Role of the County Donegal Heritage Office
The main aspects of the role of the County Donegal Heritage Office are to:
- Raise awareness of County Donegal’s cultural, built and natural heritage;
- Provide advice and information on heritage matters to the public and Donegal County Council staff;
- Collect data and conduct research on aspects of County Donegal’s heritage;
- Promote best practice in relation to heritage matters;
- Prepare and implement the County Donegal Heritage Plan in conjunction with the County Donegal Heritage Forum; and
- Manage the County Donegal Heritage Office and County Donegal Heritage Forum administration, budgets and publicity.

European Year of Cultural Heritage
The theme for the European Year of Cultural Heritage (2018) in Ireland was ‘Make a Connection’ and was coordinated by The Heritage Council and Local Authority Heritage Officers. The County Donegal Heritage Officer was part of an Irish heritage delegation that visited the European Commission in Brussels, Belgium in early June. The purpose of the two-day visit was to increase understanding of European institutions and structures as they relate to the management of cultural heritage. The visit included meetings with various Directorates of the European Commission, a presentation on the work of Heritage Officers, visits to several European Commission institutions and a meeting with MEPs. The delegation also included other Local Authority Heritage Officers, Heritage Council staff, museum curators and staff from natural, built and cultural heritage organisations across the country. Donegal County Council also implemented a European Year of Cultural Heritage grants scheme as part of the implementation of the Culture & Creativity Strategy for County Donegal (Action 3.8) and the County Donegal Heritage Plan (Action 3.8). Fourteen grants of €1,500 were made available to support activities or works relevant to ‘making a connection’ with our cultural, built or natural heritage in County Donegal. The funding was provided through the ‘Creative Ireland’ programme which was supported by the Department of Culture, Heritage & the Gaeltacht and Donegal County Council.

Heritage Officers from Donegal, Sligo, Offaly, Westmeath, Clare & Wicklow were among an Irish heritage delegation that visited the European Commission in Brussels, Belgium in early June. The delegation also included Heritage Council staff, museum curators and staff from natural, built and cultural heritage organisations across the country.

Siobhán Ryan, County Sligo Heritage Officer and Joseph Gallagher, County Donegal Heritage Officer, pictured with Marian Harkin MEP on a recent visit to the European Commission in Brussels, Belgium.
Audit of Columban Cultural Heritage
The Audit of Columban Cultural Heritage was a partnership initiative between Donegal County Council, Derry City & Strabane District Council, Foras na Gaeilge & The Heritage Council as part of the implementation of the County Donegal Heritage Plan (Action 5.19) and the Culture & Creativity Strategy for County Donegal (Action 4.2). The aims of the audit were to (i) conduct audit and mapping of heritage sites, objects and archives associated with St. Colmcille; (ii) highlight conservation works required to the archaeological and built heritage associated with St. Colmcille; (iii) identify historical and heritage venues associated with, or near heritage sites associated with, St. Colmcille capable of hosting events as part of the 2021 commemorations; (iv) identify history and heritage groups and individuals, their mission statements and their role in the preservation, conservation and promotion of the cultural, built and natural heritage associated with St. Colmcille; (v) highlight links between the material culture associated with St. Colmcille and aspects of folklore, folk traditions, language, placenames and intangible cultural heritage; and (vi) deliver a report, database and two public presentations on the audit’s findings. The audit, undertaken by Abarta Heritage, will assist in planning for forthcoming commemorations of the 1,500th anniversary of St. Colmcille’s birth in 2021. The audit will provide essential baseline information for identifying key aspects of Columban cultural heritage, key stakeholders and resources/opportunities for commemoration.

Condition Survey of Historic Graveyards
There are 50 historic graveyards in the care of Donegal County Council and most of them are included in the Record of Monuments and Places and protected under the National Monuments Acts (1930-2004). The condition survey will inform the on-going management of these heritage sites and may highlight opportunities for the implementation of best conservation practice measures that will benefit the natural, built and cultural heritage at these sites (Heritage Plan Action 2.11). The aims of this survey were to (i) visit each of the 50 historic graveyards in the guardianship of Donegal County Council and record the condition and maintenance of the archaeological, built and natural heritage; (ii) compile a base map, datasheet and photographic record of the condition of the graveyard highlighting possible maintenance and conservation issues; (iii) identify, and liaise with, history and heritage groups and individuals involved in the recording, maintenance and conservation of the heritage in these historic graveyards; and (iv) compile a report that summarises the maintenance and heritage conservation issues in these historic graveyards and suggest conservation priorities. The condition survey was an action of the County Donegal Heritage Plan (Action 2.11) and was undertaken by John Cronin & Associates.
Ballybogan historic graveyard in Churchtown townland in Stranorlar Municipal District is one of 12 historic graveyards in the guardianship of Donegal County Council that underwent habitat assessment and mapping. A badger sett has been established at the site and Japanese Knotweed, an invasive species, is present in the vicinity.

