

Library Job Swop with Kildare Library and Arts Service, Local Studies Section, Newbridge

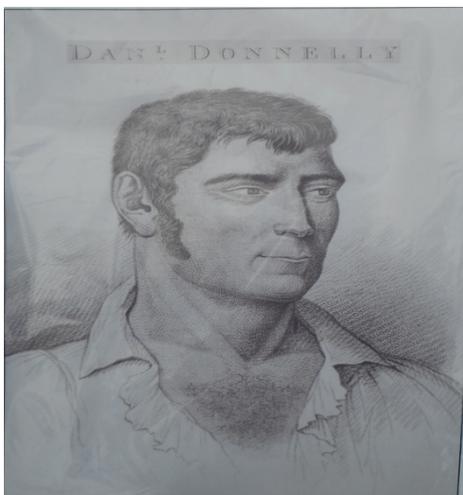
On Friday 13th November 2015, as part of the Library Ireland Week Job Swop initiative, I spent a very pleasant and interesting day with Kildare Library and Arts Services - Local Studies Section in Newbridge. I was met by Mario Corrigan, the local studies librarian and later by James Durney Writer in Residence for 2015/16. James' book *Foremost and ready: Kildare and the 1916 Rising* was launched in Naas Town Hall on the 20th November 2015. Mario invited me to view the Teresa Brayton Archive which was lent to Maynooth University in 2014 to mount an exhibition on local poet and nationalist Teresa Brayton. Later in the morning pupils from the local school attended a talk by Mario on their topics for Leaving Cert history. Mario and James advised them on the use of primary

sources and also how to narrow the focus of their projects.



After lunch we drove to Donnelly's Hollow in the Curragh to commemorate the 200th year anniversary of the famous boxing match between George Cooper and Dan Donnelly which took place on the 13th November 1815. A good crowd assembled around the stone memorial and Mario laid a wreath. Representatives of local history groups assembled which also included some schoolgirls who read a short piece about Dan Donnelly and the fight. Twenty thousand people packed themselves into this natural amphitheatre in 1815 which had a ring roped in the hollow for

the fighters. As bare knuckle fighting was illegal the fight was held at 8.00am and the crowd was somewhat shielded from the view of the authorities. These fights were brutal affairs with little adherence to any rules. Fights could last up to fifty rounds and usually only ended when one of the opponents was so injured or exhausted they could no longer continue. Gambling was a significant feature of these events.



Dan Donnelly won the fight and walked back up to the rim of the hollow to a waiting carriage. He had promised his family he would return immediately after the fight. His fanatical followers carved out his footsteps and they have been maintained ever since. Mario said a few words and then invited Patrick Myler to speak. Patrick wrote a biography on Dan Donnelly in 1976 titled *Dan Donnelly 1788-1820: pugilist, publican, playboy*; this was updated in 2010. Patrick took lots of questions and despite the inclement weather a lively discussion ensued. Brian Byrne whose family owned the 'Hideout' in Kilcullen which for many years displayed Dan Donnelly's arm over the fireplace also added significant pieces of information. Mario then invited the group back to the

Library for some refreshments and a presentation on Dan Donnelly's life. A film producer also attended the event with the possibility of a film on Dan Donnelly at some future date. Dan Donnelly

had a reputation as a gambler, womanizer and a drunkard. He was the proprietor of a succession of Dublin pubs all of which were unprofitable. He died aged 32 in 1820. Grave robbers stole his body for an eminent surgeon who was later prevailed upon to part with it. He did so with the condition he could keep his right arm. The Byrne family secured possession of the arm and it finally made its way back to the 'Hideout' in Kilcullen in the 1950's.



It was a privilege to be part of this event and although I grew up having an awareness of Dan Donnelly I learned so much more about him and why it was important for ordinary and poor people to have a hero to celebrate. Local Studies in Newbridge work with local groups to mark events and people who have made a contribution to the fabric of Kildare life. At the moment they are busy with the Decade of Commemorations in Kildare which is celebrating the efforts of Kildare people in the fight for Irish freedom.

The job swap was a very interesting and informative experience.

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