

## **New Inn Mummer's Festival to Stage 31st Annual Event**

*15 December 2008.*

**The organising committee of the renowned New Inn Mummer's Festival confirmed this week that the 31st staging of the great event will take place in the New Inn Leisure Centre on Saturday night 3 January and Sunday afternoon 4 January 2009.**

This unique festival of traditional music, song, dance and storytelling draws patrons and participants from all over the country, and is eagerly awaited as part of the Christmas/New year celebrations and festivities.

**Festival Chairman, Michael Mullins** confirmed that the competition for senior groups will take place as usual on the Saturday night, while the wonderful junior competition will be on the Sunday afternoon. Last year, he said, we had eleven groups at the festival, and we expect to equal this for our 31st event. The festival secretary, **Michael Finnerty** is pleased with the initial early expressions of interest in participating, and he is urging all groups to confirm their entry as soon as possible.

*He can be contacted at :*

**New Inn,  
Ballinasloe,  
telephone no : 090 9675600.**

We really appreciate the wonderful effort that Groups put into rehearsing, at this busy time of the year he added.

Last years senior festival winners from **Rahan, Co. Offaly** will be defending their title, and they will be difficult to dethrone, but they can expect tough competition from many groups who will want to capture the **Peter Donohue Perpetual Trophy**.

In the Junior section last year there was intense competition for the major honours, and in a very keenly contested event, **Rahan** emerged to record a historic double for the Offaly visitors. The Festival organisers are really pleased with the increased interest in the Junior section this year, as this is the lifeblood of the event, and it augurs well for the future of the Festival.

Last year, the BBC recorded some material at the Festival, and there was a very positive reaction to this from many quarters.

Despite the recession, thanks to their generous sponsors, there will be plenty of prizes on offer. There will be cash prizes as well as perpetual trophies for winning groups, and many individual prizes to recognise great singers, musicians, dancers and storytellers.

The New Inn Mummer's festival is organised by the Community Council, and as well as encouraging and promoting a great tradition, it helps fund some of the costs of running the community leisure centre. Some of the proceeds are also given to charity, and following the 2008 festival, a donation was made to the **East Galway Sunflowers**, a wonderful group of people who bring **Chernobyl children** to Galway every Summer, and whose volunteers have travelled out to improve facilities for the children at Schools and in orphanages.

Lovers of traditional entertainment should make a note in their diary – the **31st Annual New Inn Mummer's Festival 3rd and 4th January 2009**, in the spacious and well heated Leisure Centre, where you will receive a warm welcome from the Festival Committee.

**Michael Mullins**  
**Festival Chairman**  
**Cleaghmore, Ballinasloe, Co Galway**  
Tel : **087 2607405**

*'The wran, the wran, the king of all birds,  
St. Stephen's Day was caught in the furze,  
Up with the kettle and down with the pan,  
Give us a penny to bury the wran.'*

### **Wren Boys**

Hunting the Wren traditionally takes place on St Stephen's Day (Boxing Day). It was unlucky to hunt it at any other time. The Wren is known as the King of Birds.

Long ago, the Birds held a contest to see who should be King by who could soar highest. Of course it was the Eagle, but as the Eagle tired, the Wren appeared from under its tail feathers and soared even higher.

Boys find and kill a Wren and put it (sometimes in a box or lantern) on a ribbon decorated pole which is paraded door to door where food, drink or money are begged sometimes in exchange for a feather.

The Wren represents the Old Year, the Robin represents the New. The Robin is alleged to have trapped the Wren in an Ivy Bush (or Holly Bush) and killed it. Thus the old year was ritualistically killed to make way for the new and is re-enacted by the Wren Boys.

Nowadays, the Wren is usually left alive and out in a cage, or an artificial one is used.

It is quite possibly one of the oldest surviving rituals and may be the link between many of the surviving fragmented customs of Britain and Ireland.

The Wren boys are strongly associated with Mumming, music and dance and often have blackened faces.

*source* : **Folklopedia**

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*Source* : <http://www.folklopedia.org/docuwiki/doku.php>

**Mummers' Plays** (also known as *mumming*) are seasonal folk plays performed by troupes of actors known as *mummers* or *guisers* (or by local names such as *rhymers*, *pace-egggers*, *soulers*, *tipteerers*, *galoshins*, *guysers*, and so on), originally from the British Isles (see *wrenboys*), but later in other parts of the world. They are sometimes performed in the street but more usually as house-to-house visits and in public houses.

### **Etymology and early precedents**

The word *mummer* is sometimes explained to derive from Middle English *mum* ("silent") or Greek *mommo* ("mask"), but is more likely to be associated with Early New High German *mummer* ("disguised person", attested in Johann Fischart) and *vermummen* ("to wrap up, to disguise, to mask ones faces")[13], which itself is derived from or came to be associated with *mummen* (first attested already in Middle High German by a prohibition in Mühlhausen, Thuringia, 1351)[14] and *mum(en)schanz*, (Hans Sachs, Nuremberg, 16th cent.), these latter words originally referring to a game or throw (*schanz*) of dice[15].

According to German and Austrian sources dating from the 16th century, during carnival persons wearing masks used to make house-to-house visits offering a *mum(en)schanz*, a game of dice. This custom was practiced not only by commoners, but also by the nobility: on Shrove Tuesday of 1557, Albert V, Duke of Bavaria went to visit the archbishop of Salzburg and played a game of dice with him[15]. A similar incident, involving an Englishman, is attested for the French court by the German count and chronicler Froben Christoph von Zimmern: during carnival 1540, while the French king Francis I was residing at Angers, an Englishman (*ain Engellender*) wearing a mask and accompanied by other masked persons paid a visit to the king and offered him a *momschanz* (a game of dice), bringing with him a sum of money which was so high that the king was ashamed not to have a similar sum at hand and had to wait two hours until the money could be lent from local merchants[16].

While the game *mum(en)schanz* was played not only by masked persons, and not only during carnival, the German word *mummenschanz* nevertheless took on the meaning "costume, masquerade" and, by the 18th century, had lost its association with gambling and dice.

The custom attested for early modern Germany and France seems to have parallels also in late medieval England. According to *History and the Morris Dance* (2005) by John Cutting (page 81), there was a curious event in 1377, where 130 men on horseback went "mumming" to the Prince of Wales (later Richard II). They threw some dice, which appear to have been loaded dice, and so lost several gold rings. The rings were effectively presents for the prince. In 1418 a law was passed forbidding "mumming, plays, interludes or any other disguisings with any feigned beards, painted visors, deformed or coloured visages in any wise, upon pain of imprisonment". In the first case the event was on February 2, nine days before Ash Wednesday, and may well have been a carnival practice. In the second case, the law was applied to "the Feast of Christmas" (Cutting page 83), not related to the ordinary period of carnival preceding the Christian fasting of Lent, yet maybe related to Christmas fasting, which went ordinarily from November 11 to January 6.

It should be pointed out that there is no clear evidence linking these late medieval and early modern customs with English mummers' plays in the late 18th century, nor evidence for proving that the English words *mummer* and *mumming* are more likely to be derived from continental roots than vice versa.

*source* : [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mummers\\_Play](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mummers_Play)