

Enhancing a precious legacy: County Meath Heritage Plan

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The County Meath Heritage Plan challenges all of us to become explorers and innovators in our own county. Our familiar Meath landscape is a splendid treasury of Ireland's heritage. Over the millennia Meath's natural environment has moulded our archaeology, architecture, languages, literatures, history, religions, folklore, placenames, music, song, dance, art and craft. Striking continuities in human experience exist between our most distant ancestors in Meath and society of the present day. From the mysterious spiritual resonance of Brú na Bóinne to Tara's symbolism of political sovereignty and freedom, Meath's heritage is at the heart of Irish national identity. This is a landscape which perpetually invites us on journeys of exploration: of geology, of history, of religion, of literature, of mythology and saga, of the elusive mysteries of creation itself.

Hence there was a general welcome for the decision of Meath Local Authorities to initiate the preparation of the first County Heritage Plan. The Meath Heritage Plan is of five-year duration and aims to identify, protect, manage and conserve the heritage of the county. A fundamental objective of the Heritage Plan is to enhance awareness, appreciation and enjoyment of the built, natural and cultural heritage of Meath.

The Meath Heritage Forum was instituted to undertake the preparation and implementation of the Plan. The Forum consists of representatives of organisations and groups involved with heritage in the county, with membership drawn from a wide range of sectors: local government, state agencies, farming bodies, educational institutions, community groups and heritage organisations, local development interests and business.

In preparation for the Plan, a programme of public consultation was undertaken by the Heritage Officer, Dr. Loreto Guinan. By means of an advertisement campaign in the media, the public were invited to make written submissions in which they could identify heritage issues and needs which they believed should be addressed in the Plan. In

addition, public consultation meetings on the Heritage Plan were also held in Ashbourne, Navan, Kells, Slane and Trim. At the conclusion of the public consultation phase the Forum divided into three separate working groups in order to focus on key dimensions of the heritage. These were: (I) Natural Environment, (II) Built Environment (including archaeology), and (III) Cultural Heritage and Education. Some additional people with specialist expertise who were not already on the Forum were then invited to join the working groups.

There was strong public response to the consultation process. The high number of participants at the public meetings was striking evidence of the deep engagement of the public with the matter of heritage. Written submissions on many aspects of the county's heritage were received from a wide range of individuals, either in their private capacities or on behalf of organisations. These submissions clearly demonstrated deep commitment and creative concern for heritage issues on the part of a wide spectrum of the population. Because contributions frequently came from people already actively involved in heritage bodies, the valuable work being conducted by such organisations throughout the county was made vividly apparent. Numerous positive and exciting initiatives have been flourishing in many communities in Meath. Hence it was clear that a firm foundation already existed upon which the Heritage Forum could build.

Analysis of the submissions revealed very strong public demand for greater provision of information about all aspects of the heritage. Crucial facilities such as archives, libraries, museums, publications, information technology, compilation of databases, improved signage and fuller use of the communications media were specified in relation to all three strands of working party endeavour, natural, built and cultural heritage. Allied to this was the vitally important issue of heritage education, particularly at primary and post-primary level, which was highlighted in many responses. A third major public concern related to maximising the beneficial effects of the work done by numerous groups throughout the county who are already involved in heritage activities. Meath is fortunate in having a wealth of voluntary community endeavour. Prominent initiatives currently include Kells Heritage Festival, Scurlogstown Olympiad, Féile Ríona in Summerhill, a wide variety of activities including Dámh na Mí, in Ráth Cairn and Baile Ghib, and the O'Carolan Harp, Cultural and

Heritage Festival in Nobber. On a county-wide scale the richly varied activities of Heritage Week embrace the public at large. Meath Archaeological and Historical Society also attracts widespread participation by the conduct of lectures and field-trips throughout the region and by its publication of *Ríocht na Midhe*. In addition, there are some very active local history and heritage societies, with notable examples in Ballinacree and Slane. Many individual parishes have researched, compiled and published valuable parish histories in response to the enlightened encouragement of Bishop Michael Smith: striking examples include Bohermeen, Kilsyre-Ballinlough, Kilclon and Oldcastle. Provision of support for the richly productive work of such groups was seen as a valuable investment in the community. Likewise there was concern at the lack of access to heritage and its benefits for newcomers to Meath, particularly in the rapidly expanding communities of the east and south of the county. Non-nationals might be excluded even more acutely. There was public demand, therefore, for the promotion of networking between organisations in order to facilitate the exchange and transfer of information and expertise. For instance, no structure exists at present which could facilitate the transfer of expertise and experience from the highly successful Moynalty Festival Committee to some other community wishing to embark upon a similar enterprise.

