

EDUCATION AT KERRY COUNTY MUSEUM – YES! YOU CAN TOUCH IT!

Claudia Köhler (Education, Community & Outreach Officer)



Kerry County Museum was named Museum of the Year 2009 by the Heritage Council and the Northern Ireland Museums Council.

When I came to Kerry County Museum as Education, Community & Outreach Officer two years ago, I found an Aladdin's Cave full of exciting exhibitions, artefacts, photographs and a dedicated team of colleagues. At present, we have over 4,000 artefacts in our collection, two permanent exhibitions - the Museum Gallery and the Medieval Experience - and we have just launched a new special exhibition Kerry Lives illustrated with photographs from the Kennelly Archive. This provides the backbone of the Museum's Education, Community and Outreach Programme.

The Museum is an educational treasure trove with more than 6,000 years of archaeology and history to choose from. The starting point of the Museum Gallery is the stone artefacts manufactured by the first Mesolithic settlers in Kerry around 4,500 BC. Their middens (rubbish heaps) were excavated at Ferriter's Cove, near Ballyferriter on the Dingle Peninsula. Stone hammers from the earliest known copper mine in north-western Europe at Ross Island near Killarney are displayed. Impressive Bronze Age weapons and musical instruments from Kerry may have been votive offerings deposited in bogs and so luckily preserved for posterity. Another great story in the Museum Gallery relates to St. Brendan and his voyage across the North Atlantic in a simple leather boat. Not less fascinating is Kerry's Viking connection represented by a silver hoard and other artefacts from Cloghermore Cave near Tralee. A highlight for many visitors is the Medieval Experience, a recreation of medieval Tralee complete with the sounds and smells. The great story of Kerry's local hero Tom Crean is told in our award-winning Antarctica exhibition. Last but not least, our current special exhibition Kerry Lives is a superb photographic testimonial of life in Kerry 50 years ago.

My job as Education Officer is to provide a link between the Museum and its visitors. It is our visitors, from Kerry or from outside the county or from abroad, young or older, individuals or groups that bring the



Mary Creagh from Tralee and her grandson Michael exploring our new exhibition 'Kerry Lives' featuring photographs from the Kennelly Archive (© Domnick Walsh Photography).

museum to life. A museum without visitors is just a collection of objects. I want to improve levels of access and make the museum experience as educational and enjoyable as possible. Recently, we launched Pangur Bán's Trail - a family discovery trail through the Museum Gallery. Pangur Bán, a street-wise white cat, encourages families to investigate Kerry's past. Highlights include an animal quiz, an archaeological mystery puzzle, a Celtic legends reading corner, an interactive map exploring the World of St. Brendan, a Viking board game and a try-on replica costume of Tom Crean's Burberry gear.

All these activities ensure that children of all ages are given the tools to actively engage with the Museum and our collections. The message we want to bring across is that museums are not places anymore where nothing can be touched and children are hushed into silent boredom. The positive comments written in our visitor book by families and other guests show us that we are on the right track.



"The Museum is telling a story and it's my story too because when I moved here I became part of the Irish story." – Isif Cirpaci, aged 10.

"What's in the Box?"

If you can't come to the Museum then we will come to you!

Kerry County Museum was named 2009 Museum of the Year at the Museum Awards hosted by the Heritage Council, in partnership with the Northern Ireland Museums Council in May 2009. We were also highly commended in the Education Category for our "What's in the Box?" outreach service. "What's in the Box?" is a handling collection of artefacts and replica objects based on the Museum's collections. It is designed to be one of the central features of the Museum's education and outreach programme. Children and adults have the opportunity to investigate history and archaeology through hands-on experience with original artefacts.

We have created three customized boxes which are available on loan to primary schools and other educational institutions in Kerry. Each box relates to a specific period - Prehistory (Stone Age and Bronze Age), Middle Ages and 20th century - and each contains a different set of objects. The boxes are specifically designed to tie in with the curriculum and are complimented by educational resource materials and activity sheets. I usually deliver the boxes to interested schools and the school can book it for up to one month.

The idea behind "What's in the Box" is simple: If you can't visit the Museum, the Museum will come and visit you. Kerry is a large county, and for schools and community groups at the western, southern and northern extremities, a visit to the Museum in Tralee entails a full day out. The objects arrive in the school in "treasure chests", specifically designed to bring a sense of discovery and excitement to the classroom. We have had a number of requests to develop a Tom Crean/Antarctic box and we would also like to develop a Viking loan box based on the exciting finds from Cloghermore Cave.



