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Vol. 15 Issue 5: December 25/January 2026

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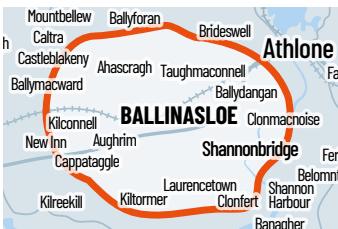


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KPW Print, Ballinasloe

PRINT: KPW Print, Ballinasloe

PHOTOS: John Finnerty, Evelyn Donellan, Michael S. Kelly, Robbie Riddell, Simona Reinyte



6,000 Copies Distributed

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 BallinasloeLIFEMagazine 7

REAMHRA

Welcome to our bumper Christmas Edition – 76 pages of local content – only our first under a new President, who as a Galway girl has more reason perhaps than others to remember fondly this town and her engagement with it.

Whilst working in her early years in her first chosen field of psychiatry, she was introduced to a young Garbally teacher from Clare and the rest, as reported by national media, is history! Many a young man in Ireland and elsewhere today has good reason to be happy that they met Brian McEnery as a teacher or youth leader of the 80s and 90s in our community.

We wish them and their boys well in the next seven years as our first family.

It was nice in a way to see the girl from Shantalla appoint her first Minister as we go to press – another girl from the West – Hildegarde Naughton, whose uncle resides locally and has a host of connections and cousins in South Roscommon. Hopefully that might help bring some progress on what the staff and students of our principal national school in the town centre have been campaigning for over nearly 25 years!!

Frank Cluskey, the sage but very witty Dublin

Leader of the Labour Party, summed up Charles J. Haughey's appointment of Gene Fitzgerald as Minister for Finance in his minority Government in 1980–81 with the remark: "Jaysus, there's confidence for ya." Gene, for all the things he was good at, did not have public sector economics especially high on the list. I was reminded of this when the Taoiseach appointed Simon Harris TD as Minister for Finance – a constitutional office. Paschal and Michael McGrath were a double act who learned their craft from the Noonan/Howlin combination of the FG–Labour Government post-crash.

I suspect very few of the "money mafia" or the electorate would echo the late Cluskey's analysis of a man who did not even run the school tuck shop, but we can be sure that the Tánaiste, like CJ before him, will not be seeing any leadership assaults mounted from the Department of Finance.

This magazine is a compendium of primarily voluntary effort; its mandate is to profile and promote the positive aspects of ALL our community's voluntary activities. Every two years we pause and salute those among us who give up the most valuable thing they have to make living here more

Welcome to Ballinasloe Life Volume 15 Issue 5

tolerable, fun, engaging and sustainable. The 2022 Census informs us that 14% of the population – nearly 1.5 out of every 10 of us – volunteer. The largest numbers are involved in sport, at almost 290,000 people or 6% of the population. The next most common area was in the community, followed by social and charitable organisations.

I have no doubt from my observation post here as Editor that our voluntary efforts surpass the average. Thanks again to the People of the Year Awards that BACD run every two years – we stop and acknowledge the work these often-unsung heroes do for us all.

Well done to all the nominees and those selected, but during the New Year resolutions, try maybe to volunteer some time, some new hours

a week, to the very many groups who do sterling work for us all. Beannachtaí na Nollag agus gach rath don Athbhliain.

Colm Croffy,
Editor.



I have visited many towns and villages across our island over the last 12 months and am surprised at the volume of work done by County Councils all over the country in providing amenity facilities for residents to enjoy.

Ballinasloe is crying out for investment in our own local, unique natural feature, which is the River Suck.

Funds are still "resting in the County Council's bank account", a sum in excess of €10,000,000 taken over from the coffers of Ballinasloe Urban District Council over 10 years ago. A portion of this is earmarked for the provision of a new road at the rear of Main Street/Society Street and it has formed part of the Local Area Plan for the last 15 years, but nothing whatsoever has been done to move on this. The rest is on standby for remedial work on the old town dump, but this will never cost this level of funding, so we, the people of Ballinasloe, need to see a formidable plan for the use of this money as the Local Area Plan comes under review in the next few months.

I do acknowledge we have a large area close to the river classified

as a floodplain, and building cannot take place there. However, there is nothing to stop investment in boardwalks, jetties and slipways onto the river right around the town, most particularly in the areas at the rear of Main Street and from the Marina down to the lock, which would link in with the proposed cycleway. Why this cycleway cannot be progressed from Athlone's newly built bridge for same to Ballinasloe needs serious questioning, as most of the land involved is owned by the State to build on.

This is one of the many areas that needs to be focused on prior to the sign-off of a new Local Area Plan, as the opportunity will not arise for another five years unless we get commitments now.

On a more festive note, I wish all our readers all over the world a very Happy Christmas and a Prosperous 2026.

Seamus Duffy,
Chairman Ballinasloe Area Community Development Clg.



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Cllr Harney Praises Progress on PUH Services

By Colm Croffy

Cllr Alan Harney was pleased with the progress made on reforms at Portiuncula University Hospital. He noted that, of the reviews completed so far, an average of 78% of the recommended actions have been implemented. "That is good progress in a short space of time. However, we do need to see the completion of the remaining points," he states.

Cllr Harney added: "I have long been pushing for an increased number of consultant obstetricians at the hospital. It was identified in the 2018 Walker Report... we are now seeing progress... the current numbers are 6.5 posts, with another 0.5 post being recruited. This will bring the consultant numbers to 7, which is a really necessary level to ensure appropriate cover at all times."

The hospital has also been surveyed for mobile phone coverage and a business case submitted for funding, while a feasibility study will take place on another key recommendation, that of

building a theatre next to the labour ward. "Both are capital projects which should be approved without delay," Cllr Harney added. A minor procedures room has also been upgraded to provide additional theatre capacity, while a new maternity outpatient department is due to open in Brackernagh early next year.

Cllr Harney continued: "It is so important that we see a full restoration of services so that women right across this region have timely access to maternity services. I will continue to advocate for this until such time as we get the service to where it needs to be. I am also calling on the HSE to work to restore public confidence in the service."

He concluded: "I want to pay tribute to the staff in the hospital, who have been working under incredibly difficult circumstances in recent months."

Grant Support for St Catherine's Hall in Aughrim

Galway County Council's Local Enhancement Programme for 2025 provided capital funding for the recent purchase and laying of tar macadam at the front of St Catherine's Hall in Aughrim. The hall is widely used by a range of community groups: activities include pre-school and after-school clubs, concerts and jive classes, amongst others. The work was undertaken to improve access to the hall for all users of the facility.

The grant of €5,000 was secured with the support of Councillor Alan Harney, who made representations to Galway County Council on behalf of St Catherine's Hall Committee. Following the drawing down of the grant, the committee appointed M & J Flynn Contractors from Athlone to provide a safe, functional and aesthetically pleasing surface to enable all users to safely access the hall. In addition, M & J Flynn donated 50% of the cost of car

park space lining, for which St Catherine's Hall Committee is very grateful.

The committee are very pleased with the results and, at its recent AGM, the Chairperson of the committee proposed a vote of thanks to both Galway County Council and Councillor Alan Harney for their support in this regard. The vote was agreed by all present.



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Town Centre First Plan Being Finalised

By Colm Croffy



The drop-in consultation event for the plan in St Michael's Square

Work is progressing well on the Town Centre First Plan, which will set out a vision for the town's future and identify projects suitable for funding over the coming years. The plan is being developed by the Ballinasloe Town Team, in consultation with the community and with support from Galway County Council and The Paul Hogarth Company.

In May 2025, the Draft Town Centre First Plan was shared with the public for feedback, culminating in a well-attended drop-in event in St Michael's Square.

The draft plan's vision is that: "Ballinasloe embraces its distinctive character and heritage, as a welcoming, safe, and vibrant place for everyone." To achieve this, the plan identifies seven key projects: The Fair Green, River Suck, The Square, Ballinasloe Stories, Vacant Buildings, Healthy Streets, and Town Centre Neighbourhood Development.

An impressive 368 consultation responses were received, with 91% of respondents supportive of the draft plan and 82% agreeing with its overarching vision. All proposed projects scored well, with the most popular being efforts to address vacant buildings, improve the Fair Green as a public and events space, and enhance

access to the River Suck. The survey also generated a wealth of ideas and suggestions, which the Town Team has been carefully reviewing and integrating where possible. This feedback is vital in ensuring the final plan reflects the priorities of local people.

More recently the consultation results were presented to the elected members of the town's Municipal District, who congratulated all involved. Work is now focused on finalising the plan and preparing a short film to communicate its proposals to key audiences, including potential funding bodies.

Once complete, a prioritisation process will identify which projects should proceed first for funding applications. Each will then follow its own public engagement and planning approval stages before delivery.

The Ballinasloe Town Team extends sincere thanks to everyone who participated in the consultation and contributed ideas for this exciting initiative. The team looks forward to sharing the final Town Centre First Plan with the community in the near future.



A table showing how different projects in the plan were ranked

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Parsons Seeks More Resources for Town

By Colm Croffy



Cllr Dr Evelyn Parsons at the library at the launch of the consultation on a historic Town Trail heritage walk recently.

Cllr Dr Evelyn Parsons has intensified calls for decisive action from Galway County Council as several projects important to Ballinasloe advance but remain vulnerable to delays due to staffing shortages and capacity issues.

A number of community projects funded through applications she worked on are progressing through design and re-tendering. "I'm pleased to see progress on these projects," Cllr Parsons said. These schemes include a €50,000 Outdoor Recreation

Infrastructure Scheme (ORIS) feasibility study; €100,000 for playground upgrades; and €125,000 for upgrades to the public toilets in St Michael's Square. "Together [these projects] amount to €275,000 in investment... these improvements are long overdue and now need to move through delivery without further drift," Cllr Parsons added.

A central issue she has raised with Galway County Council is the shortage of engineering and technical staff assigned to the town and also across the county. Posts remain unfilled or temporary, placing pressure on existing personnel. The shortage may slow work on road safety, capital projects and public amenities.

"Ballinasloe is in danger of being held back by significant staffing gaps," Cllr Parsons said. "Key projects cannot progress at the pace required without adequate engineers and support staff. Filling these posts and resourcing the district properly must now be treated as a priority."

Cllr Parsons has requested that the Council's Project Office take a direct role in advancing several major initiatives, including the Swim & Linear Park feasibility study and also the Townparks Relief Road. She has highlighted that these projects require specialist coordination and master planning. She also noted that the Townparks Relief Road project must be progressed to planning stage. "This major project

represents a county commitment now and should not rest solely on overstretched area engineering teams," she said.

Anti-social Behaviour a Focus

Community safety remains a strong focus for Cllr Parsons, and she has engaged with senior management at Galway County Council on anti-social behaviour issues.

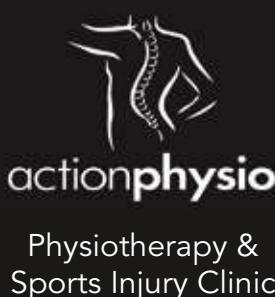
She is also focused on repeated incidents of anti-social behaviour at Dunlo Track, which have affected regular users and led to property damage. She has called for increased security hours, greater staffing presence, acceleration of CCTV installation, and she has submitted a pre-budget case for additional funding to protect this important public amenity and ensure it remains safe and accessible. The Local Safety Partnership Task Force is due to commence soon, and she will continue to push for coordinated action to address persistent issues.

Increased Funding Calls

At County Council level, Cllr Parsons has tabled a Notice of Motion requesting a full written update on the Ballinasloe Landfill Remediation Fund, including its current balance and ring-fenced financial commitments to the Townparks Relief Road scheme and Townparks amenities. The councillor has also called for reserves that can be used as match funding for major regeneration applications such as the Rural Regeneration Development Fund or Urban Regeneration Development Fund.

While welcoming the additional €10 million provided in Galway County Council's budget, Cllr Parsons noted that the resources needed across the county remain substantial and that strategic investment must be directed to where communities are experiencing pressure. She added that the town deserves to see significant development progress and an ability to harness opportunities arising for community development on the St Brigid's Hospital site, including the possibility of a domestic violence refuge there.

Housing representations, health, and pedestrian and road safety issues – including funding support for safety at the Creagh Junction – are priority issues for the Cllr at this time.



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36 Months Of Bad Luck Or Poor Policy?

By Colm Croffy

In the region of €26 million of Central Exchequer Funding, principally through Thrive, & Urban Village Renewal – from Ministerial announcements and local Media reports in the last three years, has been funnelled across 8 principal towns of Galway County.

The table indicating what desk research can show –means that this town is only on the grid for a Town Centre First Study – in the order of some €130,000!!

The official line appears to be that our town cannot make application to these National Funding schemes until such time as the Town Centre First Study reports ; not for the community but for the town centre – 3km from St. Michael's Spire (which oddly therefore removes the St. Brigid's campus and the Garbally Mansion and lands offered at a pepper corn price some 30 months ago to the County Council for €1 sale).

Since the first two editions of the Rural Economic Development Scheme in 2015, 2016 (the fore runner to Rural & Urban Renewal schemes) no Community can apply on their own, without being endorsed by the County Council first.

BACD were successful in 2015, came up short on points in 2016 and then in a joint bid in 2017 failed on a technicality for funds, then REDZ was mothballed. These applications were made on the back of Town Team Benchmarking Survey and Action plan undertaken by Action For Market Towns UK, funded by a grant of €3,500 from the local Credit Union Social Fund and €3,000 from Galway County Council.

The Town Action plan cost €12,000 launched in 2015 – as a blueprint for progress and projects for development as identified by stakeholders and community for the next decade.

Interestingly across the island the cost of these “approved “action plans are now typically in the region of €140,000 on average!

It was launched to great fanfare in 2015. None of the other towns have had such, bottom-up community led focus on their future needs and capability but seemingly this is not what the policy is about rewarding.

Since 1999 a thriving Social Services Centre, an employment supporting Enterprise and Technology Centre, A wonderful Town Hall Theatre and our newest Hub, have all been developed by locals.

There are no Galway County Council Staff Officers managing any of this infrastructure – it's all Not for Profit Companies, Volunteers and some key staff doing the heavy lifting.

Contrast this with the new facilities being developed for all these other fine towns – they are to be funded lavishly by State Schemes and then resourced by the County Council.

The new Joint Enterprise Hub and Performance Arts Spaces of Loughrea Town Hall and Portumna Courthouse which cost nearly €7 m to develop; have a full-time manager from the Council.

Is there any explanation as to why in the last decade our collective ability to secure grant aid has been so overlooked or might it be just that our development needs can; like a new National School – promised now some 25 years , can just be long fingered?

2023 – 2025	
Town	Approx Total Thrive and Renewal Schemes
Athenry	€6 m
Ballinasloe	€130,000
Clifden	€400,000
Gort	€1.25 m
Kinvara	€1.3 m
Loughrea	€1.3 m
Oranmore	€245,000
Portumna	€3 m
Tuam	€10.4 m



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Company Reviews Successful Year

By Colm Croffy

Ballinasloe Area Community Development (BACD) held its 26th Annual General Meeting on 30th October 2025 in the Ballinasloe Enterprise Hub, where members, directors, and stakeholders gathered to reflect on a year of continued progress, strong organisational performance, and deepening community engagement.

Chairperson Seamus Duffy opened the meeting by welcoming attendees and emphasising the positive position of BACD's core projects.

Both the Ballinasloe Enterprise Centre (BEC) and Enterprise Hub (BEH) remain close to full occupancy, demonstrating continued demand for enterprise space and supports. Ballinasloe Life Magazine also celebrated a significant milestone — 88 editions over 16 years — remaining fully self-sustaining thanks to the dedication of volunteers and strong local business advertising support.

Seamus highlighted a year rich in community-focused initiatives, from the success of the Pulse business networking club to the ABCD forums, and the standout Mid-Summer Multicultural Festival. He also acknowledged the appointment of a new contractor for the Christmas Lights and praised long-standing business sponsors whose support ensures these projects continue each year, with special mention to Ballinasloe Credit Union, who, as a key partner, are always behind so many of the projects carried out.

BACD's advocacy work remains a core focus, with ongoing engagement on key local issues including the Greenway, dereliction, St. Brigid's Campus, and town centre revitalisation. Seamus expressed gratitude to the Board, volunteers, funders, and staff — particularly recognising the commitment of the Staff



Some of the BACD Directors and Staff at their AGM.

FRONT ROW (L-R): John McKenna, Brian King, Claire Gibbons, Seamus Duffy, Joe Lyons. **BACK ROW (L-R):** Pearse Keller, Sean Kelly, Martina Flanagan (Assistant Manager), Lyn Donnelly (Manager), Eoghan Kenny, Cllr Alan Harney. **MISSING FROM PHOTO:** Cllr Michael Connolly, Marina Downey.

Team of Lyn Donnelly and Martina Flanagan.

Auditor James Coyle gave an extensive overview of the Charitable Company's Annual Returns for the 12 months to end of June 2025. James reported it was a clean audit and the companies accounts were healthy, but it was prudent of the board to ensure there remains enough cashflow to cover the existing debts.

During director elections,

Seamus Duffy and Brian King were re-elected, while thanks were extended to outgoing director Anita Killeen for her significant contribution, especially in the area of sustainable energy.

The board for the forthcoming year was ratified as:

Seamus Duffy (Chairperson), Brian King (Vice Chair), Joe Lyons, Dan Dowling, Marina Downey, Claire Gibbons, Alan Harney, Michael Connolly, Sean Kelly, Eoghan Kenny, John McKenna, and Pearse Keller.

Operational updates showcased a busy and productive year across BACD's programmes, including People and Planet First verification, facilities upgrades, active hub programming, tourism development through the new Ballinasloe.ie website, and the ongoing evolution of Ballinasloe Life's distribution and reach.

In AOB, members emphasised the importance of rural magazine distribution within the common bond area of the Ballinasloe Credit Union, concerns over access to St. Brigid's lands, and frustration regarding the lack of major government investment in Ballinasloe compared with other towns.

The meeting concluded with a vote of sympathy to the Kelly family on the passing of Ken Kelly, a long-standing pioneering contributor to the magazine.

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Conservation Engineer Opens in New Hub

By Maria Connolly

Recently relocated to the West and one of Society Street's newest tenants, Trevor Wood, a trained Conservation Engineer, is thrilled to be developing the next phase of his career in East Galway.

59-year-old Trevor, originally from Aylesbury, first enjoyed the Irish experience from Wicklow, where he worked and lived for some 11 seasons before looking for a more permanent base in the midlands catchment of the Shannon. He found a lovely property in Kiltomer to re-develop as his principal residence. Along with a home, he also needed an office environment and was very fortunate to find, through a Pulse meeting, that the Enterprise Hub had some spaces left. He snapped one up and is now working on a variety of local heritage and history projects.

Trevor started his career in construction back in 1984, as a trainee draftsperson. He spent 14 years in training before becoming a Chartered Engineer, and five years ago became a Conservation Accredited Engineer. "I feel very privileged to have obtained such accreditation," he says, noting that there is a shortage of conservation engineers in both Ireland and the UK at the moment. He was drawn to conservation engineering by a passion for older buildings and materials, feeling that: "apart from some award-winning designs, the majority of modern projects lack the soul of older, traditionally constructed structures."

Conservation engineering is: "about taking an old structure – be that a building, bridge, weir, or simply a historic wall – and helping it to survive another hundred years or so by whatever means necessary, but also with as minimal intervention as possible." Trevor spends a lot of time researching the structures he's working on to determine when they were built and what materials were used, but he also researches the changes that



Conservation Engineer Trevor Wood

have occurred to the building over time in terms of previous repairs and how these may have affected the original structure. "A lot of more modern interventions in the last 100 years, with the wider use of cementitious and fast construction methods, have actually caused more harm than good to many such structures," he adds.

He started his own business in 2009, when the international firm he was working for decided to pull out of the Irish market. "I was offered positions in the UK and the Middle East, but by this time I had fallen in love with Ireland," he adds. Trevor had also worked for a small consultancy a few years previously, which convinced him that setting up a small practice of his own would suit him. While starting his business during the financial crisis was challenging, he credits the experience with ensuring that his firm was:

"lean and efficient."

His work takes him all over Ireland. One notable project was Sigginstown Castle in Co. Wexford. "I often get asked about it as it was... in an episode on the Great House Revival." Closer to Ballinasloe, he is the Conservation Engineer for the Bawn Wall in Ballinasloe, the remains of a medieval castle.

Outside of work, Trevor is working on the restoration of his "forever home" in Kiltomer, and he is an: "avid" masters swimmer and keen cyclist. He adds that Kiltomer: "appears to be somewhere that I can, over time, get to know more people and enjoy the local community spirit that hopefully I can positively contribute to."

TWCE Conservation Engineers are based at 5 Ballinasloe Enterprise Hub. They can be contacted on 087 121 6290, or by email: info@twce.ie



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Apella Nail Spa Opens

By Maria Connolly

Attention all fans of nail art: Apella Nail Spa is now open on Dunlo Street. This modern, relaxed and welcoming salon is owned by Erik Hoang and offers a full suite of treatments for hands and feet.

Erik, who lives in Dublin, has no previous connection with Ballinasloe. "One beautiful day, I was just driving through out of curiosity to see what the town and its people were like. I instantly fell in love with the warm atmosphere and charm of this place," he says. "I decided to open my nail salon in Ballinasloe because I see great potential here."

His journey into the beauty industry was equally serendipitous. "My first part-time job in Ireland was answering phones at a nail salon – and that's where my passion began. More than 10 years later, I'm proud to be part of this wonderful industry." He loves working in the industry for: "the chance to connect with others, to keep learning, and to provide excellent services at reasonable prices – helping everyone look and feel their best."

In addition to regular file and polishes and manicures, the salon offers acrylic nails and the Builder in a Bottle (BIAB) treatment, specially designed to strengthen nails over the long term. The BIAB treatment also provides a good base for gel nails, as it allows the natural nail to grow underneath the polish. The salon



Erik Hoang, owner of Apella Nail Spa

offers nail art including ombre, and examples can be seen on their Facebook and Instagram pages.

Apella also offers Signature Manicures and Signature Pedicures. The Signature Manicure includes a mini-manicure, hand and arm exfoliation, followed by an extended massage and a hand mask, before the treatment finishes with Shellac nails. The treatment includes a complimentary glass of prosecco. The Signature Pedicure is similar, and includes a hydrating foot mask wrapped in hot towels. "I warmly invite everyone to come and experience them for yourself — I promise, you won't be disappointed!" Erik says.

So far, Erik has been delighted with the response of the town to his new business. "The people of Ballinasloe are incredibly kind and welcoming. They've visited my salon, offered their support, and made me feel right at home from the very beginning. I genuinely love this town." Erik has also been

supported by loyal clients from Athlone and County Galway.

Apella Nail Spa is open seven days a week: Monday–Wednesday 10am–7pm, Thursday and Friday 10am–8pm, Saturday 10am–6pm, and Sunday 11am–5pm. To make an appointment, call 089 258 8866. You can also book via their Facebook and Instagram pages. Walk-in clients are also welcome.

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New Fragrance Company For Town

By Maria Connolly

A new Irish fragrance brand is reshaping how we think about scent. *tír* fragrances, co-founded by Ballinasloe native Sean Deane and Dublin's John Slattery, is a modern solid fragrance company that blends sustainability, design and storytelling, based in Ballinasloe.

Its name, *tír*—the Irish word for “land”—captures the brand's deep connection to Ireland's natural beauty and cultural heritage, while offering something fresh and contemporary for today's consumer.

The founders' backgrounds reflect their passion for brand building and storytelling. Sean grew up in town, attending Creagh National School and Garbally College before studying Global Business at Dublin City University and completing a master's in international marketing at UCD.

His career has spanned marketing, brand strategy, and the food and drink sector, and he now works with Bord Bia, supporting Irish companies in the UK market. John, from Terenure in Dublin, studied Business and Management at Technological University Dublin and built his career across brand, sales and operations roles. He currently works for TikTok. The two first met nearly a decade ago while working at Jameson Irish Whiskey, where their shared interest in storytelling and Irish identity began to take shape.

For Sean, the idea was born from a desire to create something honest and grounded. Together with John, he envisioned a brand that would stand apart from the polished, distant world of traditional fragrance. “So much of the fragrance industry feels disconnected from real life,” Sean adds. “*tír* is the opposite—it's rooted in real experiences, made with natural ingredients and designed to move with you,” explains Sean.

tír has launched with two fragrances. Wood and Wild is inspired by untamed Irish woodlands, with spiced musk and jasmine



Sean Deane and John Slattery Founders of Tir Fragrance Brand

unfolding over oak, incense and tobacco. Pasture and Peel draws from the image of overgrown Irish orchards after rainfall, blending crisp fruit, soft woods and warm amber into a clean, comforting scent. Both fragrances are gender-neutral, designed for everyday wear and aimed at people who prefer something subtle, natural and personal.

Unlike traditional sprays, *tír* makes solid fragrances with natural, alcohol-free ingredients. Each scent is blended into a balm-like base and presented in a refillable, travel-friendly wooden case. The format is long-lasting, portable and kind to skin, making it ideal for busy lives.