Habitat Assessments & Mapping of Historic Graveyards
As well as containing significant archaeological and built heritage, historic graveyards provide important habitats for our wildlife. The habitat assessments and mapping of 12 historic graveyards in the guardianship of Donegal County Council will inform the on-going management of these heritage sites and will highlight opportunities for the implementation of best conservation practice measures that will benefit the natural heritage at these sites. Aulino Wann & Associates was commissioned by Donegal County Council to undertake these habitat assessments as part of the implementation of the County Donegal Heritage Plan (Action 2.11) and the National Biodiversity Action Plan. The aims of the habitat assessments and mapping were to: (i) record, map and assess the habitats and natural heritage in 12 historic graveyards in the guardianship of Donegal County Council; (ii) produce a base map, datasheet and photographic record of the natural heritage of each graveyard highlighting possible maintenance and conservation issues; (iii) liaise with Donegal County Council staff, local community groups and individuals involved in the recording, maintenance and conservation of the heritage in these historic graveyards; (iv) compile a report that summarises the natural heritage and conservation issues in these historic graveyards and suggest conservation priorities; and (v) deliver a report, mapping, database and presentation on the study’s findings. Part-funding of €6,930 was secured from the National Parks & Wildlife Service to undertake this work.

Heritage Maps Initiative
The ‘Heritage Maps’ initiative is a partnership between The Heritage Council and local authorities which allows the public to access and view heritage data by area. The County Donegal Heritage Office is working with the GIS Section of Donegal County Council on an on-going basis to submit information for County Donegal to this initiative. The ‘Heritage Maps’ viewer contributes to the achievement of Action 4.3 in the County Donegal Heritage Plan and can be accessed at: www.heritagemaps.ie

Tír Chonaill Stone Festival
As part of the implementation of the County Donegal Heritage Plan (Action 2.1), Donegal County Council provided support for the Tír Chonaill Stone Festival (Friday, June 22 – Sunday, June 24) in Mountcharles organised by the Dry Stone Wall Association of Ireland. They undertook the repair of a dry-stone wall along the shore with the help of stonemasons and voluntary labour from all over Ireland and further afield.

Repair of dry-stone wall along the shorefront in Mountcharles that was undertaken as part of the Tír Chonaill Stone Festival.
Traditional Shopfronts & Vernacular Signage Seminar
Eighty people attended the free ‘Traditional Shopfronts & Vernacular Signage’ seminar in the Events Centre, Central Library, Letterkenny on Saturday, November 10 as part of the implementation of the County Donegal Heritage Plan (Action 2.4) organised by the County Donegal Heritage Office, Donegal County Council in association with the Letterkenny ‘Tidy Towns’ Committee and The Heritage Council. The aims of the free seminar were to raise awareness and appreciation of traditional shopfronts and vernacular signage in towns and villages in County Donegal and to provide information and advice in order to encourage their preservation, conservation and enhancement. There were illustrated presentations by expert guest speakers including Duncan McLaren (Conservation Architect, Dedalus Architecture), Collette Beattie (Conservation Officer, Donegal County Council), Cllr. Seamus Ó Domhnaill (Cathaoirleach, Donegal County Council), Anne McGowan (Chairperson, Letterkenny Tidy Towns Committee), Ronan O’Donnell (Project Officer, Walled City Partnership, Derry) and Trevor Finnegan (Revert Design). The seminar was opened by Cllr. Seamus Ó Domhnaill, Cathaoirleach, Donegal County Council and Anne McGowan, Chairperson, Letterkenny ‘Tidy Towns’ Committee.

