

Wild Atlantic Writers – Gathering and Book Fair



THE ALLINGHAM FESTIVAL
Creativity Across Borders



Participate in workshops and information sessions in the North West on writing and publishing. Learn more about bursaries, fellowships, and other support systems for writers.

Offer your books for sale at the 2016 Allingham Festival.

The Gathering

The organisers of the 2016 Allingham Festival would like to invite you to an initial gathering of *Wild Atlantic Writers* on Saturday, 5 November.

The goal of the WAW is to attract Irish writing and publishing organisations to schedule workshops and information sessions in the North West. On 5 November, Bernadette Greenan, General Manager of the Irish Writers Centre in Dublin, will outline the IWC's *Mindshift* and *Propel* professional-development initiatives for writers. Her presentation, and a brainstorming session about future speakers and activities for the Wild Atlantic Writers, will follow the Literary Luncheon.

Focus on Writing events

Saturday 5 November

- 10:30 am: Poetry Workshop with Afric McGlinchy – €10
- 12:30 pm: Literary Luncheon – €10
- 1:30 pm: Gathering of the Wild Atlantic Writers (free)
- 3:30 pm: The Anne Enright Interview with Sinéad Gleeson – €10
- 6:00 pm: Allingham Poetry and Flash Fiction Awards (free)
- 7:00 pm: Launch of *A Dying Language* by Monica Corish (free)
- 8:00 pm: The Allingham Concert, with readings by Anne Enright and Afric

McGlinchy – €10

Watch the 2016 Allingham Festival website for discount ticket sales to the Focus on Writing events.

The Book Fair

Do you have copies of your novels, short story collections, poetry collections, or chapbooks for sale? Sell them at the Wild Atlantic Writers' Book Fair in the foyer of the Abbey Arts and Culture Centre at the Allingham Festival. The staff of the Novel Idea bookstore will manage the sales. As a special gesture to the Wild Atlantic Writers at the Festival, the bookstore will not retain a commission – all WAW sales revenues the Festival will go to the authors.

Guidelines

- Up to five copies of each book can be brought to the Abbey Centre for the WAW Book Fair.
- If copies are sold during the Book Fair, authors can bring in replacement copies to keep five copies on offer at during the sale.
- The WAW Book Fair is managed by the staff of the "A Novel Idea" Bookstore in Ballyshannon.
- Authors can bring in books during the set-up of the Novel Idea tables in the Abbey Centre foyer from 10:00 am to noon on Saturday 5 Nov, or during the open sales periods:
 - Noon – 8:00 pm on Saturday, 5 Nov
 - Noon – 4:00 pm on Sunday, 6 Nov
- Authors will set the prices of their own books. Prices must be clearly marked on each copy.
- Authors will be responsible for retrieving unsold books by or before 4:00 pm on Sunday, 6 Nov.

We hope that a gathering of Wild Atlantic Writers from the North West and beyond will become an annual feature of the Allingham Festival. If the WAW can attract a critical mass of participating writers, it may become possible to organise other events through the year.

We'll hope to see you at the Wild Atlantic Writers' gathering and many other events at the 2016 Allingham Festival

Tom Sigafos is Chair of Allingham Arts Association

The Phone Box



For weeks all the talk had been of a public telephone coming to Enniskillen.

I claimed to have insider knowledge thanks to the two Telephone Exchange girls who lodged with my grandmother.

'They say it's coming,' I proudly informed my school friends. 'Anyone will be able to make a call.'

'But, who would you call?'

'Anyone,' I said, although truth to tell I knew no one who had a phone.

Not even my two uncles who lived in England had one. But, the idea of being able to talk to someone on the phone thrilled me. Of course we had all seen how important a telephone was at the truppenny matinees in the Regal cinema: the trembling dialling of 999, the mysterious caller at the end of the line in murder mysteries.

The Diamond, at the top of Eden Street where I lived, was fenced off and work began at the side of Blake's pub. Then, coming home from school on Friday, there it was; a red telephone box.

'Do you think we can go into it?' my friend Bridie asked.

We cautiously pulled open the heavy metal and glass door. The phone sat on top of a black contraption with slots for money and buttons. Button A on top and Button B at the bottom. All shiny, new, just waiting for someone to make a call.

'What is it for?' an elderly man coming out of Blake's asked.

'It's a phone.' I said.

'A what?'

'A telephone. You make a call and you can talk to someone who's far away.'

'Do you mean to say that I could talk to someone in Lisbellaw and they would hear me?'

