in Clonmel had served the county at large.

In 1886 the crime rate had fallen sufficiently to warrant Nenagh goal's closure, and a year later most of the buildings were allocated to the local community of the Congregation of Mercy to use as a National School. The Governor's House was adapted by them as their convent and remained as such for twenty-five years until a new one was erected on the site behind it where the female gaol once stood. The House then became an Intermediate School and continued to be used as part of the Sister's Secondary School until 1981. The Gatehouse continued as such after the nuns moved in, and housed the convent caretaker and his family until the late 1950s.

### Concept

The concept of a museum, art, photographic and archival centre for the baronies of the two Ormonds, Owey and Arra, grew out of an awareness of the large number of people interested in various strands of heritage and willing to share the slice of it they possessed. This was evident in the public's response to the re-opening in 1972 of the 13th-century Norman (Butler) Castle in Nenagh, to magazines of history and verse and their launching in music and song, to adult education courses and local history exhibitions in several localities, to art and photographic exhibitions and audio-visual shows and to the Ormond Historical Society's series of lectures and field trips catering for the same baronies since 1977.

In 1975 seven pupils from St. Mary's Secondary School, Nenagh, won first prize in An Taisce's national competition 'New Look for Old Buildings'. Their project traced the history of the gaol, convent and school and forecast 'a new era as a local museum and craft centre'. The concept thus shared by local historians, the group of students and their teachers became feasible when the Governor's House classrooms were vacated in 1981 on the completion of a school extension. This was just a year after the historians' market research concluded with a well-patronised 'Old Nenagh Exhibition', which mixed highly local material with the National Library-Public Record Office-National Museum 1798 exhibition, to which local 1798 material was added.

Nenagh District Heritage Society was formed in April 1982. Its first Hon. Secretary was Geraldine McNulty (nee McCarthy), one of the 1975 seven students. She was succeeded by Bridie O'Brien (nee Carroll), one of the first class of boarders to join the school in 1929. The Sisters of Mercy allocated the Society the Governor's House on a ten-year lease. By July 1983 the advanced state of decay of the Gatehouse-cum-convent lodge, and particularly of the roadside facade from which stones had commenced to fall, led the Society to lease it also from the Sisters and to devise a programme of restoration. Sr. Kathleen Minogue, Bursar of Killaloe Mercy Union and a Society trustee, was a key person in those arrangements.

The Gatehouse contains condemned cells, tiny exercise yards, execution room and scaffold site. This is the building where Daniel and William Cormack from the parish of Loughmore spent six weeks, and in front of which they were publicly hanged in May 1858 for the alleged murder of John Ellis, Kilrush House, land agent to John Trant, Dovea House near Thurles.



Principally because of their exhumation and re-burial after a massive funeral-cum-political demonstration in 1910, they were the only ones in folk memory of the seventeen hanged at the gaol in its first seventeen years.

## Planning; Organisation

The Society started with a number of advantages. Its twenty-three founder members, all but one of whom formed the inaugural Management Committee, incorporated the professional skills of local history studies, teaching, journalism and public relations, architecture and accountancy and of management and administration in the public service, business and tourism. One member had attended the seminal Irish Museums Association 1980 seminar.

The IMA guidelines regarding trusteeship with links to local authorities (in Nenagh's case, in the person of John McGinley, County Manager), and to education, local history, business and tourism, were adopted together with other advice on security, temperature, humidity and lighting. Invaluable details were advised by such as John Teahan, Keeper of Fine Arts in the National Museum, Aidan Walsh, Monaghan County Museum Curator and gleaned from the experience at Damer House, Roscrea of George Cunningham and Ted Stapleton.

It was decided to borrow the widespread English term 'Heritage Centre' (first used in Ireland by Roscrea) as representing the wider range of planned displays better than those associated with the traditional 'museum'. '*Oidhreachtlan Cheanntair Aonach Urmhuman*' became the Irish version, the first word being favoured as against Corofin's '*Sinnsearlann*' (where the emphasis is on family history), and the placename being the traditional one of recent centuries as against the truncated '*Aonach*' adopted more recently for post and road signs.

AnCO, the Industrial Training Authority, were the indispensable agents of reconstruction and of the first three season's displays. The manager of the Limerick Training Centre, Frank Treacy and his successor Gerry Ryan and their senior officials (Hubert Lynch, Eddie Kelly and Tom Malone on reconstruction, and Chris Delaney and Jim Moran on research and display projects) enabled adaptation of the Governor's House between January 1983 and the opening in June 1984 and the restoration of the Gatehouse between October 1983 and January 1985.

