

Halloween

at Lifford Old Courthouse



Scary Puppet Show (at 2pm sharp)

Ghost Stories & Witches Brew

Fancy Dress Competition

Prizes to be won

Puppet Disco with DJ Foxy Cool

Thursday 31st October 2002 from 2 – 6pm

Admission: Children €6/£4.00stg, Adults Free (young children must be accompanied by an adult)

Christmas



The Ramblin Scallywags Puppet Theatre presents
A CHRISTMAS CAROL at Lifford Old Courthouse

Plus Come & see Santas toy factory in the cells

Write & post your letter to Lapland

Receive a gift from Father Christmas

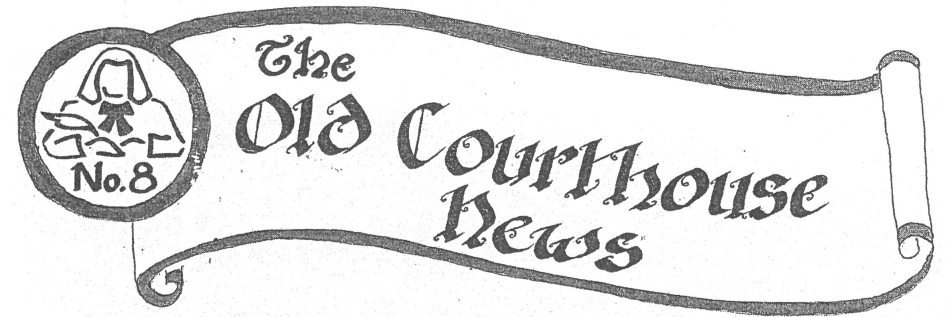
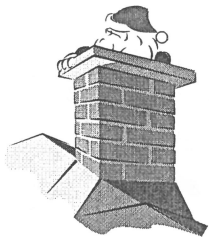
7th December – 19th December

Monday – Friday shows at 5pm & 7pm

Sat & Sun shows at 1pm, 3pm & 5pm

BOOKING ESSENTIAL (074) 41733

Admission: Children €8/£5.50 stg, Adults €2/£1.50stg
The Courthouse Restaurant will be open during all shows



Autumn Leaves

Lifford Association for Tourism, Commerce & Heritage Ltd.

YOUR LETTERS



HANSARD PLAQUE

Billy Ramsay - : from Derry, writes:

"Did anyone take a photograph of the plaque on the Old Hansard School in Lifford Diamond, before some idiot chipped it off?"

If any of our readers can oblige we'd be grateful!

OLD MURLOG SCHOOL

Someone else looking for an old photograph is Nora Gallagher, Birdstown, Ballindrait. She asks, "Would anyone have a picture of the Old Junior School at Murlóg, which she attended in the 1930's?" It was demolished, we believe, sometime in the 1960's?."

COOK'S CORNER

Old Courthouse famous scones!

2lbs Neill's self-raising soda bread
flour.
4 oz castor sugar
4 eggs.
6oz soft margarine.

Using a pint glass or jug, break your eggs into jug, and top up to 1 pint with milk. Mix all ingredients together to form a fairly firm consistency. Turn the dough out onto board, and knead lightly. Roll out to quarter of an inch thick, and

cut into rounds. Place on greased tin and bake at 200 c, or gas mark 6, for 10 - 15 minutes.

REMEMBER

The clocks go back one hour on Sunday October 27th.



CONGRATULATIONS

All best wishes for the future to our county archivist, Niamh Brennan and Tom King who got married on September 13th.



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September
27th The Elves
28th Gemini

October
5th Two Amigos
6th White Lightning
7th Partyboys
12th Undiscovered
19th Soul

18th The Elves
19th Friends

25th Night At Races
26th In Aid of Argyry NS
26th Virgil Quinn
27th Gemini

LIFFORD COMMUNITY LIBRARY



Please note that we have moved to the Old Courthouse, The Diamond, Lifford. The library is now fully automated and Internet facilities will be available soon.

