

Comhnasc

The Fair Deal Scheme
Protecting yourself online
Maintaining bone health
Audiobooks



Support for UNICEF's Covid-19 appeal

Dear Colleagues,

When I talk to members there is great praise and pride in the way the vaccine rollout has been managed. At this point, all our members will have had the opportunity of availing of a vaccine. This brings great comfort to us individually and collectively.

The NEC has decided that we should show our solidarity with those less fortunate by supporting UNICEF's *Get a Vaccine, Give a Vaccine* appeal. This is an ambitious project to deliver two billion Covid-19 vaccines to the world's most vulnerable and high-risk families. The welfare of children is at the heart of this programme, as UNICEF believe that *'Nobody is safe until everyone is safe and no child is safe until everyone they rely on is safe.'* We are confident that we will have the full support of members in donating €10,000 to this humanitarian request.

Feature articles

This issue of *Comhnasc* has several feature articles that I hope you will enjoy. They include a timely outline, by IT expert Adrian Weckler, of what to look out for in online and phone scamming; Tony Clayton-Lea on the pleasures of audiobooks; Dominic Coyle, on the Fair Deal Scheme; and nutritionist Gaye Godkin on supporting bone and skeletal health.

We also have a selection of members' articles, which are, of course, central to *Comhnasc*. The range includes contributions from Wexford-based Anne Cousins, who has recently published *REDRESS*, her first volume of poetry, and

a story of a young migrant's arrival in Allenstown Co. Meath in 1940 by Máire McCabe.

Tá sé mar aidhm againn cur leis an méid ábhar a fhoilsíonn muid i nGaeilge i gComhnasc. Mar sin cuireann sé áthas orainn dhá alt i nGaeilge a fhoilsiú san eagrán seo – ceann le Nóirín Bhreathnach agus ceann le Tomás Ó Concubhair. Chomh maith leis sin tá dhá phíosa filíochta againn ó Mhícheál Ó hAllmhuráin.

RTAI Activities

Social events, meetings and outings are at the heart of RTAI activities. The past 18 months, therefore, have been very challenging with the cancellation of all in-person meetings. However, the pace and extent of the vaccination programme gives us firm confidence that branches will be able to put in place a list of activities for the Autumn, even if some curtailment to the normal programme is required.

Accordingly, the NEC will meet at the end of August to prepare a plan for resuming at least some of our social activities

Our next *Comhnasc* will be issued in December. In the meantime, enjoy the remaining weeks of summer, and please continue to stay safe.

Best wishes,



Billy Sheehan

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Deal Or No Deal?

*The Nursing Home Support Scheme (Fair Deal) helps subsidise the cost of care for people in nursing homes. **Dominic Coyle** outlines the pros and cons.*

For most people, nursing home care is not the first choice. We'd prefer to grow older surrounded by family – or, if they have moved on, at least amid the familiar surroundings of the family home. That's not always possible. Infirmity of body and mind can make a nursing home an increasingly sensible option. But the vast majority of nursing homes are privately run (that is, not by the HSE) and they're not cheap. The average cost of a bed in a nursing home these days is about €1,000 a week, and about 20% more than that if you live in Dublin. Even with a good pension after a lifetime in public service, that is a large sum to swallow. For some couples where both need care, that's a bill of more than €100,000 a year.

Accurate up to date figures are not readily available, but the HSE says that about 5% of older people will require long-term residential nursing home care. That figure rises with age: above 85 and the figure is closer to one in five. Industry sources suggest the average length of long-stay

care is about three years. That's a significant financial commitment, one that is beyond many families. Fair Deal, or the Nursing Home Support Scheme to give it its formal name, was established in 2009. Run by the HSE, it involves payment by both the patient and the State.

How does it work?

Firstly, there's a 16-page application form, although much of that is taken up by instructions on how to fill it in. As part of that form, you agree to a care needs assessment. Carried out by a public nurse or a doctor, this looks at things such as how you are managing daily tasks like getting bathed and dressed, moving around and eating or shopping. It might also involve a physical examination. It also looks at your care network: are you using a home care assistant, have you got adequate support from family and neighbours and, finally and most importantly, what you would like to do yourself?

Only after this does money enter the equation. You will have been asked for details of all your income and your savings or investments in the original application form, together with supporting documents. While all this is going on, you need to choose which nursing home you want to go to. This is your choice, not something that is allocated to you by the HSE or the Fair Deal process (although many homes will have a waiting list).

What will it cost?

In the financial assessment, the HSE works out how much you will be expected to contribute to the cost of your care. In simple terms, this will be 80% of your income and 7.5% of the value of your assets or savings if you are a single person or a widow(er). If your partner is alive, this figure is cut in half – 40% of family income and 3.75% of family savings. The first €36,000 of personal savings or investments is exempt under the Fair Deal scheme, rising to €72,000 if you are one half of a couple. And who counts as a partner? Clearly a spouse, but anyone, man or woman, whom you have lived with as partners for more than three years qualifies.

People are always cautious about the idea of their savings being depleted, especially when they might have earmarked some of these for family and friends in their will. There is always the temptation to transfer such assets before any financial assessment if you think you might be going into nursing home care. My advice is don't bother. The HSE can claw back anything that you have transferred in the five years before making your Fair Deal application. And if the assets are no longer available to you, you will end up paying a bigger portion of your annual savings.

The Family Home

The only big issue for most people is the family home. Your home is an asset; for most people, it is their most valuable asset, and it does have special status in the assessment. That doesn't mean it escapes easily but special arrangements come into play. The 7.5% charge is still levied on the value of the home but only for the first three years of your care. If you are in care for more than three years, no further contribution is assessed against the family home. And, as with your other assets and savings, if you have a partner or spouse, just 3.75% is levied against the value of your home in each of those three years. But even over three years, that comes to 22.5% of the value of your home (11.25% for one member of a couple). How are you supposed to find the funds for that? You aren't.

What happens instead is that you avail of what is called Nursing Home Loan (Ancillary State Support). This is effectively a loan from the HSE to cover the cost that is levied against the family home. It becomes a charge against the

property, and the HSE will notify the Property Registration Authority of this so that the property cannot be sold without it securing repayment of the loan. The loan does not fall due until you die. If your partner still lives in the property, they can apply for collection of the loan to be deferred until they die. As long as you do not sell the house, your family home will be untouched at least until you die and the maximum the HSE will be owed is 22.5% of its value. However, if you do sell the house, or your spouse/partner/family do, things change. At that stage, the amount received for the house becomes part of your general savings and assets, and the 3.75% or 7.5% charge, as relevant, is levied against it every year – even beyond the three-year family home limit. This is one of the oddities of the scheme, and it means there are thousands of homes lying vacant across the State simply because their sale would trigger an additional annual charge on a nursing home patient.

Totting the bill

Having assessed your contribution by calculating 80% of your income and 7.5% of your savings and assets, including the value of the family home (or half of all that where there is a partner), the HSE comes up with a figure for your financial contribution to your care. For that vast majority of people, this will be substantially less than the actual cost of the care and makes Fair Deal a good deal for them. Where it is not, the HSE has to tell you.

Leaving the money aside, the important thing for most people who are considering entering a nursing home is what exactly they can expect in terms of care. And the answer, in terms of Fair Deal, is pretty tightly defined. Fair Deal entitles a person to accommodation, including bedding. Their nursing care is also covered as is their food and laundry. Thereafter it is limited. You are entitled to “standard aids and appliances to assist with daily living” but not necessarily the best available.

More importantly, what is not included? In general, you will not be covered for primary care services such as doctor, physio or therapist visits. The assumption is that you will have a medical card (assessed on means) or a GP card (free to everyone over the age of 70) to cover GP visits. The same applies to prescription charges under the medical card or the drug payments scheme where the bill can run to €114 a month. Also excluded is specialised equipment that might make your life a lot easier.

Clearance isn't automatic

On a more prosaic but important level, the cost of your toiletries will not be covered by the HSE and nor will engagement in any social programmes run by the home or any transport costs. Items like dry cleaning, hairdressing and even the daily newspaper will also be expected to be



‘The important thing for most people who are considering entering a nursing home is what exactly they can expect in terms of care.’

covered from your financial resources. This is why you retain the 20% of income (or 20% of the State pension amount, whichever is the lower) in the financial assessment. But if you are on a state pension without other income, it might not get you too far in terms of remaining

socially engaged in the nursing home.

Getting through the process is supposed to take four weeks but it can take a lot longer, up to nine weeks at certain points over the past number of years. If you make a mistake with documentation, it can delay the process. That’s important because Fair Deal does not backdate financial support. Until you get clearance from the HSE, you or your family will be liable for nursing home costs should you need a bed in one. And clearance isn’t automatic. Apart from the care need and financial assessments, Fair Deal has to work within a fixed budget. This year, that’s €1.05 billion, which is less than was budgeted for at the outset last year, even though demand is continually rising. According to a review of the scheme

by the Comptroller & Auditor General, published in 2020, around 10,000 apply annually for the scheme.

The bottom line? Fair Deal is a very reassuring financial safety net even if it’s far from perfect for those in need of nursing home care.

Dominic Coyle is Deputy Business Editor at The Irish Times.



Binneas na Beatha

(Do Shíle)

Mícheál Ó hAllmhuráin

Cáilíodh Mícheál i gColáiste Phádraig i 1968. Tar éis staidéar breise in Ollscoil Átha Cliath chaith sé roinnt blianta ag múineadh leis na hÍosánaigh i gColáiste Mungret i Luimneach. Ina áit dhúchais, i mBaile Uí Thaidhg Contae Chiarraí, a chaith sé na blianta deiridh dá thréimshe múinteoireachta.

Mar lampa rug tú leat lóchrann an léinn

Go croí na hAifrice

Chun go gcífeadh glúin na hóige an léas

A niamhghlanann aigne

Ar bhonn torthúil na gcóras gan bhréag ...

Cuma cad a chas id choinne as círéib

I gcom na caismirte

Choinnigh do ghúí ag glanadh fód le faobhar

Le eang eascairte

Na fírinne a fhorbairt do dhilchine fé néal...

I gcaitheamh do ré i bhfochair na bhfíreán

B’í fis na fairsinge

A chraobhscaoil tú chun go sealbhódh gach n-aon

Toisí na haislinge

A ghabhann le mórchonair na maitheasa sa saol...

Anois tánn tú fillte abhaile ón imgein

Ach i gcroí na hAifrice

Fanann binneas na beatha ag cothú go caomh

Síolta na sainaighe

A riarann torthaí le féile ar gach taobh

Supporting bone and skeletal health

By **Gaye Godkin**



We are never too old to be younger. Such a pleasant thought to entertain. In fact this is a reality that many don't grasp and hold onto. However, the body does keep the score! Quantifying human ageing is similar to that of a tree, by counting the rings on a tree we have a good idea of its age. Humans show their biological age in how their structure has weathered the years on this earth. Being upwardly mobile, maintaining the ability to move is a pleasure denied to many whose skeletal health has deteriorated.

Osteoporosis is not an inevitable part of ageing. It is preventable, it is so vital that all of us of all ages, start taking care of our bones now before it is too late. Even if you have a diagnosis of Osteopenia, which is weakening of the bones, this is totally reversible.

Maintaining healthy bone is a balancing act. Our bodies continually remove older bone and replace it with new. This is called bone re-modelling. As adults, if we lose bone

at too fast a rate, replace it at too slow a rate, or both, the result is osteoporosis—weak, porous bones that fracture easily. One in two women in Ireland over the age of 60 has a diagnosis of Osteoporosis, while one in five men has Osteoporosis. This is an insidious disease that affects both men and women of all ages. Many people develop it far younger and are totally unaware of its presence. It is typically referred to as 'The silent illness' as it is not apparently symptomatic. Diagnosis occurs following a DEXA bone scan or attendance at a hospital with a bone fracture. Back pain is often a warning that the lower vertebrae are thinning and in trouble. While the disorder is more common in older than younger people, I am seeing young people from the age of 20 with weak bones who need treatment. Fractured bones from this condition can be life-altering, and even life-threatening.

The Aetiology of Osteoporosis is multi-factorial. There

are over 150 reasons why bone loss occurs. Bone cells originate in the immune system and differentiate into bone building and bone cleaving cells. Building good bone during childhood and adolescent years is imperative. Bone mass peaks between ages 18 and 25. This peak mass is determined largely by genetics, intra-uterine maternal health, nutrition, physical activity, health status during growth, eating disorders, thyroid imbalances, kidney, liver disease, celiac disease and gut disorders. Hormonal and endocrine factors play a role as well. As we age, hormonal changes (particularly menopause); health problems and long-term use of certain medications (including steroids, anti-acids, heartburn and reflux drugs, as well as chemotherapy) all play a role in creating the imbalance that leads to weaker bones. Smoking is associated with lower bone density, as is alcohol abuse. Nutritionally, low calcium intake, low protein, and insufficient vitamin D are all associated with higher risk for bone loss, and emerging research suggests other roles for diet as well.

