



# THE Archive FREE

---

## Journal of The Northside Folklore Project

The Northside Folklore Project is a joint initiative of Northside Community Enterprises Ltd and the Centre for Folklore and Ethnology at NUI, Cork, this project works to record the folklore and folklife of the Northside communities of Cork city. Through its involvement with community groups and its retraining of research assistants on a Fas pilot community employment scheme, both groups involved in the initiative have worked to develop the folklore collection process in an urban context and with the inclusion of minority groups.

Research is carried out on ten sub projects at present, reflecting the broad scope of the initiative. These include the harrier tradition, traveller's traditions, fashions of the past and present, the textile industry, Blackpool during the Emergency, calendar customs of Farranree, schools folklore, the showband tradition, life in the prison service and scouting traditions of the Northside.

One of the projects main aims is to document the native tradition within these key areas so that a record remains of life in a Northside community during the latter half of the 20th century. Research assistants receive advanced communications and ethnology training so they can compile lists of suitable topics before embarking on the field work phase of the initiative. During this stage, interviews are conducted with native Northside people and aspects of their traditions and life histories are recorded. The results of these interviews are transcribed, indexed and archived in what has become a pilot community archive at NCE Ltd, Millfield. It is perhaps worthy of note that six of the researchers currently working on the project are native Northsiders.

The Northside Folklore Project has a steering committee comprising of members of Blackpool and Mayfield Historical Societies as well as management of NCE Ltd and the staff of the Centre for Folklore and Ethnology at The National University of Ireland, Cork.

The project aims to continue with community archiving at Millfield and a professional archivist works to train research assistants in archival techniques. Included in the archive are comprehensive library and reading facilities which provide free access to newspapers, books and CD ROM. A recent grant from The Heritage Council has facilitated the purchase of important laser scanning and word processing equipment which will see the archive being computerised over the next six months. Local researchers are welcome at the archive and the library and newspapers are also available to the public.

This journal represents some of the proceeds of our first years work on The Northside Folklore Project. Researchers wrote an account of their main topics of research during the year and summarised them for the journal. In this and in future issues, we hope to keep the communities whose folklore we collect and archive, informed about the work of the project and involved in our research.

**Donal Sugrue**

*Stiúrthóir 04/11/97*



FÁS Funded Project

AN  
COMHAIRLE  
OIDHREACHT



Supported  
by  
THE  
HERITAGE  
COUNCIL



# The Dixies a Northside Showband

A celebratory appearance by a re-assembled **by Stephen Hunter**

line-up of Cork showband the Dixies at the Arcadia Ballroom, Lower Glanmire Road, on Easter Sunday, 1997, was a resounding success. That a group with its origins in the mid-1950s should still attract an audience of hundreds is testimony to its enduring appeal. It all began with weekly Trad Jazz sessions at the Shandon Boat Club. The original core of Sean Lucey (leader and clarinet), Theo Cahill (trombone) and zany drummer Joe McCarthy was soon augmented by Larry Neville (trumpet) and Mick Murphy (piano). In the late '50s Jimmy Mintem (singer/saxophone), Christie O'Mahony (bass), Finbarr O'Leary (keyboards), Steve Lynch



(guitar) and John Sheehan (trumpet) arrived. (Personnel changes have been simplified). Becoming fully professional in 1961 the band added Brendan O'Brien as lead vocalist. Virtually all these players were Northsiders, mostly educated at the Christian Brothers' North Monastery School. Several had come to music through the Butter Exchange Band. Innovative promoter and Arcadia manager Peter Prendergast was pivotal to much of their success.

With the first great blossoming of the mid-to-late '60s came No.1 hit recordings, sell-out concerts (4,300 punters jammed into the Arc' one St. Stephen's Night; bill-topping at New York's Carnegie Hall), triumphal

returns to Cork, an audience with Pope Paul VI, stints in Las Vegas. Then an amicable break-up in 1972. Reforming in 1982 the band enjoyed a remarkable resurgence, with landmark tours of the Arabian Gulf. O'Brien's near fatal 1974 encounter with a live microphone on-stage at the Stardust Ballroom (on Grand Parade, now the Waterside Hotel) and his exhausting legal battles for compensation have passed



into popular history. Relative "youngster" (born 1948) Terry McCarthy has mostly filled the lead vocal spot since 1985. The music, rooted in Trad Jazz, Pop and Rock classics from the '50s to the '90s, has perennial attractions, not the least of which is a versatile and exuberant hornsection.

I wanted to retrieve something of the spirit of this era's late '50s to early '70s glory days before it faded from general remembrance. "Examiner" journalist Vincent Power's admirable book "Send 'Em Home Sweating" was a good startingpoint. I interviewed past and present Dixies, promoters, members of the dancing public. Vintage copies of "Spotlight" (a 1960s magazine) yielded a wealth of information on clothing and hairstyles.

Most men wore dark suits to dances, sharply-cut with narrow trouser legs, lighter-hued shirts. Pointed "winkle-picker" shoes, later "Beatle" and "Chelsea" boots. Hair heavily oiled and slicked down, dragged around the sides of the head to meet in the "duck's arse" style. During the '60s these tended to give place to flared trousers and longer hair with an un-oiled "natural" look. Womens' styles included "A-line"



dresses ending above the knee, with a cardigan or jacket of contrasting colour. Footwear was usually practical for dancing - sturdy "court-heels" on "slingback" shoes. Great care went into the preparation of bouffant-type "beehive" hairstyles, with the hair piled on top of the head. Short-strapped handbags; a string of pearls worn around the neck and an accompanying "twinset" of earrings

and a bracelet.

