

Presidential visit to Churchtown

14TH JULY 2000



Includes full text of all speeches and a
selection of photographs



Churchtown Village Renewal Trust

It was a red letter day for Churchtown on 14th July 2000 when President Mary McAleese visited the village to review all the renewal work completed over recent years and open the newly renovated Community Centre on Kerry Lane.

At the Opening Ceremony Gerry Murphy, chairperson of the Trust said: "there is more to life than money and there is far more than money involved in what has happened in Churchtown. What is happening here is built on a dream of people serving their community at local level supported by local government, other regional and national State sponsored organisations and most importantly the European Union's various support programmes.

President McAleese in her address said: "It is a tribute to the people of Churchtown that you have met the challenges so well. It is absolutely astonishing what has taken place and continues to take place here in this most amazing community".

Three presentations were made to the President on her visit – a CD and tape recorded by Nivita, a set of Father Twohig's published works and a bouquet of flowers presented by Michelle Bourke on behalf of the pupils of the local national school who also provided a guard of honour for the President.



Eileen Ahern-O'Connor, chairperson of the Churchtown Development Association, said in her address to over 300 people who welcomed the President that: "We would also like to thank the people and the friends of Churchtown who have generously supported this project. Whenever there was fundraising you never let us down and we hope you will agree that your financial contribution has been well spent". She went on to talk about FÁS's contribution to the overall renewal effort and thanked Gerry Farrissey, John Murphy and Paddy O'Connell for their contribution.

Peggy O'Flaherty secretary of the Churchtown Development Association also spoke at the reception saying: "Every parish needs people who are prepared to make sacrifices in terms of their free time for the benefit of the greater community and it is important that we should



Arrival of the Presidential cavalcade

recognise such effort. The Churchtown Village Renewal Trust commissioned a medal for this purpose and today we wish to honour two local people who have served this community well over many years".

Two "medals of honour" were then presented by Carmel Fox of Ballyhoura Development to Patrick Irwin and Noel Linehan in recognition of their community service over the years. The Bruhenny Choir led by Mary Wilson provided the music for the event and were selected for special praise by the President.

Many other dignitaries attended the event in Churchtown including Theresa White, County Manager for North Cork, local TD Michael Moynihan, Tom Sheahan, MCC represented the Chairman of Cork County Council, Dan Joe Fitzgerald MCC, Brian Quinlan of Enterprise Ireland and Pat O'Callaghan and Paddy Carlton of FÁS.

President McAleese also visited Padre Pio Nursing & Convalescent Home where she was greeted by Karen and Pat Kennedy, staff and patients.

Inspector Michael J Keogh, of Mallow, Sergeant George Finch of Charleville and Garda John Hurley of Buttevant were responsible for security on the day which ran extremely smoothly. The event concluded with a light buffet provided with the compliments of the Churchtown Village Renewal Trust.



Gerry Murphy, chairperson of the Churchtown Village Renewal Trust, welcomes President McAleese and Martin McAleese to Churchtown.

Address by Gerry Murphy

Chairperson of the Churchtown Village Renewal Trust.

Distinguished Guests, Visitors and People of Churchtown. Let us welcome President Mary McAleese and her husband Martin to our lovely and vibrant parish in this year of the Millennium.

President McAleese we are so pleased that you have honoured us with your presence on this great day for our parish as we unveil our new Community Centre and celebrate all the renewal work – both community, public and commercial – that has taken place over the last six years and also celebrate the great



President and Martin McAleese inspect the photographic archive of "before and after" photographs of the village renewal efforts in recent years.

legacy that has been left to us by previous generations of Churchtown citizens many of whom are recognised on the "Roll of Honour" in the foyer of this fine building.

This authentic Georgian village rebuilt between 1820 and 1846 is now undergoing a most significant renewal thanks to the work and foresight of the local community served very well by the executive and committees of the Churchtown Development Association, the local GAA, and the Churchtown Village Renewal Trust.

