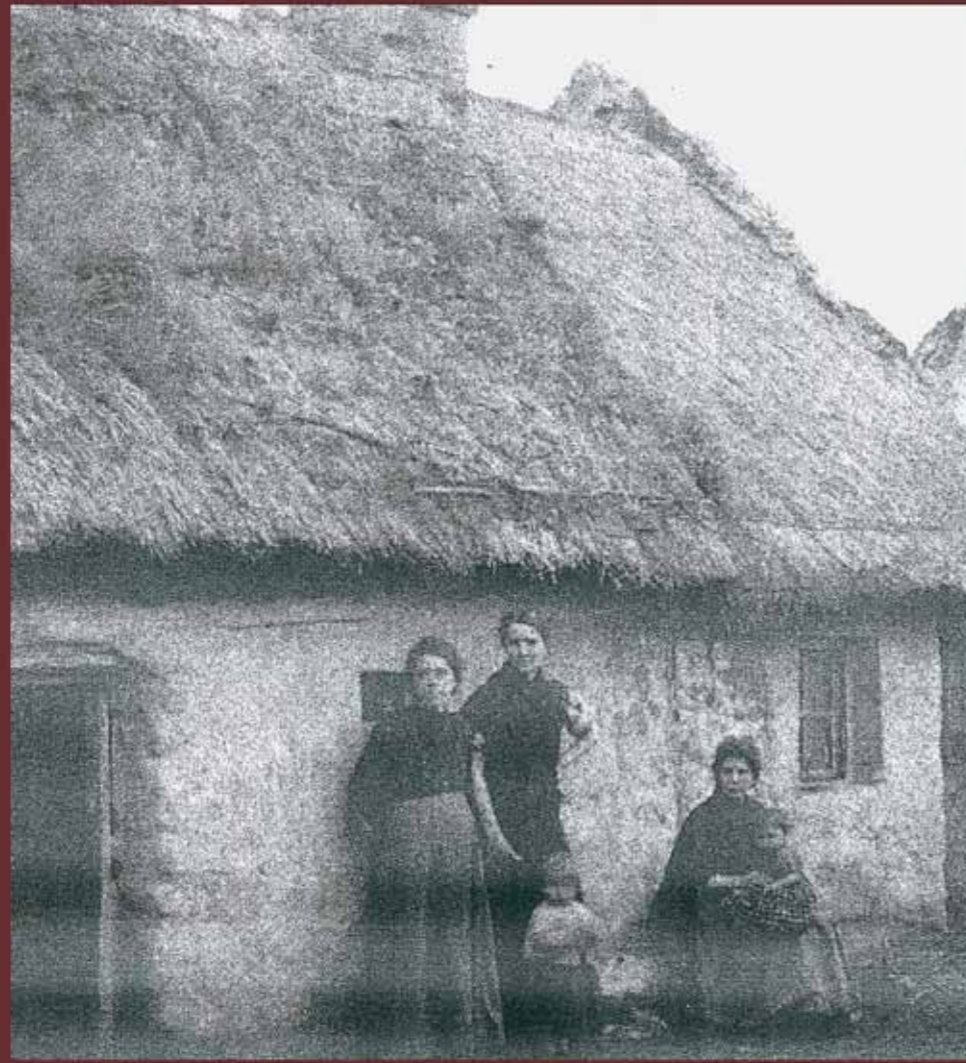


Galway city museum newsletter

nuacht litir museam cathrach na Gallimhe



no. 5 autumn/winter 2004
uimhir 5 fómhar/gelmbheadh 2004

*Heritage - make it your generations tradition
about the years our Heritage
enrich the lives*

Faite go nuachtlitir Museum Cathrach na Gaillimhe uimhir a 5

Welcome to Galway City Museum Newsletter No.5

Editorial

Welcome to the fifth edition of our Galway City Museum Newsletter/Nuacht Litir Músaem Cathrach na Gaillimhe. It comes at a time of exciting developments and the new museum development continues apace and donations of objects of all kinds continue to flow. The interest in the museum project and the good will towards it is very heartening and we look forward to having the world class facility the city richly deserves.