Opening Hours:

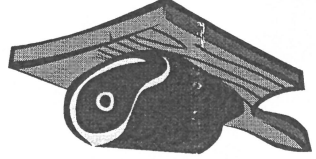
Monday	10.30 - 6.00
Tuesday	10.30 - 8.00
Wednesday	10.30 - 5.00
Thursday	10.30 - 8.00
Friday	10.30 - 6.00

Closed for lunch Tues, Wed, & Thurs. 1.00 - 1.30

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October

Fri 4th Astro
Sat 5th Eclipse
Sun 6th Fully Booked

Fri 11th Jodie
Gallagher
Sat 12th The Fluffy
Ducks
Sun 13th Philis

Fri 18th Joe Quigley
Sat 19th D Wilder
Sun 20th Adonis Blu

Fri 25th Fresh
Vibes
Sat 26th Spirit of
Freedom
Sun 27th Cainte

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THE OLD COURTHOUSE TAKES TO THE WATER



Taken on the banks of the River Foyle at Lifford Old Courthouse Visitor Centre, this picture features Mr Dick Warner, the renowned researcher and presenter of the RTE series "Waterways", with Dr Billy Patton and Mr Gerald McMenamin of Lifford Association for Tourism, Commerce & Heritage.

Mr Warner was on his initial visit before undertaking a feasibility study, on the possibility of operating a riverbus from the Old Courthouse to Derry. Commissioned by LATCH Ltd., the feasibility study will be looking into the history of navigation on the River Foyle, the development of onshore facilities, the huge potential for cross border river tourism and the history and archaeology of the river banks.

This project will entail the creation of many new jobs not only in the design of a customised boat to meet

the unique features of the river Foyle, but will also result in permanent positions for up to six full time employees and numerous part time jobs and will make an important contribution to the local economy.

Halloween

Halloween is almost upon us!

And you're in for a big surprise!

*Witches ghosts, and ghouls,
You won't believe your eyes!*

*Come to Lifford Old Courthouse,
Fun and games for all to see,
Witches are there to greet you,
You will pay but a very small fee!*

*Eye of a newt, legs of a snail,
Tongue of a moth, and a dragonfly's tail.*

*This all goes together to make
witches brew,
It's here at the Courthouse, made
just for you!*

*This Halloween, the best place to be,
Is Lifford Old Courthouse, come
along and you'll see,
There's a great time in store, we
guarantee,
So do come and join us, for a very
small fee.*

Pamela Hepburn



“Are you abused within the home?”
then we can help to pave the way,
To support you and your children,
make the decisions of YOUR
choice.

They listened for many hours,
helped me take back my voice.
They helped revive my self-esteem,
which had been buried for so long,
It took time for me to realise, it was
HIM who was in the wrong.
Leaving wasn't easy; he said it was
me who was unkind.

First with threats and then with
promises, he tried to change my
mind.
Life still isn't easy. I won't pretend
it's so

The futures looking brighter.
There's still some way to go.
Sitting in my home tonight, there's
peace instead of fear

It's a joy to watch my children
smile. When once it was just tears.
If as you read my story, you think,
that woman could be me?

Know the help you need is out there,
then you will start to see
Love is not control and power; it's
respect, loyalty and trust
And when you share your life with
another

It's not ME but should be US.
By Mary McKenna
Donegal Domestic Violence Service

The Domestic Violence service is there
for anyone, Free and Confidential. If
you think you need their help, call their
help line, anytime, day or night on 074
26267.

Poetry Corner

I first met him down the local; he
seemed to be such fun

The life and soul of the party,
buying drinks for everyone.

We started going out together, firstly
with a group of friends,

Then he said we didn't need them,
so my friendships I did end.

He said we should get married; there
was no reason we should wait,

I wouldn't need to work he said, all
my needs he now would meet.

Sure we didn't need my family
interfering in our lives

The decisions were all his to make,
now that I was his wife.

When we had the children I hoped
he'd see the light,

But he took no interest in them, still
went out every night

Spending money that was needed
for necessities I'd say

Then he'd exploded with anger;
there would be hell to pay.

How dare I question what he did, I
didn't have the right

I was just a stupid housewife, he
would shout with all his might.

It went along like this for years, but
I still had my pride

I never would disclose my fears, to
anyone outside.

