

CCN NEWSLETTER

Comhar Comaraigh Network.

March 2026



Stradbally GAA Club in Focus



From Ukraine to Ireland



Comeragh Outdoor Recreation Plan



Kilmacthomas Woman Bridie Griffin celebrates 105th Birthday



Lackendara Hermit of The Comeraghs

Inside this Issue

Padraig O Mileadha, Fenor Bog, Owl Box Competition, Coast To Comeragh with Kieran Foley and much more from the Comeragh Area

STRONGER



TOGETHER

A Very Frustrated Community Volunteer

As a volunteer for my local community centre for over thirty five years I have never in those thirty five years felt so much frustration as I feel of late.

Accessing funding—essential for maintaining and expanding the facility —often requires navigating complex bureaucratic processes. While funding is essential for community initiatives, the bureaucratic demands associated with applications pose significant challenges for volunteers.

Forms are often lengthy, highly detailed, and filled with technical language that can be difficult for non-specialists to interpret. Online or in person workshops with large attendances are not the answer. Volunteers, frequently struggle to understand eligibility criteria, reporting requirements, and financial terminology. Volunteers typically balance their community work alongside personal and professional responsibilities. Completing funding applications can be extremely time consuming and puts an extra strain on all ready overworked volunteers.

As many funding applications have moved online, digital literacy and access have become additional barriers. This in turn leads to a reluctance of people to put themselves forward as volunteers thus resulting in committees made up entirely of aging members struggling to cope with the day to day running of a community facility. **This a serious issue and needs to be addressed without delay.**

THERE IS A SOLUTION - THE SERVICES OF A FULLTIME CO-ORDINATOR – PROPOSED BY COMHAR COMARAIGH

Some of the benefits of a fulltime coordinator are:

A full-time coordinator can actively monitor and identify relevant funding streams, ensuring that community groups are aware of opportunities they might otherwise miss.

By taking on the administrative burden of funding applications, a coordinator frees up volunteers to focus on delivering services and engaging with the community. This leads to better use of limited volunteer time and reduces the risk of burnout.

Their expertise significantly improves the quality and competitiveness of applications.

A dedicated coordinator can act as a point of contact between community groups and funding bodies.

Coordinators can support long-term planning by aligning funding applications with broader community goals.

With professional support, community groups are more likely to submit high-quality applications, leading to higher success rates. This, in turn, increases the resources available to deliver and expand community services.

(Angela Mulcahy, Kill Community Centre)

LACKENDARA HERMIT OF THE COMERAGHS

BY SILE MURPHY

Jim Fitzgerald was born on the western side of the Comeraghs in Lackendara, Ballinamult, in 1886. His father was a farm labourer and Jim spent his boyhood days helping his father. It was there that he got his first liking for nature, and peace and solitude. But when Jim grew up times were hard and at the age of 23 he had to leave home and fend for himself. He joined the Connaught Rangers in 1913 and was sent out to fight in France. Then in 1916 he was transferred to Mesopotamia to fight the Turks.

In 1918 Jim Fitzgerald was demobbed and he returned to Ballinamult to work as a farm labourer. But all the time he was searching for a little place to live quietly. He found it here at Kilclooney. His presence was not detected for some time. There were sightings of a strange man running and hiding behind bushes and rocks until Micil O Foghlú who lived just below Coumshingaun Lake eventually got to speak to him. They both spoke Irish so Jim felt safe to talk with him. He told Micil about his experiences on the battle field *“They were great fighters but very cruel, and many of my comrades died in terrible agony under the sun. Often in my sleep I see them dying again. That’s why I hate living with people. They’re very cruel”*.



His ‘home’ was a crude burrow dug into the mountain-side against an old stone ditch. It was about six feet long, four feet wide and four feet high. The sides and roof were supported with beaten out tar barrels and the mud floor was studded with stones. The entire hut was covered over with sods and a gap in the stones served as a door. At first he had no chimney and the smoke from his fire overflowed out the door but then he made a hole in the roof for a chimney. His bed was outside his hut in a split rock. He crawled, legs first, into this and then pulled a bush in after him to hide himself from strangers.

He lived on his £2 per week British Army Pension which he cashed every two weeks in Clonea, then he bought his supplies for the fortnight and drank the change before returning home. His diet never changed, tea, bread, butter and milk. Occasionally he would allow himself the luxury of a black pudding which he cooked mixed with the bread, milk and butter in a biscuit tin over the fire. Although he did not wish to speak to people, yet when spoken to, he was polite and respectful. Even the local children were more curious than afraid of ‘Lackendara’, with the long beard. They knew that he would never hurt them no matter how near they went to his hut. “Don’t come in here at all girlie, or the fleas will hop on you” was his way of telling the children to keep away.

He retired to Kilclooney because people were always fighting and worrying.

“They make new things to kill each other and then when some of them are dead the rest of them cry. I don’t want to be killed, up here I’m safe and happy and I don’t have to worry about work or a house. But if I go back to live with people I’ll make somebody unhappy.

Just like you and everyone else”.



He became known as the “Rock man” and lived on yellow meal stirabout, milk and potatoes and a few bottles which he bought with his British Army Pension. He supplemented his pension by working for local farmers but he preferred to do this work late in the evenings e.g. grubbing furze, clearing drains or seasonal work such as thinning turnips. He was not a man to work in the company of others. He never came to the annual shearing gatherings where local sheepbreeders met to shear each others sheep and enjoy shared food and a plentiful supply of large bottles. He came along when all had gone home and collected any stray wool left on the ground. This was deliberately left so that there was something for poor Lackendarra to collect. By the end of the summer he would have several bags of wool to be sent in to Morrisseys in Carrick on Suir. Wool was a valuable commodity in those days and he would have got a good price for it.

LACKENDARA HERMIT OF THE COMERAGHS

Death of Lackendarra: But the damp, cold and bad weather finally took its toll on Lackendarra and he got pneumonia. He was rushed to Ardkeen Hospital and was given a good wash, and his beard was shaven off. While in hospital he never slept in a bed. Every night at lights out he crawled onto the floor and slept there. Lackendarra Jim never returned to his home in the Mountains. He died in 1959 and while the people of Clonea-Power parish hoped that he would be buried in Clonea power but he was taken to be buried in Touraneena with his Fitzgerald relatives

World-wide Celebrity “Lackendarra” became a world-wide celebrity and his published story was commissioned by “Wide World Magazine” and published under the title of :- *“Oul Jim of the Comeraghs”* by John Scarry.

On the 26th Dec. 1954 I set out from Waterford City with professional photographer Simon Farrell. In the townland of Kilclooney below the Comeraghs we engaged a local guide Paddy Butler who knew the hermit. We met the recluse above his hut. A close-up view revealed a sturdy dishevelled man of medium size and great flexibility of muscles which bulged the sleeves of his oily jacket. A fleece of matted hair covered his face and almost concealed his mouth. His odd attire was set off by two gathers of hemp rope below his knees and a girdle of strong twine held up his trousers. The hermit did not talk much with us and suddenly ran away into the mist. The following March I again called to see him and this time I found him in his hut. Great War: The old warrior huddled beside his blazing furze fire was in talkative mood. He told us that when he returned home from the First War he was a broken man physically and mentally, he was fed up with society and wanted to live in the seclusion of the mountains. His parents Fitzgeralds were dead and he was the last of the noble line of Fitzgeralds of Lackendarra (descendants of the Great Fitzgeralds Earls of Desmond). Not insane: “I am not insane”, he said “Far from it, I want to be at peace with the world and where could one find better peace than in this elevated place where you can see six counties on a fine day”. He reeled off the names of several men whose exploits have been recorded in Irish history and who ended their days in the Comeragh Mountains. Blakeney: Blakeney who is recorded as “An eccentric being who loved no man nor woman either and who after a continuance of some years in the gaieties of this world constructed a dwelling in the Comeraghs and with a single male attendant (for he never admitted female into his residence) returned to live here in solitude. According to his own wish he was buried under the doorstep of his cottage with his dog and gun.”

Lackendarra Jim told us that when he first came to the mountains he found a cave at Coumshingaun Lake with a long passage way and he lived in it. A few nights after his arrival he was awakened to the piercing wails of a woman and the groans of a man. These sounds were followed by the clip clop of hoof beats and the echoes of clashing steel. He said the passageway continued for a mile and opened out again over Crotty’s Lake. This noise continues each night without variation until his nerves forced him to depart. “I thought Crotty’s Ghost was after me and I believe the wail I heard belong to Crotty’s Wife and so I always steer clear of that haunted belong to Crotty’s Wife and so I always steer clear of that haunted cavern when I go up to the lake.