CIVIC SWORD AND MACE CLEANED AND DISPLAYED

The City Council would like to thank Robert Balcoe of Blacoe Jewellers, Mainguard Street for kindly offering to clean the Civic Sword and Mace free of charge before it went on exhibition in City Hall. The Sword and Mace had, for many years been appropriately displayed in the foyer of the Bank of Ireland at No. 19, Eyre Square. When that building was sold some time ago the sword and mace and their display case was moved to City Hall. We are thankful to the Bank of Ireland for the excellent care which they took of these valuable historic artifacts over the years and look forward to their prominent display along with other regalia of the City Council in the new Galway City Museum.

IMAGES OF THE PEOPLE – OUR COVER PHOTOGRAPH

The cover for this issue of the Galway City Museum Newsletter captures some residents of a small house in the Claddagh, taken sometime around 1913. If you have any information regarding the people in the photograph please contact The Heritage Office, Galway City Council, College Road, Galway City.

Recent Acquisitions to Galway City Museum

Among the fascinating items which have been donated recently are objects varying from cinema equipment to weighing scales, photographs and a selection of bottles found during the preparatory work for the Childrens Park which Galway City Council is developing at the corner of University Road and the Eglinton Canal. Several groups of objects including naval and maritime objects and items relating to Young's Aeriated Water Company augment parts of our existing collections.

ITEMS FROM THE ASTORIA / CLADDAGH PALACE CINEMA

The following items have been donated by Mr. David Mangan in memory of his father: A Zeiss Ikon projector, a pair of speakers and a film reel-box from the former Claddagh Palace Cinema which had previously been known as the Astoria. The film reel holder is a Simplex Brand manufactured by the J. Frank Brockless Company Limited of Great Marlborough Street, London. These items add considerably to our cinema related collection we also have on display the projector from the former Town Hall Cinema.



WEIGHING SCALES

A set of scales or balance. This item was originally brought from the north of the country and was brought by the donors family who used it in weighting bags of flour when they came to Galway. Donated by Mrs. Maeve Kelly.

BOTTLES

A selections of bottles from the canal bank and the site of the Childrens Millennium Park University Road.

POTTERY FRAGMENT

Pot sherd with graffiti of what appears to be a man in a kilt or possibly of a woman. The figure is crudely incised and cuts across existing striations and damage to the exterior of the vessel. The hat or helmet is slightly domed. The figure has a helmet or hat and appears to juggle circular objects, perhaps balls or items with a central perforation. The pottery is certainly post medieval and is perhaps as late as the 17th to 18th centuries though pottery with similar fabric continued to be made as late as the early 19th century. There appear to be scanty traces of an internal glaze. The large flat bottomed vessel was possibly a milk cooler or crock. The traces of glaze are cream to off-white in colour. Found in the spoil from the City Councils construction of the Millennium Childrens Bridge near Beggars Bridge. The spoil includes stone rubble and pottery filed into the junction of the river and canal and includes rubble demolished from Galway. Donated by Jim Higgins, Heritage Officer.



ROYAL ARMS FROM FAIRHILL

Royal Arms from Fairhill probably late 15th to 16th century in date. The arms of England and France are shown quarterly on the shield which is now fragmentary. This stone was built into a path of No. 54 Fairhill Road and has been donated by the owner of the house Mr. Tommy Gill. Mr. Gill remembers his father using the stone as a handy surface on which to chop wood. Probably from a public building or perhaps a church such as the Dominican Church in the Claddagh. The royal arms were usually displayed in churches and on public buildings except during the Cromwellian period. This is one of just four such pre-19th century royal arms known from Galway City.



GAUGE FOR MEASURING ROPES AND CABLES

A wooden and brass gauge for measuring the circumference of ropes and cables. The wooden and brass object is made by R Hood Haggie and Son Ltd. Of Newcastle is gradated in inches and centimeters and is inscribed with "Breaking loads in Tons Galvanised Howser Steel Ropes" Early 20th century. Donated by Mr. Ken Kelly.