The business is proudly based in Ballinasloe, and the founders hope to grow the brand enough to create local opportunities and a stronger presence in the town. They credit the Local Enterprise Office in Galway, particularly Lynn Donnelly and her team, for their guidance and support, as well as Irish perfumers, suppliers, family and friends who tested early samples and encouraged them along the way.



Looking ahead, Sean and John see success as building a strong, sustainable Irish brand recognised internationally. They hope to expand the collection with more Irish-inspired scents and grow a loyal community around *tír*. For them, *tír* is more than fragrance—it is heritage, honesty and connection, carried in a pocket-sized case and designed to move with you.

tír fragrances are available at www.tirfragrances.com and on Instagram @tirfragrances.

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Ballinasloe Native Firm Targets €100 Million Income

By Colm Croffy

Ballinasloe-born Paddy Finn is powering ahead with Viotas, the energy technology company he co-founded with Duncan O'Toole in 2013.

The firm, which advises large companies on how to reduce energy consumption and be paid for doing so, now operates in four countries, and has a turnover of €25 million. It expects to achieve revenues of €100 million by 2030.

The firm and Dr Paddy got a big feature splash in the Sunday Business Post recently.

Paddy grew up in Atticorra, the youngest of five — Fintan, Deirdre, Seán, Edel, and Frances — born to their late mum Frances and dad John.

He attended Creagh National School and Garbally College, and obtained his Bachelor degree from the University of Limerick. He worked as an Energy Analyst before undertaking a doctorate, and then spent three years as an Energy Consultant before founding Viotas.

The idea for Viotas grew out of Paddy's research for his PhD, which was in how flexibility by large customers in how they used energy could ensure that the electricity grid used more renewable energy overall. "Duncan also had an involvement at the university, and he was involved in a business that was focused on trading power," Paddy says. "Between the two of us, we felt we could really raise the bar in terms of what was out there."

With their combined expertise, the pair

founded Viotas to tell big power users how to reduce their consumption, and to be paid for selling energy back to the grid. "We enable these customers to be flexible in how they use power, essentially making these sites look like power stations

and to trade electricity just like any other power station." The goal is that by encouraging more large energy customers to reduce consumption, the strain put on the grid is reduced substantially.

The company entered the market in 2014 and grew quickly. When they entered: "we were the 10th of 10 companies, the smallest in the market. We're now larger than all of the others combined," Paddy adds. The firm, which is headquartered in Castletroy, Limerick, now employs 110 people and operates in Australia, Poland and the United States, as well as Ireland.

"We've invested our cashflow into further research and development and international expansion."

By 2030, the company expects to grow in Australia and the US in particular, where it plans on adding: "at least one more market" to the current operation, which is based in Texas. "We also plan on operating in a market in Asia by that point as well."

Outside of work, Finn has a passion for scuba diving. He is a Volunteer Scuba Diving Instructor with the University of Limerick and is also a Volunteer Scuba Diver in the Killaloe/ Ballina Search and Recovery Unit, meaning he is on-call to carry out underwater searches for missing persons when tasked by the Irish Coast Guard.



Paddy Finn



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Ballinasloe, Co Galway



Moycairn Drive,
Creagh, Ballinasloe



62 Esker Hills,
Ballinasloe, Co Galway



Land at Moyarwood,
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Patrick Neary Joins SparksWealth

By Maria Connolly

If you are seeking simple, straightforward financial advice, Patrick Neary can help. The Ballyforan native joined SparksWealth as a Financial Advisor earlier this year.

He has a background in financial services, having previously studied Business at TUS, Athlone, and he worked at Bank of Ireland for two years while completing his Qualified Financial Advisor exams. Patrick also spent six and a half years working in Melbourne to gain more life experience before returning to Ireland this year.

"Upon returning, I identified a clear gap in the market - a need for financial guidance that is simple, practical, and easy for clients to implement. This inspired me to join a business focused on helping people take control of their finances with clarity and confidence," Patrick states.

"We specialise in educating clients and guiding them to make informed decisions," he adds. The company looks for "world-class" investment, pension, and life companies, and focuses on "preserving and protecting your wealth, while helping you grow it in line with your goals."

They also aim to make their reports visually engaging and easy to understand. Advisors check in with clients at least once a year, presenting possible scenarios in simple terms so that clients can make informed decisions about their money.

Patrick notes that many people are focused on their work, home, and community: "which means financial wellbeing can often be overlooked. I believe finances deserve the same attention as your health."

He can support clients with pensions (reviewing old or setting up new), savings and investments, life and serious illness cover, income and mortgage protection, tax-efficient planning for the

self-employed, and financial guidance for returning expats. "Whether you are planning ahead for family security, building long-term wealth, or simply want to feel more confident about your financial future, I am here to help you put the right plans in place," he adds.

He is available for clients "as their goals and circumstances evolve over time. I want to look back and know that I've built genuine, long-term relationships with clients - that they've achieved their goals because of the advice and structure we put in place together. Ultimately, I'll know I've succeeded when SparksWealth is not just thriving as a business, but also making a meaningful impact in people's financial lives," he explains.

Patrick joined the Pulse Club for networking opportunities. "Since joining, I have had the pleasure of connecting with some truly inspiring individuals. The welcoming and supportive environment has made it easy to build meaningful relationships, and being a part of it has significantly broadened my professional and personal network," he adds.

He offers an initial, free, no-obligation consultation, which can be booked using the QR code with this article. He works

Monday-Friday, 9am-5.30pm, but for clients with busy schedules, he can arrange evening consultations. He can meet clients virtually, or in person by appointment.

Outside of work, Patrick enjoys staying active and engaging in sports. "I enjoy going to the gym regularly, playing Gaelic football with St. Aidan's Football Club, and occasionally hitting the golf course. I also place a high value on spending quality time with family and friends," he says.

You can contact Patrick by email at patrick.neary@sparkswealth.ie or by phone on 087 470 0187.



Patrick Neary, Financial Advisor with SparksWealth.



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Soroptimist Public Speaking Restarts

By Maria Connolly



Mary Courtney at the Soroptimist "Bag a Bargain" sale

The Ballinasloe and District Soroptimist Club had a great response to the Bag a Bargain pop-up shop during the recent Country Fair Day. A lot of work went into collecting goods to sell, and the proceeds will go to support local charities and women's aid organisations.

On November 20, the local heat of the Soroptimist Public Speaking Competition took place in Gullane's Hotel. This competition is in its 45th year

nationally.

The club's next campaign will be promoting the "Orange the World" campaign, which will commence at the end of November. The colour orange is used to symbolise a brighter future, free from violence, and to call for action and commitment from all to ending gender-based violence.

November 25 marks the UN International Day of the Elimination of Gender-based Violence, and the start of 16 Days of Activism against Gender Violence, which ends on December 10 (Human Rights Day). During this time, Soroptimists across Ireland will be taking action and calling for the elimination of gender-based violence.

According to the World Health Organisation (WHO), violence against women is a "devastatingly pervasive" global issue. The WHO data illustrates that one in three women worldwide has experienced physical or sexual violence, primarily by an intimate partner. A recent EU-wide survey on violence against women found that half of all women have been sexually harassed.

In Ireland, violence against women is a significant issue that has worsened since the pandemic. Women's Aid figures show that 244 women have been murdered since 1996 and, in resolved

cases, 87% of these women were killed by a man known to them. At least 26% of women in Ireland have experienced physical and/or sexual violence since the age of 15, and 41% of people in Ireland know a woman within their circle of friends or family who is a victim of some form of domestic violence.

"Let us stand together and spread the word that we will not tolerate violence against any gender," stated Maria Finnegan, P.R.O.



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Local Boy Recovers Following Transplant

By Maria Connolly

Tomás Fahy from Beechlawn is looking forward to a return to sports – and to going back to school in January – following a life-saving bone marrow transplant earlier this year.

Eight-year-old Tomás was diagnosed with a rare condition, aplastic anaemia, late in 2024. The condition affects just two in a million people, and occurs when bone marrow stops producing new blood cells. Fortunately, his sister, Róisín, was a good match for a transplant.



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It wasn't possible to do the operation in Ireland, but there was space at the Bone Marrow Transplant Unit in Leeds, and the Irish state agreed to cover the full cost of the operation. Róisín was in her final year of university and doing exams, so Children's Health Ireland arranged for her to donate in Dublin, and the bone marrow was sent to Leeds for the procedure on the following day.



Tomás and Padraig Fahy

The family set up a fundraiser to enable his mother, Úna, to take time off work, and his father, Padraig, also flew over to Leeds for six weeks. "There was a wonderful sense of joy when we did the fundraiser," Úna says. "I felt like I was lifted out of the normal stress." She added that a tractor run organised to support the family "brought tears to a lot of our eyes". She was also grateful for the fundraising match organised by LGFA.

Tomás is now "doing great", and the family recently celebrated a double milestone when his Hickman medicine line was removed on the same day that Róisín graduated. Tomás hopes to return to playing rugby, hurling, Gaelic football and soccer soon.

Despite his young age, Úna credits her son's strong character with helping him through the ordeal. "He's such a strong individual... his strength, his belief in himself, that's what gets him through it," she said.

Úna, dad Padraig and the wider family are hugely appreciative of the huge fundraising support and good wishes that they received from all locally during the past few testing months.



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Beagh Roundabout Upgraded

By Colm Croffy



The official opening of the upgraded Beagh Roundabout took place recently, with the ribbon-cutting ceremony performed by Cllr Dominic Connolly, Chairman of the South Roscommon Municipal Area Council, John Molloy, Chairman of Creagh Community Council, and distinguished local resident John Boland.

The original plan was to erect a sculpture of a birch tree in the centre of the roundabout, but the planning department of Roscommon County Council rejected the concept. An appeal to An Bord Pleanála was also turned down, on the grounds that a visually striking sculpture could distract motorists and potentially cause accidents.

The decision delayed the project by eighteen months. Creagh Community Council were instead advised to carry out an upgrade that would not involve a "physical structure" and would

therefore not require planning permission.

After considerable discussion between Roscommon County Council, Creagh Community Council and the project landscaper, Alan Clark, they agreed to proceed with an upgrade costing €33,000. Roscommon County Council provided a grant of €15,000, while a much-appreciated contribution by local businessman Michael Dolan of Centra and Moycarn Marina, along with Creagh Council funds, covered the balance.

The Biogas Concern Group have begun open community meetings in the Rugby Club house, (H53F446) with all invited. Concerned citizens are asked to keep an eye out on their Social Posts for further important meetings, which will set out the steps that group will utilise in making their concerns and submissions to the planners known.

Full Planning Application for New Bio Gas Plant

As we go to print, a full planning application has just been lodged with Galway County Council by Cycle0 to build and operate a Bio-Methane Gas Plant in Glin, Clontuskert. The site notice was posted on 18/11/2025 near the Glenloughaun (Glin Cross) site.

Planning documents will shortly be available for review through the Galway County Council Planning Department website.

Readers who wish to learn more about the campaign can visit the Ballinasloe Biogas Concern Group Facebook page for updates and contact details.

The Ballinasloe Biogas Concern Group are also organising an open community meeting at Ballinasloe Rugby Club on **Wednesday 26th November, at 8 pm in the Ballinasloe Rugby Club, H53 F446, all are invited!**



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A Memoir of Love, Loss, and War

By Julia Prystupa



A Ukrainian writer now living in Ballinasloe has completed a memoir that captures the intertwined experiences of illness, war and the sustaining power of faith. *Life After Life*, by Yevhenii Aleksanov, documents both a deeply personal journey and the wider upheavals facing his homeland.

Aleksanov, aged 47, built his early career in film and photography, telling stories

through images. Writing, however, was not part of his original path. It emerged during the illness of his wife, Aliona, when he began making notes as a way of processing grief and preserving memories. What started as private reflections later developed into the manuscript of *Life After Life*.

At its centre, the memoir recounts Aliona's struggle with cancer, alongside the uncertainties of treatment and the challenges endured. While recording these hardships, it also reflects the love and faith that carried the couple through. Eight years ago, Aleksanov and Aliona met in Kyiv. Just a month later, she received her diagnosis. Despite the difficult prognosis, they married and built a life together.

The narrative then shifts with the outbreak of war in Ukraine. Like many others, the couple was forced to leave their home. Their journey led them initially to Carraroe, and later to Ballinasloe, where they settled. Aliona underwent treatment at University Hospital Galway and Portiuncula University Hospital during this time.

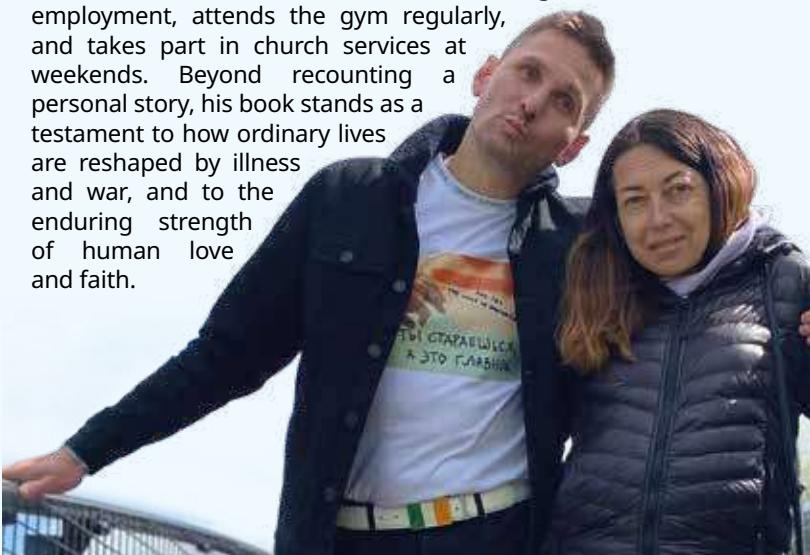
Aliona passed away in July 2024. In his book, however, Aleksanov chose not to mention her death directly, instead leaving readers

with a sense of hope and the conviction that love and God can overcome even the darkest circumstances. He has explained that writing the book was a promise he made to his wife before her passing — a way to honour her life and share their story.

Stylistically, *Life After Life* blends diary-like reflections with literary storytelling. Its chapters trace hardship alongside moments of hope, offering insight into loss, resilience and the search for meaning. While firmly rooted in one family's experience, it also addresses broader themes of displacement, endurance and compassion in times of crisis.

The manuscript has been completed in Ukrainian, Russian and English. It is now officially published and available for purchase as an eBook on Amazon — a major milestone in Aleksanov's journey. He shared that he is thrilled the story is finally reaching readers worldwide. You can find the book at <https://www.amazon.com/dp/B0FVMBMN78>.

Now settled in our town, Aleksanov is seeking employment, attends the gym regularly, and takes part in church services at weekends. Beyond recounting a personal story, his book stands as a testament to how ordinary lives are reshaped by illness and war, and to the enduring strength of human love and faith.



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PEOPLE OF THE YEAR AWARDS 2025



Creative Arts, Heritage & Culture Award – Individual

L TO R: J.J. Smith, Maire Power, John Boland, George Geraghty, Declan Quinn, Conor Johnston, Michael Cusack



Community Group Award

BACK ROW: M. Whelahan (Hillcrest Residents Association), N. Dowd (St Grellan's, St Theresa's & St Anne's Residents Association), W. Duthie (Lions Club), M. Kelly (Civil Defence), E. Naughton. FRONT ROW: F. Carroll, J. Carroll, L. Lloyd-Keighery, A. Ward (Poolboy Community Development Group)



Creative Arts, Heritage & Culture Award – Group

L TO R: S. Madden (BCU Chair), R. Cobban, P. Enright-Mooney (BDVC), N. Corcoran (Miseoir Festival), A. Gilligan (Scoil an Chroí Naofa), E. Egan & M. Tully (BARA Singers), C. Gibbons (Féile Cheoil L. Reynolds), D. O'Neachtain (Ballinasloe Town Band), P. Kilduff (BHS), J. Egan (Galway 1925 Football Centenary), M. Croffy (Fair & Festival Committee)



Business Community Spirit

BACK ROW: M. Janusz (Shearwater Hotel & Spa), M. Dolan (Dolans Service Station), A. O'Grady (Western Post Form), M. Coleman (Trior Construction). FRONT ROW: F. Monaghan, C. Gullane (Gullane Hotel), N. Creaven Connaghton (Shop Ballinasloe), M. Kelly (KPW Design & Print)



Volunteer Award – Individual

BACK ROW: P. Lyons, S. Madden (Chair BCU), P. Burns, J. Salmon
FRONT ROW: M. Ward L. Treacy, B. Kenny, R. Power.



Sports and Recreation Club Award

BACK ROW: G. Kelly (Rugby), S. O'Connell (GAA), D. Leyden (Tennis), S. Duffy (BACD), M. & J. Dolphin (Itosu Kai). FRONT ROW: A. M. Nair (Cricket), B. Manning (Town AFC), M. Rigney & C. Kerr (Camogie)



Sports Volunteer Award

BACK ROW: A. Dooley, G. Murphy (Manager BCU), G. Seale, S. Goode. **FRONT ROW:** M. Creaven, A. Zancanaro (representing her dad, Gary), J. Walshe, M. Rigney



Sports and Recreation Team Award

E. McKeon (Golf Club U-18 Interclub Team), A. Kerr (Ballinasloe Junior Camogie Team), L. Farrell (Rugby U16 Girls Team), M. Blair (Ballinasloe Town AFC U17 Boys), R. Monaghan (Padraig Pearse's Junior C LGFA)



Sports and Recreation Individual

BACK ROW: T. Cafferky (representing his son Tom), C. Casey, S. Lyons. **FRONT ROW:** C. Flanagan, C. Hogan, K. Meehan Donnelly

Ballinasloe came together to honour its remarkable volunteers, community groups, sports leaders, creative champions and local businesses at the People of the Year Awards, hosted by BACD and supported by Ballinasloe Credit Union, the Shearwater Hotel, and KPW Design & Print.

Held in the Shearwater Hotel on Friday 21st of November, the event celebrated dozens of individuals and groups whose work, talent and commitment continue to enrich the town. A capacity audience attended, representing sports clubs, businesses, charities, schools, cultural organisations and community groups from town and its hinterland.

CREATIVE ARTS, HERITAGE & CULTURE AWARD – INDIVIDUAL

Nominees: John Boland, Michael Cusack, George Geraghty, Conor Johnston, Declan Quinn, Robbie Riddle, JJ Smith, Marie Power
Winner: John Boland

CREATIVE ARTS, HERITAGE & CULTURE AWARD – GROUP

Nominees: BARA Singers, Ballinasloe & District Vintage Club, Ballinasloe Heritage Society, Ballinasloe Fair & Festival Committee, Ballinasloe Town Band, Féile Cheoil Larry Reynolds Committee, Galway 1925 All-Ireland Commemoration Committee, The Miseáir Festival – Galway Traveller Movement, Scoil an Chroí Naofa Multicultural Committee, **Winner:** Féile Cheoil Larry Reynolds

VOLUNTEER AWARD

Nominees: Michael Burns, Brian Kenny, Pádraig Lyons, Regina Power, John Salmon, Loraine Treacy, Mary Ward. **Winner:** Loraine Treacy



Chair of BACD Seamus Duffy presents **John Boland** with his Individual Award for the Creative Arts, Heritage & Culture Award.



President Gerry Kelly and some officers from the Rugby Club accept a special Adjudicators' Award for reaching their 150th anniversary milestone.

SPORTS VOLUNTEER AWARD

Nominees: Michelle Creaven, Aidan Dooley, Steve Goode, Gerry Seale, Michelle Rigney, Johnny Walshe, Garry Zancanaro
Winner: Michelle Rigney

COMMUNITY GROUP AWARD

Nominees: Ballinasloe Civil Defence, Ballinasloe Lions Club, Hillcrest Residents Association, Poolboy Community Development Group, St Grellan's, St Theresa's & St Anne's Residents Association. **Winner:** Ballinasloe Lions Club

BUSINESS COMMUNITY SPIRIT AWARD

Nominees: Dolans Service Station, Gullane's Hotel, KPW Print, Shearwater Hotel & Spa, ShopBallinasloe Team, Tríor Construction Western Postform.
Winner: ShopBallinasloe Team

SPORTS & RECREATION TEAM AWARD

Nominees: Ballinasloe Golf Club U18 Interclub, Ballinasloe RFC U16 Girls, Ballinasloe Town AFC U17 Boys, Padraig Pearse's LGFA Junior C Team, Béal Átha na Slua / Ballinasloe Camogie Junior Team. **Winner:** Ballinasloe RFC U16 Girls

SPORTS & RECREATION INDIVIDUAL AWARD

Nominees: Tom Cafferky, Cormac Casey, Caoimhe Flanagan, Clodagh Hogan, Keela Meehan Donnelly, Sarah Lyons
Winner: Cormac Casey

SPORTS & RECREATION CLUB AWARD

Nominees: Ballinasloe GAA, Ballinasloe Rugby Club, Ballinasloe & District Tennis Club, Ballinasloe Town AFC, Ballinasloe Camogie Club, Itosu Kai Kiltormer/Eyrecourt, Kilconnell Cricket Club. **Winner:** Ballinasloe Town AFC

SPECIAL RECOGNITION AWARD

Ballinasloe Rugby Club – to honour the club's 150th anniversary and its lasting contribution to community and sport.

HALL OF FAME AWARD

Recipient: Noel Madden
Honoured for a lifetime of commitment, leadership and exceptional contribution across community life.

The evening also showcased highlights from the Ballinasloe Midsummer Festival, reflecting the power of collaboration among more than 40 local groups, clubs, schools and organisations.

BACD Chair Seamus Duffy noted he and the Awards Committee "extended their sincere thanks to all volunteers, nominees, community partners and supporters who continue to make Ballinasloe a thriving and connected community."

HALL OF FAME INDUCTEE AWARD



Carmel Greally, winner of the 2023 Hall of Fame, with Sean Madden, Chair of the BCU, presenting Noel Madden – 2025 winner.



Noel with his wife Mary, sons and daughter, and most of his brothers and sisters who arrived to share in his accolade

Noel with his specially commissioned award



Celebrating 40 Years of Community Care

By Colm Croffy

It was a momentous morning in Brackernagh, in the grounds of Quarry House, where 40 years since the opening of the custom build (designed by the late Larry Duffy) Day Care Centre, the team at Ballinasloe Social Services commemorated their past and showcased their new future.

The attendees were brought full circle to a giant of Christian generosity and practical hope, Sr. Stan, whose requiem mass was being prayed in Dublin at the very same time.

The slender thread of Sr. Stan's legacy, from the nursery in Kilkenny where it was first piloted under a very far-seeing Bishop, connected all the way through a young Margaret Mansfield (Retired Garbally teacher) who, as Chair of the Board Michael Lally, reminded the gathering, worked for some six years at the Kilkenny Social Services Centre with Sr. Stan before arriving to Ballinasloe.

Present today, Margaret set about joining the late Dr. Joe



Duffy Family L-R: Mairead Hurley, Fiona Duffy, Ann Duffy, Fergal Duffy

Tarpey's volunteers in the mid-70s when the concept of services for the disadvantaged was first mooted for our community.

Michael and many of the hard-working volunteers remembered fondly Sr. Stan's visits to the Centre for AGM addresses, invited by Dr. Joe Cassidy, and indeed her other visits down through the years.

In delivering the potted history of the Centre, its birth and development, Michael was very keen to remind folks that while Kilkenny had Stan, this community had the backing of the Sisters of Mercy. He noted that it was Sr. John and Sr. Dymphna who had started the Meals on Wheels service, and how the order seconded to the Centre as its first Day Centre Manager, Sr. Alacoque, who was also present. Sr. Helena continued the Meals on Wheels service after Sr. John, and Sr. Bridie was also a great support to the local community.

The Centre and its services would not have survived the financial crash and the resulting strain on all public budgets in the years afterwards were it not for their continuous generosity.

Mentioned too in a special way was the friendship, support and practical assistance through kitchens in the supper room and places in the old Church of Ireland Rectory School where Fr. John Garvey and Rector John Godfrey, as well as the support of so many of their parishioners, were acknowledged.

Chair Michael, his Board



L-R BACK ROW: Susan Forde (Tusla), Declan Quinn (BSS Board), Catherine Colleran (BSS Board), Stephen Kerr (BSS Board), Dr. Kevin Connolly (BSS Board), Michael Lally (BSS Board), John Donnellan (Tusla). L-R FRONT ROW: Una Hernon Grenham (BSS Board), Jenny O'Sullivan (BSS Board), Caroline Layng (BSS Board), Teresa Coughlan, Director of Services (BSS)

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members current and retired, the current staff, volunteers and supporters gave appropriate mentions to the various aspects of healthcare authorities of the state, from Western Health Board, HSE, Tusla and indeed Galway County Council and Galway Rural Development for their partnering and funding of so many elements of their current and capital developments.

Previous Chair Eamon Lally came out of the archive trawl undertaken by Michael as very much a leader who was tone-deaf to the word "no" from any agency of the state in the early years, but especially the Western Health Board officials.