He constructed his “Hut” with tin and poles and slept in the cleft of a rock. During the snow of ‘47 he was snowed in for three months and the only living things he saw were robins, sparrows and thrushes which hopped into his “kitchen” and ate crumbs from his hands. He had to dig a tunnel through the snow from his “bed” to his “kitchen”. When he had his chimney cleared he lit a blazing fire of furze and made tea. He drank several tins of it while the robins perched on his head”



WIN AN OWL BOX

Freebox

By Joanna O'Sullivan

Competition time!

New year, new possibilities.

Calling all county Waterford primary school level students.

For the chance

to Win an Owl Box

for your primary school or community.

Tell us, in 100 words or less,

why your school or community deserves to win this fabulous prize.

Entries to dungarvanmensshed@gmail.com by 5pm on 30th April 2026
(including your name, age, and the name of your school or community)

TERMS & CONDITIONS: By participating in this competition you are agreeing to the competition terms and conditions, some of which may be implied, or added post publication. By entering the competition you confirm that you are eligible to do so and that you represent a primary school or community that the prize might be awarded to. The prize is an owl box, and does not include delivery or placement. No alternatives to the prize, cash or otherwise, will be offered.

The judge's decision is final, and no correspondence will be entered into concerning the result.

The competition is open to primary school students, in county Waterford, Ireland, age 12 and under. Entries are accepted on the basis that an adult allows entry. There is a limit of one entry per person, and the competition is free to enter. This is a writing competition. Entries must be submitted by e-mail. Entries received after 5pm on 30/04/2026 will not be judged as the competition will be closed. Winner will be contacted by reply e-mail, and announced in next publication. Should the winner not communicate acceptance of prize by 31/07/2026, they will forfeit, and a new winner will be chosen to receive the prize.



Art by Sadie O'Sullivan



DUNHILL MULTI EDUCATION CENTRE

Now that the days are getting longer and hopefully the weather is improving, there are lots of activities happening at Dunhill Multi-Education Centre. On Mondays there is contract bridge in the evening at 19:00 and Wednesdays our Copper Coast Community Choir starts at 11:00.

On Wednesday evenings the 20th season of the Julian Walton Lecture Series continues starting at 19:30 with some interesting speakers yet to deliver.

Winter Lecture Series XX, 2026

with

Julian Walton

Wednesdays 25th February to 18th March 2026 Time 19:30 to 20:30

Wednesday 25th February

Rev. Daniel Fleming: Passing the Church Plate: 'The Coulter Alms Dishes of Christ Church, Tramore.'

Wednesday 4th March

Eugene Broderick: Daniel O'Connell and the Campaign to Abolish Slavery.

Wednesday 11th March

Dermot Power: In Search of the Street and Placenames of Waterford City.

Wednesday 18th March

Julian Walton: Recording Waterford Tombstone Inscriptions Half a Century Ago: A Prequel to the Work of John Tierney.

Lectures are held in the Dunhill Multi-Education Centre every Wednesday starting at 19:30 followed by a question-and-answer session. Light refreshments will be served afterwards.

Cost: €7.50 per person.

. We look forward to meeting old friends and new.



On Friday the Dunhill Community Garden group meet from 10:00 to 12:00 for gardening in polytunnel and outdoor space followed by refreshments. This is free of charge and all are welcome.

Chair Yoga with Saffron will keep you fit and mobile and it takes place on Thursday at 10:00



The Park Café is open everyday Monday to Friday from 09:00 to 14:30 for breakfast, lunch and snacks all freshly prepared onsite and serving locally roasted Trá Coffee from the Ecopark.

FROM UKRAINE TO IRELAND

:A Bladesmith Brings Traditional Craft to the Local Community

A new workshop based in Dunhill has recently opened its doors, bringing with it the sound of hammer on steel and a deep respect for traditional craftsmanship. At the heart of it stands Niko, a professional bladesmith with around ten years of experience, who has made Ireland the new home for his craft.

Originally from Ukraine, Niko began forging nearly a decade ago, building his own workshop and dedicating himself to the demanding art of hand-forged blades. Over the years, he refined his technique and developed a reputation for producing fully hand-forged knives and axes — each piece shaped, hardened and finished with care and precision.

After moving to Ireland, he decided to continue his journey by establishing a new workshop and launching his business locally. Today, his work includes high-quality kitchen knives, from practical everyday tools to finely crafted professional chef's knives, as well as hunting knives, hand-forged axes, and one-of-a-kind collectible pieces made for those who appreciate traditional craftsmanship. Working with a variety of steels, including Damascus steel known for its distinctive flowing patterns and strength, Niko creates blades that combine durability, balance and elegance. Every piece is individually crafted, reflecting his belief that a knife or axe should not only perform exceptionally well, but also feel natural and alive in the hand.

For Niko, bladesmithing is more than a trade — it is a lifelong craft rooted in patience, discipline and attention to detail. By bringing his experience and traditional forging techniques to Ireland, he adds a unique dimension to the local artisan community.

As interest grows among home cooks, hunters, collectors and professional chefs, his workshop is steadily becoming part of the area's small business landscape — proof that craftsmanship, when carried with passion and dedication, can cross borders and find a new home. Niko has a workshop in Kilcannon, Dunhill.

To see his latest work, behind-the-scenes forging, and finished pieces, follow *Niko Forge* on Facebook and Instagram.

For inquiries, contact niko.bladesmith@gmail.com.



DUNHILL GAA SILVER AWARD

Dunhill GAA Healthy Club Win Silver Award in 2025.

At the 2023 AGM of Dunhill GAA Club Rosie Murphy was elected Healthy Club Officer. Her first responsibility was to apply for healthy club status to Croke Park on behalf of the Club. She duly made an application to the next Phase 6 of the Irish Life GAA Healthy Clubs Programme in December 2023. In January 2024 the Club was notified of the successful outcome of their application. They were one of over 266 clubs who had applied that year. As a successful club we had until Feb 5th to accept the agreement form on the terms and conditions of participating the programme. Thereafter Rosie was invited to complete her Healthy Club Officer (HCO) training to help her get the Club started on its journey. Next the healthy club programme, orientation day, phase 6 for newly recruited clubs took place in Croke Park on Saturday 9th March 2024 and both Rosie Murphy accompanied by Rachel White were in attendance. Here they learnt about the three levels that are involved in the Healthy Club Awards Programme, namely Foundation, Silver & Gold, and the criteria that must be met in each case. An outline of the various steps that needed to be undertaken was explained, the first of which was to set up a healthy club sub-committee. To that end in April 2024 a call went out to all the Dunhill GAA club members and also an effort was made to seek active representation of the wider community, including St. Anne's Camogie/Ladies Football Club.

The response was immediate and impressive and so a sub-committee of 10 volunteers was formed. At their first meeting the criteria for the Foundation Level award were explained and as it turned out a lot of those activities were already taking place in the club, e.g. the Ireland Lights Up programme. The new sub-committee members shared their own ideas and suggestions for adding some additional activities to what the club was already doing, e.g. social hurling, couch to 5k and the GAA squash tournament. The Dunhill Healthy Club was officially launched on the 13th July with a social hurling come & try it event in our new astro pitch, a walk for wellbeing on our new walking track, a mindful scavenger hunt and the planting of wild flowers followed by refreshments and the presentation of the cheque from the darkness into light fundraiser walk to Pieta House.

Below is an outline of an array of the activities that are on offer during the year by the Dunhill GAA Club, organised by a wide array of volunteers primarily, with some activities and services offered by paid personnel.