METRIC CONVERTER

A Precision craft inventor in a plastic slip case with facilities for distance, volume and so on. Dated 1974. Donated by Mr. Ken Kelly.

LIGHTBOAT LIGHT

This fascinating item was attached by a rope to the boat and had a cork "collar" around it which allowed it to float in the water. The metal cylinder contained wires and mercury and when held in an upright condition a circuit was formed which lit the bulb in the glass topped light at the upper end. Turning the metal 'torch' around broke the circuit and turned the light off. Early 20th century. Donated by Mr. Ken Kelly.



BOOKLET ON 'PERSONAL SURVIVAL AT SEA'

Issued by the British Department Trade Her Majesty's Stationary Office London, 1979.

Donated by Mr. Ken Kelly.



POSTCARD

A postcard of the 1960's or early 1970's showing the Naomh Eanna in Galway Docks. The full colour card is captioned "CIE's M.V. Naomh Eanna leaving Galway for the Aran Islands"

Donated by Mr. Ken Kelly.

NAUTICAL PICTURES

Nine modern framed prints of various ships. The prints all date to the 20th century. Donated by Mr. Ken Kelly. We are very thankful to Mr. Kelly who has continued to provide the museum with interesting naval and nautical items.



TIN BOX BELONGING TO A ROYAL NAVY OFFICER

The box was made for storing naval shoulder boards or epaulettes along with medals, sashes, badges or other decorative elements of a uniform. Made of tin there is an oval compartment within it. The lid bears two copper-alloy plaques. A shield shaped plaque. The first plaque is inscribed BY APPOINTMENT J.B. JOHNSTONE 34 SACKVILLE ST. LONDON AND AT 32 MOLESWORTH ST.

DUBLIN AND THE ROYAL ARMS. The second plaque bears the words "CYRIL T.M. FULLER, ROYAL NAVY". Purchase.

ITEMS RELATING TO JOSEPH YOUNG'S MINERAL WATER COMPANY EGLINTON ST. GALWAY

These three items complement a number of bottles, mirrors and advertising plaques which the Museum already possesses and widens the range of the collection. The large handled jug, is similar to smaller ones we already have, but we previously had no examples of the glazed pottery mineral water bottle or of the type of spouted water jug which we have now acquired.



EIGHT GALLON JUG

This large vessel with a small narrow neck originally equipped with a cork stopper. The vessel has a strap handle and is glazed in off-white and light brown. The original cork is in the spout. It is stamped "Price 17 Bristol" (the maker's mark). There is an impressed inscription on the upper shoulder which reads as follows "J. YOUNG AERATED WATER MANUFACTURER WHOLESALE WINE AND SPIRIT MERCHANTS GALWAY". Purchase.

SPOUTED WATER JUG

A glazed pottery jug with an off white glaze and stamped with the following inscription "ASK FOR YOUNGS AERATED WATERS MANUFACTURED AT HIBERNIAN WORKS GALWAY". Purchase.



GLAZED POTTERY MINERAL WATER BOTTLE

A tall glazed pottery bottle in off white with a long neck. The vessel is stamped with the inscription MINERAL WATER MANUFACTURER J. YOUNG REGISTERED GALWAY". Has a makers mark. "Price 15 Bristol". The mineral water factory was in Eglinton Street where The Great Outdoors shop now stands. Purchase.

APPEALS FOR HISTORICAL INFORMATION

1 Mr. Peadar O'Dowd is appealing for information on the history of the Rooney building in Victoria Place.

1 Padraig Faherty is looking for information of the Blake family of Drum, Furbo and Spiddal and their burial places.

1 William Henry is looking for information on Galwegian participants in World War I.

1 Dr. John Cunningham is writing a book on aspects of the social history of Galway City from the 18th to the early 20th century and is looking for suitable illustrative material for his publication which will be entitled "A Town Tormented by the Sea."

