



Laois Heritage Office Newsletter

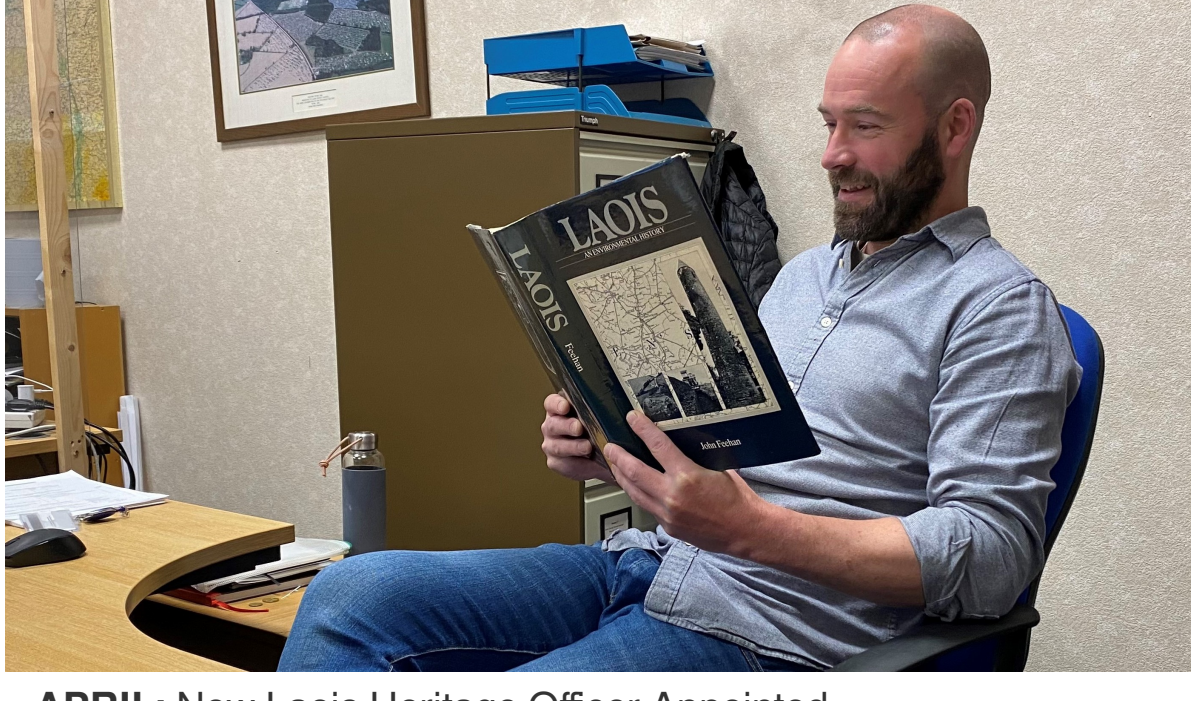
January 2024

Welcome to the Laois Heritage Office Newsletter – providing updates on heritage-related news, events and activities in Laois.

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A short summary of 2023...

Before jumping straight into 2024, this January newsletter will take a brief look back at some of the main heritage-related events and activities in Laois from last year.



APRIL: New Laois Heritage Officer Appointed

In April, Thomas Carolan was appointed as the new Heritage Officer for Laois. With a background in history and environmental management, Thomas brings a variety of experience to the role – having worked as an archaeologist, in environmental education, and most recently with LAWPPO – the Local Authority Waters Programme. “A diverse range of experience is very helpful as a Heritage Officer – from natural to built and cultural heritage, the scope of the role is broad and that’s what makes it so interesting!” – Thomas



MAY: National Biodiversity Week 2023 (19th – 28th May)

Events in Laois included: a ‘dusk chorus’ at Abbeylix Bog, and a photography display on the biodiversity of Abbeylix Bog in Abbeylix Library. Abbeylix Library also held a Biodiversity-themed family craft event - making ‘bug collage’. Wildlife photography featured again with a talk in Portlaoise library by award winning photographer Heather Rice on the techniques of capturing wildlife images, and also the benefits of nature as discussed in her book ‘Nature Photography Therapy’. In Camross there was an event examining the ecology of the high-quality water of the Little Delour River.



JUNE: Re-opening of Old St. Peter's Church and Graveyard

On 13th June Thomasina Connell, then Cathaoirleach of Laois County Council officially re-opened old St. Peter’s Church and Graveyard in Portlaoise. Significant work has been completed in recent years to restore the church and overall site, which had become very run down and overgrown.