Ireland Lights Up Walking Programme / Irish Life's Steps Challenge - Every Step Counts – MyLife App – Club Funding Competition / Walking Leader Training / Smoking Free / Vaping Free Policy & Club Grounds Initiative Sustainable & Renewal Club initiatives / Tree planting / Social Hurling / West Tipperary Social Hurling Tournament/ Couch to 5k, Walk-Jog- Run for Fun, / Jog & Jargon Programmes / Miles for Myeloma Walk – Awareness Raising Fundraiser (local patient) / Dunhill Heritage Place Day; Stand – Exhibiting GAA Heritage / Darkness into Light – Dawn Walk – Suicide Awareness raiser & Pieta House Fundraiser / Dunhill GAA v Dunhill Squash Club Friendly Tournament / Helping with the organisation of parish & club social events e.g. celebration to mark the presentation of the Benemerenti Medal to the sacristan of Dunhill church, and the 50 Year Celebration of the 1975 County Senior Football Championship Victory / Fower Bed Planting School Project on GAA grounds / Healthy Club Webinar / Healthy Club Easter Hamper Draw / Texaco Support for Sport Application / Healthy Club Research – SETU / Dissertation Student / The Mick White Tournament. U4-10 boys and girls hurling- 120 participants / The Golf Classic- club fundraiser / Attended Healthy Club Munster Conference / Supported the organisation of Halloween, Christmas, / Easter & Summer Camps / Supported the organisation of Birthday parties in club sports centre / Exercise to Music Classes / Strength & Conditioning for Teams Gym Instruction / Personal Training / Shop / Café facilities / The Copper Post Community Newsletter / Development of various Policies that align with health, e.g. healthy eating/ Development of Critical Incident Plan / Training - Safe Talk, Safeguarding / Health Screening programme / Provision for the Tiny Tots Play-School- Childcare / Well Kids Coaching / National School's Coaching Initiative / G4M&Others One Healthy Club Initiative with St. Anne's Camogie/Ladies Football Club Provision for the development of GAA games at both juvenile & senior levels across both codes & genders (Hurling/ Football/Camogie & Ladies Football).

The Healthy Club Awards took place on 14th October 2025 and the Dunhill GAA Club received its 'Silver Status' award. The club is now moving forward in 2026 and aiming to achieve Gold Status.

Members of the Healthy Club Sub-Committee include: Rosie Murphy (HC Officer), Rachel White, Niamh Ryan, Dermot Dunphy, Martin Harney, Hilary Murphy, Joanne Freyne, Elaine Pundure, Steph Golds, Louise Murphy & Ciara Crowley.

Anyone who would like to join this sub-Committee please inform any of the current sub-committee members. We are always looking to new people with good energy and fresh ideas joining us.

ACHIEVEMENTS

'Cliffcastle House' Outstanding success for new playwright.

Congratulations to James Barry Co Founder of The Gealach Gorm Theatre on the recent success of his play 'Cliffcastle Castle' performed by The Gealach Gorm Theatre Group to packed audiences recently.

James Barry is co-founder of The Gealach Gorm Theatre and has a long association with drama in Kill through his performances in Scór and Scór naÓg and with The Gealach Gorm Theatre Group since it's foundation in 1999. He has played many roles from pantomime dames and ugly sisters to a priest in John B Keane's 'Moll' and a constable in 'Murder On A Budget'. He has written poetry for a long number of years and during the Covid lockdown he turned his hand to playwriting. He was delighted to have his playscript 'Cliffcastle House' performed by The Gealach Gorm Theatre Group. Not alone did he write the play but he also designed and built the set and sourced all the props for the production.

Surrounded by ancient forests Cliffcastle House has stood in an isolated valley for centuries. The building has a dark reputation linked mainly to the depredations of Geoffrey Power, the 4th Baron Cliffcastle. Rumours of murder and strange rituals carried out by the 4th Baron haunt the area to this day and he fathered many children outside of his marriage. John Power, the 6th Baron Cliffcastle, has recently died unmarried and childless, ending the direct line of descent and raising the question of who will take ownership of the lands. In his will he set out a series of conditions to determine who may inherit the estate and title. His probate solicitors were tasked with tracing those eligible to inherit, as per the stipulations of the will, and bringing them to the estate in order to decide who the new Baron or Baroness shall be. The day of reckoning has arrived. Under a threatening sky the candidates reach Cliffcastle House just as the first drops of rain fall. With tensions rising in the gathered group the worsening storm may be a portent of the events that lie ahead.

The Gealach Gorm Theatre Group and surrounding community are extremely proud of his success.



COMERAGH OUTDOOR RECREATION PLAN

Waterford Outdoor Recreation Plan incorporating the Comeragh Mountains Outdoor Recreation Strategy – Progress Update

Work continues to advance on the development of the Waterford Outdoor Recreation Plan, a key strategic framework that will guide the sustainable development, management and promotion of outdoor recreation across the county in the years ahead.

Over the past year, significant groundwork has been undertaken to ensure the plan reflects the needs, opportunities and aspirations of Waterford’s outdoor community. Early stages of the process included stakeholder mapping, sectoral engagement, data gathering and collaboration with local clubs, organisations, landowners, community groups and state agencies.

A particularly important element of this work was the series of public consultation events held across the county. These sessions were enthusiastically attended and generated valuable feedback from a broad cross-section of participants. The level of engagement clearly demonstrated the strong appetite for outdoor recreation in Waterford and the willingness of communities to contribute to shaping its future. In addition to the in-person consultations, an online survey was circulated which gathered over 1,000 responses, ensuring as many voices as possible could be heard. This extensive engagement process has informed the priorities, actions and vision set out in the draft plan.

A significant milestone in recent months has been the completion of a full Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA), finalised in mid-January. The SEA is a comprehensive and essential process that ensures the plan aligns with environmental legislation and best practice. Following consultation with the designated competent authorities, we are currently incorporating feedback into the final draft of the plan.

Once the plan has been finalised, the new Waterford Outdoor Recreation Forum will play an important role in supporting the implementation of the plan and feeding into the work of the Waterford Outdoor Recreation Committee. It’s envisaged that the forum will be established in the months following the launch of the plan in 2026.

Comeragh Mountains Outdoor Recreation Strategy

The Comeragh Mountains Outdoor Recreation Strategy was developed in tandem with the Waterford Outdoor Recreation Plan and will form a supplementary document to the main plan itself. The Comeraghs is seen as a unique geographical location within the context of Waterford and is a key destination of outdoor enthusiasts. This strategy therefore seeks to develop a holistic and collaborative approach to managing outdoor recreation in the area, for the benefit of the mountain environment and local communities. It will set out a vision, strategic priorities and actions for the next 5 years to realise this ambition under the following themes: Leadership and Collaboration; Environment; Access and infrastructure; Awareness; Opportunities and Expertise .

If you would like any further information about the plans , please contact Waterford Sports Partnerships’ Outdoor Recreation Officer, David Abbott, at dabbott@waterfordsportspartnership.ie or Johnny Brunnock, Trails Officer, Waterford City and County Council at jbrunnock@waterfordcouncil.ie.



Picture John Foley



Picture John Foley

Copper Coast Geopark News Update



Copper Coast Geopark is delighted to announce that we have been awarded funding from Community Foundation Ireland to develop a Community Biodiversity Action Plan for an area in Bunmahon.

This exciting project will bring together landowners, farmers, community groups, schools, the National Parks and Wildlife Service (NPWS), and the Waterford Biodiversity Officer to map local habitats and identify actions to protect and enhance biodiversity in the area.

The plan will focus on supporting important local species such as choughs, pollinators, wildlife, and local biodiversity, while helping to protect and celebrate the unique natural heritage of the Copper Coast.

Community involvement will be vital to the success of this project. We will be hosting an Open Day at the Copper Coast Geopark Visitor Centre in April, where people can learn more about the project and find out how they can get involved. Please keep an eye on our social media pages for further details and updates.

Looking ahead, May will be a busy month for the Geopark as we celebrate both the Bealtaine Festival and European Geoparks Week. We have a variety of events planned, including a Fossil Bingo event, a Geoheritage Walk, and a Garden Swap and Share event, offering fun and engaging opportunities for people of all ages to connect with the geology, nature, and heritage of the Copper Coast.



The Copper Coast Geopark is the oldest UNESCO Global Geopark on the island of Ireland

GAA CLUB IN FOCUS

Stradbally, Sráidbhaile na nDéise, An tSraidbhaile, is a GAA club serving the parish of Stradbally, Ballylaneen, Faha, and beyond in County Waterford, and competing in football, hurling and ladies football. With an eye to the future GAA developments of “one club,” there are moves afoot to try to establish Camogie in the club starting at under 8 age level. Traditionally, we have always had girls playing underage hurling on the boys teams. We currently have girls from our underage football teams playing camogie with adjoining clubs. Depending on the interest shown, we may endeavour to register in the next year. Our members identify as being connected to Stradbally by location or familial ties, going to school there, going to religious services there or being buried there. Once a Stradbally person, always a Stradbally person.