Calcium is well known as the 'bone health mineral' Consuming adequate daily calcium and vitamin D (just as long as you don't overdo it) through diet and sunshine is a good starting point. The bones are the main storage site for calcium, an element which is necessary for many important bodily functions. If we do not get the calcium we need from our diet, the body will take calcium from the bones and release it into the blood as it is required in many other parts of the body. The parathyroid gland regulates the amount of calcium moving from bone to blood and blood to bone.

About 75 to 80 percent of the calcium consumed in Irish diet is from dairy products such as milk, yogurt, and cheese. Calcium is found naturally in plant foods such as dark leafy greens and almonds, one of the best sources of calcium is tinned salmon if the bones are consumed. Calcium is not the only mineral required to strengthen bones, far too much emphasis is placed on its consumption and supplementation. In fact bones require a full orchestra of many minerals, proteins and nutrients to maintain them. Never supplement with calcium on its own. I have seen many people present with calcification of the arteries from taking calcium supplements. Taking calcium is not the answer to treating Osteoporosis; it is far more complex than that. Vitamin D is vital for the transportation of minerals across the gut wall. Vitamin D is known as the sunshine vitamin as natural sunshine is the best source. Vitamin D production is dependent on cholesterol because we need cholesterol in our skins cells to make vitamin D from sunlight. Vitamin D is later transformed again in the liver and kidneys, but cholesterol is needed for the first step. Vitamin D is stored in the body's fat cells for approximately 25 days. Recent research has shown that people who are obese may be unable to use

their stored vitamin D as their fat cells are dysregulated meaning they don't work properly. Vitamin K2 is a fat soluble vitamin which is crucial to bone health; its release triggers the production of Osteocalcin. Osteocalcin is the second most abundant protein in human bone comprising of 49 amino acids (building blocks of the body from digested protein). Dietary sources of Vitamin K2 are animal foods, organ meats such as liver is the best dietary source. Aged cheese is another good source of K2. Cheese is an all over great food for bone health as it also contains calcium, magnesium, and good quality protein. Do not be tempted to buy low-fat cheese, it is adulterated. Cheese contains live microbes which reinoculate the gut with bone promoting lacto and bifido bacterium. K2 is also synthesised in the gut by bacteria whose job it is to ferment plant food and produce K2.

As you can see, bone health is quite a complex issue. Lifestyle factors such as adequate sleep are vital for bone cell differentiation. Healthy bone cells maintain a balanced equilibrium between bone building cells and bone cleaving cells. Insufficient sleep impairs this function. Drinking plenty of fluids that are not caffeinated also supports bone cells. Aim to consume up to 2 litres of water or herbal teas per day.

Exercise is a major player in skeletal health. The secret is to move as much as you can as often as you can. If you have a diagnoses of Osteopenia or Osteoporosis sitting down for more than 30 minutes at a time is not good. Regular Pilates and walking really helps to maintain bone. The best exercise of all is weight bearing. Lifting light weights three times per week coupled with a good diet and good quality sleep can reverse Osteopenia.

Prolonged exposure to toxic stress has a deleterious effect on bone. High levels of circulating cortisol which are produced by the adrenal glands when stressed affect gut health and nutrient absorption across the gut wall. Cortisol places the body into a state of high alert and all non essential bodily processes shut down. Bone remodelling is switched off as long as circulating cortisol levels remain high. Learning to deal with stress in a healthy way will promote bone health. Taking a walk or time out during a stressful event helps the body to recalibrate.

There is much we can do to maintain our bones. The earlier we start the better, like most illnesses the onset of Osteoporosis is dependent on 80% of our diet and lifestyle choices. Take care of your body, it is the only place you have to live in.

Consultant nutritionist Gaye Godkin offers a one to one personalised nutrition service dealing with a broad range of lifestyle conditions. Her consultations are now delivered via platforms such as Zoom and Skype. Gaye can be contacted at www.gayegodkin.ie or 086 6072110

Security Alert

Technology expert **Adrian Weckler** outlines five ways to take direct action against scam calls, texts and emails.

There can be few people reading this who have not received a bogus call from an 083 or 087 number, listening to a voice recording claiming to be from the Department of Social Protection, the Revenue, or the Garda Síochána. Few in number, also, are those who haven't received a scam text purporting to be from delivery companies, trying to trick you into tapping links for alleged fines or so-called 'account verification'. As for the old-fashioned 'phishing' emails pretending to be from banks looking for your login details? They haven't gone away, either. What can you do to protect yourself? Read on.

Get an app to block scam calls

Some apps block recognised scam or spam numbers. Truecaller (free with in-app purchases for both the iPhone or Android) does this. It uses a database of known scam numbers to block or mute calls and texts as they arrive. It's important to add that this won't block all such numbers, as the scammers can sometimes spoof or imitate legitimate mobile numbers, but it's certainly worth having.

Your own phone settings can help

In the iPhone's settings, go to 'phone' and then 'silence unknown callers'. Turning this on sends calls that aren't in your contacts (or recognised from outgoing calls you've previously made, or from Siri suggestions) straight through to your voicemail. That's not the same as blocking them, but it does mean you're not flustered or panicked on the spot when you receive one, potentially making an unwise choice. On Android phones, go to 'settings' and then 'caller ID & spam'. It performs effectively the same function.

Don't click online links in texts – ever!

This is the hardest one to abide by because plenty of legitimate organisations still use live links in their texts or emails. Anyone receiving a text message from, for example, the HSE about their Covid vaccine appointment will

see live web links to HSE resources in the text message. This noted, it's still best practice not to tap or click on them – instead, type out the website in your browser. Scammers are especially sneaky on phone systems because they can do things like get inside existing text threads you may already have with, for example, your bank. (This is called 'smishing' and has been a problem in Ireland for a while.)

How to protect your phone from the new wave of 'calendar spam'

Have you seen an issue where your calendar app appears to have lots of spam diary notifications? That'll be the new wave of calendar spam currently sweeping through peoples' calendar apps. This particularly affects those with iPhones or iPads. Those who see this in their calendars usually get it by mistakenly accepting a calendar invitation, sometimes sneakily disguised by a spammer. There is a relatively simple way to fix it: go into your calendar app, select one of the spam calendar invitations and choose 'unsubscribe'. This should knock all of them off your calendar app.

Don't respond or interact with suspicious-looking emails

Even though it's not a universally observed rule, most legitimate services will never email you with just one or two lines and a link. Even if they do (although they're not supposed to), don't click on the link but rather contact them back using another means. Look up their website, for example. If you're still unsure, copy one of the phrases in the email (or text) and google it. If it's a scam, there's a high chance your Google result will confirm that it is. And remember – bad spelling and/or grammar remains a tell-tale sign of a scam.

Adrian Weckler is the Technology Editor of the Irish and Sunday Independent newspapers.

Hear! Hear!

*Audiobooks take your understanding of books and writing to a different level – and when the writing is narrated by a perfect voice the experience is all the more satisfying. **Tony Clayton-Lea** lends an ear to the value of a good audiobook and outlines some tips and tricks for choosing the best.*



If you are an avid physical book or ebook reader, then you might think audiobooks are unnecessary. We know how you feel – there is nothing to beat the sense of comfort of holding a book, reading the words, and allowing the storylines and characters to drag you in. But what if you're holding one of those 600-plus brick-sized tomes that are difficult to negotiate unless you crack open the spine? No one is saying there's a competition between reading and listening (one academic study concluded that both methods share “comparable comprehension and retention of text”), but there are easier and more portable ways to enjoy words and one of those is via a pair of small earphones or earbuds. You won't be alone, either. The global audiobook market increased by 25% last year to almost \$4 billion, a figure that proves the aural medium is fast becoming more appealing to people, especially if they are on the move or commuting. Given the podcast market is also gaining ground, there is clearly an upsurge in the desire for audio content (as marketers would define it) that publishers are only too happy to provide. But let's go back a while to how audiobooks began

From talking books to listening apps

In 1932, they were called talking books, and they came about when the American Foundation for the Blind started to produce vinyl records for blind civilians and war-blinded military personnel that couldn't read Braille.

By the early '50s, spoken word records were distributed to selected retail stores across the US and the UK. The first of these records laid down the template for authors reading their work – a collection of poems read by the Welsh poet Dylan Thomas. That spoken word record was such a success that the Library of Congress recognised the recording as being the launchpad for the audiobook industry in the US. From the '30s onwards, 'talking books', like any and every technology-driven format, have evolved: books on tape replaced vinyl audiobooks; CDs replaced vinyl; digital replaced CDs. Wherever there is Wi-Fi there is an audiobook. But never mind about the history of audiobooks and their ease of use. Perhaps the most pertinent questions are the ones that many people ask when they are confronted with a different way of doing the most normal of things: why should I change and if I change will I like it?

Free trials, no tribulations

The simple fact of the matter is that if you like books, then you will also like audiobooks. More to the point, perhaps, is this: if you like reading but don't have the time, then you should dive in – and quickly. Matthew Rubery, the author of *The Untold History of the Talking Book*, says that humble if multi-varied audiobooks are “for people who can't read enough.” Nowadays, the flourishing audiobook sector is available on every device you can think of – desk-

tops, laptops, Kindles, smartphones and – yes, really – smartwatches. The way to listen to audiobooks is via any number of audiobook apps. Most services/sellers will offer a subscription that (initially) allows free trials, which will tell you quickly enough if listening to books is something you want to form a lasting relationship with. (See panel for options, suggestions, pros and cons.)

“Matthew Rubern, the author of *The Untold History of the Talking Book*, says that audiobooks are for people who can’t read enough.”



AUDIOBOOKS – WHERE TO GET THEM

Audible

Offering audiobooks on any device with the Audible app, access for titles – which range from fiction, literature and biographies to self-help and romance – is through either one-off purchases or an optional subscription. A free trial membership offers 30 days, which is enough time to decide. During this period, you receive one audiobook and two Audible Originals (bespoke audiobooks that are unavailable elsewhere). If you decide to become a member after the 30-day free trial, depending on reading tastes the monthly subscription can vary from €10 to €13.

Pros: Audible has a huge range of titles amounting to more than 200,000 as well as the previously mentioned Audible Originals. One of the real positives with Audible is that if you don’t like a title, you can exchange it free of charge, and if you subscribe and feel it really isn’t for you, then you can cancel your subscription fee (without any

penalty) in the first 30 days.

Cons: Relative to other services, Audible is expensive.

Google Audiobooks

Launched about three years ago, Google Audiobooks is taking on Audible at its own game and slowly but surely edging towards it.

Pros: The primary differences between the two are that GA sells audiobooks individually and it doesn’t lock you into a monthly subscription. Price comparison between the two is also very competitive, with GA audiobooks equal to or cheaper than an Audible monthly subscription.

Cons: The choice of titles is considerably smaller than that of Audible, but it’s increasing year on year.

Libraries Ireland/BorrowBox

Of course, if you feel you have enough monthly subscriptions on your hands and you’d rather not rack up another Direct Debit, then Libraries Ireland and BorrowBox are here to help. If you visit the website www.librariesireland.ie it has a section called ‘eLibrary’. Within this section, there is an Audiobook selection service that can be accessed using your library barcode and library pin number, both of which are on your physical library card.

Pros: No subscriptions. For readers of many genres or those that get through no more than a few books per month, it’s ideal.

Cons: If you are a voracious reader or a reader of specific genres or areas, there might not be everything you’re looking for here.



RTAI **Solidarity Fund** *Here To Help*

Last year the RTAI Solidarity Fund provided financial assistance to nine education projects. Five of these are featured over the next few pages. Projects in Zambia, Ghana and two in Kenya will be featured in the next edition.

SeeBeyondBorders

Battambang province, North West Cambodia

SeeBeyondBorders works to implement UN Sustainable Development Goal 4 – Quality Education. Through a peer mentorship programme, the project develops teaching skills of primary teachers so they can provide children with a quality education. By age of 15, a mere 2% of Cambodians are achieving minimum reading standards (OECD 2018). The teaching of reading in Cambodian primary schools typically focuses on memorising vast numbers of letter combinations and words, in isolation

SeeBeyondBorders works with the Ministry of Education to create positive, systemic and sustainable change in education for the children of Cambodia

(rather than in the context of a piece of writing, such as a book). The goal of SeeBeyondBorders' Literacy Program is to improve the professional knowledge, practice and engagement of Cambodian teachers tutoring literacy. It incorporates reading, writing, listening and speaking. SeeBeyondBorders works with the Ministry of Education to create positive, systemic and sustainable change in education for the children of Cambodia.