Old St. Peter’s Church and Graveyard are intertwined with the very origins of Portlaoise, formerly Maryborough as a town. Not long after construction began on the original fort in the town around 1547, the church and graveyard were also constructed, sitting inside the town walls that developed around the fort (named ‘Fort Protector’ after Edward Seymour (Lord Somerset), brother-in-law of King Henry VIII). The fort and associated buildings such as old St. Peter’s Church constituted the beginning of the formalised plantation of Laois and Offaly.



Laois Heritage Week 2023 Laois Heritage Week 2023 Event Guide, 20th Century Architecture Walking Tour, Portlaoise, The Golden Ravens Viking re-enactment group, ‘Pick Your Own Sunflower Event’ in Heath House, and Laois Cricket club and Malthouse Tours, Stradally.

AUGUST: Heritage Week 2023

This year’s HW theme was ‘Living Heritage’. There was a wide range of events and activities in Laois for all ages showcasing the rich heritage of the county, from guided walks to open days, exhibitions, and talks on a variety of topics.

The winner of the Laois HW 2023 event was ‘20th Century Walking Tour of Portlaoise’ by John Beattie, Architectural Conservation Advisor, National Inventory of Architectural Heritage.

A printed Laois Events Guide was distributed to libraries around the county and a virtual version was available online. Click below to view.

Laois Heritage Week 2023 Event Guide



NOVEMBER: Annual Remembrance Ceremony Portlaoise

The annual remembrance ceremony for those who died in World War One and in subsequent conflicts around the world was held on Sunday 19th November 2023 in Portlaoise. A service of remembrance took place in St Peter’s Church of Ireland followed by a wreath laying ceremony at the War Memorial in Portlaoise where veterans and members of the public laid wreaths. Charlie Flanagan TD gave a speech.



(left), Cllr Padraig Fleming, John Mulholland CEO of Laois County Council, Cllr Paschal McEvoy Cathaoirleach Laois County Council, Thomas Carolan Laois Heritage Officer, Cllr Catherine Fitzgerald, David O’Hara Senior Planner Laois County Council.

DECEMBER: Laois Heritage Seminar, and Launch of the ‘Laois Heritage & Biodiversity Strategy 2021 – 2026’

On 2nd December the Laois Heritage Seminar took place in the Midlands Park Hotel in Portlaoise. With talks on recent heritage projects and activities in Laois, the event was very well attended and provided a great opportunity to share the work of the Laois heritage office with the wider community.

The event also provided the opportunity to officially launch the **Laois Heritage & Biodiversity strategy 2021 – 2026**. This strategy had been completed but but not previously published and formerly launched due to the Covid 19 pandemic.



DECEMBER: Book Launch Celebrating 25 years of the Heritage Officer Network

Project examples from around the country are featured in a new publication celebrating 25 years of the Heritage Officer Network, which was launched in the Newpark Hotel Kilkenny by Minister for Nature, Heritage and Electoral Reform Malcolm Noonan TD. The booklet is entitled: ‘**Opening the door to Ireland’s heritage: A collection of Local Authority Heritage Officer Projects**’. The project to restore Old St Peter’s Church & Graveyard, Portlaoise is featured for Laois.

[VIEW BOOKLET](#)



Conservation Grants & Community Monuments Fund

In 2023 the Laois Heritage Office continued to support the conservation of protected structures, vernacular buildings, and archaeological monuments through the administration of grants from the Department of Housing, Local Government, and Heritage. Community groups, private individuals and the County Council received funding towards the protection and conservation of heritage structures.

CONSERVATION GRANTS:

The Built Heritage Investment Scheme (BHIS) supports owners and custodians to protect and care for buildings on the Laois Record of Protected Structures.

The Historic Structures Fund (HSF) focuses on the conservation and enhancement of historic structures and buildings for the benefit of communities and the public.

The Community Monuments Fund (CMF)

CMF assists with conservation, research and interpretation of archaeological monuments by communities and private owners.

Applications for the 2024 grants are now closed. For more information on the grants if you are interested in applying next year click on the links below.

Community Monuments Fund

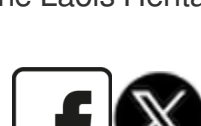
CONSERVATION GRANTS (HSF & BHIS)

Submissions sought for Laois Heritage Society Journal

Laois Heritage Society welcome the submission of articles for its 11th iteration of the Laois Heritage Journal. Submissions of approx. 3000 words on Laois Heritage, History, Archaeology, Folklore and more will be accepted for review no later than 28th of February 2024 (extended from 15th of January 2024).

Please forward submission to PRO Regina Dunne at laoisheritagewebsite@gmail.com

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