History and Achievements Stradbally GAA was formed on November 1st 1886 when the main activity was athletics but gradually the emphasis moved to football. Stradbally won their first Junior title in 1932, followed by minor title in 1937 which led to the first 5-in a row in the 1940s. In the 1940s the manager Fr Cummins, got a cousin of his to buy a new set of red jerseys in Cork and the club colours changed from horizontal stripes to red and white. Following a lean period in the late 40s and early 50s we were regraded to Junior. We regained Senior status again in 1957, which we held until 2023. Having been regraded to Intermediate for 2024, we won that championship for 2 years and will return to the senior ranks in 2026. In total Stradbally have won 19 Waterford Senior football titles. In total Stradbally have won the Waterford Minor title in 1937, 1964, 2006, Junior titles in 1932, 1957, 2006, 2016. The Premier Intermediate Championship 2024 and 2025. The Senior Football Championship in 1940, 1941, 1942, 1943, 1944, 1972, 1980, 1982, 1987, 2001, 2002, 2003, 2004, 2005, 2009, 2010, 2012, 2015, 2017 and



were beaten senior finalists on 12 occasions. From 1972 to 2006 the one constant was **Sean Ahearne** in team leadership/management roles. Stradbally won under 21 football in 1974, 1997, 1999, Intermediate hurling in 1993, 1998 and Junior Hurling in 1974 and 1987. This century, a number of players won 10 County Senior football medals. Among the intercounty players on that team was 4 time All Star Hurler, **Michael (Brick) Walsh**. In all grades we are a dual club, the players play in both codes. No account of the clubs' successes could be penned without mentioning the contribution of those who week in week out provide

first aid for our teams, wash the jerseys, line the pitch etc. Our club is built on volunteerism, on the contribution of the many for the benefit of all in the area. These are often the same families who are involved in the Tidy Towns, etc.

Cultural Activites, Our Gaelic culture is an important part of the Stradbally area and we have a history within the GAA club, of being active in Scor, Munster champions in Scór na nÓg in 1993, winning the All Ireland Scór na nÓg, in Rinne Foirne in 1994 and 1995 and the Senior Scor Figure Dancing in 2000. Scor, especially dancing, lost out badly during the lock down in Covid but is up and running again now. This is all due to the availability of the clubhouse/social centre for practice sessions and to the dedication of Liz Murphy. In recent years the club hosts a cultural night to showcase Irish culture to locals and visitors alike.

Facilities In the early years, the club was dependent on the kindness of local farmers who gave it the use of their land to train. As a community Stradbally club has always welcomed players of all faiths and none, many of the farmers who facilitated the club pre 1972 were Church of Ireland small farmers. In 1972 a field was purchased and developed, opening the social centre/club house in 1979. With our own field it allowed the club to provide a pitch more suitable for hurling. We acquired an adjoining field in 2003. In 2008/2009 we installed floodlights and drained the top field. Today we have two full size floodlit pitches, an additional smaller juvenile training area, a hurling wall, a clubhouse/social centre, gym and dressing rooms, surrounded by a walking track which is used by the whole community for safe walking at night. We are currently fundraising for further developments including an astroturf area. With sustainability in mind, one of our next big projects is to upgrade the lights on the top (older) field to LEDs

GAA CLUB IN FOCUS

Stradbally LGFA, operating from the same facilities, have won the Waterford Minor football championship in 2013, 2014, Junior Football championship in 2011, 2006 and the Intermediate championship in 2014. In 2025 they were beaten finalists at Junior level and semi-finalists at Senior level. The mothers and others also play from our grounds which gives an opportunity to the more senior ladies to remain involved both socially and physically.

In recent years huge progress has been made at underage level with teams at under 12, under 14 and under 16 now operating in Division 1 in Hurling, competing and winning the Shield final in under 16 hurling. Much of this underage development in both codes is due to the input of the former players who played at adult level in the 1990s and 2000s and to the work and support of the Principals and staff in the Primary Schools in the Parish.

Stradbally have represented Waterford in the Munster Senior and Intermediate Club football Championship where we have been beaten senior finalists in 1980 and 2004.

Social Centre While our club house/social centre is primarily for the benefit of our members, it is used by the local community for the afters of funerals, christenings and other family events, by county and national organisations for information days/evenings, by state agencies as a polling station which allows the local schools to remain open on polling days. Dancing and other classes are also held there. Irish dancing lessons have been held there for many years. It is open each Sunday night for a chat and refreshments as a meeting place for club members and the community. It also hosts fundraising events both for the club and the community.

Among other achievements of club members, Pat (Paco) Curran played simultaneously for the Waterford senior teams in the 1980s/90s as goalkeeper in hurling and football, at a time when dual players could line out for the football team one week and the hurling team the following week in the national league. He was awarded the Hurling Save of the Year in 1987. Many club members too numerous to name individually, have represented the club as Co Board Officials and team selectors over the years.

No account of this glorious club in 2026 would be complete without mentioning the loss to the club of the three Toms, Tom Hearne, Tom Foley and Tom Cunningham in 2004/2005, all of whom played for many years for this club and worked tirelessly behind the scenes to produce younger players over the years. Ar Dheis Dé go bhfuil siad.



PADRAIG O MILEADHA

Sitting proudly in the centre of the village of Touraneena is a monument, which recognises the contribution to Irish culture, made by local poet Pádraig O Mileadha.

Born in 1877, in Sceithini, near Touraneena village, West Waterford, in the district known as Sliabh gCua / Na Déise.

Pádraig was brought up by his grandfather, Muiris. The old man could speak no English, yet, when Pádraig had completed his elementary education at the local National School, he could neither read nor write in his home language, because Irish was forbidden, by law, to be taught in Irish schools. As a teenager he made it his business to acquire those skills on his own initiative.

In 1903 Pádraig emigrated to Wales and ended up in Clydach in the Swansea Valley. He found employment in the local Mond Nickel Works and eventually met and married Ellen Cullinan, who had also emigrated from “Na Déise”. Their children went to the local Catholic school,

where they found themselves immersed in English, which was the only language of education in Wales at that time. However, they lived in an area where practically everyone spoke Welsh, so the children learned some Welsh informally, especially songs.

Pádraig, however, was mainly concerned about his own language and devoted himself to the work of “Conradh na Gaeilge” (the “Gaelic League”, founded in 1893 by Douglas Hyde) which in those years had a network of branches in South Wales. He was in great demand as a teacher at the evening classes arranged by the “Conradh”, sometimes travelling as far as Merthyr Tydfil after completing an exhausting day at the nickel works.

It was during this time that the poet wrote his most famous piece - Sliabh Geal gCua, a poem in song that has become accepted as one of Ireland’s greatest songs of exile and one of the classics of the language. Pádraig would often go with his wife and children to the seaside - Swansea Bay, Mumbles, the many coves of Gower. There he would sit and think of his childhood home, of his own language and of the grand old people who had spoken that language all around him in his earliest years. One day, either as he sat by the sea or back at his Welsh home in Clydach, he wrote down these lovely words. The song has been recorded by Liam Clancy, Nioclás Tóibin and many other noted performers.

He took an active part in trade union activities at his workplace and finally lost his job there, because he took the side of the workers during a strike, which closed the Mond Nickel Works for three months in 1922.

He went back to Ireland with his wife and children in 1922. The family had been impoverished during the long strike and in Ireland they had to confront a land in the throes of civil war. After many months of hardship, endured with the help of family and friends, Pádraig succeeded in getting a job as a teacher of Irish.

He remained in that post until his health broke during the Second World War. He died in 1947 and was buried in the cemetery at Tur an Fhíona (Touraneena).

Then, in 1977, 100 years after his birth, the President of Ireland, Cathal O Dálaigh, unveiled the monument and a plaque placed over his grave. In unveiling the monument Mr. O Dálaigh said the name of Pádraig O Milléadha was one that was held with honour the country over. “We believe as he believed” Mr. O Dálaigh said “that the Irish language is part of the old heritage of Ireland and that a child should imbibe it from the cradle.



PADRAIG O MILEADHA

Then, in 1977, 100 years after his birth, the President of Ireland, Cathal O Dálaigh, unveiled the monument and a plaque placed over his grave. In unveiling the monument Mr. O Dálaigh said the name of Pádraig O Milléadha was one that was held with honour the country over. "We believe as he believed" Mr. O Dálaigh said "that the Irish language is part of the old heritage of Ireland and that a child should imbibe it from the cradle.

The platform party included Mgr. Tomas O Fiach, President of St. Patrick's College Maynooth, who was the chief celebrant of a special sung Mass in Touraneena Church; Dr. Kenneth Whitaker, former Governor of the Central Bank and presently Chancellor of the National University and Chairman of Bord na Gaeilge; U.C.C. Lecturer Padraig Tyres, who hails from Touraneena Parish, the Co. Waterford Poet and author Padraig O Fionnusa, and Mr. Sean Whelan, M.C.C., Vice Chairman of Waterford Co. Council.