On behalf of all connected with the place, he was very humbled that 40 years after the doors swung open on a complex that cost £126,000 and the trustees had a grant of £23,000 from the Health Board and IFI, the group got to formally recognise and pay tribute, in front of his wife Ann and family, to the generosity, work and legacy of the Vocational School Drawing Teacher Larry Duffy.

No organisation could have had a more expert, generous, affable, conscientious and creative draughtsman to lead out a major project on what was, for the Board of the day, a journey



1985 Board. L-R: Dr. Kevin Connolly, Ann Kenny, Eamon Lally, Sr. Alacoque, Michael Lally. FRONT ROW: Peig Burke

into the unknown. And he did all of this painstaking, time-consuming, research-demanding work pro bono, free of charge, gifted to this community. To pay tribute to this massive contribution and formally recognise the legacy of Larry Duffy, his wife Ann unveiled a plaque in his honour in the Centre.

Social Services Manager Teresa Coughlan, after several HSE and Tusla Regional Managers spoke in very favourable and encouraging terms, noted how happy they

were to support and partner the level of compassionate and professional care work being done on the campus.

Centre Manager Teresa again thanked all, but especially the people of the town and wider community, who time and time again continually support the work of the Centre.

She then outlined the piloting of the Tusla-funded Family Resource Centre and the work the two new staff members – Una Murphy, Co-ordinator, and Teresa Madden, Family Support Worker – have been doing with so many families and young people, in the full ethos and spirit of the Centre.

She excitedly informed the event of the welcome news that Galway County Council had secured funding to purchase the house and plot next door and develop it, with interagency support, as a new Family Resource Centre to house the expanding service over the coming years.

Finally, the event concluded poignantly with Sr. Alacoque reciting John O'Donohue's poem "A New Beginning," accompanied by a talented young local harpist, Jean O'Connor.



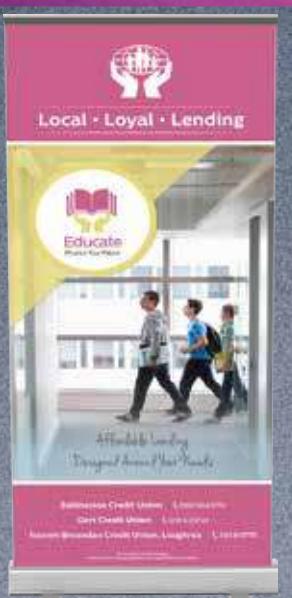
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Green for Phelan-McDermid Syndrome

By Maria Connolly

October 22 every year is a very significant day for Phelan-McDermid Syndrome (PMS), when buildings all over the world – including Niagara Falls, Blackpool Tower and the Sydney Opera House – shine green.

You may have spotted some of the town's charming buildings glowing green on the day, all thanks to Cllr. Alan Harney, Galway County Council engineers, and East Galway and Midlands Cancer Centre for facilitating this.

The local lights came about as Rosie Darragh's son, Jack, from Poolboy, was diagnosed in 1997 with this extremely rare chromosome disorder at the age of four. "He was the first person diagnosed with it in Ireland," Rosie says. There are approximately 400 families with PMS in Ireland and the UK, and almost 5,000 in the world. The condition affects speech, mobility and cognitive development.

The local Brothers of Charity services work with Jack, enabling him to participate in swimming, walking and day trips. To raise awareness of PMS (and to celebrate Halloween), they recently hosted a very special and thoroughly enjoyable disco to raise awareness of PMS. Rosie is very thankful to their staff, especially Jade, and the Shearwater Hotel for hosting the event. PMS

is caused by a deletion on chromosome 22q13, hence the decision to raise awareness on 22 October. It was originally called 22q13 Syndrome, but due to increased awareness and research, more people were diagnosed.

It was renamed Phelan-McDermid Syndrome to honour the two American geneticists who discovered it. The purpose of the awareness day is to highlight PMS for more and earlier diagnosis and ongoing research.

The Phelan-McDermid Syndrome Foundation provides information and support to both medical professionals and families. Being able to speak to children, parents and other families all over the world is a massive support, especially in the early stages after diagnosis. For more information, please visit www.pmsf.org.uk.



Poolboy resident Jack Darragh, who was diagnosed with Phelan McDermid Syndrome at the age of four.

Walking 32 Counties

Sean Crehan, a Londoner with family roots in Cappataggle and Kilconnell, has completed an extraordinary journey: walking from Kiltimagh, Co. Mayo to Broderick's Bar in Kilconnell while covering all 32 counties of Ireland and almost 1,300 km on foot.

His goal was to raise awareness of cancer, especially prostate cancer. Sean was joined at various points along the route by family, friends and colleagues, all supporting his mission.

At the time of going to press, Sean had raised over £20,455 on the UK fundraising site JustGiving, along with more than €2,000 in Ireland. UK donations will go to Prostate Cancer UK, while Irish donations will support East Galway & Midlands Cancer Support.

Donations are still welcome at: www.idonate.ie/swift/WAPCUK25.



Sean Crehan

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Chalonnes-Sur-Loire Twinning

By Maria Connolly

The annual twinning visit from Chalonnes-Sur-Loire, France, took place recently. Now spanning over four decades of friendship and cultural exchange, the visit has traditionally been timed to coincide with the pinnacle event in Ballinasloe's calendar.

The French delegation was welcomed at Dublin Airport by Sean Tully. Those visiting from France included Marie-Annick and Maurice Cebron; Cllr Martine Fardeau (representing the Mayor's Office); Cllr Christelle Chalumeau Rachineux (Municipal Representative); John Kirton (Interpreter); and Yannick and Isabelle Garnier (from the Board of Wine Federation).

They were greeted by their host families just in time to enjoy the Friday night fireworks display. On Saturday, Country Fair Day, the group visited the Ahascragh Distillery and, coming from a renowned wine-growing region, were particularly impressed.

The Three Fairs Dinner took place in the Shearwater Hotel on the second Saturday night — a notable departure from the tradition of over 40 years, but one designed to offer greater variety and engagement for all visiting delegations.

The Three Fairs Twinning — linking the three oldest recorded fairs in Ireland: the Puck Fair of Killorglin, the Aul Lammas Fair of Ballycastle, and the Great October Fair of Ballinasloe — was established during challenging times for the island in the mid-1970s. For many decades, the Town Councils of Ballinasloe, Ballycastle, and Kerry County Council drove the alliance forward with great enthusiasm, supported strongly by the Tourist Boards and both Governments. In more recent years, changes to local government structures have lessened its visibility.

Speakers on the night included David Collins, Mayor of Co. Galway; Cllr Martine Fardeau; and Bill Kennedy MBE (representing the Causeway Coast and Glens Borough Council). Gifts were exchanged between council representatives. Sean Tully served as MC, assisted by Annalise Fardeau and Catherine Gagneux (Honorary French Consul). The event was thoroughly enjoyed by all.



Clr. Christelle Chalumeau Rachineux, Chalonnes Council, David Collins, Cathaoirleach, Galway County Council, Clr. Martine Fardeau, Chalonnes Council, Sean Tully, Chairman, Ballinasloe Town Twinning



David Collins, Cathaoirleach, Galway County Council, Clr Bill Kennedy, Causeway Coast & Glens Borough Council, Sean Tully, Chairman, Ballinasloe Town Twinning

The Twinning Dinner took place on Sunday evening in Ballinasloe Golf Club and proved another very pleasant occasion. Geraldine Kelly, Honorary Secretary, made presentations on behalf of the Ballinasloe Town Twinning Committee to the visiting delegation.

Sean Tully thanked all those who attended, with special appreciation for the host families: Geraldine and MI S. Kelly; Tom and Liz Madden; Mary and PJ Carty; Mike and Anne Kelly; and Sean and Ita Tully. Speakers included Yannick Garnier, who extended an invitation to the 2026 festival, and Marie-Annick Cebron, President of the French Twinning Committee, who expressed heartfelt thanks to everyone involved in making the visit such a happy one. John Kirton again acted as interpreter.

MC Sean Tully concluded by thanking Ballinasloe Golf Club, especially Tee 19, for the excellent food, and wished all visitors a safe journey home.



Marie-Annick Cebron, Chalonnes Town Twinning, Geraldine Kelly Sec. Ballinasloe Town Twinning Committee.



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Joe Burke Guest Speaker At Youth Event

By Maria Connolly

Former Comhairle member, volunteer youth leader and Ballinasloe native, Joseph Burke, got the chance to open up about his lived experiences with mental health at the County Galway Comhairle na nÓg Youth Conference, which took place in Galway County Council chambers recently.

Young people from secondary schools across Galway County were invited to attend and discussed issues that concern young people in their area.

Comhairle na nÓg are based in every local authority in the country. The organisation enables young people aged 12-17 to exercise their right in influencing decision-makers on the topics most important to them.

Joseph spoke about his personal journey through bullying, anxiety, and mental illness, raising awareness about mental health, and the importance of support networks.

Reflecting on his school years, Joseph described his experiences with 'smart comments/slaggering' from a majority of his peers, which isolated him and severely affected his well-being.

Struggling with anxiety and dyslexia made homework impossible and caused many arguments with the school and at home, and led to school avoidance and low self-esteem. He also faced panic attacks and sleepless nights.

Joseph credits his recovery to supportive figures, including his "one good adult", his support network and his involvement in youth work, which helped rebuild his confidence and sense of belonging.



Joseph Burke

Now a qualified social care worker, Joseph says connection, communication, and compassion remain key to maintaining his well-being. "Don't bottle it up," he advises. "Talking to family, friends, or professionals can make all the difference."

Joseph currently works as a Support Worker with the Brothers of Charity. He's an active volunteer who loves finding ways to use his experiences to try and help others, sharing and spreading awareness on mental health.

He volunteers for Regari Recovery College in Roscommon, and is a member of a mental health research advisory group for the Royal College of Surgeons, providing the perspectives of those with lived experience on research.

In the future, he would like to find more opportunities to share his story with others. He continues to manage bipolar disorder and anxiety.

For further information on Comhairle na nÓg, please visit <https://comhairlenanog.ie/>.



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Від сусідів до друзів: Рік спільногого життя

By Julia Prystupa

За цей рік Баллінаслоу стало місцем, де переплелися дві історії — українська та ірландська. Проживши поруч понад рік, ми можемо озирнутися й побачити, як багато нового відкрили одне про одного. Ми знайшли спільне — любов до родини, повагу до традицій та біль від втрат, спричинених війною. Відчули й відмінності — у звичаях, у способах святкувати чи жартувати. Та саме вони відкривають нові горизонти, навчають одне одного й допомагають творити спільну історію.

Для тих, хто вперше ступає на цю землю, вона відкривається не лише як країна, а як відчуття дому — спокійного, де тебе чекають. У містечках на кшталт Баллінаслоу це тепло живе в усмішці незнайомця, у сміху в пабі та в тихій, але міцній силі громади. Люди збираються на матчах, весілях, похоронах і святкуваннях, що єднають покоління, — і саме в цій здатності разом радіти й сумувати, підтримувати й пам'ятати б'ється серце Ірландії. Іхня культура, сповнена міфів, музики й звичаїв, бережно передається з покоління в покоління, зігриваючи життя любов'ю й відчуттям належності.

Вірність і гостинність — частина характеру цих людей. Віданість близьким і рідному краю залишається непохитною, а гостинність проявляється у простому й широму жесті: за столом завжди знайдеться місце для ще одного.

Характер ірландців поєднує політичну відкритість і природну скромність. Вони охоче й глибоко дискутують про політику, спираючись на історичний досвід, але водночас залишаються стриманими: не вихваляються досягненнями й легко відводять компліменти.

Тут щедрість і гумор ідути поруч щодня, створюючи відчуття справжнього затишку й легкості. Доброта тут природна, як дихання: сусід зупиниться, щоб підвезти, незнайомець — щоб допомогти. Навіть у найсерйозніших розмовах неодмінно з'явиться жарт, що нагадує: важливі миті теж можуть бути освітлені усмішкою.

Гармонія цього краю народжується в простих речах — у чашці гарячого чаю, у спогляданні природи чи прогулянках уздовж торф'янників і морського узбережжя. Чайник тут завжди напоготові, щоб зігріти не лише руки, а й розмову, зібрати людей навколо одного столу. Ці звичні ритуали повертають спокій і наповнюють енергією.



Neighbours to Friends: A Year of Shared Life

Over the past year, Ballinasloe has become more than just a shared space—it's become a shared story. As Ukrainian families settled into the town and Irish neighbours welcomed them, something meaningful began to grow. Through school gate chats, community events, and shared meals, we've come to understand not just each other's cultures, but each other's values. Now, after a year of living side by side, we can reflect on what we've learned—what we have in common, what makes us different, and how those differences make our neighbourhood stronger.

Ukrainians carry a quiet strength, rebuilding even after unimaginable loss. Their determination is always anchored by strong family ties—whether separated by borders or

gathered around the dinner table. Family is the foundation that sustains hope and resilience.

Learning is a shared pursuit. Parents encourage curiosity and independence while helping children navigate new languages and school systems. At the same time, Ukrainians themselves adapt quickly—mastering English, navigating Irish bureaucracy, and supporting one another through the challenges of resettlement.

Heritage is proudly preserved through embroidered shirts, folk songs, and cultural celebrations that bring colour to local life. Alongside this, spiritual traditions—Orthodox, Catholic, or secular—offer comfort and grounding, especially during times of uncertainty. Together, culture and

faith provide continuity and strength.

Meals like borscht or varenyky are more than nourishment—they're stories passed down through generations. Sharing food is an act of hospitality and care, often accompanied by laughter, memories, and a sense of belonging. It's one of the simplest yet most powerful bridges between communities.

Ukrainians don't just seek shelter—they seek purpose. Many have joined local initiatives, volunteered, and offered their skills to the community. And when kindness is extended—a lift to the shop, a warm welcome—it is remembered sincerely. Gratitude strengthens bonds, turning neighbours into friends.



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Galway Rural Development Success

By Maria Connolly

It's been another action-packed year for Galway Rural Development (GRD). Despite ongoing challenges in rural Ireland, GRD has continued to step up, innovate, and deliver real impact for communities across East Galway.

GRD's office on Dunlo Street is a hub of activity, hosting groups and activities, and providing a safe place for people to seek advice and support around the services and programmes it provides.

The Social Inclusion and Community Activation Programme (SICAP) continues to make a difference to the people living in Ballinasloe through the people and projects it supports. One of the highlights this year was the Midsummer Multicultural Festival, which helped shine a light on inclusion and equality, ensuring everyone has a chance to thrive. SICAP also continues to support many other community groups in the town, such as Ballinasloe's Care and Repair and the Traveller Women's Group.



Care & Repair equipment launch (L-R): Patricia Tierney, Jerry Cawley, Michael Coffey, Billy Ward, Karyn Gavin (GRD), and Eric Naughton. GRD's SICAP team supported the Care & Repair team with a €2,500 equipment grant.



The hugely successful Midsummer Multicultural Festival, supported by GRD.

The Tús, Rural Social Scheme and Community Employment (CE) scheme remain a cornerstone of community life, helping to keep rural Ireland ticking and providing support to organisations such as East Galway Midlands Cancer Care, Vision Ireland, Galway Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals and Poolboy Community Crèche. With 335 active participants across 18

schemes, GRD is proud to support countless local groups that depend on these vital programmes.

A particularly exciting development has been the launch of the WorkAbility Programme, designed to support people with disabilities in moving closer to employment. The response has been overwhelmingly positive, with participation already exceeding expectations in 2025.

In addition, the organisation continues to make a real difference through initiatives such as ParentChild+, which

supports families to ensure every child starts school confident and ready to learn. Programmes like HSE Health Projects and the Empowering Communities Programme have also brought new energy and wellbeing into local life. GRD has also worked with local communities delivering projects such as defibrillator training and supporting the purchase and installation of a new AED.

Since launching the latest LEADER Programme just a year ago, GRD has approved an impressive €2.2 million in funding for 31 local project groups.

From funding community projects to empowering individuals, GRD's impact in Ballinasloe has never been stronger. The dedication of staff, volunteers, and community partners who continue to work together to make the town thrive is a shining example of what can be achieved through collaboration, care, and vision.

All at Galway Rural Development would like to take this opportunity to wish all those we work with and support a very Happy Christmas, and look forward to continuing to work with everyone for 2026 and beyond. Here's to another year of growth, inclusion, and community spirit — together, we're building a brighter future for Ballinasloe and all of East Galway.



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Christmas Giving Locally

By Colm Croffy

There will be plenty of money raised for good causes this Christmas as the town's many organisations return with annual fundraising and sports activities.

Christmas Jumper Day is always a popular event, and it will be held this year on Friday 5th December. Proceeds will go to Ballinasloe Social Services and Galway Hospice and, as usual, plenty of local businesses and schools will be taking part. Last year's event raised over €10,000 for charity, and organisers will be hoping to top that.

For those looking for handmade gifts and other treats, the Brothers of Charity are holding their annual Sale of Work on Monday 8th December, 10:30am-1:00pm in the Shearwater Hotel. Entry is free, and everyone is invited. In addition to the craft stalls, there will be plenty of home baking and a raffle.

Having been active in the town for over 40 years, Ballinasloe Lions are a staple of the town's voluntary provision. They will hold a church gate collection to raise funds for their popular Christmas hamper food appeal on Saturday 13th December and Sunday 14th December. All the money raised will go to fund the hampers, which will be delivered to approximately 150 individuals and families on Wednesday 19th December.

Another organisation that are preparing hampers is COPE Galway. Over December, Coral Leisure will have a Giving Tree in their reception, allowing people to donate specific gifts for COPE hampers. The "Trees of Cope" have special tags that list wish-list items for families. Those visiting Coral Leisure can select a tag, purchase the requested gift, and drop it into the leisure centre. The gifts will then be used to make up bespoke hampers for the various recipients. Last year, COPE Galway distributed over 400 hampers to those who might otherwise have gone without a Christmas meal.



Rachel Goode, who will be bringing her "Magic of Christmas" concert back to the Shearwater this festive season.

With the rising cost of living, more families are turning to St Vincent de Paul for help. The charity is accepting donations of cash and goods in the shop, or cash in St Michael's Presbytery, Dunlo Street. You can also donate by bank transfer to: Allied Irish Bank, Dunlo Street **IBAN: IE83 AIBK 9370 4530 7561 83 BIC: AIBKIE2D**. The St Vincent's shop will also be hosting a memory tree throughout the month of December. Customers can buy a decoration in memory of a loved one to hang on the memory tree, which will be displayed in the shop throughout the month.

As for Christmas concerts, Soprano Rachel Goode will be returning to the town with her annual fundraising concert, The Magic of Christmas, in aid of East Galway and Midlands Cancer Support Centre**. It** will take place on Wednesday 17th December at the Shearwater Hotel. Also performing on the night will be Gerard Fahy, Trasna, Mike Hanrahan, and the Clonfert College Choir. The concert starts at 8:00pm, but the Clonfert College Trad Band will be providing pre-show entertainment from 7:00pm. The 2024 concert was very successful and raised €4,275 for the charity. Tickets for this year's show are priced at €25.

Another fundraising concert will take place in the Town Hall Theatre on Friday 19th December when the Town Band takes to the stage with special guests, St Brigid's Community Choir. The concert will start at 7:30pm, and the junior band will also make



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their first public appearance. Tickets will be available for purchase at the door, with 50% of the proceeds going to the Portiuncula Paediatric Unit.

The Traditional Christmas Eve carolling and entertaining by St. Michaels Folk Group Choir will be on Main St at 2:30pm, but the Town Band will also be on hand to warm up passers-by with their Festive Music at 1:30pm.

For those seeking a more active form of charity giving, Padraig Pearses GAA Club are hosting the GOAL Mile again this Christmas Day. The walk will take place between 10:00am and 12:00pm, and everyone is welcome (including dogs). It's a great way to work up a hunger for the Christmas feast or work off the chocolates! You can make a contribution to GOAL on the day, but if you would like to register in advance and get your GOAL beanie hat/t-shirt, you can do so now here: Register - GOAL Mile 2025 or search for the walk on <https://goalmile.org>.



The COPE giving tree at Coral Leisure.



Volunteers collecting for Christmas jumper day.

Clontuskert Craft Fair & Festive Party

Croí Clontuskert Community Development proudly hosts its second annual Craft Fair & Festive Party! This much-loved community event returns to the Kiltormer Sports Complex on Sunday, 7 December, from 1.00pm to 5.00pm.

Following the success of last year's inaugural fair, this year's event promises to be even bigger and better. Visitors can look forward to an afternoon filled with craft stalls, a bake sale, tea and coffee, mince pies, and a raffle, plus a special visit from Santa Claus himself!

The Craft Fair offers the perfect opportunity to pick up unique, handmade gifts from talented local crafters while enjoying the warm, festive atmosphere and meeting up with members of local and neighbouring communities. Whether you're browsing for presents or just soaking up the holiday cheer, there's something for everyone to enjoy.

Entry is free, and tables for stallholders are available for just €25. Anyone interested in taking part can contact Liz at 086 170 6475 or email clontuskertcd@gmail.com to book a spot.

Follow us on Facebook for all the updates: Croí Clontuskert Community Development



Some of the Croí Clontuskert Committee & Volunteers at last years event.

BACK ROW (L-R): Cormac Frehill, Bríd Lyons, Mary Kelly, Teresa Lyons, Ada Cummins, Liz Frehill, James Shaughnessy, Maria Brennan, and Ciara Frehill.

FRONT (L-R): Sheila Muldoon, Maurice Muldoon, Damian Curley, Carol Finneran, Santa Clause, Laura Coleman, and Darina Cooke.



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Campbells Celebrate 51 Years Together

By Maria Connolly

Athlone native and long-time adopted son of Ballinasloe, Pat Campbell, and his wife, Marian Campbell (formerly Marian Loughnane), recently celebrated 51 years of marital bliss.

When Pat arrived in the town some 52 years ago, he worked as a barman in Duck's Bar on Dunlo Street (now Venezia restaurant) and later did some part-time work in 'Cúil na Gréine', later called The Mount.

Pat joined the Irish Defence Forces (Army) and spent 36 years serving his country. He served with the United Nations Peacekeeping Forces on three tours of duty in Lebanon, and also served in both Kosovo and Liberia.

Marian worked for several years in West Shoes, Dubarry Shoes, and in AT Cross.

Pat and Marian's priority and passion for the past 51 years have undoubtedly been their family, which includes sons Jason and Glenn, the late Patrick Brian (R.I.P.), daughter Siobhain, daughters-in-law, son-in-law, and adored grandchildren.

A close second to family for Pat and Marian would have to be their total commitment to Ballinasloe Town AFC Soccer



Pat and Marian Campbell on their wedding day 51 years ago in 1974.



A recent photo of the Campbell family. L-R: Glenn, Siobhain, Marian, Pat, the late Patrick Brian (R.I.P.), and Jason.

Club. They both played for the club, as did many of their family and extended family.

In fact, Pat has been a stalwart of the club since he arrived in town all those years ago. He has served in multiple roles, including Youth Manager, Senior Men's Manager, Groundsman, Referee, Vice-Chairperson, and Club Chairperson.

Indeed, he was Club Chairperson when the club won the Credit Union Voluntary Organisation of the Year award in the town in 1998. Pat took on any role he was asked to, including selling club lotto tickets on a regular basis over many years. He is currently assisting the men's senior team as match-day Kit Man.

The couple are enjoying retirement and love their annual holidays abroad. And, of course, Pat is still very active every year, saving the turf in the bog and bringing it home to their family house at St Joseph's Place.

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Soapbox Debating Competition at the Library

By Maria Connolly



Pictured in Ballinasloe Library Church Gallery: Joe Jennings (Executive Librarian), Siobhán Fitzgerald (Judging Chair), John Brady (16s-and-under Winner), Lidia Rose Murphy (16s-and-under Runner-up), Rida Kashif (17s-and-over Winner), Mary Ellen Coen (17s-and-over Runner-up), and Ollie Turner (Event MC).

It's been a busy time in the library. Eighteen students from across the county recently went head-to-head to win the top spot for the regional leg of the Europe Direct Soapbox Competition. This year's theme was "Likes, Lies and Legal Limits: Is it Time the EU Banned Social Media for Under-16s?"

Students from Portumna Community School, High Cross College Tuam, Holy Rosary Mountbellew, Scoil an Chroí Naofa Ballinasloe, Creagh National School and Clonfert College put their presentation skills to the test and treated the audience to lively, well-researched debates that highlighted students' compelling arguments for and against the motion. Participants demonstrated their ability to engage with key European issues while showcasing their public speaking skills.

Judges Siobhán Fitzgerald, Máirtín O'Donnchadha and Joe Bergin were impressed with the high standard of entries and praised all participants for



Local children pictured with Library Assistant Mary Healy.

their enthusiasm and passionate presentations.

The winner of the 17s-and-over category was Rida Kashif from Clonfert College, and Mary Ellen Coen from Portumna Community School was the highly commended runner-up. The winner of the 16s-and-under category was John Brady from Creagh National School, and Lidia Rose Murphy from High Cross College Tuam was the highly commended runner-up.

