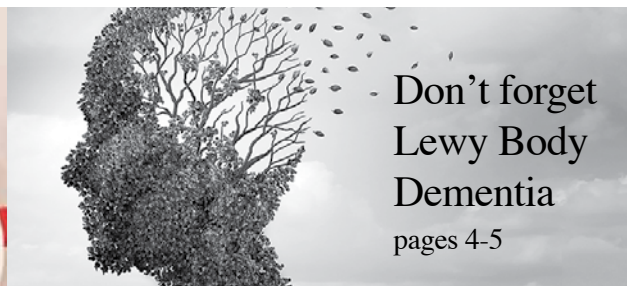




Find inspiration throughout this issue.



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Bandon GAA club are celebrating winning the SuperValu 'Community includes Everyone' Award which includes a donation of €5,000 towards further progressing the clubs inclusion and diversity programme. Pictured are Kitty Mullally and Levi Garde. Photo by Ger McCarthy.

## West Cork groups encouraged to apply for €1.8m Community Fund Scheme

Cork County Council has announced funding to the value of over €1.8million to support local communities in 2024. This is the Council's tenth year providing the Community Fund Scheme which has assisted in delivering a host of valuable community initiatives right across Cork County every year.

The scheme provides financial assistance to a range of different community, sporting and voluntary organisations under three distinctive fund types: The Capital Fund, Community Contract, and Amenity Fund and is administered locally by Cork County Council's eight Municipal Districts. These funds support a range of projects and initiatives, including the work of

Tidy Towns groups and community associations, infrastructural works, and sports and leisure facilities.

Mayor of the County of Cork, Cllr. Frank O'Flynn welcomed the return of the scheme for 2024 saying, "Now in its tenth year, the Community Fund Scheme has been very well-received by community groups around Cork since being first introduced. Communities have shown great pride in their local areas with some excellent projects undertaken through this scheme. I encourage community groups to make an application for this year's scheme to make a real difference to your local area."

Chief Executive of Cork County Council, Valerie O'Sullivan added "The Community Fund Scheme has

always been a welcome boost for our towns and villages. I'm pleased to announce that we have made €1.8m in support available again this year which exemplifies the Council's commitment to supporting communities in their efforts to continually enhance and improve the quality of life in their locality."

Guidelines for the scheme and application details are available on Cork County Council's website at [www.CorkCoCo.ie](http://www.CorkCoCo.ie) from Wednesday, January 10, 2024 to 4pm on Tuesday, February 13, 2024. Further details, including contact details for your local Municipal District Office are also available on the Council's website.



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# Leading and serving with the heart of a true volunteer

First established in 1939 as the Irish Red Cross Society (IRCS), today The Irish Red Cross is part of the world's largest humanitarian network helping people affected by crisis and conflict. Over the years the organisation has provided first aid services in wartime and peacetime, playing a vital and pioneering role in public health and social care services in Ireland, as well as providing international humanitarian aid and relief. Celebrating an impressive 50 years of service to the Irish Red Cross, Cork South West Area Director of Units, John Joe Lyons (72), chats to **Mary O'Brien** about his ongoing work with the organisation.

Disbanded in the 1940s after World War II, the resurrection of the Clonakilty branch of the Irish Red Cross was spearheaded by a Dr Edward Barrett in the early 1970s. At that time, a young John Joe Lyons, 22, was volunteering with the Civil Defence when he and two other volunteers, Denis Lee and Conor Dullea from Courtmacherry, were recruited over to join the mostly female team of Clonakilty Red Cross nurses.

The Irish Red Cross has always played an important role in supporting the elderly

in Irish society, particularly before the introduction of nursing homes. When John Joe joined the organisation in 1973, his training consisted of basic first aid and home nursing care courses. "Our role in the early days revolved mainly around teaching people who were caring for elderly family members at home how to make a bed properly, give a bed bath and so on," he shares. "The training today is obviously very different," he laughs.

Since its inception the Red Cross has been very involved with the settlement and needs

of refugees, the organisation's impressive work in this regard seen most recently with their support of thousands of Ukrainian refugees seeking temporary refuge in Ireland. John Joe's experience with assisting refugees dates back to his first year with the organisation, in 1973, when Clonakilty welcomed some of the refugees from Northern Ireland, who had been streaming across the border since 1969 in their thousands to escape the violence of the Troubles. During those years, the Irish Red Cross was charged by the government with

collecting money and relief supplies for the refugees. Those who arrived in Clonakilty were housed outside the town at Darrara Agricultural College and bused into and out of Clonakilty by the Civil Defence. The Clonakilty Red Cross looked after their basic needs, supplying them with spending money, food, clothing and first aid where needed.

Fast forward to 2022 and the Red Cross branches in the Cork South West Area under John Joe worked closely with Cork County Council to support the Ukrainian people seeking refuge in Ireland. "It was a huge undertaking," says John Joe, who shares how the Red Cross branches across Cork County have given out almost 6000 welcome packs to-date.

Clonakilty Community Centre provided temporary emergency accommodation for some of the first arrivals into West Cork from Ukraine. "Of course it was better than having no place to go but it was heart-breaking to see all the same," says John Joe. He recalls one teenager, who arrived in severe pain from a toothache after several days of travelling on her own. As it was late at night the only pain relief she could be offered was paracetamol. "It's a very sad situation but there was and still is massive support from the local community. You only have to put the call out and something arrives when needed. It's unbelievable how kind-hearted and generous people are. It certainly makes our job a lot easier," says John Joe, who recalls another occasion in the past when the local branch collected the grand total of £25,000 at a church gate collection when fundraising to help people affected by a natural disaster in



a third world country.

Jumping back to 1975, the Clonakilty branch of the Irish Red Cross was put on the road for the first time with the donation of a secondhand ambulance by a local lady, Mrs O'Donoghue of Western Road. This allowed the team – driver, first responder and nurse – to offer assistance at community events such as the Festival of West Cork, Clonakilty Show and various horse racing events and festivals in the locality. In the early 80s, the Clonakilty Red Cross even provided cover on Inchydoney beach for two months of the busy summer season when hordes of holiday-makers would inevitably result

in the requirement for basic first aid. "While at the time we were able to help with most fractures, we had to call on the National Ambulance Service for cardiac arrests," explains John Joe. "In those days, the Red Cross ambulance was basically a van with an oxygen tank!"

While he has attended many incidents over the years, from serious car accidents to children falling off merry-go-rounds, dealing with everything from fractures and concussions to severe burns, cardiac arrests and spinal injuries, one of the most frightening events that still stands out in John Joe's memories was the moment a jockey completely lost control

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of his horse at the races in Clonakilty Show. "I can still see him coming around the corner, holding on to the horse by the skin of his teeth. The sound his head made as he hit the ground going past us stayed with me," he shares. "We carried him on board the ambulance on a spinal board, which is nothing like the special vacuum mattress you have today that packs around a body like a plaster of Paris. Thankfully he survived."

As time moved on, in 2000 the National Ambulance Service and Red Cross service was regulated with the formation of the Pre-Hospital Emergency Care Council (PHECC), an independent statutory agency with responsibility for standards, education and training in the field of pre-hospital emergency care. From thereon the lowest level of qualification in the Irish Red Cross was that of Emergency First Responder. "Emergency Medical Technician roles were also created, which meant the service was capable of treating a patient with cardiac drugs in an ambulance," explains John Joe.

Finally in 2004, the series of troublesome secondhand ambulances that the Clonakilty Branch had been at the mercy of for so many years, were

replaced with a brand new vehicle, due to the fundraising efforts of the Clonakilty branch and the generosity of the local community. "There were great celebrations when we purchased the new ambulance," remembers John Joe. "The other ambulances were a lot older and inevitably broke down regularly, so on numerous occasions we would have had to call on one of the other ambulances in West Cork for cover." The same year, the Irish Red Cross created divisions within the organisation and John Joe was appointed as the Cork South West Area Unit Director, a role he still holds and one which involves overseeing and providing support at training sessions at all of the West Cork branches and recruiting new volunteers, as well as community work like distributing flood relief or organising the transportation by ambulance of a 95-year-old lady from Dublin to spend time with her daughter in Clonakilty, providing medical cover at local events or attending serious incidents such as the Tit Bonhomme fishing tragedy off Union Hall in 2012, where John Joe was on standby for the entire ten day search and rescue operation.

In 2017 John Joe was honoured with the National Volunteer of the Year Award by the Irish Red Cross.

Today the father-of four married to Sheila – who passed on his love of the job to his youngest son Ray, now an advanced paramedic working full-time with London Ambulance Service – is as busy as ever, making sure that all of the Red Cross volunteers under his care in West Cork are as qualified and licensed as they need to be.

"I'm very proud that we have an ambulance service in our community that's second-to-none and that so many of our volunteers advance to the National Ambulance Service," he says. "It's a great starting block for volunteers who want to eventually become paramedics," he says.

After 50 years of service, John Joe's dedication and commitment to his role with the Irish Red Cross is unwavering. "I just love the work," he shrugs. It's this passion that has inspired so many volunteers over the years and to which the West Cork community undoubtedly owes a great debt of gratitude.



John Joe Lyons, Connor Dullea and Anne Applyard (RIP) attending a St Patrick's Day parade in the early 1970s.






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# Don't forget Lewy Body Dementia

As we approach the inaugural World Lewy Body Dementia Day on January 28, Kevin Quaid, who was diagnosed with Lewy body dementia in 2017 after a previous diagnosis of Parkinson's Disease, tells **Mary O'Brien** why he wants people who have dementia to be less afraid of the disease and Iracema Leroi, a professor in geriatric psychiatry at Trinity College and consultant psychiatrist at St. James's Hospital in Dublin shares news of funding for a new programme to increase the quality of diagnosis and care for people with Lewy body dementias.



*Dementia campaigner  
Kevin Quaid*

“We have to stop the fear and the stigma,” says Kevin passionately. “People have symptoms and yet they’re afraid to go and get a diagnosis, instead lying awake at night wondering what they have.”

Kevin is Chair of The Alzheimer Society of Ireland’s Irish Dementia Working Group; Vice-Chair of the Alzheimer Europe European Working Group of People with Dementia and the founder of Lewy Body Ireland. He has written two books about his experiences with Dementia, titled ‘Lewy Body Dementia, Survival and

Me’ and ‘I am KEVIN not Lewy’ and is currently working on his third.

He stresses the importance of having a name for your dementia so a plan can be put in place. “There is no such thing as just a touch of dementia... a shot in the dark is just not good enough,” says Kevin.

There are over 200 subtypes of dementia with the most common including Alzheimers – one in nine people over the age of 65 or older – followed by Lewy body dementia, vascular, and mixed dementia. According to international dementia statistics, someone in the world

develops dementia every three seconds and it’s estimated that there are up to 10,000 people living with Lewy body dementia in Ireland.

The cause of Lewy body dementia is not known but it gets its name from a build-up of protein in brain cells called ‘Lewy bodies’ which are also seen in the brains of people with Parkinson’s disease. Many people with Parkinson’s eventually develop problems with thinking and reasoning, and many people with Lewy body dementia experience movement



*Iracema Leroi, MD,  
FRCPC, MRCPsych*

symptoms. While Lewy body dementia is the second most common type of dementia, it is frequently un- or misdiagnosed, as it can present in multiple forms. Lewy body dementia and Parkinson’s disease dementia together account for up to 15 per cent of all dementias and people living with these types of dementia can often fall through gaps in care.

Some of the most common symptoms of Lewy body dementia are problems with thinking, visual hallucinations, parkinsonism, sleep issues and

autonomic symptoms including a drop in blood pressure, incontinence and constipation

Professor Iracema Leroi is the co-lead on the Dementia Trials Ireland team that has just been awarded funding by Ireland’s Health Research Board for a four-year program grant to increase the quality of diagnosis and care for people with Lewy body dementias. The team hopes that this will result in a steep change in support for individuals, their families, as well as the health system.

Dublin.

“We want to try to raise awareness, understanding and knowledge around Lewy body dementia at all tiers within the medical system, particularly in secondary care and memory clinics so that people get an accurate diagnosis earlier on,” she says.

For Kevin, there were a number of red flags with his health, starting with severe blood pressure problems in his mid-forties and progressing to problems like a lack of spatial awareness

Kevin says that while he wasn’t fitting the criteria for Lewy body dementia at the time, he developed a number of new symptoms very quickly. “My hallucinations and night terrors got worse and I developed sleep apnea. I also had to stop driving, as I couldn’t judge distance anymore and I was seeing cars and people that weren’t there at all.”

Professor Leroi runs a Mind and Movement Clinic, specialising in the mental and cognitive health of people with Parkinson’s-related disorders who have progressed to the dementia stage at St James’ Hospital in

before his diagnosis at age 53. A DaTscan, which looks at the function of dopamine transporters in the brain, eventually confirmed a clinical diagnosis of Lewy body dementia.

Kevin says that while he

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Kevin Quaid  
speaking at the  
Alzheimer Europe  
Conference in 2023.



wasn't fitting the criteria for Lewy body dementia at the time, he developed a number of new symptoms very quickly. "My hallucinations and night terrors got worse and I developed sleep apnea. I also had to stop driving, as I couldn't judge distance anymore and I was seeing cars and people that weren't there at all."

"It's terrifying for people who don't know what's happening to them," he continues. "I'm twenty stone and six foot one. Can you imagine waking up at night after dreaming you murdered someone in your sleep and not knowing who or where you are or who is alongside you in the bed. It was only my wife Helena's voice that would bring me back."

"And it's a lot easier living with the disease than living alongside it," he shares. "As a family, we have discussed everything, from when I might need to go into a care home to power of attorney to funeral arrangements."

Kevin is eight years into the disease after his diagnosis and says he has good and bad days. He was diagnosed recently with polymyalgia, a condition that causes pain and muscle stiffness.

He says something that has been life-changing was getting his hearing checked six months ago. "I can't put into words the difference this had made to my life," he shares. "Before the hearing aids, I had to have white noise on in the background all

"There is so much anecdotal evidence that shows how things like choirs and group activities can be transformative for someone living with dementia in so many ways – the impact of music on the brain or the fact that people might not remember your name but can remember the words to a song," says Professor Leroi.

the time to try to drown out the constant buzzing sound in my head. Since getting the hearing aids, I can just sit quietly."

Acquired hearing impairment in middle age is one of the well-recognised risk factors for developing dementia in later life.

Professor Leroi is the Chief Investigator for the EU-funded SENSE-Cog programme, which aims to understand the links among hearing, vision and cognitive impairment in older people and is investigating whether hearing and vision enhancement improves outcomes for people with dementia.

"A hearing impairment can diminish a person with dementia's ability to absorb information, which will also impact on

their ability to remember, so if you already have diminished cognition that's going to be exaggerated," explains Professor Leroi.

"As dementia progresses, hearing impairment can start to impact on care partners and be associated with social isolation, lower quality of life and may even hasten progression."

Kevin's new book delves into how the arts, music in particular, can help someone with Lewy body dementia.

"There is so much anecdotal evidence that shows how things like choirs and group activities can be transformative for someone living with dementia in so many ways – the impact of music on the brain or the fact that people might not remember your name but can remember the words to a song," says Professor Leroi. "It also gives a great sense of empowerment and community and some people with dementia have really embraced that."

A 2020 landmark report from the Lancet Commission supports 12 potentially modifiable risk factors for dementia: These include less education, hypertension, hearing impairment, smoking, obesity, depression, physical inactivity, diabetes, low social contact, excessive alcohol consumption, traumatic brain injury, and air pollution. The report says that "Together the 12 modifiable risk factors account for around 40 per cent of worldwide dementias, which consequently could theoretically be prevented or delayed. The potential for prevention is high."

"Essentially the message is healthy heart, healthy brain, plus eliminate the factors listed by the Lancet report," says Professor Leroi.

"You can't change your age, your genetics or the pathology but you can change things that might make the disease worse like blood pressure, social isolation, depression and so on."

"You change your plans, the course of your road, but you don't give up," says Kevin.

Kevin received an Honorary Doctorate of Business Administration from Longford College last November. The Doctorate awarded through Rushford Business School acknowledges Kevin's outstanding contributions to the field of Lewy body dementia advocacy, specifically through the values of innovation, leadership, and a commitment to public service.

For more information on Lewy Body Dementia or other types of dementia visit [lewy-bodyireland.org](http://lewy-bodyireland.org), [alzheimer.ie](http://alzheimer.ie) and [dementia.ie](http://dementia.ie).

'Lewy Body Dementia Survival and Me' and 'I am KEVIN! not Lewy' by Kevin Quaid are available to purchase on Amazon.



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# Making overtures



THE DNA OF WEST CORK PEOPLE

Mark Grace

Mark Grace is a genetic genealogist and family historian at Ballynoe House, Ardfield, Co. Cork

This is my 30th column for West Cork People covering various topics in relation to DNA testing and matching for family history, as well outlining histories of West Cork families discovered along the way. I hope this has encouraged you try DNA testing to prove your own paper family history. From the feedback I get, I know many regular readers have. It is more affordable than ever and provides a rewarding hobby and learning experience. Perhaps you have received or taken a DNA test over Christmas and want to get more involved in exploring your roots this new year?

Outreach, or contacting people on family history and DNA testing websites, is the primary way to try and gather family stories, swap photographs, and ultimately document your genetically-proven ancestral legacy using DNA matching. It sounds simple enough when these platforms provide internal messaging systems for this purpose, however it is worth remembering that you are dealing with real people you have no prior relationship with. They can be unpredictable and surprising. You do not know their reasons for having DNA tested or being on the same website as you and how they feel about being contacted. It is not as simple as one may think (i.e. assuming we all have a common purpose), especially if you are enthusiastically starting out on your own adventure!

Despite the apparent informality that these messaging systems provide, you should always start communications in a simple, clear, and polite manner. I have mentioned in previous articles that you should not make the rookie error of trying to provide a full and detailed message as that

is often a waste of your time based on the low response rate. It may not even be read. Less than one per cent will reply. Keep it short and to the point of why you are contacting them and invite them to respond. If they reply, then provide more, start building a collaborative relationship and opt to continue correspondence by email. If they don't reply, try not to get frustrated (as I know many people do).

The lack of response to outreach is one of the most confusing and frustrating aspects of this hobby and it can result in people giving up. I discuss 'The Silent Majority' in my January 2022 column which is available online at [www.westcorkpeople.ie](http://www.westcorkpeople.ie). It is important to manage your expectations so you can focus on the positive.

Over 45 years of research (starting from when letter writing was the only way and moving into the age of DNA and email) I have probably experienced it all. I divide the one per cent who do reply into five general categories, which is provided as a guide to what you may experience:

Level 5 – These are the people you hope to find. Responsive, highly collaborative, keen hobbyist or genetic genealogists, genuinely interested, with frequent interactions. This includes adoptees and those who have unclear parentage who are keen to find answers. If tested, they openly share their DNA data and match lists with genetic genealogists. They share their data to other sites. Not having previously tested, they find reason to do so or get other family members involved. They understand what collaborating with a DNA legacy project is and what proving a shared family tree is all about. Keen to learn, no DNA project or family history research is successful without several key collaborators at this level.

Level 4 – Tend to be collaborative to a point and show a mild interest. A degree of reluctance is often due to the lack of understanding of how DNA matching works or that they have a family matter they are trying to resolve without 'upsetting' others. There can be a high degree of altruism for sharing some data without considering it a legacy issue for them personally. They may not open up their match lists for review and their involvement can wane over time. Careful management is required to maintain interest but successful dialogue can move them to Level 5, espe-

cially adoptees and those with uncertain parentage who get to understand they will advance their cause much more quickly through collaboration. This is the main group of successful contacts you will deal with.

Level 3 – Neutrals; the second most likely group you will encounter. Some information exchange but disinterested in what DNA may offer, even if they have DNA tested themselves. Might allow access to a family tree if kept in private mode but have not taken the step of linking their DNA results to their family tree. May look at DNA sometime in the future if not tested. You may have to accept that you will not make much progress at this level, but you may get something. Thank them, leave your contact information, and move on. You may hear back from them one day.

Level 2 – This group can be hard to read and sometimes dismissive and even slightly rude in reply. Replies tend not to address the initial outreach, apparently not understanding the reason behind it. Can consider your approach to be a scam and therefore suspicious of you (sadly there are some scammers using family history websites, but it is not common as they can be reported and removed). More detailed follow ups often draw a blank and you soon will realise they are not worth time pursuing.

Level 1 – While rare, you do find people on family history and DNA websites who respond in an openly rude manner (which you can report). They seem affronted by the fact you contacted them in the first place. Whether they have DNA tested or not they express conspiracy theories and are deeply suspicious of certain ethnic groups and big corporations. It is always a surprise to get replies like this, unrelated to the topic at hand, but it is best not to engage with them. Like unsuccessful Level 2 replies, flag them in the match comments so you don't contact them again.

Level 0 – This is the 99 per cent, 'The Silent Majority' who have an online presence but never respond for all the possible reasons discussed in that article.

In all your efforts with outreach, I wish you a happy New Year and the very best of luck!

Questions that can be answered as part of future articles can be emailed to [DNAmatchingprojects@gmail.com](mailto:DNAmatchingprojects@gmail.com) or follow the West Cork DNA projects on Facebook 'My Irish Genealogy & DNA'.

## Letter from the Editor

Welcome to the January edition of West Cork People.

After a two week hibernation and much-needed rest, the January issue has, as usual, catapulted us into the New Year, with one paper down already!

This time of year can be difficult for many with pressure to turn over a new leaf adding stress to a month that's already hard to face into. I'm of the mind that adding rather than taking away things is the way to get through it...so 'more' is definitely my word for 2024. More swims, more saunas, more music, more laughter, more gatherings with friends and family, more of all the things that bring joy.

For the month that's in it, we have collated a paper that should hopefully give you inspiration and hope in your journey towards a happier and healthier you in 2024.

Nutritionist Michelle Ryan looks at ways we can improve gut health and support weight loss, Hannah Dare explains why getting more cruciferous vegetables like broccoli and cauliflower into our diet can help with disease prevention, Rosari Kingston shares some of the powerful healing benefits of the humble dandelion and Karen dispenses a tasty recipe that won't break the bank!

With someone in the world developing dementia every three seconds, it's important to break down the stigma and fear surrounding this disease. Inside this issue, inspirational dementia advocate Kevin Quaid gives an insight into his journey with Lewy body dementia, explaining why it's so important to get an early diagnosis and why even though a disease like this may change your course in life, there is always hope. Geriatric psychiatry professor Iracema Leroi supports this with her announcement of funding for a new programme to increase the quality of diagnosis and care for people with Lewy body dementias in Ireland.

Just before Christmas, I had the pleasure of meeting some of the men who attend the Clonakilty Men's Shed. With the Men's Shed movement now recognised for the mental and physical health and wellbeing benefits it brings to men, it was no surprise to find a group ready to share their good humour and positive experiences. The Clonakilty Men's Shed welcomes new members of all ages.

With January nearly behind us and the first snowdrops and daffs already peaking through, it's time to start looking forward to Spring. Plant the last of your bulbs now for some early colour, plan some activities or gigs to look forward to and make some time for yourself to enjoy the read with a cuppa!

Until next month,

Mary



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# The power of company for men in a Shed

Birthed first in Australia, the men's shed movement took off in Ireland in 2009 with the formation of a men's shed in Tipperary. The movement – now recognised for its massive physical and mental health and wellbeing benefits to men – grew rapidly, with the Irish Men's Sheds Association, formed in 2011, today boasting over 400 registered sheds, of which Clonakilty is one. Currently Ireland has the highest number of Sheds per capita of any country in the world.

Up and running with two years, Clonakilty Men's Shed provides a space for men from all walks of life, from retired tour guides and carpenters to busy hoteliers, to meet and connect with one another, sharing expertise and experiences, for some even bringing a whole new sense of direction to life.

"We're always meeting and doing things," shares Clonakilty Men's Shed Chairperson Tom O'Donovan. "We're a very proactive and engaged organisation, whether it's doing yoga, going to the gym, taking a walk around town together or heading off on a trip somewhere. Yesterday we went for a spin down to the Michael Collins Centre Museum in Arigideen and from there on to the cafe at Ballyseedy for food, before ending in a visit to the Carrigaline Men's Shed." Making the days out even more carefree and enjoyable is the free community bus and Garda driver at their service a number of times throughout the year, for which they're very grateful.

While they're currently availing of the convenience of a small house located in the town at St Paul's Close on

Western Road, which has been kindly donated temporarily by the local Saint Vincent de Paul association, the plan eventually is to fit a stove in the prefabricated building they're renovating on the site of the Allotments on the outskirts of Clonakilty. Some of the participants have already turned their hands to vegetable growing here and there is ample space to build a proper workshop, where the breathtaking view of Clonakilty bay will surely more than make up for the distance from town.

Around the table is where most of the ideas and plans for future activities and trips are hatched, with many of the men up for turning their hand or "chancing their arm" as chairperson Tom puts it, at anything, from throwing shapes on the yoga mat to throwing pottery on the wheel.

Last year a large group travelled up to Dublin on a cultural outing to see a play at The Gaiety Theatre, the number of buses and trains missed along the way all taken in stride, and only adding to a memorable day out. "Everything always gets done in the end," shares Tom laughing.

Just before Christmas, a group completed the community-based health promotion 'Sheds for Life' programme, the purpose of which is to engage men in more open and meaningful discussions around their physical and mental wellbeing, while also encouraging them to maintain healthier lifestyle choices and increase their awareness in areas such as physical activity, healthy eating and mental wellbeing.

Lorna O'Regan of FeelGood Health and Fitness in Clon-

akilty, who delivered six weeks of cookery workshops, as well as 10 weeks of exercise classes as part of this programme, found working with the Clonakilty Men's Shed to be "an absolutely fantastic experience. "I worked on balance and mobility with men of all ages and fitness abilities, we well as having the craic with them," she shares. "This is what everyone wants... an opportunity to connect and have fun."



Many of the participants mentioned how the classes helped them to bond with each other, as well as giving them more confidence in exercising and cooking. "I thoroughly enjoyed the classes with Lorna, as she made them fun and interesting," says John McNulty. "We had great chats and I got to know people I never spoke to before," shares Dave Sheehan. Learning to cook from raw food to beautiful healthy cooked food and the sitting down and eating together afterwards was so good for the company and I believe our mental health. Throughout Lorna was knowledgeable and entertaining, a brilliant teacher."

Pádraig O'Mahony has seen his balance improve since the classes, which also helped his

sciatica, and while he admits to not having tried his hand in the kitchen at home yet, he blames his wife Mary for setting the standard too high!

After two years, the Clonakilty Men's Shed has visited nearly every museum in Cork and most islands west of the city. There have been sailing lessons and cycles, health talks and classes, floats in local festivals, deliveries of wood organised to the elderly in the community, even visits to the Dáil and meetings with the President, and much more besides! And the bucket list is endless. Visiting caves or the local sauna on Red Strand will be another day out soon," says Tom. But of course there's always someone aiming higher! "There's a men's shed in Florida we'd like to visit," laughs one "or I rather fancy a trip to Australia to see where it all started," chortles another. "Who knows where it'll take us next!" says Tom wryly, one eyebrow cocked!

Anyone is welcome to join Clonakilty Men's Shed. Contact Noel Lynch on 0862316029 / 0872924372 for more information. Follow Clonakilty Men's Shed on Facebook.



Clonakilty Men's Shed members with Lorna O'Regan of FeelGood Fitness.

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# The prominent role of cats in folklore: Part I

In part one of two-part article, **Eugene Daly** shares the many superstitions and stories connected with the cat in Irish folklore.

A traditional Irish greeting on entering a house was; 'God save all here, except the cat', on account of its association with the devil. Despite this, it was believed to be lucky for a stray cat to enter the house. Many of the superstitions concern the cat's supposed 'sixth sense'. In County Clare it was thought that to be looked at fixedly by a cat after it had washed its face was a sign of approaching marriage. On the other hand, to be looked at fixedly by a cat, except after washing its face, was an omen of sickness or death. To dream of a cat foretold an enemy; to dream of a dog a friend. In Ireland generally a purring cat or a cat with its back to the fire was a sign of rain. Another belief was that it was an omen of bad luck if a cat caught a mouse and allowed it to escape for no reason. In Limerick it was thought that putting a cat under a pot brought bad weather and it was apparently a common practice among sailors' wives in order to keep their men at home.

Black cats are considered the most powerful in terms of magic and superstition. It was considered lucky to have



## FACT & FOLKLORE

Eugene Daly

A retired primary teacher, West Cork native Eugene Daly has a lifelong interest in the Irish language and the islands (both his parents were islanders). He has published a number of local history books and is a regular contributor on folklore to Ireland's Own magazine. Eugene's fields of interest span local history, folklore, Irish mythology, traditions and placenames.

a black cat cross your path on New Year's Eve, and if a black cat comes into the house on Christmas Night, the inhabitants will have great luck for the coming year. Many people consider it lucky to have a black cat cross the road in front of them or to come upon a black cat unexpectedly.

Many folk tales about cats

emphasise that they have a wild, untrustworthy nature, even the fully domesticated pets. A very popular story concerns the death of the king of the cats. The story goes that a man out travelling met a huge cat which attacked him, and which with difficulty, he managed to kill. As it lay dying, the cat told him that it was the king of the cats. On his return home, the man told his wife how he had killed the king of the cats. Hearing this, the couple's domestic cat which been sleeping by the fire, leaped up and attacked the man, sinking his claws into his throat, killing him (in some versions of this story the man manages to fight the cat off).

Cats appear in quite a few Irish proverbs. A few examples are: 'Is ar a shon féin a dheineann an cat crónán' – It's for her own good that the cat purrs; 'Trí bhua an chait – (radharc istioiche, siúl nach gclóisfí agus dearmad mhna an tí) – three fortunes of the cat – (keen sight in darkness, walking without sound and the housewife's forgetfulness); 'Ar mhaithe leis féin a dheineann an cat crónán' – it's for its own good that the cat purrs; 'Beagán ar bheagán a d'ith an cat an scadán' – bit by bit the cat ate the herring. 'Níor dhóigh seanchat riamh é féin' – an old cat never burned itself – emphasising the value of experience.

Another well-known proverb is 'Briseann an dúchas trí shúilibh an chait' – nature breaks out through the eyes of the cat. This proverb is illustrated by an old Irish tale about a man who had his cat so well trained that it would hold a candle for him while he read. A visiting poor scholar bet the man that he could make the cat drop the candle. The man

In Ireland it was considered lucky to have a black cat cross your path, especially on New Year's Eve; if a black cat came into the house on Christmas Night the inhabitants would have great luck for the coming year.



of the house took on the bet. Accordingly, he returned some time later and released a mouse that ran across the table in front of the cat. The cat's eyes were riveted on the mouse but it continued to hold the candle. The scholar released another mouse with the same result. But the third time he released a mouse the cat could contain itself no longer. Flinging aside the candle, it gave chase. The moral of both the proverb and the tale is that nothing can conceal its true nature completely. Another well known one is 'Cad a dhéanfaidh mac an chait ach luch a mharú?' – what would the young cat do but kill a mouse, i.e. like father, like son.

The most famous Irish proverb about cats describes those who would quarrel to the bitter end; 'fighting like Kilkenny cats'. According to legend the name arose when Hessian soldiers were quartered in Kilkenny during the 1798 rebellion. They amused themselves by tying two cats together by their tails, and throwing them over a line to fight. Their commanding officer disapproved

of this practice and banned it, but it continued in secret. One day as a fight was in progress, the soldiers heard an officer approaching. One of the soldiers cut down the cats with his sword, leaving only their tails. The officer enquired as to where the cats had gone. The soldier replied that they had devoured each other, so furious was their fighting and that only their tails remained. The true origin of the story, however, most likely lies in Kilkenny history.

A regular feature of Irish myths is that people turn, or are turned, into cats. According to one legend, the goddess Clíona, associated with county Cork and particularly with Glandore, turned her sister Aoibheall into a white cat because they were both in love with the same chieftain. Clíona married the chieftain, O'Keeffe, and they lived happily together for a long time. Eventually, however, the chieftain found out the truth and demanded that Clíona restore her sister's human shape. Unfortunately, it was too late to do anything, and in his rage, the chieftain banished Clíona from

his sight,

The cat has always had an ambiguous reputation in myth and folklore. On the one hand it is the playful and useful companion of man, and widely thought of with affection and respect. On the other hand its cool, independent nature, ruthless skill in hunting, and links to night time and the dark, have often caused it to be regarded with suspicion and even persecuted as an animal of witchcraft and magic.

Black cats are considered the most powerful in terms of magic and superstition. In Ireland it was considered lucky to have a black cat cross your path, especially on New Year's Eve; if a black cat came into the house on Christmas Night the inhabitants would have great luck for the coming year. Indeed these superstitions about black cats are still believed by many people.

*Next month Eugene will share some of the legends of cats in other countries, as well as continuing with its role in Irish folklore.*

Christopher O'Sullivan TD

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If I can be of any assistance to you please do not hesitate to get in contact.

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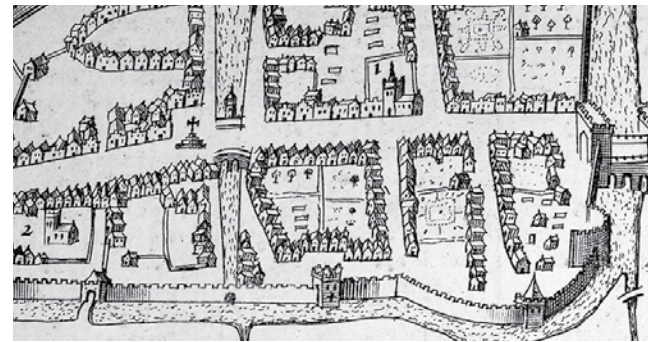
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## Free interactive digital map aims to uncover centuries of Cork City's history

The 'Digital Atlas of Cork/Corcaigh' is a free online interactive map that invites everyone to discover the built heritage of Cork City. Showcasing 6,245 sites of Cork City's history – including buildings, streets, bridges and monuments, from AD 623 through to 1900 – the atlas includes descriptions of over 800 streets, including their names in Irish and English, as well as historical variants. Users can browse the digital atlas or search for a specific site in the city. They can also select and view features associated with specific time periods, from medieval times to

the present day.