Voluntary labour and a paid plasterer brought all the outstanding structural and decorative work on the Gatehouse to a conclusion by May, when the Centre re-opened to the public. New manual skills were acquired by the 'white collar' labourers who participated in sixteen Saturday meitheals. Architect Neil Corrigan on the Governor's House, Woodwork Instructor Michael McNulty on the Gatehouse and liaison officer Nancy Murphy provided the Society's planning and supervisory input.

Meantime the dangerous facade had the benevolent attention of David Slattery, Senior Architect, Office of Public Works, who had become interested in Nenagh previously. The Gaol's and Courthouse's original architect was John B. Keane, who had also designed Waterford Courthouse, a recent OPW renovation. Slattery's and other advice culminated in an impressive reconstruction by Top Quarries, Ballinasloe, under John Cotter. The cost was shared equally by the Sisters of Mercy and the Society.

## Displays

The key early planning decisions on exhibitions by the Society were:

- (1). to aim at equal end-products of education and entertainment, with marketing directed at schools, tourists and local people;
- (2). hence, to mix artefacts, photographs, graphics and text judiciously in the museum element;



(3). to reserve the lower of the two rear half-octagon rooms (which jointly formed the original two-storey goal chapel) for alternating short-term displays; and  
(4). being unable to meet the IMA criterion of 30% storage space though aiming at a number of varied displays and being without the prospect of a long-term curator with conservation skills, to prefer the loan and return of selected items designed for changing themes to the building up of a collection.

(1) has been consistently fulfilled to judge by visitor response; (2) has in later seasons been trimmed towards an injection of livelier aspects as in models and taped music and commentary, with audio-visual and video now on the horizon; (3) has been implemented with two highly-popular flower festivals, a Carrolls Photographer of the Year exhibition, a local photographer's work of the Thirties to Fifties, a local art exhibition and an outstanding one of embroidered pictures, contemporary crafts, Toomevara Foróige national award-winning project, Breacadh patchwork and local model-maker's work. The room has also hosted National Library and National Museum touring exhibitions arranged by their Education Officers, Noel Kissane and Felicity Devlin.

Local historians Daniel Grace (also a history teacher) and Donal Murphy were successive chairmen of Display Committees which planned the exhibitions and weighed in with the AnCO researchers, artists and technicians on mounting them. The longer-running exhibitions, in the order of popularity as scored in written visitor responses, have been the recreated shop and schoolroom, the Gaoler and the Gaoled theme in the Gatehouse, and the simulated forge and butter-maker's room in the Governor's House basement.

The perennial favourite, the shop, was initially organised by teacher Nora Chadwick. Typical of the response of the local public in general, it has since attracted donations of bar pumps, telephone exchange, post box, advertising signs and billheads galore. The forge has been furnished by a practising blacksmith. In the Gatehouse photographs, text, graphics and taped commentary convey the story of the gaol and Cormack Brothers, and give a flavour of crime, punishment and prison conditions in the last century. Apart from the condemned cells the building has seven fine rooms, two of these being adapted for use as a Tourist Information Office and leased to Shannonside Tourism, now incorporated in Shannon Development.

The environmental, commercial and recreational aspects of Lough Derg, the largest lake on the River Shannon and only five miles from the Centre, were featured for two seasons. The centrepiece of the display was a model (6" to the mile) of the lake and shore, made in hardwall plaster by an architectural technician and a graphic artist on the AnCO scheme. While the former aspects of the display have been dismantled, later displays have been designed around the model because of its popularity and educational value.

On the overall theme of 'Lifestyles in North West Tipperary' other exhibitions have included the Soldier, the Nun, the Quarryman, the Hurler and The Guardian newspaper. Religion, Recreation and Everyday Life miscellanies have also featured. An AnCO scheme survey of a sample of dwellings – ring forts, mottes, castles, tower houses, vernacular and 'big' houses – will be moulded into an exhibition in the future.

True to a commitment by its Director, Dr. Brendan O Ríordáin, at the 1980 Killarney seminar, the National Museum has been generous with repatriation of local material not needed for the Museum's own permanent displays. Two 5,500-year-old skeletons from Pat Wallace's Ardcroney exploration featured in three seasons of 'Neolithic Man'. Together with U.C.C.'s Shanballyedmond finds and with decorated grave markers from Latteragh's monastic site, these have been the archaeological exceptions to the Centre's emphasis on modern social history.



## Finance

Capital expenditure on materials and contracts for the restoration and initial displays was £96,000. Shannonside Tourism, at the instigation of its Chairman, Frank Lewis (also first chairman of the Society) and its successive Managers Sean Browne and Brendan Russell, together with its parent Bord Failte and its several development personnel headed by Niall Reddy and Paul Glynn, funded the costs of the Tourist Information Office. They added generous incremental grants to the Centre itself and were followed by Tipperary (N.R.) County Council and Nenagh U.D.C. Bodies as diverse as the Irish Museums Trust, Georgian Society, Nenagh Lions Club, Annfield Singers, Nenagh Players, North Tipperary G.A.A., Secondary School P.P.U., I.C.A., Brownies and three Bridge Clubs weighed in.