‘Learning Through Landscape’ Teachers’ Continuing Professional Development Course
The Donegal Education Centre, National Parks & Wildlife Service, Inland Fisheries Ireland and the County Donegal Heritage Office organised a ‘Learning Through The Landscape’ Continuing Professional Development Course for Primary Teachers in Glenveagh National Park from Monday, July 2 until Friday, July 6. The course was sanctioned by the Department of Education & Skills and was fully subscribed again this year (25 primary teachers). Themes addressed related to the primary curriculum and included reading the landscape and habitats (such as rivers and bogs) as well as transferable skills such as using maps, surveying, fieldwork and GIS. As part of the implementation of the County Donegal Heritage Plan (Action 4.14), the County Donegal Heritage Office sponsored the participation of ecologist, author and broadcaster Éanna Ni Lamhna who delivered a training day on bogs as habitats and contributed towards the provision of teaching materials.
National Heritage Week in County Donegal

National Heritage Week took place from August 18 – 26 and was a tremendous success. ‘Heritage Week’ is coordinated by The Heritage Council and Local Authority Heritage Officers and, as 2018 was the European Year of Cultural Heritage, people were encouraged to ‘make a connection’ with their natural, built and cultural heritage. There were over 120 events taking place for ‘Heritage Week’ in County Donegal with over 20 events organised or hosted by the Culture Division, Donegal County Council. County Donegal was the county with the most events taking place in Ireland per head of population again this year. Credit for the success of ‘Heritage Week’ in County Donegal must go to over 80 groups and many individuals who organised events and the communities that supported them. The County Donegal Heritage Office, Culture Division produced 6,000 copies of the highly-popular, pocket-sized ‘County Donegal Heritage Week Event Guide’ and it was launched by Cllr. Seamus Ó Domhnaill, Cathaoirleach, Donegal County Council on Tuesday, August 7 in Glenveagh National Park. Heritage Week events received coverage on several local radio stations and extensive coverage in the local press and social media.

Conservation Report on St. Colmcille’s Chapel, Gartan

The County Donegal Heritage Office commissioned Dedalus Architecture to prepare a conservation report on St. Colmcille’s Chapel in Gartan, an archaeological monument (DG044-017005-) protected under the National Monuments Acts. Local heritage groups had expressed concern about the condition of the structure and would like to ensure that the structure is appropriately conserved by the 1,500th anniversary of the birth of St. Colmcille in 2021. The local community groups will be able to use the conservation report to leverage funding for conservation works to the structure over the next couple of years. The report contributes to the achievement of Action 2.5 in the County Donegal Heritage Plan.
About 100 people attended the launch of ‘Scéaltaí: The 1930s Schools’ Manuscript Collection in County Donegal’ booklet in Dooish National School, Ballybofey on Tuesday, October 9. In 1937-1938, the Irish Folklore Commission, in collaboration with the Department of Education and the Irish National Teachers’ Organisation, initiated a revolutionary scheme in which schoolchildren were encouraged to collect and document folklore, material culture, heritage and local history. Over a period of eighteen months, over 50,000 children in 5,000 primary schools in twenty-six counties were encouraged to collect folklore material in their home districts on themes such as local history and monuments, folktales and legends, riddles and proverbs, songs, customs and beliefs, games and pastimes, traditional work practices and crafts. As part of the implementation of the County Donegal Heritage Plan (Action 4.1), Dr. Eithne Ní Gallchobhair of the Royal Irish Academy was commissioned to research and write this free, A5-size, 56-page booklet which is the fourth in the ‘Donegal Heritage Series’ published by the County Donegal Heritage Office, Donegal County Council in association with The Heritage Council. The booklet was launched by Dr. Criostóir Mac Carthaigh, Director of the National Folklore Collection, UCD in the presence of Cllr. Seamus Ó Domhnaill, Cathaoirleach, Donegal County Council. Copies of the Scéaltaí booklet are available free-of-charge from the County Donegal Heritage Office, the Donegal Education Centre or your local library. It is also available on-line on the County Donegal Heritage Office website at: www.donegalcoco.ie/heritage