The 'Digital Atlas of Cork/Corcaigh' includes a specially-commissioned historical map depicting each individual house and plot during the mid-nineteenth century (1842). This is just one of a number of layered maps that may be switched on and off to show how the city developed over 200 years. Other layers include Ordnance Survey maps – a present-day plan of the city, as well as historic maps showing Cork pre-Famine and at the turn of the twentieth century. The 'Digital Atlas of Cork/Corcaigh' will be of interest to a wide range of individuals from



the 'rebel city' and beyond, including students of all levels and their teachers, researchers and planners. A downloadable user guide has been created to accompany the resource, to allow anyone to explore the

Digital Atlas with further education and project work in mind.

The 'Digital Atlas of Cork/Corcaigh' can be accessed online through the Royal Irish Academy's website: [www.ria.ie](http://www.ria.ie).



# Local Festival Fund for 2024 now open for applications

Cork County Council is inviting applications for funding under the Cork County Local Festival Fund 2024, a competitive grant scheme supporting the development of festivals that drive domestic tourism and help to improve the visitor experience.

A total of €85,000 is available through the Local Festival Fund for 2024 and applicants can apply for funding up to a maximum of €6,000 per festival. Funding is provided by Fáilte Ireland, at 50 per cent, with Cork County Council providing the additional 50 per cent match funding.

A festival may be eligible for funding under the Local Festival Fund, if: It is held within the boundaries of Cork County; It attracts domestic visitors and improves the visitor experience; It generates a minimum of 150 visitor bed-nights in paid accommodation; The festival has a minimum expenditure of €7,500.

Welcoming the announcement of the scheme for 2024,



Mayor of the County of Cork, Cllr. Frank O'Flynn said, "Cork County Local Festival Fund 2024 will support some of Cork's most exciting and unique festivals in 2024. Festivals have huge positive effects on our towns and villages. Not only do they promote cultural heritage and foster community pride, they also are a huge boost to the economy. As well as bringing local communities together, local festivals have the potential to attract thousands of visitors to Cork County to experience our rich culture, deep rooted traditions and vibrant community spirit."

Chief Executive of Cork County Council, Valerie O'Sullivan added, "This year, Cork County Council has increased its funding in support of local festivals and events, with a renewed emphasis on sustainability. Demonstrating our ongoing commitment to Climate Change, part of the total fund of €85,000 will be allocated to successful Local Festival Fund applicants that demonstrate festival greening measures using sustainable best practices. Cork County hosts an array of distinctive and exciting festivals of all sizes and we are delighted to support the groups and communities that work tirelessly to bring these events to life for everyone to enjoy."

Further information on the Local Festival Fund, including application criteria is available on Cork County Council's website [www.corkcoco.ie](http://www.corkcoco.ie) Online applications close on Friday, January 26 at 5pm. For further details contact [LocalFestivalFund@CorkCoCo.ie](mailto:LocalFestivalFund@CorkCoCo.ie)

# National Cycling Network will see 3,500km of safe bike corridors

Minister of Transport, Eamon Ryan T.D., has welcomed the publication of the new National Cycle Network (NCN) plan which sets out how the country will criss-crossed with 3,500 km of safe, high quality and inviting cycle routes, linking over 200 cities, towns and villages and up to 2.8 million people nationally.

The NCN is composed of 85 corridors, integrating existing and planned greenways and other cycling infrastructure such as the Eurovelo routes, as well as an extensive new network of safe cycle routes along existing roads. It will also link to destinations such as transport hubs, centres of education, employment, leisure and tourist

destinations, making it easier and safer for people throughout the country to choose cycling as part of their daily activities. The aim is that 80 per cent of households and nearly 90 per cent of jobs will be located within 5km of the network.

The Minister commented that, "This national cycling network will act as a core spine,


connecting towns, cities and destinations across the country with safe, segregated cycling infrastructure wherever feasible. I think this will really help to encourage cycling confidence and in turn the number of trips taken by both walking and cycling amongst locals, leisure users, and tourists alike."

Over 400 km of existing

greenways or other cycling infrastructure will be included as key corridors in the new NCN. In addition, over 900 km of additional planned and proposed greenways will be included in the network. The remaining 2,200 km of the NCN will be provided along existing road infrastructure, ensuring that cycling infrastructure will


be, for the most part, segregated from traffic, allowing cyclists to travel in their own space, away from road vehicles and with a higher level of safety and comfort where possible.

The National Cycle Network plan can be viewed at [www.gov.ie/en/publication](http://www.gov.ie/en/publication)



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# Chris Heinhold co-opted to Cork County Council by Social Democrats



**Social Democrats**

Please get in touch if there is anything at all my team and I can help you with.

**Holly CAIRNS TD**

Leader of the Social Democrats  
Representing Cork South-West

086 361 5830 holly.cairns@oir.ie  
holly\_cairns\_td HollyCairnsTD

Chris Heinhold has been announced as the Social Democrats' new councillor for Bantry - West Cork. At a meeting of the council on January 8, Chris was co-opted to the seat vacated by Ross O'Connell who has chosen not to contest the upcoming local elections due to work commitments.

Speaking after the meeting, Cllr Chris Heinhold said; "I am honoured to represent the Social Democrats on Cork County Council at such an exciting time for the party.

"I share the party's vision for progressive policies in areas like health, housing, public services and the environment. These issues will be key priorities for me as I begin my new role as a Social Democrats councillor for the Bantry - West Cork - Bantry Electoral Area."

Welcoming Chris' co-option, Social Democrats leader Holly Cairns said: "As a former councillor for the Bantry Electoral



Chris Heinhold with Holly Cairns.

Area, I am delighted to introduce Chris as our party's newest councillor. I have no doubt that he will be a passionate and hard-working representative for Bantry on the council.

"Chris is truly committed to affecting real change in our community through progressive

policies on health, transport, housing, workers rights, and the environment. He is a fantastic addition to our team in West Cork."

Chris Heinhold owns and operates two restaurants in Bantry town, employing 20 staff. He is a father of two young children,

with another on the way.

Previously, Chris attended University College Cork as a mature student, achieving a first class honours MA in International Politics. He also spent time working with UNITE, the union, as a researcher.

## EU reforms will diminish the rights of asylum seekers says Amnesty



**AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL**

Amnesty International believes that the reforms agreed on December 20, 2023 by the EU on the Pact on Migration and Asylum will lead to greater human suffering.

The deal reached by the European Commission, Council of the EU and European Parliament will diminish the rights of people on the move and Eve Geddi, Director of AI's European Institutions office believes it

will set back European asylum law for decades.

"It will affect the way asylum seekers are treated by countries outside the EU, their access to asylum and legal support at Europe's border to their reception within the EU, make it harder for people to access safety. There will be reduced safeguards for people seeking asylum in the EU with more people channeled through substandard border asylum procedures, rather than receiving a fair and full assessment of their asylum claims. It also reinforces the EU's dependence on states beyond its borders to manage

migration, building on recent deals with Albania, Libya, Tunisia and Turkey. Rather than investing in dignified reception within the EU and expanding safe and regular pathways to allow people to reach protection in Europe without relying on dangerous journeys, this amounts to a further step towards externalising border control and evading Europe's protection responsibilities."

Talks will continue at a technical level up until February 2024 with a formal adoption expected before the European Parliament elections in June 2024.

Poverty, war and climate change are the main reasons people leave their homes and everything they know. Certain sectors of the press would have us believe that the majority of asylum seekers are criminals/dangerous/not like us, that cannot possibly make a contribution to our societies. The reality is that the vast majority of refugees/asylum seekers are just like the readership of West Cork People, wanting safety, a life for our children, the chance to work and study and contribute to the society we live in...to be human.



**FINE GAEL**

**Brendan McCARTHY**

Local Election Candidate  
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## New addition to Heritage of County Cork Collection

The Natural Heritage of County Cork', which takes readers on a captivating journey through the rich tapestry of the county's natural heritage wonders, has just been launched by The Mayor of the County of Cork, Cllr Frank O'Flynn.

Speaking at the launch, Mayor O'Flynn said "This publication features detailed insights into over 600 species inhabiting the county and highlights 30 different sites worth exploring.

From towering cliffs to serene forests, this publication serves as a comprehensive guide to the exceptional natural beauty that County Cork offers."

"The Natural Heritage of County Cork' is the 11th installment in the Heritage of County Cork collection. The series of books have garnered national recognition for its dedication to preserving, and celebrating, County Cork's diverse heritage since its inception in 2013 with close to 8000 copies sold. The

collection spans a wide spectrum of heritage, from bridges and castles to houses, churches and industrial landmarks. Each edition delves into the unique facets that contribute to the cultural richness of County Cork.

This publication, supported by the Heritage Council, and part of the Heritage of County Cork Publication Collection, focuses on the unrivalled natural heritage of the county. Mayor O'Flynn went on to say, "The Natural Heritage of County

Cork' tells of how important our natural heritage is and shows how natural heritage is an intrinsic part of who we are as a people, that it is not just everywhere around us in a physical sense, but also in our intangible heritage, our culture, our Irish language and so much more."

"The Natural Heritage of County Cork' can be purchased from your local bookshop and for more information email corkheritage@corkcoco.ie



# Is Paul Lynch's novel 'Prophet Song' a tale of things to come?



## HISTORY & POLITICS

Kieran Doyle

On November 23, 2023, Dublin bordered on the brink of anarchy. The riots fuelled by far-right propagandists and lit by criminal opportunists, racists and anarchists engulfed Dublin for a few scary hours. Scary, not by virtue of scale or duration, but because something like this, was happening in Ireland. Three days later, Paul Lynch became the fifth writer from the Republic of Ireland to win one of the most prestigious prizes in literature – the 'Man Booker

Prize'. He topic – Ireland ruled by a right-wing totalitarian government and the breakdown of law and order.

I read his novel 'Prophet Song' before the riot and before he won the award. I remember thinking it was farfetched and didn't work in an Irish context. Of course, Lynch is a great writer and his style, as much as anything, has won him great acclaim, but I couldn't help being unconvinced by the Irish setting for a complete breakdown in civil order. Then the riots happened, and the country took a collective gasp.

Despite the serendipity of those events, I'm still skeptical that we have to fear the far right (or far left for that matter) taking power in Ireland. This country has the 15th oldest democracy in the world out of 195 nations. That's something we should not take for granted. Lynch's book examines the emergence of a right-wing government that uses its political power to silence the opposition. It starts gently, targeting ordinary trade unionists who

want to protest publicly, before escalating to arrests and 'disappearing' people like something from a south American dictatorship of the 1970s. Inside a very small timeframe within the book, a war breaks out between the totalitarian government and the rest. There are battle zones and no-go areas. No one intervenes – the EU, UK, USA. I just couldn't buy into it. Sure, there's a lesson in there about the preservation of democracy and Lynch's timing is superb. Throw in the Booker prize judge's penchant for choosing novels that portray originality in style and structure, and you'll find a match in 'Prophet Song'. But like anything in life, some love the Beatles, others ask what's the fuss? Taste is subjective, but I could never find myself suspending my disbelief enough to believe in the book. The end is fantastically written, and Lynch does manage to draw his reader into the horrors and reality of forced migration, but I won't say too much more, in case you intend to read it.

Far right and far left

movements don't believe in democracy. Hitler and Lenin both used the democratic model before they quickly dismantled it. Israeli leader Benjamin Netanyahu has formed the most right-wing government in Israel's history and lest we forget, had attempted to curb the power of judges, from limiting the Supreme Court's ability to review parliamentary decisions – an outrageous attack on democracy. Danny Morrison speaking at the 1981 Sinn Féin Ard Fheis, famously declared the best strategy for their party was to pursue their cause with "an Armalite in one hand and a ballot box in the other". Seven years earlier Yasser Arafat, former leader of the PLO, declared to the United Nations that, "I come bearing an olive branch in one hand, and the freedom fighter's gun in the other. Do not let the olive branch fall from my hand." Napoleon used the neoliberalism of the French Revolution to ride in the wave that unshackled France from monarchism. Once he crowned himself the French Emperor, he ruled as merciless-

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ly as any despotic king.

The far right and its followers have no interest in debate, discourse, democracy and nation building. Instead they aim to deconstruct the nation and remould it in their image – which

usually amounts to being purely: 'INSERT NATION/Irish/British/French' – i.e immigrants out. As long as we have had nation states, this has existed. The 'No Knowing Party' (made

*Continued on page 13...*

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## GROUNDLED

MEP Grace O'Sullivan

# A different Christmas in Bethlehem

“This would have been a time of joy. Instead, we are mourning, fearful. We are tormented by the silence of the world.”

These are the words of the Christian pastor of Bethlehem Munther Isaac as he gave his Christmas Eve sermon in the

town where Jesus is said to have been born some 2000 years ago.

This year, the bells of Bethlehem's many churches were silent. A Christmas celebration in that town of some 20,000 people is normally one of the biggest festivals of the whole region. In a normal year, Bethlehem's Orthodox Church band plays bagpipes up and down the ancient Star Street where the Three Kings were said to have walked to Christ's manger.

This year, Christmas was all but cancelled in the town that birthed it. In solidarity with Gaza, Bethlehem called off most of its celebrations. Instead the town hosted an artwork called 'Nativity under the Rubble' depicting the newborn baby Jesus in the ruins of a destroyed concrete manger. The Mayor of Bethlehem noted that the forced displacement of two million people in the bombardment of Gaza echoed the Holy Family's escape from King Herod's decree.

The situation in Gaza has gone from bad to worse, as the Israeli army has essentially levelled the whole strip in a barbaric act of collective punishment for the Hamas atrocities of October 7. When I travelled to Palestine last year, everyone knew the violence Israel's army was capable of, as they had lived under the violence of the occupation for decades. However, few would have foreseen the killing of 30,000 Gazan civilians including 10,000 children.



An image from the 'Gaza and the Sea' exhibition and calendar.

Gaza is home to some of the oldest Christian communities on the planet, and like their Muslim brothers and sisters, their communities have been devastated by Israel's bombardment of civilian areas, churches, schools and apartment blocks. Perhaps the third oldest church in the world, St. Porphyrius' was bombed in the early days of the conflict while it was being used by over 450 Christian and Muslim Gazans together as a refuge from the Israeli air force's attacks. No one is safe in Gaza.

Before the horrific violence began, I started a small project to commission a Palestinian photographer to capture the relationship between Gaza and the Sea. It was intended to

create a photo exhibition and a 2024 calendar and to reflect the things we have in common with people on the other side of the Mediterranean. Indeed looking at some of the photos of fishermen mending nets, and locals bringing in the day's catch, some of the photos could almost be from Castletownbere!

'Gaza and the Sea' calendars are available to be ordered from my website or can be picked up at my office in Cork City. The calendars are free of charge and delivery is available in Ireland, however I encourage donations to organisations working directly on the ground in Gaza, like the Red Crescent, Medecins Sans Frontieres, or the Palestine Children's Relief Fund.

The photography in those

calendars shows a beautiful, more peaceful Gaza. In contrast to the images on the news, they show a more human side to one of the most difficult places to live on earth. Perhaps they show a brighter future too.

Bethlehem's Pastor Isaac Munther, in his Christmas Eve address, added this note for the future: "Despite the immense blow we have endured, we Palestinians will recover, we will rise and stand up again from the midst of destruction."

My hope for 2024 is that we can all look forward to a more peaceful year, where Christmas can once again be celebrated at the birthplace of it all.

'Gaza and the Sea' calendar can be ordered at [graceosullivan.ie](http://graceosullivan.ie)

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## Alfred Nobel: Nobel Peace Prize and dynamite inventor

*"Perhaps my factories will put an end to war sooner than your congresses: on the day that two army corps can mutually annihilate each other in a second, all civilised nations will surely recoil with horror and disband their troops."* - Alfred Nobel

The word 'Nobel' automatically brings to mind the award given out annually for outstanding contributions to peace in the world – the Nobel Peace Prize. This award is, of course, named after its founder, Alfred Nobel, an incredibly inventive, ambitious and creative man, who held 350 different patents for various inventions. What is perhaps less well known about Nobel, whose name has become synonymous with peace, is that his fortune was made from inventing dynamite.

Nobel's journey is a tale of paradoxes, weaving together the strands of innovation, philan-



### THE HISTORY CORNER

Shane Daly

Shane Daly is a History Graduate from University College Cork, with a BAM in History and an MA in Irish History.

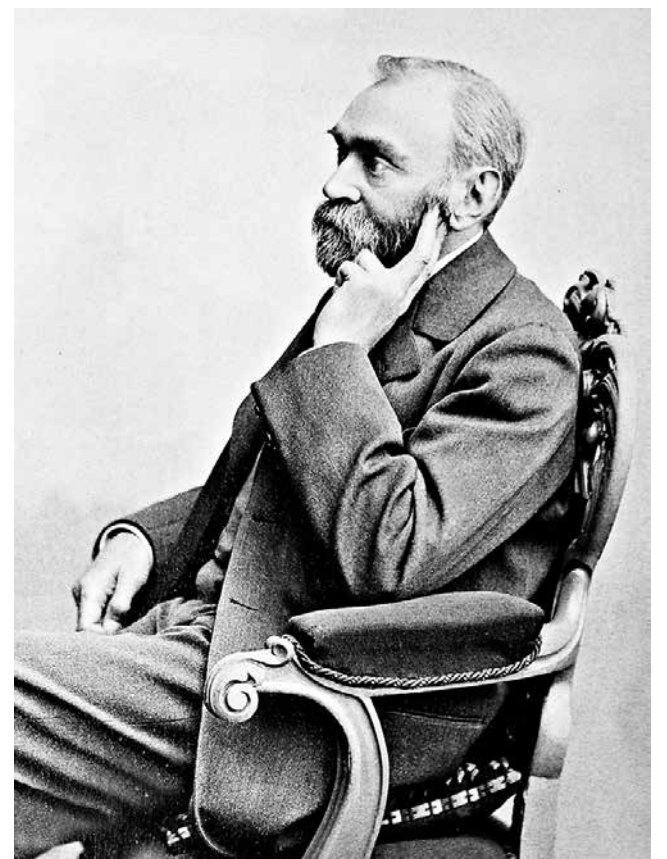
thropy, and an unwavering commitment to leaving a lasting impact on humanity.

The young Alfred Nobel had

ambitions of becoming a writer but, as his father thought that a scientific career would be more practical, he was sent, at the age of 16, to apprentice in the laboratory of the noted French chemist Theophile Pelouze. It was here that Nobel met Ascanio Sobrero, an Italian chemist, who shared his discovery of a fascinating substance called 'Pyroglycerine', an oily liquid that exploded with great vigour when detonated. After experimentation, Ascanio eventually produced the yellow liquid substance 'Nitro-glycerine', which although powerful, was extremely temperamental and dangerous, as it was sensitive to shock. Nobel realised that if nitro-glycerine were to be used as an explosive, a reliable detonation system would have to be found. In the meantime, he suggested to his father that they focus their attention on making nitro-glycerine on a large scale. Immanuel Nobel did not need

much convincing because his factory in St. Petersburg, which had been very profitable during the Crimean War, now faced bankruptcy. The family moved back to Sweden and set up a factory to produce nitro-glycerine. Almost immediately tragedy struck when an explosion killed Emil, the youngest son. While making nitro-glycerine was difficult, working out how to detonate it posed an even bigger concern, but one which Alfred solved with his invention of the mercury fulminate blasting cap.

Nobel's greatest contribution was the invention of dynamite, which safely harnessed the energy of nitro-glycerine. He had long considered the idea of mixing nitro-glycerine with some solid material with the hope of decreasing its shock sensitivity; finally hitting on a type of silica called kieselguhr, which meant that the sticks of dynamite could be moulded





## Is Paul Lynch's novel 'Prophet Song' a tale of things to come?.... cont'd from page 11

famous in Martin Scorsese's 'Gangs of New York' movie) emerged in the 1840s as an anti-immigration party, whose aims were to preserve the 'American way of life' and for a decade, they were a significant force in the ballot box and in the street brawls. They played on the fears of mass immigration of the 'ungodly, uncivilised and filthy Irish' that were emigrating en masse due to the Famine and poverty found in Ireland. The party thrived up until the forces of pro and anti-slavery of the 1860s polarised around the more established Republican and Democratic parties. What happened in Dublin and Ross Lake House in Galway is an age-old process that gets played out time and time again. Its main weapons are fear and ignorance. They want you to believe that groups of immigrants come to the country unvetted – incorrect. They want you to believe that taking in migrants impoverish us – incorrect. Ireland, according to the CSO taken from 2021 figures, has the second highest GDP per capita in Purchasing Power Standards in the EU. Yet somewhere in the dark ether of fear, immigrants somehow make us poorer individually? Again – incorrect. Our democracy is healthy enough to ask relevant questions and must do so without accusations of racism. People are asking relevant questions such as what happens to our tourist industry if hotel spaces are limited? Should immigrants



We should realise by now that an incoming tide floats all boats and Ireland more than any country in the EU has benefitted from our interdependency with other European countries and migration. Without immigration we would sink.

who move from one EU state to Ireland be offered the same welfare benefits? Should a means test be introduced? I don't have the answers but unlike the mindset of the far right, let them be debated dispassionately and without bias or pejorative accusations.

What has made headlines in recent months has been the current 'concern' at numbers of Ukrainian immigrants. Ironically, if the Ukraine succeeds in its accession as a member of the EU, the problem disappears, as they will be entitled to be here like any German or Polish person for example. I remember when poorer nations, Romania and Bulgaria, succeeded in

joining the EU community; there were noises being made about the influx of improvised peoples, troublemakers, gypsies, criminals. More fear, more racism and more misinformation. I think we should realise by now that an incoming tide floats all boats and Ireland more than any country in the EU has benefitted from our interdependency with other European countries and migration. Without immigration we would sink.

The whole concept of controlled immigration is a relatively new one in humanity. From the time Homo sapiens left Africa and colonised Europe, humankind has been on the move. Borders were

malleable and unfixed for centuries. Empires expanded and shrank. Rutger Bergman in his book 'Utopia for Realists' begs the question, should we just get rid of borders? Indeed passports were not generally used and it wasn't till a 1920 conference in Paris, that the international community agreed for the first time on the use of passports. This was a result of the insecurity and fallout after WW1. After all, borders are costly to maintain and guard. Processing and deporting costs are huge. The United States, the Europe Union, the former Soviet satellites, to take but three examples, all have freedom of movement and the right to work within land on a continental scale. Yugoslavia, which meant united 'Land of the Southern Slavs', was deemed one of the few communist success stories, and when it ceased to exist and create borders, the nationalists in Croatia, Serbia, Bosnia stirred up the fear factor again resulting in years of violation of international law and ethnic cleansing. That was in the 1990s – not some dark corner of a forgotten ancient past.

The far rights claims, always centre around loss of jobs to migrants, loss of wealth, loss of identity, increase in criminality. The reality is only three per cent of the world's population live outside their country of birth. Are they responsible for all the above? The far rights are not simple, marginalised, or just working class either. Be

aware. The Nazi party, contrary to popular belief, was not filled with henchmen and thugs, but educated people, doctors, PHD students. Educated people are unshakeable in their convictions more than anyone and have the tools to defend their position. That's why the far right have and still use politics to ascend to power and can be quite able and adept at doing it. Can I see them succeeding here? I still don't think so. Enough of us have emigrated or have some family members abroad, and that cre-

ates empathy. Emigration is part of our DNA.

I'll leave the last word on the topic to our award-winning writer, Paul Lynch, from his novel 'Prophet Song'. It can be applied to the misinformation and unverified sources regarding immigrants.

'If you say one thing is another thing and you say it enough times, then it must be so, and if you keep saying it over and over people accept it as true – this is an old idea'.



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## Alfred Nobel.... cont'd from previous page.

and safely transported, only exploding when triggered with a blasting cap. Nobel's intention was that dynamite would play an important role in the construction industry. It did, and was used all over the world in building projects such as the Panama Canal and many others. It was also however used in war and the deaths of possibly millions of people. This horrified Nobel but was something he had no control over. Except, to try to make amends.

In 1888, the death of his brother Ludvig resulted in several newspapers mistakenly publishing obituaries of Alfred. One French newspaper condemned him for his invention of explosives and, in many versions of the story, dynamite is quoted. The obituary stated, 'The merchant of death is dead' and went on to say, 'Dr. Alfred Nobel, who became rich by finding ways to kill more people faster than ever before, died yesterday.' After reading the obituary, Nobel was so appalled at the idea that he would be

remembered in this way that he made the decision to posthumously donate the majority of his wealth to fund the Nobel Prize, leaving a better legacy behind him.

Nobel signed his last will and testament to set aside the bulk of his estate to establish the Nobel Prizes, which were

to be awarded annually without distinction of nationality. After taxes and bequests to individuals, the will allocated 94 per cent of Nobel's total assets, roughly €337 million, to this cause. There's no way to know if it was a guilty conscience or the final vanity project of an obscenely wealthy industrialist

but, after over 120 years, that question is academic. Regardless of his motivations, Alfred Nobel gave us an international cultural touchstone with the Nobel Prize, a prize that is arguably the most prestigious in the world.



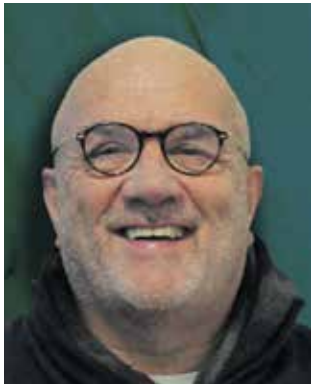
A different time: The Nobel Peace Prize laureates for 1994 were PLO Chairman Yasser Arafat, Israeli Foreign Minister Shimon Peres, Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin

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# The evolution of primary education in Ireland

As we approach the bi-centenary of the Irish National School system, in 1931, **Michael Crowley** looks at its evolution and says it's time to start a conversation about the role of primary education in the new Ireland in order to create a more inclusive and innovative force in Irish society



## EDUCATION

### Dr Michael Crowley

Michael Crowley, Ed.D is a retired educationalist. In his career he has worked in primary education as a teacher/principal, in teacher training, in teacher professional development, in school evaluation and in adult education. His particular areas of interest are the history of education, school leadership and change management. He still works, from time to time, in an advisory/consultancy capacity with schools.

The origins of State-supported national school education for the people of Ireland dates to that period before the Famine when, under British colonial rule, Lord Edward Stanley was Chief Secretary. Stanley's ambitious educational initiative in Ireland was the first of its kind in Europe and even predated the provision of primary education to the general population in England by some thirty years or more. It was a very novel initiative and a clear break in continuity from the past efforts of hedge school masters, privateers or societies like the Kildare Place Society (KPS). Many of those societies were, some have claimed, hell-bent on converting the majority Catholic population to the Protestant faith. On the other hand, hedge schools, which had flourished during the era of the Penal Laws, were also considered to be dangerous hotbeds of republican sentiments by the British colonial administration. In general before 1831, education was haphazardly organised, mostly fee-paying, lacking in recognisable standards with mostly untrained teachers and was, philosophically and financially, out of the reach of the majority peasant population

of Ireland. At that time, ordinary people had no need to become literate or numerate and were busy eking out an existence in a densely populated country with a very low standard of living. Nevertheless, the new State-supported and regulated system was intended to provide an education for the poorer peasant classes in Irish society and it was a novel departure by the British Administration in Ireland given their general adherence to the political philosophy of 'Laissez-Faire' which believed in non-intervention and held the view that those who suffered from misfortune or misery at home, or, in the colonies, had only themselves to blame.

The 1831 Education Act was, clearly, intended to be a new beginning and as the Stanley Letters stated, '... a system of Education from which should be banished even the suspicion of proselytism, and which, admitting children of all religious persuasions, should not interfere with the peculiar tenets of any'. Religious affiliation was not to be a factor in terms of attendance at these schools. It was intended that these schools would be open for up to four days a week and that approved Clergy of any persuasion could, on the remaining days, if they so wished, provide denominational religious instruction to their members only. Attendance did not become compulsory until 1872. Unfortunately, this new scheme was to provide instruction through English only and Irish was not to be a subject area of instruction. As a result, many would claim that the National School system killed the Irish language but that is, at best, simplistic and the slow decline of Irish during the 19th century was an obvious aspect of life to which many factors contributed. Amongst these, the economic boom that accompanied the Napoleonic Wars, the move away from cottage industry, the drive to industrialise and urbanise, all of which brought a sharper focus on the literacy and numeracy skills that were essential in the marketplace, should be considered more significant.

Under the terms of the 1831 Act, locally-owned and state-funded schools were developed and funded to the tune of 80 per cent by the State. Over the next 50 years, schools were built all over Ireland and free education was provided to all who chose to attend. By 1870 almost 7,000 schools had been constructed across the country, at roughly three-mile intervals. This had increased to almost 10,000 by the turn of the 20th Century and, by that time, almost every parish in the county had a school, which be-

came an important mark of their identity usually personified in the local 'Master' who became a community leader and point of contact in many aspects of local life. Hedge schools had all but disappeared by 1870 and the many voluntary religious groups (Protestant Societies, Sunday School Societies, Religious Orders of Nuns and Christian Brothers) of all denominations were slowly incorporated into the national system as it grew.

that the effort to educate the peasantry of Ireland was a social experiment destined to serve the Empire by civilising the Irish without forcing them to renege on their traditional religious beliefs; a praiseworthy initiative in many respects or a realisation, perhaps, that repression (Penal Laws, etc.) had failed. However, that plan was thwarted by the emerging power of the Catholic Church in post-Famine Ireland with Cardinal Cullen being the

cent-plus at one stage) were under the patronage of the Catholic Bishops of each Diocese.

Following independence, primary schools quickly came to be seen as an ideal political platform on which our lost culture and traditions and language might be restored following centuries of colonial oppression; a recurring post-colonial phenomenon in newly independent nations across the world. This was an era when, for the general population, their education ended at 14-years-of-age, as Second Level schools were scarce and, more importantly, fee paying putting them beyond the reach of the majority. In post-independence Irish schools, history was re-packaged, the restoration of the Irish language became a national obsession and schools became functional places where facts, dates, lists, prayers and Catechism questions were learned by rote and where fear and corporal punishment was the order of each day for many pupils with educational challenges or for those without social capital. An understandable but very narrow educational philosophy began to emerge which dominated Irish Primary Schools for the 50 years that followed independence and no major curriculum reform happened until the early 1970s. Since the seventies, the curriculum has been broadened, education is a lot more child-centred, additional help is provided for pupils with learning difficulties, corporal punishment has been assigned to the dustbin of history and clerical control has declined to the extent that it is now, increasingly, irrelevant. Unfortunately, alongside reform

By 1870 almost 7,000 schools had been constructed across the country, at roughly three-mile intervals. This had increased to almost 10,000 by the turn of the 20th Century and, by that time, almost every parish in the county had a school which became an important mark of their identity, usually personified in the local 'Master' who became a community leader and point of contact in many aspects of local life.

Thus began the Irish engagement with formal education on grand scale. The 3,250 or so primary schools currently operating in Ireland still reflect the structures that were put in place almost two centuries ago, although their ambition today has broadened to include an expectation that, in line with the article 29 of the UN Convention of the Rights of the Child, within their walls all young people have the opportunity to develop their 'personality, talents and mental and physical abilities to the fullest'. The modern curriculum is designed to support that ideal and is, when effectively implemented,

chief architect of that political victory. Once managerial control was established, the schools in post-famine Ireland became a major platform on which the Catholic Church established its powerful foothold on Irish society. The Catholic hierarchy saw schools as a perfect vehicle through which they might exert a positive, as they understood it, but, ultimately, controlling influence over society. The major Church figure in post famine Ireland was Cardinal Paul Cullen and his intentions were clear from the statement attributed to him that, 'Catholic children should be taught in Catholic schools by Catholic



a window of opportunity onto the world of creativity and knowledge. Many contextual factors make its implementation difficult, but in general, schools today are child-friendly and outcomes focused and provide a good foundation for learning.

However, let us not forget that educational provision is always underpinned by political and/or religious ideologies and this has been apparent from the start. It could be argued, for example,

teachers under Catholic control'. Consequently, by the turn of the twentieth century, local parish schools built under the terms of the 1831 Act were denominationally segregated and clerically managed. This was one of the first practical examples of the Church-State joint governance model of social control that, arguably, cast a long shadow on Irish society following independence from Britain when the vast majority of schools (95 per

came new political ideologies which replaced the cultural nationalism of 'Holy Catholic Ireland' with the concept of education serving the workplace. Today, schools are constantly badgered by external initiatives which serve to promote some current or populist agenda. These are, not necessarily, bad agendas but they come in a 'one size fits all packages' which, sometimes, ignores the local in favour of the populist, global.