Solidarity Fund assistance

Funds received from the RTAI directly impacted the professional development of 22 primary school teachers in SeeBeyondBorders' Literacy Project in Battambang Province. During the 2020/2021 academic year, these teachers taught 724 children in grades 1 to 3. Teachers received continuous and ongoing support from SeeBeyondBorders staff to improve their teaching quality in Khmer literacy. RTAI funds supported the salary of a SeeBeyondBorders Mentor Coordinator for four months as well as enabling the purchase of a high-quality camera. The camera was used to record best practice educational videos for teachers.

RTAI sponsor

Marie Moreau, a retired school Principal of Rush and Lusk Educate Together NS. "I have had a lifelong interest in development education and development issues. I got to know about SeeBeyondBorders through a fellow Principal, Maeve Corish, and a primary teacher from Dublin, Colm Byrne, who has worked as Director of Development SeeBeyondBorders for a number of years. I had a wonderful experience participating in the SeeBeyondBorders Teacher Programme in January 2020 and seeing its invaluable work first-hand. I feel privileged to be a Board Trustee of SeeBeyondBorders Ireland, which recently launched as a new charity in Ireland, RCN 20206034."



Marie Moreau sharing her experience with Cambodian colleagues

GIVE (Gambia Ireland Volunteers in Education)

The Gambia, West Africa

GIVE team comprises Irish teachers, retired or on a career break, who share their classroom experience with teachers in The Gambia.

The Gambian teachers work in Early Childhood Education (equivalent to Junior and Senior Infants) and Grades 1 and 2 of Lower Basic Education. The Irish teachers work in teams of four or five and deliver this professional development programme to their Gambian teacher colleagues in workshop settings.

The workshop consists of several modules, including classroom management, the Gambian curriculum, lesson planning, language acquisition, number work, integrated studies, music and song, making and collecting practical teaching resources.

In recent years, GIVE has completed a programme of training of Gambian teachers as facilitators, which has enabled the delivery of professional development programmes in clusters to their colleague teachers during the school year. This year, GIVE commenced training the next cohort of facilitators at Early Childhood and Lower Basic levels and is planning on resuming this training programme when they next visit The Gambia, hopefully in 2022.

Solidarity Fund assistance

RTAI funding helps to meet the daily running costs involved in the delivery of GIVE workshops. It enables GIVE to purchase the materials needed for each separate course and supports the payment of a small daily allowance covering bus fares and a small lunch for each Gambian participant. It also covers the cost of a basic resource pack of classroom materials such as chalk, chart paper, markers, colouring pencils, pens, and pencils.

The retention of the trained facilitators in the system is of critical importance to the delivery of professional development workshops in clusters during the school year. Three such workshops were delivered by Gambian



January 2020 GIVE volunteers in The Gambia.

Front l.to r. Edward Gibba, The Gambia, Ann Buckeridge, Carlow, Eibhlín Mac Namara, Dublin.

2nd Row: Pauline Moran, Dublin, Margaret Cunningham, Donegal, Máire Ní Chuinneagáin, An Ghaillimh, Patricia Britton, Donegal.

At Back: Angela Griffin, Dublin, Micheál Ó Gríofa, Dublin.

facilitators in February and March of this year at a cost of 170,000 Dalasi (over €3,000). Each Irish volunteer on the GIVE programme fully funds their travel and accommodation costs and their living and transport expenses while in The Gambia..

RTAI sponsor

Micheál Ó Gríofa (Dublin South), Chairperson, GIVE, has been a member of the Board of Directors of the GIVE Foundation for about eight years and its chairperson for the past four years. "I've been a volunteer on the GIVE team in The Gambia on many occasions – it is an enormously enriching experience."

Teach Smarter, Not Harder

Primary schools in Uganda

The project grew from my observations as a tutor of student teachers on school practice who used a stick quite liberally to control and discipline the class,” says Eilís McDonald. “Although the 1996 Education Act outlaws the use of corporal punishment in schools, the law is generally flouted. The reason given is that the law was only included to qualify for overseas aid and besides, almost all agree they would not be in the positions they are in today if learning had not been beaten into them. Many organisations are concerned about corporal punishment in schools. Lots of glossy material has been published and delivered to schools to help raise awareness about it and explain why it should be different, but nobody has explained to teachers how they can bring about a change. Teach Smarter, Not Harder does exactly that.

Solidarity Fund assistance

Two Ugandan teachers are employed to travel around the country delivering the programme as a compulsory in-service course to all tutors in Primary Teachers' Training Colleges. The Ministry of Education maintains that since all tutors will have completed the course, they will, in turn, pass positive discipline measures to their students who will in their training learn about treating the children in their care with respect. It won't happen overnight, but RTAI funding helps to make classrooms in Uganda a more child-friendly environment.

RTAI sponsor

At retirement as Principal of Stratford-on-Slaney NS, Co. Wicklow,” says Eilís, “I went as a volunteer tutor at Butiiti Teachers' Training College in Western Uganda where I saw the need to do something constructive about corporal



Eilís McDonald with tutors at Butiiti Primary Teachers' College, Uganda, working on the Teach Smarter, not Harder programme.

punishment in primary schools. Teachers teach as they were taught – all stick and no carrots! This programme is to help teachers organise and manage their classroom and lessons in such a manner that reduces the likelihood of confrontation with pupils and deals with discipline in a positive manner.”

Schools for Syria

Tyre, South Lebanon

Schools for Syria provides very basic education in English, Arabic and Maths to the poorest of Syrian refugees who are working on the streets of Tyre, South Lebanon, and whose income makes the difference between eating and starving for their families.

Solidarity Fund assistance

The RTAI funds allowed for the transportation of kindergarten and primary school children from the camps where they live to school and home again each day in a project

run by Irish Rosminian priest Fr William Stuart.

Because of Covid-19 restrictions, numbers on the bus had to be limited so having the funds allowed for the provision of extra buses to transport the full cohort of pupils. This allowed all the pupils to continue as much as possible with their very basic education and social development.

RTAI sponsor

Alice Ring (Dublin North Branch) recommended this project for support: “I have known Fr Stuart for many years and

have been a remote supporter of his Schools for Syria project since its beginning. Thanks to many friends and former colleagues, we have managed to provide limited financial assistance together with consignments of old laptops and printers that we have had reconditioned along with basic art materials, sports equipment and clothing for younger children. We receive regular updates, along with photos and videos of very happy children busy working and having fun in their classrooms. Being all too aware of the appalling conditions of these children's lives, it is very satisfying to know that a small effort on our part makes such a phenomenal difference in Tyre. I am so grateful for the support of the RTAI for this extremely worthwhile project."



'We receive regular updates, along with photos and videos of very happy children busy working and having fun in their classrooms.'



Left: Fr William on board the bus with some very happy pupils on their way to school. Above: Syrian refugee camp, Lebanon

Construction of Education Centre

La Sainte Union Sisters (LSU) at Dundani, outside Dar es Salaam, Tanzania

Dundani is a fast-growing area with few services. The existing schools are few, overwhelmed and dilapidated. The Sisters realise the importance of high-quality pre-school and primary education which unfortunately is a sector neglected in Tanzania. The Sisters have long experience of putting in in such infrastructure and helping to bring development to communities.

Accordingly, Sister Annette Farrell is overseeing the building of an education centre in the convent grounds, which will be a locus for a kindergarten, for women's groups and adult literacy initiatives. The

project is at an early stage but will expand as funds become available.

Solidarity Fund assistance

The Holy Union Sisters are very grateful to the RTAI for their support which enabled several classrooms to be finished, the provision of storage facilities and externally the levelling of pathways to provide safe access to the school.

RTAI sponsor

Ms Mai Lynch, (Offaly Branch) whose association with LSU extends back to 1974 when she started teaching with the order in Banagher, Co. Offaly.



Pwani region, Tanzania

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17238 INTO retired teachers advert 07-21

Recent Solidarity Grants

The RTAI Solidarity Committee has recently approved the payment of grants to the following 3 projects:

- Daughters of Charity of St. Vincent de Paul – support for primary schools in Addis Ababa and Bulbula, Ethiopia
- Asociacion Inhiambia, Managua, Nicaragua – project to divert 60 child workers to primary school
- Gambia Ireland Volunteers in Education (GIVE) – teacher professional development project in the Gambia.

The members of the Solidarity Committee on this occasion were Mr Pádraig S Ó Conaill (Vice-President), Ms Marian Ryan and Ms Marjorie Murphy.

A further meeting of the Solidarity Committee will take place in the Autumn and application forms are available to members from info@rtaireland.ie

RTAI Bursary Scheme 2021

The NEC would like to congratulate the following members who are recipients of RTAI bursaries in 2021:

- Ms Molly O'Duffy, MA in History, Open University
- Mr Cathal Duffy, Bachelor in Deaf Studies, Trinity College
- Ms Mary O'Riordan, Certificate in Organic Horticulture, Limerick ETB
- Ms Anne English, Dianchúrsa i Scríobh na Gaeilge, Ollscoil Mhá Nuad
- Ms Ann Murtagh, Irish Sign Language, Irish Deaf Society

The application process for the 2022 round of RTAI Bursaries will be carried in the December Comhnasc.

Remote working

Working remotely is still part of the work pattern of RTAI staff who continue to work from home in accordance with Government advice to do so except when attendance in the office is necessary. We anticipate that our routine will return to a more regular office-based pattern as we move into September and beyond.

However, we are determined that members do not experience any interruption in service due to remote working.

Our office telephone service is operating as normal at 01 2454130. (Please ring in the morning where possible.)

General queries can be emailed to info@rtaireland.ie and Billy Sheehan can be contacted at: generalsecretary@rtaireland.ie

Negotiating rights for retired workers

The Alliance of Retired Public Service Employees (ARPS) has, in recent years sought to secure some formal recognition for the rights of retired workers in the industrial relations process in matters that impact on pensions.

Ms Bríd Smith TD has taken a particular interest in this matter and has put significant work and commitment into drafting the INDUSTRIAL RELATIONS (PROVISIONS IN RESPECT OF PENSION ENTITLEMENTS OF RETIRED WORKERS) BILL 2021.

This Bill had its second reading in the Dáil on 29 June last when a government amendment to defer further consideration of the Bill for a period of 12 months was carried. While this is a disappointing outcome for all those working with Ms Smith to progress this matter, the Government parties did not vote against the Bill which is significant. The deferral is ostensibly “to allow for consultation with unions and employers and the Industrial Relations bodies, which will allow for full discussion and exploration of legal and technical issues that may arise...”

The Alliance is disappointed that the amendment does not specifically reference it as one of the groups to be included in the consultation process. Nonetheless, it will remain actively involved with the process and will continue to engage with Oireachtas members to secure their support for the Bill when it comes back to the Dáil in 12 months time.

The support of individual unions and of the ICTU, which have been lukewarm towards the Bill, will also be canvassed in the interim.

Pension increase

On 1 October 2021

Under the terms of the current public service pay agreement, *Building Momentum*, salaries in the public sector are set to increase by 1% on 1 October 2021.

This 1% increase will also apply to public service pensions.

A further 1% is due to be paid on 1 October 2022 which will also apply to pensions.

Counselling – Inspire wellbeing

RTAI members have access to a confidential counselling service provided by Inspire (previously Carecall). This service can be accessed by calling 1800 409 673. (Available on a 24/7 basis).

Where face to face counselling is preferred up to 3 sessions are provided to RTAI members at no charge, as the service provider is paid directly by RTAI.

2008 Benchmarking Award

The *Building Momentum* pay deal also provided for the establishment of a Sectoral Bargaining Fund for each public sector group (teachers, nurses, etc). The purpose of the fund is to enable each sector to deal with ‘outstanding adjudications, commitments recommendations and awards specific to that sector’.

The amount of money available to each sectoral group is equivalent to 1% of the annual pay bill for that sector. Increases arising from this aspect of the pay deal will commence on 1 February 2022.

In relation to the primary teaching sector, the key outstanding award relates to a long-delayed increase in allowances for principals and deputy principals. The Public Service Benchmarking Body which reported in January of 2008 recommended that these allowances would rise from 1 September 2008. However, the implementation of this recommendation remains outstanding, and it is the intention of the INTO to use the fund that is now available to finally secure these increases for principals and deputy principals.

Meeting with INTO

It is not clear how the proposed increases in allowances for principals/deputy principals, if secured, will impact on pensions.

The RTAI President Brian Mangan and General Secretary Billy Sheehan had a meeting recently with INTO General Secretary John Boyle and INTO Deputy General Secretary Deirdre O’Connor to emphasise our expectation that any increase in allowances to serving principals/deputy principals will apply to retired teachers of the same grade.

