



Dear Members and Supporters,

Welcome to GIFCC 4th Newsletter. We are delighted to share our thoughts, ideas and updates with you in our latest edition.

RECENT EVENTS

For those of you who have been following us closely, you will be aware we hosted a stall at the St Patrick's Day Festival, held at The Green Quarter in the Entertainment Quarter, Moore Park, on Sunday 18th March.

No doubt a number of you braved the very hot weather to attend the event. We were there to raise awareness and promote the GIFCC by selling merchandise (*Orphan Girl* CDs and GIFCC pins), recruiting new members and selling raffle tickets. Despite the extreme heat, it was a well-attended fun-filled family day with music, dance and lots to eat and drink.

On Friday 6th April, we held our second fundraising event at History House, the headquarters of the Royal Australian Historical Society (RAHS), 133 Macquarie Street, Sydney.

Our special guest was Evelyn Conlon, popular Irish novelist, who talked about her evocative novel, *Not the Same Sky*. Evelyn uses the diary of ship surgeon Charles Strutt and other archival and secondary sources for her imaginative reconstruction of the voyage of the *Thomas Arbuthnot*, and of the fate of four of the transported orphans: Honora, Julia, Bridget and Anne. Renowned Irish flautist, Fintan Vallely contributed musical interludes during Evelyn's storytelling, adding ambiance and poignancy to the storyline.

After the formal part of the evening, the audience mingled while enjoying delicious finger-food and drinks. The evening was a great success as we raised \$3,500 towards the Great Irish Famine Refugee Scholarship to support a refugee student at Western Sydney University.

FUTURE EVENTS

Annual Gathering of Descendants and Friends

Sunday 26th August at 12.00pm

Our 19th Annual Gathering will be held at the Famine Memorial, Hyde Park Barracks, Sydney. Paul Lynch who will be our speaker at August event. He is a Member of the NSW Legislative Assembly, Member for Liverpool and Shadow Attorney General. All welcome!

Dr Patricia (Trish) Strong, Chairperson,
GIFCC: chair@irishfaminememorial.org

Fundraising Trivia Night

Planning is underway for a fund raising trivia night, which will be held in October 2018. Further details will follow.

DONATIONS AND BEQUESTS

We remind you to consider a tax-deductible donation to our outreach programs - the Mamre Fund and Refugee Scholarship. Alternatively, you may like to donate to the GIFCC Inc. to support our on-going operational costs. Donations directly to GIFCC are not tax deductible, however we greatly welcome and appreciate any support you can provide to promote our organisation. Please go to www.irishfaminememorial.org for **How to Donate** link. Additionally, we invite you to consider making a bequest via your will. If you would like information regarding making a bequest, please email: contact@irishfaminememorial.org and request a GIFCC Bequest Brochure.

MEMBERSHIPS

A friendly reminder that your renewal membership is due 1st July 2018. We also welcome new memberships as the nominal fee of \$5.00 helps fund our activities. We have attached a copy of the membership /renewal form for your convenience at the back of the edition of this newsletter. Our membership emails contact details are: memberships@irishfaminememorial.org or you can post to GIFCC, P.O.Box 209, Roseville, NSW 2069

BIRR (PARSONSTOWN) WORKHOUSE, KINGS COUNTY (OFFALY) RESCUED

Photograph: Aerial View of Birr workhouse (September 2013)

Over the period of the Earl Grey Famine workhouse emigration scheme 65 of the 4114 girls who came to Australia came from the Birr workhouse.

Birr workhouse is one of the original 130 workhouses built in the first phase of Irish workhouses after the Act of 1838. The first workhouses in Ireland were ready for occupation in 1841 and Birr opened in 1842, closing in 1921. These were designed by George Wilkinson and Birr is the best preserved and least altered of the original designed workhouses being a wonderful surviving example of the standard plan (see the often-used aerial shot).

Over the years the Birr workhouse has stood derelict despite many efforts to restore it or convert it to another use (see photo taken in September 2013). A private investor purchased it some years ago to use the site to construct apartments but the economic downturn in Ireland meant this

did not proceed. Meanwhile the building continued to crumble and Birr people could not see a way to progress interest in it. Meanwhile later workhouses (built after 1850) such as Portumna, Donaghmore and Mount Bellew, which had fewer records and no connection to the Australian famine emigration scheme of Earl Grey, have created interest in the Famine.

Recently, good news at last and just in time for the building. A wealthy Canadian woman, purchased the site for €250,000 and has had plans drawn up for a facility for dementia patients. There will be self-contained apartments and secure areas where patients can wander, so there will be minimum need for sedation and robotics will be used to ensure their safety. The plans show alterations to the building that are historically acceptable. The site will be open to the public in the non-secured areas with plans for a car park, café, creche, playground, etc. The women's section on

the side furthest from the town is relatively undamaged and the plan is to preserve it as a museum, so the orphan girls and other inmates of the workhouse will be commemorated at last.

At a recent meeting in Birr Town Council Chamber, a conservation architect employed on the project showed plans and details and said she hoped work on the roof would start this summer and then planning permission would be sought for the extensive developments which hopefully will be completed in about two years.

For more information and images of Birr see:

<http://www.birrhistsoc.com/Workhouse.htm>

You can also do a search of www.irishfaminememorial.org for girls from Kings or Offaly. Please note that not all Offaly/Kings girls have their workhouses identified on our database - some were in Edenderry or Tullamore workhouses with a few from other places yet to be confirmed.

Watch this space. If you have identified your workhouse orphan from any workhouse then please feel free to email me at contact@irishfaminememorial.org

Dr Perry McIntyre
Vice-Chair & Historian GIFCC



Photograph: Birr workhouse (September 2013)



APPLICATION FOR or RENEWAL OF MEMBERSHIP

GREAT IRISH FAMINE COMMEMORATION COMMITTEE

(Incorporated under the Associations Incorporation Act 2009)

I [name]
(please print)

Membership number (if renewing) _____

Of (address)

.....**State** **Postcode**.....

Email.....**phone**

Hereby apply to become a member / renew my membership of the above-named Incorporated Association. In the event of my admission as a member, I agree to be bound by the Constitution of the Association.

Signature of applicant**date**.....

Membership fee is \$5 payable annually for the year commencing on 1 July

Payment either by:

- 1) Direct transfer to GIFCC CBA account BSB 062 030 Account 1001 3868

Reference: your name and/or membership number

or

- 2) Cheque payable to Great Irish Famine Commemoration Committee

Please complete the form and **email** it to memberships@irishfaminememorial.org
or post to GIFCC, PO Box 209, Roseville NSW 2069

(Please note we are moving towards using electronic media i.e. using email or our website to reduce costs associated with mail handling and postage, therefore email is preferable).