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Indeed it may now be opportune, in the decade leading up to the bi-centennial celebration of the Irish primary school system, to re-evaluate the merits of its non-denominational objectives, which were thwarted by the status quo of that time as represented by the emerging political influence of a reforming Catholic church in Ireland. Maybe it is time to have an open and inclusive national conversation about school patronage that reflects current rather than historic or self-serving agendas. Maybe it is time to reflect, in the run up to 2031, on the political ideology that underpins education today and re-frame the school system to reflect the needs of new exciting communities that want only what is best for their children and that are well capable of re-imagining schools for that purpose without being exclusionary or elitist. The majority of schools do remain under Catholic patronage (90 per cent-plus) but, in reality, they are welcoming and inclusive of all denominations and none. All are, in my experience, simply local schools who look after all members of their community without prejudice with their Catholic ethos being most evident in the manner in which they model inclusivity and accept diversity. However, discussions of this nature are often negatively framed around the time allocated to 'Faith Formation' in Catholic schools; those who don't wish to attend are accommodated but, especially in smaller schools, there is a huge challenge in providing additional activities in supervised alternative classrooms due, mainly, to lack of human and physical resources. There is, we are told by official Ireland, no rush to divest these schools to other patronage providers such as Educate Together, and so on but maybe that is just a way of avoiding an open and honest discussion on these important matters. But is it necessary that every school should allow for religious preference in proportion to the community it

serves and how is that possible? Or is it time to separate religion from education and replace denominational Faith Formation with moral development as a common link between all faiths and none. Should religion be removed from schools and relocated in the Churches, Mosques and Synagogues of Ireland? And given the reality that many of the teachers who teach religion do not practice it, should it be left in the hands of trained and committed practitioners, i.e. those ritual specialists of their respective religious denominations? These are, undoubtedly, complex questions but maybe we need to talk about them and develop a bottom-up approach that understands the spirituality of the modern Irish family and that is not rooted in a dated and inflexible religious perspective drowning in dogma and self-imposed regulatory prohibitions.

The Irish national school system was intended to be non-denominational but became denominational due to the historical and polemical context from which it emerged. Today, though we remain cultural Catholics, the evidence of Catholic dogma and ritual in the public spaces that we occupy is diminished greatly. Though religion is mostly confined in our schools to the celebration of the Sacraments of Holy Communion and Confirmation, many are still exercised by it. In real terms there are not half enough priests in the Diocese of Cork and Ross to maintain the same level of involvement with schools as before and this will get increasingly worse given the age profile of priests in the Diocese and the mostly empty seminaries. Beyond their practical role in the holistic development of each child in their assigned schools, which they can't and don't fulfil, choosing instead to devolve responsibility to teachers in a meaningless covenant enshrined in a piece of paper (Certificate in Religious Instruction) that confirms teachers are qualified to teach religion regardless of their personal views, the clergy are

becoming invisible in schools. The Catholic Patronage model has, since the 1970s, devolved responsibility for school governance to local voluntary Boards of Management (BOM) which are reviewed every four years. This huge structure is built on volunteerism and hardly fit for purpose in the litigiously aware society we now live in. Schools are complex places with many stakeholders to represent, and local chairpersons, no matter how well-intentioned, can often wander into uncharted waters. Nor does the BOM structure always allow for the very best fit with respect to the appointment of school chairpersons, for example. This appointment is at the discretion of the patron who nominates two people onto every school board. The patron will, understandably, opt for someone who is, ideally, a practicing Catholic but, at the minimum, will need to support the school ethos and be a person of good standing in the locality and a safe pair of hands who will work within the agreed governance parameters – no radicals need apply!

But so much is taken for granted; so much is accepted without question; so much lip-service and pretence is evident and there appears to be no appetite for reimagining the structures that define our schools from a managerial perspective.

Notwithstanding all that, the Catholic patronage model has served schools well and without considering the merits of alternative models of management it would be foolish to just 'throw the baby out with the bathwater'. As the old order wanes, new powers emerge that dominate the educational airways and media outlets. Education, the media constantly remind us, now needs to be designed to serve the workplace and corporate giants want skilled practitioners to emerge from the education system, i.e., fully trained and ready to enter the workplace and hit the ground running. This is evident in the proliferation of more

specific, technical courses and degree programmes which are now on offer in Irish Universities and in the reduced intake to Humanities programmes which were the favoured route for many graduates in times past. Creative thinkers are inferior to practical problem solvers these days it seems. This is evident in the dependence of universities on corporate funding and international students to the detriment of their role in guiding social change through informed debate. Outside of the historical area of debate where academics analysis is still sought, where

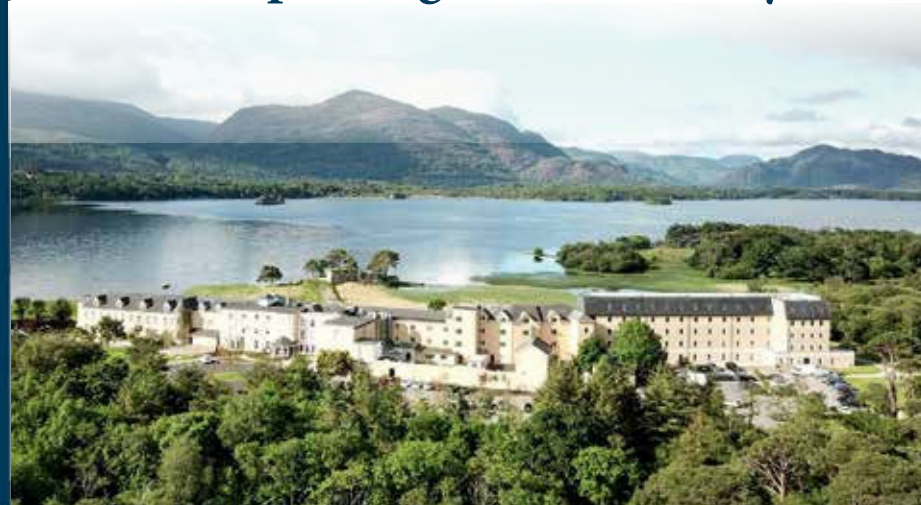
are the public figures that once framed social dialogue in Ireland? What has happened to all the intellectuals with a social conscience and a clear view on what society should look like?

The journey of almost two centuries has been an interesting one and many of the points and issues referred to could become the basis for future debate – the sooner the better in my view! In the run in to the bi-centennial celebration of formal educational provision in 2031 we need to re-evaluate the role of education and especially our primary schools because they will be

the foundation stone of the new Ireland which must become a more inclusive, creative and innovative force for good in the new order of Irish society. Many schools are examples of good practice in that respect but some skeletons also hide in closets. It's time to think about the future before it takes us by surprise and leads down a philosophical cul de sac, or, we are presented with some 'fait accompli' which disregards tradition or may not put the rights of all stakeholders on an equal footing.



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## ENVIRONMENT : Making a difference

## The Whooper swan – our vocal Icelandic winter visitor



If you have ever been lucky enough to be close to a Whooper swan night roost at dusk you will be treated to one of the wonders of Irish winters says Claire Deasy, Birdwatch Ireland West Cork Branch.

Shortly after the sun sets, when the wind drops and the world appears to take on an extra stillness, the silence is broken by a distant whooping or bugling sound, faint at first but getting louder as the Whooper swans fly closer to the water body that they will spend the night at. When the Whoopers land on the water there is a large chorus of whooping and splashing sounds, wings flapping as Whoopers greet each other and socialise before eventually settling down and stillness returns to the winter night. This is a pattern that is repeated every night over the winter period from October to April, as Whoopers are largely site faithful and return to the same communal winter roost each night, although movement to different nearby roost sites is also not uncommon, for example in times of flooding or if flocks are disturbed.

In Ireland we have three Swan species; the well-known Mute Swan is resident here all year round and the two lesser-known migrant species; the Whooper Swan and Bewick Swan, who journey here for the winter months. The Whooper Swan is one of Ireland's very welcome winter migrants, flying in from Iceland to escape and find refuge from the colder climates of the north. It can be identified by its yellow and black bill with the yellow projecting below the nostril, as opposed to the orange and black bill of the Mute swan. The Bewick swan also has a black and yellow bill but is smaller than the Whooper Swan and has less yellow in its bill. Amazingly the yellow patterns on the Whooper Swan bill are unique to each individual with the shapes on the bill serving as an identifier similar to the human 'fingerprint'. The Whooper and Bewick Swans are Annex I protected species under the EU Birds Directive and Amber listed of medium conservation concern. As its name suggests,



the Whooper Swan is a highly vocal species emitting a distinctive 'whooping' or bugle sound similar to an old-fashioned car horn, hence its Irish name Eala ghlórach (noisy swan). It is considered to be amongst the heaviest flying birds with the largest recorded Whooper Swan being a Danish male weighing in at 15.5kg, although their weight is typically in the range of 7.4–14.0 kilograms and with a wing span of up to 2.75m. Whoopers make the long sea crossing (approximately 1300km) in a single flight in family parties. Many swans winter at the same sites each year, often occupying the same fields and night roosts year on year. We know that Whooper Swans that migrate to Ireland and Western Scotland originate in western Iceland whereas Whoopers that visit England and Eastern Scotland come from eastern Iceland. They stay in Ireland during the winter months (October to April) feeding largely on improved and rough grassland pastures (and to a lesser extent arable stubble) in close proximity to lakes, quarry ponds, and flooded rivers. In the recent 2020 Swan Census, 74 per cent of Whooper Swans were recorded on grassland habitats. By comparison, only 11.5–20.6 per cent of Whooper Swans in Britain were using pasture habitats in the last three censuses, and almost no Whooper Swan in Iceland are found on pasture over winter. In County Cork, the 2020 census recorded 488 Whooper swans with populations of national importance occurring at the Blackwater Callows (Cork/Waterford border). Other traditional wintering sites include Kilcolman Bog and the floodplains of the River Awbeg, River Blackwater and Bride and River Funshion in North Cork. Here in West Cork, the Whooper Swans occur along the River Bandon Valley where numbers regularly surpass 100 individuals; histor-

ically they also occurred along the Argideen river valley. The Gearagh also supports good numbers of Whooper Swans each winter.

The Whooper Swans that are present in Ireland each winter breed in Iceland during the summer. It is a very rare breeder in Ireland, with records on lakes in the midlands and north-west. Like other swans, Whoopers generally mate for life.

The Whooper Swan story in Ireland is a rare 'good news' story, in a time of biodiversity crisis and climate collapse. Since the mid 1980s, a Swan census is conducted every five years by Birdwatch Ireland, National Parks and Wildlife Service, and a network of volunteers to count our migratory Whooper and Bewick Swan populations. In the most recent 2020 census in total, 19,111 Whooper Swans were counted in 550 flocks on the island of Ireland with birds recorded in every county. This represents an increase of 26.5 per cent compared to the 2015 census and is the highest total recorded for the species in Ireland to date. The increase in Whooper Swans in Ireland has coincided with a rise in the overall Icelandic-breeding population. Bewick's Swans, by contrast, have declined to the point that they are expected to cease being a regularly-occurring species in Ireland. Only 12 Bewick's Swans were recorded in Ireland in the 2020 census, mostly in Wexford. This compares with historical times when Ussher and Warren (1900) found Bewick's Swans more numerous and widespread than Whooper Swans in Ireland. One of the potential reasons that the species has declined in Ireland is that Bewick's Swans find suitable sites to winter in Germany, Netherlands and Britain, and due to warming winters and climate change no longer need to fly as far west as Ireland.

The Whooper Swan has long since been a creature of intrigue



and admiration; it features in Irish myth and legend, most notably in the story of the Children of Lir. W.B Yeats Poem 'Wild Swans of Coole' is thought to be inspired by the Whooper Swans that frequent Coole Lough in Co. Galway, indeed Coole Lough remains an important site for Whooper Swans to this day. The saying 'Swan Song' refers to an ancient belief that swans sing a beautiful song just before their death and its reference can be found in the works of Plato, Aristotle, Cicero, and later Shakespeare. The Whooper Swan may be at the source of this, as it has an additional tracheal loop within its sternum, which enables it to produce the resonant honks which give the bird its name. When it dies, its lungs collapse making a series of long, drawn-out soft running notes and scientists have proposed that this is likely to be the basis of famous 'Swan Song' saying of old!

#### BirdWatch Ireland West Cork Branch News

Upcoming outings being held by the Branch are:  
**Sunday, January 28:**  
 West Cork bird race  
**Sunday, February 11:**  
 Gulls & Divers in Bantry  
 Visit our website [www.birdwatchirelandwestcork.ie](http://www.birdwatchirelandwestcork.ie) for more information about these events. To receive news and reminders about our events, join our mailing list by sending an email to [mailinglist@birdwatchirelandwestcork.ie](mailto:mailinglist@birdwatchirelandwestcork.ie). For more information about the Branch, contact Fiona O'Neill at [secretary@birdwatchirelandwestcork.ie](mailto:secretary@birdwatchirelandwestcork.ie).  
**Facebook**  
 @BirdWatchIrelandWestCork  
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#### The Wild Swans at Coole (W.B. Yeats)

*The trees are in their autumn beauty, / The woodland paths are dry, / Under the October twilight the water / Mirrors a still sky;*

*Upon the brimming water among the stones / Are nine-and-fifty swans. / The nineteenth autumn has come upon me / Since I first made my count; / I saw, before I had well finished, / All suddenly mount / And scatter wheeling in great broken rings / Upon their clamorous wings.*

*I have looked upon those brilliant creatures, / And now my heart is sore. / All's changed since I, hearing at twilight, / The first time on this shore, / The bell-beat of their wings above my head, / Trod with a lighter tread.*

*Unwearied still, lover by lover, / They paddle in the cold / Companionable streams or climb the air; / Their hearts have not grown old; / Passion or conquest, wander where they will, / Attend upon them still.*

*But now they drift on the still water, / Mysterious, beautiful; / Among what rushes will they build, / By what lake's edge or pool / Delight men's eyes when I awake some day / To find they have flown away?*

## Irish book on aquatic plants published

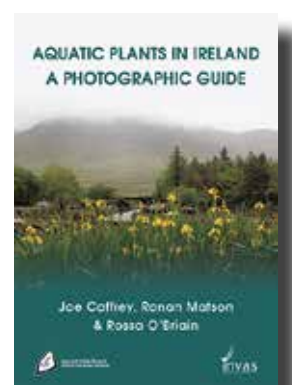
Inland Fisheries Ireland has published a first-ever book on aquatic plants, featuring 401 different Irish river, lake, and pond plant species.

The 576-page 'Aquatic Plants in Ireland-A Photographic Guide' identifies flora in freshwater habitats across the country – using concise text, and more than 1,200 full colour photographs and diagrams.

Dr Ronan Matson, co-author and Research Officer at Inland Fisheries Ireland (IFI), commented: "Aquatic environments are particularly vulnerable to threats posed by biodiversity loss, climate change, and the spread of invasive species.

"The first step in mitigating their impact is to accurately identify the species that exist within these fragile ecosystems.

"This comprehensive Irish aquatic plant encyclopedia is unique. In it, the diversity of our lakes, reservoirs, ponds, canals, rivers, streams, ditches, bog pools, and wetlands, are more than matched by the diverse plant species that call these habitats home."



'Aquatic Plants in Ireland-A Photographic Guide' also includes a number of invasive alien plant species that are rapidly expanding their range in, and along, Ireland's watercourses – and having serious adverse effects on native habitats and biodiversity.

The full-colour publication costs €40 for the softback edition, and €70 for the hardback version, excluding postage.

Members of the public who would like to purchase 'Aquatic Plants in Ireland-A Photographic Guide' can contact Dr Ronan Matson of IFI, via: [ronan.matson@fisheriesireland.ie](mailto:ronan.matson@fisheriesireland.ie).



## ENVIRONMENT : Making a difference

## How to save energy and money at home



## RETROFIT

Xavier Dubuisson

Xavier Dubuisson is an engineer with 25 years experience in the field of sustainable energy in Ireland and internationally. The founder and CEO at RetroKit, a start-up dedicated to upscaling home energy upgrades with innovative digital solutions and one of the partners in the CHERIS project. Xavier has many years of experience helping homeowners make the right decisions when upgrading or building low energy homes.

Over the last six months, we have taken you through the different steps when completing a home energy upgrade, starting with insulation, moving through ventilation and air quality, windows and doors. We then moved onto heating and generating electricity through renewable energy such as solar panels. We will continue to provide updates and hope to start to bring you some real life stories from people who have started or completed an energy retrofit of their own home.

From talking to people taking part in the CHERIS project, we know that it may be difficult for a lot of people this winter to afford some of these retrofit measures but we also know that people are keen to take some action, however small. The motivations vary, from saving money to helping the environment to having a more comfortable home. So in this article, I'd like to share some practical tips on how you can save energy around your home without spending any money. A summary leaflet with these tips is also available to download through the CHERIS project website.

According to a recent study by the Sustainable Energy Authority of Ireland, about 40 per cent of people heated empty rooms or an unoccupied home and a quarter of thermostat

owners had theirs set to 21 degrees Celsius or higher.

The price of electricity more than doubled following the start of the Ukraine war. To start, it is worth checking if you already have, or can switch to, night rate electricity, which is significantly cheaper than day rate. If you do, it would save you a lot of money to programme anything such as heating hot water, running washing machines, drying clothes and so on, to avail of these rates. Modern appliances can be programmed to come on during the night. But if you have an older appliance, you can use a smart plug that will help programming.

It is worth shopping around to get the best electricity rates. I would recommend checking bonkers.ie or switcher.ie, which are very handy tools to compare unit prices between the different electricity providers and help you get the most suitable package for your needs. There are a number of providers new to the market including Yuno and some that have a focus on renewable and community energy such as Community Power, Waterpower and Ecopower alongside the household brands we are mostly familiar with. According to Switcher.ie you could save up to €417 on electricity bills. You will just need a copy of a recent electricity bill to get started.

We have outlined a few other tips below for different areas around the house which we hope will help you.

**Space Heating:**

During colder months, heating tends to account for a significant portion of energy use. Consider these tips to keep you house warm more efficiently:

- Lowering your thermostat by just one degree celsius can make a noticeable difference in energy consumption.
- Reduce heating periods by an hour or adjust timers to optimise energy use.
- Use curtains and dress accordingly: closing curtains at night will help to retain heat. Dress appropriately for the weather to reduce reliance on heating.

**Water Heating:**

- Address any leaks or dripping taps promptly to save both water and energy.
- Insulate hot water tanks and pipes. Programme water heating times efficiently to avoid unnecessary use.
- Ensure your thermostat is set to an optimal temperature of 60 degrees Celsius or higher.

**Lighting:**

- Opt for low-energy LED bulbs and use the lowest wattage needed for adequate lighting.
- Turn off lights when leaving a room. Implement timers or sensors for efficient use.

**Cooking:**

- Use smaller appliances like microwaves, slow cookers, pressure cookers, and air fryers and induction hobs whenever possible, as they are more energy-efficient.
- Keep a lid on saucepans when cooking.
- Keep the oven door shut while cooking, avoid using foil at the bottom, and defrost frozen food in the fridge beforehand to reduce energy demand.

**Washing Machine:**

- Wash full loads and use eco-settings at lower water temperatures when possible.
- Run a monthly maintenance cycle to keep your machine clean and more efficient.

**Tumble Dryer:**

- Whenever feasible, air dry clothes outside or if this is not possible use a dehumidifier in a warm, closed room. Some more expensive tumble dryers incorporate a heat pump and are

**Update from the CHERIS project**

The CHERIS team (Ludgate Hub, RetroKit and The Wheel) spent months preparing for the free information clinics provided to members of the West Cork community. The team was delighted to finally host meetings with individual home owners over two days at the clinics, which were held online and at Ludgate Hub before Christmas. At the clinics, unbiased and tailored information was provided to each of the attendees using an amazing digital toolkit created by RetroKit.

The team would like to offer a huge thank you its voluntary mentors who represented the project so well on the day. Mentors came from a wide spectrum of the community including Credit Unions, CorkETB, local businesses, a Housing Association, members of Sustainable Energy Communities and Sherkin Island. The CHERIS team looks forward to catching up with participants in the coming months to see what progress they've made on their journey to reducing and decarbonising the energy used in their homes.



a lot more efficient and cheaper to run.

- Spin clothes well in the washing machine, use dryer balls, and clean the lint filter after each use.

**Dishwasher:**

- Run the dishwasher with full loads, use eco settings and service regularly.

**Fridge/Freezer:**

- Set appropriate temperatures for the fridge and freezer.

- Check that door seals are intact and avoid leaving doors open unnecessarily.
- Defrost items in the fridge, and don't overfill the appliances.

**Small Appliances and Electronics:**

- Kettle: Only boil as much water as needed and avoid reboiling. Kettles with a vacuum-insulated container keep the water hot for much longer.
- Use energy-saving modes,

turn off electronics when not in use, and avoid leaving them on standby mode.

These tips should help reduce your household's energy consumption and cut down on electricity bills while contributing positively to the environment. None of the suggestions require drastic lifestyle changes but can make a substantial difference in the long run.

For more tips codema.ie and seai.ie are useful resources.

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## ENVIRONMENT : Making a difference

# Why do flatfish look so miserable?



## THE ANIMAL WORLD

Dr. Jeremy A. Dorman

Dr Dorman is a zoologist and teacher living in West Cork.

Have you ever looked closely at the head of a flatfish? Probably not, unless you are a fisherman or fishmonger. In Ireland, we generally like our fish beheaded; for many people, a fish is just a white fillet, or, in the words of the late, inimitable Keith Floyd, ‘an unidentified frying object’. In other parts of the world, people are not so squeamish – think of pilchard heads poking out of a stargazy pie, or a conger head lurking in a pot of Breton fish soup. In China there are restaurants that serve almost nothing but fish heads. I once had a Japanese girlfriend who loved to eat fish eyes.

Many kinds of fish are flat. Rays are dorso-ventrally flattened for life on the sea bed. The John Dory, ugly but delicious, is laterally flattened, all the better for sneaking up on its prey unnoticed. The freshwater angelfish is similarly compressed so it can hide among the stems and leaves of water plants. But only flatfish undergo a radical metamorphosis which totally changes the shape of the head, making them the most asymmetrical of all vertebrates.

Flatfish belong to the order Pleuronectiformes, which contains 16 families and about 800 species. They are found worldwide, from the poles to the tropics. Most are marine, but a few species, such as our own flounder, can live in brackish waters and rivers. Flatfish range in size from the tiny *Tarphops oligolepis* of the western Pacific, which grows to no more than 4.5 centimetres, to the enormous Atlantic halibut which can reach 2.5 metres and weigh over 300 kilograms.

Flatfish lay their eggs – over a million in the larger

species – on the sea bed, but they float up into the plankton so the young fish can develop away from their parents, to avoid competition and possible cannibalism. Some species, for example turbot, live their first few months in the surface plankton and can be observed from a boat on very calm days, with other baby fish such as rockling and garfish, wriggling along in the drift lines of floating weed and other debris that gathers at the boundaries of currents.

Baby flatfish look like any other fish at first, with an eye on either side of the head. But as they grow, hormones produced by the thyroid gland cause a remarkable transformation – while the body becomes laterally flattened, one eye moves from one side of the fish, over the top of the head.

Baby flatfish look like any other fish at first, with an eye on either side of the head. But as they grow, hormones produced by the thyroid gland cause a remarkable transformation – while the body becomes laterally flattened, one eye moves from one side of the fish, over the top of the head. By the time the little fish is ready to swim back to the bottom – six to ten weeks in the case of the plaice – both eyes are on the same side of the body. As the eye migrates, the respective nostril does too, and the mouth becomes distorted, giving flatfish their peculiarly mournful expressions. The pectoral fin, scales and lateral line on the blind side are all less developed.

Pigmentation changes too – the side with eyes is coloured, usually in shades of brown or mottled patterns, while the blind side is white. Flatfish colouration, as well as their habit of burying themselves in the bottom sediments, renders them well camouflaged. Most can change their pigmentation to match their background. Some have special mechanisms for avoiding predation – the white-blotched sole from Australia can, when young,

mimic poisonous species of flatworms in both their black and orange colouration and their undulating movements. The Moses sole, from the western Indian Ocean, secretes a toxin which paralyses the mouths of predators such as sharks.

Halibut, plaice and European flounders have their eyes on the right side of the head. Turbot, brill and megrim have theirs on the left, as do smaller, lesser-known flatfish such as topknots and scaldfish. The true soles are right-eyed, but are easily distinguished from plaice and flounders by their tiny mouths, rounded heads and longer, narrower bodies.

As happens occasionally in garden snails, whose shells are usually coiled to the right, there can be reversals in symmetry, for example flounders whose eyes migrate the wrong way, so they are left-eyed instead of right.

Why did flatfish develop in such a way? Some might say it was just how God made them (look at a wide-eyed flounder and you would think he was having a joke – it is like something Picasso might have painted in his weirdest cuboid phase). But there is a more logical explanation. Flatfish are related to the perciform fish (perch, bass, wrasse etc.); several species of wrasse are known to lie on their sides on the sea bed, half-buried in sand, to escape predators or to sleep. For such fish, it would be an advantage to have both eyes on the side that is looking up, so presumably that was something natural selection favoured. We will never know exactly how or when the first flatfish evolved, but two fossil fish – *Heteronectes* and *Amphistium*, from Eocene rocks in Italy (about 45-million-years-old) – both had an eye half-way over the top of their heads. Similarly, the most primitive of the living flatfish, the Indian halibut or adalab – found from the Indian Ocean to the western Pacific – has one eye situated on the dorsal edge of the head, rather than completely on the same side as the other eye, and it sometimes swims in an upright position, like a normal fish.

Flatfish are important commercially. Plaice is probably the most popular in the British Isles, while turbot and common sole (also called black or Dover sole) are the most highly prized. As with many animals, the English names of



Plaice



Wide-eyed flounder



Megrim

Megrim, *Lepidorhombus whiffiagonis*, must be one of the most miserable-looking creatures of all; even its English name is depressing – megrim is an old word for migraine, and in plural form, relates to being in low spirits (I get the megrims every winter).

Flatfish can be confusing – the word ‘flounder’ is used for a variety of unrelated species, and several ‘soles’ are not soles at all, e.g. the lemon sole belongs to the right-eyed flounder family. Some less

familiar flatfish have been re-branded as soles by the fishing industry to make them sound more appealing – the witch, another right-eyed flounder, is also called the Torbay sole, while the left-eyed megrim has become the Cornish sole. This fish, *Lepidorhombus whiffiagonis*, must be one of the most miserable-looking creatures of all; even its English name is depressing – megrim is an old word for migraine, and in plural form, relates to being in low spirits (I get the megrims every winter).

The mighty halibut, now endangered because of over-fishing, is possibly the only flatfish to have inspired a poet. “To The Immortal Memory of the Halibut (on which I dined this day, Monday, April 26, 1784)” was written by William Cowper, better known for his religious works. In the poem,

Cowper considered the life and habitat of a halibut, before pondering: “ – Wherever thou hast fed, thou little thought’st, And I not more, that I should feed on thee.”

Most people are not so reflective when faced with a dead animal on their plates. If they were, more would become vegetarians. Flatfish and other benthic species are caught by dragging a great big net, with chains and otter boards, across the sea bed, killing everything in its path – small unwanted fish, worms, brittle stars, sea cucumbers and tiny creatures few would even know existed. It is rather like bull-dozing a great swathe through a forest, destroying every plant and invertebrate in it, just to catch the edible mammals.

Some of my best friends are fishermen; they have to earn a living, and people have to eat. I myself spent twenty summers working as an angling boat skipper, and dined on fish every day. But with ever-improving technology and increased demand, commercial fishing has become far too destructive. As well as bottom trawling, there are the ghost nets that haunt the oceans and drown turtles and dolphins; the long lines that have brought some albatross species to near extinction; the super trawlers with nets a mile long that can catch hundreds of tons of fish a day, and the foreign fishing vessels that ruin the livelihoods of inshore fishermen in poor countries. Anyone with a conscience should worry about the provenance of their battered cod, sole *bonne femme* or tuna sashimi; anyone with any compassion must think of the fish’s suffering. I remember the last time I went fishing, over twenty years ago, and watched mackerel gasping for life in the fish box. I don’t know why it didn’t bother me before, but I have rarely eaten a fish since (and I don’t eat meat, but that is another story).

Cowper ended his poem with the whimsical notion that the halibut’s “brethren of the slimy fin” are envious because it was doomed to be eaten by a bard. But look at those doleful eyes and downcast mouth, even knowing they are the result of evolution, and it is not hard to imagine the flatfish saying “We are all just doomed”.



## ENVIRONMENT : Making a difference

# Deelish Garden Centre marks 40 years with 4000 trees giveaway

Deelish Garden Centre turns 40 this year and to celebrate this milestone, and as a gesture of goodwill to customers and the community, the garden centre is giving away 4,000 native trees.

"We hope to encourage people to plant as many trees as possible in West Cork, creating native woodlands that in turn will encourage biodiversity and wildlife; help restore natural ecosystems, sequester carbon back from the atmosphere and make West Cork an even more beautiful place in which to live!" shares proprietor Noah Chase.

"My parents, Bill and Rain

Chase, established Deelish Garden Centre back in 1984, making it the oldest garden centre in West Cork. We are very proud to have helped many gardeners over the last four decades, supplying a huge range of plants and trees, many of which today are part of West Cork's gardens and woodlands."

Over the coming year, Deelish has planned a range of events to celebrate four decades in business. For this first exciting giveaway event, the garden centre is offering anywhere from one up to 50 native trees per property to suit individual requirements and up to 300 native trees to local com-

munity projects and educational facilities.

"Even for the smallest garden or space, there is a way of participating in this event, so please don't be daunted, come in and let's discuss what we can do. No strings attached, just free trees!" says Noah.

To avail of this offer, just visit Deelish Garden Centre in Skibbereen and let Noah and the team know how many trees you'd like and your planting plans. There will be over 17 different native Irish varieties available to choose from so you are sure to find something suitable for your local conditions. The trees on offer will be given

away on a 'first come, first served' basis and an Eircode must be supplied so that the planted trees can be mapped in order to see how the project is growing.

"We look forward to giving these trees away over the coming weeks and catching up with many old friends and customers, as well as meeting many new gardeners who are helping us to expand West Cork's woodlands," says Noah.

"Wishing you all a happy and healthy 2024 and remember, gardening doesn't have to cost the Earth!"

## DEELISH GARDEN CENTRE

We're on the banks of the Ilan, 1 mile west of SKIBBEREEN on the old Baltimore road. Fully signposted off N71. OPEN MON TO SAT 10AM - 5.30PM, SUNDAYS & BANK HOLIDAYS 2 - 5.30PM PHONE: 028 21374 @ f



**40 YEARS GIVEAWAY!**

**4,000 NATIVE IRISH TREES FREE TO HOMES & COMMUNITIES IN WEST CORK**

**No strings attached!**  
**Just visit us at Deelish to get yours.**

# Honey lovers buzzing about new beginner's beekeeping course

Carbery and South West Beekeepers Associations have joined forces to educate all aspiring beekeepers about this rewarding hobby that contributes to environmental health while providing opportunities for sustainable local honey production. Beginning on January 22, the five week 'Beginners Beekeeping Course' is led by Bob McCutcheon who has been a beekeeper for over 30 years.

Whilst beekeeping requires knowledge and attention – regular hive inspections, disease management, and seasonal maintenance are essential, with May, June and July being the busiest months – with proper education and dedication, many find it to be a very manageable



and rewarding hobby or even a small-scale business.

On this beginner beekeeping course, participants will learn about hive management, bee

biology, pest control, honey extraction, and safety practices. The course cover topics such as recognising and preventing diseases, understanding hive

dynamics, and seasonal beekeeping tasks. Practical skills, like handling bees and using beekeeping equipment, are also part of the curriculum.

Carbery Beekeepers Association, which has just celebrated 40 years, is based in Skibbereen and serves beekeepers from Goleen to Rosscarbery. South West Beekeepers Association is based in Clonakilty. Both organisations offer support and education by organising workshops, conferences, and training sessions to enhance beekeepers' knowledge and skills throughout the year.

For more information on the beekeeping course, which starts January 22 at the Celtic Ross Hotel see the advert on this page.

Carbery & South West Beekeepers Associations

## BEGINNER BEEKEEPING COURSE

Celtic Ross Hotel beginning  
**Monday 22<sup>nd</sup> Jan @7.30pm**

**5 week course: 22<sup>nd</sup>, 29<sup>th</sup> Jan  
& 12<sup>th</sup>, 19<sup>th</sup> & 26<sup>th</sup> Feb**

€100 | Notes provided

No experience or equipment necessary!

If interested call/text

**Brendan 086-3314603**

**or Liam 086-8901696**

# Change in legislation means that everyone in rural Cork is entitled to a Brown Bin service

New legislation, coming into effect in January 2024, means all householders in Ireland will be entitled to a brown bin recycling collection service from their waste collector.

"Whether you live low in a valley, or high on a hill, the forthcoming household food and biowaste regulations means everyone, everywhere, can now avail of a brown bin service," said Pauline McDonogh, spokesperson for MyWaste.ie.

"There are many households who are already fantastic at recycling and make a great effort to separate food waste. This change in legislation will make it easier for them, as they can now finally access a brown bin collection service. If you don't currently have a brown bin, I'd encourage you to organise one early in 2024. Contact your current waste collector – because you're never too remote to recycle," she added.

The brown bin service accepts all types of food including raw and cooked meat and fish, plate scrapings, along with fruit and vegetable peelings. Other items that can go into the brown bin include food-soiled paper napkins, paper towels, pizza boxes as well as grass clippings and light garden waste. There is lots of information available at mywaste.ie.

"With more and more households having access to the brown bin, it will allow more people to play their part to separate waste into the different streams and help Ireland achieve its national recycling target," said Des Crinion Chairperson of Irish Waste Management Association.

"Recycling waste correctly, by putting it in the brown bin, is a vital step in our collective efforts to achieve targets and tackle climate change. The material from the brown bin is sent for composting or

anaerobic digestion (AD) here on the island of Ireland. All waste collectors are preparing for these new regulations. To avail of this service from January, contact your current waste collector," he added.

MyWaste.ie has information on how to manage all waste types including preventing and recycling food waste in your home.

"Every single person can make a huge difference in helping our environment and contributing positively to Ireland achieving a recycling rate of 60 per cent by 2030," said Pauline McDonogh, Spokesperson for MyWaste.ie.