Congratulations to Rida Kashif and John Brady, who will be representing Europe Direct Ballinasloe in the National Soapbox Final at the Royal College of Physicians in Kildare Street, Dublin, in December. Regional winners representing the eight Europe Direct Centres in Ireland will compete for the top title and the chance to win €1,000.

There were also spooky times at Halloween. Branch Librarian Bríd Grehan treated Senior Infants classes from Scoil an Chroí Naofa to a fun spider-making craft, while Library Assistant Mary Healy read some spooky Halloween stories, and participants made some ghastly ghosts to help decorate the library.

In terms of upcoming exhibitions, Gables Art Group returns to Ballinasloe Library this December and will be launching their exhibition on Saturday, December 6, at 2pm. Artwork will be available to view in the Church Gallery from Tuesday, December 2, until Friday, December 19. Meanwhile, in January, the library will welcome Abbie McGown on Saturday, January 24, at 2.30pm as she delivers her talk entitled "St. Gabriel's Convent, St. Joseph's Industrial School and Ballinasloe Library." Her talk will focus on the origins, history and previous incarnations of what is now the Library and Church Gallery.



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Increased Marks for Tidy Towns

By Maria Connolly

The Tidy Towns Committee increased its mark in all eight categories to a new high of 357 out of a possible 550. This SuperValu National Tidy Towns Competition result represents an increase of 12 marks on the 2024 result.

The committee was lauded in this year's Adjudication Report for being supported by approximately sixty volunteers. The report also noted that "it displays admirable energy and commitment, and there is evident pride in Ballinasloe's place in the Tidy Towns competition. The inclusion of new members alongside experienced long-term volunteers ensures valuable continuity and fresh perspectives!"

Ballinasloe Tidy Towns Committee held its annual Local Competitions



Debra Grennan-Keighery (Overall winners, Dun Esker Residents Association), Eddie Kelly (SuperValu Ballinasloe), Fiona Carroll (Dun Esker Residents Association).

Awards Ceremony on Monday, November 10th, at the Ballinasloe Soccer Complex. Presenting the award to the overall winners, Dun-Esker Residents Association Chairperson Tom Madden said that the main focus for the coming season would be on promoting awareness of the devastating global impact of climate change.

These local competitions are kindly sponsored by Dunne's SuperValu Brackernagh.

The committee also acknowledges the ongoing funding support that is provided by Galway County Council.

The committee always welcomes new volunteers. For further information, please email ballinasloetidytowns@gmail.com or telephone 086 817 9580.

Padraig Pearses Cultural Activities

Padraig Pearses continue to lead the way among GAA clubs when it comes to cultural activities, with 19 young club members recently taking part in the Roscommon Scór na nÓg 2025 County competition.

These young people represented their club and parishes through the Irish language and cultural identity of the GAA. The club was represented in Solo Singing, Recitation, Drama, Ballad Singing, and they also had two teams participating in Tráth na gCeist. These very talented club members were: Erin Arru, Aoibhín Seale, Donnacha Seale, John Brady, Danny Brady, Rachael Fallon, Daniel Fallon, Ellen Monaghan, Róisín O'Sullivan, Éabha O'Sullivan, Miriam Darcy, Finn Cormican, Paul Óg Flynn, James McHugh, Katie



Padraig Pearses GAA club members on night two of the Scór na nÓg competition.

Grenham, Katie Killeen, Kate Killeen Lyons, Ailbhe Glynn Desmond and Oisín Murphy. Many thanks to the senior coaches who volunteered to help these young people with their roles. They were: Tom Costello, Aisling O'Sullivan, Hubert Darcy, Geraldine Sheeran, Hugh Collins, Mary Darcy and Oisín Seale. Ar aghaidh linn.

Padraig Pearses also have several upcoming events celebrating Irish culture. A Christmas junior trad session will take place on Sunday, December 14, from 5.00pm-6.30pm. There will also be a senior trad session over the Christmas holidays – keep an eye on the club's social

media accounts for further details.

In February, Lá Fhéile Bríde will be celebrated with music, song and stories in the clubhouse on Sunday, February 1, at 9pm.

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Scoil an Chroí Naofa Campaign for New School

By Maria Connolly



Staff and pupils of Scoil an Chroí Naofa outside one of the two current school buildings.

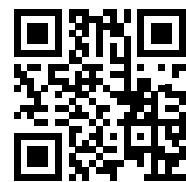
Scoil an Chroí Naofa has recently launched an online petition via www.change.org, to give impetus to their campaign for a new, modern and energy-efficient building. When the boys' and girls' schools in town amalgamated 30 years ago, the Department of Education promised a new school building, and staff and pupils have been waiting since. "Our 300 pupils are learning in outdated classrooms," says School Principal, Christine Connor.

At present, the school operates from two buildings divided by the busy Society Street, requiring pupils to cross multiple times per day and putting them at risk of accidents. One building was constructed in 1937, and the other is a "temporary" prefab that was constructed in 1972. The prefab has no insulation, and the school's entire capitation grant is currently spent on heating. Resources are especially needed as the school is a DEIS Band 1 school that serves those facing educational disadvantage, and the staff aim to provide opportunity and inclusion for all.

A design team was first appointed for the project back in 2001. "Over the last 24 years, there has been delay after delay. Plans have had to be revised and updated a number of times. Planning permission has been sought, extended and lapsed," says Christine. A revised, detailed Stage 2B design package was submitted to the Department of Education earlier this year, but approval has yet to be granted.

The petition seeks the immediate approval and delivery of the new school building. "Our teachers and staff continue to create a warm, caring and inclusive environment, but goodwill isn't enough," Christine adds.

The school hopes that the people of Ballinasloe will come together to sign the petition. It can be found on www.change.org (<https://c.org/qFGyV4PmCT>), Facebook, Instagram and TikTok.



Midlands String Quartet Presents:

Christmas Classics by Candlelight

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Yvonne O'Toole

St John's Church of Ireland
Ballinasloe H53 XP90

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Clonfert College Busy Term

By Maria Connolly

It's been a busy autumn term for all years at Clonfert College. Nina Carberry MEP recently visited the college to speak to Transition Year students. She discussed leadership, resilience, EU citizenship and the importance of pursuing your passions. Her visit was in association with Junior Achievement Ireland, an organisation that teaches young people the skills they need to succeed in a changing world.



Meanwhile, the first-year students took part in a reflective, uplifting retreat in Knock. It was a wonderful opportunity for the students to take time out from their busy school routines, connect with one another, and explore themes of friendship, faith, wellbeing and personal growth. There have also been educational days out for Leaving Cert students.

The Leaving Cert Applied students spent a heart-warming morning in Ballinasloe Social Services, meeting the elderly who attend day care on Mondays. Students enjoyed playing bingo, sharing stories and chatting about what Christmas was like in years gone by — a lovely connection across generations. The Leaving Cert Geography students also participated in a river field trip for their project work. From measuring river velocity and channel width to analysing bedload and completing field sketches, students got hands-on experience applying techniques learned in class.

Finally, congratulations go to Dylan Greene, who picked up the trophy for Goal of the Season with Moore United, and to the Senior B Girls Volleyball team, who have recently qualified for the All-Ireland semi-final.

Heading First Equestrian Event Success For St. Ronans



St Ronan's National School, Taughmaconnell, the overall winner of the Interschools Ireland Primary School event. This is St Ronan's first ever equestrian team. L-R: Ellen Keyes, Millie Keyes, Molly Costello and Zoe Shaughnessy.



Lily Costello, who received an individual award at the Interschools Ireland Primary School competition in Mullingar equestrian.



Sadie Costello, who received an award in the individual competition at the interschools Ireland Primary School competition in Mullingar equestrian.

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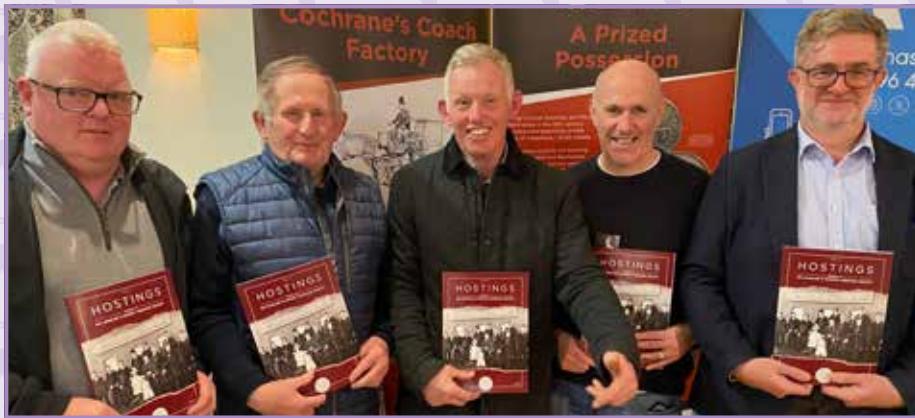
Seamus Duffy (Chair BACD) Minister Dara Calleary & BACD manager Lyn Donnelly at the National Hubs Summit held in Ballinasloe on the 13th November



Author Declan Quinn with his wonderful book Ballinasloe RFC - 150 Years of Rugby, when it was on the Number Best Sellers Spot for most of October in Salmons Department Store.



Tom Ward and editor Damian Mac Con Uladh deep in chat at the launch of the second edition of Hostings.



Pictured at the launch of Hostings were Niall Fahy, Willie Tully, Cllr. Dermot Connolly, Brendan Jennings, and editor Damian Mac Con Uladh.

International Credit Union Day 2025 Photo



Sofia Trandafir With Grainne Murphy & Sean Madden from BCU



Eve & Jane Mc Court With their Granddad Willie Burke



Ayla Howley with Saoirse Keighrey from BCU



Donncha Loughnane with Grainne Murphy and Sean Madden from BCU



Donations & Sponsorship: Joshua Judge with Linda Feeney from BCU



Captain Paddy Creaven, President Gerry Fitzgerald with the winner of the O Connor Mc Hugh singles Matchplay Jack Coughlan. Also in the photo is the first winner of the prize some 50 years ago - Joe Moore

Real Savings at
Dunne's SuperValu Ballinasloe



Tom Madden & Johnny Walsh (Ballinasloe Tidy Towns),
Debra Grennan (Dun Esker Residents Association),
Eddie Kelly (SuperValu Ballinasloe), Fiona Carroll
(Dun Esker Residents Association), Jean Connor
& Padraig Lyons (Ballinasloe Tidy Towns)



Padraig Pearses Culture: Padraig Pearses GAA club members on night two of the Scór na nÓg competition.



The Crew from the Hill Bar, Kiltormer with a donation of €26,503, the proceeds of a very successful 50KM Charity Cycle Fundraiser presented to East Galway Midlands Cancer Support Centre in November



Cllr. Allan Harney, James Burke, Christmas Lights Business Liaison Co-ordinator, Nina Carberry MEP in Gullane Hotel at a Clonfert School visit recently



The Harney family celebrating the upcoming retirements of Seamus and Maura (Glantaune)

DECEMBER 2025 EVENTS GUIDE

December 1, Monday

Men's Shed Meeting	10am-2pm	Cullens Yard, Main St
Bsloe Active Ret Knitting session	10.3 -12.30am	Gullane's Hotel
Bsloe Active Ret Bowling	10.30 - 12.30am	Emerald Ballroom Bsloe
Parents of Ch w Ad. Needs Sup Meet	10.30am-12pm	Fam&Com Resource Centre
Crafty Girls Classes	11am-1pm	E.M.C. Care C., Brackernagh
Bsloe Active Ret Aqua Aerobics	2-3pm	Coral Leisure Centre
Social Tennis. WoMen's Evening	6pm	Tennis Court
Brazilian jiu jitsu, Kickboxing	6pm, 7pm	The King's Court Academy
Pitales with Paula	6.30pm	Moore Hall
Bowls	8pm-10pm	Ballymacward Hall

December 2, Tuesday

Yoga with Ju	7.30am, 10am	Enterprise Centre
Slimming World Group classes	8am / 9.30am	Shearwater Hotel
	5.30pm / 7pm	
Breastfeeding Support Group	10am-11.30am	Youth Work, Marina Point
Bsloe Active Ret Walking Club	10.30 - 12.30 am	Running Track, Brackernagh
Baby Massage Classes	11am-12pm	Youth Work, Marina Point
Learn English with Fáilte Isteach	11.15am	Library
Bridge Project	Drop in Service	Fam&Com Resource Centre
After school activities, 10-17 y	3.30pm-7pm	Youthwork Ir, Marina Point
Social Tennis. Men's Evening	6pm	Tennis Court
Bsloe Active Ret Aqua Aerobics	7pm-8pm	Coral Leisure Centre
Bridge Club	7.30pm	Bridge Rooms, Sarsfield Rd
Road Runners Track Session	7.30pm	Dunlo Track, Brackernagh
Bsloe GAA Bingo	8pm	Emerald Ballroom
Badminton	8pm-9pm	Ballymacward Hall

December 3, Wednesday

Social Bridge	11am-1pm	Bridge Rooms, Sarsfield Rd
French w/ Lizzie	11am-12pm	Gullane's Hotel
Crafty Girls Group	11.15am-12.45pm	Library
Baby Rhyme Time	11.30am	Library
Bsloe Active Ret Aqua Aerobics	2pm-3pm	Coral Leisure Centre
Bsloe Active Ret Book Club	3.30pm	Bsloe Library
After school activities, 10-17 y	3.30pm-7pm	Youthwork Ir, Marina Point
Kids BJJ, BJJ, MMA	5pm, 6pm, 7pm	The King's Court Academy
Children's Dance Class	6pm-7pm	Ballymacward Hall
Tennis. Mixed Doubles/JP Coaching	6.30pm	Tennis Court
Pilates	6.30pm	Shannonbridge Village Hall
Yoga with Ju	7.15pm-8.15pm	Enterprise Centre
Pilates with Paula	7.45pm	Moore Hall
Pulse drums programme	6.30pm, 7.30pm	Town Hall Theatre
Jiving & Social Dancing	8pm	Pádraig Pearse's Clubhouse
Fitness Class	8pm-9pm	Ballymacward Hall
Live Trad & Folk session	9pm	An Tain Bar

December 4, Thursday

Annual Xmas Fayre & Cake Sale	9.30am-3pm	Day Care Centre
HSE Ukrainian Response Clinic	10am-12noon	Fam&Com Resource Centre
Bsloe Active Ret Singing Class	10.3-12.30pm	Bsloe Town Band Hall
Chair Yoga	10.30-11.30am	Ballymacward Hall
Irish Conversation	11am-12pm	Gullane's Hotel
Christms Wreath Workshop	11am-1pm	Town Hall
International Women's Group	11.15am	Library
Bsloe Active Ret Aqua Aerobics	2pm-3pm	Coral Leisure Centre
Social Club	2.30pm-4.30pm	Ballymacward Hall
Local Auth. Integration Team Clinic	afternoon	Fam&Com Resource Centre
After school activities, 10-17 y	3.30pm-7pm	Youthwork Ir, Marina Point
Christms Workshop - mini wreath	3.30-4.30pm	Kilmillor Library
BJJ, Kickboxing	6pm, 7pm	The King's Court Academy
Faith & Fun Club	7pm-7.50pm	Our Lady of Lourdes Church
Pilates	7pm, 8pm	Ballymacward Hall
Bsloe Active Ret Bowling	7pm-9pm	Emerald Ballroom Bsloe
Beginners/Improvers Tennis	7pm-8pm	Tennis Court
Road Runners Track Session	7.30pm	Dunlo Track, Brackernagh
Bridge Club	7.30pm	Bridge Rooms, Sarsfield Rd
Darts Tournament Vault 15.0	7.45pm	The Countryman
Tennis. Div.6 MenTraining	8pm-9pm	Tennis Court
Folk and Trad Session	9pm	Gibbons Pillar House Bar
Trad Music	9.30pm	Fallon's Bar

December 5, Friday

Yoga with Ju	7.30am, 10am	Enterprise Centre
Indoor Country Market	9am-1pm	Social Services Centre
Men's Shed Meeting	10am-2pm	Cullens Yard, Main St
Pilates	10am, 11am	Ballymacward Hall
Bridge Project	Drop In Service	Fam&Com Resource Centre
Christms Jumper Day	All Day	Town-wide
Tennis. Junior Coaching	4.30pm-5.30pm	Tennis Court
Open Tennis	6pm	Tennis Court
Fitness Class	8pm-9pm	Ballymacward Hall
Traditional Music Session	9.30pm	Emerald Bar
Music. Down the road	10pm	Brewery Lane
Find The Joker	10pm	An Tain Bar

December 6, Saturday

Little Kickers	9, 9.45, 10.35am	Emerald Ballroom
Plates	9.30am, 10.35am	Shannonbridge Village Hall
Open Mat	10am-11.30am	The King's Court Academy
Lions Hockey Club training	11.15am	AFC soccer pitch
Daidína Nollaig (as Gaeilge)	TBC	Pádraig Pearse's Clubhouse
Open Tennis	2pm	Tennis Court
Music in a Canal Bar	Evening Time	Shearwater Hotel
Xmas Party	Evening Time	Moycard Lodge & Marina
Xmas Party	Evening Time	Luker's, Shbridge

Xmas Classics by Candlelight

Music. Fairly lively	8pm	St John's Church
Music. Trevor Cavanagh	10pm	Brewery Lane
Music. Micheal Regan	10pm	Gibbons Pillar House Bar
Live Music	10pm	Millars Bar, Ballydangan
Live Music	10pm	An Tain Bar, Joe's Bar
	10pm	Fallon's Bar, Shbridge

December 7, Sunday

Social Tennis	10am-2pm	Tennis Court
Christmas Craft Fair	11am-3pm	Town Band Hall, Dunlo Hill
Craft Fair & Festive Party	1pm-5pm	Kiltormer Sports Complex
Open Tennis	2pm	Tennis Court
Padraig Pearse's GAA Club AGM	4pm	Ballymacward Hall
Social Dancing. Stephen Smyth	4.30pm-7pm	Shearwater Hotel
Live Trad & Folk session	6pm	An Tain Bar
Live Music	7pm	JJ Killeens
Country Dancing. Patrick Feeney	8.30pm	Shearwater Hotel

December 8, Monday

Men's Shed Meeting	10am-2pm	Cullens Yard, Main St
Crafty Girls Classes	11am-1pm	E.M.C. Care C., Brackernagh
Santa's sensory play, 0-6y	11am-12.30pm	Shearwater Hotel
Pitales with Paula	6.30pm	Moore Hall
"Puss in Boots" Panto	7.30pm	Town Hall Theatre

December 9, Tuesday

Baby Massage Classes	11am-12pm	Youth Work, Marina Point
Learn English with Fáilte Isteach	11.15am	Library
Bridge Project	Drop in Service	Fam&Com Resource Centre
After school activities, 10-17 y	3.30pm-7pm	Youthwork Ir, Marina Point
Social Tennis. Men's Evening	6pm	Tennis Court
Bsloe Active Ret Aqua Aerobics	7pm-8pm	Coral Leisure Centre
Bridge Club	7.30pm	Bridge Rooms, Sarsfield Rd
Road Runners Track Session	7.30pm	Dunlo Track, Brackernagh
Bsloe GAA Bingo	8pm	Emerald Ballroom
Badminton	8pm-9pm	Ballymacward Hall

December 10, Wednesday

Brothers of Charity Sale of Work	10.30am - 1pm	Shearwater Hotel
French w/ Lizzie	11am-12pm	Gullane's Hotel
Crafty Girls Group	11.15am-12.45pm	Library
Baby Rhyme Time	11.30am	Library
Bsloe Active Ret Book Club	11.30pm	Golden Years Book Club
After school activities, 10-17 y	11.30pm-7pm	Shannonbridge Village Hall
Kids BJJ, BJJ, MMA	5pm, 6pm, 7pm	The King's Court Academy
Children's Dance Class	6pm-7pm	Ballymacward Hall
Tennis. Mixed Doubles/JP Coaching	6.30pm	Tennis Court
Pilates	6.30pm	Shannonbridge Village Hall
Yoga with Ju	7.15pm-8.15pm	Enterprise Centre
Pilates with Paula	7.45pm	Moore Hall
Pulse drums programme	6.30pm, 7.30pm	Town Hall Theatre
Jiving & Social Dancing	8pm	Pádraig Pearse's Clubhouse
Fitness Class	8pm-9pm	Ballymacward Hall
Live Trad & Folk session	9pm	An Tain Bar

December 11, Thursday

Irish Conversation	11am-12pm	Gullane's Hotel
International Women's Group	11.15am	Library
After school activities, 10-17 y	11.15pm-7pm	Young Parent Support Programme
Kids BJJ, BJJ, MMA	5pm, 6pm, 7pm	Drop in Service
Children's Dance Class	6pm-7pm	Fam&Com Resource Centre
Tennis. Mixed Doubles/JP Coaching	6.30pm	"Puss in Boots" Panto
Pilates	6.30pm	Gibbons Pillar House Bar
Yoga with Ju	7.15pm-8.15pm	Enterprise Centre
Pilates with Paula	7.45pm	Moore Hall
Pulse drums programme	6.30pm, 7.30pm	Town Hall Theatre
Jiving & Social Dancing	8pm	Pádraig Pearse's Clubhouse
Fitness Class	8pm-9pm	Ballymacward Hall
Live Trad & Folk session	9pm	An Tain Bar

December 12, Friday

Indoor Country Market	9am-1pm	Social Services Centre
Men's Shed Meeting	10am-2pm	Cullens Yard, Main St
Pilates	10am, 11am	Ballymacward Hall
Bridge Project	Drop In Service	Fam&Com Resource Centre
Christms Jumper Day	All Day	Town-wide
Tennis. Junior Coaching	4.30pm-5.30pm	Tennis Court
Open Tennis	6pm	Tennis Court
Fitness Class	7pm-8pm	Ballymacward Hall
Traditional Music Session	8pm	Emerald Bar
Music. Down the road	9pm	Brewery Lane
Find The Joker	10pm	An Tain Bar

December 13, Saturday

Pilates	9.30am, 10.35am	Shannonbridge Village Hall
Bsloe Active Ret Bowling	7pm-9pm	Emerald Ballroom Bsloe
Beginners/Improvers Tennis	7pm-8pm	Tennis Court
Road Runners Track Session	7.30pm	Dunlo Track, Brackernagh
Bridge Club	7.30pm	Bridge Rooms, Sarsfield Rd
Darts Tournament Vault 15.0	7.45pm	The Countryman
Tennis. Div.6 MenTraining	8pm-9pm	Tennis Court
Folk and Trad Session	9pm	Gibbons Pillar House Bar
Trad Music	9.30pm	Fallon's Bar

December 14, Sunday

Carol Service	10am	St John's Church
Christms Party	1.30pm	Moore Hall
"Puss in Boots" Panto	2.30pm	Town Hall Theatre
Social Dancing. Michael Collins	4.30pm-7pm	Shearwater Hotel
Christms Junior Trad session	5pm-6.30pm	Padraig Pearse's GAA Club
Live Trad & Folk session	6pm	An Tain Bar
Christms Party	7pm	JJ Killeens
Music in a Canal Bar	8.30pm	Shearwater Hotel
Live Music	10pm	An Tain, Gibbons Bar, Joe's Bar
Country Dancing	10pm	Fallon's, JJ Killeens Shbridge
Live Music	10pm	Live Music
Live Music	10pm	Broderick's Bar, Kilconnell
NYE Music. Cowboy Roadshow	10pm	Millars Bar, Ballydangan

December 15, Monday

Men's Shed Meeting	10am-2pm	Cullens Yard, Main St
Crafty Girls Classes	11am-1pm	E.M.C. Care C., Brackernagh
Pitales with Paula	6.30pm	Moore Hall
"Puss in Boots" Panto	7.30pm	Town Hall Theatre
Learn English with Fáilte Isteach	11.15am	Library
Bsloe GAA Bingo	8pm	Emerald Ballroom
French w/ Lizzie	11am-12.45pm	Gibbons Pillar House Bar
Crafty Girls Group	11.30am	Library
Baby Rhyme Time	11.30pm	Library
Citizens Inf. Centre Outreach	by appointment	Fam&Com Resource Centre
Pitales	6.30pm	Shannonbridge Village Hall