The more I tried to make it work,
the tighter he'd turn the screws,

When I saw the children's constant
fear, I knew what I had to do.
I'd heard the number read out, on
the radio every day

for the local people during the Great
Famine.

We also learned that Lord Lifford
wasn't the last owner of the estate
and castle in Meenglas. The last
owner was a Mr.Lamb, but how it
came to be in his hands we do not
know! However, it didn't belong to
him for long. Mr. Lamb sold it to a
local contractor, Jason Hannigan.
As a result it was demolished in
1944. Mr Hannigan sold the slates
from the roof to local people and the
stones were used to build roads. In
Meenglas today, there is not a trace
of the castle or estate.

During our research of Lord Lifford,
we interviewed a local man from
Meenglas whose mother worked in
Lord Lifford's house, which was
built on his estate at Meenglas.
Although he was but a young boy
himself at this time, he told us
everything he could remember and
interviewing he would have heard
from his parents. We recorded the
interview but the quality of the
recording was poor and distorted.

LORD LIFFORD AND MEENGLAS CASTLE

He brought us to Meenglas Church,
which we believed was the original
church built by Lord Lifford.
However, we learned that there was
a much larger church on the site
previous to the present church, but it
had to be demolished due to a
decrease in the population caused by
emigration. The present church
contains a plaque in remembrance of
Lord Lifford's death in 1887, which
his wife, Lady Lydia Lifford,
erected in the original Meenglas
church.

We were told that Lord Lifford was
a very fair landlord compared to
some other landlords and treated his
tenants very well. He built the
church, a school and one house that
still stands today. He also
constructed a man-made lake,
known as Lough Shannah in the
townland of Trusk, to provide work

In a new venture in 1879, the West
Donegal Railway Company was
formed, in which Lord Lifford was
also a Chairman. However, in the
early years, the link up between
Meenglas.

Old Cures For Ailments

As we head into the shortening evenings here are a few cures you may want to remember when the autumn chill catches you!!

For Headache:

Tie a band of white cotton or linen around the forehead to cure a headache.



A cure for Measles:

Walk under a donkey or lead a donkey to a stream and drink from the water.



Whooping Cough:

Get a piece of homemade bread from a woman whose maiden name is the same as her married name and eat it.



Chilblains:

When the cold of winter inflicts Chilblains or any foot complaint, soak your feet in the water in which you have boiled potatoes - don't dry your feet.



Childbirth:

For easy childbirth the mother-to-be should drink a tea made from raspberry leaves. She has a cup every morning starting three weeks before the baby is due.



Corns:

For the relief of corns, a piece of fat bacon was placed round the toe.



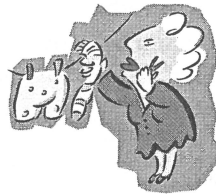
Bed-wetting:

The cure for bed-wetting isn't very pleasant. Unknown to the patients make them drink the water (cold) in which a field mouse has been boiled alive.



Sore Throat:

Personally I can't wait to try this when my annual sore throat kicks in. Heat salt in the oven, put this into a man's sock that has been well worn, fasten around the neck with a safety pin and go to bed!!!!



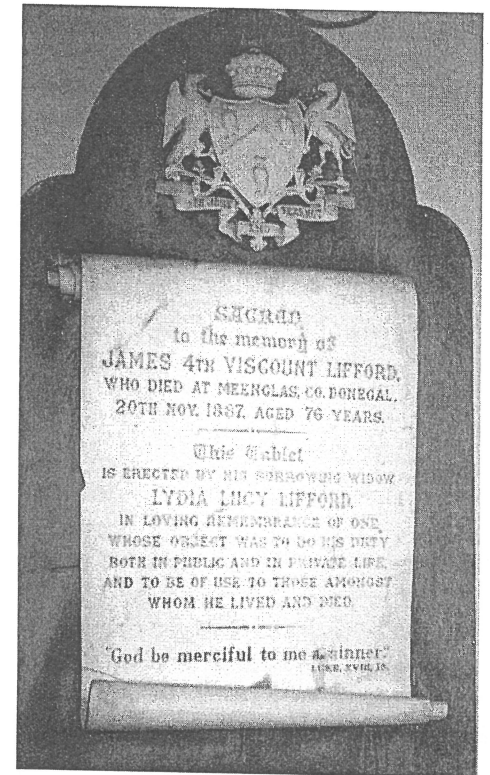
Taken from extracts of 'In and Around Raphoe' also 'A Local History of Lifford'.

