

Athlone Literary Festival

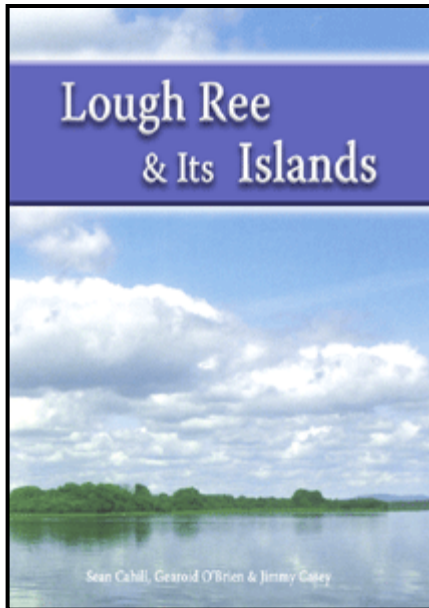


REPORT ON 2006 EVENT

Our seventh event was a source of satisfaction to the committee and to participants alike. We dealt with a wide range of topics and – as always - managed to leave plenty of time for exchanges of ideas during question and answer sessions, coffee breaks, and lunch breaks. We also had opportunities to mix and mingle on two consecutive nights.

Our Festival was officially opened by Desmond Egan whose work is widely known in Europe and in America and indeed has been translated into many European languages. In calling on him to address an invited audience and officially open the Festival, Chairman George Eaton referred specifically to the great work which he and his wife Viv have undertaken over the years in organising no less than nineteen Gerard Manley Hopkins Summer Schools in Monasterevin.

Desmond spoke at length about life and poetry, about Athlone and Ireland. He read one previously unpublished poem and another previously unpublished poem which he had written specially for the occasion.



Eanna Rowe, Marketing Manager of Waterways Ireland, who sponsored our event, also spoke. Waterways Ireland is one of the all-Ireland bodies established to promote the island of Ireland's inland waterways under the terms of the Good Friday Agreement.

A unique feature of the opening of this year's Festival was the photographic exhibition – By Shannon Shores – which was mounted in the Radisson Hotel for the enjoyment of those who attended on Friday night and transferred on Saturday morning to the Prince of Wales Hotel where those participating in the serious Saturday seminars could enjoy it also.

Athlone Town Council took the decision early in 2006 to name a street for T.P. O'Connor the Athlone born journalist, writer, newspaperman and politician who represented the Liverpool constituency in the House of Commons in London for many years. The Mayor of Athlone Councillor John Butler was asked to convey to his colleagues on the Council the appreciation of Athlone Literary Festival for this decision pointing out that some years ago the Council named a street John Broderick Street at the suggestion of the Committee and so it was fitting that we responded to the Council by having a focus on the life and work of T.P. O'Connor. This took the form of the opening event on Saturday morning which was chaired by Professor Brian Farrell

famous throughout Ireland for his many current affairs programmes and for his role as anchor-man in the marathon coverage of many general election results. The main speaker on T.P. O'Connor was Ruth Illingworth, a lecturer in the National University of Ireland at Maynooth and a member of Mullingar Town Council. A vote of thanks to the speakers was proposed by the Leader of the Senate, Mrs Mary O'Rourke who attended this element of our program.

Taking the other elements in chronological order – Iain Duggan, published poet and Franciscan Friar gave a poetry workshop and reading which was much appreciated and shortly after he commenced, John Donohoe, the proprietor of the Na Linte Bookshop gave an illustrated talk on George Russell AE, the great Irish writer, painter and mystic. John was breaking new ground as it seems that, to the best of anybody's recollection, no talk on AE had been given in Athlone before, nor had AE any particular connection with Athlone but his influence on Irish life was and is all pervasive.

There was so much happening that many people found it hard to find the time to visit the photographic exhibition and consume a quick lunch before settling down to one of the next two simultaneous items. Caroline Barry who is based in Tyrrellspass gave a Creative Writing Workshop which is one of her specialities. She regularly gives these workshops in the Midlands and from time to time workshops also for people who want to write for children or even workshops for children.