'Yes, you could. And, even over in England.'

'Daughter dear, don't let anyone hear you saying things like that. They'll put you down in Omagh.'

How we longed to make a call. I failed to persuade my grandmother to call someone. As she pointed out, no one she knew had a telephone. Then one day the magic happened. The phone rang as I was walking home from school with Bridie. We stood looking at the box, not daring to answer.

'Go on, ' Bridie pushed me forward, 'answer it!'

It stopped ringing, disappointment washed over me, I had been too slow. Then

it began to ring again. This time I didn't hesitate. We hauled open the door and I lifted the heavy black receiver.

'Hello?'

'Hello. Is that Enniskillen 7809?'

The American drawl was from all the Saturday matinees I had ever watched.

I carefully read the number on the dial before confirming that it was.

'This is a collect call for a Mrs O'Malley of 19 Eden Street. Is she willing to talk the call?'

I was flummoxed. Collect call?

'Hello? Are you there? Mrs O'Malley?'

'I'll get her!'

'Who are you?'

For a moment I considered hanging up. It was probably an offence to answer a public telephone when you didn't know anyone with a phone.

'I'm Chris Campbell,' I confessed.

'Not O'Malley? Is this a public telephone?'

'Yes,' I managed waiting to be scolded for my audacity.

'OK. Can you fetch Mrs O'Malley? I have her daughter on the line from Pittsburgh.'

'Get Mrs O'Malley! Her daughter wants to talk to her!' I roared to the wide-eyed Bridie still holding the door open. She tore off down the street.

By now several children had gathered and through the open door listened to my conversation with the operator.

'Hello caller, are you still holding? Someone in Enniskillen has gone to fetch Mrs O'Malley.'

'Thank you. I'm still holding,' Mrs O'Malley's daughter, in faraway Pittsburgh replied.

'Hello Chris Campbell. Are you still holding?'

'Yes,' I said, gaining in boldness by the minute.

'Stay on the line now Chris Campbell, don't you hang up.'

Mrs O'Malley arrived, in her best Sunday coat and hat escorted by the excited Bridie. She stood hesitantly outside the box.

'Hello Mary-Lou? Mrs O'Malley is here!' I said.

By this time the Operator and I were on first name terms.

'OK. Put her on now and, thank you for your assistance Chris Campbell. You have a good day now, you hear?'

'I will. It's been a great day!'

It was to remain a day that I would always remember.

I handed the phone to Mrs O'Malley and, as she squeezed in beside me, I noticed she had put on lipstick and there was a gentle waft of *Evening in Paris*. I slipped out and we all stood in a circle around the open door listening unashamedly to a mother talking to her daughter in far away America.

Magic!

The phone on The Diamond would come to be the harbinger of news from afar to our local community. Families reunited, romances conducted, and a lifeline for our emigrant population.

As public telephone boxes disappear from our towns, replaced by Smart phones, Skype, Facetime and Internet Cafes, it behoves us remember the magic of those Transatlantic calls to the red phone box on The Diamond.

Chris Campbell retired to her native Enniskillen after working and living in Belfast and Belgium for many years.



The Home Farm

A steady drizzle seeps across the island of Inishmore, soaking into an already sodden earth and choking the soil beneath. Wet fields and wet sky merge so easily together that the horizon is lost far beyond the curve of the earth.

And there sits the simple whitewashed cottage where my father grew up, nestling forlornly in the Fermanagh mist where giant beeches provide only temporary shelter from the elements. One hundred and sixty years of history were secreted within the walls of that modest, working class dwelling, home to ten children in my father's day and undoubtedly many more in the years before.

The front door, which was really a back door and always the most used, opened with the turn of a stout key in an upside-down lock. This door opened into a parlour where eyes would need adjusting to the dimness of the light even on the brightest of days.

A delicious woody aroma hung in the air as peat spat and gurgled in a hearth big enough for a man to stand in. More than a few times my father had been known to cook a duck egg under the smoldering ashes while I would sit mesmerized by the bigness and greenness of such a tasty treat. As the fire roared anyone within a few feet away ran the risk of being roasted alive, but to move out only the smallest of distances would likely threaten hypothermia; there never seemed to be any middle ground in that house where electricity

was an unaffordable indulgence.