December 16, Tuesday

JANUARY 2026 EVENTS GUIDE

January 2, Friday	Indoor Country Market	9am-1pm	Social Services Centre	Indoor Country Market	9am-1pm	Social Services Centre	International Women's Group	11.15am	Library
Tennis. Junior Coaching	4.30pm-5.30pm	Tennis Court		Men's Shed Meeting	10am-2pm	Cullens Yard, Main St	Local Auth. Integration Team Clinic	afternoon	Fam&Com Resource Centre
Open Tennis	6pm	Tennis Court		Parent, Child and Toddler group	morning	Fam&Com Resource Centre	Young Parent Support Programme	Drop in Service	Fam&Com Resource Centre
Traditional Music Session	9.30pm	Emerald Bar		Traditional Music Session	9.30pm	Emerald Bar	Pilates	6.30pm	Shannonbridge Village Hall
Find The Joker	10pm	An Tain Bar		Find The Joker	10pm	An Tain Bar	Folk and Trad Session	9pm	Gibbons Pillar House Bar
Live music	10pm	Brewery Lane		Live music	10pm	Brewery Lane	Trad Music	9.30pm	Fallon's Bar
January 3, Saturday				January 10, Saturday			January 23, Friday		
Open Tennis	2pm	Tennis Court		Little Kickers	9am, 9.45am, 10.35am	Emerald Ballroom	Indoor Country Market	9am-1pm	Social Services Centre
Music in a Canal Bar	Evening Time	Shearwater Hotel		Open Mat	10am-11.30am	The King's Court Academy	Men's Shed Meeting	10am-2pm	Cullens Yard, Main St
Music. The CEOs	10pm	Brewery Lane		Lions Hockey Club training	11.15am	AFC soccer pitch	Traditional Music Session	9.30pm	Emerald Bar
Music. Katie Henshaw & Mike Flynn	10pm	Gibbons Pillar House Bar		Music in a Canal Bar	Evening Time	Shearwater Hotel	Find The Joker	10pm	An Tain Bar
Live Music	10pm	An Tain Bar, Joe's Bar		Music. 3 men & a bass	10pm	Brewery Lane	Live music	10pm	Brewery Lane
Live Music	10pm	Fallon's, JJ Killeens Shbridge		Music. Trevor Cavanagh	10pm	Gibbons Pillar House Bar			
Music. Colum Carroll	10pm	Millars Bar, Ballydangan		Music. Colum Carroll	10pm	Millars Bar, Ballydangan			
January 4, Sunday				Live Music	10pm	An Tain Bar, Joe's Bar			
Social Tennis	10am-2pm	Tennis Court		Live Music	10pm	Fallon's, JJ Killeens Shbridge			
Open Tennis	2pm	Tennis Court							
Ladies Little Xmas	2pm-6pm	Luker's, Shbridge		January 11, Sunday			January 24, Saturday		
Live Trad & Folk session	6pm	An Tain Bar		Live Trad & Folk session	6pm	An Tain Bar	St Gab Conv, St Jo School & Library Talk	2.30pm	Library
Live Music	7pm	JJ Killeens		Live Music	7pm	JJ Killeens	Music in a Canal Bar	Evening Time	Shearwater Hotel
January 5, Monday				January 12, Monday			Pilates	10am	Shannonbridge Village Hall
Men's Shed Meeting	10am-2pm	Cullens Yard, Main St		Men's Shed Meeting	10am-2pm	Cullens Yard, Main St	Live Music	10pm	Fallon's Bar, JJ Killeens Shbridge
Parents of Ch w Ad. Needs Sup Meet	10.30am-12pm	Fam&Com Resource Centre		Crafty Girls Classes	11am-1pm	E.M.C. Care C., Brackernagh	Live Music	10pm	An Tain Bar, Joe's Bar, Gibbons Bar
Bsloe Active Ret Knitting session	10.30-12.30am	Gullane's Hotel					Music. Red Tape	10pm	Brewery Lane
Bsloe Active Ret Bowling	10.30 - 12.30am	Emerald Ballroom Bsloe		Learn English with Fáilte Isteach	11.15am	Library	Music. Nightowls	10pm	Millars Bar, Ballydangan
Crafty Girls Classes	11am-1pm	E.M.C. Care C., Brackernagh		After school activities, 10-17 y	3.30pm-7pm	Youthwork Ir, Marina Point			
Bsloe Active Ret Aqua Aerobics	2-3pm	Coral Leisure Centre		Bsloe GAA Bingo	8pm	Emerald Ballroom			
Brazilian jiu jitsu, Kickboxing	6pm, 7pm	The King's Court Academy							
Social Tennis. WoMen's Evening	6pm	Tennis Court		January 14, Wednesday					
January 6, Tuesday				French w/ Lizzie	11am-12pm	Gullane's Hotel			
Yoga with Ju	7.30am, 10am	Enterprise Centre		Crafty Girls Group	11.15am-12.45pm	Library			
Slimming World Group classes	8am, 9.30am 5.30pm, 7pm	Shearwater Hotel		Baby Rhyme Time	11.30am	Library			
Bsloe Active Ret Walking Club	10.30-12.30 am	Running Track, Brackernagh		Golden Years Book Club	11.30am	Library			
Learn English with Fáilte Isteach	11.15am	Library		After school activities, 10-17 y	3.30pm-7pm	Youthwork Ir, Marina Point			
Parenting through Stem	TBC	Fam&Com Resource Centre		Jiving & Social Dancing	8pm	Pádraig Pearses Clubhouse			
Social Tennis. Men's Evening	6pm	Tennis Court		Live Trad & Folk session	9pm	An Tain Bar			
BJJ, Kickboxing	6pm, 7pm	The King's Court Academy							
Bsloe Active Ret Aqua Aerobics	7pm-8pm	Coral Leisure Centre		January 15, Thursday					
Bridge Club	7.30pm	Bridge Rooms, Sarsfield Rd		Office Admin Skills course	10am-12pm	Study Centre			
Road Runners Track Session	7.30pm	Dunlo Track, Brackernagh		Irish Conversation	11am-12pm	Gullane's Hotel			
Bsloe GAA Bingo	8pm	Emerald Ballroom		International Women's Group	11.15am	Library			
January 7, Wednesday				After school activities, 10-17 y	3.30pm-7pm	Youthwork Ir, Marina Point			
Breastfeeding Support Group	10am-11.30am	Youth Work, Marina Point		Folk and Trad Session	9pm	Gibbons Pillar House Bar			
Social Bridge	11am-1pm	Bridge Rooms, Sarsfield Rd		Trad Music	9.30pm	Fallon's Bar			
French w/ Lizzie	11am-12pm	Gullane's Hotel							
Crafty Girls Group	11.15am-12.45pm	Library		January 16, Friday					
Baby Rhyme Time	11.30am	Library		Indoor Country Market	9am-1pm	Social Services Centre			
Bsloe Active Ret Aqua Aerobics	2pm-3pm	Coral Leisure Centre		Men's Shed Meeting	10am-2pm	Cullens Yard, Main St			
Bsloe Active Ret Book Club	3.30pm	Bsloe Library		Garth Brooks Tribute	TBC	Shearwater Hotel			
Kids BJJ, BJJ, MMA	5pm, 6pm, 7pm	The King's Court Academy		Traditional Music Session	9.30pm	Emerald Bar			
Pulse drums programme	6.30pm, 7.30pm	Town Hall Theatre		Find The Joker	10pm	An Tain Bar			
Tennis. Mixed Doubles/JP Coaching	6.30pm	Tennis Court		Music. Down the road	10pm	Brewery Lane			
Yoga with Ju	7.15pm-8.15pm	Enterprise Centre							
Jiving & Social Dancing	8pm	Pádraig Pearses Clubhouse		January 17, Saturday					
Live Trad & Folk session	9pm	An Tain Bar		Music in a Canal Bar	Evening Time	Shearwater Hotel			
January 8, Thursday				Music. Kevin Barrett	10pm	Gibbons Pillar House Bar			
HSE Ukrainian Response Clinic	10am-12noon	Fam&Com Resource Centre		Live Music	10pm	An Tain, Joe's, Brewery Lane			
Bsloe Active Ret Singing Class	10.30 -12.30pm	Bsloe Town Band Hall		Music	10pm	Millars Bar, Ballydangan			
Irish Conversation	11am-12pm	Gullane's Hotel		Live Music	10pm	Fallon's, JJ Killeens Shbridge			
International Women's Group	11.15am	Library							
Young Parent Support Programme	Drop in Service	Fam&Com Resource Centre		January 18, Sunday					
Local Auth. Integration Team Clinic	afternoon	Fam&Com Resource Centre		Live Trad & Folk session	6pm	An Tain Bar			
Bsloe Active Ret Aqua Aerobics	2pm-3pm	Coral Leisure Centre		Live Music	7pm	JJ Killeens			
Bsloe Active Ret Bowling	7pm-9pm	Emerald Ballroom Bsloe							
Faith & Fun Club	7pm-7.50pm	Our Lady of Lourdes Church		January 19, Monday					
Beginners/Improvers Tennis	7pm-8pm	Tennis Court		Men's Shed Meeting	10am-2pm	Cullens Yard, Main St			
Bridge Club	7.30pm	Bridge Rooms, Sarsfield Rd		Crafty Girls Classes	11am-1pm	E.M.C. Care C., Brackernagh			
Road Runners Track Session	7.30pm	Dunlo Track, Brackernagh		January 20, Tuesday					
Tennis. Div.6 MenTraining	8pm-9pm	Tennis Court		Learn English with Fáilte Isteach	11.15am	Library			
Folk and Trad Session	9pm	Gibbons Pillar House Bar		Bsloe GAA Bingo	8pm	Emerald Ballroom			
Trad Music	9.30pm	Fallon's Bar							
January 9, Friday				January 21, Wednesday					
Yoga with Ju	7.30am, 10am	Enterprise Centre		French w/ Lizzie	11am-12pm	Gullane's Hotel			
				Crafty Girls Group	11.15am-12.45pm	Library			
				Baby Rhyme Time	11.30am	Library			
				Citizens Info. Centre Outreach	by appointment	Fam&Com Resource Centre			
				Jiving & Social Dancing	8pm	Pádraig Pearses Clubhouse			
				Live Trad & Folk session	9pm	An Tain Bar			
				January 22, Thursday					
				HSE Ukrainian Response Clinic	10am-12noon	Fam&Com Resource Centre			
				Irish Conversation	11am-12pm	Gullane's Hotel			

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Supporters gathered at Glentaun to welcome home the Three in A Row Winning Junior Hurlers.



Ballinasloe AFC Under 12 players on their debut for Athlone Town Academy. Pictured left to right are Nathan Kelly, Harry Kinsella, Jack Duffy and Tiernan Hogan. Missing from the photo is Aaron Connaughton.



Garbally Leaving Certificate
Class of 1965

56 boys sat the Leaving Certificate exam in 1965 in Garbally and 60 years later, 21 of them returned for a reunion in Gullane's Hotel.

BACK ROW (L-R): Pat Fineran, Martin Egan, John Burke, MI Mulryan, Peter Sobolewski, and Peter Kenny.

MIDDLE ROW (L-R): Kevin Keane, Eamon Gullane, Tom Nugent, Robert Scott, Martin Smyth, Frank Grenham, and Joe McGovern.

FRONT ROW (L-R): John Kafferley, Ollie Keegan, Tommy Elder, Enda Lohan, Fr Gordon Ryan, Paddy Lally, and Edward Deeney.

Missing from the photo is Michael Burke.

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PEOPLE MATTERS | NOT PROPERTY

At first glance, it might seem like I'm just in the business of selling houses – but for me, it's much more personal than that. Every sale, every move, every set of keys tells a story. And at the heart of it all are the people – their journeys, their milestones, and their next chapter.

Helping people move on to new beginnings is what fires me up every day. That's what makes this job so rewarding – not just the sale itself, but knowing I've helped someone take the next step in their life with confidence and peace of mind.

When I first meet a homeowner, I always start with a few simple questions:

- **Why are you selling?**
- **What's your next move?**
- **What kind of timeline are you working towards?**

Once I understand your situation and goals, I can put together a plan that fits you – not just your property. From there, we'll work together to present your home in its best light and reach the right buyers.

Buying or selling a home can be a big deal. It's exciting, but it can also feel overwhelming. My role is to guide you through it all – keeping things clear, calm, and as stress-free as possible.

For me, being an estate agent is personal. I'm passionate about property, but even more so about people. Every home has its own story, and I treat each sale with the same care and attention I'd give to my own. Clear communication, honest advice, and genuine care are at the heart of everything I do. Trust is the foundation of every successful sale.

As the year comes to a close, I want to say a heartfelt thank you to everyone I've had the pleasure of working with. Your trust and support mean the world to me. It's been a joy helping so many local families and individuals reach their property goals – and I look forward to helping many more in the year ahead.



**Thinking
of Selling?**

If you're **thinking about selling** in the new year, or just curious about your options, I'd love to have a friendly, no-pressure chat. No obligations, no hard sell – just an open conversation about what might work best for you.

I've also been lucky to receive some lovely feedback from clients. Their words mean a lot – not just because they reflect a sale, but because they show the experience felt personal and positive:

"I highly recommend Kevin if you're buying or selling. He's professional but personable, with excellent communication throughout. He managed to sell and purchase a property for me within three weeks and made me feel at ease about putting my house on the market." – **Olivia**

"Kevin did an excellent job selling our house. He was professional, straightforward, and kept us informed every step of the way. His market knowledge and attention to detail made the process smooth and stress-free." – **Karagh**

"Kevin is fantastic – friendly, helpful, and knowledgeable. We could call him any time and nothing was too much to ask. A huge thank you from my family for helping us achieve our dream of owning our own home!" – **Eva**

"Kevin promised he'd find us a home that ticked all the boxes, and he delivered 110%. From start to finish, he was transparent, communicative, and great fun, making the move much easier than we imagined." – **Sinead**

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Portiuncula Downgrade Challenge

By Colm Croffy

PMA has escalated the downgrade of PUH to the Oireachtas Petitions and Ombudsman Committee and the Public Accounts Committee, citing a persistent lack of transparency.

As a member of the Regional Health Forum West, Cllr Parsons has persistently sought clarity from the HSE on the evidence-based rationale behind the reconfiguration of maternity services. Despite repeated requests, no independent clinical assessments, published risk analysis, or equality and human rights impact evaluations have been provided to elected representatives. The absence of such fundamental documentation has raised serious questions about the transparency of the changes being implemented.

Cllr Parsons' engagement with the Public Accounts Committee (PAC) recently resulted in detailed questions being put to HSE CEO Bernard Gloster by Albert Dolan TD for East Galway.

The responses, Cllr Parsons noted, revealed "stark inconsistencies" between national-level acknowledgements and the information provided to regional representatives. Similar discrepancies have emerged in responses to parliamentary questions raised by Dr Martin Daly TD at the Health Committee and by Claire Kerrane TD in the Dáil.

"This is not a routine operational adjustment — it is a major regional reconfiguration of maternity access across eight counties," Cllr Parsons said. "It is wholly unacceptable that such a significant policy shift is proceeding without independent external scrutiny, without direct Ministerial engagement with Forum members, or a transparent evidence base."

Cllr Parsons also criticised the HSE's most recent update on 7 November to elected members, and she did not join in welcoming a narrative which framed the removal of maternity outpatient services from the main hospital block as a positive "progress".

"Separating maternity outpatient care from the main hospital block will distance it from essential core maternity support



services and may represent yet another step in the downgrade, and it is important to really question what 'progress' is being advanced," she said. "A reported 78% implementation rate of recent report recommendations ignores the long-standing failure to implement core governance and safety recommendations from the Walker

Report going back to 2018 — failures that should have been addressed before any service withdrawal was considered."

Portiuncula Maternity Alliance's petition of 15,000 signatures has been escalated to the Joint Oireachtas Committee on Public Petitions and the Ombudsman, seeking a full review of the process, access to documentation, and a transparent evidence trail. "We also requested the Petitions Committee to engage with the Oireachtas Health Committee and other committees to examine the issues, broader policy implications, and regional equity concerns."

At Regional Forum level, Cllr Parsons has tabled a motion calling for Department of Health engagement and immediate HIQA inspections of both PUH and University Hospital Galway maternity units — neither of which has undergone a maternity-specific inspection since 2019, despite significant changes to patient pathways. "If risks were serious enough to divert women to distant units, one would expect they would trigger a national escalation and an independent inspection of safety risks before — not after — decisions were made," she said.

Cllr Parsons says that local representatives continually highlight the impact on families, clinicians, and communities across the West and Midlands, citing increased travel distances, reduced choice, and pressure on already stretched services. "This is clearly now a national issue; there is an evident need to get beyond regional structures to test processes and confidence in the seat of power," she concluded. "Decisions affecting women and families in our wide region demand full transparency, independent oversight, and direct Ministerial accountability."

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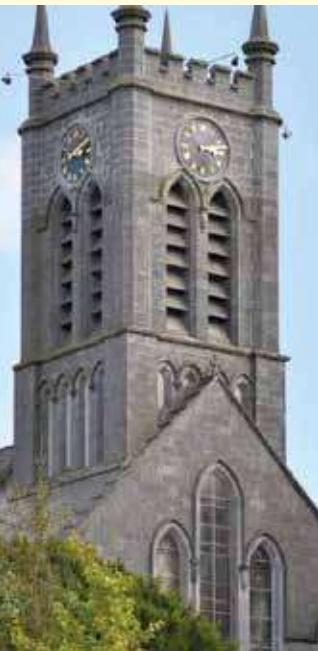
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Christmas Classics By Candlelight

By Maria Connolly

Image from: facebook.com/p/Midlands-String-Quartet-61556588671254/

Music fans will be delighted this winter when the Midlands String Quartet brings the festive spirit to life. They will be performing in a special "Christmas Classics by Candlelight" concert at St John's Church of Ireland, Society St, on Saturday, December 6.

The classically trained quartet features Anne Phelan (Violin I), Niamh O'Raw (Violin II), William Cullagh (Viola), and Gary Doherty (Cello). Their concert will feature a blend of timeless Christmas music, combining the magical sounds of a string quartet with the soaring vocals of renowned Irish soprano Yvonne O'Toole. The evening promises to be a celebration of both instrumental

beauty and song, creating the perfect atmosphere to celebrate the start of the holiday season.

Doors for the concert open at 7.30pm, with the concert beginning at 8pm. Tickets are available at the door, priced €20 for adults, €15 for pensioners and students, and €10 for children. If you are unable to make this concert, the Midlands String Quartet will also be performing in Portlaoise on Saturday, December 13.

The event is one of several taking place in St John's Church over the Christmas season. A carol service will be held in the church on Sunday, December 14, at 10am, and Christmas Day Eucharist will take place on Thursday, December 25, at 10.30am.

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Town Band Tunes Up For Tinsel Time

By Colm Croffy

When Halloween falls, can Christmas be far behind? ... And so it is with Ballinasloe Town Band, as Bandmaster Frank Kennedy files away the summer tune sheets and dusts down the Christmas music scores. "It's the most wonderful time of the year," as the band gets busy with rehearsals for the upcoming Christmas season.

The band was honoured to once again be invited to provide the pre-event entertainment for the People of the Year Award ceremony 2025 in the Shearwater Hotel. They were especially delighted to have been nominated and short-listed in two categories. Long-serving band member JJ Smith was deservedly nominated for the Creative Arts, Heritage and Culture Individual Award, where the hallmark of his service is his reliability.

The second nomination was for the band itself in the Community Group Awards, in recognition of its many contributions to the town and its hinterland.

November is traditionally a time for remembering those we love who pass on to their eternal reward, and the town band remembered all its deceased members as well as deceased family members at Mass in St. Michael's Church recently.

As for Christmas activities, the band will host its annual fundraiser, the Christmas Craft and Gift Fair, in the Band Hall, Dunlo Street, on Sunday, December 7, from 11am-4pm. Entertainment will be provided by the Active Retirement Association Choir and an ensemble of members of the town band. Delectable treats will be on offer



Members of the Town Band at a rehearsal



Bandmaster Frank Kennedy with German trumpet player Erik Wybitul

to satisfy hungry patrons.

The band will host its Christmas concert in the Town Hall Theatre on Friday, December 19, from 7.30pm. St Brigid's Community Choir from Kiltoom will be the special guests for the event.

The junior band will also be making their first public appearance. Tickets will be available for purchase at the door, with 50% of the proceeds going to the Portiuncula Paediatric Unit.

Visitations to local nursing homes will occur throughout December as the band brings Christmas cheer to the residents.

The traditional ringing-in of the New Year will occur prior to midnight on December 31 at the horse statue in St. Michael's Square (weather permitting). The month of January will then be devoted to learning new music and preparing for any event requests that are received.



SURMODICS COFFEE MORNING AND CAKE SALE IN SUPPORT OF GALWAY HOSPICE!



SURMODICS

Surmodics were delighted to recently host our annual **Halloween-themed Coffee Morning and Cake Sale** to raise money for Galway Hospice.

This event has become a much-loved tradition for us, and this year was no exception. Our talented employees baked a wide range of **spooktacular Halloween-themed treats** — from brownies, cookies, and rice krispie treats to banana bread and cheesecake — all of which were enjoyed (and quickly sold out!) on the day.

A huge thank you to everyone who contributed — whether by baking or donating. We're proud to support such a worthy cause and to see our team come together once again to make a difference for **Galway Hospice**, which does amazing work in our community.





Town Hall Theatre Closes Out Busy Year

By Colm Croffy



Pupils from Ardscoil Mhuire and Garbally College in the Transition Year production of *Annie*.

There is lots of festive fun to look forward to in the Town Hall Theatre this December. First, B'sloe Panto will bring *Puss in Boots* to the stage for eight shows from Monday, 8 December, to Sunday, 14 December.

Then, on Friday, 19 December, Ballinasloe Town Band will fill the venue with yuletide cheer in a special Christmas recital – definitely one not to be missed.

There is also plenty coming up early in the New Year, including Clonfert College's Transition Year production and Ballinasloe Musical Society's *Shrek*.

2025 was a busy year for the theatre, both on stage and behind the scenes. The auditorium saw sell-out performances for Ardscoil Mhuire's heartwarming Transition Year production of *Annie*, Ballinasloe Musical Society's enchanting and colourful *The Little Mermaid*, In Step's magical *Imagine That*, AKT's lively *Get Your AKT Together*, and Milkshake Dance & Performance Academy's energy-filled *Elev8*.

Away from the stage, work continued to improve and safeguard the building. Solar panels, installed in March, thanks to funding

from the Community Climate Action Fund, have been an incredible addition and have had a positive effect on the building's energy footprint.

Backstage, worn and damaged flooring in the back hallway and bathrooms was replaced with fresh, easy-to-maintain laminate. The bathrooms were also refreshed with a new coat of paint, and there are plans in place to continue painting throughout the rest of the backstage area in the coming months. The tired swing doors from the porch into the foyer have been replaced with a bespoke set, much more complementary to the foyer's new aesthetic, thanks to funding from Galway County Council's Local Enhancement Fund.

Earlier this year, an application to the Community Centre's Investment Fund was successful, resulting in a grant award of just over €67k. This money will be used to refurbish the seats in the auditorium, install a brand-new stage curtain, and carry out external stonework. The committee is working hard to get everything in place for these works to be carried out in spring 2026.

Group 8 and local artist Amy Naughton both took up residence in rented rooms in the theatre this year, and their addition has been highly successful. Group 8 has held numerous successful workshops since the summer, encompassing a wide variety of art forms, with plenty more planned for both young and old in the new year.

The Town Hall Theatre Committee will host their AGM on Thursday, 15 January, at 8pm in the theatre, and all are welcome to attend. They would like to thank everyone who has supported the theatre over the past year.

"Your continued patronage and generosity is greatly appreciated and goes a long way to ensuring that this fantastic venue will be here to serve the community for many years to come. Wishing you all a Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year!" stated Maire Hughes, Chairperson.

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Brian Casey – Curating the Glasnevin Legacy

By Colm Croffy



Dr Brian Casey

Dublin Cemeteries Trust (DCT) recently announced Portnick's Dr Brian Casey as its new Historian and Archives Manager, bringing a wealth of historical expertise and archival knowledge to one of Ireland's most significant heritage organisations.

Dr Casey holds a PhD in Modern Irish History from Maynooth University and a Diploma in Archives and Records Management from Dundee University.

"History was always my favourite and strongest subject in school. I was very lucky that my family, especially my mother, encouraged and supported this love. The first history book I remember buying was Tadhg MacLoughlin's *Ballinasloe: Inniu agus Inne*," he recalls.

This interest was nurtured by excellent teaching in Creagh National School and Garbally College. "I was lucky to have a lot of supportive teachers. Joe Molloy and Michael Lally were inspiring English teachers. But really, Pat Johnston was my biggest

influence to study history. She always sought to challenge us, getting us to think differently about the past," he states.

He ventured to Maynooth University to become a history teacher but got to write an essay on the Clancarty family, which eventually grew into a PhD: *'Land, politics and religion on the Clancarty estate, east Galway, 1851–1914'*, which he finished in 2011.

The challenge in writing about the Clancarty family and estate was the lack of estate papers. Clonbrock and Mahon in Ahascragh have left a good tranche of estate papers but, luckily, Ballinasloe had a vibrant newspaper culture, which he stitched together for his PhD, becoming a sort of 'history from below' rather than from the Big House.

He graduated in 2011 during the depths of the post-Celtic Tiger recession. Bishop John Kirby was looking for an archivist at the time, so he moved back home for a couple of years to work there.

That work helped him secure a post as FMDM Fellow in the History of Catholicism at Durham University, where he worked between 2020 and 2024. He is finishing a book on the Franciscan Missionaries of the Divine Motherhood, who built and managed Portiuncula Hospital.

"It was a challenging and rewarding job. I saw the world visiting archives. I visited Australia, Italy, Malaysia, Singapore, Zambia and Zimbabwe. I believe historians should always try and visit where they are writing about. Seeing the landscape, hearing the noises and meeting people can help offer a subtlety to understanding that can't be derived from sitting in a library all the time," he explains.

