

# Athlone Literary Festival



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## Official Opening

The ancient Castle of Athlone was the venue for the official opening ceremony performed by Mary Cloake, the Director of the Arts Council. Mary, who has been with the Arts Council since 1993, charmed the audience with some very well thought out ideas delivered in a relaxed light hearted style. The capacity audience included the Mayor of Athlone Councillor Kieran Molloy and members of the family of the late Conleth Ellis.

## Book Launch in Castle

As well as officially opening the Festival, Mary Cloake launched a book - and what could be more appropriate for the opening of a Literary Festival than the launching of a book? In this case the book was Selected Poems of Conleth Ellis featuring poems from his five English language collections together with twenty one poems published for the first time posthumously. Our Chairman Dave O'Connell introduced Mary Cloake and Carol O'Brady, a member of the family of the late Conleth Ellis responded.

## Local History Workshop

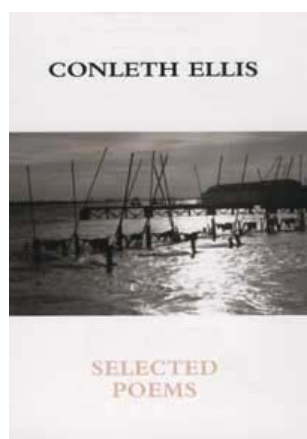
Dr. Patrick Murray combined with Dr. Harman Murtagh and Gearoid O'Brien to offer a workshop which was most helpful to participants interested in researching, writing and publishing local history. Between these three speakers, there was a deep well of experience for participants to draw on, and there were also some very helpful and interesting hand-outs.

## Early Radio

Aidan Mathews gave his audience a most interesting talk on early radio, and radio drama, and all embellished with sound-effects. Aidan, who has been a Radio Drama Producer with RTÉ since 1984, won an award on "Walking Out Together" in 2004.

## Poetry

Dr. Nerys Williams conducted a Work-shop which was greatly enjoyed by all who attended it, in spite of, or maybe because of the obligation placed on each participant to write and then read out a short poem - there and then! Nerys, who is a lecturer at UCD, specializes in Contemporary American Poetry and recent Anglo-Welsh poetry.



## Conleth Ellis

George Eaton chaired a session, which devoted its time to the works of this Carlow-born poet who, after working for some years in Belfast, came to live in Athlone and became a valued member of the community and a much-revered teacher at the Marist College.

Fred Johnston travelled over from Galway and gave the main paper focussing on Conleth's poetry in English but referring also to his published prose and poetry in Irish. His paper was

followed by a magnificent reminiscence of Conleth as an inspiring teacher given by Declan McCormack. Then Mel O'Flynn read 8 of the poems from Selected Poems.

### **Brian Leyden**

Brian made a return visit to our Festival and enchanted his audience with readings from his published work. This includes the Home Place a best-selling memoir, the short-story collection Departures, and his novel Death & Plenty.

### **Gabriel Fitzmaurice**

Gabriel travelled up from Moyvane in County Kerry to pay his first visit to our Festival. His audience found his reading of his own poems to be most moving and many will hope for a return visit. Gabriel, who is a former chairman of Listowel Writers Week, is also a singer and a musician.

### **Direct from the Authors Mouth**

While the Prince of Wales Hotel was the venue for the day-time events, on Saturday night the scene changed to the Dean Crowe Theatre where Myles Dungan introduced Deirdre Purcell, Patricia Scanlan and Claudia Carroll to a large audience. This event was undoubtedly a first for the Midlands - three of Ireland's top female writers on stage together telling their stories, talking about how they solved problems and overcame obstacles, all in response to gentle probing by Myles Dungan. After each of the three writers answered questions from Myles they then jointly took questions from the floor. It was an innovation - and an inspiration - and special thanks to One Direct for their sponsorship of this particular event.

### **Social Side**

Our 2005 event would not have been the success that it was without providing much opportunity for dialogue and networking. And these opportunities were provided in plenty. Both on Friday night after the visit to Athlone Castle, and again on Saturday in the Prince of Wales Hotel, at the Dean Crowe Theatre and after the Dean Crowe Theatre at a special late-night supper back in the Prince of Wales Hotel. This supper was a really enjoyable gathering - which many participants found it hard to leave.

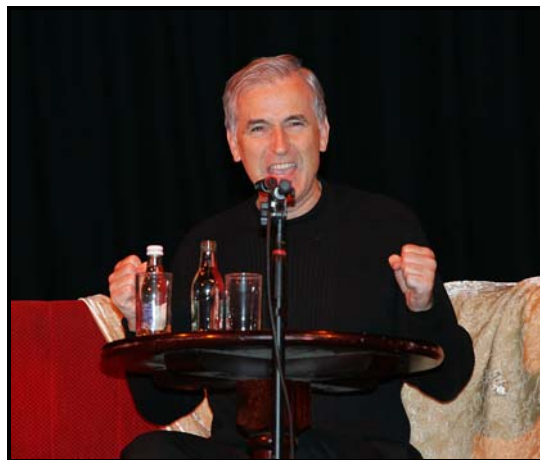
## Athlone Literary Festival 2005 Photo Gallery



Deirdre Purcell reads from her latest novel, *Watched* by fellow authors Claudia Carroll and Patricia Scanlan. Three of Ireland's top best-selling female writers.



RTE's award-winning drama producer Aidan Mathews explains the art of screenwriting at the Prince of Wales Hotel.



RTE's Myles Dungan – host of the One Direct-sponsored night with the authors – in full flow at the Dean Crowe Theatre.



Athlone's Holy Trinity of historians, Harman Murtagh, Gearoid O' Brien and Patrick Murray, during their workshop at the Prince of Wales Hotel, on how to research and compile history.



Declan Browne and Breffni Rowan at the Literary Festival opening in Athlone Castle.



Jean Farrell, Vera Hughes and Jacqueline O' Shea at the Literary Festival opening in Athlone Castle.



Mel O' Flynn and Maurice Collins at the Literary Festival opening in Athlone Castle.