

PRESS RELEASE

Wednesday, 11th July 2018

Kerry Writers' Museum Achieves Top National Award from The Heritage Council of Ireland

64 Museum Sites Now Participating in National Standards Programme

A museum dedicated to five of County Kerry's most notable writers has today (**10.7.18**) achieved the highest standard possible under a museum national standards programme run by the Heritage Council. Located in a 19th-century Georgian residence in the heart of Listowel, **An Seanchaí - Kerry Writers' Museum** offers its visitors an audio-visual journey through the literary lives of John B. Keane, Bryan MacMahon, George Fitzmaurice, Brendan Kennelly and Maurice Walsh. Run by a small but dedicated staff, the museum offers privileged access to an important literary collection as well as an impressive array of interpretative and cultural events throughout the year.

Established by the [Heritage Council](#) in 2006 to benchmark and promote professional standards in the care of collections, the **Museum Standards Programme for Ireland (MSPI)** has attracted involvement across the cultural spectrum, from national institutions to small, volunteer-led organisations. Representative of the new dynamism and activity of the museum sector in 2018, **An Seanchaí - Kerry Writers' Museum** is one of 64 museums and galleries to benefit from participation in the MSPI to date. While recognising the achievement of standards through accreditation, the MSPI is also about supporting the museum community as a whole. Its participants engage in a range of processes, which help to secure Ireland's collections for future generations and to engage its visitors with what those collections have to offer.

Former Minister for Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht, Jimmy Deenihan attended the MSPI awards ceremony in Kilkenny castle today as a special guest of the **Kerry Writers' Museum**. It was one of nine Irish museums recognised for excellence and professionalism, and one of eight to be awarded the top standard of Full Accreditation. The rigorous assessment process requires museums to meet each of 34 internationally recognised MSPI standards ensuring the highest standards in visitor services, collections care and governance.

Speaking at the awards ceremony today, the **Chairman of the Heritage Council, Mr Michael Parsons**, said:

'What we see through this programme is that Ireland's museums are exciting and vibrant places where the staff are working hard, often with very limited budgets and resources, to ensure that the collections in their care are protected and made available to the public. Not

only is this important work from a cultural point of view, it also supports tourism in a locality and helps people feel proud of the place where they live.'

Today's accreditations followed an extensive assessment programme carried out by national and international experts. Of the eight museums awarded **Full Accreditation**, four – **The Butler Gallery; Chester Beatty Library; Foynes Flying Boat and Maritime Museum and Monaghan County Museum** – retained Full Accreditation that had been previously won, while four others – **The Heritage Centre, Royal College of Physicians of Ireland; Clare Museum; Músaem Chorca Dhuibhne**, Baile an Fheirtéaraig and **Seanchaí – Kerry Writers' Museum** – achieved Full Accreditation for the first time. **Thomas MacDonagh Museum** in Cloughjordan, Co. Tipperary was awarded Interim Accreditation.

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About the Heritage Council: The Heritage Council was established under the Heritage Act 1995 with responsibility to propose policies and priorities for the national heritage. It works in co-operation with a range of agencies, communities and individuals to promote education, enjoyment and understanding of our national heritage. For further information, visit: www.heritagecouncil.ie.

About the Museum Standards Programme for Ireland: The Programme was launched in 2007 and celebrated its 10th Anniversary in 2017. 64 sites across Ireland participate in the Heritage Council's Museum Standards Programme for Ireland. To be eligible to join the Programme applicants must demonstrate that they meet the definition of a museum, which includes owning and displaying original collections for the public benefit, holding collections in trust, and being not-for-profit. In 2018, 36 sites are accredited at Full Accreditation, 6 sites at Interim Accreditation. Being a participant is a public promise by each museum to care for the heritage of its community. Achieving accreditation in MSPI demonstrates that a museum is meeting its promise. There are thirty-four standards covering collections care, governance and management, and visitor services. It takes five years on average to achieve all the standards. Participating museums are assessed by a panel of national and international experts. The Programme is overseen by an Advisory Group, which includes representatives from the Department of Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht, the National Museum of Ireland, the Irish Museums Association, the Arts Council, the Northern Ireland Museums Council, experts in museum education and an overseas representative. The Heritage Council is the awarding body.