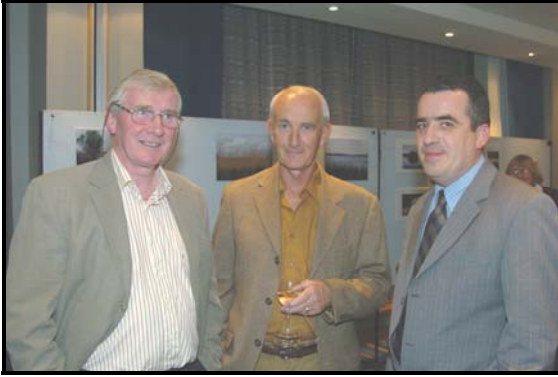
Catherine Cotter is a former member of the Board of Childrens Books Ireland and of the Irish Writers Centre. She gave a talk on childrens book illustrations citing examples from the work of Quentin Blake, Korky Paul, Helen Cooper, Dr. Seuss and P.J. Lynch. The Caroline Barry and Catherine Cotter events again were, like John Donohoe's talk, not particularly linked to Athlone or to the Irish Midlands but were of more universal appeal.

Before these two elements were complete, Sean Cahill, Gearoid O'Brien and Jimmy Casey combined to give a much appreciated talk on Lough Ree and its Islands. Here at last we had something that was definitely local as Athlone is situated – as everybody knows – at the Southern end of Lough Ree. The three speakers are co-authors of a book of the same name – Lough Ree and its Islands – which was at that time, Saturday September 23rd, just about to be published.

So ended six excellent items and the Committee members while extremely grateful to the speakers, to those who introduced them, to those who asked questions and to those who proposed votes of thanks, were nevertheless forced to accept the valid criticism that perhaps they had organised too much in so far as it was not possible for anybody to attend all six and perhaps there may be wisdom in having a smaller number of events timed so that our more enthusiastic supporters can manage to attend all of them.

On Saturday evening we had a most enjoyable supper with lots of socialising and reminiscing in the Prince of Wales Hotel where we were entertained to a rehearsed reading of an excerpt from *You Never Can Tell* by George Bernard Shaw, the 150th Anniversary of whose birth is being celebrated this year. Our former Chairman Dave O'Connell presided and introduced the three performers Mel O'Flynn, Dermot Ward and Aoife Gibbons.

Athlone Literary Festival 2006 Photo Gallery



Damien Delaney, Maurice Collins and Eanna Rowe



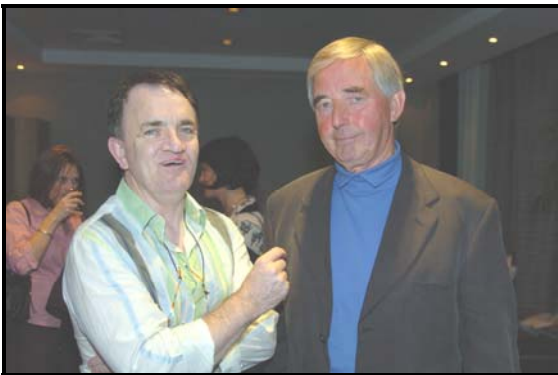
Sr. Hannah, Maura O'Faolain and Deirdre Collins



Senator O'Rourke, James Hayes and Pat Eaton



Brian Farrell with Mel O'Flynn



John Donohoe with Desmond Rushe



Mary Ganly and Catherine Kelly with Mike Ganly



Catherine Cotter with George Eaton



Brian Farrell with Ruth Illingworth



Deirdre Collins with Iain Duggan



Caroline Barry in workshop session



Jimmy Casey, Sean Cahill & Gearoid O' Brien



Carmel Duffy, Cllr. John Butler, Mayor of Athlone & George Eaton



Seamus McCormack of the Goldsmith Summer School, Aidan Heavey & Dympna McCormack



Dave O' Connell and Teresa Mannion