Before television became ubiquitous, the dances offered young people a window onto a wider and more sophisticated world. When Brendan O'Brien sang Buddy Holly songs or the Waterford-based Brendan Bowyer (Royal Showband) gyrated in imitation of Elvis the identities of these local heroes became fused with those of distant, fabled stars. Denunciations of this "devil's music" from some priestly pulpits only increased its allure for the young. Obliging, the horned-one himself made some cameo appearances at a number of halls, generating something of a minor wave of hysteria.

A story from the Arcadia has many variants. A young woman dancing with a handsome stranger dropped her shawl onto the floor. Stooping to retrieve it she was horrified to discover that her partner possessed cloven hooves instead of human feet. She ran screaming from the hall, the sinister beau vanishing in the confusion.

Less frivolously, I have had accounts from credible witnesses concerning strange phenomena in the same building, the "Blue Room" (often used for practice sessions) in particular. An uneasy atmosphere, intense cold, sudden untraceable gusts of wind. Some musicians would not play there after midnight. One

night the proprietor was working alone, all doors and windows locked. From above the stage he saw an unknown man walk across the dance-floor. He called out, ran to investigate, but found no one. Whatever the explanations, these reports are fascinating additions to the corpus of tales of the unexplained that attaches itself to theatres and auditoria.

But most patrons were bent on pleasures of a palpably physical kind, (albeit relatively innocent by 1990s standards). The ambitious policies of Taoiseach Sean Lemass encouraged an unprecedented wave of economic expansion. Workers from building sites and factories such as Ford's and the Sunbeam Mills, paypackets often swollen with shift allowances and overtime payments, eagerly awaited the weekend. A sea-change was taking place in Irish society as courting rituals changed and sexual mores gradually liberalised. People were coming to terms with a difficult legacy of poverty and emigration, foreign domination, civil war and the birthpangs of the new state. They felt that a good time was long overdue and showbands such as the Dixies were there to help provide it. Throughout the '60s the Dixies and other bands made a regular exodus to the U.K. to find work during Lent because Irish halls were closed for the period. This state of affairs was not destined to last much longer. For better or worse, a shift was being effected from a traditional agriculturally-based world with its slower rhythms and conservative customs to a modern internationalist ethos.

At its peak the showband boom provided employment directly to some 12,000 people. The bubble burst in the early '70s, brought on by a whole complex of social changes. People wanted more comfort than the big halls provided (most had been unlicensed to sell alcohol, the "minerals bar" being a fixture). The rise of discotheques, more intimate lounges and smaller guitar-based bands (most showbands had six to ten members) all played their part. The greed and short-sightedness of some hall-owners and musicians contributed, as did television. The Dixies, in various incarnations, still perform in pub lounges such as Blackpool's Bridge Inn or Mayfield's Cotton Ball, and look poised to play on into the next Millennium. Their achievement as contributors to popular culture is secure. A generous entry in the Guinness Encyclopedia of Popular Music, falling between 1980s Australian avant-garde rockers the Divinyls and Black American blues great Willie Dixon, provides ample

## The Northside Folklore Project



Open Monday to Friday - 9am to 5pm -  
Large Selection of Books - Modern and Classical

*~ open to the public - everybody welcome ~*

# Draghunting

By  
Caroline Cronin, 1997

It is said that if you take a stroll on any piece of open land on the Northside of Cork City in the early morning or evening you will see someone walking a hound. This

area supports a proud harrier tradition which appears to have originated as a response of the poorer people to the more "glamorous" mounted hunts associated with the landed gentry from the 17th. Century onwards. The dogs are used for chasing foxes and hares in winter and for summer drag-hunts.

English breeds (particularly from Cumbria) are increasingly used in the drag because they are faster: "English dogs and Irish dogs...there's no comparison. English dogs just run away from them, you know." (Michael John Buckley, Clogheen Harrier Club). But the reputation of the Irish dogs remains high. The Kerry Beagle is a fine beast that stands over twenty inches at the shoulder. Said to be descended from animals that swam ashore from a wrecked ship of the Spanish Armada in 1588, the first record of a pack dates from 1798, Scarteen, Co. Kerry.

Drag-hunts are the culmination of much hard work on the part of the clubs involved. Dogs are exercised, trained and dieted for weeks. The course is surveyed, permission sought from landowners where necessary. The area is walked afterwards and inspected to ensure that everything is in place and any damage rectified. On the big day an artificial scent is laid by runners. A typical course is 6 to 12 miles long, with

the first animal over the line the winner. Traditionally the finish was a tense, silent affair, with the animals racing towards a boundary that consisted of a ditch. In the last year this has been replaced by a simple finish-line and the occasion is now festive with crowds of onlookers whooping and shouting as the dogs approach. Family groups and friends enjoy themselves on these days, with women playing an important role throughout.

The first drag was probably held at the beginning of the 20th. Century. A whole mythology has grown up around the hounds and their exploits. The sound of harriers baying is known as "music". A famous dog which ran drags from 1921 to 1926 was Ringwood, better known as "The Armoured Car". This celebrated animal had immense stamina,

great pace, a mellow "tongue" and was bred by Connie Doyle, of the Northern Harriers, Fairhill:

*"When outshone the evening star*

*Who was running out in front*

*And he leading the hunt?*

*It was Doyle's Armoured Car!"*

Fox hunting is as strong as ever and there is no doubt that the drag will continue to be popular, with a number of well-

supported clubs north of the River Lee. The Kerry Pike Harrier Club (established 1823) is one of the oldest in the country. The very active Fairhill Harrier Club was founded in 1893. The Northern Hunt meets once a month in Johnnie's Bar, Wolfe Tone Street. Northern United was inaugurated in 1924. Beamish and Crawford began sponsoring the All-Ireland Drag in 1928. United later won it three years in succession, securing ownership of a fine silver trophy. Sponsorship of the All-Ireland has shifted to Murphy's Brewery, while Guinness support another prestige event, the International Draghunt.