Also on the platform were the poet's son, Muirish O Milleadha, and his daughter Margaret Bean Ui Hallachain and his grandson Muiris O Hallachain (Monnie Hallanan).

Although Padraig had never received more than the elementary education offered at his local school, and had spent almost twenty years as a factory worker, he had always been interested in books, literature, music and song. During the years in Clydach his children inherited a tradition of Irish music, song and dance which his grandchildren and great grandchildren maintain to this day. He himself wrote verses, poems and songs in both English and Irish which are now a cherished part of the cultural heritage of County Waterford.

Ó a Shliabh Geal gCua na Féile	Sé mo léan ná fuaireas tógaint
Is fada uait i gcéin mé	Le léann is mór-chuid eolais
Im shuí cois cuain im aonair	I nGaelinn uasal cheolmhar
Go tréith-lag fé bhrón	Ba sheolta mo bhéal
An tuile bhuí ar thaobh díom	Do threabhfaínn cuairt thar sáile
'Dir mé 'gus tír mo chléibhe	Is do thabharfaínn bua thar barr chughat
'S a Shliabh Geal gCua na Féile	Mar, a Shliabh Geal gCua ba bhreá liom
Nách géar é mo sceol.	Thú d'árdach i réim
Dá mbeinnse 'measc mo ghaolta	Mo ghrá-sa thall na Déise
I Sceithín ghlas na séimh-fhear	'Dir bhánta, gleannta 's sléibhte
Nuair a scaipeann teas na gréine ann	Ó shnámhas anonn thar tréan-mhuir
Ón spéir gheal gan smál	Táim tréith-lag gan bhrí
Nó dá mbeinnse ansúd faoin réaltan	Ach ó b'áil le Dia mé ghlaoch as
Nuair a thiteann drúcht ar fhéar ann	Mo shlán-sa siar go hÉirinn
Ó a Shliabh Geal gCua nár dhéirc sin	Agus slán le Sliabh na Féile
Dá mb'fhéidir í d'fháil	Le saor-ghean óm chroí.

FROM COAST TO COMERAGH

WITH



Kieran Foley

Cirilo Amoros commemoration at Ballyvooney

In February, the 100th anniversary of the Cirilo Amoros incident was marked in Stradbally. The ship ran aground during a storm on February 15th 1926 at Ballyvooney Cove. Locals sprang into action to help bring the crew of more than 30 ashore. Fortunately, there weren't any fatalities but numerous items were washed ashore, to the bemusement of many, including oranges and bottles of wine. A special event was staged at Ballyvooney on Sunday February 15th last which involved the unveiling of a plaque. The event was organised by locals keen to promote and preserve this important part of the local area's history. Following the event, those in attendance went to Whelan's Bar which was adorned with Spanish flags to mark the occasion. Caroline Whelan had baked a beautiful cake in the shape of the Cirilo Amoros which was enjoyed by all. You can listen back to a special report from this commemoration in the podcasts section on wlrfm.com



Further success for John Hayes

There has been further success for Fenor's John Hayes who battled to make history at the World Ice Art Championships in Alaska.

He became the first Irish man, among more than 100 participants from around the world, to compete in the Championships, which began in 1989 and are held annually.

The contest sees teams tasked with carving ice into abstract or ultra-realistic works of art.

The piece entitled 'The Cat Lady' that was created by John and his team earned them a fourth place position.

John, well-known to many through Special Branch Carvers, is certainly now showcasing his talents on a global scale.



Fred Sirieix visits County Waterford

In January, *Tour de Fred – Part Deux* was broadcast on ITV and subsequently broadcast on Virgin One. The series followed popular TV personality Fred Sirieix as he visited the South and South East. Waterford featured prominently in the series which showcased the county in all its majestic glory. Significant coverage was given to features and amenities within the Comeragh region, including the Waterford Greenway, the Waterford Suir Valley railway and Mount Congreve. After visiting the city, Fred cycled along the Copper Coast, extolling the beauty of the area. He stopped off in Fenor before making his way to the Comeragh Mountains, venturing into the Mahon Falls. He also participated in a yoga class at Crough Wood. This was a fantastic series which certainly promoted Waterford in a very positive light.



Bridie Griffin celebrates 105th birthday

Bridie Griffin, well-known to many across Waterford and beyond through her family's business Griffin's Garage, celebrated her 105th birthday on January 3rd.

Bridie was born in 1921, a year defined by the final months of fighting in the War of Independence and the agreement of the Anglo-Irish Treaty.

Born and reared on a farm in Ballingarron near Bonmahon, Bridie was the third eldest in her family which consisted of three brothers and five sisters born to parents William and Mary Anne O'Connell.

She walked three miles to attend Ballinarrid National School and later went to Carrick-on-Suir as a boarder. She married Jack Griffin (RIP) in October 1947 and the couple raised two sons, Leo and Willie, and one daughter, Marian (RIP).

Bridie is grandmother to Laura, Brian, Katie and John and is also a great-grandmother.

In 2021, when Bridie turned 100, a socially distant celebration was held outside Griffin's Garage at the height of Covid-19 restrictions.

As she marked her momentous 105th birthday, she spoke to WLR with her granddaughter Laura and shared some of her words of wisdom. You can listen to the full interview in the podcasts section on wlrfm.com



Funding for Kilmacthomas Fire Station

Approval has been granted for Waterford City and County Council to accept a tender for a new fire station in Kilmacthomas. As a result, the long-awaited project can now move to construction. The €2.7 million development marks a major step forward for local fire services.

The new station will be located on the R667, around one kilometre from the village. The modern facility will include locker rooms, showers, a training room, and a drill tower. In addition, it will accommodate two fire appliances and up to twelve firefighters.

The project delivers a significant upgrade for retained firefighters who serve mid-County Waterford. After several false dawns in the past, this recent decision represents progress for Kilmacthomas and the wider community.



Community Finance Ireland is the most progressive social finance provider on the island of Ireland. We are in this position because we work exclusively with community groups, volunteer led sports clubs, not-for-profits and social enterprises to help them access affordable and sustainable loans. We are passionate about ensuring social impact is felt not just dreamt.

We believe in putting people in front of people and each of our clients has a dedicated local Client Relationship Manager who will meet with you in person and help you with every step of your loan from initial project idea to loan drawdown and beyond.

In our 25 years of doing business, we have supported a wide variety of projects including: Support with drawing down of retrospective grants, Sports Capital Grants, GAA Provincial Grants, LEADER grants and local government grants. Assisting with the purchase of new or existing premises.

Upgrading, retro-fitting and future-proofing facilities. Helping to improve, diversify or expand services to increase your membership base.

Refinancing existing debts into a more manageable package.

We have loaned over €110m to clients across the island of Ireland including groups like Pallasgreen Templebraden Community Council who used bridging finance from CFI to install a new community playground, a sensory garden and walkway and renovated their community hall. The revitalised community hall hosts weekly exercise classes, youth club activities and is home to the Blasta Café which has become a hub for locals to meet and enjoy some delicious home bakes. Supporting loans ranging from €10k to €500k, you can be confident that if you have an idea or a dream, we know how to support your request and help get finance into your project.

If you are ready to make an application, visit our website: www.communityfinanceireland.com or call our office on 041 6858 637.



Chronic Health Advocate – Supporting Families Living with Illness

Local social enterprise continues to grow its programmes, wins community recognition and prepares to launch a new Mobile Wellness Pod.

Chronic Health Advocate is a Waterford-based social enterprise founded by Dunhill natives ElaineSarah Comerford and Mark Bolger, dedicated to supporting families living with chronic, life-altering and complex illnesses.



The inspiration for Chronic Health Advocate grew from lived experience within the local community. When ElaineSarah and Mark faced serious health challenges in their own family, they experienced the incredible support of neighbours, friends and the wider community. They quickly realised that not every family facing illness has access to that kind of support network, which inspired them to create an organisation built around peer support and connection. For many families, illness can bring long hospital stays, emotional strain, financial pressure and isolation. Chronic Health Advocate was created to ensure that families navigating these challenges do not feel alone and have access to community, support and practical tools to help them cope and thrive.

Over the past year the organisation has continued to grow its work supporting parents and carers across Ireland through a range of innovative programmes designed to strengthen wellbeing, connection and resilience.

One of the most popular initiatives is Art for the Heart, a creative online social programme where parents come together to relax, connect and take part in guided art sessions. For many parents caring for a child with complex medical needs, these evenings provide a rare opportunity to take a breath, enjoy some creative time and connect with others who truly understand their journey. The organisation also delivers structured peer support programmes that help parents rebuild emotional strength, improve communication within the family and regain a sense of control during difficult times.