West Donegal and the Finn Valley was proving a strain on the limited resources, which resulted in a four-mile gap at Druminin. This was both disappointing and embarrassing and as a result, Lord Lifford made the effort to raise the necessary capital to finish the work. The West Donegal Light Railway Order (1886) was the outcome, authorising £19,000. Work was started but unfortunately Lord Lifford did not live to see the scheme completed. He died in 1887 and his son-in-law Sir Samuel Hayes took his place as chairman on the two boards.

Throughout the interview we took a number of photographs of the present church, the plaque in memory of Lord Lifford and the house which we think he built for one of his workers.

Carrying out an interview and visiting the place was a memorable way of finding out about Lord Lifford and his estate. I would like to take this opportunity to thank Mr. Pearson for taking the time to help us with our research and telling us everything he knows about Lord Lifford during his time in Meenglas.

By Sinead McCafferty and Angela Mulreany.



WOMEN TALK

I hate housework! You make the beds, you do the dishes – and six months later you have to start all over again.

Joan Rivers

A successful man is one who makes more money than his wife can spend. A successful woman is one who can find such a man.

Lana Turner

A man in the house is worth two in the street.

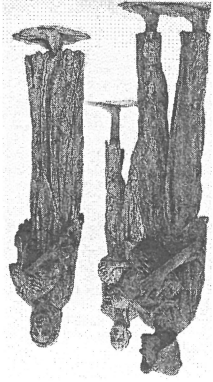
Mae West

The Famine Years

Hearing about the Famine has never really registered with me; it was something that happened a long time ago and didn't affect my family, or did it? I decided to have a look at some books about the Famine and also old newspapers in the library and what I have come across makes heartbreaking reading. The hunger and despair that the people must have gone through I just cannot imagine.

The potato was the main substance of the diet here and when the blight struck in 1845 the government or the landlords who owned the land didn't take the fear that gripped the nation seriously. The government eventually stepped in to help with relief in the form of the workhouse, and by giving employment to the men in the shape of making 'broad roads'.

Engineers were sent to mark out the new lines, which were in the most awkward of places over rock and bog with the most difficult of routes. The daily wage was a miserable 9 pennies per day, that is, if the men had the strength to get there in the first place. If a man didn't show up on time or at roll call his wage was cut by half or a quarter. It didn't matter what distance he had to come or the weather conditions he might have to come in. While the men



want of food.

laboured at the roads the women were at home with their starving children, listening to their pitiful cries, and then, their silence for the

Journal' dated 10th February 1847;

'On Monday evening last, about three o'clock, a poor man of the name of Edward Welton, fell down through sheer exhaustion, for want of food, about two miles beyond St. Johnston, at the village of Craighadoes,

(Craighadoes/Craeghaddoos), and, immediately afterwards without being able to speak. The poor man was accompanied by his wife and child; they had been in Scotland for some time, and, their passage money having been paid from Glasgow to Londonderry, they had proceeded thus far on their way to Ballina, their native place, when this untimely fate overtook the unhappy man who was only 25 years of age. The want of food had produced

The Crawfords and Fionnuala!

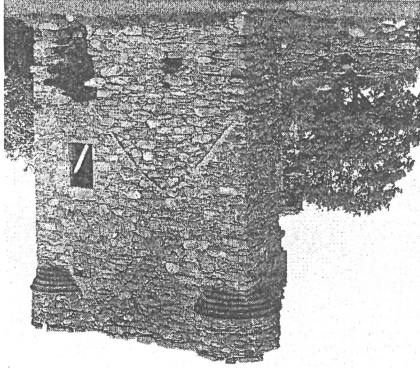
In looking for Winston Churchill's connection to the O'Donnell clan, I read with interest of Fionnuala 'Inghean Dubh' Mac Domhnaill.