While our INTO colleagues are determined to secure the best outcome for retired teachers, they were not able to confirm what arrangements would apply to retirees, as formal negotiations with the Department of Education had not commenced at that point. Furthermore, any outcome from these discussions would have to be in line with arrangements in other unions and would require the approval of the Department of Public Expenditure and reform.

The initial step requires a recosting of the 14 year old benchmarking award as there has been significant growth in the size of schools during this period. The ‘pot’ of money available for implementation of the award at primary level is €26 million per annum (approx.) and whether this figure is sufficient to fully deliver the benchmarking increases will not be clear until the revised figures are available.

The RTAI will have a further meeting with INTO in September and the INTO has undertaken to keep our Association fully briefed on any developments in the interim.

New RTAI directors

At our Annual Convention earlier this year 3 new directors were elected to the RTAI Board/National Executive Committee

Fachtna Hamilton (Representing members in Cork City & County)

Fachtna was born in the village of Glandore, West Cork, in 1952. He attended the local Primary School and then Mount St. Michael Secondary School, Rosscarbery. He graduated from St. Pat's College of Education, Drumcondra, in 1972. Fachtna taught in St. Patrick's Boys N.S., Skibbereen from 1972 until his retirement in 2011. He was appointed Deputy Principal in 1996 and Principal in 1998.

He attained his BA Degree in UCC in 1980 and his H.Dip in Education in 1981 and was Secretary of Skibbereen Branch INTO for 23 years before his retirement and Secretary to West Cork Principals' Forum for six years.

Fachtna married Jacinta in 1975 and have three children, James, Lucy, Brian. "We have five beautiful grandchildren," he says proudly. His hobbies include walking, gardening, and time spent in their campervan. He is very involved with his local O'Donovan Rossa GAA Club.

"Jacinta and I love to travel," he adds. "Having been confined to base during lockdowns, I am looking forward to foreign travel in 2022. I am looking forward, too, to returning to something as close to normality as possible with friends and colleagues in the RTAI."



Marian Ryan (Representing members in counties Carlow, Kilkenny, Waterford, Wexford and Wicklow)

Marian was born and raised in Limerick city and attended the Presentation convent schools, Sexton Street. She graduated as an NT from Mary Immaculate Training College. She came to Kilkenny for her first job and never left. She taught all of her working life at the St. John of God Primary school, a mixed school at first and later girls only. She is married to Jim, and they have five adult children and 12 grandchildren. "I am called on to do some babysitting from time to time, which I enjoy," says Marian.

Marian plays the violin and is a member of Kilkenny Community Orchestra. She also plays music with the choir in her local parish church. Her pastimes include

gardening, reading, watching television, and being involved with the Kilkenny branch of RTAI, which she joined on retirement and of which she has been branch secretary for some years.

"I am looking forward very much to meeting up with relatives and friends in the next while," says Marian, "and hope that RTA activities, local and national, can resume soon. I miss our coffee and lunch meet-ups and, of course, our day trips and hotel breaks. I am also looking forward to travelling to Medjugorje and maybe Tenerife at some point in the next year."



John Conroy (Representing members in Dublin City and County north of the Liffey)

John was born in Sligo in March 1951, but moved to Clonmel and then to Wexford via Dublin. His education, he says "rambled all over the country." Primary schools included St. Vincent's Ursuline Convent and St. John's Marist Brothers, Sligo, and High School CBS, Clonmel. Secondary schools included High School, Clonmel, Marion College, Dublin, and finally CBS Wexford.

He graduated from St. Pat's in 1971 and from UCD in 1974, and spent all of his teaching career in St. Vincent's CBS, Glasnevin until his retirement in 2012. Throughout his teaching career, he maintained an interest in INTO, which in turn led him to the RTAI.

John is married to Mary, and they have three daughters, Eimear, Muireann, Aoife, They also have three grandchildren, Hannah, Aidan, and Emily.

His hobbies include reading, theatre, walking, taking short breaks around Ireland, and attending hurling and football matches. On theatre, he says, "I've seen a lot of good ones since my father introduced my brothers and me to the Wexford Drama Festival in the '60s. A Whistle in the Dark, by Tom Murphy, was outstanding."

For the year ahead, John says he is looking forward to "renewed vibrancy in RTAI activities and good health that we may enjoy life's simple pleasures."



Updating membership contact details

The RTAI aspires to having current contact details on file for every member. Some of the contact details supplied by members when initially joining the Association change over time. While this is more frequent with telephone numbers and email addresses it can also include postal addresses.

We would appreciate if members would let us know if there is any change to the contact information, we have on file so that we can update our records. We are particularly keen to have an accurate postal address for each member, to facilitate the delivery of Comhnasc.

Any change to contact details can be notified by email to info@rtaireland.ie or by post to RTAI, 35 Parnell Square, Dublin 1, D01 ET 35.

Members' contact details will only be used in relation to RTAI business as set out in the RTAI Data Privacy Policy.

Write for Comhnasc?

Articles written by RTAI members are a central feature of our journal and we greatly welcome receiving material for publication, especially from members who have not previously been published.

Short stories, prose and poetry are all welcome. Ta fáilte speisialta roimh ailteanna i nGaeilge

A short guidance note for contributors (dealing with word count etc) is available from info@rtaireland.ie

Alternatively, if you would like to discuss a proposal before you put pen to paper you can email: generalsecretary@rtaireland.ie

Our next edition will be in December and articles for inclusion should be submitted by the end of October 2021.

While we endeavour to publish as many articles as possible, we are not always able to include every submission received.

Substitute teaching in retirement

Circular 3/2021 issued by the Department of Education last January addresses the issue of pension abatement. Abatement is a *potential* reduction in pension where a retired teacher returns to employment with the DE.

Abatement seeks to put a 'cap' on payment so that when a retired teacher is employed for a specific period e.g., a fortnight, his or her combined income from pension and substitute pay cannot exceed what he/she would have earned in a fortnight, prior to retirement.

If the combined earnings in a specific period, do exceed pre-retirement salary then the pension is reduced just for that period, so that the 'cap' is maintained.

To facilitate retired teachers working in schools, the first 50 days of employment are not counted for abate-

ment purposes i.e., it is only from day 51 onwards that the issue could potentially arise. The 50 days are measured over a calendar year and not a school year.

Working beyond 50 days as a substitute teacher will not give rise to abatement for most retired teachers as the daily substitute rate is low. And in any case where abatement arises the amount of any reduction in pension will not be significant.

The pension abatement rules are not new. However, apart from the '50-day waiver period', the DE is adopting a more rigorous approach to applying the abatement rules.

Note: Where the work undertaken is categorised as fixed-term (temporary) the same principle applies i.e., pay plus pension, cannot exceed pre-retirement earnings with the Department of Education.

Sa Leacain dúinn

Le **Noirín Bhreathnach**

In iarthar sléibhte Chill Mhantáin os cionn lochanna Bhaile Coimín agus cúpla míle lasmuigh den bhaile sin, tá sráidbhaile An Leacain. Teach an Phobail ársa ón bhliain 1811 tógtha d'eibhear; ceann, is dóigh, dena chéad séipéil Chaitliceacha tógtha agus na péindlíthe fós i bhfeidhm. Ocht mbliana déag roimh Fhuascailt na gCaitliceach agus ocht mbliana déag faoi dhó roimh bhliain an drochshaoil. Teach tábhairne den scoth leis an ainm Zeller (de bhunús Eilvéiseach de réir m'eolais). Iar-uachtarlann; tá ardán na gcuinneog fós ann. Cúpla teach cónaithe, bunscoil nua le radharc álainn ar na lochanna, iar-bhunscoil (1869) ina ionad pobail anois. Gan siopa ar bith.

Seo áit a mbaillíonn an grúpa siúil bhrairse deisceart Bhleá Cliath anois is arís (ar ndóigh ach nuair nach mbíonn dianghlasáil!). Tosaímid ár siúlóid suas Slí an Aifrinn i ndiaidh an bháid ar an bpríomhbhóthar. Os ár gcomhair tá droim idir Log na gCon agus Cnoc an tSamhaidh. Tá iarsmaí seanbhuaille thréigthe anseo agus is dócha gurbh é sin an tslí anuas go dtí An Leacain.

Ag deireadh na slí leanann an bealach isteach foraois giúiseanna. Fá cheilt anseo ach i réiteach coille, tá tuama ón gClochaois Nua. Den ailtireacht chéanna de Bhrú na Bóinne ach níos scriosta, is os cionn 5,000 bliain d'aois é. Ait go leor, níl an tuama seo ar aon mhullach.



Treo deiseal: An séipéal, Slí an Aifrinn agus an tuama ón gClochaois Nua





An leac cuimhneacháin

Neamhchosúil leis an gcarn mór i mBrú na Bóinne, ach cosúil le cinn eile ansin agus timpeall Shliabh na Caillí, tá an pasáiste anseo dírithe soir/siar – i dtreo éirí agus luí na gréine san earrach agus san fhómhar. B’amanna tábhachtacha talmhaíochta an t-am sin agus fós sa lá atá inniu ann iad cónochtaí an earraigh agus an fhómhair. Maisítear na crainn ar imeall an réitigh anseo agus crochtar seoda bréaga orthu go minic.

Coiscéim ghairid anois amach ón bhforaois agus ar an droim. Ar chlé tá Log na gCon agus ar dheis Cnoc an tSamhaidh atá míle nó dhó soir.

Inár ndiaidh, tá radharc draíochta os cionn na lochanna. Taiscumar do Bhleá Cliath iad a cruthaíodh sna 1930idí nuair a dambáladh an Life ag Poll an Phúca agus bádh an gleann seo. Tá sráidbhaile, Baile na hAbhann, faoin uisce, agus tagann bóithre agus droichid agus, fiú amháin, séipéal aníos anois is arís nuair a islíonn an leibhéal; rud nach dtarlaíonn ach ar an bhfíor chorruair. Is dreapadh dúshlánach go mullach an chnoic agus a charn é ach is fiú an radharc an dua. Ar an taobh thiar tá Cipiúr lena aeróg; an áit is airde i mBleá Cliath. Ar an taobh thoir tá Mullach Cliabháin, a choire fós fá cheilt, an darna sliabh is airde i gCill Mhantáin agus thiar tá Magh na Life agus machaire Chill Dara. Giota beag siar, sin é túr Tuaim an Aonaigh nó Cnoc an Turlaigh mar a thugtar ar anois. Tá tollán cairéalaithe ó bharr an chnoic anuas go dtí an coire ag a

bhun. Istoiche beirtar an t-uisce suas go dtí an taiscumar ar an mbarr agus i rith an lae scaoiltear anuas é chun leictreachas a ghiniúint. Anseo ar Chnoc an tSamhaidh, ar lá seaca soiléir, san iarnóin agus an ghrian ar do chúl, bíonn An Bhreatain Bheag le feiceáil. Is dócha go mbíonn siadsan in ann muidne a fheiceáil fosta.

Anuas anois, an dreapadh faraor cailte, go dtí an bearnas – Baile na nUltach – agus an ród síos go dtí An Leacain. Áit oiriúnach do shos beag agus b’fhéidir greim le-nithe agus le n-ól. Tá rud neamhchoitianta ag baint leis an ngaoth sa bhearnas agus feictear faoileoireacht foluana go minic anseo. Anois, ár n-intinn an cnoc – Cnoc Dubh – os ár gcomhair a dhreapadh. Ar na sean léarscáileanna ní raibh ainm ag an gcnoc sin ainmnithe agus ní luaití ach amháin a airde – 1984 troigh sa seanairgead! Dúradh ag an am gurbh é an t-aon chnoc i Laighin leis a leabhar féin. Nuair a bhí Art Ó Néill agus Aodh Rua Ó Domhnaill ag éalú ó chaisleán Bhleá Cliath i 1592, deirtear gur bhain siad an bearnas seo amach. Bhí siad ag triall ar Ghleann Molúra agus dún Fhiach Mac Aodh Ó Beirne atá cúig nó sé míle níos faide. Cailleadh Art den fhuacht i nGleann Rí gar don áit sin ach d’éirigh le hAodh Rua.

Déantar athléiriú ar an éalú achan bhliain. Bailíonn daoine cróga le chéile ag geata an chaisleáin oíche Nollag na mBan agus siúlann siad go dtí an bearnas seo agus as sin go Gleann Molúra thar an áit ina bhfuil Art curtha.