For more information, please visit mywaste.ie



## FARMING

## Looking back on 2023



Great expect'hay'sions: Cows waiting for their daily topmost fodder to be pushed closer on Tommy Moyles' farm at Ardfield, Clonakilty.

FARMING  
IN WEST CORK

Tommy Moyles

In his farming diary, West Cork suckler farmer and columnist with the Irish Farmers Journal, Tommy Moyles covers the lay of the land across all agri and farming enterprises – news, views and people in farming across West Cork and further afield.

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From a farming perspective, I'm not sorry to see the back of 2023. It was a washout and a favourable spring is sorely needed on many farms. It might seem like I'm overdoing the weather thing but the rain did feel relentless. That didn't help farmer mood, as commodity prices, especially dairy, collapsed from their record highs in 2022 and policy changes, especially around the nitrates derogation seemed to emerge every quarter. That drip-drip introduction of changes meant farmers barely had time to digest what each policy change meant for their farm before the next one was announced.

As challenging as the weather was for livestock producers, those growing crops struggled

to catch a break from bad weather at both planting and harvesting. It eventually resulted in the government stepping in and bringing in an unharvested crop payment to try and help farmers who were unable to harvest grain.

It's scant consolation but going through those issues shows the resilience farmers have and have always displayed. It's the nature of the business where tomorrow is almost more important than today.

The fallout from last year's weather continues on many West Cork farms. The ground is saturated and trying to get at field work will require a decent dry spell just to make it navigable and get field work underway. Calving has begun on a share of farms in the region and, as February comes into view, that will ratchet up significantly.

**Weather**

Weather is one of the main topics of conversation with farmers and everyone's idea of a drop of rain is different. With that in mind, I prefer to look at Met Eireann's West Cork weather station on Sherkin island to give a solid indicator of how things have been. The average rainfall for the year was 1,377mm, which is 189mm higher than the Long-Term Average (LTA). This increase in precipitation made farming challenging right across the sectors within the West Cork region. The summer felt wetter than usual and so it proved. From July to October, 588mm fell, putting it almost 202mm above the LTA. Looking back, I remember how happy we seemed when weather came good in February. We weren't to know it then but it proved to be too good.

The LTA rainfall figures recorded there from 1981 to 2010 for February is 101.4mm. This year it stood at 29.4mm.

Only two months in the last four years, June 21 and August 22, were drier than February 2023. March and April were too wet, May and early June too dry and there were even concerns we were heading for a drought early on. Saying all that, maybe it's a good thing we can't control the weather.

**Politics and farming**

I'd love for 2024 to be a boring year when it comes to weather and a settled spell of policy would be welcomed by farmers. There's another group who I'm sure would love that as well, at least for the first five months of 2024. Politicians.

Local and European elections are flagged for June and there's also the likelihood of a general election within the next 12 months too. The mood music among farmers isn't too good after 2023 when it comes to politics and this could be an election where party loyalty will be tested. This will especially apply to farmers affected by the introduction of a new organic nitrate limit that came in on at the start of the year.

Traditionally farmers have been a relatively powerful voting block, however it could be argued that this was in a slightly different Ireland: One where farming had a more visible presence across society and when the Irish farmers voted either Fianna Fail or Fine Gael. Farmers took advantage of that and were generally able to play one against the other depending on which party held the seats of government. The nitrates derogation issue made many realise that this is no longer possible and I attended a meeting in Cork in late November where this realisation was articulated by many farmers who felt let down. They had put in a huge lobbying effort, were made promises that turned out to be

empty and now they were left to pick up the financial pieces. Nitrates may have largely had a direct impact on dairy farmers but there is a lot of unhappiness with the Department of Agriculture across the sectors. Where this is really evident was in the delay in CAP payments, some of which may not be paid until well into February.

I remember writing in these pages in the early months of last year about the new flagship environmental scheme ACRES (Agri-Climate Rural Environmental Scheme) and how a new €1.5 billion flagship agri-environment will deliver for farmers and the environment. There was a target of 50,000 participants to be split in two tranches with 30,000 in the first intake and 20,000 in the second. Roughly 46,000 farmers applied initially and a decision was made to accept them all. In fairness to the department, it was a catch-22 situation. Turning away 16,000 farmers from an environmental scheme wouldn't be a good look. The challenge was, would the IT system already dealing with a new raft of CAP measures be able to cope. We've seen since that the pressure proved too much and, as a result, payments remain unpaid to 18,000 farmers. On top of that, 9,000 farmers applied for the second tranche but it appears the door to accept everyone has been firmly closed, so a ranking system will come into play, as the number of farmers who can get into it appears to be capped at 50,000.

The farmer vote can't be taken for granted anymore but the numbers put pressure on the clout farmers have too. In 2023, 128,712 farmers applied online for the new Basic Income Support for Sustainable (BISS). That's similar to the population of a five seat Dáil Éireann constituency. Adding family votes

and those of people involved in the agri-business sphere in the mix and that farmer voting block expands. But dig a little deeper into voter numbers. The Green party is held up as the government bogey man on farming and rural issues but in the 2020 general election it received 155,695 first preference votes. How, or if, that changes in the next election will be interesting.

As the new year gets underway, German farmers are protesting, following major protests by Dutch and Belgian farmers in 2022. Those saw the emergence of a farmer's party in the Netherlands, which performed well in senate elections, but didn't have the same impact when it came to the Dutch general election in November. While I wouldn't envisage it to hit the same levels, it wouldn't be beyond the realms of possibility that similar protests take place here. That said, both the IFA and ICMSA have new presidents taking over in 2024, and Francie Gorman and Denis Drennan are likely to want to hit the ground running in terms of making an impact. Given the various issues that continued throughout last year, there's a range of issues they could run with, if they do decide to protest. Only time will tell if they do.

**The home farm**

There were days this winter when I didn't know where to look in the yard. Even with a cap and hood on, I had my head driven into my face by gales. That was all well and good until I reached the slatted areas and I could see the slurry levels rising in the tanks. You'd wonder if it's better to walk with your head and eyes up but then you see where the silage is or is meant to be. Cattle have been

housed longer than usual on many farms because of the bad autumn so it's a case of slurry tanks filling and silage stocks emptying causing a bigger issue than usual.

Thankfully things seem to be under control with both slurry and fodder on my own farm, but it's a balancing act. I try to be negative when it comes to planning around slurry storage and silage, so aim to have plenty of both. That makes things more comfortable when factors outside your control work against you.

The weekly diet for the cows here consists of three days hay and four days silage. Most are in good condition so don't need the better-quality silage. Those looking a little thinner will receive a dose for rumen fluke. My vets advised me to try selective dosing for parasites a few years ago and it's been a saver when it comes to labour among other things. I give the cows a few weeks in the same conditions and diet and you'll see some thrive and others lag behind a little. Invariably there's something holding these back so rather than giving a blanket anti-parasite dose to everything, only those who visibly look like they need it, receive one.

My reason for adding hay is to stretch silage stocks and it also makes more sense for me to hold that for after calving just in case we get a difficult spring. The in-calf heifers are getting hay too but only once a fortnight. They need a better-quality feed, as they are still growing as well. The daily yard routine is well versed at this stage so eyes will turn towards to fields, and getting fences sorted ahead of the grazing season is the next job. That, and putting in another few hundred metres of hedging, as part of the ACRES environmental scheme.



## FOOD, HEALTH &amp; LIFESTYLE

## Kenmare Bay Hotel on the road to four star with a green and grand revival



2004. The hotel, initially opened in 2007 after a redevelopment phase, saw the addition of a leisure centre, banqueting suite, and an impressive 44 additional bedrooms. However, he is not resting on past laurels. Instead he envisions a greener future for the hotel, aligning with the global shift toward sustainability.

The cornerstone of this environmentally-conscious transformation lies in the incorporation of solar power biomass fuel to reduce gas reliance and electric vehicle (EV) charging points and a more recycle-friendly service throughout. This commitment to renewable energy sources reflects a commendable effort to reduce the hotel's carbon footprint and contribute to a more sustainable future.

It's a step towards responsible business practices, and Kenmare Bay Hotel is poised to become a beacon of eco-friendly hospitality in the region.

The renovation plan extends beyond environmental considerations to enhance the overall guest experience. The restaur-

ant, a focal point of the hotel's charm, is lined up for a complete redesign and refurbishment. This promises not only a visual feast but also an elevated culinary experience for visitors and locals alike.

The commitment to excellence doesn't stop there. A significant portion of the investment is allocated to upgrading 30 rooms to a luxurious four-star standard, with an additional 50 rooms set to undergo similar enhancements by the following winter. The move is a testament to Kenmare Bay Hotel's dedication to providing unparalleled comfort and elegance for its guests.

Recognising the importance of inclusivity, the refurbishment plan includes the addition of a second guest lift, ensuring easier access to the 80 renovated rooms. This thoughtful touch demonstrates a commitment to creating a welcoming environment for guests of all abilities, emphasising Kenmare Bay Hotel's dedication to hospitality with a heart.

What makes this renovation even more commendable is Riobard's emphasis on supporting the local community. From sourcing tradespeople to materials, the project will prioritise local businesses, fostering a sense of community and boosting the regional economy. This 'think local' approach adds a unique touch to the refurbishment, making it a collaborative effort that goes beyond the walls of the hotel.

As the plan unfolds over the next 18 months, Kenmare Bay Hotel's transformation is set to

become a symbol of sustainable luxury and community collaboration. Riobard Lyne's vision for the hotel is not just about bricks and mortar; it's a commitment to the environment, guest satisfaction, and the local community. Kenmare Bay Hotel is not merely renovating; it's evolving into a model of responsible, refined, and locally rooted hospitality. The journey towards a greener and grander Kenmare Bay Hotel is a journey worth celebrating for both residents and visitors alike.

In a bold move that has set the picturesque town of Kenmare abuzz with anticipation, Riobard Lyne, (Bob) with strong roots in Kilgarvan, has announced a multi-million-euro investment to renovate the Kenmare Bay Hotel and Resort. This landmark establishment, under

Riobard's ownership since 2004, has been a staple in the region, and the planned renovations are poised to elevate the hotel to new heights of luxury, sustainability, and accessibility.

Riobard's commitment to the Kenmare Bay Hotel has been evident since his acquisition in

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\*These classes are run by external instructors. Contact them directly to secure your place.

<b>MON</b> <b>SPINNING</b> 7.00am – 8.00am <b>KETTLEBELLS</b> 10.00am – 11.00am <b>YOGA</b> (Barbara 083 0733060)* 5.30pm – 6.30pm <b>ZUMBA</b> (Flavie 087 6548138)* 6.45pm – 7.45pm <b>AERIAL YOGA</b> (Barbara 083 0733060)* 8.15pm -9.15pm	<b>TUE</b> <b>HIIT CIRCUITS</b> 10.00am – 11.00am <b>AQUACISE</b> 11.00am – 11.45am <b>CORK CITY BALLET</b> (Alan 087 7851225)* 3.30pm – 7.30pm <b>SPINNING</b> 6.30pm – 7.30pm <b>STEP</b> 7.30pm – 8.15pm	<b>WED</b> <b>SPINNING</b> 7.00am – 8.00am <b>CIRCUITS</b> 10.00am – 11.00am <b>YOGA</b> (Barbara 083 0733060)* 5.30pm – 6.30pm <b>ZUMBA</b> (Flavie 087 6548138)* 6.45pm – 7.45pm	<b>THUR</b> <b>STEP</b> 9.00am – 9.45am <b>AQUACISE</b> 10.00am – 10.45am <b>SPINNING</b> 6.30pm – 7.30pm <b>AERIAL YOGA</b> (Barbara 083 0733060)* 7pm -8pm <b>AERIAL YOGA</b> (Barbara 083 0733060)* 8.15pm -9.15pm	<b>FRI</b> <b>SPINNING</b> 7.00am – 8.00am <b>CIRCUIT</b> 10.00am – 11.00am <b>ZUMBA GOLD</b> (Flavie 087 6548138)* 10.30am – 11.30am <b>TEEN FITNESS</b> 4.30pm – 5.30pm <b>BELLY DANCING</b> (Mila 086 4551257)* 7pm -8.30pm
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## PRICES

MEMBERS: €6 per class, 10 class pass €54 NON-MEMBERS: €9 per class, 10 class pass €81. Teen classes €5.

The jungle gym (normal opening hours) is available to members doing any class. Classes can be booked through the "Clonpool" app or on 023 88 34387.

## SAT

**AERIAL YOGA**  
(Barbara 083 0733060)\*  
9.15am – 10.15am



## FOOD, HEALTH &amp; LIFESTYLE

# A poor man's recipe rich in flavour

Our vegetable garden is enjoying a wet winter doze – there's not too much to do and plenty to pick. I wander around with a fork, lifting celeriac, leeks, parsnips and turnips out of the ground.

The brassica cage, which is well protected this year, has plenty of green things growing – sprouts, cabbage and kale and we should get a good crop of sprouting broccoli when the time comes.

This period of very slow



## A FLAVOUR OF WEST CORK RECIPE

Karen Austin

weed growth is most welcome and I can spend my time hanging out in the glasshouse drinking cups of tea and browsing seed catalogues..

I often have trouble thinking of which recipe to write but this time I had plenty of ideas to share with you so the difficult bit was to make a decision! It was going to be a Mediterranean Winter Cassoulet, a delicious mix of butterbeans, celeriac, carrots and parsnips all cooked gently with tomato and white wine, covered with a crunchy topping of garlic bread crumbs but I overcooked it. Although it was still very edible and tasty, it looked too burnt in the photo, so I went back to the drawing board and now we're having pasta e patate. Just as well I had more recipes up my sleeve and the chances are you have the ingredients in the house.

This frugal recipe from Italy is from a group of recipes known as *cocina povera*, which translates to 'poor kitchen'. *Cocina povera* grew out of ne-

cessity in central and southern Italy where the rural population used humble local ingredients and transformed them into delicious meals. These days these dishes often star on the menus of fancy restaurants. This frugal, no-waste system uses inexpensive, seasonal ingredients and tweaks every bit of flavour out of them to produce comforting and delicious meals.

Pasta and potato don't initially sound like good companions but they do marry very well. This rather alien idea of two carbs in one dish sounded really strange to me until I tried it. And for sure it works very well. This recipe might sound like you need a run around the block after eating it but it won't be necessary and it will use up all the annoying odds and ends of pasta in the cupboard.

Stirring in grated cheese upgrades the dish but leave it out if you prefer vegan. I use all my odds and ends of tasty cheese but use whatever you have/enjoy. It's a bonus if it melts.

## Pasta e Patate

Serves 4

### Ingredients:

- 100mls extra virgin olive oil
- 1 medium onion, peeled and finely chopped
- 1 stem celery- diced small
- 1 medium carrot-peeled and diced small
- 1 clove garlic- peeled and chopped
- 150mls tomato sauce – fresh



or from a jar

- 4 medium potatoes – not floury
- 1 litre vegetable stock
- 400g pasta – various
- 200 - 300g grated cheese

### Method:

Heat a medium/large sauce pan, add enough olive oil to just cover the bottom of the pan. Stir in the chopped onions, diced celery and carrots. Season with a little salt and when you can hear the vegetables sizzling stir in the garlic then turn the heat to low. Cook gently until the vegetables begin to soften.

Peel the potatoes and cut into a 1cm dice. Stir the potatoes and tomato sauce in with the vegetables. Season with a little salt and black pepper then cook gently with a lid on for 10 minutes. Keep an eye on it as it tends to stick. If this

happens add a little vegetable stock. Simmer for roughly ten minutes then add the rest of the stock and simmer for a further 15-20 minutes. Stir in the pasta. Check the seasoning. Cook for a further eight minutes, then stir in the grated cheese. Take off the heat and serve.

This dish thickens considerably if you leave it stand. To reheat just add a little more stock or water.

Happy cooking and Happy New Year

Karen  
Lettercollum Kitchen Project,  
Timoleague  
info@lettercollum.ie  
www.lettercollum.ie  
0238846251

PS See advert on this page for cooking class information!

## LETTERCOLLUM

### CURRY CLASS

SATURDAY 20<sup>TH</sup> JANUARY

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023 8846251 karen@lettercollum.ie

The classes are held at Lettercollum in Timoleague.

They begin at 10.30am and finish around 3pm. The cost is €120 and includes all recipes, tastings and a large lunch.



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## BirthWave Baby Fair to support new mums and parents with young families

Over the last year, a number of people who support expectant mothers and young families have come together to share their experience and knowledge with new mums and parents with young families.

This has inspired the upcoming 'BirthWave Baby Fair' on Sunday, January 28, at the Westlodge Hotel, from 1pm to 5pm.

Leemore Butler, previous owner of Holistic Nurture Centre, Dublin, who specialised in supporting for women in all phases of their lives, moved to Bantry post-pandemic. Leemore started teaching baby massage over two decades ago. This love of helping mum and babies led her to become prenatal and

postnatal yoga teacher, birth doula, postnatal doula and death doula, pregnancy and aromatherapy/holistic massage therapist. She also offers the NADA method (ear acupuncture) and reiki. She leads red tent women's circles, postnatal community groups, and teaches prenatal yoga at Bantry Holistic Centre. Leemore Butler at 086 814 8658.

Erin Kelly Ashworth has been a yoga teacher for over ten years and opened Bantry Holistic Centre in 2016. She was excited to use her holistic knowledge from her prenatal yoga practice in her own births. With her youngest son, she tried HypnoBirthing. This course taught her how to include breathing, relaxation, positive

affirmations, visualisations, education and self hypnosis (Monegan, 1991) to allow her to trust herself to tune into her natural instincts to have a calm birth. She found this so empowering she was inspired to become a HypnoBirthing Educator. As a hypnotherapist, yoga and mindfulness teacher, sound healing therapist, and mum of six, she has a lot to offer her clients on their birthing and parenting journey. Erin Kelly Ashworth 086 208 0762.

Gillian Arundel has been working as a breastfeeding (IBCLC) in a hospital and centre for new parents for 16 years and brings her wealth of experience to West Cork. She returned to Munster post-pandemic to her husband's native Ahaki-

sta. She has started offering newborn and feeding classes for expectant and parents of babies. Gillian is also a holistic sleep coach that provides gentle evidence based support that is responsive to your child's needs with no cry it out. She offers private one-to-ones for breastfeeding and sleep coaching consultations. Gillian Arundel 083 433 1125

These women are only three of the many expert presenters.

The BirthWave Baby Fair will also feature service providers and vendors, as well as goodie bags and raffle prizes.

This is an opportunity to get familiar with all the resources needed for the first few years of parenting.



## FOOD, HEALTH &amp; LIFESTYLE

## Struggling with gut health or weight loss?

**Michelle Ryan** of B WELL-HIVE looks at how making just one positive change can change your health direction, your gut health and support your 2024 weight loss journey.



Are you struggling with a slow metabolism, inflamed gut, bloating, and food triggers? Tried a low-fat diet or low-calorie diet with no lasting success? Feel like you lose some weight only to gain it back? Or maybe, despite your best efforts, you feel like you're not making any changes to your body composition in recent months, no matter how

hard you try?

When it comes to making any move or change in a new year the first thing you have to think about is where that change or adjustment could make the most impact on feeling healthier in body and mind. What is going to do it for you?

The idea of change can bring overwhelm to some and hope and positivity to others. The best way to overcome any challenge is to identify ONE big thing you would like to achieve in year ahead, then break it down into small tasks. Small and consistent actions can make that significant impact on your overall wellness and health: Committing to even a whole-some breakfast every morning could be just the beginning to a healthier you in 2024.

The most common stumbling block is setting yourself up for failure right from the start, having high expectations on yourself. The trouble is, when we stop doing the ONE thing we committed to at the start of year, we fall into unhealthy patterns quickly. You feel great for 30 minutes, yet an hour later you're craving your favourite food and it keeps going on like that throughout the day. Sound familiar?

Prior to studying nutrition, I found that I was reacting to my trigger foods with symptoms like bloating, constipation, stress and fatigue. "Symptoms were on and off, and depending on what I ate, I would get

inflammation, so I never knew what to eat. As a result my immunity was nearly always affected; I suffered many chest infections, with little or no energy most days. I know now that when I eat the right foods that work for me, my day is very different. Eating the right foods is non-negotiable to staying on track in my daily life.

Did you know that eating something high in sugar and high in processed fat triggers the release of dopamine, the neurotransmitter associated with feelings of reward and satisfaction? By falling into this trap, you train your brain to think 'you need to eat this to help you feel better'. You might use these foods to regulate your mood and lower your stress. But in the long run, this sends you on a rollercoaster, especially over Christmas and at stressful times, and it can be challenging to get back into a healthy routine, especially with flu season setting in.

You might ask, what causes you to crave sugar in the first place? You're more inclined to eat these kinds of foods when you're stressed or tired because your brain is looking for more fuel than it would be when you are relaxed and well-nourished. That might not come as a huge surprise to you, or a food allergy might be the trigger.

If you have any of these symptoms – feeling bloated, reflux and increased acid – then you could try swapping highly

processed foods for whole grains and root vegetables and increasing your protein intake. This helps to regulate the release of glucose into the bloodstream. Making the switch to a more wholesome and nourishing alternative may be a much more sustainable approach to healthy weight loss than the crazy diets you might be tempted to try.

A stumbling block is identifying if you have an intolerance to foods that you regularly eat, which can cause many symptoms and leave you feeling unwell even when you have eliminated sugar. As mentioned above, my reactions to many foods triggered all sorts of symptoms like bloating, constipation, and fatigue. It was very on and off, never knowing which was the trigger that, combined with stress, was overload. Identifying that I had a food intolerance to dairy and gluten, and understanding the difference between intolerance and allergy and how it can seriously affect gut health and reduce disease was the turning point in my health and the reason I now work with a more

holistic approach to gut health and weight loss.

What are the main differences between an allergy and food intolerance? Allergies develop in infancy, whilst an intolerance can come on at any age. An allergy causes a reaction immediately or within 24 hours whilst an intolerance reaction can take up to 72 hours. Symptoms of an allergic reaction include wheezing, itching, diarrhoea, dizziness, breathing, swelling. Symptoms of an intolerance reaction include migraines, arthritis, anxiety, depression, psoriasis, tiredness, digestive symptoms such as bloating, weight gain and feeling low in mood.

If you have ever found yourself asking these questions, a nutritionist could really help with improving your gut health and achieving weight loss, coming up with a nutrition plan that is best for you.

One thing that is unique about the Food Intolerance Test and Nutritional Programme that I offer is that you can also have your own health goals and current health assessed. Every person's reason for not losing

weight is a little different. By working with a nutritionist, you will uncover those issues plus get support in the programme to stay on track.

#### What client's have to say:

"I no longer have cravings, which is incredible for me. I now know what to cook and how to plan my meals, so I eat well for the entire week. I've been amazed by how relaxed I am about eating now."

"So far I've lost 47 pounds and I will continue to follow the program to lose more weight. What's so great about this program is that it's simple!"

For more information on your Gut Health and Wellness Programme with an included Food Assessment, Intolerance Food Test, Food Plan, 1:1 Coaching and support, and what this involves, or if you would like to join, call Michelle on 087 6704930. Or just getting a food intolerance test might give the answers you're looking for.

#### CUT-OUT & KEEP RECIPES

## Gut healthy shaved brussels sprout salad

Nutritionist **Michelle Ryan**, of [bwellhive.ie](http://bwellhive.ie) shares her recipe for gut enhancing salad. "This is best enjoyed on the same day. Great for lunch or with chicken or fish for an evening meal."

Serves 4

#### For the salad:

- 4 cups Brussels sprouts, thinly sliced
- 1.5 cups of cooked kidney beans
- 1 cup cherry tomatoes halved
- 1/2 small red onion thinly sliced
- 1/4 cup kalamata olives pitted sliced
- 2 Tbsp roasted pine nuts
- 2 Tbsp vegan parmesan (optional)

#### For the dressing:

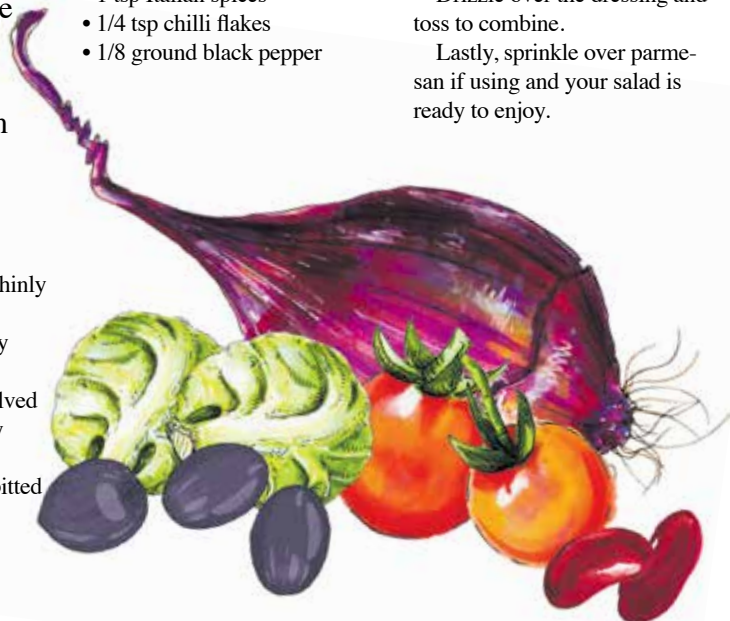
- 2 Tbsp olive oil
- 1 Tbsp red wine vinegar
- 2 tsp balsamic vinegar
- 1 tsp maple syrup
- 1 tsp Italian spices
- 1/4 tsp chilli flakes
- 1/8 ground black pepper

Combine all the dressing ingredients separately. Mix well and set aside.

Add all of the salad ingredients to a large bowl.

Drizzle over the dressing and toss to combine.

Lastly, sprinkle over parmesan if using and your salad is ready to enjoy.



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## FOOD, HEALTH &amp; LIFESTYLE

# The secret to broccoli's superfood status

Happy New Year! I hope you had a peaceful and relaxing Christmas Break, and are feeling great about 2024.

This month I decided to focus on a fascinating compound

called sulforaphane – a big name with big health benefits! In fact, it is one of the most potent food-derived anti-carcinogens known at this time. Read on to find out what sulforaphane is, how it benefits us, and

how to maximise its potential in your daily diet.

## What is sulforaphane?

Cruciferous vegetables, such as broccoli and cauliflower, are well-known for their disease-preventive effects, but have you ever wondered why exactly that is? One reason is because of the compound called sulforaphane (SFN) which you'll find in cruciferous vegetables and also in potent extract form.

Sulforaphane (SFN) is the main reason that broccoli is considered a superfood. It's also found in cauliflower, cabbage, brussel sprouts, kale, mustard and wasabi. However it's a humble sprouted seed that contains the highest concentrations – Broccoli seed sprouts contain about 10 times that of broccoli itself, making them a 'super' superfood.

What does sulforaphane do for our body? Studies show it can help fight cancer, diabetes, arthritis and other inflammatory conditions, prevent brain and liver damage, and more. It's being studied all over the world for a myriad of different conditions, with often startling results. Synthetic versions are being prescribed as part of cancer treatment, and you can find a natural form in a capsule also, but we like to focus on diet first.

In the US, researchers looked into the benefits of eating vegetables on life expectancy. The top 20 per cent (who at the most veg generally) had approximately 15 per cent less chance of dying young (from any causes). But the top 20 per cent of people who ate the most CRUCIFEROUS vegetables had 22 per cent less chance of dying young, regardless of other factors like exercise. So there's something in these vegetables that has a hugely



## HEALTH

Hannah Dare  
Organico Bantry

protective effect on our health.

## So what are the possible health benefits of SFN?

Sulforaphane is a powerful anti-inflammatory, with anti-oxidant-like effects. It helps fight oxidative stress (which is considered to be a major cause of modern diseases like type 2 diabetes and cancer).

Research shows that sulforaphane can potentially help prevent cancer, diabetes, and liver, lung and brain damage, and much more. It can help boost immunity, it's cardio-protective (helps our heart) and can help us detoxify serious chemicals. For this reason it might be good to take alongside chemotherapy.

Initial research often looks at the impact on, say, cancer cells in a test tube environment. But what does this actually mean in our body? One innovative study I found (Johns Hopkins University) gave women who were about to undergo breast-reduction surgery a dose of broccoli-sprout juice just before they went in, and analysed their breast tissue afterwards. The compound SFN was found in their breast tissue. This shows that it is absorbed and also that it targets breast tissue in real time – which is interesting for

any of us who are concerned with the increasing levels of breast cancer these days.

Other studies looked at the way SFN reduces prostate cancer cells, how it can help with bladder and colorectal cancer.

None of this means you would try to treat cancer by drinking broccoli sprout juice. However, if you want to seriously boost your health, you could add sulforaphane-rich foods into your everyday meals, and I think it's good to know of ways we can use our diet to help prevent serious disease.

## How to maximise the benefits of SFN

To maximise the benefits of eating SFN-rich foods, you need to eat them nearly raw or very lightly cooked. Making kale salad, or eating broccoli sprouts in a salad is ideal. I also love broccoli and feta salad. Drinking broccoli sprout juice daily is another option.

However, there are a few ways to maximise the benefits of SFN even when cooking broccoli (I was happy to read this as it's not all that easy to get kids to eat raw broccoli). According to Dr Gregor (the MD behind the health website Nutritionfacts.org) the best thing to do is to chop up the broccoli, leave it for 30 minutes (this activates the SFN) and then cook as lightly as you can. In fact, steaming is the best method of cooking broccoli to maximise the SFN, for three minutes maximum.

Another way to activate the SFN, if you're short of time, is to use mustard in the same meal – say in a dressing or as a condiment (if you want to dive deep into the chemistry behind this you can do so on Dr Gregor's website!). Another interesting fact I came across was that fresh broccoli has 10 times the amount of SFN as

frozen, so it's fresh (and organic of course!) all the way for me.

For general health, the main message from all this interest in cruciferous vegetables is to eat as much as you can, as often as you can. Try to have broccoli, cauliflower, cabbage, kale brussel sprouts and broccoli sprouts on a daily basis. For the highest concentration of SFN, you need to focus on eating broccoli sprouts or broccoli sprout juice.

We stock ready-to-eat organic broccoli sprouts in Organico. But if you want to really increase your intake of SFN, for more specific health reasons, then growing broccoli sprouts and juicing them could be a good option. You can buy the seeds and sprout them using simple methods at home – we stock broccoli seeds for sprouting, and a quick search online will give you the method.

If you want to try adding broccoli sprout juice to your diet the easy way, Irish company No Hurt No Harm (NHNH) makes a juice shot from broccoli sprout and beetroot (more palatable than the sprout juice on its own, plus beetroot juice has its own benefits) and these can be found in most health food shops. If your local shop doesn't stock it, we have it on our online shop. You can also buy sulforaphane in capsule form.

For more information, you can look up Sulforaphane on Found My Fitness on Youtube (Dr Rhonda Patrick is fascinating) and also on Nutritionfacts.org, Dr Gregor's website.

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For the highest concentration of SFN, you need to focus on eating broccoli sprouts or broccoli sprout juice.



## FOOD, HEALTH &amp; LIFESTYLE

## Embracing change

"The only constant in life is change" - Heraclitus

If change is a constant thing that happens, why do so many find it so challenging asks **Joyce O'Sullivan** of Solace Holistic Centre? Don't get me wrong, some people thrive on things constantly changing, but for the most part, the rest of us design a life and routines that we are happy with – so why would we want things to change!

As we move into the new year, it is important to go at a pace that is comfortable and realistic to your energy. It is easy to get caught up in the trap of resolutions and making unrealistic promises to yourself and to others. To support this, I hope that you get some time



to pause, breathe a little deeper and reflect on what is important to you first and foremost.

I will also say that even though we have now gone past the shortest day, we are still in hibernation. During this time we conserve our energy and also reflect on what's important

to us. It is also possible to set some seeds now and plan for things to flourish and bloom in the spring. Spring can support and encourage more activity and changes to happen, without getting caught up in the stress, and overthinking process, that can be associated to change.

Change, once embraced, allows for great opportunities to appear. Over the winter Solace has experienced certain changes. The primary focus for me has always been the therapeutic use of massage therapy and reflexology to support healing. I am delighted to say that I am now expanding this to include regular meditation groups and holistic self-care workshops.

My goal when I opened Solace was to create a space that 'supports healing from within'.

I will continue to provide holistic massage therapy and reflexology treatments, but to support this I am also starting a new journey as a holistic training provider. This, as mentioned, will include the holistic self-care workshops and meditation groups and, from September 2024, I will begin teaching reflexology.

To support the creation of a new safe and supportive space for workshops and training, there will be some renovations happening at Solace in January, therefore the centre will be closed from Monday, January 8 to Tuesday, January 16.

More details of all workshops and training is available on [www.solaceholisticcentre.com](http://www.solaceholisticcentre.com) or contact Joyce on 087 9510554

## SouthDoc introduces service changes for Clonakilty and Macroom

SouthDoc, the out-of-hours GP service providing urgent and non-emergency care in Cork and Kerry, has introduced some service changes from January 2 in Macroom and Clonakilty.

The realignment will see:

- The provision of a dedicated Home Visit division for patients unable to attend a Treatment Centre
- Macroom will remain by appointment only
- Clonakilty to operate as usual during the week and on Saturday and Sunday from 09.00 to 18.00, with Locum Doctor cover otherwise provided from Bandon
- Macroom and Clonakilty will remain open, and appointments arranged for patients as clinically indicated

The HSE says the streamlining of the service is in response to the continuing shortage of GPs and resultant growing risk of burnout of GPs who continue to provide a day-time service in these areas. It will lead to enlarged SouthDoc rotas for GPs, preventing GP burnout and future proofing the out-of-hours service.