The parlour, even in its simplicity, was a feast for the eyes. Above the mantelpiece hewn roughly from an old oak tree, hung a double barrel shotgun. Horse brasses rested neatly in a row along the mantel shelf and an old crock swayed on a blackened hook hanging mysteriously from somewhere up the chimney. On the back wall stood more evidence of my grandfather's handiwork; a yellowing dresser, bursting with willow patterned plates that were chipped and cracked from years of use.

The only natural light came from a single window near the door, and only when the last vestige of daylight had faded would the mantle of the paraffin lamp be lit. This mantle was treated like a piece of gold by the adults, and children tampered with it at their peril.

It was not the only thing inside the house we children were warned about. For many years I had been intrigued by a little door in the back hallway which was always securely locked. There was only one occasion when I was finally deemed to be 'responsible enough' for my father to allow me to venture up there with him.

It opened on to a set of stairs leading up to the attic where a makeshift dividing wall had, in the past, split the area into two bedrooms. I followed instructions to avoid the rotting wooden boards beneath my feet and was taken to a place near the chimney breast that felt both warm and damp at the same time. A strange odour permeated the still air and, the room was pitch black save for the light of my father's torch. Suddenly I saw what seemed like a hundred pairs of eyes staring at me through the gloom. Bats. My father waited a few seconds before guiding me back to the staircase. We never spoke of it again but it was a moment I treasured: me, my dad and the bats and not another soul to share the moment.

It always seemed strange that here were so many restrictions put on us within the house, because outside we were free to explore the twenty-six acres of land. Being the youngest I was often left alone in the bog during a game of hide-and-seek when my brother and sister thought it funny to scarper back to the house without telling me. There was the swamp where we captured newts in the summer and Lough Barry where we fished using improvised hooks attached to maggots dug from the silo. My sister and I galloped across fields on imaginary steeds, flying over ditches and landing in sheughs.

But most of all there was the silence. As a small child I would strain my ears to hear even the distant sound of a dog's bark or gentle mooing of cattle in a far-flung field, but the only noise to break the silence was the sound of wood being chopped in an out-house, accompanied by and my father's whistling.

At the end of a day when the timber had been stacked in the wood shed, I had carved yet another boy's initials on one of the trees and the smell of my mother's stew enticed us back indoors, we would gather together in the parlour. After supper I would be sent reluctantly to the bed I shared with my sister which was hard and lumpy and inevitably freezing. Later on in the

evening she would join me and I took great comfort in snuggling into her back for warmth before finally falling asleep.

Lynda Tavakoli lives near Lisburn where she teaches special needs and also facilitates creative writing courses in the area. Her poetry and prose have been widely published throughout Ireland and abroad and her debut short story collection 'Under a Cold White Moon' is due for publication this coming autumn with David J Publishing.



Two Poems of Fermanagh

Forecast, Drumhoney, July 2010

The rain isn't taking the time to come down
I agree, as puddles start where before
there was well trodden earth and stones.
A herd of cows pilgrimage through
the field, knowing intuitively when to move
from one patch of grass to another.

Friends lent us this cabin, you unable to fly
this was our summer holiday, a catching of breath
watching reruns of Friends with poor reception.

This morning we ran between showers
to retrieve ice cream to eat in the car,
we can't go outside without getting wet.

I tune my guitar while you cross stitch
a child's face with brown thread through
a blank canvas – a future embraced.

Manor House Marina, April 2013

The children gather up treasures
as they appear on the trail,
easter eggs planted there by providence's hand,
glinting in the sun, precious and frail.
Stones are kicked away,

A dead wren is stepped around,
branches lifted and broken in play.
I hear my daughter's squeals of glee
as brightly wrapped treats are found.
No one else notices a flock of geese
take off from the lake,
in sync and swift to the eye,
they cut up their own wake,
their wingspan fills the sky.

Glen Wilson was highly commended in the 2015 Gregory O'Donoghue International Poetry Competition. He has won the Poetry Space competition and was shortlisted for the Wasafiri New Writing Prize 2014 and the Seamus Heaney Award for New Writing 2016.

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Fermanagh and the Brontës

The Northern Irish ancestry of the Brontë sisters is now well known, with the Brontë Heritage Centre at Ballymascanlon in County Down, birthplace of their father Patrick Brantý, but there is also a tenuous and intriguing link to Fermanagh.

The name down the years has also been spelled as Brunty, Brantý, or Prunty – Patrick is thought to have taken the modern spelling in honour of Lord Nelson, Duke of Brontë.