Ach ní bhíonn sé ar intinn againne siúl chomh fada sin. Coiscéim ghairid, an chuid is mó de ar an mbóthar portaigh agus ag an mbarr ar dheas tá an tslí síos. Ar thaobh an chosáin tá coirthe. Leac chuimhneacháin d'fhoireann eitleáin Bhriotanaigh. Ar seachrán agus é ag dul abhaile ó Bheirlín, d'imigh sé síos anseo in Aibreán 1941. Cailleadh ceathrar, atá curtha i reilig an tséipéil Phrotastúnaigh i mBaile Coimín. Leanaimis ar aghaidh go Pound Lane agus is féidir an tsiúlóid iomlán a fheiceáil. Beagnach ag an mbóthar, tá Carraig an Aifrinn; leac mhór eabhair agus cros gearrtha inti. "Anseo i lár a ghleanna", aimsir na bpéindlíthe agus cosc ar an reiligiún Caitliceach, bhailíodh muintir na háite go rúnda chun Aifreann a cheil-



Carraig an Aifrinn



An bollán le sé pholl



Post na gcóistí

iúradh amuigh faoin spéir. Bhíodh roinnt acu ar faire ar eagla go mbeadh na cótaí dearga ag teacht. Sa ghort ar chlé (príobháideach), tá bollán as cuimse le sé pholl. Ionad ar turas oilithreachta, chastaí clocha deiseal sna poill agus ghuití. Níos déanaí, meastar go raibh leigheasanna do ghalair éagsúla in uisce na bpoll agus anois is arís, mhallaítí namhaid ag casadh na gcloch tuathal. Iarsmaí, b'fhéidir, d'am agus creidimh ní ba shine ná an Chríostaíocht.

Ar an tslí ar ais go dtí An Leacain tá reilig Naomh Bhaodáin, naomh an cheantair, ar chlé. Tá a thobar bean-naithe báite anois faoin taiscumar. Cúpla céad slat eile agus tá an Cillín ar dheis. Áit fá leith ina gcuirtí leanaí nó páistí a d'éag gan bhaisteadh agus de réir sin ní bhíodh sé ceadaithe dóibh a bheith curtha sa reilig.

Nóiméid nó dhó eile agus seo linn ar ais sa Leacain. Bhíomar ar an mbóthar anseo lá amháin nuair a bhuaileamar le scata mór caorach ag teach inár ngaor lán fuinnimh. Cúpla céad ar a laghad a bhíodhas á mbailiú anuas ó na sléibhte. Bhí an iliomad díobh go raibh na madraí ag rith

anonn is anall suas orthu gan aon deacracht. Ag deireadh an tainreatha bhí an feirmeoir ina charr agus é lán de chaoirigh aige fosta. Bhí an suíochán tosaigh paisinéara imithe sa chaoi go mbeadh sé in ann caora nó dhó breise a bhrú isteach. Agus é ag dul tharainn bhronn sé bean-nacht fá leith orainn; d'ordaigh sé a ordóg leath orlaigh den roth stiúrtha.

Ar ais sa Leacain, tabhair fá deara leac bheag leis an dáta 1811 sa bhalla os comhair na slí isteach tí Zeller. Comhartha bóthair lasmuigh d'oifig an phoist agus post na gcóistí.

Timpeall 11 km agus 600m de dhreapadh. 4 uaire a chloig d'éinne atá measartha aclaí.

Ó Ráth Cúil i gContae Bhaile Átha Cliath, d'fhreastail Nóirín Bhreathnach ar Choláiste Dhún Charúin agus mhúin sí i mbunscoil Mhuire Bhanríon na nAspal, Cluain Buiríosa, Cluain Dolcáin. Is ball de Bhrainse Bhaile Átha Cliath Theas í, agus rannpháirtí rialta, roimh an dianghlasáil, ina ghrúpa siúlóide cnoic.

I gColáiste Phádraig Dom



Le Tomás Ó Concubhair

I Meán Fhómhair na bliana míle naoi gcéad agus seasca, d'fhágas Trá Lí ar an traen ag triail ar Bhaile Átha Cliath agus an coláiste traenála. B'shin é an chéad uair agam a' dhul chun na hard cathrach. Bhíos i gCorcaigh ceart go leor ag cluiche Ceannais Peile na Mumhan agus i Luimneach ar chuairt chuig col ceathrar m'athar a bhí ina bean rialta ann. B'shin chomh fada 's a chuaigh mé go dtí seo. Nach mise a bhí mórtasach asam féin ag triail ar chathair mhór Átha Cliath.

Ar shroisint an choláiste dúinn cuireadh fáilte romhainn agus bhuaileas le mo chairde ó Bhaile Bhúirne. Bhí an-áthas orm Seán Mac Phaidín agus Fionnbarra Ó Ceallaigh a fheiceáil. Bhí an saol i mBaile Átha Cliath an-chosúil le Baile Bhúirne. Bhí muintir na céad bliana bailithe le chéile i suainlios mór. Sa chillín bhí báisín agus crúiscín mór bán. Bhíodh orainn dul go seomra eile leis an ártach céanna a

líonadh le huisce, é thabhairt arais agus sinn féin a ní ón mbáisín. Sean áras a bhí sa choláiste nár athraigh ón am a tógadh é. Sagairt de Ord Naomh Uinsíonn a bhí i mbun na h-áite.

D'éirimis thart ar a seacht a clog agus tar éis sinn féin a ní, théimis ar Aifreann. Uaireanta bhíodh luí isteach ag mic léinn a bhíodh tuirseach ar maidin. Thagadh duine des na sagairt ar a dtugtaí 'an Bat' timpeall ina éide dubh ar chosa in airde len iad a ruaigeadh as an leaba. Maidin amháin bhí Fionnbarra agus a chomharsa béal dorais sa leaba. "Was the Bat around yet?", arsa Fionnbarra. Leis sin, tharraing an Bat an cuirtín trasna agus chuir sé in iúl do Fhionnbarra go raibh sé thar am aige éirí.

Luíomar isteach le saol an choláiste gan mórán dua. Bhí sean taithí againn ar choláistí cónaithe ónár dtréimhse i mBaile Bhúirne. Bhí an leagan amach céanna anseo, ceach-

tanna i rith an lae agus staidéar is d'óiche go dtí a deich. Bhíodh prefects ón dara bhliain i bhfeidhil an staidéir. Níor chuir siad éinne i gcuimhne dom ach Stazi na Gearmáine Thoir i ré an Chumannachais leis an droch shúil a chaithidís timpeall agus iad ina suí ar ardán ós ár gcomhair amach dá gcloisfidís aon cogarnail. Bhíodh níos mó saoirse againn ceart go leor. Ligti amach chuig rinncí sinn ar an nDomhnach agus bhíodh leath lá againn ar an gCéadaoin agus an Satharn. Chuirte na doirse faoi ghlas gach oíche agus éinne a bhíodh déanach bhíodh air drepadh thar balla. Ba mhinic a tharla sé, go mór mhór ar an nDomhnach.

Chuireamar aithne ar a chéile. Na Hedgers ó aimsir na scoileanna scairte a thugtaí ar mhuintir na céad bliana agus na Gents ar mhic léinn na bliana romhainn. Bhí buachaillí ós na ceithre hairde ann. Bhí slua maith ó Thír Chonaill ann go mór mhór ó Ghaoth Dóbhair agus Gaeilge á spalpadh acu eatartha féin. Bhíos an-mhór le cuid acu mar gurab as na Doirí Beaga do mo chara Seán.

Maidir leis na léachtanna i rith an lae, ní mórán áird a thugaimís orthu. Bhíodh mac léinn in aice liom. Leabhar níor cheannaigh sé chun staidéir ach cóipleabhar amháin. Ag tarraingt aghaidheanna a chaitheadh sé an t-am. Agus na scrúduithe ag druim linn, bhíodh sé ag lorg nótaí ós na mic léinn eile. D'éirigh go seoighe leis. Lá amháin agus ollamh ag déanamh ceoil linn bhí mo dhuine ag útamáil. "Are you listening Mr", arsa an t-ollamh. "I am", ar seisean. "I am what", arsa an teagascóir. "I am listening", arsa an mac léinn. "Get out", arsa an duine eile agus amach leis.

Théimis suas go Baile Phib chun cleachtadh múinteoireachta a dhéanamh sa scoil áitiúil an chéad bhliain. Bhí Mr. Reidy i gceannas. Bhí sé snasta ó bhun go bathais. Bhí sé mar a bheadh ceann des na Tailor's Dummies a chaitheadh an fhaisean ba nua aimseartha i bhfuinneoga Clery's ar Shráid Uí Chonaill. Thug sé le fios dúinn an t-am

ceart le bheith sa scoil leis na focail seo leanas. "When I say twenty past nine and ten to two, I mean twenty past nine and ten to two".

An chéad uair a sheasas ós comhair an ranga ba bheag nár thit an t-anam asam bhíos chomh neirbhíseach san. Dheineas dearmad ar gach rud a bhí leagtha amach agam le déanamh. Tháinig misneach chugam ar ball agus níos mó iontaoibh agam asam féin.

An bhliain dar gcionn, théimis síos go Bun Scoil Naomh Pádraig leis an cleachtadh múinteoireachta a dhéanamh. Bhí fear darbh ainm Bob Mc Nally i gceannas. Bhíodh ceachtanna á múineadh againn agus Bob thíos ag bun an tseomra ag déanamh cigireachta orainn. Lá amháin agus mo cheacht críochnaithe agam, thuigeas ón dreach a bhí air nach mó ná sásta a bhí sé le mo chur i láthair. Ar seisean liom, "Mr. O'Connor. If you continue teaching like that you will never be a teacher". Ní thuigim fós nuair a smaoinim ar na focail sin cén miorúilt a thugas i gcrích gur éirigh liom sé bhliain 's dhá fhichead a chur díom ag gabháil leis an gceird céanna.

Ní dóigh liom gur chuala an bheirt cheannasaí i gcleachtadh na múinteoireachta an tsean ráiteas riamh "Mol an óige agus tiocfaidh sé". Níor cothaíodh aon dea-mhuin-tearas idir iad agus na mic léinn. Saineolaithe a bhí iontu ó thaobh na múinteoireachta a mheasamar ach ní cuimhin liom ceachtar acu a theacht ós comhair an ranga le mo linnse agus a rá, "B'fhéidir go mbeadh an tslí seo níos fearr leis an ábhar a chur i láthair na ndaltaí".

An rud ba mhó a chuireadh isteach orainn i gColáiste Phádraig ná ganntanas airgid. Bhí sé gann ar a lán de mhuintir na hÉireann ag an am, ceal oibre. Bhíodh thart ar céad mac léinn ag dul isteach sa choláiste gach bliain ach ag an am céanna bhí caoga míle d'fhuíl úr na hÉireann idir fir 's mnáibh ag imeacht ar an mbád bán. Ba náireach an mhaise é.

Bhíodh roinnt caithimh aimsire sa choláiste againn. Théimis ag rince go Ostán Naomh Sheoirse i gCearnóg Pharnell oíche Domhnaigh. Faighimís isteach saor in aisce mar gur mic léinn a bhí ionainn. Théimis freisin go dtí an National mar a mbíodh muintir na tuaithe ag damhsa, nó b'fhéidir an lerne nó Barry's mar a mbíodh cailíní na hárd Cathrach. Bhíodh an-spórt againn leis na Gurriers mar a thugtaí ar na cailíní céanna. San iarnóin ar an nDomhnach freisin bhíodh an Crows Hop ar siúl ins an Four Provinces. Bhailíodh na mic léinn ó Choláiste Phádraig agus na hábhair múinteora ban ó Dhún Cheirí, an Charraig Dhubh le chéile le h'aghaidh dreas rince. Shiúlaimís an chuid ba mhó



den am go dtí na hallaí rince céanna chun airgead a shábháil dá mba rud é go raibh sé againn.

Bhí caitheamh aimsire breise againn sa dara bhliain. Bhíodh piontaí portair Bhaile Átha Cliath á n'ól againn, ceird a fhoghlaimíos i Londain an samhradh roimhe sin agus airgead againn ar feadh tamaill pé scéal é len iad a cheannach tar éis tréimhse a chaitheamh ag obair sa tionscail tógála i Sasana. Bhí na piontaí céanna an-saor ag an am agus cé nach raibh ach sé nó seacht bpúnt déag sa tseachtain á thuilleamh agam i Londain cheannófa a lán leis an airgead céanna.

Bhímís ag imirt peile sa pháirc ag am sosa. Bhíodh roinnt eile ag imirt iomána. Ní raibh aon rugar á imirt againn ná mórán sacar ach oiread. Ní raibh mé féin ná mo chairde ró-dháiríre faoin bpeil agus mar sin níor éirigh linn áit a bhaint amach ar aon fhoireann mór le rá.

D'imigh an dá bhliain i gColáiste Phádraig go tapaidh. D'éirigh linn go léir ins na cleachtaithe múinteoireachta. Bhíomar in ár n'oidí scoile ag an tráth seo agus é mar aidhm againn aos óg na hÉireann a chur ar bhealach a leasa. Cleachtadh a dheineann foirfeacht agus b'shin mar a fuairamar an ceann is fearr ar na fadhbanna a d'eascair i mblianta tosaigh na múinteoireachta.