*Connie Doyle*

# Scouting on The Northside

By Michael Hennessey, 1997

officer with the C.B.S.I. (Catholic Boy Scouts of Ireland), who outlined the history of the Scout Shop (opened 1970) on MacCurtain Street, Cork. Mr. John Gaffney, a troop leader of the North Cathedral Unit (10th. Cork Troop) when I was in it, recalled the two trips the unit made to England. One was to Gilwell Park, London home of international Scouting, where the movement's founder, Lord Baden Powell, had his headquarters. A frequent excursion was "down the harbour" to Spike Island, where we would play soccer and visit the barracks and former military prison. On one occasion my brother Christopher (also in 10th. Cork Troop) sat down in a cell that had once housed a prisoner named Mitchell. He felt a strong sense of presence, as if Mitchell were still there. I have never seen him jump up so quickly in his life!

The times I spent in the Scouts were among the most rewarding in my life. I had some great trips away, learnt many practical skills and formed some enduring friendships. When I began the Scouting Project I called on Mr. Jim Goulding, a development



Most camping trips took place in August. A visit to Cahirciveen saw us camped in a field outside the town. One night we were chased by somebody or something for about a mile up a country road. On these expeditions we used to carry Icelandic tents, wood for "gadgets" ("altar-fires"-used for cooking) and other gear the best part of a mile, set up camp before dark, then get back down to a meeting-place for supper. Friday night was meeting-night. On Saturday mornings we would do "test work", when merit badges were awarded for proficiency in various skills -e.g. knot-tying, cooking, swimming and life-saving. Knots included reef-knots, bow-line knot (used for securing boats), slip-knot (for tying two pieces of wood together) and "square-lashing"-employed to build the gadgets.

My last trip was to Carrignavar, Co. Cork. Here we played games such as "Capture the flag" and "Mummies". The leaders, swathed in toilet paper, would pose as "two mummies escaped from the museum". The troop had a designated time to catch them by; the mummies would shed some "skin" to give the pursuers a trail to follow.

A personal high point came in 1982 when I was presented with the "Scout of the Year Award" by Mr. Jim Cashman, the hurler. A great friend of mine was Neville Sheehan, one of six brothers who shared a fine sense of humour. He also had plenty of courage. En route to a troop meeting he and another lad (Joe Buckley) ran into a blazing building and rescued two small children from a house-fire. The pair were awarded the City's third-highest

decoration for bravery, a bronze medal. Neville passed away in 1994, loved and sadly missed by all his family and friends. He exemplified all that is best in the Scouting tradition.

# Northside Fashions

By Lorraine Cahalane

I began my fashion project in February 1997. This is such a broad topic that I soon realised that I could hardly hope to cover everything relevant to it. Fashion is everywhere, from modelling catwalks, glossy magazines and television to the gear and accessories of hobby and sports enthusiasts -e.g. anglers and devotees of major Soccer clubs such as Manchester United.

My first interview was with a 14 year-old Mayfield girl. We discussed teenagers and fashion, disco-wear and the cost of clothes. Some shops and garments are "in" for teenagers, others definitely aren't.

Q: "What sort of jeans would you go for?"

A: "I would only wear Levis or Wranglers because when you're younger it don't make a difference what kind of jeans you wear, but when you're a teenager it's un-cool to wear things that aren't Levis; you know, with the brand-name."

A 65 year-old woman described customs associated with clothing in the 1930s.

Q: "Were there special times of the year for getting new clothes?"

A: "Yeah, there was Christmas and Easter, yeah."

Q: "Were they worn going to Mass first?"

A: "Oh yeah, we wore them first as Sunday

clothes, as they called them. After a while we wore them when we came home from school and that kind of thing."

A vibrant folklore still surrounds childrens' First Holy Communion and Confirmation, even in this secularised age. There is a healthy industry supported by the manufacture and sale of clothing for the big event, photographs of it, and other related matters such as catering for meals for extended family groups who make the occasion a day to be remembered. Girls are dressed all in white-shoes, stockings, dress and veil, while boys sport black shoes, "formal" trousers and a variety of jackets-often a school blazer with a white sash. Outfits are expensive; perhaps £100 for a boy's First Communion, nearer £200 for a girl. Nowadays clothes are rarely handed down from older to younger siblings-it would not be "their" special day if they were!

Shoe-fashions of the 1970s were described to me by a 41 year-old woman who has worked in four Cork boutiques: "Platforms and espadrilles; high leather boots that reached above the knee, we used to wear them with hot-pants. Very high platforms of the Gary Glitter type that are out now."

A 23 year-old Mayfield woman who is getting married in October told me of her wedding preparations. I photo-



graphed her in her wedding dress.

**Q:** "Do you believe in any superstitions relating to weddings? That it is unlucky if it rains or if you drop the rings or break a glass or cup?"

**A:** "No, I don't believe in any of that. If I believed in that kind of superstition I wouldn't be having green brides-maids' dresses because they're supposed to be unlucky as well. I don't believe in it at all, no."