He moved back to Ireland in 2024, spending his time on freelance projects and writing, but also found time to set up a history book club.

His new post at Glasnevin Cemetery sees him research, write, and speak about the cemeteries and their place in Irish history.

It has been an active cemetery since 1832, since the first burial



of Michael Carey in 1832. As well as being an active cemetery, it also runs daily tours and has a Visitor Centre. Some of the most significant figures in Irish history are buried here.

Reflecting on heritage issues he states: "Growing up, history, especially local history, seemed to be the preserve of older people looking to engage in nostalgic views of the past. I think in the past ten years, there has been

a huge growth in interest in local history. The success of the Ballinasloe and District Heritage Society is testament to the huge surge in this interest, often starting with people researching their own family history. In addition, the availability of many sources online that are free or affordable has democratised history, to an extent, and that is a great thing."

He is encouraged by contemporary engagement with history — songs being found in archives, recorded, and now seeping into public consciousness. "Podcasts, movies, TV shows and documentaries try to be more attentive to the historical record. However, we need to be careful not to take simplistic views of the past. The survival of evidence is fragmented and contradictory and there are gaps in our understanding. Nostalgia is dangerous for history. It risks 'the condescension of posterity' and does not navigate towards a healthy future for the world," he asserts.

Asked about the current generation's shepherding of local history, he feels it



Some members of Dr. Brian's family who came to his recent talk in Gullane's – T. Ryan, A. Hurley, M. Casey (mum), Dr. Brian, S. Óg Hurley, N. Hurley.



Dr Casey with Newstalk's Sean Moncrieff

is getting better. "The interest fostered in a structured way by the Ballinasloe and District Heritage Society and other like-minded groups through their public lectures and hostings. A lot more can be unleashed. I am sure there are people who think nothing particularly interesting happened in this part of the world. I was one of those people until I started PhD research and was blown away by the personalities,

ideas and movements in the area," he acknowledges.

"There is a better historical literacy in Ireland than in the UK. I find the history section in an Irish bookshop broader, more varied and interesting. I think we are good in Ireland at seeking to understand the past. I spoke to local history societies in the UK, and the demographic was quite elderly. In Ireland, it can be a bit more mixed," he notes.

As for those who think it's old hat, he has strong advice: "History is an excellent subject for any young person who may not be sure what they want to do as a career after third level. It is a good grounding for many career choices — teaching, civil service, law or even in new industries. It teaches critical thinking, writing and understanding difficult concepts. There can be a lot of reading and that can be challenging but also rewarding. Some of the best and the worst writers are historians!" he laughs.

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B'sloe Panto Produces Puss in Boots

By Maria Connolly

Will has been left with nothing but the family cat after his father's passing, but there is so much more to this moggy than meets the eye. Clever and charming, this cat might be about to make all of Will's dreams come true. B'sloe Panto's production of *Puss in Boots* is about to take to the stage of the Town Hall Theatre, running from 8-14 December.

This year's cast features an assortment of panto staples along with some new faces. The title role of *Puss in Boots* will be played by sixth-year Clonfert College student Alannah Grenham. Alannah has a passion for acting and singing, having played the lead in her Transition Year musical Calamity Jane in 2024 and Princess Rose in last year's panto.

Will, a good-natured daydreamer, is being played by Patrick Hanrahan. An accomplished musician and singer, he has taken part in several shows, including playing the title role in last year's *Jack and the Beanstalk*. Doireann Gilmore is returning for her fourth show, taking on the role of Will's prim and proper aunt, Dame Hettie. Etiquette-obsessed and slightly judgmental, she has a soft spot for her nephew and she isn't about to leave him all alone to fend for himself.

Mike O'Reilly, Karen Dowd, and Shantelle Hodgins will be playing the royal family of King Herbert, Queen Mildred, and Princess Alice. Mike is a panto veteran and was awarded B'sloe Panto's Lifetime Achievement Award in a surprise ceremony during one of last year's performances.

After making her panto debut last year, Ballinasloe native Karen



The Principals of B'sloe Panto's production of *Puss in Boots*.

FRONT ROW (L TO R): Miriam D'arcy, Shantelle Hodgins and Alannah Grenham. **MIDDLE ROW (L TO R):** Patrick Hanrahan, Mike O'Reilly, Doireann Gilmore and Karen Dowd. **BACK ROW (L TO R):** Tom Devine and Des Grealis. **MISSING FROM PHOTO:** Koby Campbell.

is delighted to return for this regal role. Shantelle is a fifth-year student at Clonfert College and has been taking part in panto since 2017. A talented dancer, Shantelle is no stranger to performing on stage, and audiences may recognise her following her stellar performance as the titular Annie in the town's Transition Year musical earlier this year. Fellow fifth-year student Miriam D'Arcy was also involved in *Annie*, bringing the unscrupulous antagonist Mrs. Hannigan to life. She will be the narrator of the show and guide the audience through the story of *Puss in Boots*.

No panto is complete without a nefarious villain, and Lord Rodger definitely fits the bill. Des Grealis, originally from Co. Mayo but now living in Athlone, will be playing him. Des is a seasoned performer and is looking forward to joining the team again, having played the role of Gorgon in their 2022 production, *Cinderella*. In true villain form, Lord Rodger is aided in his scheming

by a pair of henchmen, Nosmo and Nopar King, played by the dynamic duo of Tom Devine and Koby Campbell. Tom is a first-year student at Clonfert College who loves performing and has been involved with panto since he was six. Koby has also been involved in panto since he was little and was even part of the most junior chorus group when B'sloe Panto first did *Puss in Boots* back in 2014.

Puss in Boots runs from 8-14 December in the Town Hall Theatre, beginning nightly at 7.30pm, with matinees on Saturday and Sunday at 2.30pm. Tickets range from €15-€17 and are available online at www.buytickets.at/bsloepanto or on the door. Pre-booking is advised. For more info, find B'sloe Panto on Facebook or Instagram.

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Liam Curley: A Lifetime on Stage and in Service

By Colm Croffy

There is something deeply engaging about Liam Curley, the retired psychiatric nurse, addiction counsellor, and passionate champion of drama and live performance; his energy is something to behold.

A biography is warranted for his contribution to psychiatric care west of the River Shannon and for his pioneering work in the then HSE-managed and acclaimed addiction unit connected with St. Brigid's.

There are many souls enjoying a life free of addictive harm and countless families locally and in the Midwest who feel in his debt — Liam as a kind, generous and wise counsellor — but for the purposes of this insight, it is his lifelong engagement with drama and the stage that we are focusing on.

For a local who has given nearly six decades of effort and entertainment to the stage, it's hard to fathom where the impulse first came.

He seems to pin it on his tactical switch of domicile when he arrived from Drum to his aunt and uncle, Joe Kelly (he of the travelling shop fame), in Portnick at about 10 years of age.

He recalls with affection his secondary education in St. Michael's Vocational School, with a very kind and enthusiastic teacher, Gabriel Rohan, "having some good influence over us — well at least me and my good buddy, the late Pat Joe Guinnessey."

Plays, literature, and radio featured heavily in his Creagh youth, and eventually he found himself in the committee vortex of the new Macra na Tuithe

movement (today's Foróige), with a club being founded in Creagh.

"These were heady days in the mid-60s. These clubs, usually set up by a busy curate or teacher — in our case Mr. Folen — were huge in giving youngsters from a variety of backgrounds confidence to make speeches, recite, debate, act, dance, and sing," Liam recalls.

There was a show on RTÉ Radio at the time, on Sunday afternoons, called Down the Country with Desmond — the father of acclaimed actress Brenda Fricker — and Liam was auditioned to go on the show and chat about forming new clubs.

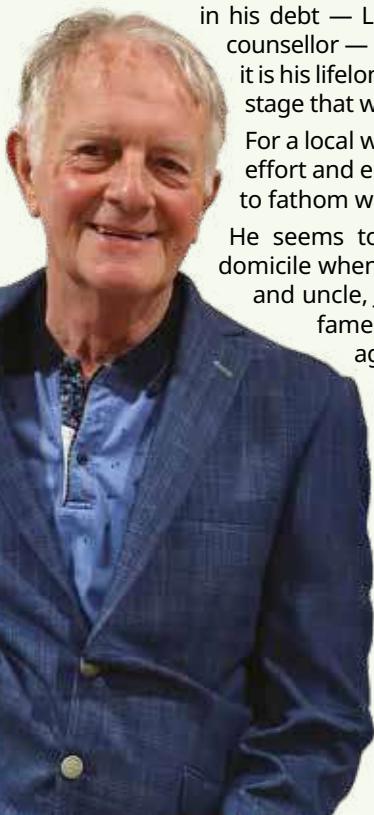
"No sooner had the show gone out when my PP, Fr. Egan in the home parish in Drum, was on to my mother to get the lad down here to set up a club. I had to cycle out to the hall; first fella in the door that night was Brendan Shine — and we all know what happened him," laughs Liam.

"The 60s in town were a marvellous purple patch for amateur performance with the energy of Fr. Ryle's Relays (first group to get the rights to John B's Sive) and all the Dermot Connolly-produced pieces. With great performers like Patti Maguire, Paddy Cormican, Pat Joe Carey — we were all drawn to the footlights in some way during the time," he states.

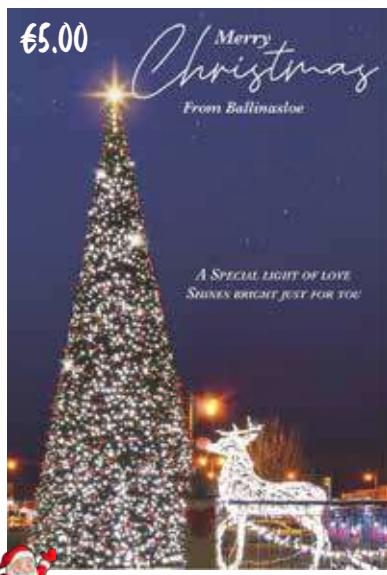
Post-Leaving Cert he still remembers his application interview to be a nurse, with the late Jack Halpin and Frank Dooley on the panel. His training involved some general nursing in the UK — where, of course, he met the love of his life, Nuala.

Back in the late 60s and early 70s, he found himself Chairman of the Canteen Committee in St. Brigid's. Part of their onerous duties was supporting the programme of the late Jack Creaven, who was elected Entertainment Officer.

"In the 70s and 80s, extracurricular on-site entertainment was very much staff and patients having fun together, whether it was outings, sports days, or the variety shows or concerts in the small hall in the Pines — where Barry Lally might produce a sketch or two, Tom Quinn might gather the trad musicians for 12 rehearsals before 15 minutes of performance, and we



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all provided comic relief for the situation we found ourselves in."

The building of the Dr. John O'Shea Recreation Hall after a fire in the early 80s gave the hospital site an oasis of entertainment and indoor sports possibilities, which the Canteen Committee cabal were quick to develop.

The DNA from the Pines Site Variety Shows moved under Barry Lally's theatrical skills into the St. Brigid's Drama Society, made up of staff and associates of the campus.

"It was a sort of Project Arts Centre on the Suck under the artistic vision and leadership of Barry, who was a colossus in his knowledge of theatre, drama, the skills of set-making and lighting to produce. We were all his apprentices — Eamon Fallon on lights, Paddy Seale on transport, Frank Dooley as secretary, Martin Stack for crew, and Mary O'Connell and Pat Vaughan — staples for principals," explains Liam.

The first play was Ibsen's *Ghosts* — not for the faint-hearted! They set the bar high and toured the am-dram circuit. Iris Ballard, adjudicator at the Roscommon Drama Festival, referred to it as "most enlightening and entertaining."

Liam was performing, set-building, and lighting in this nursery of talent when he was pressed upon to direct the St. Francis of Assisi show, celebrating 800 years, written by Dr. Michael O'Dowd and staged as a fundraiser for PUH in the early 80s.

He has not looked back — or stopped — since. Highlights of his career include a love affair with the Listowel writer John B., and directing Eileen Quinn in *The Field*. He giggles aloud when recalling directing the redoubtable Dermot Connolly in *Moll*.

He still performs on and off stage with the Musical Society —



Cupid Wore Skirts by Sam Cree
The cast and director of Moore & Cloonfad Drama Society's production of *Separate Beds*, staged this weekend. **SEATED FROM LEFT:** Aoife Hibbitt, Finola O'Brien, Liam Curley (director), Bernie Greene, Niall Flynn. **STANDING FROM LEFT:** Sharon D'Arcy, Oliver Grenham, Tom Costello, Padraic Egan, Nuala Murray. **MISSING FROM PHOTO:** Ben Halpin.

for example, with Aidan Dervan in *My Fair Lady* — but it is with the amateur players of the outlying villages (Taughmaconnell, Aughrim, Fohenagh, Caltra, Mountbellew) that he has enjoyed the most in recent decades.

Pride of place, of course, must go to the Moore and Cloonfad District Drama Society, which has a huge and loyal following for their three- to four-night performances of plays annually.

"It's not just about the lines — they are indeed demanding — but all the

actors on stage must understand the dynamics. And I think what the St. Brigid's Drama apprenticeship taught me was the value of ensemble playing."

He has tales of tilly lamps burning fingers on stage, sets arriving to wrong halls, actors arriving a little too oiled for moisturiser application, and misspelled posters in spades — we must get them recorded!

As to the secret of a good amateur production, for Liam it's simple: "You must make rehearsals as enjoyable as possible for all who give of their time, and you must always respect the audience."

He undertook his most recent producer role with the Moore and Cloonfad team this spring with the acclaimed play *Single Beds* by Sam Cree.

When not producing, reading or preparing, he is enjoying a calm retirement with his wife Nuala and their children Caroline, Aiden, Dermot, Siobhán, Ann and Aoife, and their many grandkids.

For Liam, he is indeed a fervent believer that "The Show Must Go On"!

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Fair and Festival "Renews" Traditions

By Maria Connolly



The town recently showed once again why it holds a special place in the life of the West. The 2025 Fair and Festival drew record crowds over two weekends, combining fine livestock, entertainment, and a proud celebration of tradition at one of Ireland's greatest rural gatherings.

Dating back to the 1700s, when it was known across Europe as the Great October Fair, the event was once the largest of its kind on the continent. In 2025, that heritage felt alive again, with the Fair Green filled with energy; horses changing hands, neighbours meeting, and visitors enjoying a scene that has defined the town for centuries.

The opening weekend saw the Ballinasloe Credit Union Horse of the Fair Lunging Competition, which was judged by retired champion jockey Davy Russell, Commandant Geoff Curran, and local horse trainer and breeder Damien Griffin. "It was my first time judging here, and the atmosphere was unbelievable," said Davy. "You hear about [the fair] all your life, but nothing prepares you for it — the scale, the passion, the pride."

The second weekend began in spectacular fashion with the Supermac's Fireworks Display on Friday night lighting up the skies above the town.

Saturday showcased the best of local breeding. The Showing Classes for young foals, Connemaras, and Irish Draughts reflected the depth of quality. The Overall Foal of the Fair later sold for a substantial sum — proof that the fair remains at the heart of Ireland's horse world.

The Traditional Sheep Fair, also on Saturday, drew entries from East Galway, Roscommon, and Westmeath. "It's great to see the sheep section thriving — it's such an important part of the Fair's story, and it's getting bigger and bigger each year," said Blánaid Gallagher of the Galway Sheep Association.

There was a moving moment when Karen Lyons and her brother James presented the Sheep of the Fair 2025 award in memory of their late father, Jimmy Lyons, who had been deeply involved with the Fair. "Dad loved the Fair," said Karen. "It's lovely to see him remembered in this way."

The Credit Union Soundstage and Festival Music Marquee kept crowds entertained with live performances from local artists, including a standout show by Cliona Hagan. The Bread Basket Dog Show, Street Tug of War, Vintage Vehicle Display, Motorbike Stunt Show, and baking, art, and craft displays rounded off an action-packed programme.

Festival Chairman, Mal Croffy, reflected proudly on what he called a landmark year.

"It was a great fair with a wonderful turnout," he said. "The second weekend always feels like our own Thanksgiving — people come

home, the place fills up, and there's a great buzz around."

Mal thanked his fellow committee members, whose dedication throughout the year made the event possible, and the many sponsors, including: Gullane's Hotel, Ballinasloe Credit Union, Galway County Council, Supermac's, Truir Construction, KPW Print Management, Shearwater Hotel, Galway Rural Development, Dolan's Centra, and Moycairn Lodge. A full list of sponsors is available online.

Among the visitors was TD Martin Daly, who praised the event's enduring legacy:

"The townspeople should be proud of the rich heritage they have: a fabulous fair with huge history, and plenty of warmth, friendship, and joy," he said.

Now that the Fair Green lies quiet again, talk around town is of how good the 2025 edition was. Mal Croffy summed up the feeling shared by many: "The 2025 Fair and Festival didn't just celebrate the past; it renewed it. And in doing so, it reminded everyone that Ballinasloe will always be home to the Great October Fair."



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Forever 80s Galway Radio Lights Up December

By Maria Connolly

A bright spark of nostalgia is lighting up the West this winter as Forever 80s Galway Radio brings the magic of the eighties back to the airwaves — with an extra festive twist. Broadcasting proudly from Ballinasloe and reaching listeners across Ireland, the station is already loved for its upbeat mix of neon-soaked classics, but this December it's adding even more sparkle.

Throughout the month, listeners can enjoy all their festive favourites alongside the decade's greatest hits, creating the perfect soundtrack for the season.

The station is also shining a spotlight on young local talent. One of the real highlights this year is the brilliant series of radio pieces created by the Transition Year students of Clonfert College.

This wonderful project is proudly supported and run in partnership with our local Credit Union, giving students hands-on experience in broadcasting, storytelling and community engagement. Their creativity and effort shine through every segment, and we're delighted to showcase their work on air. Their work adds a fresh, creative touch to the line-up while giving students valuable experience in broadcasting and media production. It's a true celebration of community involvement and local voices.

Forever 80s Galway Radio continues to be backed by a strong network of local businesses who support the station through advertising. Their

contribution plays a vital role in keeping the music flowing and the project thriving. Readers are encouraged to support these advertisers whenever possible — their involvement helps ensure that community-focused initiatives like this one can continue to grow.

All revenue raised by the station during its seasonal broadcast will be used directly to support Ballinasloe's festive lighting. These funds help brighten the town each Christmas, creating a warm and welcoming atmosphere for residents and visitors alike. With rising costs, community backing has never been more important, and every contribution makes a real difference. For those wishing to help keep Ballinasloe shining brightly, donations to the festive light fund can be made easily by visiting forever80sradio.ie and clicking on the Merry Christmas banner.

Whether you tune in for the music, the memories or the festive cheer, Forever 80s Galway Radio offers something special for everyone this December — a joyful blend of local pride, seasonal magic and timeless eighties energy. Turn it up, enjoy the glow, and be part of something brighter. To listen, just ask your smart speaker to "Play Forever 80s Galway Radio".



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Jacqueline Daly, Director of Services at East Galway & Midlands Cancer Support, with the new Ultra Tesla chair.

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Tennis Club Enjoying Autumn Season

By Maria Connolly

The tennis club's autumn/winter programme is in full swing. As well as activities on weeknights, they have tennis taster sessions for adults on Thursday evenings from 7-8pm. The club has all-weather, flood-lit courts, making tennis a great sport to try out during the darker evenings, and non-members can pay as you go.

The club continues to go from strength to strength in competitions. The men's Division 5 team reached the final of the Midland League and lost out narrowly on a tie-break. Both ladies' and men's teams have started off well in the Connacht Winter League and are showing that they can compete against the top clubs in Connacht. The club also had seven doubles teams competing in the Moate Open, with two teams



The Division 5 men's team with two Midland League coordinators. L-R: Tim Conway (Midland League Coordinator), Robert Riddell, Michael Bleahene, Vincent Hall, Martin Sibanda, and Pat O'Gorman (Midland League Coordinator).

reaching the semi-finals.

Junior coaching and adult beginner coaching sessions are running on an ongoing basis throughout the season. Keep an eye on the club's Facebook and Instagram pages for new courses.

The annual table quiz in Gullane's Hotel recently was a great night and raised much-appreciated funds to help develop the club. Club President Joe Staunton

thanked Thomas and the staff for all their work on the night.

"On behalf of all at the Tennis Club, I would like to wish you all a very Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year. We hope to see you up at the courts soon," he added.

Clontuskert Rounders First Sessions

Clontuskert Rounders Club, based at Clontuskert Community Pitch, was founded recently when Breaffy Rounders players Mark Jennings (GAA Rounders Connacht Representative) and Paula Doherty kindly ran an 'Introduction to Rounders' session. There was great interest on the day, with participants practising all the key rounders skills – throwing, catching, and batting – before finishing up with a friendly match that gave everyone a chance to bat and run. The morning concluded with a well-deserved cuppa in the Community Hub.

Following this successful event, the Clontuskert Rounders Club Committee was established, with the following officers:

Chairman: John Kelly, **Secretary:** Darina Cooke, **Treasurer:** Laura Coleman, **Child Officer:** Teresa Lyons.

Although most competitions had finished for the season, the group held three fun training sessions on Sunday mornings during September, which were thoroughly enjoyed by everyone

who attended.

Training will resume in early 2026, with plans to field U13 teams (children born 2012-2016) and U16 teams (children born 2010-2013), as well as, hopefully, forming minor and adult teams for competitions taking place during Summer/Autumn 2026.

If you or your child would like to join the club for 2026, either as a player or a coach (coaching training provided), please contact Darina at 087 770 3880 or clontuskertrounders@hotmail.com to register your interest.

Stay up to date by following Clontuskert Rounders Club on social media: **Facebook:** Clontuskert Rounders Club,

Instagram: @clontuskertrounders

The club was thrilled with all that supported the "Bracelets for Bases" fundraiser so far. Pardy's Lawrencetown and Billy's Discount Ballinasloe were specially mentioned by the officers for kindly selling the bracelets!

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Snooker Club's Winter Season Underway

By Maria Connolly

The Snooker and Social Club are very proud of their standing in the local community, having provided a social space to enjoy games on the green baize for over a century.

The club is always looking to upgrade. New heaters and new cloth coverings were installed on both tables earlier this year, keeping the equipment at a high performance standard. It's great to see members keep improving their personal bests on the revamped tables.

The winter season is in full swing and the Johnnie Riddell Memorial Snooker and Billiards competitions are currently underway and were at the semi-final stage at the time of going to press.

The Christmas Competition will get started shortly, and it always sees healthy competition to win the Christmas hampers. Many thanks to Paul Keighery Painting and Decorating for the donation of the hampers.

For those looking for an evening escape from the long and dreary winter nights, or a nice Christmas gift, the club offers both Junior and Senior memberships and they are always happy to welcome new faces at any time, young and old.

If someone would like to become a member - or to gift membership to someone else - please call into the club Monday to Friday from 5pm to 9pm. The club steward, Keith McDonnell, is always there to assist. The club is located at the side of the Emerald Social Centre, opposite the local Town Library.

To keep up with club news, follow them on Facebook: Snookerclub Ballinasloe

"All at Ballinasloe Snooker and Social Club would like to wish everyone a very Happy Christmas and a Blessed New Year", states Chair Ger Coughlan.

Double Success For Pool Player

Ballinasloe Snooker Club member Paul Keighery recently won both the Galway Pool Classic and the Galway Pool Masters, his first two Galway Ranking Titles. Both events were well attended, with a record entry for the Galway Pool Masters, and Paul won fourteen matches in a row across the two events.

For the Pool Classic, the organisers, Galway Pool Committee, said that Paul was: "the best player on the day without a doubt". He beat another player from the town, David Riddell, in the final. Paul then beat Leon Tighe in the Galway Pool Masters decider.

The next ranking event is on Saturday, 6 December. Best of luck to Paul and all the other local players competing.



Paul Keighery with his Galway Pool Masters trophy



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Swimming Club New Season Success

By Maria Connolly



Senior club members at the Aspiring Meet in Castlebar.



Members of the club at the Future Challenger Meet in Athlone.

The club has been enjoying great success at swimming meets recently. The calendar opened with the Aspiring Meet for seniors in Castlebar, where many of the swimmers recorded great times for the start of the season.

At the Future Challenger Meet in Athlone, many club members achieved personal bests in their A and B time bands.

The next event was the Longford Invitational Swim Meet, where there was a mix of ages competing, with several personal bests and medals won. The seniors also competed in the Senior Schools competition in Longford, which saw several team members achieve the time goals they had set at the start of the season.

Huge congratulations go to Maeve Campbell, recipient of the Swimmer of the Month award for September, and Laoise Crosbie, Swimmer of the Month for October. Thanks also go to Cahalan Jewellers, Ballinasloe, for the lovely trophies for the Swimmer of



Members of the club at the Future Challenger Meet in Athlone.



Laoise Crosbie, Swimmer of the Month for October.



Maeve Campbell, winner of the Swimmer of the Month award for September

the Month awards.

There are several future meets coming up before Christmas, including the Christmas Cracker. Good luck to all participating swimmers!