The Churchtown Development Association is responsible for the development of our new hall at a cost of £200,000. The GAA purchased a parish sports grounds in 1987 and have invested £100,000 so far in its development. The Trust has managed the investment of over £70,000 in various renewal projects in the village over the last three years and the County Council is just completing 3 new houses on Chapel Lane costing £200,000.

President McAleese meets the FÁS team who have beautified the village and renovated the hall.

Plans have been submitted to the Department of Sports to develop dressing rooms and a stand at our parish sports grounds and I have been advised by our local representative, Michael Moynihan TD, that he is more than optimistic that this, our third application for "lottery" funding, will be successful.

In addition to this social/public investment in recent years there has been further commercial expenditure of over £2 million between the Padre Pio Nursing Home and Boss Murphy's holiday, training and conference facility.

The new housing development just started across the road from this hall will bring the total investment in Churchtown in a short few years to almost £10 million.

Who would have dreamt this was possible just a few years ago? Who would have dreamt that Kostal Ireland would be about to create 700 new jobs just 8 miles from our village.

But there is more to life than money and there is far more than money involved in what has happened in Churchtown. What is happening here is built on a dream of people serving their community at local level supported by local government, other regional and national State sponsored organisations and most importantly the European Union's various support programmes.

This is why we have representatives of Cork County Council, FÁS, Ballyhoura Development and Enterprise Ireland on our stage here today and it falls on me as chairperson of the Trust to thank these people – Carmel Fox of Ballyhoura Development, Councillor Tom



Address by Gerry Murphy continued...

Sheahan representing the Chairman of the County Council, Theresa White, County Manager in North Cork and Noel Dillon (retired County Manager). Pat O'Callaghan and Paddy Carlton of FÁS who have done so much to help us here in Churchtown.

The Trust could not operate efficiently without the support of the Churchtown Development Association and for that support we are indeed grateful. On a personal basis I want to thank most especially the Association's chairpeople with whom I have had the privilege of working with over the last three years... Oliver Byrne, who is recovering from a major operation – and we wish him well – and Eileen Ahern O'Connor who is our current excellent chairperson. You and your dedicated committee members have served this parish very well indeed.

Some people dream in bed and others dream great dreams during their waking hours. In Churchtown our daytime dreams have become a reality. Let us then never stop dreaming of great things for our Parish.

In February 1999 in our "Churchtown Declaration" we said we were going to renew our community with or without external support but that with external support we would do it far quicker. It is great to be able to say that Churchtown has captured many people's imagination and secured the support of the organisations represented here today. We are indeed with their help, support and advice surging forward.

The contrast between this grand event and the sorrow that befell this parish on 25th October last when four of our young people – three of them founders of the music group Nivita – were taken from us in a tragic accident is stark. Once again we express our



Fr Patrick Twohig PP blessing the Hall.

sincere sympathy to the Conroy and O'Herlihy families on their terrible loss. At that time President McAleese was, of course, represented here in Churchtown and took the time to ring Father Twohig to express her sympathy and for that we are grateful. I would now like to present our President with the first professional CD and Tape recorded by Nivita

President McAleese we know your presidency is one of hope and bridge building. Hope in an Ireland where bridges are built between rich and poor, north and south, tradition and change, town and country. These are our hopes too and we wish you well in your important office.

In conclusion, let us be grateful then for what we have and ensure that when our time comes we can rest assured in the knowledge that we have made use of our talents and added to the legacy we pass to future generations.

President McAleese, distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen. Thank you.



Over 300 people were in Churchtown to meet the President.

Address by President McAleese

Is breá liom bheith anseo i bhur measc ag an ócáid speisialta seo, agus ba mhaith liom mo bhuíochas a chur in iúl díbh as an chuireadh agus as fáilte fíorchaoin.

It is a great pleasure to join you here today for the official opening of the Churchtown Community Centre. I would like to thank Gerry Murphy for the kind invitation.