For further information: www.heritagecouncil.ie

You Tube videos <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qWj9a87nWA8>

https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLIKz_D-MJSUIQ1OwJf84wNW_k99i1Y5Uh

Additional Information on Individual Winners:

THE BUTLER GALLERY

Maintenance of Full Accreditation

The Heritage Council is pleased to announce Maintenance of Accreditation for The Butler Gallery under the Museum Standards Programme for Ireland (MSPI). This is the second time the Gallery has successfully confirmed this status indicating it has continued to perform at the level of full accreditation since 2008. Commenting, its MSPI assessor said, *'The Butler Gallery's application reflected the workings of a well-run institution, displaying high standards and strong commitment from staff and Board members as well as continued support from its funding bodies and stakeholders. The policy of collaborating with other institutions in Ireland and abroad continues to reap benefits for the Gallery, for example the Allianz Business to Arts Award for Best Midsize Sponsorship in 2016 achieved for the Gallery's successful collaboration in making Song of the Sea: The Exhibition'*. Its current show, The Breadwinner Exhibition, is also made in collaboration with Cartoon Saloon.

The most significant on-going objective of the Butler Gallery is developing a new venue for the Gallery at Evan's Home in partnership with Kilkenny Co Council and supported by Fáilte Ireland. Work has started earlier in June on this exciting new space and Butler Gallery hopes to be open to the public there by early 2020.

CHESTER BEATTY LIBRARY

Maintenance of Full Accreditation

The Heritage Council is pleased to announce Maintenance of Accreditation for the Chester Beatty Library under the Museum Standards Programme for Ireland (MSPI). Its previous assessment highlighted the importance of the Chester Beatty Library including its major public educational role and its international significance as a centre for research. In assessing the current application for maintenance of Accreditation its MSPI Assessor said he was, *'very pleased to report that the high standards noted previously have been maintained and enhanced during the intervening period. The submission for maintenance of accreditation was exemplary in form and content and I was especially impressed by the way in which the senior management team enthusiastically presented the work of the Library during the site visit.'* He also noted the trustees have agreed a robust and viable development plan that has already resulted in significant increases in visitor numbers and an augmented reputation for collections care and scholarship.

In 2018, the Chester Beatty is celebrating the 50th anniversary of its founder's extraordinary gift to the nation with a major project to allow greater access to the museum's treasures. A new website will be launched in the autumn, together with the first phase of Collections Online, an exciting initiative which will enable the Chester Beatty to engage, connect and

inspire people across the world. Commenting, its MSPI Assessor said, *'The increased accessibility to these pre-eminent collections can only be a good thing for the Library and for Ireland'*.

FOYNES FLYING BOAT AND MARITIME MUSEUM

Maintenance of Full Accreditation

The Heritage Council is pleased to announce Maintenance of Accreditation for Foynes Flying Boat and Maritime Museum under the Museum Standards Programme for Ireland (MSPI). Its MSPI assessors said, *'the museum staff have maintained and embedded the standards required for Full Accreditation. The museum staff are to be congratulated on their success and the continued achievement of the required standards.'*

The museum originally achieved accreditation during a period when its new maritime galleries were being developed and further improvements have since been made to the existing aviation displays. The new developments have added to the visitor experience, as well as to the care of collections. The success of the museum has encouraged the production of plans for new developments. The numbers of visitors have exceeded those anticipated in the original design (about 1million visitors since opening in 1989).

Since it was last accredited the museum has received an exciting and significant donation. The Museum has announced, *"All the style and glamour of the Golden Age of Hollywood is to go on display this July at the Foynes Flying Boat and Maritime Museum, thanks to the generosity of the family of its late patron, Maureen O'Hara. Among the items to go on display is Ms O'Hara's Oscar, costumes and accessories from many of her films, as well as the style and dresses the Irish beauty wore to major Hollywood events and broadcasts". The aviation collection of her late husband and airline owner, Captain Charles Blair, continues as a core display to tell the story of when Flying Boats landing from the USA and Europe linked Foynes Harbour to the rest of the world.*

MONAGHAN COUNTY MUSEUM

Maintenance of Full Accreditation

The Heritage Council is pleased to announce Maintenance of Accreditation for Monaghan County Museum under the Museum Standards Programme for Ireland (MSPI). This is the second time the museum has successfully confirmed this status indicating it has continued to perform at the level of full accreditation since 2008. Its assessor was impressed with the involvement of all of the staff in both the application and the site visit. It was obvious each member of staff was extremely knowledgeable with regards to their responsibilities within the museum. This shows itself throughout the policies, exhibitions and education provision. The staff is to be commended for the work that they do.