A good example of Northside women inventing (or reinventing) a fashion trend is a hairstyle known as "the bubble". It is not seen so often now, but a year or two ago it was all the rage in Cork with girls and young women who had long hair. The effect is achieved by combing back hair from the forehead and the sides of the face and then gathering it into a high ponytail on the crown of the head. It is tied with "scrunchies"-coloured elasticated circles of material. The remaining length of hair is left to flow loose at the back. From a folkloric point of view it is interesting that some girls on the Northside actually claim to have to have originated or rediscovered the style, and that young women in other areas like the Southside later adopted it in imitation.



# Schools

By *Conor Kennelly*

The schools project began in November 1996 with the twin objectives of asking children to collect local folklore and recording their own folklore. The Schools Commission of the 1930s undertook similar tasks, but its scope was virtually confined to rural areas, urban culture being then consistently undervalued. Attitudes have changed and anyway a much larger proportion of the population now lives in an urban environment. My topics included love and marriage, calendar festivals and childrens' games. Folklore is something that is constantly being changed and modified. Some traditional calendar customs in Cork have not died out. Other examples demonstrate the continuing ability of children to invent and create.

The method of interviewing and collecting is straight-forward. A Walkman cassette-recorder is used to log the interviews and on some occasions photographs are taken to archive the material culture. The children generally are not reticent about being questioned. I talked with a group of fifth-class boys in a Northside school about various topics - Santa Claus, customs still obtaining at Christmas-time in some Northside households and love and marriage.

## Origins of Santa:

**Tony :** "There was a fella over in Italy sir, he was a priest and wealthy people used to give him presents and all the poor people, he used to go around and he used to put presents in their letterbox and when he died, God let him go back every year sir."

## Santa's Attire:

**Daniel :** "Santa, this is what I heard, that he got his red and white jacket by this French person that made up his jacket by material, I forget his name, but his second name was Rancho, something C. Rancho."

## Christmas Customs:

**Colin :** "People light a light on Christmas because there was a man who went to sea at night-time and one day there was a storm and if back then anyone wanted someone to come back they would light a candle and when the fella went out to sea they all lit a candle for the man because he was trapped and he couldn't get in."

**Daniel :** "Up in my Nan's house from Knocknaheeny Father Crowley comes up every year with a can with a Hail Mary on



it, and he lights a candle for my Nan right by her bedroom window and he goes around sprinkling the water all over the house.”

#### Love and Marriage:

**Kevin :** “Well, if you break up it’s like diving into a river or something.”

**Daniel :** “Some people say like you’re a fool to get married, but like if you’re sick like you’ll have someone to take care of you.”

*I spent some productive time at two girls’ schools (of a similar age and working-class background to the boys) discussing commonly-used terms and games and associated rhymes.*

#### Some Colloquialisms:

The term “conjent box” (a box for savings) persists, as does “anking” (to hide something). Both these were passed on by parents. Others have a more recent provenance.

**Deirdre :** “ ‘Feen’ is what we call a boy here in Cork and we call a girl a ‘beurr’.”

**Connor :** “Have these words come in recently?”

**Deirdre :** “Well, it’s there for only a couple of years now. Children use it, and teenagers.”

#### The Fifty:

**Vicky :** “Like if a boy asked you out and you never turned up, that’s ‘a fifty’.”

#### A Mog:

**Catherine :** “A mog is a word like you’re stupid. If you’re mad you’d go, ‘Go way, you mog’.”

#### Ecce:

**Deirdre :** “Ecce is homework. If you’re going home now you’d say ‘I have to do a load of ecce’. I don’t know why they call it ‘ecce’.”

#### Games and Rhymes:

**Stephanie :** “Under the bambushes, under the tree  
Bum, bum, bum,

True love for my darling, true love for me  
To raise a family  
A boy for you and a girl for me...”

There is an implication here that even at an early age girls still see marriage and the nuclear family as the ideal.

**Mary :** “ It’s a game and you throw the ball up against the wall and there’s a rhyme:”

“Bounce me,clappy  
Bounce the ball to backy  
First my heel, then my throw?  
Bounce the ball and under we go.”

The schools project has great potential for development. I have hardly touched on folk tales and legends. The collection process must be a two-way one. It can raise the self-esteem of the children when they realise that what they say and do has value; something that the conventional educational system doesn’t always achieve. It is our aim to expand the project next year. I hope that the reader will have found this to be a worthwhile topic.

---

# The Travelling Community

*By Catherine Fray*

In November 1996 I decided to do a project on the Travelling Community living on the Northside of Cork City. I interviewed a travelling family, the Quilligans, from Rathpeacon Road, Farranree. Mary Quilligan, mother of the family, told me of the FÁS-sponsored Saint Finbarr’s Training Centre in Brocklesby Street, Blackpool, where her two daughters were trainees. Breda O’Driscoll, a 21-year-old teacher’s aide there, proved to be an invaluable source of information about the Travelling People and their ways.

St. Finbarr’s was founded in 1981 by the Cork Committee of Travelling People. It helps young people to improve their education, often disrupted by moving about. Classes include literacy, numeracy, woodwork and metalwork. Domestic and cookery teacher Ms.Janice Hegener put trainees through a course where ten girls earned the “Cert” award,(equivalent to the Junior Certificate in secondary schools)- an impressive achievement by any standards. Other teachers are Mr. Den-

nis Ruddle, Mr. Tim O'Mullane and Ms. Janet Twomey. The youngsters are learning both practical skills and a new pride in their culture, which has roots deep in the history of the wider community of the Irish nation. Memories are being nurtured of a time when Traveller men would mend pots, pans and umbrellas in return for small payments to help sustain their families, while the women would make clothespins, prepare "swag" (decorative festoons composed of flowers and grasses), and tell fortunes. Some of us can remember the "rag and bone man" - he would come through the streets on his horse and cart and trade toys for old clothes. He has departed the scene. Many of the traditional ways of the Irish Travellers have disappeared before the onset of "Progress".