The three working groups established by the Forum considered these and many other issues raised in the public submissions. Key strategies emerged from detailed discussion and analysis and the components of a draft plan were gradually evolved. The individual findings of the three working groups were then combined into an overall structure. Central importance in this structure is given to four major strategic themes, namely:

- 1. Awareness and Education.**
- 2. Baseline Data and Information.**
- 3. Best Practice in Heritage Conservation and Management.**
- 4. Local Authority.**

Elaboration upon these themes is offered as follows:

1. Awareness and Education

The broad theme of heritage awareness and education embraces four major strategies.

- (a) Firstly there is the challenge of enhancing awareness and promoting public appreciation of all aspects of the heritage. To

this end a range of actions is identified which will have broad impact on the public consciousness. Maximum public involvement will be sought through promotion of the varied countywide activities of Heritage Week. A higher profile in the communications media will be sought for the unique heritage of Meath. Promotion of the Meath Heritage Plan itself will further amplify the public impact. For instance, an annual heritage day is envisaged when implementation of the Heritage Plan can be reported upon. Representatives of local communities throughout the county could make presentations on their own initiatives at such an event. Exhibitions to showcase particular projects would have graphic effect. The network of contacts and friendships fostered on the occasion could yield further creative initiatives. In addition, the creation of a readily recognisable logo for the Meath Heritage Plan would have broad public effect. Likewise, publication of a web-based directory of environment/heritage related material, regularly updated, would have wide public appeal and utility. Meath's heritage-inspired festivals have attained notable success and the Heritage Plan specifies encouragement and promotion of such valuable growth-points in the culture. Allied to this is the aim of fostering lecture programmes and talks on aspects of heritage.

The immensely valuable resource of the natural environment is of paramount importance for today's increasingly urbanised and sedentary society. A variety of initiatives is planned in this regard, including promotion of public participation in National Tree Week and National Tree Day; introduction of an annual event celebrating nature and wildlife, and the promotion, as part of Heritage Week, of sharper and more informed focus upon the geological environment.

The Native Woodland Scheme of the Forest Service will be promoted as a valuable help to landowners in the management and expansion of native woodland resources. Development of woodland amenities in and around villages through the NeighbourWood initiative of the Forest Service will also be encouraged. Promotion of Meath County Council's annual Pride of Place Harvest Walk Competition will also be sought. A series of high quality posters illuminating aspects of Meath's natural, built and cultural heritage will be produced.

(b) The second major strategy in the enhancement of public

awareness is to ensure access to the heritage for all. Among the actions planned is the exploration on a pilot basis, in cooperation with the Heritage Council, of a "Heritage in the Community" initiative, based on the Council's existing project, Heritage in Schools which has proved very successful. Also specified are measures for the improvement of interpretative signage at heritage sites and the further development of heritage trails in towns and villages, actions which would clearly improve public access. Promotion of heritage-based multicultural events is envisaged, to embrace more fully the growing diversity of population in Meath. Likewise, greater understanding of Traveller heritage and culture will be encouraged. Emphasis will be placed on the transmission of local heritage information through community fora activities, such as newsletters and meet-and-greet in local communities, with a view to enhancing ownership of the heritage for all residents, including newcomers to Meath. Voluntary involvement in the collection and circulation of heritage data and information will be encouraged and facilitated.

- (c) Education is clearly central to raising public awareness and is a vital component of the Heritage Plan. In the broadest sense, our entire environment, with all the living landscape and its myriad contents, constitutes our heritage. That heritage can be a powerful springboard for learning. But heritage, however, especially for the young, requires interpretation. And since every teacher is already a skilled interpreter, the role of education in extending young people's understanding of heritage is crucially important. Hence the Heritage Plan envisages cooperation with Navan Education Centre in the development of a heritage education and awareness programme aimed at teachers and students in primary and post primary schools. The successful "Heritage in Schools" scheme sponsored by the INTO and the Heritage Council will also be promoted. The feasibility of assisting heritage and cultural groups through provision of training and education courses will be explored with Meath VEC. Likewise, the provision of seminars and workshops to teach specific skills such as the proper recording of graveyard data, or the use of special building mortars will be explored. Meath's elected representatives and the staff of the county's Local Authorities obviously play a key role in relation to heritage and the Plan envisages the provision for them of in-service training on

heritage conservation and management. Development of links with third-level institutes, such as the History Department of NUI Maynooth and the Geography Department, UCD, will also be sought in order to advance study and research on Meath heritage at the most advanced level.