In particular, there are many aspects of collection management that are exemplary. Commenting, its MSPI assessor said, *'The stores are all in excellent condition and the documentation paperwork is best practice. The number of students/young people participating in the education programme is also impressive, particularly in light of budgetary constraints schools, in particular face. The fact the museum is willing to be flexible with regards of where they deliver education programmes- many of them outside the museum - is to be commended'*.

Plans for the future development of the Museum were also noted in the MSPI assessor's report. Commenting on this, the Museum's Curator, Liam Bradley, said, *'Monaghan County are currently developing plans for a new building to house the service in Monaghan Town. The new museum, which will explore the story of the border region from the Bronze Age Black Pigs Dyke to the modern political border, will form part of a campus that will include a new library and youth service for the region.'*

CLARE MUSEUM

Full Accreditation

The Heritage Council is very pleased to confirm that Clare Museum has been awarded Full Accreditation under the Museum Standards Programme for Ireland (MSPI). It became a Participant in MSPI just before the recession. When the museum received its Interim Accreditation Certificate in 2015 this was seen as a great achievement following a number of years in which maintaining a museum service was a credit to the County and the Museum's Curator. In recommending Full Accreditation it's MSPI Assessors commented, *'Clare Museum is an excellent museum with a small but dedicated staff. It has shown a commitment to MSPI despite staff shortages which at one point saw the Curator working alone. Thankfully this has now been rectified and the Museum is once again on an upward trajectory.'*

Commenting on the Museum's future potential its Assessors said while the fixed displays are of high quality, the Museum has a very small space for temporary shows. Temporary exhibitions provide new audiences and new activities in museums. Clare Museum partly offsets this disadvantage through its detailed and active programmes, but a future opportunity to consider a dedicated temporary exhibition space should be borne in mind. It would enhance public programmes considerably and allow the Museum to take advantage of touring shows from the National Cultural Institutions and major museums.

Clare Museum is a member of the Local Authority Museums Network. It is the 9th Local Authority Museum to be awarded Full Accreditation under the Museum Standards Programme for Ireland. Two more Local Authority Museums are working to achieve accreditation.

THOMAS MACDONAGH MUSEUM

Interim Accreditation

The Heritage Council is pleased to announce Thomas MacDonagh Museum has been awarded Interim Accreditation under the Museum Standards Programme for Ireland (MSPI). Its MSPI assessors said the museum, located in Cloughjordan, Co. Tipperary, is, *'a warm, welcoming community museum and a cultural hub for the local community'* also known as Ireland's Ecovillage.

The level of professionalism both in regards to the display, as well as management is impressive. This is especially true as the museum is volunteer-run. Its MSPI assessors commented, *'The artefacts and stories about Thomas MacDonagh, Irish patriot, poet and leader in the 1916 Easter Rising, are very interesting and the volunteers have a real passion for the subject'*. During their site-visit, it was evident to the assessors that the volunteers were very keen to ensure that they were meeting accreditation standards and would continue to progress through the scheme to full accreditation.

Its MSPI assessors also said, *'Museum Management has used feedback wisely and took on board many suggestions'*. Since joining the Programme the museum has become incorporated as Thomas MacDonagh Museum CLG, clarified its mission to honour and promote the memory of Thomas MacDonagh, native of Cloughjordan, and put in place policies and plans to achieve this.

Seanchaí - Kerry Writers' Museum

Full Accreditation

The Heritage Council is pleased to announce Seanchaí - Kerry Writers' Museum, located in Listowel, County Kerry, has been awarded Full Accreditation in the Museum Standards Programme for Ireland (MSPI). Presenting a first-class application, it has progressed within a year of achieving Interim Accreditation, enthusiastically embracing the opportunity to complete the accreditation process. Its MSPI assessors commented, *'All of this work was undertaken by a small, multi-tasking staff who are to be congratulated on their professionalism and ambition'*.