Social and economic changes of the last few decades have meant difficult readjustments for the Travelling Community. Forty years ago there was more scope for Traveller thinsmiths, working especially in tin and copper on a whole range of household and agricultural items. The proliferation of plastic products from the 1960s onwards virtually killed this indus-

try. Likewise, Traveller expertise with horses was previously valued at rural events such as the Puck Fair (Killorglin, Co. Kerry) and Cahirmee Horse Fair (Co. Cork). As many of these gatherings became less integral to country life due to the mechanisation of farming, the role for Travellers was also diminished.

With hard work and goodwill on all sides new opportunities will become available to the Traveling People, combining what is best in their traditional culture with the demands of the 21st. Century. I was privileged to meet one skilled Traveller tinsmith who is passing on his craft to his son, and hopefully, grandson. Many of the Travelling Community still undertake journeys to various parts of the country during the summer months, visiting relatives and friends and reaffirming important kinship and communal ties. I found them to be warm friendly people and I hope that the North-

side Folklore Project will continue to collect and archive their folklore as it deserves to be recorded as part of our history.



*Tinsmith John Hourigan at work*

## Urban Celebration at Halloween

Urban celebration of Hallowe'en, the night of October 31st., had in the 1940s a mainly religious theme. This festival has many names; "Oiche Shamhna", Hollantide, All Hallows' Eve, among others. It falls immediately before the major Christian feast of All Saints' Day, which is November 1st., adapted from the old Celtic "Samhain", the traditional first day of winter. And November 2nd. is also an important date in the Catholic calendar; All Souls' Day, when the faithful pray for the repose of the souls. It is not surprising that church ceremonies and visits to the graves of deceased family members were major features of the time.

My father was a devout Catholic of West Cork origin who was proud to continue cherished spiritual practices. Attendance at morning Mass, visits to cemeteries and evening devotions were mandatory. My mother was from a mixed-religion background, born and reared on the Northside of Cork City. Her attitude was broader and she always ensured that everyone enjoyed some semblance of the lighter side of the celebrations. In that era of post-World War II austerity any occasion of merriment was a welcome respite from the tedium of constant financial struggle.

I cannot recall playing "trick or treat", nor wearing masks or dressing up for Hallowe'en. The game of "snap-apple" was the night's chief amusement. ("Snap-Apple Night" is yet another colloquialism for All Saints' Eve). We - mother and seven children - gathered around a large dish of water from which each in turn would attempt blindfolded to retrieve an apple without the use of hands. In another version a stick was suspended horizontally by a string with an apple and a bar of soap hung from it' two ends. With the stick rotating the sightless participant would try to bite the fruit, onlookers attempting to provide the soap instead.

A big treat was "barm-brack", usually eaten at tea-time prior to the snap-apple games. The brack (loaf) was divided among the family, each piece containing a novelty item invested with it's own humorous symbolic significance. The ring meant that the recipient was next to be married, the stick that one would beat one's partner. The rag indicated that one would be dressed in rags. The bean foretold wealth, the pea poverty.

*By Billy McCarthy*





19th. Century Snap-Apple Night

To enhance the fun we would be joined by children from other families who might be without brothers or sisters to play with. Such a visitor was a lad who was the youngest (by quite a few years) of four brothers. His junior position in the family gave him a distinct advantage at Christmas and birthdays, when he received all manner of fabulous toys. He came to our house complete with Meccano set, chemistry set or electric trains to sustain the festivities far into the night. A far cry from the high-tech diversions of the present day, but a huge event in the lives of children for whom opportunities for commercial entertainment were greatly circumscribed by the monetary restrictions of the period.

## Churches, Mills and other Matters

By Stephen Hunter

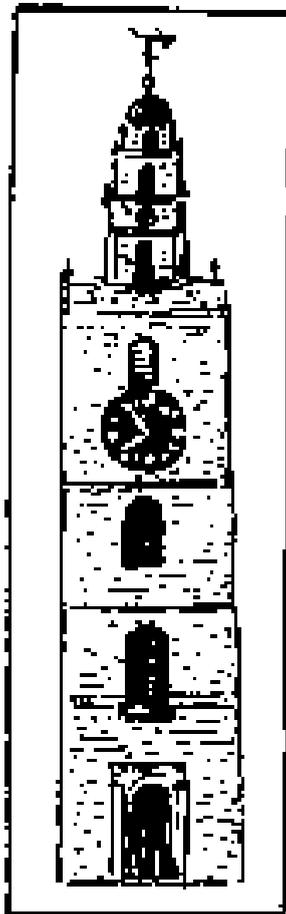
In any urban area there are usually a number of prominent buildings which serve local people as important physical and emotional landmarks. Such structures often tend to occupy a central place in a community's folklore, especially when they have been established for several or more generations. As well as any obvious intrinsic functions which might make them notable (as in hospitals, prisons or schools), the more striking ones seem to take on personalities of their own, and become part of the mental map which residents carry around with them, often long after they have left their "home" area. These buildings witness our comings and goings, joys and sorrows, failures and successes and (if they can avoid the barbarism of the demolishers), provide us with a kind of continuity. In Northside Cork, a number of constructions play this role, two are probably pre-eminent.