The HSE say failure to implement the service development plans will ultimately result in a reduction in the number of doctors and lead to potential interruptions to the service provision.

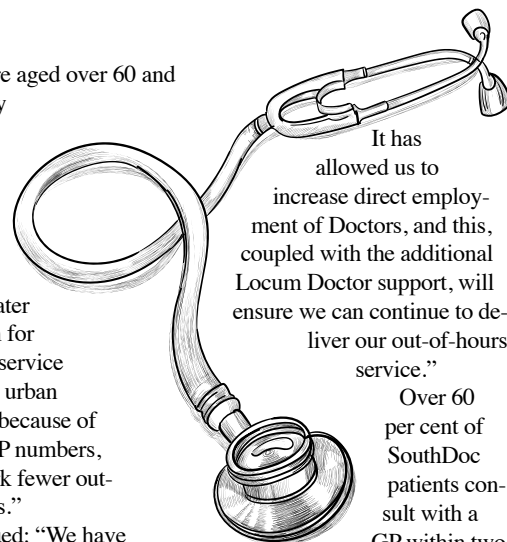
SouthDoc Chairman Dr. Andrew Crosbie stated, "These changes are essential to maintain a SouthDoc service in these areas. The out-of-hours

service is operated by member GPs who have increasingly busy day-time practice and this is a particular challenge in rural areas where there has been a significant reduction in the number of GPs over recent decades. We are now at a real pinch point and without this realignment, there's a real risk of us not being able to maintain the service going forward."

Dr Crosbie explained that in 2006, there were 162,000 patient consultations but last year this reached 231,000, yet GP numbers are declining. "That's 40 per cent more appointments with a reduced number of GPs. Some areas are more acute than others and we have to respond accordingly to ensure SouthDoc continues to operate there. Additionally, more than 25 per cent

of our GPs are aged over 60 and we are simply not going to be able to attract GPs to replace them in rural areas where there is a greater onus on them for out-of-hours service than in larger urban areas where, because of the greater GP numbers, they will work fewer out-of-hours rotas."

He continued: "We have successfully this autumn introduced similar enhancements to bolster our North Cork and West Cork services. We have already seen an increase in expressions of interest to join daytime practice in those areas.



It has allowed us to increase direct employment of Doctors, and this, coupled with the additional Locum Doctor support, will ensure we can continue to deliver our out-of-hours service."

Over 60 per cent of SouthDoc patients consult with a GP within two hours and more than 80 per cent of patients exit the SouthDoc service within three hours of making contact. Without these realignments in North Kerry and Cork, this standard could not be maintained,

he added.

Dr Gary Stack, Medical Director, SouthDoc said, "It is not sustainable to ask busy GPs to take on extra shifts at night and particularly at weekends when they've already got packed lists. So the current model of out-of-hours work is no longer sustainable, either for daytime general practice or for out-of-hours in rural areas impacted by GP shortage. Patients will continue to be seen in a safe and timely fashion. We've seen this work without issue elsewhere, including in North Cork and West Cork, so what we are doing is in the best interest of patients and the best interests of sustaining daytime general practice and out-of-hours general practice in this region."

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## FOOD, HEALTH & LIFESTYLE

# Easy does it when starting on a new exercise plan

As we embark on a new year, now is the perfect time to prioritise our health and wellbeing. As a chartered physiotherapist, **Sean Woods** of UfirstPhysio understands the importance of injury prevention, maintaining good health, and incorporating effective training into our routines. Here he gives some tips to guide you on your journey to a healthier lifestyle in 2024.

**E**mbarking on a new exercise plan is exciting, but it's crucial to start slowly. Rushing into intense workouts can lead to injuries and setbacks. Moreover, always consult with your healthcare provider before initiating any exercise regimen, ensuring your chosen activities align with your individual health needs.

**Warm-up and cool down:** Before diving into any physical activity, take the time to warm up your muscles. A proper warm-up increases blood flow, flexibility, and

reduces the risk of injuries. Likewise, after your workout, ensure a gradual cool down to help your body recover and prevent muscle stiffness.

**Stay hydrated:** Hydration is key for overall health and fitness. Make it a habit to drink an adequate amount of water throughout the day, especially before, during, and after exercise. Proper hydration supports joint function, helps regulate body temperature, and aids in recovery.

**Balanced nutrition:** Fuel your body with a well-balanced diet rich in nutrients. Incorporate a variety of fruits,

vegetables, lean proteins, and whole grains into your meals. Proper nutrition not only supports your overall health but also enhances your body's ability to recover from physical activity.

**Listen to your body:** Pay attention to signals your body sends. If you experience pain, discomfort, or fatigue, it's crucial to listen and respond accordingly. Pushing through pain can lead to injuries, so be mindful of your body's limitations.

**Vary your exercise routine:** Mix up your workouts to engage different muscle groups and prevent monotony. This not only keeps things interesting but also helps in avoiding overuse injuries. Incorporate a combination of cardiovascular exercise, strength training, and flexibility exercises into your routine.

**Prioritise rest and recovery:** Adequate rest is just as important as exercise. Ensure you get enough sleep each

night to support your body's recovery processes. Rest days are also essential to prevent burnout and allow your muscles to repair.

**Set realistic goals:** Finally, set achievable and realistic health and fitness goals. This will help you stay motivated and focused on your journey to a healthier lifestyle.

Should you run into any issues you can rest assured UfirstPhysio is here to help! Whether you are seeking rehabilitation from an ongoing condition, injury, pain relief, or performance enhancement, I will work closely with you to create a customised treatment plan. Please don't hesitate in contacting me at UfirstPhysio to schedule an appointment.

Sean Woods, Chartered Physiotherapist MISC, 087 4746030, email [info@ufirstphysio.ie](mailto:info@ufirstphysio.ie) [ufirstphysio@gmail.com](mailto:ufirstphysio@gmail.com).



# How do you know you are really alive?

**T**he opportunity to give more attention to my inner landscape during the period between Christmas and until days after the new year, had me living moment by moment. This time also led to my

thinking about the preciousness of such things. Perhaps you've had a good dose of it too, but this particular experience included one evening where a cluster of moments flooded to mind. It happened while lov-



## END OF LIFE MATTERS

Melissa Murphy

End of life Doula Melissa Murphy, a companion, guide and resource supporting our community in end of life matters.

ingly watching our dogs lying on their plushy bed – bellies up – by the woodburning stove. I chuckled and cooed like I usually do, then found myself grabbing a notepad to write these things down; deciding to share, so all of us might consider routinely tapping into precious moments too. I'll share some that arrived in that moment of moments and consider myself extremely fortunate that these happened many times during the year gone past: a sense of connect-

edness with the unseen that can happen after a deep meditation, the magnetic pulse of being at a live gig enveloped by the soul that is music, inhaling the incomparable fresh air found in the woods or out in the hills, the full body bliss of sitting in a hot sauna or being abundantly sun-kissed, the sense of weightlessness after the cranial part of a massage or while lying on a mat in post-yoga corpse pose, laughing and crying intensely with belly tension while simultaneously trying to catch my breath (thanks to an Italian American comedian), surrendering into really intentional hugs that go on for several breaths, sinking – weighed down by the many welcoming layers within my bed, feeling small: gazing at endless stars fused into the blackest sky over our home.

Lately when I've met friends, I've heard something like "you've got the right idea to living" or "you have quite a life." This is likely because many of the things that I love in life and that I'm comfortable sharing – the natural world, travelling, and usually taking photos of the same – regularly make up the content on my personal social media. I'm also drawn to stories and have an appreciation for evocative poetry, prose and arts. I immerse myself in these things as often as I can because one day, may-

be tomorrow, I won't have this time, the stability in health, or even be alive to do so. Supporting people around death, grief and end of life, while reflecting deeply on my own impermanence leads me to these loves in life again and again.

I recently came across a talk called 'Dying each moment towards a precious life' that was given by writer and artist Claudette Glasgow who suggests "noticing when you feel joy". From listening to their talk, it seems to come down to the following questions they have posed: Am I wasting my life or making it meaningful? What gives my life meaning? What offers me peace? How can I do more of it?" The seemingly never-ending to-do list was mentioned as a way many of us live – which I definitely relate to (interestingly more so as I'm getting older and as time goes on!) While I'm unlikely to give it up altogether, reframing moments as the essence of living has offered a clear, calm perspective paired with this existence where so much is unknown.

As usual, whenever I start thinking about the topic for my monthly column, I begin to notice similar threads of inspiration, so I'll leave a few more as part of this feast for thought:

"Once you realise that life is a thing that always ends with

unfinished goals, the question becomes, what do you want to spend your life pursuing, completely divorced from the idea of catching it?" - The CryptoNaturalist, poet

"What if this is the last New Year of your life? How would that impact your choice (of resolutions)? Why wait? Why not do those things now?" - Kathryn Mannix, author and palliative care doctor

"Let's say you find out you only have six more months to live. You're really alive if you wouldn't change anything." - Nara Petrovic, 'genuine humanness' researcher

It was decades ago that I was at an event and received a tiny piece of paper – like a message that you might find inside a Chinese fortune cookie. It read the same as the title of this column: 'how do you know you are really alive?' For a long time I kept it alongside a pile of stationery or taped to a journal. I've since lost track of it, but never forgot those few words. I hope they resonate with you too.

To learn more or to connect with Melissa, email her at [starsbeyondourskin@gmail.com](mailto:starsbeyondourskin@gmail.com) or visit [www.starsbeyondourskin.com](http://www.starsbeyondourskin.com). She also welcomes your questions or ideas for future columns.

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## FOOD, HEALTH &amp; LIFESTYLE

## Wild and Well Holistic moves us gently into 2024

**W**ild and Well Holistic is a massage and yoga business based in Bantry run by Saoirse Nash, whose studies in Hatha yoga with an emphasis on functional anatomy, allow her to create fun, inclusive and beginner-friendly classes and one-on-one sessions.

“Over the last few years, I’ve had my own health struggles which, at times, impacted my ability to exercise,” shares Saoirse. “This has given me deep compassion and understanding around the differences in all of our bodies. I know that no two bodies have the same capacity, and that the kindest approach is to work with your individual needs regarding exercise and movement. Through this experience with my health, I’ve become hugely passionate about taking an holistic approach to our daily lives, and I want to encourage and support others to do the same.”

It’s very important to Saoirse to work with a client’s indi-



vidual body, and in doing so, create sustainable and enjoyable movement. “A lot of us lead sedentary lifestyles, particularly if you have a job that requires you to spend a lot of time sitting down,” she says. “Other times, our jobs require us to move in the same repetitive way, which can cause strain and reduced capacity of movement as time goes on. The style of yoga that I teach includes a wide variety of functional movement, which builds strength and mobility, and helps to ensure longevity of movement in our bodies.”

Holistic massage is a complementary therapy to yoga, helping to alleviate the stress and tension that is held in our bodies, our muscles and our nervous systems – yoga will encourage bodily awareness and build strength whilst holistic massage works to reduce any remaining muscle tension, and soothe our nervous systems.

Saoirse offers a variety of sessions (including in person or online for yoga). She offers one-on-one sessions mixing both practices and creating a personalised half hour yoga class and follows that up with a half hour back, neck and shoulder massage. Alternatively, you can choose to do either do yoga or massage for the hour, and she holds a weekly yoga class in Bantry.

If you’d like to get in touch to discuss your needs and whether any of the sessions she offers are suitable please contact Saoirse on 083 3767364 or by emailing wildandwellholistic@gmail.com

## Vitalise Breath and Body Therapy provides nurturing wellness in Clonakilty

**I**n the heart of Clonakilty, a new space for holistic healing has emerged for those seeking relaxation and a revitalised sense of wellbeing. Vitalise Breath and Body Therapy, led by the experienced holistic therapist Sarah Forristal, introduces a unique space where massage therapy, reflexology and breathwork promote physical, mental and emotional harmony.

Sarah’s journey in holistic health began in Amsterdam almost 20 years ago, where she dedicated years to mastering self-cultivation practices, including meditation, qigong, yoga and breathwork. Subsequently, she attained accredited qualifications in massage, reflexology and nutritional therapy in Ireland. Sarah’s extensive training has given her a deep understanding of the intricate relationship between the body and breath, and the significance of tuning in to our bodies to cultivate holistic health.

Vitalise, meaning ‘to give life to’, encapsulates the essence of the therapeutic approach at Vitalise Breath and Body Therapy. By targeting areas where the body holds tension, Sarah’s treatments aim to



breathe life into weary muscles and release the accumulated stress and strain that are carried by the body and build up over time. The result is a profound sense of relaxation, rejuvenation and an enhanced capacity to embrace life fully.

The importance of cultivating a healthy relationship with our bodies cannot be overstated. In our fast-paced lives, stress has become an unwelcome companion that affects our physical and mental wellbeing. Vitalise offers a range of treatments that not only address these stressors but also provide individuals with

effective techniques to manage and release tension.

Beyond individual sessions, Sarah holds guided breathwork and meditation classes every Friday morning at Grow Yoga Studio, Harte’s Courtyard, from 10 am to 11 am. These classes are suitable for everyone and give people the opportunity to step out of their heads and into the wisdom of their body. Each class explores a different theme, helping participants regulate their nervous system, attune to seasonal cycles and discover breath techniques that both calm and energise.

Vitalise Breath and Body Therapy represents more than a treatment space: it embodies a commitment to fostering holistic wellbeing. Through Sarah’s expertise and the integration of diverse therapies, Vitalise is a space where clients come to relieve stress and tension, connect to their body and breath and open up the capacity to embrace life with vitality and joy.

To find out more or to book a treatment with Sarah, text 087 6080103 or email sarah@vitalise.ie. Check out vitalise.ie or follow Sarah on Instagram @sarah\_vitalise.



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## FOOD, HEALTH &amp; LIFESTYLE

HERBAL  
HEALING

Dr. Rosari Kingston

Dr. Rosari Kingston PhD, M.Sc (Herbal medicine) is a medical herbalist practising in Dr. O'Reilly's integrative clinical practice in Clonakilty as well as Church Cross, Skibbereen. Dr. Kingston's area of research are the healing modalities present in Irish vernacular medicine and she incorporates them, where possible, into her clinical practice. In her clinical practise she specialises in infertility and digestive issues.

[www.rosarikingtonphd.com](http://www.rosarikingtonphd.com)

We live our lives around the solstice, be it the longest day or the shortest day. The recent Christmas celebrations marked not only the Incarnation but also the relief that the long hours of darkness had passed, and we could look forward to increasing daylight. Our planet's path around the sun marks the changes between light and dark, warm and cold. It is a

## A new beginning

very important path, not only influencing farming, but also our health.

Exposure to natural light, particularly sunlight, plays a crucial role in maintaining a healthy circadian rhythm. The solar year influences our sleep-wake cycle, hormonal balance, and overall wellbeing.

During the longer days of spring and summer, increased exposure to sunlight stimulates the production of vitamin D in our bodies. This essential vitamin is crucial for bone health, immune function, and mood regulation. The light half of the solar year becomes a natural source of vitality and resilience for individuals.

Conversely, as the solar year transitions into autumn and winter, the reduction in daylight can impact mental health. Seasonal Affective Disorder (SAD) is a recognised condition characterised by feelings of depression and lethargy that typically occur during the darker months. Harnessing the solar year's influence, individuals can incorporate strategies such as light therapy and outdoor activities to mitigate the effects of reduced sunlight exposure during the darker months.

The transitional seasons of spring and autumn are times when our bodies have to adapt to the increasing light or the

increasing darkness. Because of this we are more prone to illness during these seasons and community awareness of this gives rise to expressions such as "change not a clout, 'til May is out".

The days gradually get brighter during January and this year we can look forward to celebrating the feast of Brigid, 'The Mother of the Gael'. One custom associated with Brigid is the 'brat Bríd', which is a piece of cloth left on a bush or windowsill overnight on the eve of Imbolg so that Brigid, on her journey through the land can bless it. This cloth carries Brigid's healing power and was used for relieving headaches by wrapping it around the head and was also given to a woman to ensure a successful birth and so she had sufficient milk to feed her newborn. This need to have sufficient milk for the young is also evident in the dandelion being called Brigid's flower. The common dandelion starts appearing in grazing pastures by the end of January. It is a galactagogue. This means it increases milk yields and sheep love it, hence improving their ability to nourish their offspring.

Humans also benefit from dandelion as an entry in 'Medical News Today' informs us that dandelions:

- Provide antioxidants. Anti-



oxidants serve to counteract the negative effects of free radicals. Free radicals are naturally produced by the human body but can inflict harm by hastening ageing or the advancement of certain diseases. Dandelions contain beta-carotene, an antioxidant that aids in cell protection. Carotenoids, such as beta-carotene, have been shown to play an important role in decreasing cell damage. Dandelion flowers are also high in flavonoids and polyphenols, both of which are antioxidants.

- Reduce cholesterol.

Dandelions contain bioactive chemicals that may aid in cholesterol reduction. In vivo and in vitro studies have revealed that dandelion may help lower blood

lipids including cholesterol and triglycerides.

- Can help to regulate blood sugar. Some research has shown promise in this area but there is a lot more to be done. Initial research attributes the anti-diabetic effect to bioactive chemical components; these include chicoric acid, taraxasterol (TS), chlorogenic acid, and sesquiterpene lactones.

- Reduces inflammation. Lab based research has shown that chemicals found in dandelion help reduce inflammation.

- Lowers blood pressure. Dandelion contains potassium which helps in reducing blood pressure.

- Are incredibly nutritious plants that are high in vitamins,

minerals, and fibre from root to blossom. Dandelion greens can be consumed cooked or raw and are high in vitamins A, C, and K. They are also high in vitamin E, folate, and other B vitamins. Iron, calcium, magnesium, and potassium are all found in dandelion greens. Dandelion root is high in inulin, a carbohydrate found in plants that promotes the formation and maintenance of healthy gut bacteria in the digestive tract. Dandelion root is commonly dried and used to make tea, but it can also be eaten whole like other root vegetables.

So, all in all, January is a month of optimism. It marks the beginning of a new year with new year resolutions and provides us with a peek of rising daylight. This year, we have Brigid's Day to look forward to, and it could be a good idea to revisit some of Brigid's traditions, such as the 'brat Bríd'. Also, by the end of January, the dandelion, a plant that is frequently classified as a weed, will have emerged. It is far from it, being beneficial to both man and beast. So, despite the wintery weather, let us appreciate January because it heralds longer days and the beginning of the agricultural and gardening seasons.

## Courage over comfort in 2024



## MINDFULNESS

Susan O'Regan

Susan O'Regan, Msc Mindfulness Studies teaches compassion-based mindfulness. She is a teacher member of the Mindfulness Teachers Association of Ireland (MTAI) and The Mindfulness Association.

Words from poet Danna Faulds come to mind while reflecting on this new year. "As many times as I forget, catch myself charging forward without even knowing where I'm going, that many times I can make

the choice to stop, to breathe, and be, and walk slowly into the mystery". The poem 'Walk Slowly' can serve as a gentle and helpful reminder to take a pause and slow down when we find ourselves rushing through our precious lives or tearing into January, setting ourselves habitual yet often unattainable goals. It is very easy today to welcome the newness of 2024 and feel grateful to be alive in this part of the world with beautiful blue skies, sunshine, and crisp clear air outside. The sun is casting lovely shadows and spreading warmth around the room, there's still a holiday feel in the air, no need to rush.

I was fortunate to spend five days of the holidays on a silent meditation retreat, the benefits of which I can feel in every fibre of my being. After a few weeks of excess, the retreat was a very welcome combination of seated meditation, walking meditation and gentle yoga. Neither austere nor lavish, this retreat was simple and modest with daily starts of 5.45am

and the provision of two meals a day. Stripped away of our usual comforts, for example, phones and books, and without adornments, like jewellery or make-up, leaves us only with ourselves, which can be challenging enough and experienced as a coming and going of pleasant and unpleasant thoughts, emotions, and sensations.

Sitting together in stillness and in silence, a sense of emptiness or even 'nothingness' can deepen on the inside, which I found profoundly healing. A clearing out of the everyday clutter, which usually fills the mind, offered a clear seeing of the contents of my mind over these few days. Mostly old, random thoughts and memories, sometimes repetitive, and not of my choosing, drifted in slowly and one by one. Some memories were comforting and reassuring, and others were of regret or possible 'wrong' turnings that I had taken in life. I was able to see each one, and acknowledge to myself that, yes, that was me, I did that, or I behaved in

that way. To let things go, we must first acknowledge and feel them. By holding the difficult thoughts, images, and memories gently and compassionately in awareness and feeling the accompanying, for example, shame or regret, the thoughts and feelings seemed to dissipate and move on of their own accord.

Consciously cultivating a willingness to unearth and face discomfort rather than bury it allows for real growth. It's a taking responsibility for ourselves, an acceptance of our humanity and our imperfections and is the very opposite of denial or distraction. Brene Brown defines integrity as "Choosing courage over comfort; choosing what is right over what is fun, fast, or easy; and choosing to practice our values rather than simply professing them". There is an integrity to mindfulness meditation practice that I both admire and aspire to, a facing into all of life, within us and in the world around us, rather than cherry picking only the bits we

like.

There were also many exquisite moments of peace and stillness at the retreat, and at the end we spent time reflecting and writing the things we wished to let go of from the year gone by, as well as writing our intentions for the new. What a lovely activity to do collectively as we stepped over the threshold from one year to another, sending our wishes out into the world. Is there something in this moment that you need to let go of to ease this transition into a new year? What is your intention for the coming year? Or your intention just for today?

Spending days in silent meditation may not be for everyone but I highly recommend introducing silence as an intentional mindfulness practice to build slowly and with support. There are simple things we can do, like turning off the radio at home or in the car now and then, so we can become more aware of our thoughts and feelings but also the sights and sounds around us as we walk

or drive. Removing earphones when going for a walk helps us be more present as we walk and open up to what's coming through our senses. Leaving the phone behind as often as possible when going for a walk or limiting your time on the phone and other devices helps to make space in our minds, as does the practice of mindfulness meditation.

Do consider trying mindfulness meditation this year. These compassion-based practices help us to grow in compassion for ourselves and others. Weekly drop-in compassion-based mindfulness practice sessions continue at CECAS, Myross Wood, Leap on Tuesday mornings through-out the year (January 9, 16, 23 and 30) from 10am-11am. €10. All are welcome to join this wonderful community of practice.

For more information, phone: 087 2700572 or email: [susanoreganmindfulness@gmail.com](mailto:susanoreganmindfulness@gmail.com)  
FB: [susanoreganmindfulness](https://www.facebook.com/susanoreganmindfulness)  
[www.mindhaven.ie](http://www.mindhaven.ie)



## FOOD, HEALTH &amp; LIFESTYLE

## Superman or human?



**Noreen Coomey** of Transition Coaching and Psychotherapy looks at why men don't ask for help.

When a man does not ask for help with a problem (which he has tried to solve on his own without success) he may end up in one of three places – the hospital, the courtroom or the morgue.

Men can resort to various

unhealthy coping mechanisms when dealing with their escalating problems. These strategies include, denial, isolation, angry aggressive behaviour, compulsive or risk-taking behaviour, substance abuse, escapism through social media or overworking.

According to cso.ie there were 504 recorded deaths by suicide in Ireland in 2020: 138 of these were female and 366 (83 per cent) male. Eight out of 10 suicides are male, eight out of 10 prisoners are male.

#### Why don't men ask for help?

Firstly, they grew up thinking they needed to be strong and handle everything on their own – the Superman Syndrome. They are slow to admit when they're struggling or need support. They may lean towards task-oriented communication, focusing on solving problems, while women lean towards more emotionally expressive communication.

Secondly, some men worry that if they say they're having a hard time, people will judge them as not being strong or capable. The stigma of being

seen as weak can stop them from reaching out for the help they really need.

Thirdly, asking for help goes against the idea that men should be able to fix everything by themselves. When they admit that they can't handle things on their own, it brings up the fear of rejection, ridicule and loss of independence, making it hard for them to open up.

And finally, some men may not know where to find the help or resources available for everyday challenges. They may even believe that getting help is only for really serious problems or that they can't financially afford it.

#### So what can we do to change this?

1. Encourage a holistic approach to coping with challenges – addressing wellbeing, healthy lifestyle, social connections and self-care practices.

2. Acknowledge and validate emotions to help create a more inclusive, comfortable environment for men expressing those emotions. It's ok to show feelings and ask for help – that's the strong, smart, 'human' thing

to do. It doesn't make someone less of a man – in fact it shows courage.

3. Create environments that validate open communication, where various ways of processing challenges contribute to healthier more inclusive discussions around problem solving. Encourage men in ways that feel authentic to them whether through problem-solving discussions or emotional sharing.

4. Make it normal to seek professional help for mental health or personal challenges. Spread the word about the help that's out there. Resources are available for men to access the help they need – coaching, therapy services and support groups.

In simple terms, it's about breaking down the idea that men should always be tough and hide their distress. Asking for help is a strong, healthy and human thing to do. We also need to support each other and create a culture where it's OK to talk about how we feel.

[www.noreencoomey.com](http://www.noreencoomey.com)

## Learn to move mindfully with the Alexander Technique

The Alexander Technique has long been recognised as a unique tool to regain flexibility, co-ordination, strength, and for improving performance in everyday activities like walking, typing, gardening and in specialised activities like music, dance, and sports.

So who can benefit? Anyone who is experiencing mobility issues that are not caused by an injury or disease or those who have been receiving treatment and/or professional coaching in music, sports and so on and are still not getting better or experiencing any improvement.



(l-r) Bridget Sheeran and Katey Sleeman

The technique also works for those who want to improve the effectiveness and efficiency of their performance!

Katey Sleeman and Bridget Sheeran are very excited to be offering a one-day workshop in Skibbereen on February 3. Katey has 30 years of experience teaching to both groups and individuals in UK, Europe and Ireland. Bridget has a very active practice throughout West Cork.

[www.kateysleeman.com](http://www.kateysleeman.com)

## Take back control this January with free nicotine replacement therapy from the HSE

January is a popular time for people to try to stop smoking. Many try to quit alone without supports and therapies that can give the best chance of quitting, such as stop smoking medications. The HSE will help you quit by providing free nicotine replacement therapy (NRT) along with other tried and tested supports.

Dr Paul Kavanagh, HSE

Public Health Medicine Consultant Lead with the Tobacco Free Ireland Programme, explains how NRT is safe and effective: "NRT are tightly regulated medicinal products which are overseen by the Health Products Regulatory Agency (HPRA) in Ireland. We know NRT is very safe and that it works. It is encouraging to see that more people who smoke are

using NRT to help them quit. We have been working hard to improve access and availability of this life-saving medicine. People who smoke and who want to stop, and healthcare professionals who are supporting them, can have full trust and confidence in the safety and effectiveness of NRT.

"Some people who smoke will be wondering about using an e-cigarette or vapes to help them stop. We do not have full trust and confidence in the safety and effectiveness of e-cigarettes as a way to stop smoking and recommend NRT as way to help them through their quit attempt."

Pat O'Callaghan who smoked for more than 40 years speaks about how the HSE Quit service helped him finally quit for good: "I tried everything to quit down through the years, the Alan Carr book and seminar twice, hypnosis twice, patches, cold turkey, you name it and I've tried it. What I found most helpful with the Quit service was the one-to-one chats I had with Miriam, my HSE Stop Smoking Advisor. This gave me an accountability and purpose that the other programmes just didn't really have."

"I used the NRT inhaler which helped me massively, as I really

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didn't want to go for vapes as a crutch. I reduced down the number of cartridges in the inhaler over a number of weeks and now I sometimes use an inhaler even without any nicotine, just out of habit."

Martina Blake, National Lead, HSE Tobacco Free Ireland Programme, says: "You are five times more likely to quit for good if you stop smoking for 28 days, and the hardest piece of this process is making the decision to quit in the first place. Our staff can help

you assess your daily routine and smoking pattern. They will help to build your confidence and motivation, assess your nicotine dependence through a simple breath test and then arrange free medication for you. They will contact you regularly over a 12-month period to keep you on track for long term success. If you slip up along the way, there is no judgment. We are here to help you achieve your quitting goal. Freephone 1800 201 203 to sign up.



## FOOD, HEALTH &amp; LIFESTYLE



## MENTAL HEALTH

Leo Muckley

Leo Muckley, MSc in Counselling and Psychotherapy, offers psychotherapy and counselling sessions in person in Glengarriff and Skibbereen, online and also by walk and talk. He is a member of the Irish Association for Counselling and Psychotherapy (IACP).

In January 2024, I will have been working with psychotherapy and counselling clients for three years. The majority of clients I have worked with have been challenged by suicide. From thoughts of suicide, known as suicidal ideation, to actively planning a suicide or to having been bereaved by suicide. Although my work is commonly immersed in suicide it is wise to acknowledge that society can still attach a stigma or a taboo to the topic.

Suicide is not commonly spoken of in society even though mental health is being spoken about more openly. This is at odds with the fact that most people in the country have been impacted by suicide, whether

## Let's talk about suicide

in their family, friend group or their community at large. So, how can we talk about suicide in a way that is respectful, compassionate, supportive and informative all at once? The topic is certainly one that can elicit a multitude of thoughts and emotions and deserves respect.

The World Health Organisation (WHO) states suicide is a global public health issue by which 703,000 people die every year, with more than one in every 100 deaths globally in 2019 the result of suicide. Closer to home, in Ireland in 2019, 524 deaths by suicide were reported, fourteen more than in 2018: 408 of those deaths were males and 116 were female. However, figures of reported deaths alone do not paint the picture of how suicide impacts us in Ireland. As an example, in 2019, Pieta delivered more than 50,000 client sessions across their nationwide network of support. These figures show that there are many more people thinking about suicide than people who take ideation into action and end their life.

Therefore, if suicide is such a common mental health challenge in Ireland, I can't help but wonder, why don't we talk about this? It is prudent to recognise that there are a few reasons why. Anyone who has lost someone to suicide will know how painful it is; it can result in unanswered questions

and can leave a person feeling guilty – not light feelings or topics that we might share when going to the shop for a pint of milk! Furthermore, suicide can still hold a sense of shame or being wrong, some might even think of it as a crime. Suicide was decriminalised only 30 years ago in Ireland in 1993. The use of language such as “committed suicide”, although still used by some, can be stigmatising and implies the act is a crime. Outside of Ireland, there are at least 20 countries in the world where suicide is considered a crime punishable by law, which leads me to wonder who can be punished when a person has ended their life? Wouldn't compassion, prevention and conversation be more appropriate?

It is also helpful to understand what leads to suicide. What is it that might make a person thinking of suicide, which is quite common, end their life? This is harder to define, as there are many reasons and experiences that could lead a person to suicide. What can be defined is that it has been found time and time again that a person wanting to end their life does not want to die. Rather, they can no longer cope with the immense mental anguish and pain they are experiencing in which no longer living seems like the permanent solution to ending that pain. More often than not, mental health challenges or common life stressors can become unmanageable to the point when a person loses touch with their ability to reach out for support leading to a constricted view of their world and their future.

This can happen over time or in a moment. It could be the loss of a loved one, financial strain, depression, relationship issues, addiction, losing a job, experiencing trauma, changes in health, overwhelming anxiety or another significant life change, to name a few reasons, but this list is not exhaustive. It is noteworthy for our West Cork community that research in 2016 found living in more rural areas of Ireland can increase the likelihood of suicide due to experiencing isolation.

In 2022, research by academics from Maynooth University, National College of Ireland, and Trinity College Dublin found that 42 per cent of Irish adults have a mental health challenge and more than one in 10 have attempted suicide. This paints the picture of how addressing mental health in general can support suicide prevention. Research has proven that the main way to prevent suicide is to talk about it. Talking to friends, partners, family and whoever might listen sounds simple but can be quite a challenge for the person thinking of ending their life due to the perceived shame and stigma and lack of hope they experience.

So what can we do about this? Charity fundraisers, mental health week and suicide prevention days are all steps in the right direction. Yet, in our own communities we can all also take individual actions to foster change. The most helpful thing any person might do if feeling concerned about someone is to ask directly “are you thinking of suicide and ending your life?”. It has been proven that this question can be

more than enough to support someone feeling suicidal. Communicating acceptance, compassion, understanding and connecting to the person from a place of concern can make all the difference. Asking this can save a life.

The next step would be to support that person in seeking further help whether it be ringing a helpline, visiting a doctor or seeking out a psychotherapist and counsellor. Lastly, if the person feels like they cannot keep themselves safe, then ringing emergency services is always the best option. It is important to remember also that we can be responsible ‘to’ a person but not ‘for’ a person and if someone wants to end their life they can do so without warning. The ability to predict suicide is no better than chance, no more accurate than the toss of a coin; this can be one of the hardest truths to accept about suicide.

With that said, it must be recognised that this topic is a difficult one and can be painful to acknowledge. It does take compassion, understanding and intention to talk about suicide yet it can only lead to better conversations and hopefully lives saved. If, after reading this, you feel that you need support, please do take care of yourself and reach out to someone close to you, to a helpline or to a mental health professional. I hope that this information can be useful for you and, with courage, we can all contribute to destigmatising and talking more openly about suicide. As the stoic Roman philosopher Seneca said, “Sometimes even to live is an

## Crisis Helplines

## Samaritans

The Samaritans telephone service is available 24 hours a day. For confidential, non-judgmental support: Free-phone 116 123, email [jo@samaritans.ie](mailto:jo@samaritans.ie). Visit [www.samaritans.ie](http://www.samaritans.ie) for details of nearest branch.

## Text 50808

A free 24/7 text service, providing everything from a calming chat to immediate support for people going through a mental health or emotional crisis: Text HELLO to 50808, anytime day or night. Visit [www.text50808.ie](http://www.text50808.ie) for more information.