During the assessment the Museum commented very favourably on the MSPI process. The Museums Manager said, *'One of the best decisions we made at Kerry Writers' Museum is joining the Museum Standards Programme for Ireland. It has inspired us to focus on how we want to develop the Museum into the future and has bestowed a greater prestige for our Museum among both the local community and our peers in the museum sector'*. Its MSPI assessors added participation also raised its operating standards and focused attention on collections, an aspect of its work that was overshadowed to some degree by the Museum's emphasis on writing and arts. With its renaming as "An Seanchaí; Kerry Writers Museum" (previously described as a cultural and literary centre), the Museum has situated itself firmly

in the collecting sphere, while retaining an impressive array of literary and cultural events that actively interprets and communicates its core mission.

Músaem Chorca Dhuibhne, Baile an Fheirtéaraigh **Full Accreditation**

The Heritage Council is very pleased to announce that Músaem Chorca Dhuibhne, Baile an Fheirtéaraigh, has been awarded Full Accreditation under the Museum Standards Programme for Ireland (MSPI). The museum, an original member of a 12-museum pilot study for an accreditation scheme for the Irish museum sector, has already been awarded Interim Accreditation twice, in 2007 and again in 2014.

The one factor inhibiting progression to Full Accreditation was the absence of appropriate storage facilities and associated standards of safeguarding. Since its last Interim assessment Chomarchachumann Fobartha Chorca Dhuibhne has built and opened new premises in Baile an Fheirtéaraigh for teaching, staff and community use which includes museum storage. Its MSPI assessors said, *'the museum collection has been safely transferred to the new premises and benefits from far improved storage conditions, with ample room for future growth of the collection in due course. In addition to this Músaem Chorca Dhuibhne successfully achieved the remaining standards required for Full Accreditation.'* It now joins fellow pilot study museums as a fully accredited MSPI Participant. Looking ahead, the Museum's Curator, Isabel Bennett said:

Cúis bhróid do Mhúsaem Chorca Dhuibhne agus d'fhoireann Oidhreacht Chorca Dhuibhne taispeántas buan úrnua a fhógairt. Táthar buíoch den Roinn Cultúir, Oidhreachta agus Gaeltachta as an maoiniú. Bainfidh cuairteoirí chun an mhúsaeim ó 2019 ar aghaidh an-taitneamh as an taispeántas nua seo.

'This is an exciting time for Músaem Chorca Dhuibhne as it is about to embark on a new permanent exhibition, thanks to funding awarded by the Department of Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht. Visitors to the museum from 2019 on can look forward to a dramatically different experience!'

The HERITAGE CENTRE, Royal College of Physicians of Ireland **Full Accreditation**

The Heritage Centre, Royal College of Physicians of Ireland, has been awarded Full Accreditation in the Museum Standards Programme for Ireland (MSPI). The Royal College of Physicians of Ireland (RCPI) is a venerable institution within Ireland and is one of a very few medical colleges worldwide that can trace its origins to the mid-17th Century. The College

has been acquiring collections since its early foundation, confirmed in a royal charter of William & Mary, dating from 1692.

The Museum submitted an excellent application. Its assessors commented, *'the rapid progression to a Full submission within a year of the Interim Accreditation assessment, in 2016, is testimony to the professionalism and commitment of the Keeper of Collections and the Executive. The Keeper is to be congratulated on the rapid rate of progress made and the quality of the professional practices adopted'*.

The assessors also commented the support of the President and Council members was also paramount in this achievement and the potential of the Museum, its collection and the value of the Standards Programme to the institution are fully appreciated at all levels of the organisation. With such continued support and appreciation, the Assessors are confident this will be of an enduring nature and will ensure that the Museum and its collection are centrally placed to serve the College primary purpose of the promotion of public health throughout Ireland.

Located within an historic building, the Museum is not without its challenges. A number of recommendations were contained within the assessors' report which have particular bearing on the storage and documentation of collections – especially the Kirkpatrick collection, which is of inestimable importance for the history of medicine in Ireland and is a key resource, consulted internationally. Responding to this challenge the Centre's Keeper, Harriet Wheelock, recently announced,

'This summer RCPI will begin work on the construction of a second archive store and new object store, which will provide improved storage conditions and allow for the expansion of the Heritage Centre's collections'.