- (d) The Gaelic heritage of Meath and the Gaeltacht of Ráth Cairn and Baile Ghib are central to the fourth major strategy in the enhancement of public awareness. Meath is unique among the counties of Leinster in possessing a Gaeltacht. Ráth Cairn has already won national renown for its creative cultivation of heritage and resourceful cultural and economic development. The Heritage Plan recognises this and envisages support for Comharchumann Ráth Cairn and for Comhlacht Forbartha Bhaile Ghib, in response to numerous public submissions. North Meath had a flourishing Gaelic and bilingual tradition of poetry which continued late into the 19th century. Besides Turlough O'Carolan from Nobber the rollcall of poets includes Fr. Paul O'Brien, the first professor of Irish in Maynooth, from Cormeen, Hugh Mac Donnell, who wrote a philosophy, from Drumconrath, Peter Daly, Carnaross, James Tevlin, Moynalty, Patrick O'Brien, Grangegeeth, Liam Kearns, Oristown, Peter Coalrake and Michael Clarke, both of Nobber, and Peter Gallegan, the noted scribe, of Ardamagh, Kilmainhamwood. And since North Meath's rich literary and manuscript tradition in Irish is shared with South Ulster, including Armagh and Down, cross-border cooperation and funding will be sought in the promotion of this common heritage, in conjunction with such bodies as Foras na Gaeilge, Údarás na Gaeltachta and Éigse Oiriaila. Two selections of the Irish poetry of Meath were published early in the 20th century: *Duanaire na Midhe* (1914) by Seosamh Laoide and *Ambráin na Midhe* (1934) by Éinrí Ó Muirgheasa. These are long out of print and it is planned to revise and republish them. In addition, public submissions recorded concern for the authenticity of Meath placenames. Hence promotion of the Irish language generally is planned, particularly in the usage of placenames, including those of townlands and in new housing developments.

2. Baseline Data and Information

Accurate information on heritage is clearly vital for informed research and effective action. Hence the broad theme of baseline data and

information addresses this fundamental requirement. Three key strategies are specified:

- (a) To catalogue and collate existing heritage data is a basic aim. It is planned to audit and publicise existing heritage databases for built and natural heritage and to use this information to inform local authority decisions and also to initiate research projects. Further, a habitat map of Meath will be drawn up, based on those by Teagasc which indicate subsoil, soils, landcover, etc.
- (b) Surveys and research will be commissioned to fill gaps in heritage information. Hence, actions regarding County Meath Graveyard Project would seek: to conduct a desk-top audit of existing graveyards so as to create a full database; to make a digital photographic survey of graveyards; to map and record memorials; to collate and present data in an accessible format; and to provide advice to stakeholders on best practice in the care and conservation of graveyards. The Heritage Plan envisages the use of technology to develop an online photographic archive. Production of a heritage guide for every parish in the county, in association with Meath Partnership, is also proposed.

Likewise, an inventory of industrial heritage is planned and also the establishment of a register of those buildings at risk in the county. A survey of demesne landscape is envisaged, including an educational element and recommendations for control and development. A pilot study of historic landscape characterisation is proposed. Compilation of an inventory of proposed Architectural Conservation Areas is planned, including the development of related educational material. Actions outlined in relation to the natural environment involve production of a booklet on major habitat areas in Meath, compilation of a record and map of champion trees, significant mature trees, and woodlands in the county, as well as the conduct of an audit of geological heritage sites, in association with the Geological Survey of Ireland, and the conservation of important sites in the County Development Plan. Further actions envisage production of a series of information leaflets on bats, registration of bat records for Meath, and commissioning of four county-wide surveys of the natural heritage covering such features as hedgerows and eskers.