## Other Supports

- Contact your GP or use the HSE Find a GP Service: [www2.hse.ie/services/find-a-gp/](http://www2.hse.ie/services/find-a-gp/)
- GP Out of Hours service: [www2.hse.ie/services/find-a-gp-out-of-hours/](http://www2.hse.ie/services/find-a-gp-out-of-hours/)
- Your Mental Health – HSE Services: [www.yourmental-health.ie](http://www.yourmental-health.ie)
- Jigsaw – The National Centre for youth mental health: [www.jigsaw.ie](http://www.jigsaw.ie)
- Pieta House – Supporting people and communities in crisis: [www.pieta.ie](http://www.pieta.ie)
- Lisheens House, Ilan Street, Skibbereen, P81W890 [www.lisheenshouse.ie](http://www.lisheenshouse.ie) helpline 023 888 8888
- Emergency services – ring 112 or 999

act of courage”. For more information on Leo's services, phone: 085 1300573 or email: [info@leomuckley.com](mailto:info@leomuckley.com) [www.leomuckley.com](http://www.leomuckley.com) Social media: [@leomuckleypsychotherapy](https://www.instagram.com/leomuckleypsychotherapy)

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## Baltimore's Wild Atlantic Pool and Fitness Centre looks forward to serving the fitness needs of its community in 2024

Community-owned and run, The Wild Atlantic Pool and Fitness Centre has proved to be a rare and valuable asset in the area: a leisure facility that brings all ages and backgrounds together. People always seem to leave happier than they arrived, which is reason enough to visit.

The centre is made up of two sections: the 16.5m swimming pool and wet area and the gym. The swimming pool is 1.3m deep throughout, meaning that it is a safe and reassuring depth for both children and adult learners. There's also a shallow baby pool area for the little ones.

Alongside the pool there is the very popular jacuzzi, which sits surrounded by a bay window making it light and peaceful. There is also a sauna and steam room, both of which help with muscle relaxation at the end of a hard gym session or day at work. While the jacuzzi was unfortunately out of action for a while this year, the demand was such that the staff have re-instated it: A major fundraising drive will be undertaken during this year to upgrade the whole system.

Upstairs in the clean and spacious building is a fully-equipped gym, suitable whether you are just starting out

on your wellness programme or a seasoned athlete. There are three state-of-the-art exercise bikes, a stepper, treadmills, rowing machine, a full cable machine and all the weights you can lift – or not! Thanks to a much-needed grant from Sport Ireland, the Wild Atlantic Pool and Fitness Centre was able to replace nearly all of its equipment, and a further small grant from the Community Support Fund means that the gym has also been redecorated.

It's not only the building and equipment that has had a revamp – there are also new trainers and events starting in the New Year.

The centre already provides public swim lessons for children and adults, aqua-phobic lessons, aqua aerobics, synchronised swimming, gym circuits and Fit For Life.

Coming in 2024 there will be Pilates, spin classes, Nippers' life guarding sports and weightlifting classes. The details for these classes and more will be available on the Centre's website and social media streams. You can even rent the whole swimming pool for a party with inflatables. It's not surprising that people leave the building fit and happy.



## FOOD, HEALTH &amp; LIFESTYLE

A  
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Tina Pisco

Today is Women's Christmas and, as every year, I'm delighted to see the end of the holiday season. It was lovely and relaxed but by New Year's Eve I was ready to move on. I hang in there for the first few days of January, but I'm itching to get all the greenery and tinsel out. I'm still stuffed to the gills from

## New Year new me?

overeating but, thanks to my daughter's help, the decorations have all been packed away and the house is almost back to normal. The only thing left is to haul the now naked Christmas tree out of the room and stack it on the woodpile out the back to gently decompose over the next year. A good sweep and I'll be ready for the new year.

I haven't made any earth-shaking resolutions for 2024. Much as I want to learn how to play the piano, or lose a stone, I'm keeping it low key. The fact is that I spent much of last year in and out of hospital, undergoing treatment for breast cancer. Thanks to an early detection and the type of tiny tumour they found, I only had small surgeries and some radiation and didn't have to endure either a mastectomy or chemotherapy. I am also at a point in my life where my time

is largely my own, my needs can be put first, and I am relatively secure financially. This has made my cancer 'journey' a very easy one, compared to others who have had a much more difficult time.

I learned a few things along the way. The first is that there are a lot of women who have had breast cancer and are doing well now. In fact, according to the Marie Keating foundation one in seven women will be diagnosed with breast cancer in their lifetime. Almost every time I mentioned it this year, a woman in my company has told me that she too was diagnosed and had treatment. I'm happy that I decided to be very open about my diagnosis, because I met so many women who had been through it. I applaud their strength and am thankful for their kindness. Their stories and stamina really helped to keep

me positive.

Another thing I learnt is patience. I've never been very good at it. I always thought that patience was like being put on a short leash, wriggling, and struggling, until the moment when you are released as someone shouts: Go! Like waiting for a cake to cool, or Santa to arrive. Holding your breath as you wait to exhale. Patience and frustration have always gone hand in hand. This year I've learnt that true patience is waiting with no end in sight. It's not holding your breath for something to happen but rather to keep breathing calmly through whatever comes. It's taking breaks to catch your breath rather than 'pushing through'. Convalescence is not a sprint. It's more of a very slow marathon, with a lot of breaks to rest. Thankfully I have two skills which really helped: I

love sleeping and I love reading books. Sleeping and reading are great ways to make the time pass while your body heals. Should that get tedious, there's always the many delights of digital entertainment. Visiting with friends is also a great way to pass the time. I'm lucky that one of my best friends lives halfway between CUH and my home. Stopping in for coffee, chats, and treats made going up and down to Cork every day for radiation therapy actually pleasant.

I took my time, grateful that I could. My to-do lists were small and easily achieved between naps. Plans were kept loose and could be chucked at the last minute. I believe that it really helped my recovery to have very little pressure to do anything at all. I know that it could have been very different if I had a full-time job outside the home

or still had small children – or both. Now nine months later, I'm ready to take stock and face the new year.

Being largely inactive has had benefits, but it also has had an effect on my overall fitness. Now that I'm finally done with hospitals and treatments, I'm ready to take stock and start getting fit. Don't get me wrong. I won't be running any marathons in 2024. In fact, I would be surprised if I ran at all! Right now my goals are much more modest. Being able to go for a long walk, carrying heavy shopping, or getting stuck in the garden again will be my gold medals. It's easy to get discouraged when you have such a long way to go, but thanks to last year I have my new friend, patience, on hand to help. So new year, new me? Not really. Just getting back to old me will be great. I'm looking forward to it.

## Transform and empower yourself through micropigmentation



In the area of aesthetic and restorative services, By Aislinn Micropigmentation Studio stands out for unparalleled skills, compassion and dedication. Aislinn Horgan, a highly trained nurse and medical tattooist, specialises in transformative procedures that go beyond conventional beauty treatments.

Aislinn's commitment to her clients is evident in her provision of services like 3D Areola and nipple restoration for post mastectomy and reconstruction clients, and Nano hairstroke brows for those grappling with brow thinning or loss due to Alopecia or chemotherapy.

Specialising in delicate



procedures, Aislinn has become renowned for her 3D Areola and nipple restoration services, providing comfort and confidence to individuals post-mastectomy

and reconstruction. Her meticulous approach has earned her the exclusive approval of Laya healthcare as the only Areola tattooing provider in Ireland,

showcasing the trust her clients and the healthcare community place in her abilities. Clients seeking brow micropigmentation services for chemotherapy and alopecia brow loss also benefit from Aislinn's expertise, further endorsed by Laya healthcare.

Aislinn has trained with the world's best trainers in Ireland, UK, Estonia, Canada, and most recently, Bratislava. This global exposure has enriched her skills, making her a sought-after expert in the field.

Notably, Aislinn is the exclusive practitioner in West Cork qualified to provide Nano hairstrokes, a cutting-edge technique revolutionising the world of brow enhancement. Nano hairstrokes involve the use of fine needles to deposit pigment into the skin, creating hyper-realistic, natural-looking eyebrow strokes. This technique is a game-changer for those looking to achieve the most authentic and subtle results in brow restoration. Aislinn's mastery of Nano hairstrokes positions her as a trailblazer in West Cork, offering a unique and sought-after service.

2024 signals a year of further growth for By Aislinn Micropigmentation Studio, as Aislinn now operates clinics across multiple locations; Clonakilty, Bishopstown, Galway, and Dublin. This widespread presence ensures accessibility for clients seeking Aislinn's expertise, regardless of their location. The studio's expansion

reflects the growing demand for Aislinn's specialised services and the positive impact she has had on the lives of her clients.

For those interested in exploring the transformative possibilities offered by Aislinn, free consultations are available via phone, or online with face to face consultations also avail-

able. Aislinn also welcomes enquiries through her website, [www.byaaislinn.ie](http://www.byaaislinn.ie). These consultations provide individuals with the opportunity to discuss their unique needs and explore the personalised solutions that Aislinn can offer.

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For over 30 years, the dedicated instructors at Cork Dance have been teaching Cork to dance and promoting social ballroom and Latin American dancing throughout the city and county. With decades of experience they will guide you in the right direction on your dance journey.

"Our mission is to get you on the dance floor as soon as possible and for you to have lots of fun while learning to dance," says instructor Anne Hurley.

"We specialise in beginner classes but, whether you're a seasoned dancer or just starting your dance journey, we have a place for you, and we'll get you moving to music in your first lesson. Our dance classes are all non-competitive, welcoming, invigorating and great fun"

Looking for wedding dance

lessons? Would you like to impress your family and friends on that very special of days?

Simply choose your very special music for your first dance as a married couple and Cork Dance will advise on a suitable style of dance and choreograph a routine for you.

Beginners' dance classes start with easy steps in the Old Time Waltz and will help you get used to dancing with a partner. It's guaranteed you will go home being able to dance.

The next week will start with revision of last week's steps and then gradually introduce other dances such as the social foxtrot, quickstep, tango, jive, cha cha cha and many more.

"Dancing is not just a hobby. It is a way of life, a journey, and one of the most fulfilling things you can do for yourself



both physically and mentally," says Anne. "Dancing has no boundaries. No matter what age, gender or ability, it is one of the most versatile and option-filled past-times."

Cork Dance club is all about having fun and making new friends. Weekly classes

take place in Bandon GAA Club and venues in Cork city. Enrolments now being taken for 2024 beginners classes. For further details contact Anne on 087 2487696, email [corkdanceclub@gmail.com](mailto:corkdanceclub@gmail.com) or visit their website [www.corkdanceclub.com](http://www.corkdanceclub.com).

Prioritising your skin  
for a healthy glow

The beginning of the year is the perfect opportunity to make resolutions that prioritise self-care and enhance your natural radiance. Here are a few of my favourites to kickstart your journey towards healthier, glowing skin. Happy New Year!

- **Consistent Cleansing Rituals:** Start the year by pledging allegiance to a consistent cleansing routine. Resolve to cleanse your skin diligently every morning and evening.

- **Sunscreen, Every Day:** This resolution is non-negotiable. Regardless of the season, make it a habit to apply sunscreen every morning. Shielding your skin from harmful UV rays is the best healthy skin aging strategy in your skincare arsenal.

- **Explore Targeted Treatments:** Identify your skin concerns and explore targeted treatments. Whether it's incorporating serums for brightening, pro-ageing, or redness, find products that address your specific needs.

- **Nourish from Within:** Beautiful skin begins with what you put into your body. Include a variety of fruits, vegetables, and water-rich foods in your diet. Hydrated and well-nourished skin radiates health.

- **Embrace Self-Care Moments:** Carve out time for self-care. Whether it's a weekly mask, a relaxing bath, or simply taking a few minutes each day to pamper your skin, these

moments contribute to overall wellbeing.

- **Regular Skin Check-ins:** Schedule regular check-ins and treatments with a skin specialist to assess your skin's health. A professional opinion can guide you toward the most effective skincare routine for your unique needs.

- **Declutter Your Skincare Shelf:** Bid farewell to expired and neglected skincare products. Streamline your routine by keeping only the essentials. Less is More!

- **Patience and Consistency:** Rome wasn't built in a day, and neither is perfect skin. Be patient and consistent with your skincare routine. Results take time, and the journey is as important as the destination.

## New Year Newness

## PRP Hair Restoration

In the realm of hair restoration, Platelet-Rich Plasma (PRP) has emerged as a groundbreaking solution, offering hope to those seeking thicker, healthier locks. New to the Aesthetic Clinic in Clonakilty, Nurse Olive is now offering PRP Hair Restoration, a non-surgical procedure that harnesses the healing power of one's blood platelets. A small sample of blood is drawn, processed to concentrate the platelets, and then strategically injected into the scalp. These platelets, rich in growth factors,

INSIDE OUT  
BEAUTY

Sherna Malone

Skincare and beauty expert Sherna Malone shares her knowledge and expertise of all things beauty – from skin care do's and don'ts to the latest products out there.

stimulate hair follicles, encouraging natural hair growth and improving the overall quality of existing strands. As a minimally invasive and painless option, PRP for hair restoration has gained popularity for its ability to address various types of hair loss, promoting not just regrowth but also boosting confidence and self-esteem. A natural and effective solution for those looking to restore their crowning glory. Hair loss requires three visits, four weeks apart – then six monthly. For more information on this and all other PRP/Cellular Matrix treatments for face, eye area and neck head to [browtiqueireland.ie](http://browtiqueireland.ie).

Ella & Jo Clear Skin AHA  
BHA Clarifying Liquid

Elevate your skincare game and with the new Ella & Jo's Clear



Skin AHA and BHA Clarifying Liquid. This powerful elixir is your secret weapon for achieving clearer, more radiant skin. A gentle exfoliation provided by AHAs, promotes cell turnover, and unveils a brighter complexion while, BHAs (Salicylic Acid) dive deep into pores, combatting congestion and refining skin texture. Vitamin B5 and Glycerin calm and soothe the skin while retaining moisture. Whether you battle hormonal breakouts or daily congestion, this clarifying liquid is designed to deliver instant and long-term results while soothing and retaining the skin's moisture barrier. Apply a small amount to cleansed skin, avoiding the eye area. For best results, use in the evening and follow with a moisturiser. If using during the day, apply sunscreen. Available online from [ellaandjo.ie](http://ellaandjo.ie) and Ella & Jo stockists nationwide, €31.95.

St. Tropez Self Tan Berry  
Sorbet Mousse

Elevate your sunless tanning ritual in 2024 and unveil luminous, bronzed, sun-kissed skin with the latest addition to the St. Tropez family. Their most iconic, fool-proof and natu-

ral-looking tan is now available in a new limited edition enticing scent of fresh berries, swirled with a touch of rose and warm vanilla. Enriched with Vitamin E for long lasting hydration and healthier looking skin, this tinted tanning mousse is easy-to-apply, streak-free and adapts to your individual skin tone for up to 10 days wear. Best for first-time tanners for trusted results time and time again, the formula delivers a natural, medium glow in one application. The lightweight, hydrating mousse glides effortlessly onto skin, is quick drying, with a non-sticky finish, making it the perfect companion for those seeking a convenient and enjoyable self-tanning experience. Available online from [cloud10beauty.com](http://cloud10beauty.com) and St. Tropez stockists nationwide, €39.95.

Neostrata Skin Active  
Tri-Therapy Lifting Serum

A multi-tasking serum that exfoliates and renews the skin's surface texture and volumises the appearance of skin. Powered by a proprietary Tri-Therapy Lifting Complex, this serum targets sagging skin, fine lines, and wrinkles, providing a visibly lifted and tightened appearance

- Aminofil to firm skin, PHA to even skin tone and Hyaluronic Acid to plump skin. Aminofil is a revolutionary amino acid derivative that targets the skin's building blocks for a more lifted appearance, it targets expression lines and crow's feet. Glucanolate is a Polyhydroxy Acid that gently exfoliates and renews the skin, leaving a brighter and smoother skin tone while low molecular weight Hyaluronic Acid penetrates deep into the skin's surface to attract moisture, providing hydration to visibly plump skin. Three hero ingredients working in harmony to unlock a firmer more radiant complexion. Available online from [neostrata.ie](http://neostrata.ie) and Neostrata stockists nationwide, €84.95.

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## FOOD, HEALTH &amp; LIFESTYLE

# Fertility series: From fearful to fearless



Amanda Roe

Acupuncture and  
Clinical Hypnotherapist

**H**ave you always wanted to have a baby, only now that you're pregnant there is an immense sense of dread and you are feeling worried sick. Perhaps you've always been a bit anxious, easily overwhelmed, or suffered with depression, but this is a side to yourself you never expected. Surely you should be immensely happy but instead you're worried, fearful and apprehensive. You may even have had a miscarriage and instead of feeling devastated there is an enormous sense of relief and

now you're wondering "what's wrong with me?"

If any of these scenarios sound like you, I'd like to reassure you that you are not alone: A severe fear of pregnancy and childbirth, also known as tokophobia, affects about 13 per cent of pregnant women. As an unfamiliar phobia, little spoken about, it often takes a woman by surprise, leaving her feeling isolated, sick to the pit of her stomach and dreading hospital appointments and the inevitable birth.

Medical advice may be as simple as don't worry about it, it's perfectly normal, and you can have a C-section, but the reality is that our unborn babies can hear us and also experience our emotions, so healing these fears as soon as possible will not only have a positive effect on you, both during the pregnancy and birth, but also afterwards, giving your baby the best emotional start.

Tokophobia can affect anyone, from those who see themselves as highly successful and ready to clear these fears 'now', to others who have experienced trauma in the past and really

don't want to open Pandora's box for fear of creating an even bigger wound. The spectrum is vast and unique, yet the one thing women have in common is a fear that is beyond their control.

A looming due date can amplify the fear and women may worry about how quickly therapy can help. Tokophobia is a psychosomatic condition, meaning that it affects both your mind and your body. Healing phobias means healing the hidden wounds and micro traumas that are stuck in your tissues, as well as your mind. The good news is that hypnotherapy is the best modality for treating tokophobia, as it treats the body and mind holistically on both conscious and subconscious levels, helping you to both understand and recover from tokophobia completely and quickly.

Healing means you can transform fear into a deep sense of calm and confidence to experience your pregnancy fearlessly and joyfully. With an immediate shift possible, it leaves you free to enjoy your pregnancy without feeling triggered or projecting your own issues on

**When YOU feel good everything is possible!**



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*Amanda Roe is a clinical hypnotherapist and acupuncturist who uses a range of holistic therapies including dietary guidance to improve fertility, emotional and mental health.*

*Supporting natural recovery from trauma, eating disorders and other mind/body illness. for more information or to book a consultation visit [www.roehealth.ie](http://www.roehealth.ie) or call/text Amanda on: 087 6331898*

## A safe space

**H**elena O'Leary offers psychotherapy and counselling and life coaching through in-person sessions in Bantry and online. An integrative therapist, she works across different therapeutic approaches depending on the needs of her clients and provides a safe space to explore behaviours, thoughts and emotions.

"Connecting with and developing empathy for ourselves and others will lead to a genuine experiencing of our lives. It is not only when something goes wrong or for negative reasons that people attend therapy – often it may be to find out why we think the way we do or find out more about why we react in a certain way," she shares.

Working with adults from age 16-up, the most common issues that Helena helps people with are anxiety, depression, trauma, loneliness, body image and emotional regulation.

Her life coaching work is a form of talk therapy but also focuses on the here-and-now of setting goals, exploring



obstacles and developing a plan for change. This could be in relation to work or to motivation, to relationships or to body image and much more.

"My job is not to lead or advise but to support and encourage," says Helena. "My logo is a tree in full bloom with the trunk of the tree appearing as a joyful person with their arms in the air. This is me and my client."

Helena grew up in West Cork, attending school in Coomhola and Bantry before leaving to study and travel. After returning to Ireland and completing her degree in Counselling in 2023, she is now forging ahead with her business. "It was important for me to expand my business to West Cork and to provide my services to the communities I was raised in," she says.

"I've always wanted a job where I feel that I am contributing. I worked in the corporate world in my twenties and though I loved my job, I hated that all I felt I was doing was making a rich man richer. I've also always been interested in people. It was following my own personal engagement with counselling and how the process helped me that everything fell into place. I know that Counselling and Life Coaching is exactly the job I'm here to do. I love it."

What clients have to say: "When I first started talking with Helena, I felt very lost and my mind was chaos. Over the

course of our sessions Helena helped me by reframing my thoughts, helping me be kinder to myself and also how to integrate healthy mindful and lifestyle habits which are sustainable for me. Helena's open, warm, and understanding nature creates a comfortable environment to air any and all thoughts."

"I've had my fair share of mental health struggles over the past few years, so I've been to a few different counsellors. Helena is hand on heart, the best counsellor I have been to, and I have built a really trusting relationship with her. Life can be pretty stressful, and Helena helps me to effectively manage that stress, allowing me to get on with day to day living and really appreciate everything that I have."

To make a booking enquiry or for further information you can contact Helena by email at [helenakoleary@gmail.com](mailto:helenakoleary@gmail.com) or by phone on 089 2243437 Instagram: @helenakcoaching [www.helenaoleary.com](http://www.helenaoleary.com)




**Helena O'Leary**  
**Counsellor, Psychotherapist & Life Coach**  
*Psychotherapy and Counselling BA (Honours)*  
*Life Coaching H.Dip (Hons. Level 8)*

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## FOOD, HEALTH & LIFESTYLE

### Open day at Gaelscoil Mhichíl Uí Choileáin



**G**aeilge is the first language of Gaelscoil Mhichíl Uí Choileáin, the co-educational primary school, located on the Fernhill Road in Clonakilty, with children immersed in the language (Tumoideachais) and culture in a friendly, fun and creative way from the day they start.

The children are the heartbeat of this multi-denominational school with respect for each

other being the fundamental foundation stone on which the school community is built. Differences are acknowledged and celebrated, but with an emphasis on inclusivity. The school aspires to each child fulfilling his/her potential in a positive and respectful, educational environment.

While the primary school curriculum forms the cornerstone of all teaching in Gaelscoil

Mhichíl Uí Choileáin, there are also a number of extra-curricular activities in music, sports, drama, science, cookery and nutrition and art, as well as many educational trips and guest speakers.

'Le Chéile' is the before and after school childcare facility provided at Gaelscoil Mhichíl Uí Choileáin, where the children are supervised and cared for in a safe, friendly and

familiar setting. There is also a homework club, separate to Le Chéile, where members of staff supervise and assist the children with their homework.

Gaelscoil Mhichíl Uí Choileáin would like to extend a warm welcome to all parents/guardians and children interested, to come and visit the school on Wednesday, January 24, from 3.30pm to 6pm. Bígí linn!

## The year to do it

**W**elcome to a new year of possibilities. I like to think of a new year as like opening a blank book. It is up to us what we want to fill the pages with!

Do you have health and fitness related dreams or goals for 2024? If you have big plans, like a complete overhaul of your lifestyle, my best advice is to break it down into smaller steps. Often when we take on a massive change or quest, we have a tendency to go all in – and all out, as soon as we hit the

first hurdle.

Breaking down our goal, let's say a weight loss goal of 10kg, into smaller steps, will make it more attainable. So instead of going for broke and excluding all sugar and carbs from your diet and forcing yourself to the gym five days a week, expecting to lose a kilo or more in that timeframe, putting a lot of restrictions and expectations on yourself, consider an alternative approach.

Let's be honest. How long will these dietary restrictions last? For how many weeks will you be going to the gym five days out of seven? (Unless you are already training and it's in your routine).

I can already hear the opposing argument: 'But if I don't go all in, I don't go at all'. Truthfully, we do need to commit to our goal, to succeed. But let me ask in return. How many times have you tried to go all in? And how many times have you succeeded?

Often when we talk bigger plans or longterm goals, such as weight loss or lifestyle changes, it's very hard to change ALL habits at once. Not only because they are habits, but because they give us comfort and security in our everyday life. To strip everything away at once, is often too hard and too much for most people.

So break everything down: The first goal could be to make a weekly plan for exercising. Do you need to go to the gym for this? Not really. Take up running or biking. Even going for longer walks every day or several times a week will add to your fitness – but if joining a gym helps you stick to your plan, then go for it. I'd keep it realistic and suggest attending three times per week. You don't have to move in to see results.

Secondly: Be flexible; some days you might not be able to go as planned, so go the next day or another day. If it's pouring down and you don't want to



### DIY FITNESS

Tania Presutti

Danish freelance journalist and fitness professional Tania Presutti, who now resides in Clonakilty, delivers a series of efficient DIY fitness exercises you can do at home.

go for your run, stay in and do a home session. If your class is booked or you're too late, try the weight section in the gym. The message is: Don't give up because of outside changes. Have a plan B and work around the obstacles.

While it's likely you'll better and stronger, not everyone will lose weight in this phase so don't get discouraged.

Once you're in a good spot with your training, you will most likely feel an urge to eat healthier. It often goes hand in hand, as a healthy body wants healthy food. Then it's time to look at what goes into your mouth and how much.

There are many diets out there and almost all of them works, as long as you follow them. But if you want lasting changes, you need to look at what is sustainable for you. And what food means to you and your quality of life. If chocolate makes you happy, sure you can cut it out while on a two-week diet, but are you prepared to let it go for ever?

Instead of working on what you 'can't' eat, another

approach is to work on how much you eat and when you eat. Just as we can condition our stomachs to hold more food, we can train them to get full from a little less. By limiting your portion sizes or only having one portion instead of multiple refills, you can still get to eat all the stuff you want. Just not as much! Another trick could be to drink a big glass of water before sitting down to eat.

My advice for when to eat, is to avoid eating before you go to bed. If you had your meals during the day, then you are hopefully not hungry before going to bed either. And if you need to get something, choose something light and healthy, like a vegetable or protein.

Losing weight is a simple equation of calories in versus calories burned and once you find a healthy balance, make it your lifestyle and you will never have to diet again.

If your 2024 goals do not revolve around weight loss or fitness, find a similar way to break down your big goal into smaller obtainable ones. You'll feel more accomplished by succeeding with small, maybe weekly or monthly goals, and it will make the road to the bigger goal easier to stay focused on.

Hopefully I have provided you with a little food for thought and inspiration on how to reach your goal.

My own goal for 2024 is to run a successful women's only boxing and thaiboxing gym and develop my coaching skills. These are longterm goals which require my patience and passion, and I'm so excited for 2024. While this means I won't have the time to contribute as regularly to West Cork People, I am always open for fitness questions via Instagram: @trainwithadane or via mail: taniaskitchenfitness@gmail.com

I wish you a wonderful, active and healthy 2024.





## FOOD, HEALTH &amp; LIFESTYLE

## Trouble with the waterworks: Part II



## WOMEN'S HEALTH

Dr Paula Stanley  
drstanley@westcorkpeople.ie

In the December issue I wrote on female urinary issues. The second part of this article deals with the causes of and treatments for the various issues that can result in female urinary symptoms.

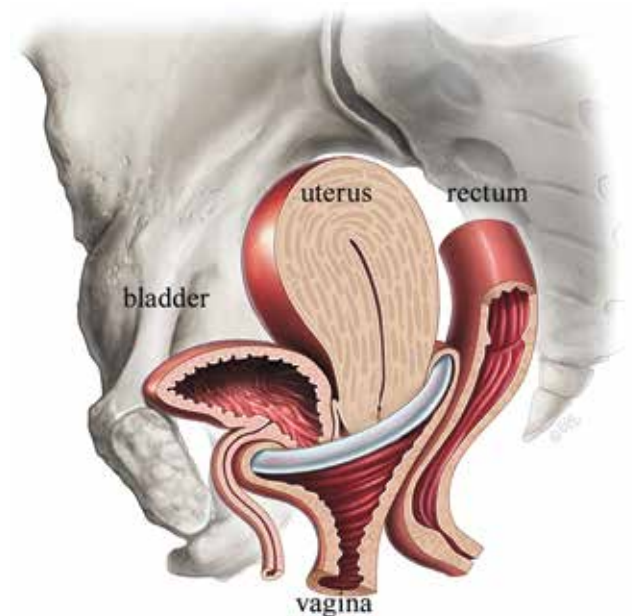
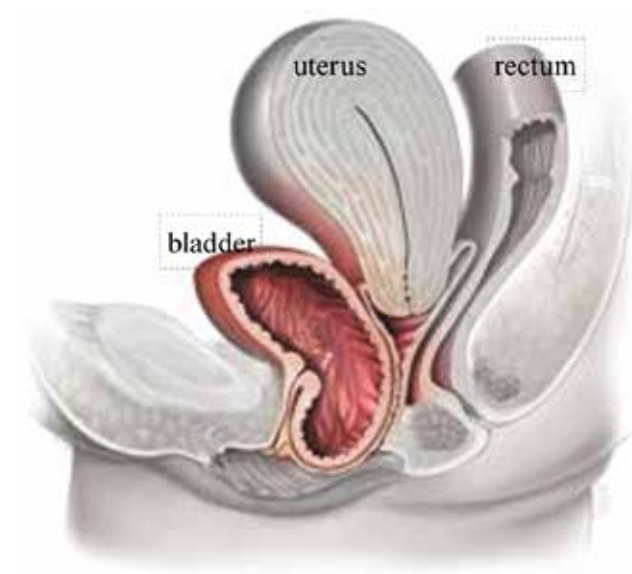
## GSM: Genitourinary Syndrome of Menopause

Common things are common... fluctuating as well as low oestrogen levels is a common cause of female urinary symptoms. The Perimenopause, topic of an earlier article is characterised by erratic fluctuations in oestrogen. This results in many women in the Perimenopause developing urinary frequency, urgency and discomfort when passing urine. These symptoms usually worsen post menopause.

Lack of oestrogen affects not only the vagina and external genital tissue but also the pelvic floor muscles and the urethra, the urine tube. Tissue in the whole area becomes less plump and this results in retraction of tissue surrounding the urethral opening, leaving it more exposed and therefore less protected. This causes discomfort when we pass urine and makes a woman more prone to true urine infections.

Treatment with vaginal oestrogen alone will effectively eradicate these urinary symptoms, often within a few weeks. Where a woman was also getting proven UTIs, vaginal oestrogen has been shown to prevent future UTIs.

Most patients I see and indeed some doctors I've encountered have limited awareness of GSM; Most are aware that lack of oestrogen



gives sore, dry, itchy vagina but are unaware that it also causes urinary symptoms.

## Urinary Tract Infections, UTIs: Yes, treat, but...

When urine dipstick test indicates an infection, a short three-five day course of a mild antibiotic is needed.

Where a woman has had three or more urine analysis-proven UTIs in a year, she needs full investigation to identify any underlying causes.

However, I have seen a few patients being treated with repeated courses of oral antibiotics in the absence of proven infections, when treatment with vaginal oestrogen for GSM completely resolved the urinary symptoms.

## Detrusor instability: also known as Overactive Bladder or OAB

OAB is a less common condition where the bladder contracts when it is not yet full. This occurs, often in a vigorous and abrupt way, resulting in a press-

ing and sometimes uncomfortable urge to pee. This can result in a woman having an urge to pee twenty or more times in the day and usually also several times at night. It can be associated with Urge Incontinence, which is when woman completely empties her bladder because she is not able to get to a bathroom fast enough. If this is suspected, I do a pre and post micturition scan, which looks at how the bladder fills and empties. A more detailed urination test called urodynamics is preferable but access to this test is usually only via a specialist clinic. OAB can be effectively treated with tablets.

## Prolapse - what do we mean by that?

For most patients I talk to, Prolapse is a scary word. It conjures up an image of their womb dropping out of their vagina: this is rarely the case. Here are some very useful links to information including useful anatomical images that clearly explain the different types of prolapse:

• [www.yourpelvicfloor.org](http://www.yourpelvicfloor.org)

• [www.inga.org](http://www.inga.org)

Most pelvic organ prolapse types do not involve prolapse or descent of the womb itself but are actually a prolapse of the vagina wall.

When we've had three or four babies, the muscles of the vaginal wall get stretched, weakened and the vagina does not spring back to its previous size and tension. Therefore for many women over 40, the vagina is more like a tardis: the vaginal opening or introitus is much smaller than the width on the inside.

What happens over time is the stretched, weakened vagina wall can sag or flop forward and down sometimes giving a lump sensation in the vagina. This usually happens with the front wall, called a Cystocele or Anterior prolapse but can involve the back wall of the vagina, called a Rectocele or posterior prolapse.

Because the front wall of the vagina lies directly behind the bladder, a cystocele pulls on the back of the bladder. This can result in frequent urination, difficulty completely emptying the bladder and most bothersome, stress incontinence. Stress incontinence is when a small amount of urine leaks as a result of sudden downward pressure on the pelvic floor such as when we sneeze or cough.

However, for many women with a cystocele, the stress incontinence often worsens so they end up needing to wear a pad just going for a walk.

## Treatment

From early in pregnancies and onwards pelvic floor exercises are vital to maintain good pelvic floor muscle strength and preventing prolapse and stress incontinence. (See [www.yourpelvicfloor.org](http://www.yourpelvicfloor.org))

While I recommend we all continue to do these exercises throughout our lives, no amount of exercising will get rid of a medium to large sized cystocele. This does not mean a woman must have surgery. I can fit a small rubber ring pessary inside the vagina that stops the prolapse from flopping down. This usually also improves the stress incontinence. If the ring pessary works well, the woman simply needs to return every six months to have it changed. The woman does not feel there is anything inside and there is no problem having sex with one in. Many GPs are skilled in fitting ring pessaries.

If significant leaking persists in spite of my treatments, then I refer to a Uro-Gynaecologist

for an opinion as to whether surgery might help. Not every type of incontinence is helped by surgery.

I hope this has been helpful and again I emphasise; if you have trouble with your water-

works: see your GP or come and see me in the Women's Health Service in Skibbereen.