Cutting the ribbon

I understand that your parish priest, Fr Twohig is a great scholar of Michael Collins, his times and legacy. In his biography of Collins, Tim Pat Coogan writes that when Collins started a new project 'he started with the impossible and worked up'. I suspect that this philosophy is close to the heart of people like Gerry Murphy. They don't look for tasks equal to their powers. Rather they look for powers equal to their tasks. Clearly, you have those powers with some to spare.

Your success tells its own powerful story – a story of a remarkable people who came together and formed the Churchtown Development Association and the Churchtown Village Renewal Trust, and together with Statutory and non Statutory Bodies you planned the renewal of your parish and surrounding areas. You made decisions for the benefit of your community. You have shown that it takes more than bricks and mortar to build a community. You need a spirit of belonging, a community spirit that unites what is otherwise a random collection of houses, a chance collection of people.

The President meets Margaret O'Brien,
Vice Chairperson of the Churchtown
Development Association.

Community spirit is built and sustained by people of big hearts, and wonderful imaginations, generous with their time, their skills, their enthusiasm, who share a dream of a better life for themselves and their families. They want to live in an environment where people care about each other, not a place of anonymous strangers. But they know community does not happen by accident. It has to be developed and sustained. Not everyone is good at doing the slog work it needs, but thank God there are such people and you have them in abundance here.

I am sure this spirit of community has helped the families and neighbours to cope with the tragic loss of Niamh O'Herlihy and her young sister Anita, and Carmel Conroy and her little daughter Emma in that terrible car accident. Such loss is heartbreaking and I know that our thoughts are with Colm and Delia Conroy, Liam and Marie O'Herlihy and Emma's father David. They will always hold a special place in the hearts and minds of this community. Caring communities share their good days and their bad. They allow people to believe they are not alone.

Today, we in Ireland are experiencing an era of prosperity and of opportunity; there is a palpable air of optimism and regeneration right across the country. Here in Churchtown as elsewhere in the country people struggle and juggle with today's web of challenges and opportunities. Everyone wants their village or town to be vibrant and dynamic, offering economic stability to the next generation. But no one wants progress to destroy cherished character and values so a careful path has to be woven between creating and managing economic success while ensuring





The President mingled with the crowd while the Bruhenny Choral Group, led by Mary Wilson, sang Danny Boy and other beautiful songs in the background.

Address by President McAleese continued...

that the spirit and character of villages like Churchtown is cherished and conserved for future generations.

It is a tribute to the people of Churchtown that you have met the challenges so well. It is absolutely astonishing what has taken place and continues to take place here in this most amazing community.

The history of Churchtown tells us of the burning of the village in 1822, the terrible human price paid during famine times leading to the movement of young people away from the land in search of a better life beyond our shores. But the place where we are born and grow up in exerts a powerful tug on the human psyche. The collective wisdom of past generations of the people is Churchtown has become part of the land itself. Many of those who stayed did so out of a desire to make their own area a better place to live, a place which would provide opportunities for themselves and their children.

Former generations bequeathed Churchtown its great legacy of wonderful stone buildings – the school building and the Market House are fine examples of your heritage. I congratulate you in particular for the way in which you have joined the old and new seamlessly together using the natural and traditional resources wisely and well while also maximising the potential of the Internet.

Today, Churchtown is an exemplary model for the development of a sustainable community, you are giving both ideas and confidence to other communities throughout Ireland and Europe.

One of our National newspapers described Churchtown as 'a scenic village off the beaten track'. What an understatement! The people of Churchtown have demonstrated their commitment to the renaissance of this village and to the creation of a model for Europe in village renewal. The centre which I am officially opening today will provide a forum where issues of interest to the entire community will be addressed and where the people of Churchtown, young and old can play their part in maintaining its profound love of both people and place.

I would like to thank all of you for your wonderful welcome today, I have enjoyed my visit to this beautiful village and it gives me great pleasure to declare the Community Centre officially open.



Father Twohig presents his published works to the President.