Sula rabhamar chun scor leis an gColáiste i mBaile Átha Cliath, bhí scrúduithe scríofa cinn bhliana le déanamh ins na h-ábhair a bhí idir lámhaibh againn. I gcás trí ábhar Béarla, Matamaitic agus Tír Eolas bhí orainn ceann amháin

a roghnú. Thógas Tír Eolas mar gurab í ab fhuirist. Na mic léinn a thogh ceann den dá ábhar eile bhí suim acu ann agus meas dá réir acu air. Na daoine a ghlac an saol go bog chuardar leis an Tír Eolas.

Chríochnaíomar na scrúduithe i Meitheamh na bliana 1962. Bhí deireadh le saol an Choláiste agus saoirse againn ar deireadh thiar. Bhí ré órga romhainn agus bheadh cúpla púnt in ár bpócaí ach post a fháil. Dá bhfaighfeá post roimis saoire an t-samhraidh agus cúpla lá oibre a dhéanamh gheobhfá pá dos na míonna Iúil agus Lúnasa. Chuirte agallaimh ar mhic léinn ag bainisteoirí na scol a bhí ag lorg múinteoirí. Bhí mac léinn amháin agus bhí an-mheas aige ar féin mar mhúinteoir. Tar éis dó an t-agallamh a chríochnú tháinig sé amach as an seomra agus ar seisean leis na mic léinn eile a bhí ag fanacht le dul faoi agallamh, "Boys he'll see no more". I bhfocail eile, "Tá an post agam". Ní raibh fonn ormsa an cúrsa sin a thógaint. Bhí soilse geala Londain um tharrach agus, an Grad-ball ar siúl, bhí mé ar an mbád bán go Holyhead i dteannta na n-imirceach eile. Lorgóinn post i scoil éigin ar ball nuair a bheadh cúpla púnt i mo phóca agam. B'shin an dara samhradh agam i Londain.

Thosaigh Tomás ag múineadh i Scoil na mBráthar, Loch Gorman ag deireadh Lúnasa 1962. Chaith sé a shaol ann. D'éirigh sé as an múinteoireacht ar an gcéad lá de MeánFomhair 2008.

Oidí ar scor

Nár choimeádamar deargintinní in ord
Nuair a bhí an tír so go mór i dtríoblóid ...

Nár sheasamar sa bhfuacht ag síorchur síol
I rí-ithir rithimeach na rún faoin tsíoraíocht ...

Nár thógamar le hintleacht fis an stáit
Go soilseodh grian na glóire go binn ar chách ...

Nár fhulaingíomar céasadh i gcorp ár lae
Go labhródh bunreacht na fírinne go saor ...

Is nár chuireamar smacht ar an bhfolús
Ionas go n-aibeodh foirfeacht farainn mar thúis ...

Anois táimid ar scor i ngarraí na ngrást
Ag iarraidh tinneas is teannas 'dhíbert chun fáin
Is ag athmheas cad a dheineamarna inár lá
Ar son Leas Órga na Beatha in Inis Fáil

Mícheál Ó hAllmhuráin



The Times They Are a-Changin'

Dermot Toomey looks back over 60 years to the location of his first appointment as a teacher. Never mind about the politics, he writes – the cost of an Austin A40 was £558!

Blackpitts/Na Claiseacha Dubha! At first glance, this is not a name likely to evoke a great deal of excitement or enthusiasm, yet it was the location of my first appointment as a teacher over 60 years ago. The full address of the school was Donovan's Lane, Blackpitts, Clanbrassil Street, in the heart of the Dublin Liberties. I later learned that the name 'Blackpitts' derived from a series of pits used to bury the dead during the Black Plague of the 1300s, although another school of thought suggests it derived from the black vats used by tanners and skinnners for curing hides as part of the leather trade.

The school building itself was classic red brick, elegant in appearance, though out of character with many of the

neighbouring buildings. It was partially hidden behind beautifully constructed high walls with just one narrow pedestrian entrance. It was built to the design of one George Coppinger Ashlin, who was the son-in-law of Augustine Pugin, the renowned architect to whose design many beautiful religious and secular buildings throughout the world are attributed. Ashlin himself, in collaboration with Edward Welby Pugin, was responsible for the design of many Irish buildings, including Cobh Cathedral, Castleknock College and St. Patrick's Training College. The work on St. Kevin's Male National Schools was completed in 1895 and the first pupils were enrolled in April of the same year.

Then and now

When I entered those hallowed walls for the first time in July 1959, Seán Lemass had just become Taoiseach, Harold McMillan was UK Premier, Dwight Eisenhower was US President, and the cost of an Austin A40 was £558. By then, the building had already stood the test of time. And today a new dawn beckons. The school is long since closed. Three terraced houses occupy what was once the schoolyard and the school building itself has been converted into four luxury apartments, two of which have been sold for over €700,000, while a third is on the market for €1.5m. Happily, the original school's name has partially been retained in the new address of the development, and many of the building's original features have also been retained.

When I began my teaching on Wednesday, July 1st, 1959, St. Kevin's had already experienced many years of decline in enrolment as families from the surrounding area moved to the developing suburbs of Crumlin, Ballyfermot, Kimmage, Drimnagh, Dolphin's Barn, and so on. In doing so they left behind what Garda Senan Finucane, from Kevin Street Garda Station, described in the late-'40s as some of the worst tenements in Dublin at that time. Interestingly, a senior and a junior school occupied the same building, the senior section being on the upper floor and the junior, from Infants to Third Class, on the lower floor. In reality, there was very little contact between senior and junior schools as an Upstairs/Downstairs tension seemed to prevail.

First assignment

Principal of the Junior school, Stan Shaw ("Mr Shaw" to me and my training college colleague, Pat McMahon, who joined the staff a short time later) assigned me to teach Junior Infants, Senior Infants and First Class, and I remained in this setting for five years. In 1959, such a placement was somewhat unusual as men were not normally assigned Infant classes. However, in the flush of youth, I relished the challenge and promptly armed myself with An Naí Scoil, which was to be my bible for the succeeding five years. (A 'near fine' copy of this book, which was first published in 1951, is currently available from a Lisburn bookseller for a modest £12.)

In the context of the modern Infant classroom, my room was extremely interesting. It was accessed through the largest of the three ground floor rooms, which some decades previously accommodated several classes. (A former pupil, writing in 2016, tells us there were several classes in the same room with a teacher at the top of each. He also tells us that it was not unusual for a pupil to ask if a younger brother or sister could be brought in for the day "to be minded" until collected by parents.) My room was timber-floored, was steeply tiered from front to back with

a series of six to eight stepped rows with a central aisle and aisles to left and right – rather like a lecture theatre. Pupils' benches were firmly bolted to the floor and walls were timbered to halfway with dark varnished wood. The room lacked basic facilities other than a single press. Heat was provided by storage heaters. Toilets were outdoors and were accessed via the large downstairs room. Indeed, it was not unusual for something rude to be written about teachers on toilet walls with chalk stolen from the classroom.

Learning environment

Looking through a modern lens it is interesting to reflect that my classroom was not conducive to best learning. It was very much of its time. The room was extremely dark, lacked basic facilities and the tiered flooring contributed to a level of unwelcome noise as well as presenting a danger to very young pupils.

Furthermore, it was not possible to display children's work. Fortunately, class numbers were relatively low with the three classes totalling somewhat more than forty pupils. On the lighter side – pupils occasionally lost pencils through gaps in the floorboards. A former pupil tells of losing a much-valued pencil through one such gap in the floorboards of a senior classroom and being told by teacher Dónall Ó Griofa that it would be "another fifty years" before the pencil would be recovered.

Challenges and odours

Life wasn't always plain sailing in St. Kevin's, and during the first week in September, I experienced two major setbacks. Firstly, my recently purchased bicycle, which was crucial for my daily cross-city journey, was, though locked, 'removed' from the school shed. Secondly, I was informed that my appointment had not been sanctioned because the Manager overlooked the existence of The Panel. A visit to Kevin Street Garda Station in search of my bicycle proved fruitless and, of course, the possibility of insurance did not arise. Thankfully, the question of my appointment was, over time, resolved satisfactorily and some weeks later I received my first cheque. At the time a wage of £6.43d per week seemed like manna from heaven.

When I first began to teach in Blackpitts, I was fascinated by the competing odours that were a part of everyday life in that part of the city. The not unpleasant tang of malt and hops from the Guinness Brewery was ever-present as was the sweet, biscuity scent from the nearby Jacob's factory. Less bearable, however, was the odour from the premises known locally as The Knacker Keefe's, where animals were regularly slaughtered and where fertiliser was manufactured. At times, the smell was so strong that all school windows had to remain closed (as noted by a pupil "to keep out the stench"). The same

pupil referred to “a butter making dairy directly across the road in the tenters facing the school.” The ‘Tenters’ to which the pupil referred is a name derived from Huguenot settlers who fled from French persecution in 1685 and settled in the area. They were expert linen makers and stretched their cloth on tenterhooks to dry. The practice is said by some to have given rise to the expression ‘on tenterhooks’.

Principals and inspectors

My Principal, Stan Shaw, was a somewhat shy and reserved gentleman who was fully committed to his life as a teacher. He was extraordinarily thorough and logged the progress of each pupil with minute detail while devising an individual education plan for each. I clearly remember bundles of copies with cutaway pages where each aspect of pupil learning was recorded with great clarity and precision. Mr Shaw then cleverly devised education plans in response to his findings. A great role model for young teachers and surely a man ahead of his time!

In the ‘60s, the visit of the inspector frequently occasioned a level of anxiety and trepidation. My memory of these visits to my classroom is quite clouded but I have clear recollection of a native of Kerry named Moriarty who inspected me for the duration of the two-year probation. I remember him as polite, methodical and always encouraging. On his final Diploma visit his parting words were “Bí deas leo mar tá siad bocht.” Methodologies, class management, preparation and so on did not feature prominently in his counsel. Instead, pupils were central to his thinking. Ar ndóigh bhí an ceart aige. Bhí na páistí bocht ach bhíodar uasal agus bhí an t-uaisleacht céanna sa chomhairle a thug sé dom.

“Bí deas leo mar tá siad bocht” – 60 years on, I can safely say that his words seminally informed my future life as a teacher.

Back to the future

St. Kevin’s finally closed its doors to pupils late in the last century. Sometime later the building became a public house, aptly named The Scholars. A headline from 2007 reported that its late licence had been revoked following the arrest of a fifteen-year-old boy who was “too drunk to stand up.” This may well have been an isolated incident as



A refurbished St Kevin’s.

Photographs courtesy of Stephen Day of Lisney, Auctioneers

the licence was reinstated following an appeal, but the pub closed permanently in 2011 and the building rapidly became almost derelict. But once again, in recent times, that great building has been saved, phoenix-like, and developed into a scheme of ultra-modern city apartments (one of which has been described as “one of the most distinctive apartments on the market in Ireland right now”).

Stolen chalk will not again be used to enliven toilet walls and it is unlikely that the many pencils ‘lost’ under floorboards will ever be recovered because although the original floors have been retained, new floors have been laid over them. And so life goes on!

Dermot trained in St. Patrick’s College from 1957-’59. He subsequently worked in Blackpitts, Dublin 8, Scoil Assaim, Dublin 5 before becoming principal of Scoil Lorcáin (later Scoil Eoin), Dublin 5 in 1975. Following his retirement he worked with the Church of Ireland, St. Patrick’s and Hibernia Colleges.

Western Roots Run Deep

Máire McCabe recounts how her family were uprooted from Clonbur, Co Galway, to Allenstown, Co Meath, as part of the Land Commission's reallocation of farmland in Ireland.

In Clonbur Co. Galway, March 29th, 1940, was a typical day for that month: cold and blustery. But my family, the Lydon's, hardly noticed the cold and the wind because it was on that day that I, along with my four brothers, mother and father, sadly left the rugged mountainous countryside of Galway and boarded the buses for the rich fertile lands of Meath. We were among the 112 people, one of 24 families, leaving a close-knit community of fishermen and small farmers.

This migration was organised by the Land Commission, which oversaw the redistribution of farmland in Ireland. It was also set in the context of relieving congestion along the western seaboard and supporting the preservation of the Irish language by setting up Gaeltacht colonies in the midlands and East of Ireland.

My parents' hearts were heavy. They were uprooting themselves from the countryside that had been home to them and their forefathers for hundreds of years. Although a beloved land, the spectre of poverty was constantly lurking in the background, forcing my parents to make that hard decision to move to where there was a chance of eking out a reasonable livelihood that would provide in the future a better chance for their five children. I was seven years of age at the time. That March morning, I was very excited and experienced none of the sadness of the adults. I couldn't wait to see the fat cows and bullocks of which I had heard so much.

