

MAYNOOTH RETIRED STAFF ASSOCIATION

TWENTY YEARS A GROWING ¹

Mary Weld

FOUNDING OF THE ASSOCIATION

In 2000, three members of the first Governing Authority were charged by the Chairman with a task for which the brief contained two words, RETIRED STAFF. They quickly set to work on two projects:

- (1) The establishment of a Policy for the Award of Emeritus Professor
- (2) The establishment of a Retired Staff Association

The first was achieved in a timely fashion, but the second took a bit longer. Saranne Magennis, Ed Madden and I worked with a group of retired staff to prepare an agreed set of Rules so that the Retired Staff Association could be launched in 2002. Ed and Saranne remained very supportive and helpful through the years, and with the goodwill of the Geography Dept, I provided secretarial support for 10 years, until my own retirement in 2012. Unfortunately, neither Ed nor Saranne can be with us today.

2002 – 2012

With a blank canvass, Marie Kelly was appointed the first Chairperson, followed by Joan Buckley, and in the first 10 years much was achieved under their leadership. Regular day trips were enjoyed; a 30-Year Reunion of Staff from the early 1970s was organised in 2004; friendships were forged with a group of retirees from TCD; a Talk was given by John Lonergan, retired Governor of Mountjoy Prison; and most notably the Archive of Memoirs Project was undertaken in 2006.

I would like to welcome Alison Farrell here today, and publicly thank her for all her help over the years, by facilitating meetings which helped to shape our vibrant Association into what it is today. Aware that I was working with the Retired Staff, in circa 2005/2006 Alison stopped me on the stairs one day and floated the idea of an Archive of Memoirs. I thought it was a wonderful idea, and we brought our thoughts and ideas to the Retired Staff Committee for their consideration. An Archive Committee was formed in 2006, which included current and retired staff from both Institutions, and the Librarian and Deputy Librarian. We also drew on the expertise of Charles Flynn. We were very grateful that both MU and SPCM funded the project. There were 30 interviews recorded by Maurice O’Keeffe of Irish Life and Lore, which included current and retired staff; students and graduates, clergy and clerics, and a member of the local community. Two graduates of Maynooth, and former Ministers of Education, Mary O’Rourke and Mary Hannifin were invited to launch the Archive in 2007. Currently there are 30 very interesting interviews lodged in the JP2 Library, but with a little bit of work needing to be done before making them available to the public. However, Peter Denman recently lifted the lid on two of those interviews, writing three very interesting pieces for our RSA Newsletter. We are eternally grateful to Alison for this initiative, as it captures life in both institutions for a period in excess of 50 years.

¹ These reflections were delivered following the AGM of the Retired Staff Association on 28th April 2022

2012 – 2022

In April 2012, it was decided to conduct a root and branch review exercise by inviting all the RSA members to attend a workshop, when Alison Farrell facilitated discussion on where the Association would like to be taken over the next ten years. Minds were open and willing, and by the end of the session a new plan was agreed. For the first time regular monthly general meetings would take place, giving an opportunity to harvest ideas in relation to activities and for all members to be part of the decision-making process. We tapped into the expertise and skills of those present, which eventually morphed into three new positions on the Committee, all reporting to the General Meeting, a Communications Officer, an Events Officer and a Membership Secretary, when the Treasurer's role was split. I will deal with developments that took place over the next ten years under headings rather than time lines, to take us to where we are today.

ASSOCIATE MEMBERSHIP

While some Members' partners and friends were already accompanying them on trips, it had been such a positive experience for everybody that, a set of rules were drawn up in 2016, to regularise their involvement and to accept them as Associate Members.

FINANCES

The only source of income for thirteen years was the Membership Fees, and while some of it was put safely away in the Credit Union for a rainy day, we were constantly going into the red in our Business Unit account. Something happened in 2013 that would change all that. Colm Nelson advised us that a group of retired staff from UCD would be visiting Maynooth for a Tour. We immediately extended an invitation to them to join us in Pugin for a cuppa and a chat. They were a lovely bunch, and we shared a number of events and information as time went on. Out of those meetings we learned that they were in receipt of an annual grant from their university. We knew that our President Philip Nolan had been a member of staff in UCD, and that he might be receptive to our request for an annual grant also. Thankfully we had a very successful meeting with him in January 2014, when he agreed to give us an annual grant. We then approached SPCM who were also agreeable to give us some funds, as well as free parking at our monthly meetings. This vital funding enabled us to do many interesting things since then.

COMMUNICATIONS

For the first ten years communication with members was mainly conducted by snail mail, but thankfully today, email has made it much easier to keep our members informed. In 2014 the RSA were permitted to have a presence on the Maynooth web site. We are very grateful for the amount of work Dervilla McKeith did in setting up those pages, and for the amount of work Jim Walsh has recently done in bringing all the information up to date. Much thanks must also go to Seamas Ó Siocháin for taking over the role of Communications Officer, who circulates to Members, and who took on the responsibility of being Editor, assisted by his team, of our Newsletters during lockdown. Marie Therese's WhatsApp group was another successful way of maintaining communication with members during lockdown.

