Emotional ceremony recalls Mayo’s Famine girls

The Australian Ambassador to Ireland, Richard Andrews, confessed he had a tear in his eye as he listened to Amy McGrath and Clara Mullarkey of St Mary’s Secondary School, Ballina, sing Orphan Girl when he visited Ballina last Friday to lay a wreath at the memorial statue to Mayo’s Forgotten Famine girls who were sent to Australia between 1848 and 50.

The young singers were accompanied by Regina Deacy on piano, violinist Cosimine Conwell and harpist Aoife Sherry. The ambassador, accompanied by his wife Saovanee, was also full of praise for the pupils at Behy NS after watching their emotional film, Orphan Girl, which has been entered for the FIS film competition for national schools. The film was introduced by Behy principal Pat Cunnane, and 5th Year pupils involved in the project were present and met the ambassador.

It is the hope of Mayo’s Forgotten Famine Girls Remembrance Group that other schools in Mayo will be encouraged to take part in competitions - details to be announced later - to create greater awareness amongst the young of the suffering of the Irish Famine so that they may draw inspiration from the stories sent to Australia.

The composer of Orphan Girl song, Brendan Graham, was present and was lavish in his praise of the singers. The ambassador also visited the Jackie Clarke Collection where he saw the Remembrance Quilt bearing the names of the 137 Mayo Famine Girls sent to Australia, and the Travel Box made by the men of Arbour Hill.

Mr Andrews was the guest of honour at a reception in the Ice House Hotel hosted by the hotel’s owner Pearse Farrell. Earlier, the ambassador visited Enniscrone House and Heritage Centre, and Belleek Castle, where he was taken on a guided tour. On Thursday he visited Westport and Rossmore.

New exhibition revisits rural electrification

by Paul O’Malley

Former president Mary Robinson returned to her native Mayo to launch a fascinating new exhibition at the Museum of Country Life in Turlough.

‘Kitchen Power — Women’s Experiences of Rural Electrification’ examines the effect of rural electrification on women in Ireland in the 1950s and 1960s. The exhibition was curated by Dr Sorcha O'Brien of Kingston University and Noel Campbell of the National Museum of Ireland.

Mrs Robinson said the exhibition resonated deeply with her. “I was delighted when I received an invitation to open this exhibition because, in my presidential inauguration address, I said that I wanted women who were outside history to be written back into history. This exhibition takes me to my own childhood growing up in Mayo, as the only daughter of a doctor from Ballina. I remember him talking passionately about the differences made to his practice as a doctor when rural electrification came,” she continued.

The exhibition comprises various artifacts from this era, including a portrait of the Sacred Heart on a laminate backboard, lit with a red electric bulb which replaced the oil lamp previously used to light up the common Catholic household fixture.

There is also a range of ESB advertising and objects from the museum’s and the ESB’s archives as well as objects from the Irish Agricultural Museum and from private collectors. A reconstruction of a 1960s ESB model kitchen, which was used to promote rural electrification to women in the 1950s, features prominently in the exhibition. It was constructed by Phillips Carver, a final year Furniture Design and Manufacture student from GMT-Limerick.

The exhibition also has recordings of voices of women who lived through the era, telling their stories in their own words. “We’re lucky that we have the generation who lived through that period still with us and still healthy,” said Noel Campbell, co-curator of the ‘Kitchen Power’ exhibition. “We’ve invited first-hand testimonies from the time and the women who lived through this can tell us first-hand the impact that it had on their households. This is important as it’s not just two curators telling these stories, it’s the women themselves telling their stories.”

Mrs Robinson talked about rural electrification in the context of the wider world. “I’m very conscious that a very large portion of our world never switched that switch for electricity. We have a long way to go and it won’t be the same, it won’t be like the grid that the ESB wheeled out. It will be a much more diverse use of lights and solar panels and all these solutions exist. The only thing we lack is the prioritising of getting these solutions to those who never switched the switch,” she concluded.

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Noel Campbell, Curator, the National Museum of Ireland – Country Life and Dr Sorcha O’Brien of Kingston University, who curated the new exhibition are pictured with former president Mary Robinson. Picture: Keith Heneghan
It's back to the future for HSE

Sometimes it seems that the Department of Health is in the grip of Groundhog Day. Almost two decades ago, the mandarins in a department that swelling vast proportion of our country's annual tax revenues decided that the age-old system of regional healthcare was to be abolished in favour of a more centralized structure.