- (c) Dissemination of information on heritage is essential for public understanding and action. Plans in this regard specify the use of

information technology to record, preserve and present heritage data. Expansion and upgrading of Meath Heritage Website is planned. It is envisaged that heritage information collated through the Heritage Plan will be made available and accessible through Meath County Library Service. Also specified is the creation of a database of all Environmental Impact Statements and reports of archaeological excavation in the county and the availability of all such reports to the public. Compilation is planned of an architectural heritage information pack to community groups, owners of protected structures and Meath County Library. Wildlife and biodiversity information will be provided through production of 10 leaflets on these subjects. It is also envisaged that an explanatory booklet on the geology of Meath will be published and that best practice guidelines will be disseminated regarding the management and conservation of the county's hedgerows.

3. Best Practice in Heritage Conservation and Management

Since our environment and heritage constitute a finite and exhaustible resource, it is clearly vital that this precious communal asset should be conserved and managed to the highest standards. In this regard four central strategies are identified, as follows:

- (a) Enhancement of heritage resources will be sought through a variety of initiatives. A feasibility study of the future use of the old St. Patrick's Classical School in Navan is projected. Also envisaged is the establishment of a Local Publications Unit in partnership with relevant stakeholders, to commission, advise on, fund and promote the publication of material of local interest. Other plans include the establishment of the Boyne-Blackwater Valley Environment Heritage Trail, preparation of a Local Biodiversity Action Plan in consultation with concerned parties and the public, development of the Meath Coastal Environment Trail, and the establishment of a Meath Biological Records Resource. As the major constraint upon the implementation of the many measures in the Meath Heritage plan will be limitations of funding, it is proposed to supplement the modest financial resources available from Meath County Council and the Heritage Council by the establishment of the County Meath Heritage Fund which would seek support for the Heritage Plan from additional sources.
- (b) Enhancement of Meath's heritage assets will be sought through

partnerships with local communities and stakeholders. A network of heritage-related bodies in the county is planned, to promote cooperation between organisations and to target education and training. Partnership with the Boyne Navigation Restoration Group is envisaged, in their phased work programme for the Boyne Navigation and Towpath. Continuing support for local heritage projects is planned, according to the availability of resources, through the Amenity Levies Scheme and the Community Grants Scheme. Liaison and cooperation will be sought with other local authorities on mutual heritage issues. An urban tree-planting programme in partnership with Pride of Place and Tidy Towns committees is also envisaged.

- (c) Best practice models in the conservation and management of heritage will be sought in a variety of ways. It is planned to expand the Register of Traditional Buildings and Conservation Skills and Trades and to ensure that this is made available on the web. A guidance document on the illumination of historic properties is to be developed. Support for the Irish Walled Towns Network through the involvement of Trim is proposed. Guidance notes on the integration of heritage into new developments will be prepared for the assistance of developers, the local authority and the general public.
- (d) Landscape and heritage are of paramount importance as a resource for the cultural and economic development of communities in Meath. Accordingly, the most modern advances will be employed in generating a more profound appreciation of this finite endowment. The development of a visualisation tool using lidar data and aerial photography to aid rural planning and management will be undertaken in partnership with the Loughcrew Survey Team (University College Cork, Cambridge University and Swanton Consultancy). Further, the development and adoption of a pilot Landscape Conservation Area in Meath will be sought under the terms of section 204 of the Planning and Development Act, 2000.

4. Local Authority

Meath Local Authorities have an ever-expanding role in relation to management and conservation of the natural and cultural environment. The rapid population growth in Meath ensures that this role will be of growing importance for the foreseeable future. It is

clearly crucial that all housing, industrial and infrastructural development should be sustainable rather than be destructive of the quality of our environment. Hence the Heritage Plan proposes certain strategies in this regard.

- (a) Enhancement of the resources of Meath's Local Authorities in the management and conservation of the natural and cultural heritage must be a priority. Availability of informed advice based upon accurate information is a clear necessity. Hence information collated through the process of the Heritage Plan will be used to inform emerging Development and Local Area Plans.
- (b) The appointment of key heritage professionals to the staff of Local Authorities in Meath is required for the most effective implementation of key legislation and policy. The following appointments are specified:
 - (i) A Conservation Officer would have a key role. This would include compilation and updating of Records of Protected Structures and Conservation Areas for Co. Meath and the Town Councils of Navan, Kells and Trim; provision of comment on Planning Applications relating to Protected Structures; giving advice on conservation and restoration; supervision of the Architectural Grant Scheme for Protected Structures in Meath; and the formulation of policies and objectives relating to the built environment in County and Local Area Development Plans.
 - (ii) The Heritage Plan recognises the valuable work undertaken by the Regional Archivist employed by the County Councils of Meath, Kildare and Wicklow since 1998 in meeting the requirements of the Local Government Act, 1994, Section 80, which places the onus of archives management upon local authorities. A full-time Archivist for Co. Meath would devise a strategy to advance public awareness and education; develop appropriate policies for the acquisition, preservation (including storage), cataloguing, conservation and public inspection of archival material detailing all aspects of Meath life; ensure adequate accommodation for the archives (in accordance with strict archival standards) and provision for public inspection; promote and advertise archival exhibitions and such events as the annual Archival Awareness Month (September); develop a website dedicated to the archival enterprise in Meath, to show how the public may access