The impact of these programmes has been significant, with many parents reporting that they feel less isolated, more hopeful and better equipped to manage the complex realities of caring for a child with serious health needs.

Recognition for the organisation's work came recently when Chronic Health Advocate received a PPN Community Award, acknowledging the positive impact the organisation is having for families and the wider community.

This month they will speak at an event on social enterprise, sharing the story of how lived experience can be transformed into meaningful supports that help others.

Looking ahead, an exciting new initiative is about to launch. In the coming months Chronic Health Advocate will begin rolling out its Mobile Wellness Pod, a travelling wellbeing space designed to provide moments of rest and restoration for parents, carers and healthcare workers. The pod will visit community locations and healthcare settings, offering a calm environment where individuals can take a short break, recharge and focus on their own wellbeing. Keep an eye out for upcoming locations where you might be able to access this support.

What began as a local idea inspired by the strength of community support within the Dunhill Community is now helping families across Ireland feel supported, connected and hopeful.

TOM KIELY – THE OLYMPIC CHAMPION AT KILGOBINET

Kevin McCarthy

The Waterford side of the Comeraghs can lay considerable claim to Ireland's greatest all-round athlete prior to Percy Kirwan. Tom Kiely hailed most definitely from Ballyneill on the north side of the Suir, and allegedly told the 1904 Olympic organisers in St Louis that he was representing 'Tipperary and Ireland'. In his athletics career, Tom Kiely amassed over forty Irish athletics titles, five English AAA titles and two 'World' championships, the first of which is nowadays classed as an Olympic decathlon title. Many regard him as Ireland's greatest ever athlete, often known simply by the nickname "The Champion".

It is less well known that Kiely spent a decade and a half living on the Waterford side of the Comeragh Mountains. In fact, when the 1911 census returns for the Kiely household were filled in, it was even mistakenly recorded that the great Tipperary man had been born in Waterford! So how did he end up in the Waterford Comeraghs?

Tom Kiely got married in his mid-thirties and seems to have had a bit of a falling out with his father in Ballyneill at the time. Tom and his wife Mary moved to a small farm near Kill in 1908 and in 1909 took over a more substantial holding at Fruithill, close to Coolnasmead and Kilgobinet, looking out on Dungarvan Bay. Kiely already had many, many contacts with County Waterford and was a good friend of Dan Fraher in Dungarvan, having often competed in athletics meetings at Dan Fraher's field.

Kiely always regarded himself as more of a cattle dealer than a farmer and at Fruithill he continued in this line. He used to buy cattle early in the year in the west, at fairs in places like Castleisland and Banteer, and have them driven along the roads back to his land in Waterford. At Fruithill, the animals were fattened up over the summer months and his wife Mary reared chickens. Each autumn, Kiely would sell his cattle for slaughter or export from the ports of Dungarvan or Waterford and earned a good living. During the Great War, he spent some of his time rearing horses for the British army. The horses would be driven along the backroads from Dungarvan to Kilmacthomas, where local dealer Rod Shanahan would buy them and ship them onwards through Waterford and ultimately to the Western Front.

Undoubtedly the biggest occasion during Kiely's sojourn in Waterford was the athletics match between him (aged 38) and the great Irish-American Olympic discus champion, Martin Sheridan of Mayo. Sheridan had just won his ninth Olympic medal at the London Games in 1908 and visited Ireland before returning to his home in the USA. Kiely had retired from athletics the previous year – in fact, his victory in the Irish 120 yards hurdles of 1907 was also the first time Percy Kirwan appeared in that race, though Kirwan did not finish. In any event, Kiely was persuaded in 1908 to come out of retirement, for one last great sporting contest – a five-weights throwing contest against Sheridan at the Fraher Field.

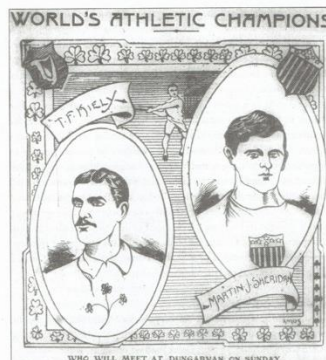
Newspaper accounts of the day suggest that 10,000 people made their way to Dungarvan that August day in 1908. They came on foot, by horse and cart, on special trains laid on from Waterford and Mallow. This was to be the ultimate contest to decide Ireland's greatest athlete, a battle between the Champion Kiely and the 'returned Yank' Sheridan, so to speak. The excitement was enhanced by the prodigious amount of betting which took place, apparently, on each event. Kiely had not thrown weights in some considerable time and Sheridan, though much younger, was a discus specialist more than a weight thrower. Frank Dineen, owner of Croke Park, came specially from Dublin to act as referee.

The five-event contest involved traditional Irish events - a 16lb shot put, a 16lb hammer, 56lb and 28lb with the final event to be a rarely-contested 7lb weight throw. After four events, Kiely had won two and Sheridan two, so it was all down to the 7lb throw. Kiely had last thrown this weight about ten years previously and Sheridan, quite probably, never at all. Each man had three throws, and each time the referee ruled the throws as fouls.

Accordingly, whether the crowd liked it or not, the contest was declared a draw. Nobody won any money that day but, in a way, it was a perfect ending, ensuring that neither the Champion nor the great hero of Irish American lost face. Both men, incidentally, were great friends and posed in their finest attire for photographs, some of which can still be seen in Waterford County Museum in Dungarvan.



Tom Kiely (front left) and Martin Sheridan (front Right) with some dignitaries on the occasion of their contest in Dungarvan. Dan Fraher is on the left at the back (Waterford Co. Museum)



A promotional poster for the Kiely-Sheridan contest in Dungarvan, from the *Irish Weekly Freeman*, 15 August 1908.

ACHIEVEMENTS

Great All-Ireland Camogie Win.

Comeragh camogie players were to the fore when Scoil Mhuire, Greenhill, Carrick-on-Suir won the senior All-Ireland Post Primary Schools B Camogie championship. They beat Presentation College, Wexford on the score of 0-13 to 2-4 in an exciting final. The team consisted of players from Portlaw, Clonea and St Mollerans (Waterford), Mooncoin, Piltown and Windgap (Kilkenny) players. It was great to see the Waterford (Comeragh)- Kilkenny combination producing such high- class camogie throughout the championship. Riona Shankey Portlaw was captain of the winning team.



Eona Shankey, from Portlaw, and the Scoil Mhuire, Greenhill, Carrick on Suir, Senior Camogie Team secured a win in st-Primary School All Ireland Senior B Camogie Final in SETU, Carlow.

New Stand for Pairc De Hindeberg, Portlaw

Portlaw GAA have received planning permission for a 200 seat viewing stand. The club had received a proposal from Philly Hennebry a former hurler who offered to cover the cost of the stand in memory of his late brother Jimmy who was a one time star forward on their team. Philly emigrated to the US in the 1980s and set up a successful business. He always kept in touch with Portlaw and the hurling club. The club are delighted to receive such a gift from the Hennebry family. The two lads were outstanding hurlers of county standard. The club plans to have the stand in place by mid to late summer, 2026.

Clonea GAA

The Clonea NS Boys Team won the Hurling Mini 7's Eastern Final beating Ballygunner NS. They are now through to the County Final.

Conor Galvin has been selected to play in the Hurling Primary School Games



A new kind of local: how coworking hubs are strengthening communities from the inside out.

By Stephen Carolan, Connected Hubs

In towns and villages across Ireland, a quiet transformation is taking place. Disused buildings of all type are becoming vibrant coworking hubs that bring together local entrepreneurs, remote workers, social enterprises and community groups.

Through the Connected Hubs network, these spaces are forming a national infrastructure for local regeneration, offering not just a place to work, but a platform to build rooted, inclusive economic opportunities.

Coworking hubs are often viewed as tools for flexible or remote working, but in the Irish context they have become much more than that. Many are managed by local development organisations, social enterprises or volunteer committees, and serve as multi-use spaces with public purpose at their core. This embedded governance allows hubs to reflect and respond to local needs, from business incubation and training programmes to childcare, community events and digital upskilling.

For small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs), hubs offer a critical lifeline, particularly in rural areas where access to broadband, meeting rooms or professional networks may be limited. The Connected Hubs platform gives these businesses the ability to book space, connect with peers and tap into a growing support ecosystem. The recent campaign targeted at SMEs, using the line “Great companies need good company”, reflects this. Coworking is reframed not as a stopgap, but as a smart, socially connected business strategy.