Harsh comments in a strange language

The bus journey was never-ending. Many times, I wanted to get off and race the bus to the next corner, but I didn't dare misbehave because my parents were so sad and quiet. Most of the adults spoke in hushed tones. Little did I know that it was the last time I was to hear only Irish being spoken. Soon I was to hear a 'foreign' language that would play a big part in my future life.

After what seemed an eternity we arrived in the Craig-Waller estate of Allenstown. There were people there to greet us, and even though I was only seven I could sense



Máire McCabe with Michael O'Halloran's *The Lost Gaeltacht*, that chronicles the story of the migration

the hostile atmosphere around us. There was one family, however, that did give us a great welcome – the Pigott family, a Church of Ireland family. They brought us in and gave us tea. It was much appreciated. Several Gardaí paced up and down but that did not stop the harsh comments hurled at us in a strange language. It was years later when I learned of the riots and unrest that preceded our arrival.

This unrest was borne out of local opposition to the resettlement. When the estate was being divided there was an expectation among some who worked as farm labourers on the estate that they would be granted some land. 'No migrants for Allenstown' and 'Meath land for the Meath men', were the

slogans of the time.

However, I couldn't wait to see our new house. My parents had already told us of the cosy Land Commission house surrounded by acres of soil that hadn't been broken for decades. I was not disappointed.

Walked to school on the first day

Inside our new abode, a welcome fire burned brightly in the hearth. Nearby was a bucket of spring water. Being the youngest I was allowed to quench my thirst first. To me, everything was just awesome. There was a week's provisions and a year's supply of turf. But the sound of my mother's sobbing dampened my excitement somewhat. The next day everything cheered up when we saw the three cows, two heifers, 12 sheep, one sow, two bonhams, 21 fowl, a horse, farm and dairy implements – not to mention the portion of land already ploughed for us.

It was a fine day, and my brothers and I had a great time exploring the fields while my parents awaited the truck from Galway carrying the furniture without the 'settle bed'. The next day my parents collected the horse and cart. We were beginning to settle down.

Life was hard in those early years, but the people from Clonbur were more than used to hard back-breaking work. Even we children had to do our share. I worked on the bog,

weeded the garden, picked stones and scutch grass – I was, in fact, a general dogsbody for my family, but I didn't mind.

After a week in my new surroundings, I started school. The school I left behind in Clonbur was a small one-teacher school. In Bohermeen it was much bigger, a four-teacher school. The five of us, accompanied by my father, walked to school on the first day. Although the older siblings had a couple of English words, I had none, so it was difficult for me at the beginning. Gradually, I picked up a few words. My earliest memory of using these in the schoolyard was when I was asked how many sisters I had. I replied four – Meotie (Martin), Johnny, Mickey and Paddy. When my new friends burst out laughing, I realised I had mixed up deirfiúracha (sisters) and deartháireacha (brothers). After that, I learned very fast, attended Mercy Secondary in Kells and then Carysfort College where I trained as a primary teacher.

True adopted natives

I truly enjoyed my childhood in Allenstown. Our parents protected us from hostile comments and attitudes from some of the Meath people. As the years passed, the move proved to be a success. This was due mainly to the industry and the determination to make a 'go of things' by our

parents, relations, and friends from Clonbur. It is only fair to point out, however, that the careful planning and material and advisory assistance given to us by the Land Commission was a great boost.

The older generation kept very much to themselves and learnt little English. They were content, but often in our house, and those of our neighbours, I listened to them talk about the life they left behind in Clonbur: beautiful, tranquil scenery, fishing, shooting, the craic. They rarely mentioned the hard times. Despite my tender years, I was aware of their lingering sadness. Indeed, many of them went back home to be buried.

The younger generation fared better. As the years passed, we buried the axe with the people of Meath and integrated very well with them. Some of us intermarried and became true adopted natives. In fact, many are the times we were proud to carry the Meath flag. But even in the euphoria of Meath victories, we never did or never will forget our western roots.

Máire started her teaching career in 1951 in Carlow before moving to the village of Swan in Co. Laois. She also taught in the Gibbstown Gaeltacht before moving to Loreto Navan where she spent 33 years. Máire was the school's first lay principal.



Lough Corrib from Clonbur with a view of Co Meath from the Hill of Tara

'Life was hard in those early years, but the people from Clonbur were more than used to hard back-breaking work.'



A Nose by Any Other Name

*Thoughts, memories, moods and feelings are all triggered by our sense of smell. **Kathleen Carroll** outlines the therapeutic properties of fragrance.*

Memory provides us with a window to our personal history and is the thread linking our present with the past and future. In his poem, *Digging*, Seamus Heaney evokes vivid images from the senses as he strives to create meaning in his present moment through the sensory exploration of the past.

‘The cold smell of potato mould, the squelch and slap
Of soggy peat, the curt cuts of an edge
Through living roots awaken in my head’

Smell evokes strong emotions, and we get a sense of this in the way olfactory images have become embedded in our vernacular: ‘the sweet smell of success’; ‘the stench of impending doom’; ‘smell a rat’; ‘smelling of roses’. Ayurveda, the ancient science of holistic healing, which originated in India over 3,000 years ago, emphasises the liberating properties of fragrance, along with the comfort and spiritual wholeness experienced when a person is in contact with aromas in all their manifestations. Non-religious practices such as Humanism, and religious traditions such as Christianity, Hinduism, Buddhism, Judaism and Islam, all value the use of incense in services of solemnity, celebration and worship, recognising the depth and intensity of scent in connecting people with each other and the divine, in both a physical and spiritual sense.

Connection between smell and mood

At the age of 22, US writer Molly Birnbaum lost her sense of smell as a result of a car accident. She described the experience as that of losing the part of her memory that, when triggered by scent, evokes recollections of feelings

around events. When US novelist/essayist Leslie Jamison lost her sense of smell in 2020 due to Covid-19, she described it in terms of longing for the memory of all the smells she knew and missed, not having realised the extent to which fragrance had raised her awareness of her surroundings and had given her experiences levels of context and security. The gradual return of her sense of smell over five months provided her with a new appreciation of how it enhanced her daily life.

Anecdotal accounts suggest a connection between smell and mood, with the bouquet of perfume and roses associated with joyful events, while lilies tend to conjure a mood of gravity. Scented candles create an ambience of relaxation, while the smell of coffee adds warmth and comfort to a room. The aroma of cooking – an Irish stew or vegetable soup, for example – can lead to recollections of times past. US author and disability rights activist Helen Keller wrote, “Smell is a potent wizard that transports you across thousands of miles and all the years you have lived. The odours of fruits waft me to my southern home, to my childhood frolics in the peach orchard. Other odours, instantaneous and fleeting, cause my heart to dilate joyously or contract with remembered grief.”

An external form of touch

Historically, in the field of science and research, the olfactory sense has received significantly less attention than that of sight and hearing. Empirical studies of memory have focused on areas of the brain responsible for processing information mediated primarily through auditory and visual channels. In the past ten years, however,

this has changed – the olfactory system receives increased recognition not only for its significance in creating perspective and generating meaning but also for its role in memory and creative ideation.

As far back as the 4th-century, Aristotle explored the olfactory sense, both for its close and intimate faculty and, recognising the tangible connection between flavour and taste, its impact on memory as an external form of touch. His investigations raised the possibility that memories elicited by a dual sensory quality, such as smell, are more enduring and vivid than other reminiscences. Autobiographical memories, containing meaningful personal detail from general and specific events in peoples' lives, offer valuable research opportunities on the influence of the senses on memory retrieval. Past pupils I meet occasionally are consistent in their recollections of the smells that they associate with their old school classrooms, corridors and cloakrooms. In turn, this triggers other memories and events that had been stashed away and otherwise forgotten and invests them with emotional potency.

Generation of unique ideas

A 2006 study of memory, conducted by Johan Willander and Maria Larsson with older participants, and using visual, auditory and olfactory cues found that memories elicited using odour cues were stronger and were drawn from earlier life events. Research published in 2002 and conducted by Simon Chu and John J. Downes, revealed that odour-cued autobiographical memories were more detailed, reliable and contained emotive qualities not evident in memories cued by visual stimuli. Interesting research on the use of odour in stimulating ideas (published in 2019 and carried out by Cantürk Akben and Hamit Coskun) found that the presentation of the scent of mandarin before and during a 'think-in' contributed to creativity and flexibility, which was subsequently demonstrated in increased generation of unique ideas.

Neuroscientific research provides a probable reason for the distinctive role played by olfaction in higher-order cognitive functioning, memory retrieval and awareness of emotion. Unlike other sensory signals, including motor signals (which must be relayed through the thalamus to the cerebral cortex for processing), research has established that the olfaction system has primary access to regions of the brain that are active during memory function (hippocampus), emotional processing (amygdala), and social and emotional reasoning (orbitofrontal cortex).

Stimulus of smell restricted

With the sense of smell occupying such an important role in thoughts, feelings and memory, the issue of anosmia (partial or complete loss of smell) assumes greater signifi-

cance. The medical advice for people who have congenital anosmia, for which there is no cure, include the following: ensure there are fully functioning smoke alarms installed in the home at all times; avoid the use of gas; label food accurately; store chemical products and fuel separately and remotely. Studies from the field of neurochemistry demonstrate a link between the inability to smell and depression, although the causal direction of these symptoms remains unclear and is subject to further scientific investigation.

The use of face coverings, along with the closure of coffee shops and restaurants – all of which were necessary public health measures in response to the Covid-19 pandemic – meant that the stimulus of smell, like touch, was reduced and restricted. It may also be one of the contributing factors to the reported rise (by the ESRI) over the past year in symptoms of anxiety and low mood alongside an increase in the consumption of junk food. For those who are insensitive to smell or have a reduced ability to detect odours (hyposmia), Joel D. Mainland, et al (2002), examined how the olfactory sense can be strengthened or regained. Test results showed that exposure to strong-smelling substances (such as the steroid androstenone, which was used in this particular experiment) for ten minutes a day for 21 days improved the ability to detect odour.

Sense of smell enriches lives

Examination of the data showed that changes occurred at a cognitive level in the olfactory system rather than in the nose, suggesting that regular and mindful exposure to smells may enhance cognition, or prevent/delay its decline. Molly Birnbaum did eventually recover her sense of smell, which she believes was due to her dedicated practice of inhaling fragrances at every available opportunity. She continues to work on regaining memories that are associated with the scents that were familiar to her, both in her childhood and adult life.

Our enjoyment, knowledge and sense of each other and the world is experienced through the senses. Cultural and societal behaviour place intrinsic value on the sense of sight (digitalisation, movies, books), sound (radio, podcasts, music), taste (intercultural cuisine) and touch (hugs, handshakes, massage). The olfactory sense has received less public attention and scientific investigation, yet we now know that turning on and turning up our sense of smell enriches our lives in every sense.

Kathleen lives in a little village outside Thurles in Co Tipperary. She retired from working as a visiting teacher for children with vision impairment in 2019. Kathleen is currently involved in data collection and research for the Children's School Lives Project, which operates out of UCD.

Urbi et orbi

To the city and the world

It was Christmas – or maybe, Easter –
when the National broadcaster
beamed Paul Montini into our kitchen.
We knelt with our mother for his blessing
in front of the new television.

Our father stilled the rolling of the screen
while we waited – the red linoleum
soft under our knees, the cold
of the old floor blocked by cork underlay –
praying for the static snow to settle,
the Vatican balcony to appear
and the third pontiff of my life so far
to raise his hand and chant the holy words.

Father marvelled that a blessing could travel
from Rome to Ballask on waves of electricity
but we silenced his doubts, assured him of our faith
in flickering images and held our plastic rosaries
aloft – beads missing, crosses chewed – greedy
for the magic from a pope's right hand.

Baby Clothes

The first time I undressed the child
the stump of the cord withered
and dropped into my hand;

and the clothes she was delivered in
– the tiny vest with cream satin ribbons;
the pink babygro with a rabbit motif –

I swaddled them in the candlewick wrap,
tucked them in a box to be stowed away,
ready for the day you would come to claim her.

So, on that raw March night
when you hammered on our door
as if your very life depended on it,
I was not surprised that my daughter's eyes
looked at me from your tear-swollen face.

She heard the commotion and tore downstairs
– my daughter – your baby.
I watched as you faced each other
before she took fright and fled.

All I could do was offer you the bundle
I had kept safe for nineteen years;

You pressed her baby-clothes to your face,
and I held you there on our hearth,
as torrents of grief flooded our house.

Phantom

The time we brought you home –
that first night when you woke
in the small hours and refused
the teat of your brand new bottle,
clamping your mouth shut only
to open it to wail inconsolably –
I was sorely tempted to hold you
to my breast but feared you would
pull away and search the shadows
for a glimpse of her ghost.