She was the second wife of the chieftain Aodh mac Maghas O'Domhnaill; they had a number of children together, one of them being the famous Aodh Ruadh, (Red Hugh). They also had a daughter Siobhan from whom Winston Churchill is descended.

Inghean Dubh was described as beautiful, 'the fair Inghean dubh, the dark daughter'; she excelled in all qualities that became a woman, yet possessing the heart of a hero and the soul of a soldier. She was ruthless in her quest to see her son Red Hugh as chieftain, stopping at nothing to do so. An illegitimate half-brother of Red Hugh who had fancied the title for himself had been disqualified by this determined lady when she ordered that a couple of his fingers be cut off as you could not become chieftain if you had any kind of deformity!

She was the channel that brought great numbers of Scottish mercenaries (Galloglagh or Galloglass) to Ireland. As she was a daughter of Mac Domhnaill, Lord of the Isles, she had the right to her own personal bodyguards. When she married she had with her 100 men described as the tallest in Scotland,

80 of whom were Crawfords. This accounts for the predominance of Crawfords in this area today, and also explains why there is a Scottish lilt to the accent in this part of the county.



Mongevlin castle, which was situated about a mile south of St. Johnston and seven miles upstream from Derry on the River Foyle, was the chief home of Inghean Dubh. In 1608 Inghean Dubh's son-in-law Naill Garbh (who had gone over to the English) put her out of the castle so he could keep an eye on things in Derry, but he was soon removed by Sir Cahir O'Doherty and Inghean Dubh was reinstated. Mongevlin Castle was a bone of contention among this family and was eventually abandoned.



A WINTER'S TALE

This story, written by the late Patrick McGettigan of Lifford, was first published in the Strabane/Lifford Notes October 1982.

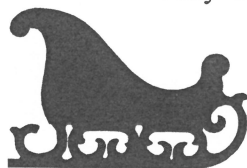


On a public road in my locality, there is a very long, and very steep hill, where as teenagers we often sleighed when the snow was packed and frozen on it. One night when I returned home after sleighing on this hill, I discovered that I had left my overcoat near the bottom of the hill. I walked back again in the moonlight and found it where I had left it. I put it on me, and was about to walk away when I heard the sound of a lone sleigh travelling at great speed down the hill. Near the end of this hill, the road forked, and the sleighs always took the long winding right-hand turn. On the road to the left however, about a hundred yards away, there was a stout wall, which was there to protect traffic from tumbling into the river below it.

I got across to this road, so that the other would be clear for the sleigher, but to my horror, the sleigh took the left turn, and as it flashed past me, I had a snap view of it. It looked long, and black, and narrow, with the diminutive figure of a boy seated in the centre of it. It did not crash into the protection wall but swept clean

over it. I listened for the scream of fright, the cry for assistance, and the crash of the sleigh through the surface ice on the river, but no sound broke the prevailing stillness around me. Even when I shone a pocket torch downwards, I could not see the surface ice on the river broken anywhere. As I hurried homeward for the second time that night, I cast many a furtive glance behind me.

On the following evening, I was cleaning out the attic at home, when a faded page of a local newspaper dropped out of a book, I picked it up, it was dated 9th January, 1875. A caption on the page stated "Tragic death of youth in sleighing accident" The article continued "in the small hours of the morning, a boy of sixteen who was sleighing alone on a local hill, lost control of the sleigh near the bottom of the hill, it took a wrong turn and swept over a protection wall by the road side, and was drowned in the river directly below the wall". The article also stated that a local joiner who had been to America, built the sleigh, and modelled it on a type used by the inhabitants of the Katskills who used it during the winter snows, and which was noted for it's speed potential, and for the difficulty of keeping it in control, especially during long runs.



dysentery, which had so far enfeebled the physical energies of the sufferer, that he fell repeatedly on the road in his attempts to get forward, before he was taken into the house where he died. He was interred yesterday at St. Johnston. A voluntary collection among the neighbours procured a coffin. No inquest was held upon the dead body.'

There were many deaths like this on the roads of Ireland, also in Great Britain, America and Canada.