At the 2009 Museum Awards, we were highly commended in the Education Category for our outreach project 'What's in the Box?'.

The loan boxes were initially designed to be used by primary schools throughout the county but their potential to be used by groups from a wide range of ages and educational backgrounds became clear quickly. An adult education group from Listowel Community College who participated in the FETAC Level 5 Culture and Heritage Studies course made great use of "What's in the Box" and follow-up visits to the Museum. Course modules included Archaeology, Heritage Studies, Local History, Folklore and Creative Writing. Course Co-ordinator Dermot Waugh, Listowel Community College, shares his experience.

The course allowed students the opportunity to access primary source material and also to gain an understanding of how documents and materials are archived, stored and catalogued. The course was assisted by Kerry County Museum's LOAN BOX scheme. This scheme was a huge benefit to the students because artefacts could be brought into the classroom and students had the time and opportunity to reflect on and question the historical evidence and also to value the role of the archaeologist. The follow-up visits to Kerry County Museum and to the Local History section of Tralee Library were an integral part of the course. Students gained an appreciation of the important role played by their local museum and archive. They also learned about the challenges of running a museum. These were important learning outcomes. The course would not have worked as well as it did without the vital link between Kerry County Museum and Listowel Community College.

Making Our Own Museum

"Extra curricular activities and special education projects such as this have the ability to create memories that last a lifetime". (Denis Coleman, Principal, CBS Primary School Tralee).

Making Our Own Museum is an outreach project which was piloted with CBS Primary School, Tralee. A catalogue documenting the project and an exhibition were the pinnacle of the project. The exhibition will soon be on display at the Department of Tourism, Culture & Sport in Killarney. Making Our Own Museum used the resources of Kerry County Museum to communicate the rich diversity of cultures in the local community. This long-term outreach project started in October 2008 and over the course of the following six months the pupils of fourth class CBS Primary School Tralee took the opportunity to unleash their creativity through story telling and creating artwork inspired by the Museum's collection. The project was a wonderful exploration of the pupil's histories and the history of Ireland.

The first couple of workshops took place in school. The 20th century loan box introduced the group to the idea of working with Museum objects. In a playful manner, the group explored the connection between stories, histories and museum objects. Finding out more about each other's lives and families was another important aspect. The class teacher noticed that the group started to discuss topics which normally do not come up in the day-to-day conversations at school. Those informal chats amongst friends resulted in great reflections on how different but also similar life can be in other countries and cultures and what it means to be Irish in a new multi-cultural society.

The next stage was several visits to the Museum. Following a tour of the Museum Gallery, Dr. Griffin Murray, Collections Officer met the group for an in-depth question and answer session. A couple of months into the project, the final part of a creative journey – making objects inspired by the Museum was reached. At the same time the children also wrote about their favourite Museum objects and their special objects, linking their personal stories and creative ideas with their Museum experience. Following the opening of the exhibition and the launch of the catalogue their stories are now truly part of the Museum's story. Dara Barrett the fourth class teacher (CBS Primary School Tralee) gave us following feedback:

I am delighted we took part in this project. It was a great learning experience for the children and they now feel a sense of ownership of the Museum, as well as having a real knowledge of the artefacts displayed there. They were given the opportunity to explore the Museum and its contents. The children researched the artefact and also used their imaginations to write a story. The results were excellent. The project allowed the children to access all the information in the Museum at their own level and to use their artistic and imaginative abilities to create their own Museum. We thoroughly enjoyed the process and we are very grateful to all those involved.

It isn't possible to discuss all our education facilities in this brief article. If you would like to hear more or if you would like to be on our contact list for forthcoming educational events, please send me an email. I would also like to emphasise that many of our projects and events are kindly supported, and hence made possible, by Tralee Town Council, Kerry County Council, The Heritage Council and The Department of Tourism, Culture and Sports and by the commitment of all staff members at Kerry County Museum.

Kerry County Museum - *Ireland's Museum of the Year 2009*

Ashe Memorial Hall, Denny Street, Tralee, County Kerry.

Website: www.kerrymuseum.ie

Email: education@kerrymuseum.ie

Tel: 066 7127777



*"Museums are not boring because you can use your imagination."
– Morgan Moriarty, CBS Primary School Tralee.*



Pupils from Holy Family National School Tralee enjoying our award-winning Antarctica Exhibition devoted to Tom Crean.