Any information can be passed on through The Heritage Office, City Hall, College Road, Galway.

PERSSES DISTILLERY - A HISTORY OF THE HARD STUFF BY MICK QUINN

In this article Mick Quinn describes the history of a great Galwegian industry. Galway City Museum has a varied collection of artefacts and illustrations relating to the Persses and their distillery and Galway City Council now owns their family town house in Dominick Street. Part of the Earl's Island distillery complex survives in the NUI Galway grounds and most of the Nun's Island complex also survives. Below Mick gives us a summary of his GMIT Heritage Management Course thesis on Persses Distillery. We were delighted to be of some help in providing him with access to some of the Perse artefacts in our museum's holdings.



On the banks of the Corrib between O'Briens bridge and the Salmon Weir bridge lies the remains of a derelict yet imposing grey edifice. This building is for the most part the only physical remains of a once thriving local distilling industry dominated by Perse Galway Whiskey. The Galway Whiskey distillery was established originally in

Newcastle, Galway in 1815 by Henry Stratford Persse, a member of the Persse dynasty (into which Lady Augusta Gregory was born) from Roxboro near Loughrea. The distillery, which operated for almost 100 years, would become Galway's single largest employer equal to any distillery outside of Dublin, exporting its product to England and its colonies.

The establishment of a distillery at this time was certainly something of a risk, given that the industry had been rocked by a number of government measures - the most notorious of which was the infamous Distilling Act of 1779 which, in an attempt to curb undeclared distilling by legitimate distillers, imposed a steep levy on pot-stills

based on their capacity and theoretical throughput. Between the end of the 18th century and 1807 eleven distilleries had closed their doors in Galway.

Part of the success of the Persse distillery in its early years may have come from supplementing their distilling with the production of beer which seems to have gained widespread popularity in Galway – a contemporary account describes ‘an imitation of pale English ale is brewed, that is much liked by many people’, while around the same time James Hardiman reveals that the ‘porter made here has been much esteemed’. Another major boost to Henry Stratford Persse came in 1823 when the Excise Act of that year replaced the dreaded tax on still capacity with an annual still license of £10, spirit was taxed at the substantially reduced rate of 2 shillings per proof gallon and distillers could reclaim a rebate on spirit exported.

The distilling industry began to flourish, its positive knock-on effects for local farmers being noted in a report into agricultural practices in County Galway from 1824. ‘The market towns of Galway, Loughrea, Tuam are all well supplied with grain, chiefly wheat and oats and when the distilleries are at work with a considerable quantity of barley’ and with keen competition from Galway buyers ‘farmers were certain of receiving the full market price of the day’. At some point in the late 1820’s Henry Stratford Persse relinquished his interest in the Newcastle distillery to the partnership of his son in law/nephew, Burton de Burgh Persse of Moyode Castle and shipping entrepreneur brothers John and William Kelly. By 1836 Burton had bought out the Kellys to become sole proprietor of the distillery, ancillary buildings and adjoining lands of over three acres, for which he paid an annual lease of twenty pounds seven shilling and half a pence.

While competition from an ever increasing supply of poteen was fierce Burton Persse must also have been worried by the number of people who were shunning alcohol on a permanent basis in order join the temperance campaign of Father Theobald Mathew. The Capuchin Friar from County Cork who advocated a need for total abstinence visited Galway to much acclaim in the spring of 1840. A report from his St. Patrick’s Day appearance in the city claims that a crowd of 200,000 turned out to greet the campaigner and ‘although the streets were impassable...not a man or woman was seen to be in a state of drunkenness’. It is certainly true that Fr. Mathews campaign had a dramatic effect on levels of alcohol consumption in Ireland. In 1838, at the outset of his mission there were approximately 213,000 taverns around the country. In less than 6 years this figure was down to 13,500. In similar fashion the number of distilleries fell from 86 in 1840 to 51 in 1851 and was down to 22 in the mid 1860’s.