The early 2000s was the age of centralisation in the private sector as advances in computer technology allowed staff to operate remotely in a way that would have seemed utterly inconceivable only a decade earlier. The whole concept of centralization was invented by the private sector to save money but the Irish healthcare system was always a long way behind. Within a year or two of its establishment, the new Health Service Executive (HSE) was costing a lot more than the old style.

The HSE was established in a time of plenty when the overarching political philosophy was to throw money at problems to make them go away. Minister Mary Harney, the only politician in 25 years to actually seek the health portfolio, made valiant efforts to wrestle control over the HSE but was unable to get the various competing interests within the health sector to look at the same page let alone sing from it.

The economic crash in 2008 sent the HSE into survival mode as it could no longer rely on the largesse of government to fund its grandiose policies but it wasn't long before it was back to its old ways. Between 2013 and 2016, the number of managers in the HSE increased by a staggering 50 per cent - from 744 to 1,295. The increase in payroll alone is about €30m and nobody is quite sure what all of these managers are required to do, especially as the HSE has not increased its frontline staff to any great degree in the past decade. Indeed, the Irish Examiner revealed last year that the HSE employed three times as many administrative/administrative/manual than staff nurses in the preceding three years.

On the face of it, the decision to revert to an area based system seems like a good one but given the wretched history of the Department of Health, one would have to be very naïve to hold out any great hopes for this model. The structure in the West appears to be a combination of the old Western and North-Western health boards so it really is a case of back to the future.

The problem is that this new round of restructuring will inevitably lead to the creation of a new generation of administrators and managers within our healthcare system. If centralisation, which in theory is meant to result in job cuts, led to the creation of more office staff, what will become of a system that has six new administrative areas? This will be open season for the bureaucrats within the HSE as they roll around in red tape to their heart's content.

While the white front line staff are struggling to cope with ever increasing workloads as the entire system creaks under a failing system that has seen one minister after another struggle to make any inroads on plotting a new way forward for healthcare in Ireland. At the start of this decade, Minister James Reilly campaigned on a policy to cut the number of board and commission levels and streamline the country's health system but by the end of his reign, it was difficult to name a single achievement from a minister who talked a good game but utterly failed to walk the walk.

The current Tánaiste Leo Varadkar spent a singularly unremarkable two years in the Department and seems to have been content to escape with a no-score draw, the logic being that a stint in the Department of Health can be decidedly unhealthy for one's political career. Simon Harris is now the man in the hot seat and, no doubt, his latest strategy is well-meaning but the record of the HSE does not give cause for confidence and there is every chance that in another decade we will be abandoning area based models and reverting once again to a centralised system - at more cost to the taxpayer, of course.

News
Ireland’s ‘quiet revolution’

Ireland’s ‘quiet revolution’

A new exhibition on rural electrification has opened at the National Museum of Country Life in Turlough. Paul O’Malley went along to learn about a revolutionary period in Irish history when women were emancipated from the drudgery of everyday chores.

The exhibition, entitled ‘Ireland’s ‘quiet revolution’, was opened by co-curator Dr Sarah O’Brien and the Museum’s curator of history, Mary Landers. It is part of the national and international commemoration of 1916, and is one of the highlights of the Museum’s ‘1916 Irish 行 Women’s’ year.

The exhibition features over 300 photographs and artefacts from the 1910s to the present day, including a photographic display of women working in the electricity industry, and a series of printed and digital artefacts from the early 20th century.

The exhibition is open to the public until the end of the year. Visitors can also see the Museum’s permanent exhibition, ‘The Story of Ireland’, which tells the story of the country from the earliest times to the present day.

The exhibition is supported by the Department of the Environment, Community and Local Government, and the National Cultural Institution. It is part of the National Museum of Country Life’s ‘1916 Irish 行 Women’s’ year, which aims to highlight the role of Irish women in the national struggle for independence, and to promote the work of women in the arts, culture, and society.

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finds its voice in new exhibition

Former President of Ireland Mary Robinson and her husband Nick chat to Catherine Heaney, chair of the board of the National Museum of Ireland, at the opening of the new exhibition in Turlough House.