This local-first model is also powering the growth of social enterprises, many of which operate from within the hubs themselves. These organisations — often focused on youth work, sustainability or inclusion — benefit from shared infrastructure, reduced overheads and collaboration opportunities. Hubs can also host artist studios and community kitchens, ensuring the space remains porous and accessible, not exclusive or corporate. Importantly, hubs support social inclusion by creating accessible, welcoming spaces



close to where people live. This is particularly valuable for people with disabilities, carers or those who find long commutes challenging. A 2023 WDC report highlighted how local coworking hubs can reduce barriers to employment for people with disabilities by removing transport obstacles and offering high-speed connectivity and professional facilities within their own community. The Connected Hubs model, which is a government of Ireland initiative, operated by the Western Development Commission on behalf of the Department of Rural and Community Development and the Gaeltacht, is increasingly being seen as a lever for place-based development. Rather than parachuting in external solutions, the hubs approach builds on what’s already there — trusted local organisations, strong social networks and underused buildings — and provides the digital and physical infrastructure to enable new forms of work and collaboration.

In this way, Connected Hubs are strengthening communities from the inside out. They are creating a new kind of local — one that values flexibility but stays rooted; one that enables enterprise but is driven by community. As Ireland continues to invest in its regions, hubs offer a blueprint for how to do so sustainably, inclusively and with long-term impact

FENOR BOG



Fenor Bog- Rita Byrne

Fenor Bog is part of the Copper Coast Heritage trail which runs from outside Tramore to Stradbally in Co. Waterford on the South coast of Ireland. It is the gateway to the Copper Coast and is just one of the features on this trail. The bog is in the village of Fenor, 6 Km from Tramore and 16 Km from Waterford City on the R675, which is the Coast Road from Tramore to Dungarvan. The entrance to the bog is from the church car park in the Village and there is also a path, from the byroad (which leads to BallyScanlan Woods and the lakes of BallyScanlan + Carrickavantry). The bog is well signposted.

Fenor Bog is a rare alkaline fen and rates highly on its biodiversity, variety of habitat and the uniqueness of species in its ecosystem. Up to 150 years ago turf or peat was cut here. Since then, it has been left undisturbed. This bog is an excellent example of rich rejuvenating peatland habitat. It contains a storehouse of natural variety - wet woodland, dominated by willow and alder, undulating great tussock sedge vegetation and flat wet wildflower areas. Ten different plant communities occur in the bog and with each vegetation survey rare fen plants are being discovered (e.g. *Calligeron giganteum*, a moss of open wet fens, previously unknown in Co. Waterford, was found here by Dr. Howard Fox, a bryologist with the National Botanic Gardens. The mineral rich surface and ground water influence the fen vegetation and water levels are at or above the surface of the bog for most of the year. The scientific importance of this area was first recognized in 1972 by An Foras Forbatha for its variety of wetland plant communities and the abundance of Marsh St. John's Wort (*Hypericum elodes*).

Fens have the highest biodiversity of any Irish Peatland, and they offer refuge to species which are post glacial relics. They are also a refuge for over 50% of Ireland's dragon flies, a vast range of insects, as well as being the habitat for migrant and wetland birds (Foss 2007).



The complexity of habitats that occur here contributes to the rich diversity of plant, Animal and insect life.

"The diversity of plants and animals on this bog is absolutely amazing, from birds to bees, dragonflies to butterflies, snails to beetles and orchids to otters, Fenor Bog has it all". (Killian Breathnach M Sc). Fen habitats, together with their unique collection of plants, animals and insects are now rare in Ireland and are seriously endangered but in Fenor, the community has insured that these 32 acres will remain, a National Nature Reserve and a safe refuge for all creatures. The founding principles of M. F. D.A. (Moin Fhionniurach Development Association) are to "Preserve, Protect and Manage Fenor Bog so that its uniqueness is protected for Posterity".

Once, Ireland had 1.2 million hectares of peatland. Today 92% of all this has been lost. Fenor Bog began to grow about 10,000 years ago in a lake basin at the foot of BallyScanlan Hill. Over time anaerobic conditions (absence of oxygen) allowed decayed plant material or peat bog to infill the lake. The accumulating peat eventually formed a thick dome called a raised bog. Turf was cut by local people back in the 1800s but for the past 150 years or so the bog has regenerated itself into the wet fen habitat it is today. Here in the bog are places where land and water meet and you will find characteristics of both terrestrial and aquatic ecosystems in these half-way worlds.

In July 2008 Fenor Community were presented with an international award in recognition of their role in conserving Fenor Bog, Dr. Matthijs Schouten, founder of the Dutch Foundation for the Conservation of Irish Bogs made the presentation on behalf of Queen Beatrix of the Netherlands.

The roof space of Fenor Church is a roost for long eared and pipistrel bats. They live on the myriads of insects that thrive on the bog. The Church roof is also home to a large colony of bees. Their food source is also the nectar of the bog flowers. In the middle of the bog, on a thick domed area there is also a hive of wild bees (in the area around this dome turf was cut and now wet vegetation is growing on what were once bogholes, it can be very dangerous and moves underfoot, i.e. vegetation growing on water). There is also a hive of bees behind the pond - opposite the G.A.A pitch.

FENOR BOG

In the conifer Plantation under BallyScanlan Hill (which is the core of one of the ancient volcanoes of the Copper Coast) a sparrow hawk has its nest. In May and June, on still evenings, baby chicks can be heard calling for food as the parents quarter the Bog and the GAA field opposite. In the area around the bog Long Eared and Barn Owls have been recorded and in winter the Short-Eared Owl has been seen within a mile of the Bog. In the tall cedar trees, which surround the church a noisy rookery of crows fill the air with their caws. The horse chestnut trees between the Church Car-park and the bog are a great source for foraging and fun for local school children in Autumn.

Reed Buntings, Sedge Warblers and Meadow Pipit breed in the tall reeds and In the Willow and Alder Carr as do Robins, Wrens, thrushes and Blackbirds.

Unfortunately, mink wiped out our duck families, but one brave coot still builds her nest in the reed-beds each year and raises a brood of chicks on the pond. At the western end of the fen there is a much larger pond where a pair of swans rear their cygnets each year. This area is not accessible from the boardwalk but can be reached from the gated lane, which is just below the church, on the Annestown road i.e. Finnegans Lane). This year (2025) a purple heron, a hobby and a turtle dove were recorded in the surroundings of the Bog

In winter tracks of badger, fox and otter are visible in the dying vegetation and from February frogspawn and tadpoles are evident in the flooded fen habitat. In Summer, basking lizards soak in the sun's heat from the boardwalk and railings and newts can be seen gorging on insects in the Ponds. Dr. Peter Turner of WRTC tells us that this area, which he has surveyed, has an abundance of Ireland's Smallest Mammal, the Pigmy Shrew.

On still evenings the mewing of Sika escapees from local deer farms) can be heard.

They Live quite happily on the drier areas under BallyScanlan Hill



On warm still summer days, the pond at the beginning of the board walk, is the place to see dragonflies, Brown Winged Hawkers, Common Darters and large Red Dragonflies flit from side to side hunting for insects. The magnificent Emperor Dragonfly was first recorded here in 2003; she was seen ovipositing in the still water of the pond. Both the dragonfly and damselfly can spend up to two years developing under water as nymphs before emerging as adults.

On a walk in the bog from early spring to deep winter, prepare to be amazed day the colors of the flowers, the yellow of the King Cup , the Vibrant blue of the devil's blue scabions, the pale cream of Meadow Sweet and Angelica, the deep pinks of ragged robin and the paler pink of Lady's smock (with bees and hoverflies and the orangetip and greenveined butterflies gorging on their nectar) and the jewel like maroon of the Marsh Cinquefoil.

Three of the dominant plants of the bog are the clumps of Carex Paniculata or tussock sedge, the Majestic Royal fern with its pale green leaves and the tall straight stems and Cigar live heads of the bull rush. (In earlier times the leaves of this plant were used in this area to thatch sheds + stables, when straw was scarce).

The purchase of the 32 acres was the beginning of the years of hard work.