The next night was little better –
the crying woke the house
and we moved from room to room,
I rocked and sang and kissed,
cajoled, then wept along with you –
I thought you might have sensed
that a hundred miles away,
a young woman – in a single bed,
in a single room – breasts bound,
her bleeding staunched,
nursed her phantom child.

Anointed

i.m. of Eavan Boland

She schooled us well in all there was to know:
how to measure, parse, recite, memorize;
how to bear witness under duress and –
in the unlikely event of a miracle –
how to greet and welcome a bishop.

When the unimaginable came to pass
we formed a circle on the cement yard;
our visitor extended a gracious hand
to our nun and we watched her black serge skirt
fly up to catch the air, parachute
to a crinoline as she sank to her knees,
my Lord on her lips, her poor face purple.

She struggled to her feet, regained her balance.
I stood breathless, trembling in the knowledge
that my homemade skirt would not disguise
a clumsy curtsy should I be asked to genuflect.

But none of us was called upon to speak
or demonstrate obeisance to The Anointed.
Before he left, we cheered his parting gift –
a holiday at the nun's discretion
and, of course, his episcopal blessing.

So I knew what I was doing last September,
when readings and recitations were over,
I dropped to my knees in front of the poet.
I didn't dare to kiss her hand or touch
the hem of her sensible garment.

Dress 1979

The blue summer dress,
purchased in haste –
nine-ninety nine in A-Wear –
was woven entirely from viscose
with an elasticated waist
that facilitated the swelling belly;
gentle gathers at shoulder level
drew the eye from the ripening breasts
and the skirt skimmed the hips.
A pattern of scattered red pencils
made the priest smile when I walked to the altar.

Morning sickness struck directly after the vows
and the floor came towards me.

I remember some embarrassed laughter
when my new mother-in-law fetched water
from the sacristy and held it to my lips,
her steadying arm around my waist.
I didn't care much then.
I care now.

I care that I broke their hearts,
that, all those years ago, I made my mother cry
and my father may have cried too
as he shook his head because, even with a degree
under my belt, I was as foolish as the ones
who gave it all away for nothing and tried
to cover their tracks with corsets
that pinched and squeezed under wedding dresses.

The dress hangs in my wardrobe –
I check it every now and then –
the waist sags slightly,
the hem has been adjusted
to accommodate changing fashions
but the blue holds fast to its man-made fibres
and the interfacing still supports the collar.

At that time

After Seamus Heaney

Hair henna-burnished almost to a halo
and pulse-points anointed with patchouli,
I put on my gypsy dress and second-hand
petticoat for that end-of-time celebration
at the poet's house by a famous strand.

In his front-room lit by sun on water,
I sit on the couch, back to the bay-window,
my memory charged to hold and keep this day,
collect and store the scraps of talk and laughter
to share tomorrow in my mother's kitchen.

A bogman's peat-brown head – serene in bronze –
presides as afternoon tea is laid out on the table
bought in the convent auction. Our host reveals
the concealed cutlery drawer while the McGarrigles
spin out old songs of regret on the record player.

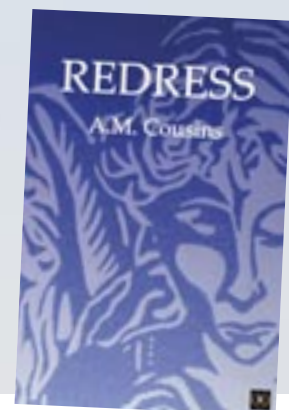
The poet's wife tends us with platters, glasses –
an abundance of kindness – as we sit cross-legged
on her rug under banners of cigarette smoke
and a professor sings *Sweet Thames flow softly*.
We join in and ruin his *rallentando*.

In later years when photos surface,
I search for myself at the poet's side.
All his students are accounted for –
the girl on the couch, her face blurred
on instamatic paper, is someone else.

The last photo: a jumble of women,
young faces warm in the rose-gold sunset,
surround the poet. I am tempted – nearly
convinced – to claim the foot, sandaled, framed
in old lace, on the margin of that goodbye.

Anne graduated from Carysfort with a B.Ed in 1978 and taught in Bayside SNS before moving back to Wexford to teach in Kilmore NS. She completed an M. Ed in 2008 and shortly afterwards moved to Kilrane NS.

Anne is also a graduate of the MA (Creative Writing) course in UCD, and her award winning poetry has been widely published. Her first collection of poems, REDRESS was published by Revival Press in March 2021.



De La Salle, Waterford

New Book on De La Salle Teacher Training College

It is probably true to say that many people living in Waterford today, and who regularly pass the De La Salle College building in Newtown, do not know there was a thriving third-level institution in the city for 48 years, and that over 50% of male primary school teachers from all over Ireland were trained there before 1939. A new book, *De La Salle Teacher Training College Waterford 1891 to 1939*, outlines the history of the college, from its opening in 1891 to its closure in 1939. The 282-page book covers many aspects of the

training college development, mostly based on primary source material including letters, documents and handwritten accounts held in the De La Salle archives in Waterford and Castletown.

De La Salle Teacher Training College Waterford 1891 to 1939, by Fergus Dunne (Creative Print and Design Wexford, €15). On sale instore and online at The Book Centre, Barronstrand Street, Waterford www.thebookcentre.ie For further details, phone 051-873823 or email website@thebookcentre.ie





View from
abandoned
schoolhouse,
Inishark,
Co. Galway



Comhnasc Crossword 32

A draw for 3 prizes of €100 will be made from all correct entries. Simply complete the crossword and send to: *Comhnasc*, R.T.A.I., Vere Foster House, 35 Parnell Square, Dublin 1, by 30 September 2021.

1		2		3		4		5	6		7		8
							9						
10					11								
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27							28						

- Across**
- 1 Sounds higher than it should be. Is it genuine? (8)
 - 5 Finally landed (6)
 - 10 The best thing on the cake? (5)
 - 11 A hormonal medication (9)
 - 12 All that is left (9)
 - 13 Old gold (5)
 - 14 Irritation (6)
 - 15 Energetic (7)
 - 18 Overdo praise (7)
 - 20 Spiteful persons (6)
 - 22 Is this a singer or an insect attack? (5)
 - 24 No delay here (4,1,4)
 - 25 We have all served long in this field (9)
 - 26 Down at heel on the hike (5)
 - 27 One who may be in 'transformation' (6)
 - 28 A pseudonym used for computing (8)
- Down**
- 1 An abode for monks (6)
 - 2 A recurring theme in the arts (9)
 - 3 The vernacular (7,8)
 - 4 The basic ploys of strategists (7)
 - 6 Cover for small wounds (8,7)
 - 7 Architectural design that is definitely not mouldy (5)
 - 8 Doing it with style (8)
 - 9 Frosty (6)
 - 16 Drug of choice in the swinging sixties (9)
 - 17 What does an ASI device measure? (8)
 - 19 Not something allowed to 27 across (6)
 - 20 Scandinavian marauders (7)
 - 21 Sounds like where you might go in Ukraine for a 26 across (6)
 - 23 Put up with it (5)

Scribble Pad

Name: _____

Address: _____

I	N	J	U	R	E	D		M	O	T	I	V	E	S
C	E	A	I	O	O	O	C							
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D	E	O	A	A	E	K	E							
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E	E	R	R		G	E	A	N						
E	A	R	A	C	H	E	Y	U	L	E	L	O	G	

Winners of Crossword No. 31

The three winners are:

Sr Leo O'Reilly, Tubbercurry, Co. Sligo

Séamus Hennigan, Mallow, Co. Cork

Brid Ní Dhochartaigh, Bailieborough, Co. Cavan

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Crossword to be completed and submitted to marketing@intocreditunion.ie or to Comhar Linn CU, 33 Parnell Square, Dublin 1.

Deadline for entries is Friday 1st of October.

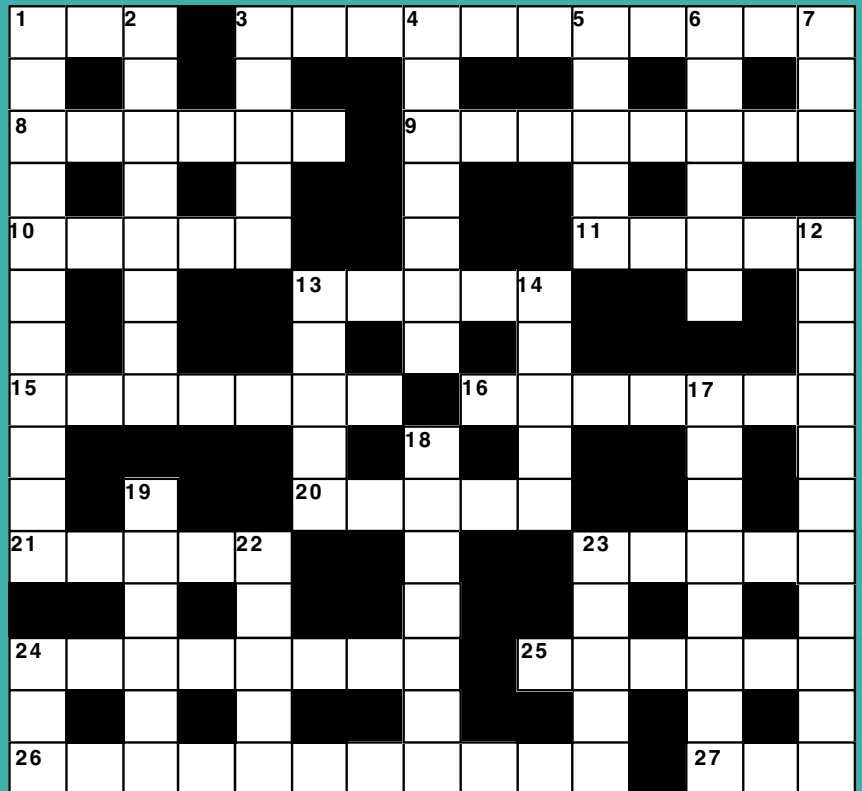
Across

1. Post-WW2 child - called Joey? (4,6)
6. Note, the chap is pleased. (4)
10. Playwright Arthur drops a novice for a middle-distance runner. (5)
11. Stop denying what's obvious - one, it has a nose and two, it has cheeks! (4,5)
12. Condiment seen as tales get rewritten. (3,4)
15. Ale is spilt here in church. (5)
17. A hot sailor makes a fictional whaler. (4)
18. It follows one of the French in a singular way. (4)
19. This flower loves using potassium in nutrients at first. (5)
21. A taxi bisecting a horse? How gruesome! (7)
23. Headgear appropriate when I enter the home of the High Kings. (5)
24. Put a ring around a mischievous expression. (4)
25. The record is kept in the Washington area. (4)
26. It will serve to give a chap an article from France. (5)
- 28 & 32d. One can access different services here at one's uppermost emporium. (3-4,4)
33. 'An amphibian in front of the Casablanca bar'? As old dogs will never learn! (3,6)
- 34 & 35. A character from Dickens distressed I hear? Eh up! (5,4)
36. Use this to clean and preserve leather, as Dad lopes around. (6,4)

Down

1. Swelling blister, under mounting pressure to begin with. (4)
2. Classical dancer? Put 'er in a Mayo town. (9)
3. I leave Scots youngsters in farm buildings. (5)
4. Most of the Faithful County will supply innards. (5)
5. Engrave part of a stretcher. (4)
7. Stiffens a drink that's off the scale. (5)
8. Nice grinds, reimagined in tasteful style. (10)
9. A loud story? Charming. (7)
13. Is it sung as Ms Callas loses the head? (4)
- 14 & 30d. Peppery condiment that might be as cute as a cob. (7,5)
16. Midday meal al fresco - how crazy is that? (3,2,5)
20. That's a strange option for this Italian resort of the rich and famous! (9)
21. How one might admire a sponge cake. (7)
22. The flower of pink wine? (4)
27. Use a willow rod in part of a window seat. (5)
29. Pried into one's offspring's turning up, being above the editor. (5)
30. See 14 down.
31. Account to California for creating what gives some accountants accreditation. (1.1.1.1.1.)
32. See 28 across.

Prize: €150 Dunnes Stores Voucher
Winner of RTAI No. 4: Patrick Mongan



RTAI NO. 4 APRIL 2021 SOLUTION

Across

1. Gap 3. Substandard 8. Brewer 9. Elegance 10. E-mail 11. Thigh 13. Maths
15. Narwhal 16. Menthol 21. Where 23. Child 24. Waterloo 25. Borzoi
26. Top priority 27. Roe

Down

1. Gable window 2. Predator 3. Shell 4. Stealth 5. Night 6. Aeneid 7. Due
12. Hollandaise sauce 13. Means 14. Suede 17. Howitzer 18. Put your feet up
22. Error 23. Crony 24. Wet

Crossword by Gordius