The Brontës always claimed that they were from an ancient family, and Douglas Hyde, Ireland's first President, held that they were descendants of a poet by the name of Pádraig Ó Pronntaigh who died in Co. Louth in 1760. Hyde probably makes the claim because he wrote a poem to welcome the newly appointed Catholic Archbishop of Armagh to Ballymascanlan in 1738. The Archbishop had been promoted from Bishop of Clogher, and perhaps Ó Pronntaigh came with him from there, because he gives his full name as '*Pádraig Ua Pronntaigh mhic Néill mhic Seadhain, ó Loch Éirne.*' If he was indeed the grandfather of Patrick Brontë, then he probably returned to Lough Erne at some stage, because it now seems that Patrick's father Hugh was born, or spent his earliest years, in Fermanagh. Hugh was a noted storyteller, and passed on to Patrick the tale of his journey to Drogheda as a child, in the company of a character who might well have been the original Heathcliff.

Hugh might not have known much about geography, since he was only eight years old at the time. He was traveling with his aunt Mary and his 'Uncle Welsh,' who had promised to make him 'a great scholar and his heir' – a promise that would quickly prove false. The journey took five days over rough roads in a

horse and cart, often at night. Hugh woke on the first morning near a bridge, with the sun rising over what he thought was the sea beyond a level plain, and mountains rising to the West. His uncle and aunt were arguing; Welsh threatening to kill both the boy and his aunt and '*throw their bodies into the river.*'

The cart could not have traveled more than twenty miles a day. Following Hugh's description of the journey as handed down to his descendants, Edward Chitham has concluded that they stopped near Belturbet and in Dundalk and Ballybay (near both of which families by the name of Prunty were living). The 'sea' that Hugh thought he saw on that first morning was Upper Lough Erne seen from Thompson's Bridge, the level of the Lough being higher in those days than it is now. Hugh's home could have been no more than ten or twenty miles further West, possibly around the area of Cleenish.

Hugh suffered for eight years on his uncle's farm near Drogheda until he finally ran away, heading North to Dundalk.

Who was Uncle Welsh, and how to account for his actions?

As the delightfully named Turtle Bunbury records, there is a family tradition that Welsh was a foundling, like Heathcliff. He was adopted by Patrick Brontë's great-grandfather (also Hugh) a cattle trader who had a farm in County Meath. This elder Hugh often crossed the Irish Sea, and found the child in Wales – hence the name. Welsh later married Hugh's daughter Mary and took over the farm, so estranging her brothers that they were convicted for assaulting him, escaped and fled to America. This would have been in 1750, the year the younger Hugh was born.

The problem with this story is that no Prunty, Brunty, or Branty farm has ever been found in Meath.

Chitham proposes that Welsh was indeed an uncle by marriage, but that Welsh, or rather Walsh, was in fact his surname, and from that he has located a possible site of the farm.

At that time the Earl of Drogheda, whose seat at Townley Hall now commemorates the Battle of the Boyne, had a land steward by the name of Edward Walsh. These Welsh/Walshes had a long-running feud with their neighbours, which had resulted in the murder of one Michael Walsh in 1743. They were a seafaring family, and from Hugh's description of Welsh as 'dark,' Chitham supposes (in an echo of Jane Eyre) that he may have been 'adopted' into that family as a by-blow of the Jamaican sugar trade – a literal as well as a metaphorical bastard.

The truth is that we have no account of the man apart from Hugh's, but the idea makes a certain amount of sense, at least as a story. For whatever reason, one can imagine him as the most despised member of a despised yet powerful family. It would not have been easy for him to make a good marriage, and there may well have been spectacular feuds with the in-laws. Perhaps Mary Branty's brothers did assault him, and flee to America. Perhaps she insisted that the heir to the farm would be someone from her extended family, with

none of his blood. And perhaps they went searching for a suitable heir to adopt, visiting relations in Dundalk and Ballybay, until they came at last to Fermanagh.

Perhaps. If that were true, then it would have been Mary even more than Welsh who bound Hugh to the farm, and perhaps that would account for Welsh's treatment of the boy who was supposed to be his heir. And perhaps it would account for the fact that when Hugh decided to run away, Mary was pregnant – a girl, as it turned out.

One last strange fact in this strange tale: when Hugh had a family of his own, he baptised his fifth son – Welsh Branty. Perhaps it is no surprise that the child grew up to be the black sheep of the family.

Jenny Brien Editor

The painting is of Anne, Emily, and Charlotte Brontë, by their brother Branwell (c. 1834). He painted himself among his sisters, but later removed the image.