Some people owned a four legged animal (excluding a cat or dog) so they weren't entitled to any relief, as the animal could be sold at the fair or market, which would be seen as sufficient to see you through for a while even though the prices at market were diabolical. All this reduced the people to the one level of starvation and despair. Neighbours tried to help each other out and would share what they had even though their own need was just as great. Eventually they were all at the same level where no-one had anything and people resorted to eating any substance that the taste buds would not reject to keep the pangs of hunger at bay. The people became so desperate that all reasoning and respect was abandoned. This was a fight for survival. A report from the 'Famine Diary' by Brendan O Cathaoir 26th July 1847 states;

'Sporadic violence is increasing. A crowd raids a mill in Dunfanaghy, County Donegal. The mob persists despite a bayonet charge by paramilitary police, during which two peasants were killed and others severely wounded. The constabulary retreats, leaving the people in possession of the mill and store. After they flee with their booty, soldiers and policemen scour the countryside and arrest four of the ringleaders.'

Scenes like this were common all over the country.

In our forthcoming issues I will cover more of The Great Famine and the effects it had on Donegal. If there is anyone out there who can contribute to this series with any stories of the Famine passed on from generation to generation, then we'd love to hear from you.



Graphics by JARLATH HAYES based on the Famine Sculpture by Rowan Gillespie.

Exhibit 'A'



In today's modern world of forensic science and DNA testing we tend to forget just how crude and primitive the process of criminal investigation used to be. A case in point arose in an article, which appeared in 'The Old Courthouse News' No. 5. This dealt with the trial of the Stewart Brothers, James and Alexander, held in Lifford in March 1831, where the accused were convicted and sentenced to death for the murder of John and Martha Lytle.



Although it was never proved conclusively, the weapon supposed to have been used in the killing was a hatchet found at the Stewarts' house. On a closer examination of the case, as reported in the local press of the time, it is remarkable how such a crucial piece of evidence could be treated in such a slipshod manner. Most certainly it would not have been acceptable as a reliable piece of evidence if presented in a criminal prosecution today.

The story of 'Exhibit A' begins on a house of September 5th, 1830. When John Baird was woken by John Lytle's little boy who told him to get the police as the old man and his wife had been killed and the house set on fire. When the police arrived,

Baird and an armed constable, William Cluff, began scouring the countryside for the perpetrators.

About 5a.m. they arrived at the Stewart household where their suspicions were aroused when they found James and Paddy Stewart sitting at the remains of a fire. They also discovered a wet coat, a pair of wet shoes and, alarmingly, that James was wearing a blood stained shirt and there was blood on his arm from elbow to wrist. Taking them prisoners, they tied them together with a handkerchief and, with the aid of a candle, continued to search the room where Baird found a hatchet leaning against the back wall. Baird "thought by the light of the candle he saw something like blood upon it; it was rather dry".

Bringing the hatchet with him, Baird, Cluff and the two Stewarts then set off in the rain to lodge the prisoners in the small gaol in Donegal Town.

On the road, Baird began to have doubts about the hatchet because "if there was blood on it, the rain would have washed it off and after some time carrying it agreed with Cluff that it was not blood". The train of events which follow become even more bizarre. About half-a-mile from the Stewart house they met Sally Hazlett and for some reason, possibly for safe-keeping or to return it to the Stewart household or

Did You Know?



Winston Churchill is a descendant of the O'Donnell clan of Donegall!!!

Searching through files in our Rupert Coughlan room recently, I came across a copy of a letter Rupert had sent to a lady in London. He had just been on a trip to Edinburgh, and while there he had visited Blenheim, the seat of the Dukes of Marlborough (Churchills). He saw something that set him thinking and when he returned home to Dublin he did a bit of digging and found that Sir Winston Leonard Spencer Churchill (1874-1965) is descended from Siobhan, a sister of the famous Red Hugh O'Donnell (d.1602). After a little research I found that Siobhan (d.1590) was married to Aodh O'Neill, they had a daughter Eilís who married Randal mac Somhairle mac Domhnaill, Earl Of Antrim (d.1636) and their 9th lineal descendant was Winston, Prime Minister of Britain!