Address by Eileen Ahern-O'Connor

Chairperson of the Churchtown Development Association

President McAleese, Rev Fathers, distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen. This is an historic event for Churchtown and I am pleased to see so many people here to share in our great day. You are all very welcome.

On behalf of the people of Churchtown I would like to thank President McAleese for opening our beautiful Community Centre. We are very honoured with your presence and that your husband was able to accompany you to Churchtown.

We would also like to thank the people and the friends of Churchtown who have generously supported this project. Whenever there was fundraising you never let us down and we hope you will agree that your financial contribution has been well spent.

On behalf of the people of Churchtown we should also thank Gerry Murphy who has invested a huge amount of his time in helping

this community. He founded the Churchtown Village Renewal Trust which has added its support, resources and skills base to our local efforts. In addition he has created the commercial Boss Murphy "brand" and other enterprise initiatives which are helping to put Churchtown back on the map.

FÁS has made a magnificent contribution to this community in two distinct ways – a group of trainees managed by Gerry Farrissey has maintained and beautified our village resulting in our Tidy Towns award and a further group of trainees supervised by Paddy O'Connell and under the management of John Murphy has taken what was our "old school" and turned it into this magnificent community centre.

We salute the executives, staff and trainees of FÁS and commend them for their contribution. I would also like to thank the members of Bruhenny Choral Group for their uplifting contribution to our opening ceremony here today.

Thanks too to the pupils of our local school who provided the Guard of Honour today led by their teachers, headmaster Gerard Lenihan and Angela O'Regan and to our master of ceremonies and secretary of the Churchtown Development Association Peggy O'Flaherty.

While being chairman of a local development association is an arduous position it is also a great honour. However, this honour must be

Eileen Ahern-O'Connor addressing the gathering in the Community Hall.



Churchtown Development Association. Front (left to right): Gerry Murphy, Fr Patrick J Twohig PP, President McAleese, Eileen Ahern-O'Connor, Mary Howard, Peggy O'Flaherty. Back Row: Noel Linehan, Margaret O'Brien, Bosco Thompson, Ina Bourke, Pat Murphy, Sean Howard, Martin McAleese and John Sampson.



Address by Eileen Ahern-O'Connor continued...

shared as no chairperson can operate successfully without a dedicated committee. On behalf of myself and the two previous chairmen – Oliver Byrne and Noel Linehan – I would like to thank most sincerely all the officers and committee members who have served our community over the last six years since the Association was founded on the 14th July 1994.

I was born and raised in this parish and left in my late teens for the bright lights of New York. Later I spent a number years in Australia. Sometimes one has to go far to realise what you have at home. I am not so much thinking now about our legacy of fine buildings but rather the community spirit or "heart" that beats in this small community of ours and indeed so many others throughout rural Ireland. Let us make sure that we preserve this vital community spirit as we renew our parish and that we instil in future generations the importance of serving the community on a voluntary basis.

In conclusion let me thank you, President McAleese and all our distinguished guests for honouring us with your presence here today.

Thank you for your attention.



Remarks by Peggy O'Flaherty, master of ceremonies and secretary of the Churchtown Development Association during the presentation of two Churchtown Village Renewal Trust medals of honour.

Every parish needs people who are prepared to make sacrifices in terms of their free time for the benefit of the greater community and it is important that we should recognise such effort. The Churchtown Village Renewal Trust commissioned a medal for this purpose and today we wish to honour two local people who have served this community well over many years.

Could I now call on Patrick Irwin and Noel Linehan to come forward and be presented with their Churchtown Village Renewal Trust medals of honour by Carmel Fox, Chief Executive of Ballyhoura Development.



Above: Carmel Fox, Chief Executive of Ballyhoura Development presenting Churchtown Village Renewal Trust Medals of Honour to Patrick Irwin and Noel Linehan for service to the community.

Left and below: the President also visited Padre Pio Nursing and Convalescent Home. She is pictured below with Karen Kennedy and staff.

