

# **CANTATA / Clare Heritage Office Heritage Workshops - 28<sup>th</sup>/29<sup>th</sup>/30<sup>th</sup> May 2007**

## **Clare Heritage Office**

The Clare Heritage Office strongly feels that local community involvement is necessary for the successful implementation of the Clare Heritage Plan, 2003-2007 and for developing and furthering future Heritage Plans. To effectively achieve this involvement, the Clare Heritage Office wishes to set up a structure that allows all heritage associations in the county and individuals with a personal interest in Heritage, to collaborate and work together. This structure in the form of a Local Community heritage network will be able to directly shape the future of heritage in the county. i.e Innovative and flagship heritage projects could be developed; resource material on heritage issues produced; valuable folklore collected and recorded; visitor information systems improved and so on. According to Tomas MacConanamra, Acting Heritage Officer *"this network aims to consolidate the success already achieved in the heritage sector and ensure a more integrated approach going forward"*

## **CANTATA**

CANTATA recognises that the Tourism industry is a changing one; the average tourist is now more independent, preferring to plan his or her own holiday using the Internet. With the Internet, the same information is available to everyone. CANTATA recognizes that a place that allows its visitors to interact with its rich built, cultural and natural heritage tends to attract the same tourists back annually. In saying this Heritage needs to be preserved – that is why the Heritage Office and us are collaborating together. CANTATA is supported by INTERREG IIIB, and involves four other European countries- France, Spain, Portugal, Wales. It stands for Celtic Authentic Niche Tourism Advancing The Atlantic Area. All of these regions are situated on the Atlantic coast, and have strong Celtic roots. They all experience a healthy tourism season in their coastal regions, but few tourists venture away from the coast to visit more inland areas. As a result tourism in this region has become unevenly dispersed and certain areas are being degraded due to unmanaged visitor numbers.

The workshops, that took place a few weeks ago, were organised by staff of the CANTATA project, and the Clare Heritage Office. We both see it as a real opportunity for local people to take an active part in the social, economic and environmental wellbeing of their locality. The following information is a summary of the issues that were raised at the three workshops.:

## **Name Of Network**

It was agreed that 'Lionra' (meaning Network as Gaelige), would be an appropriate name for the *The Clare Local Community Heritage Network* as it would be an easily identifiable one.

## **Timeframe of Network**

How long does it take for a Network to be established?- Well that depends on the level of commitment from those involved. Tomás Mac Conmara, *Acting Heritage Officer*, stressed that the next Heritage Plan 2008-2013, must represent the wishes of those who are actively working in heritage in the county. Therefore it is envisaged that by the end of December there will a clear number of people who want to become active members of this network. He also explained that what was envisaged was a communication infrastructure, which would allow all interested heritage groups or individuals to be on one network and to be able to communicate with each other. It would also allow a two-way communication channel between the Clare Heritage Office and the 'heritage community' of Clare. Again this is up to each individual who expresses an interest and acts on this interest.

## **Folklore Collection**

Folklore collection seems to be something that has come up at every workshop as an important area of activity for the network. It was also pointed at the Ennis workshop that Heritage should be fun, about social recreation, which is vital to any community. In Tuamgraney Lorna Moloney of East Clare Heritage, said that recording oral history is now cheaper than ever to do with new technologies, therefore there is no excuse why our oral history traditions cannot be recorded. A point was made at the workshop in Ennis, that folklore should be more interactive with the audience. Adam Clare of Vital Spark mentioned the possibility of creating Audio Books for tourists- with folklore recordings.

## **Increased Linkages**

There was interest in the balance between heritage and Tourism, especially between other parts of the county. Lorna Moloney again spoke about that work that East Clare Heritage are involved in and how she was looking forward to the possibilities that this Network could bring to heritage in the county.

She commented that Heritage needs to be taken out of the boxes, dusted off, and opened up to visitors, "*bringing people from far and away to share the heritage*".

There should be links created between Heritage Network, the Community Heritage Forum, and the consultative committee regarding guided walks.

## **Funding**

It was suggested that a funding support could be established as one section of the network. According to Tomas Mac Conmara, an application for funding that comes from a group of organised individuals, has a stronger case of being rewarded funding. It eliminates the possibility of other groups or individuals in one county applying for funding for the same project. CANTATA funding hopes to support some

activities of the network also, although this stream of funding has other responsibilities. But its true to say that its all about the buzzword 'Community' these days!

### **The Burren Eco-tourism project**

At the first workshop in Ennis, Carol Gleeson spoke about the Burren Eco-Tourism project, which is an excellent example of a tourism project that *actively wants* local people involved. She stressed the need for greater interaction between information and communities themselves. A network could help to make people aware of what is going on in there area, as it seems that there is a lot of information that is not reaching the target audience.

She spoke of the importance of creating a brand that people will recognise, mentioning **Greenbox** in the Northwest, as an example of a successful eco tourism project, with a strong brand and a clear, definable product. This idea originated from 100% local grassroots involvement. She mentioned that a Network could help to develop a brand for the Burren. This process of debate and discussion is the only way forward when building sustainable tourism. They are also applying for Geopark status which is a special brand given to help areas of geographical significance be preserved and promoted. Only two other areas in Ireland have similar status: the Marble Arch Caves/ Cuilcagh mountain park in Fermanagh and the Copper Coast in Waterford.