Firstly, there is the 120ft. two-tone limestone and sandstone tower of St. Anne's Shandon (Church of Ireland), "the Pepperpot". Because it has four clock faces that never seem to tell exactly the same time it is also known as "the Four-Faced Liar". Standing prominently on Shandon Hill, it was built during the 1720s, with the bells being installed in 1752. It is the subject of Father Prout's celebrated 19th. Century song "The Bells of Shandon" and arguably Cork's most famous symbol. The thirteen-foot metal salmon which sits on top of the tower has obvious connections with the River Lee, long a source of food and wealth for the settlement's population. There are also associations with the Salmon of Knowledge, a common motif in Celtic mythology.

Nearby rises the somewhat chunky yet still pleasing shape of the Roman Catholic "North Cathedral" of St Mary and St. Anne's. It was partially designed by G.R.Pain after 1820, with the tower added by Sir John Benson in

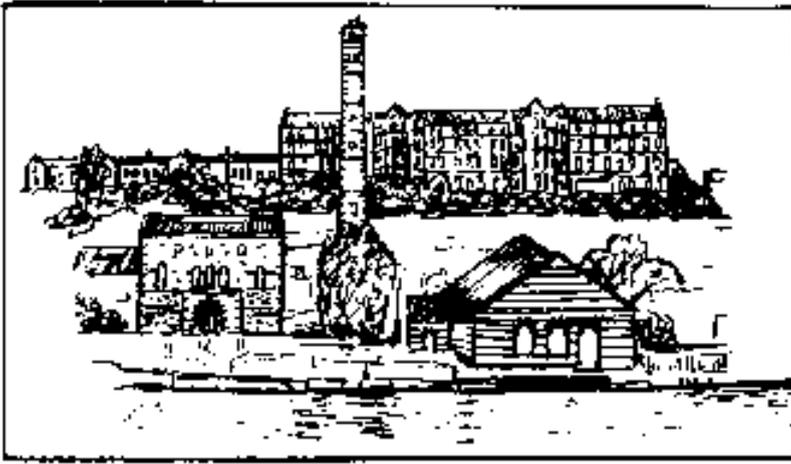
1860.

Both of these piles can be seen from a wide variety of locations, not only on the Northside, but on the Middle Parish and Southside as well. Like old friends their towers appear suddenly before us, it may be glimpsed unexpectedly from the entrance to an alley in the city, framed by walls on either side; or more distantly, their outlines descried from a ridge in some southern suburb.



These churches represent the two major religious denominations in the city. St. Anne's Shandon was historically identified with the influential Anglo-Irish part of our country's heritage. The massive shape of the North Cathedral is redolent of what was in the mid-19th. Century a newly-liberated and confident Catholicism, the confession of the large majority of the people. Both houses of worship have seen years of marriages, baptisms and funerals, and it is from the North Cathedral that large crowds of communicants depart annually to take part in the joyful pageantry of the Corpus Christi procession on the last Sunday of May or first one of June.

Now the two buildings and their respective creeds seem to complement one another in a friendly partnership rather than to compete in rivalry. But it is worth noting one tradition concerning the Protestant church that must have expressed a sense of wish-



Pope's Quay; Bruce College, Patrick's Hill; Metropole Hotel, MacCurtain St.; Trinity Presbyterian Church, Summerhill North; St. Patrick's Church, Lwr. Glanmire Rd.; St. Patrick's Hospital, Wellington Rd.; Collins Barracks, Old Youghal; Church of Ireland church, St. Lukes; Silver Springs Hotel, Tivoli; and a number of former mansions or "big houses" of the Montenotte and Tivoli areas such as Fort William House and Lotamore. I have not listed modern sports clubs, shopping-complexes or communications towers, all central to contemporary life. Many readers will think that some smaller structures such as Our Lady's Well shrine, Leitrim St. and the Toll-booth, St Lukes, cry out for inclusion. But near the top of the secondary list I would

fulfilment among many Catholics. This was that under St Anne's Shandon were three stones, that one-and-a-half of them had fallen out, when all three had done so the church and it's adherents would revert to the Old Faith.

A good case could be made for a category of "secondary" edifices, many ranking not far behind the two previously mentioned in prominence. The composition of this list would vary greatly according to personal preference and one's definition of "Northside", but here is a tentative one, the items assembled roughly from west to east, but in no special order: The extensive slate-grey pile of the former Our Lady's mental hospital, Lee Rd.; the red-brick hospital of St. Anne's, Shanakiel; the Waterworks Tower at Lee Rd.; the old City Gaol, Sunday's Well; St. Vincent de Paul Church, Sunday's Well; Church of the Ascension, Gurranbraher; Church of the Resurrection, Farranree; St. Mary's on the Hill, Knocknaheeny; the reservoir tower, Knocknaheeny; Church of the Most Precious Blood, Clogheen; Firkin Crane Centre and former Butter Exchange buildings, Shandon; the admirably reconstructed Shandon Court Hotel (formerly the North Infirmary); North Monastery School, Farranferris; Diocesan Seminary, Farranferris; the ruinous distillery tower in Watercourse Rd., Blackpool; the present cluster of Murphy's Brewery, Lady's Well; St. Mary's Dominican Church and Priory,

place the Sunbeam Mill, a gem of 19th. Century industrial architecture.

Although to some extent hidden in a valley to the back of Blackpool, and so less "on show" than many buildings on the Northside's "frontage", this towering 110ft. weathered red-brick structure is a striking emblem for the area, the more so in that it has provided employment for thousands of people down the years. Ríonach Aiken uncovered a fascinating range of historical and folkloric data about it when she researched the background to the textile industry in the locality.