One-quarter of the total was raised by the Committee directly, with trustee Mary Grace in a lead role, from the usual miscellany of ventures and its two fund-leaders — the Foundation Patron system and three seasons of church-gate collections throughout North Tipperary and Ely O'Carroll in Offaly. One hundred and sixty Foundation Patrons subscribed £50 each for the consideration of complimentary admission until 1992. The Committee enjoyed the support of several hundred collectors at forty-two venues, between-Masses hospitality, church-porch shelter in icy weather, the benevolence of many priests highlighted by three marvellous sermons exhorting cultural paving on the straight, narrow and sunny path depicted by Rev. Dan Woods, C.C., Rearcross.

Annual grants from the two local authorities provide 30% of current revenue. Admission charges -- £1 adult, 50p student and O.A.P., £2.50 family with 20% discount for groups — yield 40%. Financial needs dictated their being raised to that level after the opening season had them pitched at half that; perceived price resistance has held them at the present level for four seasons, though an increasing number of visitors comment on how low the charges are for two storied buildings and eight thematic displays.

Twenty per cent of visitors are in school groups, 30% are foreign tourists, 20% Irish tourists and 30% from North West Tipperary. In attracting the latter the Nenagh newspaper, *The Guardian*, (whose joint Managing Director, Pat Ryan, is a trustee with several roles) has been the generous and key medium; the *Tipperary Star* (Thurles) and *Midland Tribune* (Birr) have also helped. In general and in order of success measured by visitor response, visitors are attracted into the Centre by the cinema-style billboards outside the Centre, the Tourist Information Office, main road billboards and, to a growing extent, by word of mouth personal recommendation, including from guest-house owners.

Any year's current budget is almost balanced by fees charged for a developing Family History Research Service. Indexed transcripts of baptisms and marriages for 17 Roman Catholic parishes, 5 Church of Ireland Unions and 1 Methodist Circuit form the basic records. Two six-month TEAMWORK schemes which finished in June 1988 reached 1854 in the indexing of marriages, births and deaths recorded in the *Nenagh Guardian* (founded 1838). In the recruitment of staff for them (as for other schemes) John Gleeson and Nick Malcolmson of National Manpower (now FAS) were very helpful.

## Personnel

Visitor service during the first four seasons was provided by members of the above schemes and by Social Employment Scheme personnel. In the season 1988 the Society employed an Administrator from its own resources, assisted by one S.E.S. person and a rota of volunteers which includes several committee members.

However, the lack of continuity in administration imposes a considerable burden on members



involved in the training-in process. The 1988 person is the Society's ninth administrator. The first, Mark O'Neill, is now Curator of Springburn Museum, Glasgow, the second a teacher in Kerry and the most recently departed a secretary with a European Commission in Geneva.

Funds to pay for some years of continuity in administration and a job description evoking the same level of local knowledge, interest, energy, growing expertise and ability to relate to the founders' concept (as has been experienced for most of the five seasons) have become a major preoccupation of a Committee concerned with ensuring the Centre's future. They will obviously be enlisting the Centre's beneficiaries -- the educationalists, the statutory bodies entrusted with development generally and tourism in particular, and the nation of culture. The provision of a quarter-million-pound new look for old community buildings, knowledge and fun for the 20,000 visitors reached on 24 July 1988 and short-term employment for 179 persons by that date has, it appears, become but the first, though successful stage.

The inaugural 1982-4 Management Committee was:—

Chairman -- Frank Lewis; Vice-Chairman & P.R.O. — Donal A. Murphy (Trustee); Hon. Secretary — Geraldine McNulty; Hon. Treasurers — Gerard Heffernan and Sr. Kathleen Minogue (Trustee); Nora Chadwick, Neil B. Corrigan, James Gleeson, Daniel Grace, Mary Grace (Trustee), Peter Hogan, Tony McCormack, John McGinley (Trustee), Nancy Murphy, Sean Quin, Paddy Richardson, Patrick A. Ryan (Trustee), Tom Ryan, John Scroope, Noel Shoer, Peter Smith, Sr. Gertrude Williams. Gerard Lewis was a founder member also.

In addition to those of the above who have continued, the 1987-8 Committee includes: Chairman — Dan Mullane; Hon. Secretary — Bridie O'Brien; Anne Boland, Tim Boland, Mary Fogarty, Eamonn De Stafort, Tom White, Rev. Edward Whyte.