Picture: Keith Heneghan

The co-curator of the exhibition, Dr Sorcha O'Brien, said that while rural electrification had a huge impact on women's daily lives, it didn't challenge the existing gender roles in society directly.

"This doesn't really challenge the gender roles as an awful lot but it sets the groundwork for freeing up women in rural Ireland from this drudgery of everyday life," said Dr O'Brien. "You're talking about women not having to spend an entire Monday washing the family clothes by hand and then all day Tuesday ironing them. These become shorter jobs that could be spread out over the week.

Dr O'Brien said the oral history interviews revealed that the arrival of electricity allowed women to get more involved with textile work, such as knitting, sewing and crocheting.

"On the one hand you have women getting more involved in organisations such as the ICA and community work but what a lot of women were doing was textile work. For some of them that was paid work, particularly things like Aran sweaters in the west of Ireland where people would make the product and get paid by the sweater.

"But a lot of the work was quite practical: for example, you had women who were making and repairing clothing for their families."

The idea behind the textile element of the exhibition, which was created by Sligo-based artist Anna Spearman in collaboration with ICA members in Mayo, was to highlight how these skills are still utilised today in a much more creative way.

"What they've been doing is a creative response to all these materials and all these ideas," explained Dr O'Brien. "They're producing artwork with those amazing craft skills they have, they are expressing themselves through textiles."

Dr O'Brien co-curated the exhibition with Noel Campbell of the National Museum of Ireland - Country Life. Mr Campbell has said this exhibition is a natural next step for what

From my own childhood, from what I recall, the washing machine was the best thing for my mother. It rotated and it squeezed with a mangle on the top of it. It was still hard work but it was better than what we had

the museum has to offer

"What the museum focuses on in our permanent galleries is pre-electrification and pre-industrialisation and with 'Kitchen Power' we're looking at the decades after that, which is the first time the countryside really sees widespread electrification," he said.

The 'Kitchen Power - Women's Experiences of Rural Electrification' exhibition at the National Museum of Ireland - Country Life in Turlough takes a unique and personal look at what was a revolutionary period in Irish history for women.

In the words of former president Mary Robinson who opened the exhibition, instead of rocking the cradle, Irish women rocked the system. Rural electrification was a vital first step down a long road that would lead to greater freedoms for the women of Ireland.

Across

1. The same wrench may be used to build an English city. (9)
6. Scrutinise Central Tuscany. (4)
9. Traditional French hostess. (6)
11. Make one lumber about in an Australian city. (9)
12 & 30. Textile facilities can alter a slow line. Mol. (7,7)
15. Perfect - exactly as imagined. (6)
17. Press for some surgery. (4)
18. Leave undone. (19) Cast, fling. (5)
21. Dance with a chap who works at the tennis tournament. (4,3)
22. Such sauce has poets in a frenzy. (5)
24. On which the coffin may be laid at a funeral. (4)
25. Hear about a flightless bird. (4)
26. At first, rule out noise (dreaming of a musical piece). (6)
29. Wandering, or the use of a mobile phone abroad. (7,3)
33. See 9 down.
34. Tool used by turners. (9)
35. Florida islands found in a piano. (4)
36. Dream up how to make salms fade differently. (10)

Down

1. Recording artist whose stage-name honours his ancestor, Herman Melville. (4)
2. Drugs can be found, possibly in the Arctic, soon. (9)
3. Stay here for some of the Aldershot elections. (6)
4. French river, scene of a terrible World War I battle. (5)
5. Slippery type point twice to Louis. (4)
7. Bead, arc. (6)
8. One will require the French to labour at such a craft. (19)
9 & 30. Coyote sins differ, somehow, for the Quakers! (7,7)
11. Molten rock from a volcano. (4)
14. One can rule out this atomic form. (7)
16. Craft with metal can get a police officer to one end of Warwick. (6)
20. Once more sets fire to a rule, then ties off. (6)
21. I'd turn up in horror to see this composer? (7)
22. Lady's fingers, as depicted by a passable artist. (4)
27. Clever and agile, with one foot in New York. (5)
29. An attack. (6)
30. See 12 across.
31. Ancient Precambrian sandstone. (6)
32. He took to the road with a beauteous crowd. (4)

Solutions to Crossword No 842

Across


Down