The more all of us discovered in our various fields the more we realised there was to learn. Folklore is seemingly opened because it is all around us and part of the very fabric of our lives. Sometimes the difficult part is identifying it and placing it in it's own distinct category. I think by it's nature it must overlap with and draw on other disciplines such as Sociology, History and Anthropology, even Geography and Psychology. The last twelve months have been both informative and rewarding for everyone on the project.

## The Textile Industry at Millfield, Cork

By Ríonach Aiken

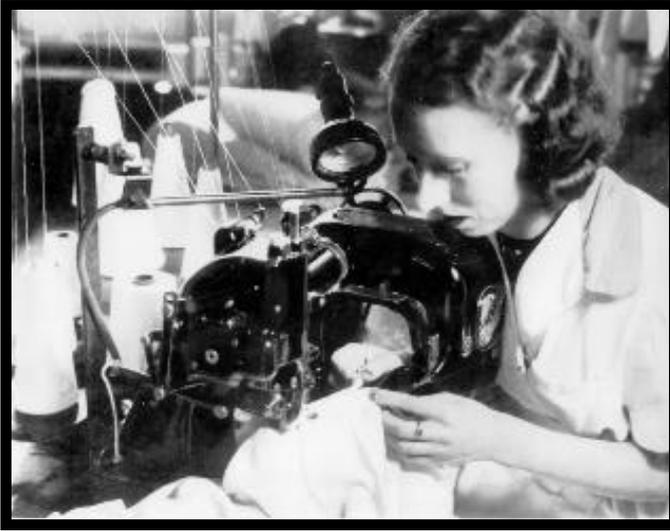
During the 19th Century in Cork a textiles industry existed which employed large

sections of the populace. Blackpool was the traditional centre of this trade, but during the 1820s the full effects of the Act of Union opened the Irish industry up to British competition with devastating results. The textile suburbs of Blackpool and the Commons Rd. experienced unprecedented poverty and destitution. Emigration was rife and by the end of the century virtually all old-style craft weavers had disappeared from the city.

Paradoxically, 1825 was not only the year that saw the first signs of this serious slump in the textile trade, but it was also

the year that the invention of wet-spinning permitted the mechanical spinning of linen, and Belfast's first linen mill was built. By the 1850s the Cork Flax Association was encouraging an increase in flax production and was setting up scutching and spinning mills. In 1864 the Cork Flax Spinning and Weaving Company procured a mill site and premises for a spinning factory between the Mallow and Commons Roads at Millfield near Blackpool, thereby enabling the area to remain synonymous with spinning and weaving through various reincarnations right up until the Sunbeam Wolsey Factory finally closed it's doors in the late 1980s.

The position chosen was the site of a former distillery and the mill was constructed between 1864-66. The adjacent River Bride provided a ready source of water for various industrial processes. During the five or six wettest months of the year it could also be harnessed to turn a waterwheel, complementing the steam power used in the operation. In the late 19th and early 20th Centuries the establishment was on the very edge of Cork's urban area. Anyone entering the city on the nearby Dublin railway line during that golden age of train travel would have been greeted by the impressive sight of the mas-



sive five-storey mill and associated buildings, including a private rail track used in the disposal of waste products from the works. The whole location would have fairly hummed with activity.

The mill has had a long and varied history. It was forced to shut down for some time in the early 1870s when economic depression affected the linen trade, but reopened in the 1880s to employ a total of 800 workers, mostly women. By 1919 the female workforce at the Millfield operation amounted to 1,000 and this was significant as being one of the largest concentrations of female labour in Cork County at that time.

In the early 1930s the Millfield premises were taken over by the rapidly growing Sunbeam Knitwear Company. By 1942 the business had become Sunbeam Wolsey Ltd., and was an entirely self-sufficient enterprise, using raw wool and silk to produce socks, underwear and silk hosiery. The number of employees increased thirteen-fold during this period, bringing the total once again to almost 1000.

During the 1970s and '80s the Sunbeam success story slowly wound down. Matters came to a crux when the by now British-owned Sunbeam Group, with factories in Bandon and Tralee (among others), went into receivership. Despite all protests, no-one was able to save the 500 worker Millfield factory and the textile industry there had closed completely by April 1990.

No discussion of the Sunbeam complex would be complete without mention of the name of Dwyer. A plaque dedicated to "the founder" William Dwyer (1887-1951) still decorates the entrance to the former works canteen, now a crèche run by Northside Community Enterprises. William Dwyer and his son Declan were widely perceived as being caring and progressive employers.