Burton Persse’s lease on the Newcastle distillery expired in 1847. At this time he decided to relocate the business to the Nun’s Island premises he had purchased from the encumbered estates court in 1840 and which he had converted into a wool-mill. The building had previously been run as a distillery by the Joyce family but with the wool trade in decline, it was decided the building should be restored to its original purpose. On Burton’s death in 1859, his son Henry Sadlier succeeded to the business and despite many negative prevailing factors such as an increase in excise duty, the continued rise in moon-shining and the expansion of cheaper blended whiskey into the market-place, the Persse Galway Whiskey Distillery was reaching its apex. An astute and detailed organiser, Henry Sadlier employed the services of Patrick McDermott M.P. for Kilkenny to act as sales representative for the company in England. McDermott originally from Portumna was able to introduce Galway Whiskey into the House of Commons bar – a merchandising coup



which allowed Persses to market their whiskey with the slogan ‘Favourite in the House of Commons’ and thus expand their export potential. The company distributed an array of merchandising products including posters, jugs and mirrors (a Persse Galway Whiskey mirror can still be seen on the stairway of the King’s Head Bar) but also rather shrewdly sponsored a West of Ireland travel guide used by English gentry tourist – which affiliated their product with the rugged scenery and sense of timelessness associated with this part of the country.



At the turn of the 19th century the Persse whiskey distillery employed an estimated 100 people and its output was 400,000 gallons annually of 25 overproof whiskey – equal to that of the famous Bushmills distillery. It’s product having initially been sold in barrels to dealers and publicans was now bottled at the plant and labelled with a picture of the Corrib-side distillery. A standard 4 year old as well as superior 7 and 10 year old reserves were available. A visit to the plant by whiskey enthusiast Alfred Barnard in 1779 describes an effective, efficient and productive operation. He notes that the business not only employed those directly involved in the production of whiskey but also manager, clerks, excisemen, smiths joiners and painters. His details of the various buildings in the complex include the 5 storied malting and corn store, (the building which is still visible today), the turf-fired kiln, the ‘ingeniously constructed’ airtight malt deposit, the mill building, the brew house which ‘is quite equal to anything we have seen in Ireland’ and a number of stores workshops and stables. Barnard records that not only is the river Corrib utilised to turn the distillery’s mill it is also used to cool pipes containing whiskey vapour and has numerous hoses connected to it in case of fire. As well as on site warehouse were further storage facilities in the docks area while the Persse bonded warehouse was situated close to the distillery’s original home in Newcastle.



The death of Henry Sadlier Persse in 1898 marked the beginning of the end for the Nun’s Island distillery. Henry’s son William, just 17 years old inherited the business but by the early years of the 20th century was not only facing the problem of an overall decline in whiskey consumption but also of inferior whiskey being sold under the guise of Galway Whiskey in his home town. The amalgamation of 3 of Dublin’s largest distillers aided by improved rail-networks ate into local Persse markets. Added to this Scotch had now definitively usurped Irish as the spirit of choice for overseas drinkers. William pioneered an innovative scheme, whereby the firm purchased highest quality barley seed for the farmers of Kinvara and North Clare but by now the Persse family were having to invest personal funds into the company while also seeking financial aid from other sources. In 1908 the Nun’s Island distillery closed its doors for the last time – with the loss of 50 workers as well as a six excise men whose salaries alone were estimated at £3,000 – and placed in liquidation.

Although the Persse family had all left the city by 1921, their memory was toasted by the people of Galway many years later. In the 1950’s a consignment of Persse whiskey was discovered in the warehouse of the Millar brewery, Nun’s Island. The stock was purchased by publican Larry Hynes and the last of the Persse Galway Whiskey was consumed in his William Street bar.

Heritage - cherish it forever

*Do you have items of relevance to Galway City Museum /
Músaem Cathrach na Gaillimhe?*



*If so, please contact The Heritage Office, Galway City Council, City Hall,
College Road, Galway.*

The Museum Newsletter / Nuacht Litir was produced by
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