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CHEAP TRAVEL

Pat and Jim were a couple of Lifford drinking buddies who worked as aeroplane mechanics in Carrickfinn. One day the airport was fogged in, and they were stuck in the hanger with nothing to do. Pat says, "Man I wish we had a drink". Jim says "Me too. Y'know, I've heard you can drink jet fuel and get a buzz. "You wanna try it"?"

So they pour themselves a couple of glasses of high-octane hooch, and get completely smashed. The next morning Pat wakes up, and is surprised at how good he feels. In fact he feels GREAT! No hangover! No bad side effects! Nothing! Then the phone rings...its Jim. Jim says, "Hey, how do you feel this morning?" Pat says, "I feel great How about You? Jim says, I feel great too! You don't have a hangover?" Pat says, "No. That jet fuel is great stuff, no hangover, nothing, we should do this more often". "Yeah Jim, well there's just one thing..."

"What's that?"

"Have you farted yet?"

"No...."

"Well, DON'T, 'cause I'm in DUBLIN!!!!



THE NEWS

Lifford Old Court House News is put together monthly by staff of the Old Court House, here in Lifford. The Court House itself was built in 1746, and is "one of the oldest, and finest courthouses in Ireland". Many famous trials took place in this building, and there is a lot of history behind the building and surrounding area. In 1994, The Old Court House was re-opened as a heritage centre and tourist attraction for the visitors to the area.

Through the Newsletter, these treasured stories of the past can be shared with present generations, and with generations to come in the future. The Newsletter is also a means of gathering information from local people who would have knowledge of the past, and may even like to share their own experiences with us. A lot of time, and research is put into each issue of the Newsletter in order to provide a most accurate account of factual stories.

If you would like to contribute to the Old Court House News with either articles, poetry, or photographs, then please get in touch with Angela or Billy, Tel 074-41733.

simply because he got fed up carrying it, Baird gave the hatchet to her. In her evidence Sally Hazlett stated that she "received the hatchet from John Baird the morning the business happened; had it from Monday till Saturday; the neighbours examined it in her presence and found some white or grey hairs upon it". When cross-examined she added "It was about Wednesday the hatchet was examined; saw nothing but hairs on it; a man named Virtue took it to the door for three or four minutes and returned it; will not swear whether it was before or after this they found the hairs on it; the hatchet lay under her children's bed; it might have got hairs on it there".

After six days, the police decided to reclaim the hatchet and sent P.C. Edward Chism to collect it from Sally Hazlett where he "found two grey or light brown hairs upon it". It may seem unbelievable today but the hatchet and the "two grey or light brown hairs" were actually produced in court and used to condemn the two brothers who were found guilty and eventual hanged in Lifford Diamond in April 1831. The hatchet also came to an ignominious end. According to one story, it was kept in the execution room of Lifford jail for many years before being finally thrown in the river.



THE SEVEN YEAR ITCH

An Act for the refraining of all persons from marriage until their former wives and former husbands be dead.

This act was passed by Parliament in the 10th year of Charles 1st (1634). In doing so it made bigamy a felony punishable by death. There was, however, an exception to the rule and did not apply 'to any person or persons, whose husband or wife shall be continually remaining beyond the seas, by the space of seven years, or whose husband or wife shall absent him or herself the one from the other, by the space of seven years, in any part within his majesties dominions the one of them not knowing the other to be living within that time'. Could this be the origin of the term 'The Seven Year Itch'? If so, it adds a different dimension to the well-known term. The present day definition would imply that one or other, even both parties in a marriage take a notion for 'pastures new' after seven years. In 1634, however, the 'itch' could come at any time and the respective partners would not be punished so long as they kept out of one anothers way for at least seven years.