The club trains at Coral Leisure, Ballinasloe. If your child would like to start training, please contact the club via email for a free assessment: secretaryballinasloesc@gmail.com.

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Junior Hurlers Three In A Row

By Maria Connolly



BACK L-R: Derek Frehill, Cormac Casey, Declan Dillon, Adam Potter, Craig Keighery, Niall Jennings, Conor Coleman, Eoin Coleman (JC), Cathal O'Hanlon (JC), Evan Hayes, Craig Potter, Cian Connolly, Anthony Smyth, Dylan Curley, Rob Nolan, Aidan Ward, Cris Rooney.

FRONT L-R: Liam Donagh, Cian Fahy, Patrick Sheahan, Alan Caulfield, Alan Reynolds, Odhran Sheanon, Danny Byrne, Jack Mitchell, Aodan Connaughton, Jason Cunningham, Naoise Murphy, Micheal O'Grady, Jodi Frehill, Conor O'Grady, Tadhg Casey.

The Junior hurling team recently won a historic third title in a row in the Junior 1 County Championship beating neighbours Kiltormer in the final. On a scoreline of 3-13 to 1-12, it was a comfortable victory in the end.

Like all local derbies, these teams are very familiar with each other. Nonetheless, this game was played in a very sporting manner and the big winner on the day was East Galway hurling.

Man of the Match and Co-Captain, Cathal O'Hanlon, said: "It's so special to have everyone here, our friends and family in Kenny Park, playing on one of the biggest days in Galway hurling." His Co-Captain, Eoin Coleman, added: "I think the support that we have got is unbelievable, from even in the Junior A when we were just about hanging in...and then to build onto that...it feels like the pride is back in Ballinasloe hurling."

The attack was spearheaded by O'Hanlon, ably assisted by Niall Jennings (who scored a fine individual goal), along with Evan Hayes and veteran Alan Caulfield. Jason Cunningham at midfield was very industrious throughout the 60-plus minutes, while the defence was rock solid with a storming display from full back Alan Reynolds. Goalkeeper Cormac Casey pulled off some heroic saves. The impact of substitutes Craig

Keighery and Cian Connolly proved inspirational.

O'Hanlon is confident that the team can go further: "We have another chance to go on and do ourselves justice. We know we're well capable of being up there...if we can put a 60-minute performance together, there's no team that can stop us...we've such an opportunity to go on all the way."

Along with the junior hurlers, the Under-11 boys from the club got an opportunity to display their skills at half time in a Go Games Exhibition against the Kiltormer U11s, making it a family day for all. Credit must go to the county board for accommodating this.

This is unprecedented achievement by the team, and much credit must be attributed to the management of Derek Frehill, Rob Nolan, and mentors.

Frehill, while paying tribute to the players, also noted that it was a success for the wider club. "There are a lot of good people that have been working really hard behind the scenes in this club for a long, long time with probably very little success and when you're coming off and you see the tears in their eyes, it does fill you with pride," he said. "At the end of the day, we understand, it's Junior hurling, but this is our Liam McCarthy [cup]...Wins like this just bring us all closer together."

Christmas Wishes



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Pearses Ladies Football and Junior Camogie Success

By Maria Connolly



Padraig Pearses Junior Camogie Champions: The Junior Camogie Team who recently won their county final.

BACK ROW (L-R): Grace Dooley, Róisín O'Sullivan, Miriam D'Arcy, Katie Mulry, Aiveen Curley, Rosa Monaghan, Gráinne Lohan, Macy McDermott, Leah Dolan, Caitlin Malone, Orla Mulryan (injured), Lorna Cruise and Sarah Dooley.

FRONT ROW (L-R): Arlene Cunningham, Ciara Hibbitt, Megan Noone, Lorraine Kenny (captain), Amy Costello, Jessica O'Brien, Shauna Hibbitt and Ciara Hibbitt. Also pictured in the photo (crouching down) are Sadie O'Brien, Mia Costello and Maeve O'Sullivan.

Having secured memorable victories against Clann na nGael, St. Dominic's, Oran, Boyle and St. Faithleach's, and a great draw against St. Brigid's in the final, the Senior Men's Football Team lost out to St Brigid's in the replay.

The Minor Boys Footballers lost against Castlerea St Kevin's in the Championship Final. It was an excellent season overall, and the team did themselves, the club and their families proud to reach this stage in a very competitive Division One Championship.

The Junior Camogie Team won the county final. What an incredible achievement by this team, who have brought home the Tom Geraghty Cup for the second year in a row! They will compete at senior level next year. Special congratulations to Róisín O'Sullivan who was awarded Player of the Match.

The Ladies Football season wrapped up with a great win for the Junior C team, beating St Dominic's in the final. Isabelle Downey was selected as Player of the Match. The Intermediate Ladies

lost to a well-drilled St Barry's team in the final. This has been a great year for the group as they have just come up from Junior A level last year and to be in the Intermediate Final was an outstanding achievement. Overall it has been a fantastic year for Ladies Football in the club – U19 winners, Junior winners and Intermediate finalists. Many thanks to all the coaches and players within this fantastic group.

The club was delighted to be awarded Irish Life GAA Healthy Club Status again for 2025-2027. Thanks to everyone who has contributed to our Healthy Club programme over the past number of years. If anyone would like to be part of our Healthy Club Project Team or have ideas, please get in touch.

As part of that programme, the Jiving and Social Dancers returned on Wednesdays in October from 8-9 pm, and will continue weekly for the next few months. Everybody is welcome. There is no charge, but it's appreciated if participants take part in the club lotto.



Pádraig Pearses Senior Panel: The men's senior football team, who lost the county final to St Brigid's in a replay.

BACK ROW (L-R): Niall Daly, Thomas Carey, Tom Butler, David Murray, Darragh Colleran, Adam McGreal, Ronan Daly, Mark Richardson, Conor Harley, Cillian Blackweir, Gavin Downey, Eoin Canning, Barry McGowan, Jason Cunningham, Richie Browne, Ryan Kelly, Shane Carty, and Jamie Donoghue. **FRONT ROW (L-R):** David Whelan, Eoin McManus, Paul Whelan, Sean Canning, Declan Kenny, Lorcan Daly, Conor Ryan, Eoin Colleran, Hubert Darcy, Jack Nevin, Paul Carey, Caelim Keogh, Conor Lohan, and Jack Tumulty.



Rugby Club 150th Anniversary Gala Ball

By Maria Connolly



Pictured at a recent visit of Connacht Squad Players to the underage teams at the Club

With the milestone of celebrating 150 years, Ballinasloe RFC is primed for a busy season. Training and matches are now well underway, with all teams participating in their respective leagues.

The senior team has made a steady start to their return to J1A status. They have been well able to "mix it" with the big boys, with a couple of well-earned wins that leave them nicely placed in the table. At the other end of the age scale, the club's first-ever under-8 girls' team took to the field in a recent girls' blitz.

The club recently held their successful 150th anniversary book launch, chronicled in great detail by Declan Quinn. This is a beautiful souvenir to have in anyone's house and would make an ideal gift this Christmas. It's priced at €25 and available to purchase in Salmon's on Main Street, online at www.shopballinasloe.ie, or at the clubhouse each Saturday morning during December.

In the meantime, mark the date in your diary. The club expects the ball to sell out very quickly, as everyone will want to be part of a special night.

And while all this is going on, players will be playing and training from minis right up to the senior team.

Club Chair Pearse Keller concluded: "Wishing all our players and coaches, members, families, and friends a very happy Christmas and a prosperous and healthy 2026."



Mrs. Chris Flynn and Womans International Player Béibhinn Parsons chatting about St. Stephens Day Festivities at the Club

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Golf Club Recovers After Storm Damage

By Maria Connolly



Pictured at the planting of a tree in memory of the late Padraig Kelly are the President of Ballinasloe Golf Club, Gerry Fitzgerald, wife of Padraig Kelly, Veronica Kelly, Elaine Kelly, his daughter, and Paddy Creaven, former Captain of Ballinasloe Golf Club.

Storm Eowyn brought down over 60 trees in January and left the course in terrible condition. The clean-up, led by Course Manager Aidan Dooley, was huge. It added considerable costs to the club's tight finances and, without the help of many volunteers, the results would have taken years to achieve.

However, the club has received many compliments from Connacht and Golf Ireland officials and visitors on how it has managed to recover compared to many others.

The replanting of trees to replace those damaged by the storm also offered an opportunity to remember past golf club members, and a red oak tree was recently planted at the club in memory of the late Padraig Kelly.

Unfortunately for the club's finances, the storm repairs came on top of a necessary sewage upgrade and planned drainage works. There are also ongoing capital requirements to upgrade machinery, finish off drainage, upgrade tee boxes, upgrade locker rooms, as well as the costs of tree planting and keeping the course in top condition.

There is an opportunity to carry out some of these required works over the next 18 months, as the club's main benefactors, Dermot and May O'Mahony, have committed to match funding

up to €100,000 from what the club raises. In order to do this, the club is asking its members to give a once-off, minimum voluntary contribution of €200 when paying their membership for 2026. Similar to previous years, payments can be made in instalments. This request is against a backdrop where membership fees have not been increased in line with inflation over the last ten years.

The main club AGM is being held at the time of going to press. However, the Men's and Ladies' committees for 2026 are as follows:

Men's Committee: Captain: Stephen Ruane, Vice-Captain: John Kelly, Hon Secretary: Seamus Duffy, Hon Treasurer: Brian Geraghty, Handicap Secretary: Edwin Flynn, Competition Secretary: Ciaran Smith, Junior Convenor: David McDonnell, and Committee Members: John Rafferty, Conor Murphy, Gavin Hynes, Liam Coughlan, Mike Coughlan, and Tim Broderick.

Ladies' Committee: Captain: Breda Conneely, Vice-Captain: Maura Kelly, Hon Secretary: Nora Callagey, Hon Treasurer: Myra Dunne, Handicap Secretary: Mary Goode, Competition Secretary: Mary Davis, Junior Convenor: Rita Moore, and Committee Members: Peggy Wong, Caroline Layng, Mary Sandys, and Marie Hession.

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Ballinasloe AFC Targets FAI Club Mark

By Maria Connolly



U-13 player Keegan Kelly, selected to represent the under-13 Galway Academy League squad.



Ballinasloe Town AFC player Danny Mulcahy, who recently lined out for the Galway Interleague team against Mayo.



Oisin Ryan, Nathan Kelly, Harry Kinsella, and Tiernan Hogan, who represented Ballinasloe Town AFC over three weekends at the under-12 Galway Interleague trials.

Great work has taken place recently to secure the FAI Club Mark from the Football Association of Ireland, spearheaded by Bjorn Manning and Bronagh Kinsella.

The Club Mark is an accreditation award that recognises the adoption of best practice in governance, management, and administration. The club expects to secure the award very soon. It will be compulsory next year for all affiliated clubs to have attained Club Mark standards.

The Senior Ladies team has got off to a promising start to the season. They are five games into their league campaign and are in third place in the table. In their most recent game, the Ladies secured a hard-fought 2-1 victory over Galway City's West

United FC, with goals from Anna Jurneczko and Pamela Fallon. The team is managed by Shane Fallon, with Tommy Lee Burke and John Cawley as Assistant Managers.

Darragh Concannon has recently taken on the position of Manager of the Senior Men's team, with Des Hope as Assistant Manager. Both Darragh and Des have extensive experience, having played at the highest level with League of Ireland clubs. Since taking over, the team has done extremely well, winning three out of four league games and beating Kilkerrin United, Ballaghaderreen, and CP Ajax FC. The one league loss was to Ballinahown FC. The ultimate objective this season is to secure promotion to the Premier Division. The Seniors also beat Dunmore FC in the Connacht Junior Cup and are now focusing on the next round.

The youth teams are all performing strongly in their respective leagues. The under-18 team has had a fantastic start to the season and is top of the table with five wins from five. The under-14 A team, under-14 C team, and under-13 B team are all in second place in their respective leagues. The under-13 B team is also enjoying a good run in the SFAI Trophy, beating Glen Celtic and hoping to overcome Tuam Celtic in the next round.

The newly-formed under-13 C team has shown great determination and progress so far this season and is in joint second place in the league table after two wins in their first four games. The team coaches are very proud of the squad and are looking forward to the rest of the season.

The under-12 B team, which includes boys and girls, started their league campaign with a promising win away to West United. The team is now looking forward to their Connacht Trophy game on December 13. Meanwhile, the under-11 girls' team has just started their league campaign and is competing well.

The club's weekly Soccer Academy, which caters for boys and girls aged 5-10, takes place every Saturday at 10am at the club grounds. Parents or guardians must stay in attendance for the duration of the training session.

Christmas Reflections

By Senator Rónán Mullen

Simple pleasures. This time of year I rummage for a suitable picture for my Christmas card. I send mostly by email. No Oireachtas envelopes are used. I buy the Christmas stamps.

I go through my phone and look at the places I've been. When I'm in churches, I'll have kept an eye out for scenes of the Annunciation, the Nativity or the Magi. Stained glass, mosaic or art. But the lighting, the angle and my weak photography skills often let me down. Try the internet.

A snow-covered Leinster House doesn't work. Plenty of my Oireachtas colleagues have chosen that already. I need a classic image. The first Christmas.

Last year, I found the right one in St Isidore's College in Rome, where I had visited in August. It's a place of great interest to any Irish person interested in history. This year, the Irish Franciscans celebrated 400 years there. It started when Fr Luke Wadding was sent over to Rome by the King of Spain and took over the care of a church which was dedicated to St Isidore, a Spanish farmer and saint. Wadding began an Irish Franciscan community which kept Irish faith, culture, language and identity alive at a time when all these things were being crushed back home. It was in places like St Isidore's, and in the Irish College which Wadding also founded, that young Irish men studied for the priesthood before coming home to face poverty and persecution - and sometimes to perish. One of the most illustrious of these Roman graduates is St Oliver Plunkett,



Flight into Egypt

born 400 years ago this year, who was executed at Tyburn in 1681.

St Isidore's commemorates the various Franciscan foundations founded in Ireland over the centuries. It has a drawing of the now ruined, but still beautiful, Franciscan foundation in Kilconnell - a place I occasionally go and like to show to people.

But its painting of the Holy Family and their Flight into Egypt, painted by the celebrated Italian baroque artist Carlo Maratti (1625-1713), inspires this article. Fr Micheal Mac Craith, Guardian of St Isidore's, points out that the depiction of Joseph and Mary holding hands is interesting because that would have been unusual in the art of the time. And Our Lady's sandals are certainly not suitable for a hasty escape on foot into Egypt, he points out, suggesting that this might be an early example of the phenomenon now known as 'product placement'. The straps on the Virgin's left foot making the letter 'A', are perhaps the

trademark of the shoemaker? Who knows? Cá bhfios?

Wellingtons, not sandals, are the kind of footwear that I associate with Christmas past. I remember one Christmas Eve helping my father to separate cattle, clean out sheds and make sure that the animals had enough feed. Suddenly Dad was called to a neighbour's house because a chimney had gone on fire. We were in the middle of the jobs and I had to continue, but was unable to finish them, probably because I was unable at that stage to drive the tractor. My father marvelled when he came back later to find that the lad had not gone into the house. Still in the yard. "You must have been perished." But I wasn't, to tell the truth, because inside I was full of Christmas. My mind was closer to the magic of the Bethlehem stable than to the ordinary everyday of a shed at home. Or maybe I was thinking of the trinkets and treats of the Season too.

Years later, I returned to the same yard one Christmas Day to coax my father, by then afflicted with Alzheimers, and going round doing the same jobs that didn't need to be done, back into the house. I remember a friendly trial of strength as I tried to get hold of a yardscraper he just wouldn't yield up. I wondered which of us had the Alzheimers as I found myself grappling with him for control of a farm implement on Christmas Day.



Young Rónán Mullen

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Forged in Fire Acclaimed

By Colm Croffy

The community heritage project Forged in Fire, documenting and celebrating Ballinasloe's history of iron and metalwork, came to a successful conclusion in October with several elements coming to fruition.

Substantial funding was provided by Creative Ireland to this collaboration between the Galway County Heritage Office, Ballinasloe & District Heritage Society and the artist collective Group 8.

Group 8 produced their artistic response to the theme with a beautifully crafted and curated exhibition featuring visual and tactile artworks along with poetry and photography. At the launch in the Library Church Gallery, Galway County Heritage Officer Marie Mannion thanked the group for leaving a legacy for the county in their interpretation of the interconnection between iron and metalwork in the town and surrounds, and the architectural, cultural and social history and heritage.

The research and discovery exhibition for the project took place in the Emerald Supper Room with a combination of display panels and a large exhibition of local artefacts telling the story.

Everything from bog iron to forge-made eel spears was on display. Some of the showpieces on the day were a competition plough made by Bannertons of Ballinasloe, forged stonemason and carpenter's tools, a 'Guinness poker', as well as historical business ledgers from forges in the town.

Of particular interest to many of the attendees were the old street signs reproduced for the event by local historian Padraic Kilduff. These signs for Higgins', Peayton's and Bannerton's forges had been identified through analysis of



Sally Ann Barrett



Group 8 members



Zara Little, Campbell Joyce, County Heritage Officer Marie Mannion, Emma Laffey, Community Archaeologist Bernie Doherty

photographs in the Lawrence collection from c.1910.

A two-part podcast documentary detailing the history of iron and metalwork in Ballinasloe and its hinterland was produced for the project by Sally Anne Barrett and launched on the day by blacksmith Reece Foster. Reece works from a 270-year-old forge in Mountshannon, and he spoke about the emotional response he had to seeing the turnout for, and interest in, the craft of metalwork that the project had created. He also highlighted the importance of community projects such as Forged in Fire in preserving heritage crafts such as iron and metalwork.

The educational panels from the exhibition were transferred over to the Library for a few days for members of the public and created a significant reaction.

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Hostings 2 Launched With Fanfare

By Colm Croffy



Editor Damian Mac Con Uladh, Aosdána member Nuala O'Connor, and some members of the Society Committee.



Johnston, and guest speaker Nuala O'Connor (Tríona Waters, Padraig Kilduff, Cathal Lucas, Willie Tully, Gerard Jennings, Marie Costello Monaghan, Pat Johnston, Gerard Madden, and Sandra Warde-Kilduff).

A large crowd turned out in Gullane's Hotel for the launch of *Hostings: Journal of Ballinasloe & District Heritage Society*. The second volume of the Journal, edited by Damian Mac Con Uladh, was officially launched by local author, poet and recently elected Aosdána member Nuala O'Connor.

Following the success of the first volume, the Journal this year was expanded in size and covers a broad and diverse range of topics.

These include an article on the legacy of artist Úna Watters by Mary Morrissey; the origins of St. Brigid's Hospitals by Tríona Waters; a history of Deerpark by Gerard Madden; a history of the town's newspaper industry by Cathal Lucas; and personal memories of Ballinasloe in the 1950s by Sandra Warde-Kilduff, among many others.

A feature of the Journal is the many photographs and illustrations sourced by the authors, the editor and the Heritage Society to complement the stories.

To celebrate the launch, the Heritage Society invited several guests from around the country who had connections to the stories in the Journal. Thoughts and reflections from these guests added a lovely nostalgic and poignant note to the proceedings, held on the 14th of November.

Artist and designer Michael Lunt recalled his time in Ballinasloe producing artworks for the iconic Roadstone Calendar in 1979 (which featured many of the town's limestone buildings), with meals in Hayden's Hotel being a particular highlight.

Waterford-based Robert Leslie, the great-great-grandson of architect James Forth Kempster, designer of many of Ballinasloe's heritage buildings, told the story of his family's links to St Paul's

Cathedral and Blenheim Palace. He admitted being somewhat spooked that people in the town knew more about his ancestor than he did until quite recently!

Liz Foye (née Mills) spoke of her family's understanding of the role the Ballinasloe Asylum played in their history, and Dervla Murray recounted kayaking along the River Suck with her father John and overnighting at the Murray family homestead at the bridge.

In her reflection, Nuala reminded the audience that she is an avid walker and described her steps and sights around the circuit, the vistas, frames, doorways, arches, lanes, parks and features that sparkle from different periods of the town's meandering past.

"As I walk and admire the layers, I begin to realise that we, all of us in this room, in this place, are the next layer. And Conor, Damian and the Committee are doing the work of the Gods in encouraging us to excavate the layers. It is brilliant that these glimpses to our past are actively investigated through the Journal, as it ensures that the layers stay brilliantly vibrant for us and for future dwellers."

Having enraptured the room with her words, Nuala O'Connor received a presentation from Zara Little-Campbell to mark her election to Aosdána and to officially launch the Society's second Journal.

The Journal is once again supported by the Galway County Heritage Office and Ballinasloe Credit Union. The Credit Union is sponsoring copies of the Journal for all schools and nursing homes/care centres within the local common bond.

Costing €15, the Journal is available from Salmons on Main Street, Dolan's Centra, and online at shopballinasloe.ie.



Nuala and Zara



Guests of the Heritage Society with Chairperson Conor Johnston and guest speaker Nuala O'Connor at the launch of Hostings (Robert Leslie, Liz Foye, Michael Lunt, Dervla Murray, and Jane Leslie).



Mol an Óige – Saoire Johnston, grandfather Johnny Johnston, grandmother Agnes Hurley, and Iarlaith Hurley at the launch.

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Centenary of 1925 All-Ireland Champion

By Maria Connolly



L TO R: P. Fahy, D. McLoughlin, B. Jennings, M. Tully, D. Egan – reminiscing about their days bringing home Sam to the town!

The past came alive recently as Gullane's Hotel hosted a moving and heartfelt centenary celebration of Galway's 1925 All-Ireland Football Champions. What began as a modest idea of a mass followed by refreshments grew into a landmark event honouring those men who first brought glory to Galway football.

The commemoration idea was sparked in summer with Anne and John Egan. Anne contacted Michael Riddell, knowing that his granduncle had played with her grandfather on the team in 1925. A committee was formed and the idea spread: a Facebook page for the centenary drew over 1,000 views within 24 hours, and once tickets for the centenary event were announced, they sold out in just 48 hours.

The mass held at St Michael's on Friday 15th November was celebrated by Fr Allman, with music provided by the Town Band.

Later on, Gullane's Ballroom was filled as three large screens showcased archival and celebratory content. Gearóid Ó Tuathaigh, Professor Emeritus in History and former Dean of Arts and Vice-President of NUI Galway, gave a presentation on the team. A range of original photographs, letters and other memorabilia related to the team were on display alongside the Michael Walsh Cup, Trixie Leech Cup, the Town League Cup, the Nestor Cup and the Sam Maguire itself.

The evening was anchored by Ollie Turner of Galway Bay FM, who interviewed committee members with family ties to the 1925 team:

Michael Riddell spoke about his granduncle, Thomas "Trixie" Leech; Michael Smyth reflected on his grandfather, Willie Smyth; John Egan honoured his grandfather, John Egan; Joey Walsh remembered his granduncle, Josie Walsh; Declan Earls paid tribute to his grandfather, Dennis Egan.

Conor Ganly from Dunlo Hill brought his grandfather Paddy's medal to the stage when he got to chat about his Kilasolan ancestor.

Other guests were also invited up on stage to share their



Fahy and Goode family members (who had a relative on the winning team) commemorate with Sam and the "Knacker" Walsh Cup.



Conor Ganly (grandson of Paddy Ganly) with Sam Maguire and the original 1925 All-Ireland medal.



Committee members Michael Smyth (composer of the ballad) and Willie Tully (Master of the local GAA archives).

recollections and stories. Each player from the team was given their due as a range of speakers breathed life into their legacy, sharing details of their work, family and, all too often, the hardships they endured.

Valerie Seale provided stirring musical performances, with her rendition of The West's Awake prompting the entire crowd to join in.

The committee are currently raising funds to establish a permanent memorial to honour the 1925 champions, the first for Galway and Connacht, ensuring their legacy endures. Steve Dolan very generously donated copies of his book, which were sold on the night. The committee are also in the process of compiling a book, which will also be going on sale in the near future.

Committee members are: John Egan (Chair), Anne Egan (Secretary), Michael Smyth (Treasurer), Michael Riddell (PRO), Steve Dolan, Declan Earls, Tina Earls, Dennis Egan, Owen Jennings, Abbie McGowan, Anne Ryan, JJ Smyth, Sean Tully, Willie Tully and Joey Walsh. All enquiries to: galway.1925centenary@gmail.com.

Tribute song to the 1925 All Ireland Football Champions Galway (By Michael Smyth)

The Road the Triumph and The Legacy
Down the road where the maroon now flies,
Through the rain and the western skies,
Once in blue and gold they played,
And a century later, their glory remains.
And we'll sing of the road, the triumph, and the legacy,
Of the hearts that beat for a county's destiny,
A hundred years have come and gone,
But the spirit of those men lives on.
In Ballinasloe where the crowd once cheered,
Their names are whispered, proud and revered,
Simple men with a noble grace,
Their story etched in time's embrace.
And we'll sing of the road, the triumph, and the legacy,
Of the pride they gave to our history,
A hundred years have come and gone,
But the spirit of those men lives on.
Through the years their footsteps fade,
Yet their dreams are the path we've made,
In every field where young hearts play,
Their echo guides the Galway way.
So, we'll sing of the road, the triumph, and the legacy,
Of the love they gave to this great Galway sea,
A century on, we stand with pride,
For the men of old — and the flame inside.
Down the road where the blue turned to white and maroon,
Their memory lives — and always will bloom.



