

Clare Heritage Projects Receive Funding

Tuesday, 11th March 2008

The Clare Heritage Office has welcomed the allocation of EUR34,500 to eight local projects.

The regeneration of the seawall at Kilkee, an educational newsletter on Lough Derg's ecosystems and a survey of the old cemetery at Drumcliffe are among the projects in receipt of funding from The Heritage Council.

Welcoming the funding allocation, Congella McGuire, Heritage Officer, Clare County Council, said, *'I am delighted that eight separate community groups have been afforded the opportunity to enjoy, record, conserve, restore and celebrate the distinctive qualities of their local heritage, their community and their environment.'*

Ms. McGuire added, *'The work carried out on these projects in 2008 will complement the wonderful range of projects that have already been carried out on a voluntary basis by many communities throughout Clare over the past number of years.'*

The funding recipients in Clare are

Kilkee Civic Trust (EUR8k) for regeneration work to Kilkee Seawall;

CELT (Centre for Environmental Living & Training) (EUR7k) for training courses on traditional and ecological skills;

Lough Derg Science Group (EUR4,500) for an educational newsletter on Lough Derg's - ecosystems;

Irish Seed Savers (EUR5k) for a mobile exhibition;

Clare Roots Society (EUR3k) for a survey of old the Drumcliffe cemetery in Ennis; **East**

Clare Heritage (EUR3k) to host education workshops;

Ballyea Pastoral Council (EUR2,500) for conservation work to St John's Well and Graveyard;

and the Quilty based **Leon Committee** (EUR1,500) for information boards and conference.

"Public understanding about our national heritage has grown dramatically over the past number of years", said Michael Starrett, Chief Executive of the Heritage Council.

He continued, *'Our grants often promote the lesser-known aspects of our heritage. Each year we see an increase in the range and quality of applications for funding for heritage projects and this correlates with research published by The Heritage Council last year that found 92% of a representative sample of the population think it is important to protect our heritage.'*

County Clare has benefited greatly under the Heritage Council's grants programme in recent years. Projects funded last year included the

'Burren Feral Goat Project', 'Irish Pollan habitat survey', 'Clare Whalelog 2007',

'Tuamgraney Community Woodland', 'Doonbeg Bay Wildlife Project',

and 'A History of the O'Gradys of Counties Clare and Limerick'.

Clare Heritage Office

<http://www.clarecoco.ie/Heritage/Heritage.html>

Introduction

The Heritage Council was established as a statutory body under the Heritage act 1995. Its role is to propose policies and priorities for the identification, protection, preservation and enhancement of the national heritage. National Heritage is defined as including monuments, archaeological objects, heritage objects such as art and industrial works, documents and genealogical records, architectural heritage, flora, fauna, wildlife habitats, landscapes, seascapes, wrecks, geology, heritage gardens, parks and inland waterways. The Council has a particular responsibility to promote interest, education, knowledge and pride in the national heritage

The Heritage Council is a statutorily independent body, established under the Heritage Act, 1995, and funded by the Department of Environment, Heritage and Local Government. The Council's statutory functions include proposing policies and priorities for the identification, protection, preservation and enhancement of the national heritage, and promoting education, knowledge and pride in, and facilitating appreciation and enjoyment of our heritage.

The National Heritage Council

It is interesting to look back and trace the emergence of the concept of a Heritage Council, which was eventually established in 1988 to look after both the natural and built aspects of the national heritage. The Arts Council had been established in 1951 and in 1988 the then Taoiseach, Charles J. Haughey, saw the need for a similar body with a heritage remit. In June of that year he set up a small committee to advise him on the functions and structures which would be appropriate, and presented a proposal for the establishment of a National Heritage Council to the Government for its approval. He wasted no time; in the same month he invited Lord Killanin to be chairman of the new body; fourteen ordinary members were appointed and it held its inaugural meeting on 5 September. While a number of changes in membership were to occur over the succeeding years, nine of the original members served from 1988 until the final meeting was held in the summer of 1995.

Initially, the Council was accommodated and staffed within the Department of an Taoiseach and its brief was:

- * To formulate policies and priorities to identify, protect, preserve, enhance, and increase awareness of Ireland's heritage in the specific areas of archaeology, architecture, flora, fauna, landscape, heritage gardens and certain inland waterways
- * To promote among the general public an interest and pride in the heritage and to facilitate the appreciation and enjoyment of it
- * To work closely with and to make recommendations to government departments, planning authorities, public bodies, and state companies in relation to matters coming within the Council's general area of responsibility and to ensure the coordination of all activities in the heritage field
- * To decide on the distribution of monies allocated for heritage work subject to the approval of an Taoiseach (and latterly the Minister for Arts, Culture and the Gaeltacht) and to decide on the priorities for such expenditure
- * To advise the Government on the legislation to establish a statutory Heritage Council.