LIFFORD GAOL – THE FINAL YEARS

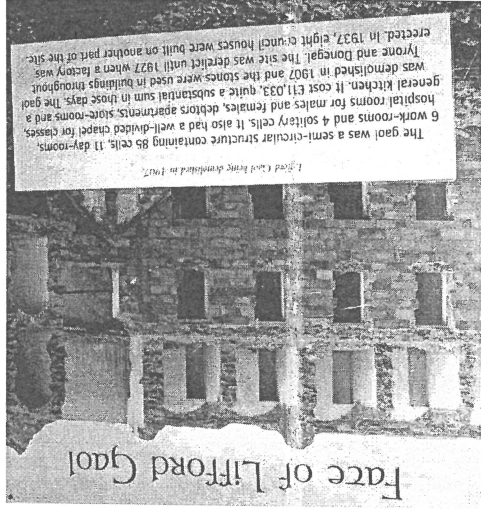
When buildings come to the end of their usefulness it is customary to close the doors for the last time. Gaols are different – they open their doors. Under the provisions of the General Prisons (Ireland) Act of 1877, Lifford gaol, which was now being used to confine untried prisoners only, was finally emptied in 1884. Apart from one instance in 1898, when the Military Authorities were permitted to use the prison as a place of confinement for military prisoners during a training exercise – “on condition that they are responsible for any damage done” – the gaol lay empty until 1907 when demolition work began.

The prevailing conditions which resulted in the 1884 closure were not confined to Lifford. All over Ireland similar events had been taking place. In Dublin’s Mountjoy jail, for instance, committals fell by more than half in the years 1853-1862. By 1870 the average number of convicts in Irish prisons had fallen to 1/3 of the 1854 level. Lifford was no exception to this downward trend. When the Inspector General of Prisons visited the gaol on the 13th June, 1854 he reported that it held 22 convicted and 8 untried felons, 18 poeteen makers and 4 vagrants or approximately less than half its total capacity.

Further more, as the author Tim Carey points out, “of those who stayed in Ireland, many led crime free lives..... because the society they were released into was one in which they did not necessarily have to steal in order to live”. Under such circumstances the requirement for a large penitentiary in Lifford was gradually deemed unnecessary and the eventual closure of the jail was only a matter of time. After some haggling by the Donegal County Council Finance Committee on

There are several reasons for this developing trend. Apart from an improvement in social and economic conditions, the decline was also largely due to the massive, unabated emigration which continued in the decades following the Great Famine 1845-1849. In the post Famine years up until the 1880’s between one third and one half of convicts emigrated when released. This wave of emigration, however, was directly influenced by the prison authorities. When transportation as an option ceased in 1853 it was superseded by ‘encouraged emigration’, the benefits of which were rammed home on an organised daily basis to the prison inmates. On release, emigration was further encouraged by financial assistance in the form of a prisoner’s gratuity, grants from the discharged prisoners’ Aid Society and donations from various charity funds..

“what would be a reasonable value to put on the jail premises” they eventually accepted £700 from Michael McCarthy, a Belfast contractor who also subcontracted part of the demolition work to William Finlay, also of Belfast.



Face of Lifford Gaol

The gaol was a semi-circular structure containing 85 cells, 11 day-rooms, 6 work-rooms and 4 solitary cells. It also had a well-divided chapel for masses, hospital rooms for males and females, debtors apartments, suit-rooms and a general kitchen. It cost £11,003, quite a substantial sum in those days. The gaol was demolished in 1907 and the stones were used in buildings throughout Tyrone and Donegal. The site was derelict until 1927 when a factory was erected. In 1937, eight council houses were built on another part of the site.

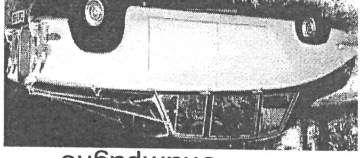
Demolition commenced in June, 1907. Lifford Gaol, however, was not going down without hitting the headlines for a last time. On June 25th, when working in the portion of the old prison known as the debtors’ yard a wall collapsed killing two men and injuring two others. Those who lost their lives were John Carton, a young unmarried Lifford man and the only support of an aged mother, and Thomas Davis, Strabane, married with three small children. The two injured were also from Lifford, Edward McCafferty and Patrick Sullivan. At the inquest, the men, it appears from the

evidence, “were engaged in tumbling a number of old cells adjoining that of Napper Tandy during the troublesome times of the Irish rebellion (1798) and whose name is pencilled in bold characters on the outer wall, when the back wall, breaking away evidently at an old chimney, crashed on top of the men without a moment’s warning”. On that sad note we’ll leave the closure and demolition of Lifford Gaol. In our next issue we will turn to the story of how the stones from the prison were used and their part in the fulfilment of a prophecy.

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