archival material, give notice of new collections available for public inspection, inform the general public about archival preservation and care, and give notice of relevant national events, conferences, etc.

- (iii) A Council Architect would have a vital advice and design role in relation to local authority housing. An architect would also have a planning role in development management and in commenting on applications. In forward planning, this officer would assist in preparation of design policies and give guidance in development plans, LAPS, framework plans, etc.
- (iv) A Biodiversity Officer would promote, manage and coordinate biodiversity and biodiversity-related activities in Meath; facilitate and manage the preparation of a County Biodiversity Plan; assist council departments in integrating Biodiversity into their actions and policies; provide advice on biodiversity matters; liaise with council officials, stakeholders, non-governmental organisations, official bodies and the general public on biodiversity matters; raise awareness of biodiversity and issues affecting biodiversity in Meath with a broad range of groups.
- (v) A Field Monuments Advisor would: monitor and report on the condition of ancient monuments within the geographical area of responsibility; liaise with monument owners and occupiers, local authorities, and other agencies on the condition of ancient monuments, advising them on appropriate management measures, including provision of general advice on the relevant agri-environment schemes; devise awareness and educational initiatives; and monitor and report on the progress of any works or management action affecting ancient monuments.

Conclusion

It was in response to the Government policy as outlined in the National Heritage Plan (2002) that the Meath Heritage Forum was convened and its Heritage Plan prepared. From the outset it must be understood that there are major financial constraints upon implementation of the full Heritage Plan. The Heritage Council because of its small budget, can approve of only a limited number of projects in any one year of the Plan. Funding for these is provided on

the basis of 75% from the Heritage Council and 25% from the Local Authority. It is also required that the operational budget provided by the Local Authority for the Heritage Plan should be of an amount equal to the Heritage Council grant award and be of a minimum of €30,000. This would allow some discretionary funding for the Heritage Officer for projects not funded by the Heritage Council.

Despite these limitations the Meath Heritage Plan represents an exciting new departure for heritage in Meath. The Meath Heritage Forum is representative of a broad range of interests in the county. The extensive public consultation conducted in the preparatory stages ensures that the Plan represents broad consensus in Meath. The comprehensive objectives formulated in the Plan and the identification of specific actions to achieve those objectives will help greatly to encourage active public engagement with heritage. Overall the Heritage Plan promises a significant infusion of fresh energy into the cultivation of Meath heritage. This will generate new initiatives and will also support and complement existing growth points in the culture.

Some of these existing heritage-inspired growth points are already highly successful and point the way towards what is possible. The O'Carolan Harp, Cultural and Heritage Festival in Nobber is a good example. It took its inspiration from the music of Turlough O'Carolan (1670 – 1738) who was a native of the parish. The magnetic appeal of the music rapidly generated enthusiasm and energy which, as the committee saw, could be harnessed for the enrichment of the community. To help enhance possession of the heritage, they initiated lectures and workshops on regional archaeology, history, music, architecture, folklore, bilingual poetry and on the significance and legacy of Turlough O'Carolan. Articles, videotapes and publications soon followed. Classes in Irish and historical tours of the area were sponsored. Local talent was encouraged as musicians, singers, dancers, artists, craft workers and photographers were encouraged to exhibit their skills.

A further striking innovation generated by the O'Carolan Festival was the foundation of the Meath Harp School. Ann Finnegan and her colleagues have done splendid work in developing this flourishing institution. The Harp School, in conjunction with *Cairde na Cruite*, provides expert tuition to young musicians from Co. Meath and beyond. Young performers from the Meath Harp School were soon taking All-Ireland titles. President Mc Aleese welcomed them to *Áras*

an Uachtaráin. Ann Finnegan's daughter, Dearbhail, a graduate of the school, is now an established professional harpist who has performed in the British House of Commons and for President Clinton in The White House. In the O'Carolan Festival then we have in miniature a striking embodiment of the pioneering self-help revivalism which shaped Irish culture in the early 20th century, and made traditional cultural forms central to national progress and self-realisation.