L to R: Pat Greene, Martin Middleton, Rita Byrne NT, Dr Mattijas Schonten, Represented the Government of the Netherlands, Jimmy O Sullivan, Stan Flynn, Dan Cowman



L to R: John Queally, Jimmy O Sullivan, Martin Cullen TD Minister for the Environment, Lar Curran Oisín Kelly Irish Peatlands Conservation Council

UPCOMING EVENTS



**Easter Sunday
5th April 2026**




To Register:
Scan the QR Code
or
Call Liam on 087 211 9203




Starting Point: **Leamybrien**
Registration: **8.00am**
Starting Time: **9.00am**
Entry Fee: **€25.00**

(donations welcome)

KILL COMMUNITY CENTRE
presents



**DEREK WARFIELD
& THE YOUNG
WOLFE
TONES**



Supported By Tommy Comerford
Sat. 11th April 2026. Doors at 6:30 Gig at 7pm
Bar & Refreshments / Tickets €25
Booking On Powertik or Contact 086-8569358

This event will help fund the
Kill Senior Residents Christmas Meal 2026

Stretch & Strengthen
CLASS FOR OVER 55s

At Kill Community Centre
4:30pm



4 week block
Beginning Thurs April 2nd

Limited spaces only
Contact Michelle 083 1737051




Kilmacthomas Scout Group
Need Your Help

Adult volunteers needed
for young people in your local community of
Kilmacthomas and Surrounding areas

No experience necessary, Training provided

Child spaces will be limited and preference will be given
where adults are willing to join up as Volunteers

Contact: jwalsh@scouts.ie or 0876990304 for further details



TURNAROUND THEATRE

**The People That Live
in Boxes**
by Les Clarke

Directed by Helena Walsh Killy

Gealach Gorm Theatre
Kill, Co Waterford

Patrick Hennigan
Helena Walsh Killy
Carmel Furlong
Emmett Cullinane

MAY 1 to 3 at 8pm

Tickets on powertik.ie
or pre-book 086 8569358



Friday Art Club
@
The Art Hand
Lots of creative
fun to be had 😊
11am to 1pm



**New classes starting
on April 23rd
for four weeks
Call Miranda on
087-8398332**

BINGO
FUNDRAISING IN AID OF CLONEA PARISH HALL
EIRC CODE : E32X578
APRIL 6TH 2026 TIME: 7.30PM



RAFFLE ON THE NIGHT WITH GREAT PRIZES
SHOP AVAILABLE ON THE NIGHT
BOOK €10
GUARANTEED TO BE A GREAT NIGHT
ALL ARE WELCOME

EASTER CAMP
Tue 7th - Fri 10th
9am - 2pm



EASTER CAMP '26
**Kilmacthomas
Montessori**
€70 PER CHILD
FUN EASTER ACTIVITIES FOR YOUR CHILD
BOOK YOUR PLACE TODAY - 087-4686758

Like to have your event
included in next issue
email
angelamulcahy14@gmail.com

From Crystal to Butter: The Story Behind Irish Gourmet Butter

Tucked away in Dunhill Eco Park in Waterford City is a small business with a big story behind it. Irish Gourmet Butter was set up in 2017 by local man Billy Sharpe, and since then it has been quietly building a reputation for quality, care, and a strong connection to its roots.

After many years working in Waterford Crystal, Billy took a leap into the food business. His career began as a glassblower, before moving into management and later representing Waterford Crystal around the world. Through this work, he travelled extensively and developed skills in craftsmanship, presentation, and business - all of which, he says, led him naturally to where he is today.

"I learned a lot about quality and consistency in Waterford Crystal," he explains. "When you're making something by hand, whether it's glass or butter, the standards matter. People expect the best."

The idea for Irish Gourmet Butter came after he decided to return to education in 2016, studying business. Alongside his wife, Mary the pair had always shared an interest in food, and with Mary's background, the move into the food industry felt like a natural step.

Mary herself is no stranger to business. A former publican, she also grew up in a family deeply involved in food, having worked alongside her father and relatives in the industry. Her knowledge, creativity, and experience have played a major role in shaping the company's products.

"Mary brings the food side and the creativity," says Billy. "I bring the business side and the structure. It works because we trust each other."

Irish Gourmet Butter is based in Dunhill Eco Park, which Billy describes as an ideal location for a small producer. He is full of praise for the support he has received there since starting out.

"The Eco Park has been nothing but supportive and fantastic," he says. "It's a great environment for small businesses, and you really feel encouraged to grow."

He also speaks highly of Senan Cooke, who he worked with in Waterford Crystal and also agrees with Senan's strong beliefs in the importance of training and personal development. "Senan has been brilliant from the start. Any time we needed advice or support, he was there."

Looking back, Billy says the move from crystal to butter making may seem unusual, but it makes sense when viewed through the lens of craftsmanship and pride in product.

"I've always worked with my hands, whether it was glass or food," he says. "It's about making something you're proud of and putting your name on it."

Nearly nine years after launching Irish Gourmet Butter and with over 30 awards for the product, the business continues to grow steadily, built on family experience, local support, and a clear passion for quality.

For Billy and Mary, the journey has been as important as the destination. "We're very grateful for where we are," he says. "It's been hard work, but it's been worth it."



LR Mary Sharpe, Heather Humphries former minister for Social Protection and Social Enterprise, Willie Sharpe and Minister John Cummins TD in their Enterprise Unit in Dunhill

NATIONAL SOCIAL ENTERPRISE POLICY

National Social Enterprise Policy. No 2. 2024-2027

Social Enterprise Definition

A social enterprise is an enterprise whose objective is to achieve a social or environmental impact, rather than maximising profit for its owners or shareholders

It pursues its objectives by trading on an ongoing basis through the provision of goods and / or services, and by reinvesting surpluses fully or primarily into achieving social objectives

It is governed in a fully accountable and transparent manner and is independent of the public sector. If dissolved, it should transfer its assets to another organisation with a similar mission.

*** In many contexts Social Enterprise is an initiator, facilitator, accommodator of private enterprises. Enterprise Ireland, Local Enterprise Office and other state supports should be available to social enterprises who are supporting private enterprises in many different ways in rural communities.**

Examples: Community Enterprise Centres (SE) Remote Working Hubs, Community Social Enterprise Sites, GAA Clubhouses, Community Social Centres, Community Services and Facilities, Take Overs of Pubs, Shops.

COMMUNITY SPORTS FACILITIES FUND

The **Community Sports Facilities Fund** (formerly the *Sports Capital Grant*) is expected to open in late Spring 2026 (likely May/June). This funding provides valuable support for sports clubs and community groups to develop facilities and purchase equipment, so early preparation is essential.

While the scheme isn't open yet, groups are strongly encouraged to begin preparation.

What you should do now;

•Ensure your organisation is **registered on the OSCAR system at the following link:** <https://www.sportscapitalprogramme.ie/>

•Check that your **Tax Clearance** is valid or apply for one <https://www.waterfordppn.ie/tax-clearance-cert-for-community-organisations/>

•Gather required documentation (e.g. governing documents, bank details)

•Start planning your project and costings etc (equipment, facility improvements, etc.)

We will share further updates, information webinars and guidance as soon as the scheme officially opens.

The **Community Centres Investment Fund** is also expected to open soon.

If you are considering applying, we encourage you to start preparing now by identifying works, gathering quotes, and ensuring your documents are in order.

Based on recent rounds (expected to be similar in 2026):

- **€10,000 – €25,000** ? small-scale improvements

- **€25,000 – €100,000** ? larger refurbishment projects

Many Thanks

Angela Mulcahy for design and production of newsletter and video
Waterford City & County Council
South East Technological University
Teagasc
Waterford-Wexford Education & Training Board
Healthy Waterford - Eoin Morrissey
Department of Rural, Community Development & Gaeltacht
Buíon (Waterford Area Partnership)
Local Enterprise Office
Leader Partnership Board
PPN
Social Enterprise Republic of Ireland
Social Enterprise World Forum
WLRFM - Kieran Foley

State Support for Rural Regeneration Projects Earn A Massive Return on Investment.

Findings from Comhar Comaraigh Network research include the delivery of massive returns on investment to the state across generations in health, social inclusion, self-reliance, services, facilities, job opportunities and lifelong learning. A current blockage is the workload carried by volunteers involved in five and six organisations. They are tied up managing and sustaining many essential services and facilities on which so many in their community are dependent. A clear out of old services and facilities took place under a national displacement programme from early 1990s - 2016 and which is a continuing process in every rural community. Communities in response became more self-reliant and worked at providing more modern replacements from which all benefited. The big test is to maintain a strong rate of progress over coming decade. The key to future success is the funding of full-time coordinators for projects of scale and potential. Coordinators can support voluntary boards and teams with new direction, resources, expertise, solutions, contacts, ideas, that will ease and incentivise the willing volunteer. The challenge now is to maintain momentum on development over coming decade.

Please watch our videos which highlights some of the many assets and amenities in the 23 villages that are part of the Comhar Comeragh Network in Co. Waterford.



In Our Own Backyard



Rural Regeneration in The Comeragh Area