EXTERNAL GROUPS

We are affiliated to Active Retirement Ireland, which also provides us with the necessary insurance cover while partaking in all our activities.

We are involved with the recently formed Third Level Network, as are most Third Level Institutions in the country. It is an important forum to share information and ideas. Our delegate is Lucille McDonald.

EVENTS

I wish to thank our two Events Secretaries, Mary Keane and more recently Marie Therese Power for their amazing work over the last 10 years, and Margaret McCormack in the early days, for organising so many events for the benefit of the members. Among the extensive list are:

- **Two Workshops**, one on **Health** and one on **Financial Matters**, where experts in their field were sourced to speak at them.
- **A number of Speakers invited to give talks** include Baroness Nuala O'Loan, Aine Brady TD, Regina Doherty TD, Senator Marie Louise O'Donnell, Caitriona Crowe (National Archives), Dermot Goode (Private Health Insurance), Micheál O Muircheartaigh (GAA), Solicitors Avril Field on Power of Attorney and Susan Webster on Wills and Inheritance. From within the ranks, we had Michael Kenny (Adult Ed), John Sweeney (Geography), Rod Walsh (Education), and Marian Brennan who spoke on Mindfulness. Writer and Graduate, Mary O'Donnell spoke to the Book Club.
- **Trips Abroad** (3-4 nights) include **Amsterdam** / Keukenhof Gardens; Paris / Palace of Versailles; **Nice** / Monaco; **Lisbon** & Lisbon Coast; **Madrid** / Segovia / Toledo; Brussels (European Parliament / Bruges / Ypres (WW1 Flanders & The Somme Battlefields / Menin Gate. Unfortunately, our trip to **Munich** in 2020 had to be called off due to Covid.
- **Trips in Ireland (3 nights)** include **Galway City** / The Burren / Inis Mór; **Sligo** / Lissadel House & Gardens (Paddy Duffy) / Arigna Coal Mines; **Westport** / Laherdaun / Michael Davitt Museum / Museum of Country Life; **Cities of Belfast & Derry** / The Antrim Coast.
- **One Day Trips outside Dublin** include **Belfast Titanic Exhibition**; **Drogheda Town** / Battle of the Boyne Site; Athlone Castle / Derryglad Folk & Heritage Museum; **St Mel's Cathedral** Longford; **Adare Manor** / St John's Castle.
- **One Day Trips Dublin City and County** include **The Grand Masonic Lodge**; **Dublin Castle** / Famine Exhibition; **Skerries Town & Mill** / Ardgillan Castle; **14 Henrietta St** / Uilleann Pipes HQ; **Dalkey** Heritage Centre / Maeve Binchy Walking Tour; **Walking Tour of The Liberties**; **Leinster House** Tour / Public Gallery; **The GPO** Exhibition; Tours of **Croke Park** and **Aviva Stadium**.
- **Gardens** include **Listoke**, **Powerscourt**, **Mount Usher**, **Kilgar** in Kilcock and **Japanese Gardens** & National Stud.

- **The Ploughing Championships**
- We have attended many events in **The National Concert Hall & The Abbey Theatre.**

CLUBS

We have three Clubs, the Book Club, The Keep Fit Club and the Knitting Club. Thanks to Mary Carthy, Bridie Mitten, Maura Haughney, Margaret Tyrrell, Mary Keane, Seamas Ó Siocháin and Teresa Bennett for taking on the role of leaders of our Clubs.

COMMITTEES

Thanks to all those members who have willingly taken on positions over the years, and while I have mentioned some of them already, there are a couple to whom I have not.

Between myself and Tom Maher, we acted as Chairpersons between 2012 and 2020. Jim Walsh was elected in 2020, and is our current Chair.

Mary Corbally and Bridie Mitten have kindly taken on the role of Minute taker. A thankless job, we are so grateful for their great work. Mary is our current Secretary.

Thanks to Rosaleen O’Riordan for taking on the task of Membership Secretary for a number of years, and to Richard Watson, who is our current Membership Secretary.

Thanks to Pat Gately for being our first Treasurer, and to Brid Shiel for taking over the purse strings after Pat. I currently hold the position of Treasurer.

Vincent Murphy and Maura Haughney both acted in the role of Vice Chairperson at different times.

Thanks to Lucille McDonald for taking on the role of Delegate to the Third Level Network.

MEMBERS AND ASSOCIATE MEMBERS

A final thanks to our Members and Associate Members, without whom we would have no Association. It is wonderful to see some new members present today, and hope to see many more in the future.

We would like to send our best wishes to Pat Gately, who is now in long-term hospital care².

We also remember our dear Members who have passed away over the last 20 years: Marie Kelly, Una Jordan, Colm Buckley, Bridie Kilkenny, Janet O’Reilly, Etáin Ó Siocháin and Bríd O’Doherty. May they Rest in Peace.

² Sadly Pat Gately passed away some weeks later. May Pat rest in peace.