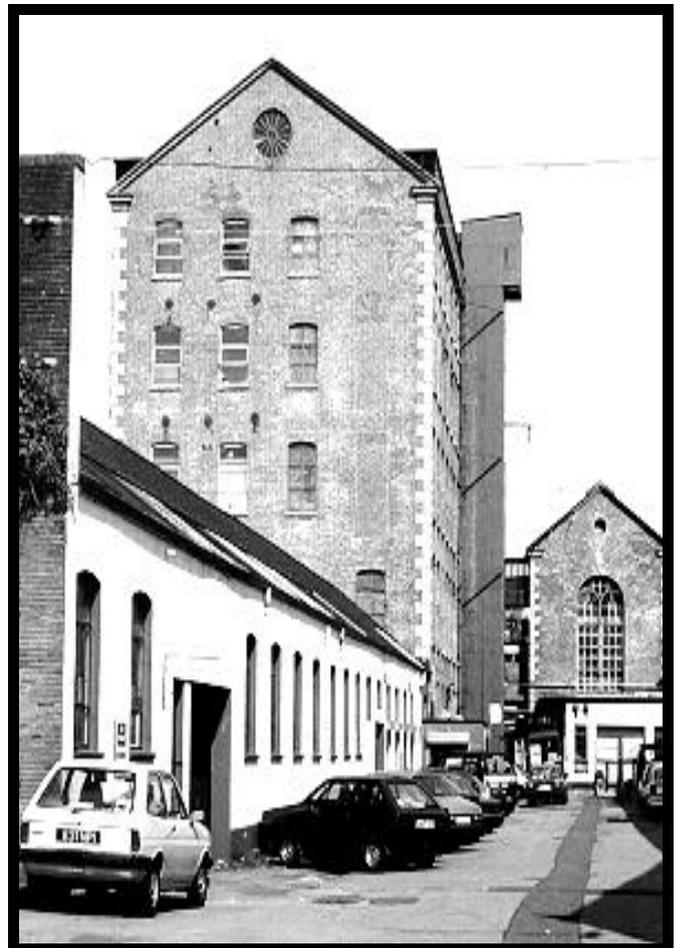
In it's Dwyer-led heyday Sunbeam boasted fine lawns and gardens, an orchard, a swimming pool for management and employees, a pitch-and-putt golf course and free medical and dental care for the workforce. Generations of members of some families made their livelihood there and many people met their future marriage-partners, "on-the-job". As one would expect, a host of interesting stories and memories attach themselves to the site. During World War Two there

were fears that neutral Ireland could become a target for aerial attack and a self-contained air-raid shelter was constructed beneath the present crèche. It still exists, slowly decaying in silence. An air-raid siren was for many years used as a factory whistle!

Caretaker Billy Foley (a Sunbeam legend, and still employed on the premises) was the source of several tales of industrial accidents of the last century. In one story, apparently dating from the 1880s, a number of workers were treading flax in a subterranean chamber as part of the flax-dressing process. Water was passed from the River Bride into the room for this purpose, but for some reason the waterwheel controlling it became jammed. With the water rising steadily higher a horrible mass-drowning of some fifteen people was only narrowly averted; at least one worker is thought to have perished. Incidentally, since then the course of the stream has been diverted.

The recessions of the 1980s and the closure of 1990 left deep scars on Millfield and other Northside communities. As funding becomes available the Sunbeam is making strong progress under the auspices of the N.C.E., although in many ways the grounds in particular seem sad shadows of what they once were. But the mill and the people surrounding it are resilient, a better day seems set to dawn with the new century.

Northside Community Enterprises Ltd. and its cultural initiative The Northside Folklore Project have established a comprehensive retraining programme as well a folklore collection unit in the old offices of The Sunbeam Wolsey Company at Millfield.



# The Northside Folklore Archive

By *Charlotte Crowley*

The Northside Folklore Archive was established in September 1996 as part of the work of the Northside Folklore Project. The Archive like the Project is also housed and based at Northside Community Enterprises Ltd.

The purpose of the Archive is to preserve, protect and make available the archival material in the custody of the Northside Folklore Archive. The Archive contains a variety of archival materials, both written and non-written material. The written material is mainly composed of manuscript and typescript field notes and transcripts of sound recordings. Non-written archival material includes photographs, sound recordings, videotape, objects and textile material.

The archives document the various aspects of the folklore and ethnology of the people who live in the Northside of Cork City. These aspects include verbal folklore in the form of jokes, stories, songs and music. The material culture of the

Northside people is seen in their dress or fashion, foods, occupation and sporting materials. Other aspects of folklore documented in the archives include the folklore surrounding the showband scene in the Northside during the 1950s and '60s, the folklore and folklife of various urban communities such as the settled travelling community and the urban lore of the school children of the Northside of Cork City.

All the archival material in the custody of the Northside Folklore Archive is arranged, listed and physically preserved according to accepted archival principals. Only material listed is made available for research. At present the Archives main source of archival material comes from the research projects being carried out by the Researchers working on the Northside Folklore Project. Each project contains various document types such as fieldnotes, photographs and sound recordings. On completion of a research project it is then listed and made available for research.

The Archive welcomes Researchers and makes every effort to assist them in their research. Only the archive material listed is made available for research. Sometimes the Archive may have to restrict access to certain folklore collections, which may contain material of a sensitive nature. The Northside Folklore Archive is open daily 9.30am - 4.30pm, Monday - Friday.

---

## Contributors

Introduction - Donal Sugrue,  
The Dixies - Stephen Hunter,  
Draghunting - Caroline Cronin,  
Schools - Conor Kennelly,  
Northside Fashions - Lorraine Cahalane,  
Scouting on the Northside - Michael Hennessey,  
The Travelling Community - Catherine Fray,  
Halloween - Billy McCarthy,  
Churches and Mills - Stephen Hunter,  
Textiles at Millfield - Ríonach Aiken,  
The Northside Folklore Archive - Charlotte Crowley,  
Layout and Design - Tim McCarthy,  
Editor - Stephen Hunter

## Acknowledgements

*The Northside Folklore Project would like to thank the following for their help and support:*

Dairygold, Pfizer, Musgrave Ltd., Murphy Brewery Ireland,  
Bord Gais, Gurrabraher Credit Union,  
Blackpool Credit Union, St Finbarrs Training Centre,  
FÁS, The Heritage Council, Audio Visual Services, UCC,  
Sinead Horgan, Emer O'Doherty,