### **Successful Networking**

Padraig Cleary of MAYDAY consultants took a different approach to explaining the Networking process. One of the members of the group had an early birthday party, where everyone sung Happy Birthday to him. This was demonstrating that there is strength in numbers; the voice of twenty people together will be heard louder than just a single one. Networking is also about creating friendships, and taking risks.

One must have clear reasons to join the network. The Network must be organised in a professional manner and meetings at the beginning should occur at regular intervals.

### **Networking using the Internet**

At the first workshop in Ennis, there was a suggestion about the potential of electronic networking –over the Internet. This could be used to collate information from various people, is fast and delivers quickly. It is envisaged that a website will be set up to facilitate this.

There was a very small attendance at Kilrush, which was a pity as our speaker Adam Clare of *Vital Spark* gave a very insightful, practical account of the potential of using the Internet as a tool for developing links between people in the county. An Internet Forum could be set up to enable a member of the Network to have discussions with another neighbours who happens to be living seventy miles away! This forum will display messages from people within the Network and special forums can be set up- e.g. Those working on Folklore collection could communicate in one forum while those working on placenames could communicating in another. Wikipedia is the online dictionary and this could be used to create an online dictionary of topics related specifically to heritage in Co. Clare- The meaning of a

“roundstone’ came up as one potential item, as well as an explanation of some of old Irish legends or sayings.

He gave an example of an online project he was working on with Galway Arts Office called

“**Newtownwhatwhere?**”.

[Http://www.galwayartscentre.ie/tulcaphelan.htm](http://www.galwayartscentre.ie/tulcaphelan.htm) The readers of this site are invited to take a personalised non-geographic journey through the districts of Newtownsmith, Woodquay, and Waterside in Galway and focus upon the experiences and knowledge of its current inhabitants. The old, the new, the past, the present and the potential future, is captured by the camera and re-presented in individual interviews, which culminate in the short film that declares the “Republic of Woodquay” - a place that is both central and yet apart from the city of Galway. You should look it up on the web. It is excellent an excellent example of how the Information Technology can be used to preserve Heritage, not destroy it.

### **Marketing/ Promotion**

A very important point made was that the Marketing strategy for the heritage Network could and should be as powerful as *Disney*. A suggestion from the audience was that a broadsheet could be published just for heritage matters, as presently there is no alternative to the local media. A little column in the local paper isn't enough publicity for heritage events. This could also be used as advertisement for commercial interests in the area.

An email is set up for the time being if anyone has any queries. It is the following: [heritage@clarecoco.ie](mailto:heritage@clarecoco.ie) . Thank-you for your support, and remember this Network hasn't been formed yet. It takes a lot more meeting up, talking but more importantly ACTION!

Nevertheless please read the following comments as an indicator of what can be developed.

These are the results of feedback received from heritage Workshops.

People's description of a Heritage Network "Working together on a give and take basis" "Easy access to information on the Internet about ancient places of interest in the county" "Umbrella for engaging and linking individuals and communities" "A facility to allow linkage and interaction of the varied aspects of heritage interest with a view to strengthening the whole as well as the elements" "A group of people interested in the history of their land" "A vehicle to draw together groups or individuals who study, use, protect; enhance or enjoy the heritage of an area" "A network of people coming together to balance preservation of heritage against tourism and other economic benefits" "Information sharing"

"Linking of people with similar interests" "Multidimensional communication"

"A supportive partnership of interested groups" "Pooling info"

"Network /group of people interested in their environment, local history, culture and folklore (willing to share with likeminded people)"

"Bringing together of people and information in connection with Heritage" "A group of people prepared to work; share in ideas and help and promote heritage" "A supported partnership on interested groups" What should the Network work towards?

"Heritage Plan Input and review"

"Develop walking routes- walking festival"

"Pool resources"

"Educate youth about heritage"

"Expand Irish Language practice"

"Organise real grassroots events, by local people for local people" "Encourage integration of groups- tourism operators" "Give general publicity and information about all heritage activities in Clare and lobby group to extent remit of the heritage act" "Get involved in Fundraising and other workshops" "Help co-ordinate and develop a Folklore collection"

## **Tourism and Heritage**

84% of respondents found that it was relatively difficult for visitors to experience the vast and deep heritage attached to Co. Clare. They commented "Sharing information with visitors is a vital step towards education and awareness leading to conservation" but that "most people pass through without having a clue where they are".

Questionnaire suggestions as to the possible working structure of the network "To act as a network and a consultative forum on a whole spectrum of heritage related issues and coordinate the activities" "Create a Website or online forum as well as newsletter for older people" "A bimonthly presentation of different projects ongoing in the county followed by group discussions"

"Important to come together periodically to learn about what's going on around the county. Training from members on various aspects of heritage"

“An information pack for schools is important with local information” “Spread information on email and online forum” “Online community to breach geographical divide and share and expand the communities knowledge”

“I think the network and experts could benefit from an expert advisory section with the network forum, to allow access to best practice and to feedback – policy at a local and national level”

“Perhaps sub networks for different aspects-e.g. Geology, historical sites, arts and crafts, etc. Linking up occasionally for main heritage network”

“A simple A4 paper calendar that amalgamates lectures/events from the myriad of historical/environment societies- Long-term involvement into a regular meeting place – online and in specific locations”

“Online site for information on heritage including Names/ address of people involved in heritage- storytellers “

“Divide by District electoral areas”