The Meath Heritage Plan specifies awareness and education as a priority and the work of the O'Carolan Festival is clearly a notable demonstration of the realisation of that goal. The Heritage Plan aims to give people fuller possession of the heritage. It sees the entire landscape and its heritage as a powerful springboard for learning. As we attend closely to it, the landscape comes alive with meaning. Much of Ireland's treasury of early and medieval literature is deeprooted in the living landscape of Meath. The landscape itself utters our history, in every hill, in every plain, in every river. Every panoramic view tells a tale, every place and every placename is invested with story or legend. In grasping these meanings our minds are led to deeper wonder. We unite the new insights with what we already know. This is the process of learning, of education, and it lights up the life we lead. A deeper, surer sense of belonging and cultural identity results. Our own place becomes, in the words of Nobel Laureate Seamus Heaney, "a country of the mind", which we possess more fully. The resulting shared sense of common identity and destiny enhances the community's cohesion and solidarity.

Meath Heritage Plan can therefore make a valuable contribution to the restoration of the heritage and the strengthening of cultural identity and cohesion in communities. Such vibrant community spirit is what sociologists term "social capital", that is the wealth or spirit of solidarity and fellowship which enables people to cooperate positively for the common good. Professor Robert Putnam of Harvard University writes that communities with high social capital have lower crime rates, more effective schools, better adjusted children and more socially concerned adults than those distressed communities where the fabric of society has unravelled.

The Heritage Plan in its aspiration towards raising awareness and providing education seeks to meet the universal need of the individual to understand, to learn and to achieve. It then aims to integrate and ground this need in the community's environment and culture. Hence the Heritage Plan offers a stabilising vision to communities in Meath

at a time when the county is in rapid transition from a rural to an urban society. Such sudden societal change carries the risk of alienation, of disintegration and the breakdown of communities. The destabilising lack of cultural heritage and loss of cultural identity in such situations may be further exacerbated by the debilitating impact of globalising, homogenous mass culture which entirely discounts the integrity of the local.

The Meath Heritage Plan aims to fortify in the face of such negative forces. It seeks to counter the experience of loss and dispossession identified by Seamus Heaney who observed, in rueful agreement with fellow-poet John Montague, that "The whole of the Irish landscape is a manuscript which we have lost the skill to read."¹ The Heritage Plan seeks to restore and enhance the manuscript of our physical and cultural landscape. Ultimately what it proposes is a revision, in the sense of seeing again what our heritage is, seeing anew the authentic Meath landscape, at the heart of Ireland. It was just such an act of creative repossession that generated the Irish Literary Renaissance, in the work of Douglas Hyde, W.B. Yeats, J.M. Synge and Lady Gregory in the early twentieth century. W.B. Yeats in his acceptance speech to the Royal Swedish Academy, upon winning the Nobel Prize in 1923, emphasised the debt of Anglo-Irish literature to the heritage of the people. Speaking of the inspiration shared with him by Lady Gregory of Coole Park, Co. Galway, he said "All about her lived a peasantry who told stories in a form of English which has much of its syntax from Gaelic, much of its vocabulary from Tudor English, but it was very slowly that we discovered in that speech of theirs our most powerful dramatic instrument...". He goes on to say of the Abbey Theatre plays that "their subject-matter differed but little from the subject-matter of the country stories."²

Heritage and tradition then, for Yeats and his fellow-writers, operated as a stimulus and an inspiration rather than as a barrier. The true barrier to balanced progress for society is loss of heritage and the consequent experience of alienation and rootlessness. The Meath Heritage Plan offers a vision of sustainable progress. It seeks to refurbish our traditions and to afford society the fullest possession of the heritage, through empowering the county's organisations and communities. The resulting cultural fulfilment and self-possession will enhance the quest for true autonomy and authenticity, the ultimate liberation of the individual and the community. In the final

analysis, what the Meath Heritage Plan offers is an enhancement of our freedom as citizens – freedom of the individual and of the community, the precious prize both of education and democracy.

References

- 1 Seamus Heaney, *Preoccupations* (London: Faber and Faber, 1980), p.132.
- 2 W.B. Yeats, *Autobiographies* (London: Macmillan, 1973), p.560.