New Oral History Project

By Maria Connolly

Ballinasloe Library will host a talk on Saturday, January 24 at 2:30 pm, titled "St Gabriel's Convent, St Joseph's Industrial School, and Ballinasloe Library." The talk is by Abbie McGowan, former Library Assistant at the library, and current Librarian at the Aidan Heavey Library, Athlone.

The talk will blend historical and genealogical research to explore the layered history of the library site – formerly home to St Gabriel's Convent and St Joseph's Industrial School – and how its repurposing reflects broader trends in Irish heritage, architecture, and community memory.

"Following on from talks by Dr Curtin and author Heidi Danielle, I've researched the histories of some of the girls who were resident at the industrial school at the turn of the century," reveals Abbie. "I'm hopeful that they may still have some living family members willing to share stories of their lives after leaving the library. The industrial school closed in 1968 and so the first-hand stories that are left are now in danger of being lost, and they are crucial to our understanding of these institutions."

A history of the building, authored by Abbie, is due to appear in *History Ireland* in early 2026 and will contain further details pertaining to the former Chapel and the official accounts of life at the reformatory and industrial school.

Although not a native of the town, Abbie hasn't been shy in showing her grá for her adopted home: she is one of the



Abbie McGowan, who launches a new oral history project at the library in January.

pioneers in the establishment of the Ballinasloe and District Heritage Society, researched and edited a short booklet on the 1691 Battle of Aughrim, and is actively involved with the 1925 Galway All-Ireland Football Championship Centenary Committee.

Abbie is currently undertaking her MSc in Information and Library Studies. Her research examines the transformation of historical buildings into modern public libraries, and her upcoming dissertation will examine how communities engage with library spaces that carry complex historical legacies.

As part of the research, the project aims to include interviews with local residents to gather personal memories and reflections on the convent and industrial school. More information relating to the project is available at www.stjosephsindustrialschoolballinasloe.wordpress.com.

Community members are warmly invited to attend the talk, share their stories, and contribute to this important research. Whether you have a personal connection to the site or an interest in heritage, architecture, or libraries, your voice matters.

To express interest in participating in the research interviews, please contact stjosephsballinasloe@gmail.com. If you're unable to attend the event, but wish to share your story, Abbie will be available to speak with on February 7 and 21 in the reference room at Ballinasloe Library.

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Holy Table Presented To St. John's Church

By Maria Connolly

Saint John's Church parishioners were delighted to receive the gift of a beautifully carved holy communion table, which was originally made for the Ballinasloe Presbyterian Church, in Society St. when it was consecrated in 1845 – some 180 years ago.

Following the closure of the Presbyterian Church, the holy communion table had been entrusted to Michael McCullagh in 2008 by John Reid and a Mr Morris from the Belfast & Munster Presbytery in Dublin, as a remembrance of the Presbyterian Church of Ballinasloe and as a commemoration of their presence within our community.

When the new Ballinasloe Library was opened in 2016, it was re-housed in the gallery space there, with a view potentially including it in the collection of a museum which had been envisaged for Ballinasloe. Unfortunately, it got damaged over time and was sent to the Ballinasloe Men's Shed for repair, where it remained out of public view for a number of years.

Following a period of careful restoration, it will now take pride of place in Saint John's Church, where it will be used as a nave altar. This will allow the Eucharistic celebrations to be brought significantly closer to the congregation than would have been the case with the original sanctuary altar, helping the worship experience to feel more inclusive and intimate.

Archdeacon John Godfrey explains why this gift means so much to the local Church of Ireland congregation. "Within the Christian tradition, Holy Communion is the central act of our worship life. So, for a community of faith, the gift of a holy table at which generations of believers have been fed going back to the time of the Famine, is a great treasure indeed. That it comes to us from the Ballinasloe Presbyterian Church, having also resided in a former Mercy chapel, makes it more precious still. It's a unique ecumenical journey, means that, each time we gather in communion here at the Lord's Table, it will be for us an abiding symbol of our unity with Christians of all denominations."



Michael McCullagh organist to St John's and St Michael's Churches.



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Cribbing About Christmas Traditions

By Colm Croffy

It's difficult to believe that the Christmas season of 12 days was celebrated for nigh 1,500 years without a red-suited man with a white beard — until Coca-Cola wheezed up a marketing campaign in 1931 — and indeed without a tree with lights until Queen Victoria accepted the South German tradition of her consort Albert in the court decorations of Windsor Castle in the 1840s!

A curate in this parish dismissed the Christmas tree in the early sixties from the altar as a pagan tradition — a tad rich from the organisation that hinged Christ's birthday a few gyrations away from the Roman Feast of Saturnalia — the shortest day of the year — with gift-giving and bringing in greenery to dress the house, traces of which follow the feast in Western culture today.

A throwaway comment from a participant at a local Christmas Past event some short years ago about the inability to buy the 2½-foot-long red candle in any of the retail establishments in the Midlands got me thinking about what unique Irish Christmastime traditions are being vapourised in the retail overkill. That rumbles now from the removal of the witches' hats and pumpkins, through Black Fridays, broke Mondays and supersize shrinking sweet tub Tuesdays for eight weeks, till we can at last enjoy the Christmas and New Year sales!

The large red candle, thrust into the earthenware jar or wooden block with a few sprigs of holly or greenery in the front window of the house, was akin to the landing strip to the family crib (manger/nativity scene). It was only lit at dusk on the eve, sometimes after the Angelus, by the youngest of the house to guide in any passer-by or stranger that needed shelter or support on Christmas night — in honour of the hospitality of the simple stable.

Maybe the Macys and Coca-Cola marketeers did steal some clever brand positioning from the Roman Catholic Church — because no Catholic home in the Western world from the 16th century onward would have had the nativity scene in a prominent place were it not for the Johnny Cash superstar of the 13th century. Enter the millionaire playboy merchant who in his later years left the pleasures of his sinful world and formed his own order

— St Francis of Assisi. In 1223 he produced the first live nativity in Greccio, Italy, complete with manger, hay, cow and donkey; placed it on the altar and celebrated Midnight Mass around it.

Prior to that, the story of the nativity, or the birth of the baby Jesus in a stable in Bethlehem, was only available in Vatican black and white — frescoes, paintings, triptychs — but when St Francis went 3D, the wonderment of the "Word made flesh" was made all the more magical to the masses, who were for most of the first two millennia illiterate but at least not distracted by TikTok but more by famine, disease and wars.

As Europe moved out of the medieval ages and arts and craftsmanship improved with new technologies of carving and casting, Church authorities commissioned artists to undertake magnificent life-sized statues of the traditional Christmas card scene, which caused the masses to flock to the once-a-year moment after the dreary weeks of bleak Advent.

Statues and figurines were much-needed souvenirs from folks on the caminos, trips to the Holy Land, and to various abbeys and shrines dotted around Europe, and large parish moments of novenas and public Saints' Days proved lucrative markets for a rich mainland European urban and rural class to outdo their neighbours with such wood and alabaster deities. In the 16th and 17th centuries a few basic figurines of the crib or nativity were making their way into upper- and middle-class homes.

City mayors, sheriffs and archbishops vied with each other to



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have large-scale outdoor public cribs in central town squares, plazas and piazzas that would act as magnets for the faithful and possibly the doubtful too.



Even though in the Gospel Jesus did apparently chase the moneylenders from the temple, his successors could not remove commerce from Christmas, and flocks of medieval "Del Boys" knew that pilgrims would need feeding and presents to bring home to the little ones and infirm who could not make the trek (there was indeed no free travel or

worrying about getting your 10,000 steps a day back then), so the Christkindl market tradition of central Europe was born.

This all occurred with speed after the obliteration of public Catholic worship islandwide here — save from the sacred well pilgrimage and mass rock on beach or mountainside to keep a faith nurtured. However, since the Flight of the Earls we had been sending young seminarians to Salamanca, Louvain, Paris and Rome and those padres came back full of ideas of how the simpler fare of a Celtic Christmas tradition — preparation, observances, feasting, hospitality and charity — could be layered with new nativity choreography.

All the Franciscan houses kept faith with their founder's crib being the centrepiece to their heralding of the feast and teaching of the nativity — with the infant only being installed in his manger at Midnight Mass.

With Catholic Emancipation of 1829 and a massive church-building programme (estimated 1,200 between 1820 and 1920), a lot of Italian cribs were bought for the purposes of connecting the magic of the mystery through the St Francis lens — not forgetting the convents, monasteries, schools, orphanages and hospitals under the Pontiff's jurisdiction.

For most in this town the earliest memory of the Christmas crib was the one erected in the entrance hall to the convent. Many infant classes were taught about the nativity in the old hardcore catechism and then rewarded with a visit to the nearest manifestation of the tale — similar to other provincial towns.

From the 1700s the starting hooter for Christmas season proper was 8th December — Feast of the Immaculate Conception (one-time sniggeringly known as when the Culchies went to Dublin to do the Christmas shopping). Families, if in big cities or towns, would pay a visit to the crib first.

Once the baby Jesus was laid in his manger at Midnight Mass (often in St Michael's to the strains of the Town Band) a piseog developed nationwide that taking a piece of straw from the crib and placing it in your wallet or purse would protect you from want for the year ahead!

Christmases of the more mechanised years saw families during the holidays driving around to visit and pray at different cribs — with different artistic aspects — angels overhead, views of the Holy City in the hills from the back window, running water streams and backlighting.

When the FMDMs had the keys to Portiuncula Hospital (named after the very first church built by the original St Francis in Assisi and still standing within the modern Italian basilica today) the inter-ward competition for best crib and decorations was fierce — I can recall counting 12 crib installations in a variety of non-health and safety-compliant ways as a young lad.

Creagh Church in the 70s and 80s had a large illuminated garden shed — not life-sized statues, but swathed in holly and ivy — built, I think, by the late Tom Forde. St Michael's had the fully Hollywood set — practically life-sized statues that would always cause the kids to gape and wonder and the adults to make the offering and light a candle for those gone before but had taught them the meaning of Christmas.

What is sometimes forgotten is that these large installations could take a week to dust off, fix, repair and install — all with volunteer parishioner craftsmen and women.

There were cribs in all the foyers and oratories or entrance hallways of the schools in the latter years of the last century and, of course, the main receptions of places of work and retail outlets.

The large outdoor crib concept did not hit these shores till 1904, when St Raphael's in Youghal built one. Hard to imagine, but the next milestone in the outdoor public crib history is the Moving Crib of St Martin of the Apostolate in Parnell Square — created in 1956 and continuing, but perhaps eclipsed by the live animal crib which began in the Mansion House in 1995 and subsequently moved to St Stephen's Green a few years ago.

Many of the recent great Irish writers and poets — Joyce, Yeats, Kavanagh, Keneally, O'Brien, Mac an tSaoi — possibly did not have miniature cribs of the scale still visible in some homes, but one can be sure that their childlike wonder of the feast of Christmas was imbued first with the sights, smells and ritual around the figures and animals of their own first youthful memories from large parish cribs.

Advent, nativity and Epiphany are woven into their distinguished Christmastide writings and verse as seamlessly as hemp and tweed in an outer garment. Oddly, their canon is scarce on flickering snowmen and reindeer set in the lawn from department stores.

I think that it was Birchgrove's Jim Reynolds and the gifted carpenter of Harbour Road, Frank Kenny, who led the build on the first public crib on St Michael's Square in the early 80s. Cllr Patsy Geraghty was involved.

Fittingly for diaspora and local, the *dramatis personae* are the very ones that captured the imagination of so many young boys and girls in the convent hallway.

Irrespective of outlook on religion, Church, Christianity — a pause at a public crib, to reflect, just take in the moment, or perhaps to shake off the dark shadow of Dickens' *Ghost of Christmas Past* — is to reconnect with the mystery of the Magi and all that is wrapped within it.

My father played the melodeon

Outside at our gate;

There were stars in the morning east

And they danced to his music.

Across the wild bogs his melodeon called

To Lennons and Callans.

As I pulled on my trousers in a hurry

I knew some strange thing had happened.

Outside in the cow-house my mother

Made the music of milking;

The light of her stable-lamp was a star

And the frost of Bethlehem made it twinkle.

Exert from Patrick Kavanagh's A Christmas Childhood



The Stained Glass of The Library Church Gallery

By Padraic Kilduff

Anyone who visits a building with stained glass cannot be unmoved by the magical interplay of light on coloured glass as it enriches the space. To look at the work involved to create the scene or image with various coloured pieces of glass all carefully cut and assembled, or the kiln-fired painted designs and images on the glass, evokes a transcendental impression.

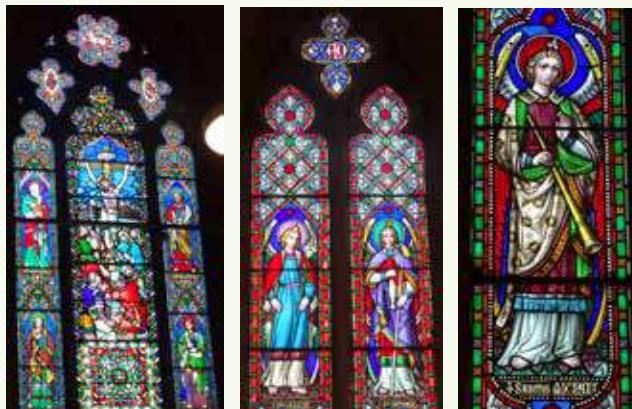
A visit to the Ballinasloe Library gallery is liable to create such an impression where all its windows are various types of stained glass. This gallery was formerly the chapel of the Sisters of Mercy convent which was begun in 1864, and its stained glass of saintly images and religious iconography flood the area with coloured light.

While observing these, one might ask who designed them? They were created by the firm of William Wailes (1808 – 1881) of Newcastle upon Tyne, the most prolific stained-glass manufacturer of his day.

He started life as a grocer and went to Germany to study stained glass, most probably with the famous firm, Mayer of Munich, returning to set up his own business.

He was one of the stained-glass artists to exhibit at the Crystal Palace Exhibition of 1851 in London. His son William Thomas and son-in-law Thomas Strang joined the business which eventually became Wailes and Strang and lasted until 1914.

Wailes's stained glass is identified by the type of glass and colour combinations. His glass is often paler but also more brightly



coloured than some of the other English workshops. This and the appearance of the figures reflects his training in Germany.

Certain colour combinations dominate his work. The clothing of his figures are often mauve lined with red. You have yellow lined with bright red, yellow lined with bright blue and red lined with green. He also used a lot of pink glass in his windows. He would also fill his windows with ornate foliate patterns and his figures had a classical, staid appearance.

Wailes's largest and most celebrated single commission is the Gloucester Cathedral west window (1859) — a frequently-discussed "showpiece" in literature on Victorian stained glass. His firm at the height of the late Victorian age had some 76 craftsmen employed.

William was seen as a Gothic Revival artist and his work complements the former chapel which was built in Gothic style from a design by James Kempster C.E. who lived in Mount Pleasant.

From the formal chronological list of the 26 Irish commissions attributed to William Wailes in the *Dictionary of Irish Architects* (1720-1940) the only other Galway church commission the firm undertook was in 1880 when it produced and installed "**Mary Magdalene Washing the Feet of Christ**".

Freeman's Journal, 08 October 1866. Ronald Torbet, *The Wonderful Windows of William Wailes* (2003). Various online articles feature William Wailes.



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Michael J. Dolan: Aughrim's Actor

By Damian Mac Con Uladh

As families gather over the Christmas period around the television, they might encounter *Scrooge* (1951), a timeless seasonal classic that many critics and film historians rank among the top Christmas films of all time.

Unbeknown to most would be that Belfast-born Brian Desmond Hurst's adaptation of Charles Dickens' *A Christmas Carol* also features among the cast a Dublin-born actor whose parents were both from the Ballinasloe district.

Michael Joseph Dolan, best remembered for his role as the Spirit of Christmas Past in *Scrooge*, was a distinguished stage actor for much of his career with the Abbey Theatre. In 1923 he took over the management of the national theatre, replacing Lennox Robinson.

In later life, Dolan also appeared in five films, making his debut playing the role of "Twiss" in *Another Shore* (1948). Other film credits include *Saints and Sinners* (1949), *Talk of a Million* (1951), and *Captain Horatio Hornblower* (1951), which also starred Gregory Peck. *Scrooge* was probably Dolan's last film, although he continued to appear on the stage up to early 1954, some months before his death.

But what of the Ballinasloe link? Michael J. Dolan was born on 8 April 1886 at 65 Meath Street, Dublin, the third and last son of Patrick Dolan and Catherine Fair (the surname was also spelled Phair or Phayre in the records). Patrick and Catherine were



Alastair Sim as Ebenezer Scrooge and Michael Dolan as the Spirit of Christmas Past in *Scrooge*, 1951

married on 29 August 1880 in Aughrim, where they lived. A labourer, Patrick was the son of Michael Dolan, deceased, and Catherine was the daughter of George Phair, a gardener, also deceased, who had once lived on Brackernagh, in Ballinasloe.

The marriage was somewhat unusual for the time, as Patrick was Catholic and Catherine was Church of Ireland. Moreover, Catherine was about ten years older than Patrick. Those circumstances may have led the newly-weds to Dublin, where their first child, John, was born in 1881 and their second child, Mary, in 1884. Interestingly, Mary, in the 1901/1911 censuses, gave Ballinasloe as her place of

birth. Patrick later became a foreman in the Guinness brewery, where he worked in the forwarding department.

Michael, then a stage actor and manager, of 15 Leinster Avenue, Dublin, married Catherine Fogarty, a newspaper reporter and daughter of William G. Fogarty, secretary of Galway County Council, in Raheny, Dublin, on 25 January 1922. They would have four children: Doreen, Jeffrey, Sheila and Patricia.

Dolan died aged 68 on 21 October 1954 in Dublin and is buried in Mount Jerome Cemetery in Dublin's Harold's Cross. Despite his relative fame during his lifetime, his final resting place lies unmarked. However, a group of YouTubers who produce videos on the graves of actors are trying to raise funds to erect a headstone on his plot.

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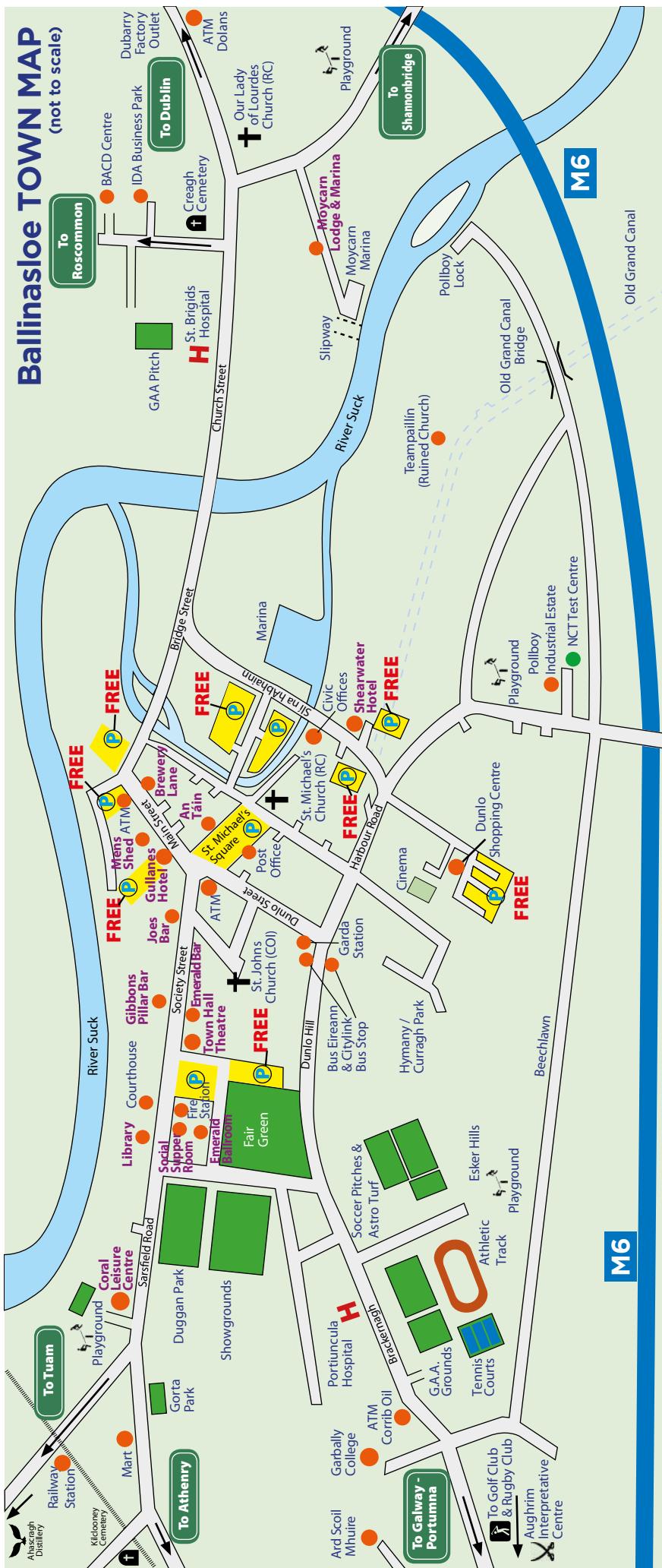
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Ballinasloe TOWN MAP (not to scale)



Ballinasloe History Walk

1 – Start at the statue known as The Man with the Horse, where Main Street joins St. Michael's Square. From the crossing near the statue, continue by turning right onto Main Street. The prosperity of Ballinasloe in Georgian times can be seen in the scale and classical style of the buildings here. A fine group of four frontages stand across from the statue of The Man with the Horse. With shops and pubs on the ground floor for the most part, these Main Street premises have several floors above.

2 – Walking along Main Street, lift your eyes above the shop frontages for one of the town's characteristic sights. There are the Diocletian windows that grace several facades. They are from the years after 1805 when the 2nd Earl was in charge. A window of this sort is formed under a semi-circular arch with two upright divisions so that the whole opening is divided into three parts.

3 – As you stand at the meeting point of Bridge Street and Main Street, you will see the Victorian frontage of a commercial premises, originally the Masonic Hall. Next to it stands a classical looking, beautifully-crafted, early 19th century stone house, currently a guest house. Beside these is a tall, fine stone-fronted classical mansion, which is now the Bank of Ireland. It was originally the town mansion of the Lord of all of Ballinasloe, the Earl of Clancarty. A friend of king George IV, the Earl was one of the architects of the resistance to the emperor Napoleon. It could be said that he was the person to whom most credit is due for the layout, growth and architectural character of Ballinasloe as we see it today.

4 – At the end of Main Street, head along Bridge Street, then turn to the right to the pathway which runs to the riverscape where you can see channels flowing through the several arches of the long stone bridge over the river Suck, one of the town's most precious monuments. The Bridge has been in continuous use since the 16th century and its extension in 1754 prepared it structurally to carry even the heaviest juggernauts of today.

5 – Walk through to the far end of the park; you will approach St Michael's Church (1852-58) that stands in a commanding position over the Square. Its architect was J.J. McCarthy, a follower of Augustus Pugin (famed for other Neo-Gothic churches in Ireland) – and the design is said to have been revised by Pugin himself. Inside are many fine stained glass window. Of particular quality are those of St. Patrick and St. Rose of Lima, of 1925, by the renowned Dublin Stained glass artist, Harry Clarke and The Raising of the daughter of Jairus by Patrick Pollen, inserted in 1958.

6 – From St. Michael's Church now walk up St. Michael's Square back towards the Man with the Horse Statue. Take a left into Dunlo Street, an important street in the history of the town, which contains, together with other buildings of about the same date, the late-Georgian Garda Station. The Station is towards the far end of the street, on the right hand side. Also on this street, over Dolan's Electrical Shop, you can see another fine example of Diocletian windows.

7 – Halfway up Dunlo Street, turn right up Duggan Street, which will take you to St. John's Church (Church of Ireland, 1843). It dominates the vast Fair Green which becomes a hive of activity during one week every year when up to 100,000 people throng to the October fair. Look out over the Fair Green and admire one of the grandest freestanding classical monuments in the region. Dedicated to Charles Le Poer Trench, it was designed in the Neo-Greek style by the English architect George Papworth (1781-1855). A mile past this monument on the Main Galway road, South West of the town, the Earl of Clancarty's former country house is situated, where imposing gates mark the entrance to Garbally Court. It has been a school since 1923.

Walk down Church Hill onto Society Street and turn left, arriving at the Courthouse on the right. Society Street, like Main Street, was the 19th century location for the professional classes. As well as The Courthouse, it contains the former Bridewell (or gaol) from the 1840s. Further along this street, Ballinasloe Railway Station is a must. Constructed in 1851, it is a Neo-Gothic limestone tour-de-force and a fine example of the quality of rural Irish railway architecture in the mid-19th century.

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