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## JUNIOR INFANT Enrolment 2024

**We are now taking enrolments for our Junior Infant class 2024.**

**Enrolment Forms can be downloaded from our school website or we will post an enrolment form directly to you.**

**Please call our office on 023 8833050 for a form or with any questions.**

**St Joseph's GNS, Convent Road, Clonakilty Co Cork, P85AX90**

[secretary@stjosephsclon.com](mailto:secretary@stjosephsclon.com)



## FOOD, HEALTH &amp; LIFESTYLE

# Ballinascarthy Macra celebrates 70 years with glamorous dinner dance

**B**allinascarthy Macra will celebrate reaching its 70th-anniversary milestone with a spectacular dinner dance on January 20 in Fernhill House Hotel. The club is planning a night of glamour, delicious food, live music and plenty of dancing, as it commemorates seven decades of friendship and community involvement.

Founded in the winter of 1954, Ballinascarthy Macra began its journey when a local agricultural advisor suggested establishing a branch of Macra na Feirme to fill the void left by the closure of a Committee of Agriculture course. The first committee included club president Bartholomew Murphy, Chairperson Thomas Kingston,

Secretary Thomas P. Kingston and Treasurer Dan Walsh.

Originally focused only on educating local farmers in agriculture, Ballinascarthy Macra soon broadened its agenda to include outings and special projects. Although in its early years, Macra was male-dominated – with the first women not joining until the late 1950s – over the decades, the organisation has grown and diversified.

Within five years of its founding the club faced the huge task of building what is now Ballinascarthy Community Hall. Each member donated a certain amount of money that would be paid back later and to raise additional funds it was decided to have one big raffle rather than small fundraising events.

With the top prize a Ford Anglia car, members travelled throughout the county and beyond selling tickets. The raffle was such a success that the tickets wouldn't fit into the container chosen for conducting the draw, but luckily the local ICA branch came to Macra's rescue by stitching together a bag made from bed linen! The hall was opened in September 1961.

The Dinner Dance will take place in Fernhill House Hotel on Saturday, January 20, 2024 from 7pm. Tickets €45 per ticket. Contact (by text if possible): Kate 086 8795334, Grace 087 0984474, Eamonn 086 2112430 or Catriona 087 9556930.



*Ballinascarthy Macra presenting a Ford Anglia car to the winner of the Community Hall fundraising raffle in 1961*



## ASTROLOGY

Kate Arbon

Kate Arbon is an astrologer, writer and spiritual teacher. Living in West Cork for over 20 years she gives personal consultations locally and internationally using traditional natal and Horary astrology.  
email: astro@katearbon  
www.katearbon.com

**T**he coming year is going to be momentous. 2023 passed by at a rapid rate and 2024 will be just as fast-paced, even chaotic at times. It is a complex year with many exciting and challenging astrological shifts. 2024 is a year of significant endings and it will be the beginning of a new era. We will see some disposed of their power, whilst others will take up their position. We are at a cusp point, a threshold, as the scene is set for the next few years and the trend of the next two decades begins.

This year brings a lot of potential for unexpected outcomes and we may get plenty of surprises. We have a potent combination of wild card planet

Uranus joining with expansive Jupiter in mid-April. The two eclipse seasons could coincide with the appearance of visible comets in April and October. Uranus brings potential for more plot twists as it connects with Pluto from July to November and Neptune from June to December.

This is a year when choosing how you want to navigate these major shifts and changes will not only determine the kind of personal experience you have but will also profoundly influence the way we move forward as a group, as humans, and as souls.

There is a choice to be made now as individuals can experience the rise in their own empowerment or they can continue to subscribe to being a victim to outside forces.

There is an emphasis on the way we identify as humanity, as a group and as individuals. We may need to consider what being human is all about as we are faced with a contrast and departure from our expectations. Possibilities that have been purely fiction or theoretical up until now will be presented to us, and we may have to either reclaim our humanity or lose it.

We start the year with all the slower and generational planets at the end of their respective current position. Uranus in Taurus, Neptune in Pisces and Pluto in Capricorn. These final degrees of a zodiac sign are powerful points of focus known

as an anaretic degree. This is a place of finality and completion. With this as the predominant energy it can feel like there is no way out of the current scenario. It seems as if we have come to a place where what has been set in motion has to be fulfilled with no alternative option ahead. This phase is extremely uncomfortable or disheartening and a good deal of trust and faith is required to endure the pressure. The release will come with the shift in energy as the planet finally moves into the first degree of the next sign. We have to wait until 2025 for Uranus and Neptune to transition but Pluto is finally making the move this year.

### Pluto moves into Aquarius for the next 20 years

The big themes for this year are going to bring a shift to who has the power and who exerts control over others. It is also time to tap into our spiritual energy and create a direct connection to the source of our power. Pluto is about bringing hidden power dynamics to the surface and there is always a release required as it changes the scenery for the next phase of growth.

We will see a re-organisation of power structures, as the old establishment makes way for the new social order. This may not be an easy or peaceful transition for some areas of the world as upheaval and unrest become widespread. It is especially important to stay

connected and grounded and maintain inner peace during these upheavals.

Pluto moves into Aquarius on January 21. It makes a retrograde for a final visit to Capricorn in May and then transits back into Aquarius in November where it stays until it moves into Pisces in 2043. Pluto was last in Aquarius in the late 1700 which was a time for revolution and a new form of governance in many countries. Pluto creates the destruction of whatever is no longer relevant, clearing the path for a new and improved version.

Aquarius is the sign of the water bearer, symbolising the flow of new knowledge and ideas to mankind. It is a fixed-air sign that holds humanitarian ideology and advanced social systems as its Utopian model. Aquarius represents the evolved human with equality and fairness at its core. Aquarius is also the sign of the collective, of humanity and the greater good. We can expect the existing control and authority to make way for the bigger social group and the ruling minority will have to relinquish their hold on the masses. We will have to let go of our familiar ways of being and lifestyles as we adapt. The changes and modifications that this era will bring are going to happen slowly over the next couple of decades. Even though we often resist change and evolution this is a time of importance as it is not possible

to maintain the structures of society because they are now more harmful than good and will, eventually become normal until they also become obsolete over time.

The primary meaning of Pluto is power. Who or what holds the power? Is it your unconscious beliefs or fears? Does something or someone have power over you? Aquarius in simple terms is the "common man" and it represents the collective as a human race. This is a time when the term "people power" can take on huge significance. What we get is down to us. We can use our ability to imagine and create our world. The experiences we have depend on how we respond and react. It is up to us as individuals to take responsibility and dream our preferred future into reality.

### Jupiter conjunct Uranus in Taurus

Jupiter expands and increases the groundbreaking, inventive, and unpredictable energy of Uranus from late March to late May. This conjunction occurs about every 14 years but they haven't met in Taurus since 1941. In the sign of material security, practicality and resources we can expect to see changes in our financial system, our food supplies and agriculture. There may be an introduction of a new banking or monetary system. As the planet of opportunity

and expansion works with the innovative planet, Uranus there is an increase in invention and inspiration. There may be shifts in the supply chains or a food revolution as a more 'hands-on' approach to food becomes desirable. Jupiter can bring some balance and benevolence to Uranus in Taurus themes. It may not be to everyone's taste to consume high-tech synthetic 'food'. The sensory sign of Taurus loves the real earthy experience and is prepared to put in the work to provide for its needs. This dynamic may bring a more home-based or rustic approach to providing basic commodities.

### Jupiter enters Gemini

From May 25, this most positive planet moves into air sign Gemini for the remainder of the year and into mid-2025. In a Mercury-ruled sign, there will be an increase in all things to do with communication, ideas and media. This has an excitable energy. Things may get said in the moment and have to be revoked. Saturn in Pisces will make a challenging aspect to Jupiter here during August and December. This restrictive influence suggests there may be limitations placed on movement, trading or social media connections. There may be sudden fluctuations in the financial sector. These months are likely to bring a mix of lively communication with lots of optimistic speculation, and then



## FOOD, HEALTH &amp; LIFESTYLE

a backlash as the stern Saturnian influence keeps this in check. Gemini is a dual sign and this can be about mixed messages or duplicity. Things may need to have two sides to make sense. This could prove a frustrating time with a lot of words spoken but not much action. Be aware of promises that can't be fulfilled or deals, contracts or commitments that are over-optimistic. There is fun and frivolity with this placement but any practical follow-up may be in short supply.

### Mercury Retrograde in Fire Signs

*April 1 – April 25 in Aries*

*August 5 – August 28 in Virgo/Leo*

*November 26 – December 15 in Sagittarius*

This year the Mercury retrogrades will focus our attention on spiritual matters, creativity and our drive or ambition.

During these phases, we can reflect on how we can rework and resolve any obstacles to the free flow of ideas and self-expression.

### Mars Transits through Capricorn to Leo

During 2024 Mars will journey through half the zodiac signs. On February 14, it makes a conjunction with Pluto. On June 11 it is halfway and Square with Pluto. By November 3, it is opposite Pluto. This Mars-Pluto dynamic represents a power play or desire to dominate. We are likely to see some powerful and combative moves at these points in the year. This cycle is a follow-on from the square of last October and the conflict that escalated at that time is still playing out. This energy can bring an attempt to annihilate whatever stands in the way of a desired outcome. When Mars starts its retrograde in Leo on

December 6 there will be some frustration with those aims through January and until Mars starts forwards again in late February 2025. This retrograde phase brings a further two oppositions with Pluto on December 31 and April 26, 2025. This can be a time of prolonged conflict with one side holding on to the original plan and not wanting to give up control or its influence.

### Saturn in Pisces with Neptune

Saturn transits through Pisces for the whole of this year and it is starting to get closer and have an influence on Neptune in this sign. Neptune is the planet of the unseen world, dreams, fantasy and imagination. It helps us to see beyond the physical world. Saturn keeps our feet firmly on the ground and holds us to physical reality. There may be a sense of disillusionment as if reality has overpowered our hopes and aspirations. The sign

of Pisces can represent giving up personal power to a greater entity. This can be a spiritually uplifting experience or it can be a form of victimhood – a result of having gone along with the wishes or desires of another. This year can be an awakening to the limitations and restrictions that are a result of having given one's power away. Communication systems may become more organised and regulated over the next couple of years. Beliefs and spiritual practices can become more like a cult or overbearing doctrine. This can also provide a positive reality check on where we have been deluded and misled. A lot of misrepresentation is revealed at this time. The extent of the deception, when discovered, may cause depression or shock at first. There is the potential to bring more of the soul expression into the physical, material world. This is about being

embedded in our humanity and also connecting to the spark of divinity. To use the Saturn/Neptune in Pisces energies constructively, take the time to imagine your future in a very real way and manifest your dreams and the world you would prefer.

Rediscover your authentic self-expression and reunite with your true power this year. As Pluto moves into Aquarius let your mind and heart be open so you can respond to the changing world with clarity and compassion.



**Aries:** You have a strong sense of duty and you can feel that your role is primarily to live up to family or social expectations in early January. You may have been striving to achieve some predefined goals and you want the recognition now. Over the coming weeks, you can reach out for what you want for yourself. Stand in the spotlight whilst acting the part of your unique self in all your glory. Ensure you take time out to wave your own flag and get noticed for your contribution before a new surge of personal creativity rolls in.



**Taurus:** Think big and stretch your imagination this month. In the past, you will have unconsciously been affected by the convictions and values of those close to you. The powerful need for a strong belief to hold on to that is solid and true for you demand your attention now. During these few weeks, as your interest in philosophical and spiritual areas is heightened, use the time to expand your inner window on the world and break new ground. The feeling of suddenly having understood something can have you wondering now what to do with it all, but that will take care of itself down the line.



**Gemini:** As January progresses, your experiences will confirm that you must not depend on other people or your possessions to provide emotional security for you. This could be a very transformative few weeks when you might unearth resources within yourself that you were previously unaware of. Allow yourself to stand aside for a moment and recognise where any deals and contracts have tied up your energy. You no longer need to rely on certain items or belongings as you become more emotionally stable. Clear out any useless things you've been hoarding, the sense of space and freedom will do you good.



**Cancer:** The focus falls on your relationships from early January and you have difficulty distinguishing between your own feelings and the people closest to you. Tune in to yourself, and allow your partner or close friends to have their moods without imagining they always have something to do with your own actions. Connecting with others in a special moment can be enjoyed when close allies or partners become your focus but you could be thinking that you have all got a little too involved or caught up with each other recently and soon you'll need to stand back.



**Leo:** You may waste too much energy on menial tasks, thus getting distracted from the broader visions in your life during these few weeks. You are likely to make yourself indispensable through being of service to the physical needs of others, and generally happy to take on a lot of tasks – both in your career and around the house. If you are not careful, however, other people will take advantage of you. Now though you should be really getting things together for yourself whilst you can keep the focus on the details. Once done, you'll be able to stand back and take pride in your accomplishments.



**Virgo:** Spontaneity is the keyword for you this month and it's time to loosen up and have some fun. Taking the lead and making some bold statements is also an option. Going just a little bit over the top will be acceptable now as this is a general time of celebration for all. Passion and intensity can run rampant as your enthusiasm overflows so get creative with your energy. You have a strong emotional need for some romantic encounters but you do know how to nurture and maintain the romance in an existing relationship too. So go the extra mile and enjoy!



**Libra:** During January you might find you need to spend more time at home and you can find great pleasure in looking after loved ones, cooking, making home improvements and so on. You feel very sensitive to the moods of others, especially if you share your personal space. Although you'll be strongly motivated to create a caring and secure environment, a crowd can be claustrophobic. You can get on each other's nerves. This is a time to acknowledge the comfortable and familiar environment that supports you. Draw on it as a source of strength but avoid being over-dominant or demanding.



**Scorpio:** Any trying or difficult emotional experiences you have early this month result from having strong differences of opinion with someone you have to deal with every day. When you argue your case you are easily swayed by irrational arguments and emotions. Could it be that everybody is trying to get their message through but no one is listening? Try not to get distracted whilst you tie up important loose ends and meet deadlines. You need to keep some time for a new project or mental challenge in later weeks. You could be making plans for travelling or starting a new class or training programme.



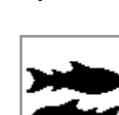
**Sagittarius:** Mid-January will find you focusing on your personal resources and economic fluctuations. You can be a very kind and giving person but you also need to feel secure. Being a little more concerned with your financial status now is probably a good thing although some people may view you as unusually materialistic and possessive. This is a time to cash in on some of your hard-earned investments and name your price for your efforts. Be confident in your skills and abilities and turn them to good use now as others will notice and reward you later.



**Capricorn:** By mid-month you are likely to have put doubts behind you and become a glowing example of both vitality and attractiveness. Let your personality truly shine and you can expect to have a powerful impact on your surroundings through your moods and feelings. You may be seen as unusually emotional or sentimental, but you know how to provide a truly nurturing environment for others. You're motivated to show how much concern and care you have for them now. Bring any critical personal projects to a conclusion whilst you have the energy required to satisfy your own high standards.



**Aquarius:** You need to withdraw from the world from time to time and commune with nature or your inner feelings. During January you are extremely sensitive to your environment and could spend a lot of time enveloped in a very private emotional world. Ideally, create a place of your own which is sacred to you where you can be alone. In this private retreat, you can become aware of your many dreams and longings. Try to work more consciously with the inner world of your imagination through creative work or meditative practice for a few days.



**Pisces:** You have the desire for strong bonds with your friends and you are especially sensitive to how they treat you this month. You are both caring and concerned for their personal development, but easily hurt if they let you down in any way. Ensure that you spend time only with people that elevate and support you. Disconnect from the daily grind and tap into your lighter side for a while. Count your blessings and remember that enjoyment of the good life is more about your own sense of well being, not money, friendship or possessions.

*January has a New Moon in 21 degrees Capricorn on January 11 at 11.57am and a Full Moon in six degrees Leo on January 25 at 5.53pm.*

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## ARTS &amp; ENTERTAINMENT

## The Fire in the Garden: Bosch and his earthly delights



## THE SHAPE OF THINGS

James Waller

James Waller is an Australian born artist and poet based in West Cork. Through this column James explores the world of art, introducing the reader to major works of art and artists and reflecting on what makes them so engaging.

It is 1463, and Jheronimus van Aken is only 13-years-old, when fire devastates his city of Den Bosch. The fire marks him; he re-ignites it when he picks up a brush and begins his apprenticeship to his father as a painter. Whilst his brothers churn out workshop copies of 'The Adoration of the Magi', and other popular themes, Hieronymus joins, in his drawings, human body parts to animals and conjures flames devouring dark horizons. Inspired by medieval bestiaries, gargoyles and the forest which surrounds Den Bosch, Hieronymus dismembers all that he can see and puts it back together in strange and confounding ways. He is clearly beyond his brothers, and his images both exhilarate and frighten his father. The boy is fearless; he does not care if others cannot understand what emerges from his hand: for him the world is



*Garden of Earthly Delights, triptych by Hieronymus Bosch, Prado Madrid*

a divine puzzle and a beautiful trap, with humanity forever threatened by the flames of the devil. He sees into the invisible, and through the invisible he comes to life.

The centuries have since vindicated the determined vision and singular purpose of the young painter from Den Bosch, known in his lifetime, and since, as Hieronymus Bosch: the painter of fantastical landscapes and powerful visions, both devilish and divine. Many readers will know of his 'Garden of Earthly Delights,' a triptych in the collection of the Prado, in Madrid. It is a 'world-scape' in three panels, the left wing depicting Eden,

with Christ between Adam and Eve, the centre panel depicting a sensual paradise of seeming harmony between man, woman, bird and beast (a medieval nudist festival), and the right wing revealing a hell-scape of divine punishment, presumably for those who have partaken in the sensual delights, depicted front and centre.

Why, one wonders, would one be punished for living in such perfect, heavenly accord, with nature? Read from left to right the triptych appears to espouse the central moral message of Christianity: that self-indulgence in the pleasures of the flesh grants an instant ticket to the fires of hell.

The right hell-panel makes a mockery of the pleasure-seekers in the centre. To the neck of a giant mandolin a naked figure is tied and tortured; out of its sound hole rises a harp, upon which another naked figure is crucified. At its base, sheet music is printed on a male behind, looked upon by a reptilian 'cantor'. It appears the arts are in league with the devil.

To the lower right, a naked woman on a spit is held by a giant rabbit over a fire. Directly below, a die is balanced by a severed hand, the palm skewered by a knife to a dish. A devil holds up a backgammon board in triumph, whilst playing cards fall from an up-turned

table. Gambling, as we know, is a first class ticket to hell. Hello Satan.

Directly below, a die is balanced by a severed hand, the palm skewered by a knife to a dish. A devil holds up a backgammon board in triumph, whilst playing cards fall from an up-turned table. Gambling, as we know, is a first class ticket to hell. Hello Satan.

youth he knew its power. The irony, of course, is that Bosch was a painter, painting an image of wonders to seduce the eye; it certainly seduced the Spanish monarch who acquired it. Did those of the elite, granted to see the image, feel at any point that they were being tricked? Bosch, the painter, painting music and the reflected image (the convex mirror being a symbol, perhaps for art) as a pathway to damnation? Or were they simply lulled into a state of wonderment by his crystalline fountains which sprout up like flowery, crustacean-inspired minarets from his earthly, painted waters of Eden?

Was Hieronymus Bosch, in his Garden of Earthly Delights, in fact mocking the podium upon which the church stood, deriding its message of purity through abstinence by offering a banquet of visual delights? It is, of course, impossible to say. What is clear is the power that his triptych continues to exert, 600 years after its creation. It is singular, unique, and unrepentant of its strangeness.

The young Jheronimus van Aken, from Den Bosch, did not follow the crowd. He looked into the invisible, and through the invisible, came to life. His example encourages us today to follow the call of whatever star draws us on; to become full in the promise of our star's realisation, to dance now with the delight of its form.

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## ARTS &amp; ENTERTAINMENT

# 'Live at St. Matthews' unveils a cultural extravaganza for January and February



In the heart of Baltimore stands the historic St. Matthews Church, a local landmark dating back to 1819. Still open on Sundays for local services, this venerable space has undergone a transformative journey in recent times, opening its doors to the community for cinematic experiences and soul-stirring music under the title 'Live at St. Matthews'.

Since its inception last May, Live at St. Matthews has become a cultural hub, hosting unforgettable performances that bridge the gap between history and modernity, welcoming the likes of The Frank & Walters, Gemma Hayes, Lisa Hannigan, David Kitt, John Spillane, and many others.

The commitment of the organisers to community engagement extends beyond music, with film events like Q&A sessions featuring award-winning screenwriters such as Paul Laverty interviewed by the legendary David Putnam. Locally-filmed gems like 'The Sparrow' have also been showcased, connecting the audience to the rich tapestry of the village's storytelling.



## Upcoming events:

• **Film Club presents An Evening with Pat Collins** on Friday, January 19. Experience the magic of cinema with Live at St. Matthews' Film Club event featuring an evening with renowned filmmaker Pat Collins. To delve into the world of storytelling through film, followed by engaging discussions, secure your tickets now.

• **Maurice Lennon Trio** on Friday, January 26. Immerse yourself in the melodic embrace of the Maurice Lennon Trio. Let the timeless tunes of this musical ensemble resonate

within the sacred walls of St. Matthews Church.

• **Songs of Gillian Welch** on Saturday, February 3. Embark on a journey into the poetic realm of Gillian Welch's songs. This promises to be an evening celebrating the artistry of one of folk music's most captivating voices.

Live at St. Matthews welcomes you to be a part of this unique cultural celebration. To join visit the website [www.liveatstmatthews.com](http://www.liveatstmatthews.com) to secure your tickets.

## LIVE AT ST MATTHEWS BALTIMORE

### January and February Highlights

**Friday, 19 January:** *Film Club presents 'An Evening with Pat Collins'*

**Friday, 26 January:**  
Maurice Lennon Trio

**Saturday, 03 February:**  
Songs of Gillian Welch

Secure your ticket at [www.liveatstmatthews.com](http://www.liveatstmatthews.com)

## Paint, print and draw at Gallery Asna

Gallery Asna's first exhibition of 2024, 'Paint! Print! Draw!', opens on Saturday January 13.

Gallery Asna and Clonakilty School of Painting presents a showcase of paintings, prints, artist books and drawings from Clonakilty School of Painting's junior/senior cycle and adult programs.

Work is drawn from both adult and junior classes and reveals the breadth of media studied at the school, from oil painting, drawing and book-



binding to drypoint etching, lino-cut and mono-print.

For most students this is their first ever exhibition and is an important validation for their continued learning and growth.

The opening will be held on Saturday 13 January, at 5.30pm. There will be light refreshments, wonderful work on the walls, and an opening speech by artist and teacher, James Waller.

Exhibition runs to January 27. Gallery Asna in Clonakilty Arts Centre is open Mon to Sat 11am to 5pm.

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## West Cork islands feature in new Ardal O'Hanlon TG4 series

From Rathlin in the north to Cape Clear in the south, the islands off the coast of Ireland have long been a source of inspiration and of myth. But they're home to a rich diversity of wildlife too – and a wide range of people. In *Inis na nÍontas*, actor and comedian Ardal O'Hanlon takes us on a fascinating journey, unearthing the history, observing the wildlife and meeting the islanders trying to live sustainably within their extraordinary

environment.

*Inis na nÍontas* is Ardal O'Hanlon's first Irish-language show. His mother, Teresa, is a native Irish-speaker and, in this series, Ardal fulfils a longstanding ambition to practise and improve his Irish and promote its use to a wider public.

The first episode was broadcast on TG4 on January 10 and focused on the north with Ardal visiting Rathlin Island, Tory Island, and Arranmore.

In the second episode on January 17 at 9.30pm, Ardal continues down the west coast to the Aran islands, where he learns from a practising monk of their ancient Christian heritage while, all around, a remarkable range of flora blooms, encouraged by traditional farming methods. Heading south, Ardal visits the abandoned Great Blasket Island, former home to Irish author Peig Sayers, now home to a thriving seal colony and two young caretakers. On nearby

Valentia, Ardal is shown fossilised evidence of early life emerging from the sea. The episode ends with a visit to spectacular Skellig Michael, a UNESCO world heritage site made internationally famous in 'Star Wars: The Force Awakens'. With Luke Skywalker long gone, the island is home to numerous puffins and the world's most dramatic ancient monastery.

In the final episode on January 24, Ardal is in the far south, where he discovers beautiful Garnish Is-

land. Warmed by the Gulf Stream, Garnish is a paradise filled with gorgeous, lush gardens. It's also a breeding ground for the rare and majestic white-tailed eagle. By kayak, Ardal sees its thriving seal colony, before heading further south to Sherkin Island, where he's at sea once more, being introduced to a playful pod of dolphins. A local historian tells us of the island's piratical past and a resident artist explains why Sherkin has become a painters'

paradise. A short hop takes Ardal to Cape Clear, Ireland's southernmost island, where he's taken on a tour in one of the island's electric buses – the only in Ireland. We meet the island's resident ornithologist, who explains the huge importance of the island for migratory birds, and visit a gin distillery that uses foraged kelp. A climactic clifftop view, out across the Atlantic, marks the end to an unforgettable journey.



## ARTS &amp; ENTERTAINMENT

## Clon Film Club back for Spring term

Clonakilty Film Club returned on January 9 with 'Driving Made-line', a charming film that saw a seemingly simple taxi ride across Paris evolve into a profound meditation on the realities of life. Five further films that span a wealth of cultures and genres round out the lineup for the Club's Spring season.

Next up on January 23 is 'The Old Oak' from director Ken Loach, globally admired for his particular brand of British socialist realism.

The Old Oak is a special place. Not only is it the last pub standing, but it's also the only remaining public space where people can meet in a once thriving



ing mining community that has now fallen on hard times after 30 years of decline. TJ Ballantyne (Dave Turner) the landlord hangs on to The Old Oak by his fingertips, and his predicament

is endangered even more when the pub becomes contested territory after the arrival of Syrian refugees who are placed in the village without any notice. In an unlikely friendship TJ meets

a curious young Syrian Yara (Ebla Mari) with her camera. Can they find a way for the two communities to understand each other? So unfolds a deeply moving drama about their fragilities and hopes.

The rest of this exciting season – including at least one film that bound for this year's Oscars – will be unveiled in the February issue of West Cork People.

*All are welcome, no membership required. Films start at 8.30pm at Clonakilty Park Cinema, Screen 2. Doors open from 8.20pm. €10. Follow Clonakilty Film Club on Facebook for updates.*

## Unsung hero of Irish music celebrated in TG4 documentary

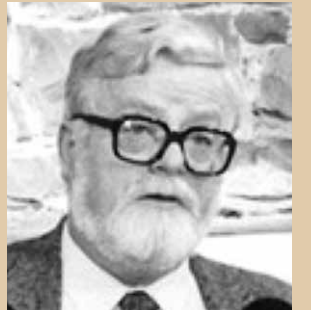
A documentary film celebrating the life of song collector, Tom Munnely, which ran on TG4 over Christmas, is available to watch on TG4 Player.

During his lifetime, Tom had the foresight to collect over 20,000 songs from the oral and aural tradition, many of which are sung today by artists such as Lankum, John Francis Flynn, Ye Vagabonds and the late Sinéad O'Connor.

Featuring music from Christy Moore, Thomas McCarthy and Lisa Lambe, 'Tom Munnely: Fear na nAmhrán' tells the story of a remarkable man who left school with a primary education but went on to leave an indelible mark on Irish song and culture. It tells the story of his friendship with the traveller John Reilly, whose songs were popularised by bands like Planxty, as well as his friendships with people like Junior

Crehan, Nora Cleary, and Tom Lenihan, whose songs and lore he collected for the Irish Folklore Commission and later for the National Folklore Collection in UCD.

Featuring contributions from Christy Moore, Thomas McCarthy, Lisa Lambe, Paddy Glackin and Maighréad Ní Dhomhnaill, 'Tom Munnely Fear na nAmhrán' brings to life these forbearers of the song tradition in Ireland and illustrates how important the work of Tom Munnely was to contemporary Irish culture.



## Niamh Regan returns to Levis'



## MUSIC BOX

Lauren Guillery

Lauren Guillery is a rock musician and music lover. Her album 'Disaster in La La Land' is available on all music platforms.

At the end of January, folk singer-songwriter Niamh Regan will embark on a solo tour that will see her perform across Ireland, stopping off in Ballydehob for an intimate gig at Levis' Corner House on February 10. The Galway musician is no stranger to Levis', having performed at their Secret Song festival a couple of years ago and playing a handful of gigs there to promote the release of her album 'Hemet' and her EP 'In the Meantime'. She is now gearing up to release her second album in May, having spent much of 2023 in the studio working on it.

Niamh Regan's first album 'Hemet' was released in the middle of the pandemic and announced her arrival as one of the most distinctive songwriters in Ireland today. The 2020



Pic: Katya Kaushan

release earned 'Album of the Year' nominations for both the RTE Folk award and the Choice Music Prize and led to performances on The Late Late Show and at Other Voices. The following year, Regan released a four track EP entitled 'In the Meantime' which was written while confined in rural Galway.

The name for Regan's upcoming album has not yet been disclosed. What can be revealed however is that, like a lot of musicians who have had a successful debut, writing a second album has been quite a challenging journey, one that was almost three years in the making. It took the songwriter some time to figure it all out, but she kept pushing until she got to a place where she felt comfortable and confident in what she was doing. "It's funny how you can kind of have a lull year of waiting, overthinking, and tripping yourself up," she confesses.

Whereas Niamh's first album was centred around piano songs, with her vocals and

songwriting at the fore and a subtle instrumentation arranged by New Zealand producer Alex Borwick, the upcoming album was recorded in Donegal with producer Tommy McLaughlin of Attica Studios, and will have a bigger 'band' sound. "I was really lucky to work with Tommy and I feel like he helped me get over myself, as well as figure out what I wanted to do and what I wanted to sound," she explains. "Thematically, this album is quite different and is more about self-acceptance and coming to grips with yourself."

Regan cites Julia Jacklin, Alex G, Andy Shauf and Wilco as inspirations for this record, and while there's more of a 'band' energy to the album, the first single to come out will be a stripped-back acoustic song called 'Madonna'. "It's kind of fitting to have that as the first single, even though it's not exactly what the rest of the album is going to be bringing," she reveals.

Niamh studied Traditional Irish Music at University of

Limerick, where she specialised in the flute and the guitar. Though she hasn't played the flute since she graduated, traditional music is part of her heritage. Her parents were big music lovers, and she attended the Fleadh, sessions with ceili bands and grupa cheoil from a young age. "Either consciously or subconsciously, Trad music is very much in my songwriting because it's what I grew up with and what I was surrounded by. The formats, the ballads, and even the drama in songwriting comes from ballads that have been there for centuries before," she continues. "I have a lot to thank that world and that community of music for, giving me the confidence to keep going with what I wanted to do. It was a good foundation for sure."

Literally, Niamh gets a lot of her inspiration from reading, watching films and just chatting with friends. "One thing for sure about lyrics, they're important to me, but I also like the notion that it's just a conversation as well. It's just a few words and

a few intentions behind it, and I think the work that I enjoy most that I put out, is when I'm not overthinking it, and I think I'm way more honest when I'm not trying."

Songwriting doesn't always come easily, and she had to get a bit of a regiment going for her second album. "I'd set aside a time and it didn't matter if I just played scales on the guitar for 45 minutes", she explains. "As long as I sat down and wrote a line or two and just practised, I was happy." In the end, she decided she would be better off doing some co-writing sessions to get the juices flowing. Producer Tommy McLaughlin came onboard. "Even if they're not songs I would use on the album, it was kind of getting me to not take songwriting too seriously. Like, just do lots of co-writes and throw lots of rubbish out there and have fun. And that's when it started coming together and I started writing a little bit better."

Collaborations are now a central part of Regan's songwriting process, even if the resulting songs do not necessarily get released. "I write with as many people as I can just for fun,"

she explains. "I think a lot of songwriters spend a lot of time trying to get out of their own heads and the best way to do that is writing with others. It's really good for the brain."

In recent months Niamh Regan has popped up on stages at home and overseas supporting American songwriters John Grant and Sam Amidon and Irish pop singer CMAT, amongst others. Playing live is her favourite thing to do, and the support slots are where she's sneakily been testing her new songs to gauge reactions from the audience. For her forthcoming solo tour next month, there will be plenty of the old material, and four or five new songs introduced each night. "I'm excited to share some new songs," she enthuses. "I just love playing live and I think that's the main thing I'd like to focus on. And you know, if people come to the gigs, that means you're doing something right!"

*Niamh Regan plays Levis' Corner House on February 10. Her forthcoming single 'Madonna' comes out on February 7.*

## January Gig Listings

Compiled by Lauren Guillery

Jan 19	Jeffrey Martin   DeBarra's Folk Club
Jan 26	Maurice Lennon Trio   Live at St Matthew's
Jan 27	Alexis Taylor (Hot Chip) DJ set   Connolly's of Leap
	Monique Clare   Levis' Corner House



## ARTS &amp; ENTERTAINMENT

# ‘Paint Your Own Pottery’ added to Kinsale Pottery’s creative offering



Paint Your Own Pottery is a relatively new activity for tourists and locals in Ireland, but it's a long-established and hugely popular business across Europe and the US. Unlike traditional pottery courses, which involve building ceramic pieces from scratch, that must then be dried, biscuit-fired, glazed and re-fired, Paint Your Own Pottery is all about decorating ready-made biscuit-fired pieces with paint-on glazes. As participants are helped by experts, this is an ideal activity for beginners. Visitors choose from the pottery's

based on what they want to paint and what they want to spend. Sessions last a couple of hours and everything is then left at the pottery for glaze firing and is ready for collection a few days later.