The Council was funded from the National Lottery's allocation to heritage and by 1993 the annual amount had risen to £1.55 million, of which £500,000 was earmarked for the Archaeological Discovery Programme which had also been established by Haughey. The Council was extremely cost effective; the administrative expenses of the small staff of a

secretary and five people were relatively small, there were no professional officers, and the members' time and expertise were offered on a voluntary basis.

The Council met monthly and established six committees which reported to the Council; these were Archaeology, Architecture, Natural Environment (including parks, gardens and certain inland waterways), Museums, and Education & Promotion. Subsequently a seventh committee was set up to monitor the finances of the Council. Membership of the committees was restricted to Council members. While people with relevant expertise became core members of committees, all of the members received minutes of each committee and were free to attend any meeting they wished. From time to time steering committees were appointed to oversee specific projects. The take up of grant money was slow at first but this soon changed as the availability of funding became more widely known. This was particularly evident in the applications for heritage buildings, which absorbed the greater portion of the funds. Grants were also given for vernacular buildings; thatched houses were recorded and safeguarded, and local cultivation of traditional thatch materials was promoted. A number of milestones were achieved. For example, in 1989 the Council encouraged the handing over of the Botanic Gardens to the Office of Public Works and supported the initial restoration of the curvilinear glasshouses. It was also involved in supporting the acquisition of Castletown House by the State, and in the extension of the National Museum to Collins Barracks. Major excavations in Waterford city were supported, as was the new survey of Clare Island following on from Praeger's earlier survey in 1910-11.

Between 1992 and 1995, 171 projects were assisted. These included some that still appear in the current Heritage Council's list of funding, such as the Irish Whale & Dolphin Group, the Irish Wetland Bird Survey, and Russborough House. Assistance was given to a wide variety of projects including:

- * The industrial archaeological interpretation project at Foxford Woollen Mills
- * The conservation of the State's geological collection by the Geological Survey of Ireland
- * A stone axe project in UCD
- * The establishment of a Field Study Laboratory at Millstreet County Park by the Irish Peatland Conservation Council
- * The restoration of the Garrison Chapel at Beggar's Bush Barracks for the establishment of the National Print Museum
- * The Fethard Town Walls project

Regional museums were supported and audited; funding was provided for computerisation and multimedia technology was encouraged. On the natural environment front, amongst other things, work was done on environmental designations, forestry policy, and the future use of cutaway bogs. Although the Council was not permitted to support religious denominations, funding was allowed to assist in the preservation of the fabric of church buildings. This considerable State investment was protected by a system that requiring the churches to enter into covenants which stipulated that the Council must be consulted in any future works, including interior re-ordering which might threaten the heritage aspects of the buildings, or forfeit the grants.

In 1993 the Council was transferred to the new Department of Arts, Culture & the Gaeltacht, established by the Inter Party Government with Michael D. Higgins as Minister. The Council welcomed the establishment of the new department as a positive step to integrate heritage policy and management. Prior to the establishment of the National Heritage Council, a draft Heritage Act (1982) envisaged an executive role for the proposed Heritage Council together with functions previously held under the National Monuments and other heritage related

Acts. In 1989 a new draft was produced proposing a more advisory role. The Council continued to comment on this draft and was in a position to make recommendations in the light of experience gained since 1988. This experience played a significant role in the drafting of the Heritage Act which, in turn, was to offer to the new Council good structures and a wide ranging brief. The matter had dragged on for a number of years, but the new Minister was anxious to see a statutory Council established and the Heritage Act (1995) was passed.

Michael D. Higgins appointed Freda Rountree as chairperson, and Tomas O Caoimh and Ruth Delany as members of the National Heritage Council. The first year was spent in wide ranging discussion and in identifying how best to fulfil the brief. Staff had been seconded from the Department and, in August 1996, the Council set about recruiting its own staff, putting in place an efficient and effective professional organisation. In 1997 the Heritage Council produced its Plan 1997 - 2000 which recognised the importance of developing partnerships, particularly with local authorities. The importance of developing a community-based approach was also recognised and the Community Grants scheme, which still forms the cornerstone of the Council's grant schemes, was established in 1997. The new Council had also inherited some problems. Because it had not been permitted to roll over monies remaining at the end of its financial year, the National Heritage Council had found it necessary to over-commit in awarding grants in the built heritage sector, where the timing of completion of works was uncertain, and where the number of applications increased annually. These promises of grant aid now had to be honoured and, early in 1997, the Council was forced not to accept any new grant applications until a considerable backlog of accumulated architectural grants had been cleared. However there was, and continues to be, a wide acknowledgement of the debt owed to the National Heritage Council for creating a vision of the way forward for heritage conservation.

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