"Pottery painting is the perfect outlet for self-expression and creativity," says Anne. "From selecting the perfect piece to choosing a custom colour palette and designing your own unique patterns, PYOP empowers you to create a one-of-a-kind work of art that reflects your personal style."

Kinsale Pottery offers weekly bookable public classes for adults and children aged eight and above, adult evening sessions and pottery painting parties for groups of six to 20 people. All materials and firings are provided, and there's a choice of refreshments available.

"For those who still want to get the full throw-down experience, we have our usual half, one and two-day classes in pottery-making. This is maybe an ideal 'toe-in-the-water' experience that will lead people to join one of our courses," says Anne.

Full details and online booking available on the Kinsale Pottery website [www.kinsaleceramics.com](http://www.kinsaleceramics.com) or call to make a group enquiry on 085 8808395 or 086 1595777.



fusing. This year we want to broaden our offering to include 'Paint Your Own Pottery'," says General Manager, Anne McManamon (pictured top).

great selection of biscuit-fired pieces – from plates, cups and teapots to whacky sculptures, trinket boxes and ornaments,

With over 1000 students visiting each year, Kinsale Pottery is the largest private crafts teaching centre in Ireland. Housed in a 250-year-old coach house and stables just outside the ancient town of Kinsale and overlooking the Bandon River, the Pottery runs classes and courses on pottery, stained glass, weaving, children's arts and crafts and even how to run a pottery business.

"We teach beginners and those with ceramics experience, from Ireland and internationally; and over the years, we've also offered a range of specialist courses in other crafts, from batik, weaving and shoe-making to jewellery, mosaics and glass

## ‘This is for you’ exhibition at Working Artists Studios in Ballydehob

Making art to capture unique moments of humanity, emotion, courage and hope, visual artist Sarah Rattle's figurative works often feature portraiture. Collaboration is central to Sarah's work with groups, developing playful, considered and inclusive projects with participants and other artists within health and social care settings. She hopes that people can identify with the work she creates, both on her own and in collaboration, from those moments which need bravery, to the moments where joy is bursting from within us.

Working Artist Studios, Ballydehob will hold a solo exhibition of Sarah's most recent work opening on January 19 at 5pm. 'This is for you' exhibi-

tion includes series' entitled 'Limitless Compassion', 'See Me' and 'The Unspoken'. Sarah took 2023 to create a collection of new work, which has been on her heart to make for a while. With a background in textiles, Sarah has always found herself exploring ways of integrating illustration into her work, finding ways of storytelling in the work she creates. She has a new love in drawing portraits and characters, representing people who have inspired her.

"This is for you. When division feels more real than unity. When those who see you, see you. As we see our differences as a strength to celebrate" is an excerpt taken from part of this work.

Tyrone born, Sarah has made her home in West Cork having

moved here nearly 20 years ago. Passionate about making art made from the heart, these artworks are intimate and compelling. She loves to work in layers, creating aesthetically beautiful detail and depth. Her passion for photography, composition, pattern and texture can be seen in her work. She also loves beautiful and clever design, traditional craftsmanship and well-executed art.

Working Artist Studios is a much-loved independent gallery and arts epicentre in Ballydehob. Run by artists for artists and art lovers, it combines studios, gallery spaces, a print room, a sculpture studio and Tailors' Hall – multi-purpose project space. Open Tuesday-Saturday, 11am - 4pm. [www.workingartiststudios.com](http://www.workingartiststudios.com)

'This is for you' Solo exhibition by Sarah Rattle. Friday January 19 - February 17, 2024. Working Artist Studios, Ballydehob.



## Kinsale Pottery Painting



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**MOVIES THIS MONTH**





ARTS & ENTERTAINMENT

The Craft Corner

This month **Natalie Webb** is showing us how to make alien bookmarks

“These are such fun to make and as they are aliens you can really use your imagination on the designs... use any colours and shapes that you love, even glitter and feathers if you like!”

Materials:

- Different colour card, I used green, purple and pink.
- Scissors
- Glue
- Pipecleaners, I used purple and green
- Pencil
- Ruler
- Markers
- Pom poms, I used pink and purple
- Googly eyes
- Sticky tape

Method:

Measure and cut a rectangle 15cm x 4cm from your card, I did one green and one pink.

For my green bookmark I cut two small pieces of green pipecleaner and stuck these at the top of my rectangle. Then I cut out a small strip of green card to stick over the taped ends to hide them.

Next stick googly eyes on the top ends of the pipecleaners.

Stick a small pom pom on the card for the nose and draw a mouth.

Just to finish off I cut out lots of purple circles and stuck them on, you can do anything here..stick on different shapes or use your markers for a design.

With the pink card I stuck a larger pink pom pom on the top for the alien head.

Then cut a length of pink pipe cleaner and make a curly shape, stick this on the back of the card so it pokes out above the head.

Stick on your googly eyes.

To finish off I used a gold marker and did some curly shapes.



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Sudoku

The goal of Sudoku is to fill a 9x9 grid with numbers so that each row, column and 3x3 section contain all of the digits between 1 and 9

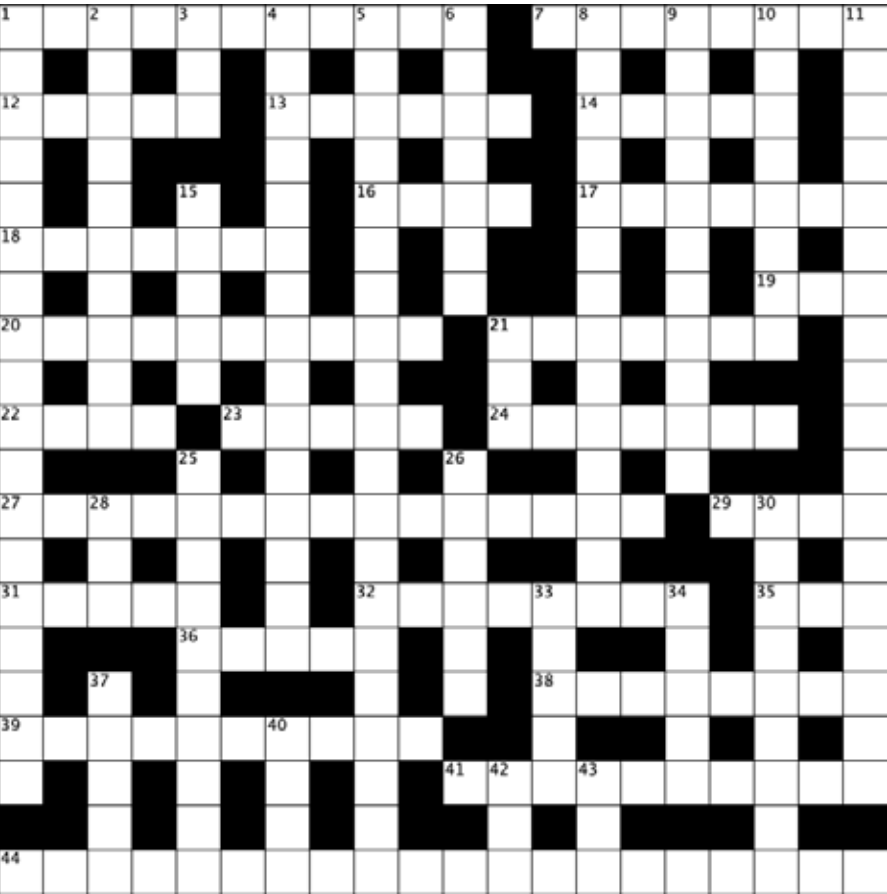
4								1
3		5						
			4	2	7			
				8	2	6		3
	7			6	1	8		
5								
			9			7	6	
		4	8				3	
	1							

#15831 Difficulty: hard

								1
					2	7		
4		3	8		5			
	6				9			
3		4		7	6			
						3		
					3			2
	9			5				4
		7			8	1	6	

#160080 Difficulty: moderate

In the news Crossword



ACROSS

- 1 16-year-old World Darts Championship finalist (4,7)
- 7 Variety of melon (8)
- 12 \_\_\_\_ and crannies (5)
- 13 Type of acid in fertilizers (6)
- 14 Essentials in a zoo (5)
- 16 ‘I am a lonesome \_\_\_\_’ (Bob Dylan song) (4)
- 17 Finished work & went to bed (7)
- 18 And 28 down. This objet d’art bears the name of its Russian creator (7,3)
- 19 Luxury restspot (3)
- 20 It’s neither up nor down (10)
- 21 Descends by rope (7)
- 22 Nora finds a horse of a different colour (4)
- 23 Arctic Circle home (5)
- 24 Paul Lynch’s Booker winning novel ‘\_\_\_\_ Song’ (7)
- 27 The copyright on this 1928 Disney film featuring Mickey Mouse expired on New Year’s Day (9,6)
- 29 Fix at the vet (4)
- 31 ‘The Sixth Sense’ director M. \_\_\_\_ Shyamalan (5)
- 32 Twisted conifers get such investigations (8)
- 35 A little impertinent brat (3)
- 36 Standing tall in Crete! (5)
- 38 Soup served cold (8)
- 39 An Audible or BorrowBox tale that is told in full (10)
- 41 Treaty of \_\_\_\_: punitive peace treaty of World War I (10)
- 44 Using propaganda in conflict to influence behaviour (13,7)

DOWN

- 1 Nickname for one of most seismically active countries in the world (4,2,3,6,3)
- 2 Laughing Australian bird (10)
- 3 Some vinyl records, briefly (3)
- 4 Method of connecting two boards of wood (6,3,6)
- 5 Indiscreetly release Tom from confinement (3,3,3,3,2,3,3)
- 6 \_\_\_\_ Warrior: Greenpeace ship bombed by the French (7)
- 8 Former Paralympic star recently granted parole (5,9)
- 9 LXXXVIII (6-5)
- 10 Signal sent in times of trouble (8)
- 11 Signs of having given something up (10,8)
- 15 Patsy Cline, Aerosmith and Gnarl Barkley have all had a hit song called \_\_\_\_ (5)
- 21 Cleopatra’s pet (3)
- 25 Lacking professional skill (10)
- 26 It reflects an Irish tabloid (6)
- 28 See 18 across.
- 30 Biopic from director Sofia Coppola (9)
- 33 Seed and neighbour of Mali (5)
- 34 Italian island that lends its name to some trousers (5)
- 37 Condition marked by tremors (5)
- 40 Cork based technology maker (4)
- 42 Best guess for when you’ll see me (abbr.) (3)
- 43 A tool in an old-fashioned magic act (3)

Across: 1 Luke Little; 7 honeydew; 12 nooks; 13 nitric; 14 cages; 16 hobob; 17 retired; 18 Fabergé; 19 spa; 20 horizontal; 21 abut; 22 Roan; 23 igloo; 24 prophetic; 27 Steamboat Willie; 29 spy; 31 Night; 32 forest; 35 imp; 36 erect; 38 gapzacho; 39 unbridled; 41 Versailles; 44 psychological warfare  
Down: 1 kind of the rising sun; 2 kookaburra; 3 LPs; 4 tongue and groove; 5 let the cat out of the bag; 6 Rainbow; 8 Oscar Pistorius; 9 eight-eight; 10 distress; 11 withdrawal symptoms; 15 crazy; 21 asp; 25 amateuist; 26 mirror; 28 egg; 30 Pricilla; 33 Niger; 34 caprt; 37 paksy; 40 Dell; 42 ETA; 43 saw



## HOME &amp; GARDEN

## Gardening in January



## GARDENING

John Hosford

The Weekend Garden Centre

Welcome to a new year of gardening. The days are already getting longer and the promise and signs of Spring are already beckoning so now is the time to plan your flower and vegetable seed requirements. New season seeds and bulbs will start to arrive in garden centres and shops during January, so dig and prepare vacant ground now in readiness for later sowing and planting of flowers and vegetables.

## Bulbs

Get any unplanted bulbs into the ground without delay. Don't let them in store or unplanted, as they will disintegrate into dust or rot. Plant Daffodils at twice the depth of the bulb and Tulips at two to three times the depth of the bulb. Protect emerging bulbs against slug and vermin damage. The first of the Snowdrops appeared before Christmas in a very early appearance this year. Established clumps of Snowdrops can be divided 'in the green' after flowering. These delightful flowers are a must in every garden and look well-planted en masse in informal drifts. The early Narcissi January Gold was in flower in many gardens this year before Christmas.

## Summer Bulbs

Summer flowering bulbs will arrive in the garden centres and shops during the month. Dahl-

ias are a good choice, as they come in a very wide array of colours and heights. They have a long flowering period and will provide a continuous succession of bloom from June until late October or the first frost. Dahlias can be started into growth indoors in a frost free place. They are planted into their flowering quarters in late May when all risk of frost has disappeared. Choose dwarf varieties for bedding schemes and containers. The taller varieties can be grown in borders or an allocated area/plot dedicated to cut flowers. Do have stakes at the ready to secure and protect against wind damage.

Gladioli will be arriving too this month. Plant these at three-week intervals from April to late June to provide a succession of delightful cut flowers from early summer to autumn. As with Dahlias, there are a wide range of colours available from purest white to darkest crimson and purple shades. Grow Gladioli in a sunny, well-drained place for best results, staking as they emerge above the ground in spring.

Begonia tubers will be available in garden centres and shops during the month. Start off indoors in frost-free conditions. Begonias come in a range of colours including red, orange, pink and white. Choose cascading varieties for hanging baskets and window boxes. Nerines are a good choice of bulb to provide colour in late autumn. They thrive best in very well-drained soil in full sun. Add grit prior to planting to enhance drainage.

## What to do with your old Christmas tree

Let it rot: Real trees are biodegradable and free from wood preservatives. This soft wood rots away within a year or two if nature is allowed to take its course. Just cut the Christmas tree into sticks and stack in inconspicuous part of the garden. The rotting tree will support many insects and other wildlife, as well as improving the soil

and feeding nearby plants.

Shred it: Shredding Christmas trees greatly accelerates their decomposition. Shreddings make a good mulch for shrubs and paths. For large quantities of shreddings, you can hire shredders from local tool hire companies in West Cork. You can of course take your discarded Christmas tree to your local County Council Recycling Centre. Details and hours are posted on notices on local newspapers or on Local Authority websites.

## Eco-friendly post Christmas

After using living outdoor plants for Christmas displays such as Skimmias, hollies, Perpetuas and other hardy plants, either pot them up individually or plant them into permanent outdoor quarters.

Don't allow plants in combination bowls beyond April/May, as they will run out of steam and out of shape. Moving into permanent quarters will allow the plants to reach their full potential without the near competition of competing plants.



Choose plants that have a good track record of lasting such as Christmas Cacti.

Grow your own decorations to cut down on artificial ones. Consider growing dried flowers and gourds to use as Christmas decorations. Add seeds of these to your seed shopping list. Then, compost after use next Christmas.

Recycle cardboard and paper. Compost cut flowers and natural material used in wreaths or Christmas arrangements.

Artificial ribbons, fabrics, wires and frames can be retrieved and stored away in readiness for next year.

## Snowdrop Open Days

Check the events columns of gardening pages of local and national newspapers for details of special Snowdrop Open Days throughout the country. These are well worth seeking out, as they are celebrations of emerging Spring with their charming jewel-like flowers.

## Vegetable Garden

Secure seed potatoes as soon as possible. It is anticipated that seed potatoes will be scarce, as a result of the challenging growing conditions last summer. Put first and second early seed potatoes sprouting. Place in a light, cool, frost-free place and after two or three weeks shoots will begin to sprout. Plant out from March or earlier if you are in a coastal frost-free area or a frost-free greenhouse.

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currants.

Bring potted strawberries under cover for delicious early crops. Remove old, dead and diseased leaves.

Force rhubarb.

## Greenhouse

Ventilate on mild, calm days. Watch out for vine weevil and be single-minded in your approach to eradicating them. Check out biological control methods. Only water plants that absolutely need watering at this time of year, early in the day using clean, fresh, lukewarm water.

Prune established Fuchsias in heated greenhouses and conservatories. Prune quite hard with a sharp secateurs – pruning all the sideshoots to one or two buds from the main framework. Re-pot using a fresh composts with a slow-release fertiliser included. Check for any presence

of pests.

Sow Sweet Peas under protection for summer displays.

## Winter colour and fragrance in the garden

Daphne bholua, Hamamelis mollis, Viburnum x bodnantense 'Dawn' should be all providing uplifting colour in the garden and filling the winter air with a delicious fragrance.

Winter Heathers will be providing a reliable source of colour.

Cornus will be providing dazzling bark colour enhanced and highlighted by precious winter sunshine.

May I take this opportunity to wish you all a very Happy and Peaceful New Year and successful and rewarding gardening.

**The Week-end Garden Centre**  
by John Hosford Just 1 mile off the N71 Bandon-Clonakilty road.  
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## PETS

## How important is a routine for your dog?



## CANINE CORNER

Liz Mahony

Liz Mahony is an experienced Dog Trainer and Holistic Therapist for all animals. In her monthly column, Liz aims to promote mutual respect between carer and dog. Contact Liz at [corkdogtrainingclasses.com](http://corkdogtrainingclasses.com).

I've always maintained and advised my clients on the importance of establishing a routine for your pet. I don't mean a rigid regimen that is strictly adhered to but I do mean a routine that reassures your dog that all is right in his world, that gives him security and builds trust in his carer.

Now, I can categorically speak from my own experience that a dog thrives on an established routine and can go to pieces when that routine is no longer in place.

I was involved in an RTA shortly before Christmas and Saffron was in the car with me. Fortunately, she was securely tethered via the seat belt otherwise I would be mourning the loss of my beloved companion.

A neighbour kindly took her home and she remained in the house by herself while I spent the night being seen to in A&E.

On my return the following day, I was far too bruised and shook to be able to give her my full attention. Saffron, having been delighted to welcome me home, found it hard to understand that I was unable to comfort and cuddle her and give her the reassurance she needed to restore her confidence.

I was due to go down on Christmas Eve to my family who had arrived over for the holiday with their two dogs who are not over-friendly to other people and strange pets. Realising over the next few days that I would be hard put to look after myself, let alone Saffron, I thought that kennels for about four days would give her the necessary security and routine that she needed.

How wrong I was. Saffron came out a nervous wreck – not I hasten to add because of the kennels but because her

whole routine, security and stability had been undermined. She joined the family but did nothing but pace around in a nervous fashion. She gulped her food and peed in the house, both of which were most unlike her.

Even the quiet times alone together at night didn't seem enough to settle her nervous system, and my heart went out to her, although I knew things would improve on our return home.

I was cosseted and cared for during my stay with the family but the time came for me to return to my own place as the holiday came to an end. I arrived home last Tuesday. My daughter settled me in, lit the fire, unpacked the shopping and she left.

I took Saffron for a short walk down the road. She stuck close to my side, watching to ensure I was alright and not

about to suddenly disappear. It was a complete role reversal and she was quite unsure of herself being so used to me giving her directions.

She heaved a huge sigh of contentment that first evening when she was able to sleep on her bed by the fire or lie beside me on her chair. Saffron has always been a real 'touchy-feely' dog but that first night in particular, she couldn't get close enough to me.

Over the next few days, she began to settle back into her routine but she was still tentative when on a walk. Obviously, the trauma of all that we'd been through was lingering. And as I began to get flashbacks, I decided that we needed the appropriate Dr Bach Flower remedy to help us over any residual shock and trauma.

Happily, Saffron is virtually back to her lively self. She has

put on most of the weight she had lost; her coat has begun to glow again, and take on a deep, healthy hue. And she now walks out with the old spring back in her step. It doesn't matter that I'm only able to take short strolls. She runs on ahead and then stops to wait for me before resuming her interest in all the scents in the grass.

It's been a tough Christmas physically for me but an emotional one for poor Saffron. She's done well but that's because I've been restoring those firm boundaries for her so that she can feel secure again.

It's been a huge learning curve for both of us but we're managing very well now. And I'm taking great pleasure in watching Saffron blossom again, as we go about our daily routine.

## OUT &amp; ABOUT IN WEST CORK



Hetty Walsh, Mags Murphy and Mary Deasy all took part in the Inchydoney Christmas Swim which raised €6000 for Fr John Kingston, Mozambique. Donations can still be sent via Go Fund Me.



Businesses from Clonakilty, Baltimore, Bandon, Schull, Bantry, Castletownbere and surrounds recently completed a 6-week business support programme with Cork County Council's Local Enterprise Office Cork North and West. Focused on working with business owners to help them grow their business, the programme was designed to help participants develop their skills in business and financial planning, marketing, sales, human resource management, leadership and team building. Pictured receiving their certificate of completion from Mayor of County Cork, Cllr Frank O'Flynn are Paula O'Donnell- Gosling Games Limited, Martin Kelleher- Martin Kelleher Property, Paul Kelly- Paul Kelly Designs LTD, Andrew Loane- Oak Fire Pizza, David Guest- Clonakilty Engineering Ltd, Karen O'Reilly- Employflex, Hugh Power- Hydrographic Surveys Ltd and Claire Marie Barton- Connecting Through Sound with Lisa Finn, Business Advisor LEO Cork North & West and the programme facilitator Sheila Anne O'Leary, Business IQ.



Katie Daly, Matt Kirby, Robbie and Leanne Dooley were also at the Inchydoney Swim.



Pictured on Sherkin Island ahead of her upcoming solo exhibition at Uillinn West Cork Arts Centre in Skibbereen was the team who helped Sherkin based artist Majella O'Neill Collins move the final pieces from the island to the mainland. L-R Deirdre Ni Luasaigh, Adrian Legg (Culture Ark), Majella O'Neill Collins & TJ Ryan. Pic Emma Jervis



## SPORT

# Teenage darts sensation Littler hits the bulls-eye in attracting younger interest to darts in Cork

With the World Darts Championships in the Alexandra Palace in London running from December 15, 2023 to January 3, 2024 and the inspirational performance of 16-year-old Luke Littler, darts was on the lips for many this year over the Christmas period, as **Matthew Hurley** finds out talking to Mark Keohane, Chairman of the Mid-West Cork Darts Organisation.

While darts may not be as popular as other activities in Ireland, there is a keen following in West Cork, with the Mid-West Cork Darts Organisation first starting up around 1985.

The organisation, which currently boasts nearly 300 members registered across 17 teams, represents Rosscarbery to Kinsale, heading north to as far as Crookstown and south to Kilbrittain.

Mark Keohane (pictured), a fierce darts lover, who played for the first time at the age of 15, has been chairman of the organisation since 2015.

Keohane played his first competitive game at the age of 18. "I played soccer, GAA, was heavily into pitch and putt but darts was always the game for me. I just found it fascinating," he explains.

"When I started watching people first, they were counting at a phenomenal rate. I just got hooked on it. It's like anything, once you get started, you enjoy it more. You're hooked forever and I just love it."

He admits to being incredibly competitive with himself.

"You'd always want to improve yourself. I just think darts is a massively popular game and anyone that tries it loves it. You see such high standards on television but that doesn't mean it is less enjoyable for those with lower standards to play it," he adds.

The organisation has faced challenges in recent times, especially since the pandemic. Darts is a pub-based sport and, with pub closures, player numbers have in turn gone down.

"We currently have 17 teams across the three divisions but we would have had up to 25 teams at some stages in the past," shares Keohane. "We do have a lot more players playing in various other tournaments across the country, that wouldn't have happened in the old days," the chairman says.

"Pre-Covid we were very proactive in increasing our profile. We used to play in a tournament in Tramore every year that was organised by Michael O'Sullivan and run trials in our own organisation. The year before Covid, we lost in the final of that tournament to a team from Dublin, who

would have four or five Irish internationals. Those trials had around 40 to 50 people playing every couple of weeks, which increased the standard. It would bring everybody on and give everyone a chance to represent their league. They're not running at the moment, as we're short on venues."

Keohane is hoping to run an order of merit in the next couple of months, bringing the mid-west players back together and encouraging players to get involved at a higher level.

There is a still a huge interest and following in darts across West Cork.

"We get large crowds at our tournaments," says Keohane. "especially for the bigger tournaments, which are always played at the Munster Arms Hotel in Bandon."

"There are people who don't play in our tournaments but they watch regularly. I think darts has had an upsurge."

There is a huge entertainment factor to darts, which is also regarded as one of the toughest sports when it comes to skill execution.

Some players are naturals, others take time to develop.

"It can be challenging. I spent many, many years playing darts. Some people come in, pick up a dart and within 12 months, they're playing at the top level locally. Most people take 10 to 12 years before they reach the top level or feel comfortable playing there."

"The better you get, the harder the sport gets in some regard because you have to keep improving and keep practising."

Over the last month in particular with the excitement of the event in London, the sport has drawn a lot of attention.

"I think darts is popular at the moment with the influence of the Premier League and the darts on the TV," shares Keohane. "Anyone I've spoken to over the past month about the World Darts Championship knows that 16-year-old Luke Littler got to the final. This is coming from people you wouldn't have thought to be darts fans. Our task is to try and capitalise on this and to encourage people more to get involved."

British youngster Littler captured the imagination of sports fans after his miraculous performances, despite losing the final to Luke Humphries.

Although players have to be 18 to play with the Mid West Cork Darts Organisation be-



cause of the tournaments being pub-based, there is a thriving youth section in Cork.

"Cork Youth Darts has encouraged young fellas all over the county and we'd have a few lads from Bandon and further West playing in that. My own son and daughter play in it. The young players then represent Cork in Munster championships. The likes of Luke Littler though are exceptional."

Other inspirational darts greats are Michael Van Gerwin, Phil Taylor and Eric Bristow. Keane Barry, the top Irish darts player at the moment, is also one to be admired.

Under the guidance of Keohane, there is no reason why the organisation can't thrive in West Cork.

"Everyone wants to try it because of the legends. It is just about getting the focus right," says Keohane. "Darts is huge in Cork as a whole, not just in Mid West Cork. East Cork, North Cork, Mallow District, there's two leagues in Cork City," the chairman explains.

"There are 11 leagues in total in Cork county. On any week, there's two to three thousand people playing darts competitively in Cork. Once there are young people interested, you'll have more and more getting involved."

"Littler is their hero now... the youngsters will be saying, if he can do it, why can't I. And of course they can."

## Legendary GAA doctor spearheads cancer ward renovation

A legendary GAA medic has helped bring increased comfort to cancer patients in their final days through a major hospital ward renovation project.

Dr Con Murphy spearheaded a series of fundraisers which raised over €300,000, enabling a major overhaul of the oncology unit at Cork University Hospital.

The funds, channelled through the hospital's fundraising arm, CUH Charity, have created a Comfort Care Suite for end-of-life patients with a separate sleeping area and kitchen for relatives, a family room and a youth room.

Now it is hoped the five-month project, designed and supervised by staff at EZ Living Interiors, can be replicated on other wards at the Wilton

campus.

Máiréad Lyons, the end-of-life Care Co-ordinator at CUH, said the initiative involved "vision, commitment and a shared goal" to enhance end-of-life care.

"It is the first of its kind at CUH, borne out of a commitment to improve the hospital environment, ensuring increased comfort for patients who are in their final days and weeks of life, and also for their loved ones," she said.

The Comfort Care Suite, once a single-patient room clinical environment, has been transformed into a homely sanctuary, while the patients' room now has an adjoining private family room with overnight accommodation and a kitchenette.

The Family Room has become a quiet space where patients and

relatives can relax or talk away from the intensity of the hospital setting.

The Youth Room, in contrast, is a vibrant area, allowing teens and young adults the opportunity for a temporary escape from the clinical environment to find solace in activities that allow them to recharge.

"We need to continue to allow families every opportunity to be together as they navigate their end-of-life care journey and we hope the Comfort Care Suite will provide this for many years to come," said Ms Lyons.

Retired GP Dr Murphy, physician to Cork GAA for over four decades, said the transformation provided "a lovely addition" to the hospital.

He praised his legion of GAA contacts, who rowed in behind



the mammoth fundraising effort, supporting three golf outings and a host of other events.

"We're delighted with the result, but I think we need a few more of them, possibly on every floor, so we're not finished yet," he said.

The overhaul was overseen by Aimee O'Donovan of EZ Living Interiors, whose staff gave their time free of charge during the re-design and renovation.

Former Cork GAA medic, Dr Con Murphy, with Máiréad Lyons, end-of-life Care Co-ordinator at CUH, in one of the three newly renovated rooms at CUH.

Pic: Brian Loughheed.



## SPORT

## Bandon GAA scoops 'Community includes Everyone' Award

Bandon GAA club are celebrating winning the SuperValu 'Community includes Everyone' Award, which includes a donation of €5,000 towards further progressing the club's inclusion and diversity programme. Although up against stiff competition from GAA clubs across Ireland, the Bandon club were announced clear winners for their 'All Star' team.

Bandon GAA All Star Team was set up in 2022 to ensure all children, regardless of ability, would be given the opportunity to be part of a team and the club. Club members spoke to parents and children to find out what they could do as a club to make it more

inclusive for children of all abilities. To-date the club has run three all-star camps with 15 children and 27 coaches helping out voluntarily.

SuperValu are Bandon GAA underage club sponsors and are hugely supportive of the club through sponsoring polo shirts for the minor team, jerseys for the All stars and Cúl Camp goodie bags.

Commenting on the award John Ahern, Underage Chairperson, Bandon GAA Club said "We're delighted to have won this award, as we are so proud of our All Stars team, these children show tremendous resilience and are a real inspiration to us all. We will certainly put the donation to good

use within the club to make it as welcoming as possible for all children. We have a tremendous group of volunteers who help out every day of the week across many various aspects from coaching to management to fundraising. Without their hard work this would not be possible."

*Pictured are John Ahern Underage Club Chairperson Bandon GAA, Alan Owens SuperValu Bandon, Liz Gleeson All Stars Camp coordinator Bandon GAA with Kitty Mullally, Levi Garde and Ruby-Anne Doyle.*  
Photo by Ger McCarthy



## MOTORING

## Revamped Ford Kuga gets the thumbs-up



### CAR REVIEWS

Sean Creedon

First the good news for those of us dreading a complete switch from Ice (petrol and diesel) engines to fully electric. At a new car presentation last month, I learned that the Irish Government has pushed the deadline for ice engines back from 2030 to 2035. So we now have at least 11 years to get ready for the big switch-over.

So if you don't want to make the switch to electric immediately maybe you could start

with a plug-in hybrid, but in truth they are not really a great example. You spend a lot of time charging the battery to get up to 60Km in full electric mode. But the beauty of a hybrid is that you do have the reassurance that if you don't have enough charge in the battery, the car will automatically switch to petrol mode.

The revamped version of the Ford Kuga that I drove recently was a plug-in version, but I didn't really need to sit around and wait while it charged. I knew that the most I could get in fully electric fully charged is around 60km. With a 14.4 kWh battery, I knew that I could get up close to 60Km in pure electric mode by pressing the EV button in the dash and drive steadily.

Ford were a bit late to begin the move away from the traditional petrol and diesel engines. They are expecting huge interest in their new Explorer EV, which should be available in Ireland early in 2024.

I'm a paid-up member of the Ford fan club and I have never driven a Ford car that I didn't like. The first item you will notice when you sit in is the 'heads-up' display which give you the speed you are driving at and the speed limit on the road you are travelling on. I find that service really useful and more and more car manufacturers are including it as a standard item in their new cars.

Ford have the most idiot-proof controls on the dash and naturally the Kuga has the standard Ford lay-out, which is so easy to use.

The seats are really com-



fortable and no doubt there is plenty of head and leg room for five well-built adults. So overall no complaints from all family members.

Very few new cars now have a spare wheel, as they try to keep the weight of the car down. Some have a 'mini' spare wheel, but I was pleasantly surprised to find a full-size spare wheel in the Kuga.

So it looks like we have at least another 11 years before

we will be compelled to buy a fully electric car. However, predicting the future is tricky, although Old Moore's Almanac tries it every year. For 2024 Old Moore is predicting a massive earthquake and really who knows what the future holds; maybe another Covid-type virus or more wars. The year 2035 is a long way off.

The Kuga was first introduced in 2008. A few years back it was priced at around

29k and some people thought that was a bit expensive. Amazing how prices have risen, especially since Covid. The Kuga is a fine car, but it has to compete in what is now a very competitive sector of the Irish motor industry.

Entry prices for new Ford Kuga (Titanium model) start at €46,340; the Kuga ST-Line X PHEV starts from €48,847.

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favour). Take it Dear Heart Of Jesus  
and place it within your own broken  
heart where your Father sees it. Then in  
his merciful eyes it will be your favour  
not mine. Amen. Say the above prayer  
for 3 days, promise publication and  
favour will be granted no matter how  
impossible. Never known to fail. P.O.R.

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impossible. Never known to fail. D.O.S.

### ST. JUDE'S NOVENA

May the Sacred Heart of Jesus be  
adored, glorified, loved and revered  
throughout the whole world now and  
forever. Sacred Heart of Jesus pray for  
us. St. Jude worker of miracles pray  
for us. St. Jude, helper of the hopeless  
pray for us. Say this prayer nine times  
daily and by the end of the 8th day,  
your prayers will be answered. Say  
it for nine days. It has never been  
known to fail. Publication must be  
promised. Thanks St. Jude. M.M.B.

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impossible. Never known to fail. K.C.

### PRAYER TO ST MARTHA

Oh St Martha, I resort to thee and to thy  
petition and faith, I offer up to thee this  
light, which I shall burn every Tuesday  
for nine Tuesdays.

Comfort me in all my difficulties and  
through the great favour thou didst  
receive when Our Saviour lodged in thy  
house., I beseech thee to have definitive  
pity in regard to the favour I ask(  
mention favour).

Intercede for my family that we may  
always be provided for in all our  
necessities. I ask thee St Martha to  
overcome the dragon which thou didst  
cast at thy feet.

One Our Father and three Hail Mary's,  
and a lighted candle every Tuesday and  
the above prayer made known with the  
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Martha. This miraculous Saint grants  
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