3D Photogrammetry of Turas Cholmcille
Turas Cholmcille is a three-mile pilgrimage route with 15 stations in Gleann Cholm Cille, County Donegal. Most of these stations (places for prayer and devotion) are archaeological monuments protected under the National Monuments Acts (1930-2004). The turas is observed on June 9 each year which is the feast day of St. Colmcille. It takes around three hours to complete and, historically, the turas was performed by barefoot pilgrims at midnight on the eve of June 9. The County Donegal Heritage Office, Donegal Council Council commissioned Digital Heritage Age to conduct 3D photogrammetry of the 15 stations of Turas Cholmcille to generate 3D digital models of the turas stations at Glencolmcille suitable for integration with web and virtual / augmented reality experiences. The work assisted in the recording, and improving the accessibility, of the turas to locals, visitors and pilgrims. The 3D photogrammetry contributes to the achievement of Action 4.3 in the County Donegal Heritage Plan and was funded by Donegal County Council as part of the Creative Ireland programme.
The Look-Out Post at St. John’s Point, County Donegal is one of 83 look-out posts erected around the coast of Ireland during the Second World War.

The Look-Out Post at St. St. John’s Point, County Donegal provides panoramic views of the natural, built and cultural heritage of the peninsula and the south Donegal coast.

Conservation Report on Look-Out Post, St. John’s Point
The Look-Out Post at St. John’s Point is one of 83 such structures erected at strategic locations around the coast of Ireland between 1939 and 1942 in response to the need to protect Ireland’s neutrality during the Second World War. The Look-Out Post is included in the National Inventory of Architectural Heritage (40909729) and is considered to be of regional significance and eligible to the Record of Protected Structures. The structure also sits on top of a cairn, an archaeological monument (DG097A005----) protected under the National Monuments Acts (1930-2004). The Look-Out Post was designated as No. 70, and this number and ‘Eire’ are set out in painted stones on the prominent headland. The Look-Out Post has been vacant and derelict for many years but has the potential to provide visitors to this heritage and scenic area with a sheltered space where interpretation materials can be presented. In partnership with Dunkineely Community Limited and the landowner, the County Donegal Heritage Office and the Conservation Office, Donegal County Council commissioned Consarc Design to prepare a conservation report on the Look-Out Post at St. John’s Point to include survey drawings and photographs; structural assessment; condition report; specification, schedule and costings for conservation works; archaeological impact assessment and preparation of consent documentation for the National Monuments Service in relation to the proposed conservation works. The conservation report will be used to leverage funding for conservation works to the structure over the next couple of years. The report contributes to the achievement of Action 2.5 in the County Donegal Heritage Plan and was funded by Donegal County Council as part of the Creative Ireland programme.

Thatched houses, such as this former extended farmstead just outside Malin Town, may benefit from the proposed Thatch Repair Grant Scheme.

Thatch Repair Grant Scheme – Framework Document
The Conservation Office & the County Donegal Heritage Office, Donegal County Council commissioned thatch specialist Dr. Fidelma Mullane to prepare a framework document for a pilot Thatch Repair Grant Scheme to be initiated in 2019. The purpose of the framework document was to (i) outline the methods of thatching in County Donegal and their distribution; (ii) describe common problems and ‘fixes’/repairs; (iii) identify a strategy and produce guidance to assess and undertake small-scale repairs; and (iv) produce guidelines for the implementation of a pilot Thatch Repair Grant Scheme. The preparation of the framework document contributes to the achievement of Actions 2.5 & 3.8 in the County Donegal Heritage Plan and was funded by Donegal County Council as part of the Creative Ireland programme.
Heritage Training & Development Programme
Heritage Officers from around the country were in County Donegal for one of their two-day Heritage Training & Development Programme sessions from Tuesday, June 12 – Thursday, June 14. There was a welcome reception in Teach Mhící Mhic Gabhann, Doire Chonaire on Tuesday evening with members of Togra Fiontar agus Cultúr Uladh, vernacular architecture specialist Dr. Fidelma Mullane, storyteller Dr. Eithne Ní Ghallchóibhír and poet Cathal Ó Searcaigh. The Heritage Training & Development Programme was held in the Public Services Centre in Dungloe (Wednesday, June 13) and in Leabharlann Phobail Ghaoth Dobhair, Na Doirí Beaga (Thursday, June 14). The visit also included site visits to traditional houses in Loughanure, Derrydruel, Meenacross & Falchorrib. The theme of the training was vernacular architecture conservation.

Traditional Boats Collection of Illustrations
Donegal County Council received a donation of 44 framed drawings of traditional boats of Ireland by Donal Mac Polin (Action 3.7). The collection has been lodged with the Donegal County Archives and will be exhibited in the Donegal County Museum in the near future.

Gabriel Montgomery Historic Maps
As part of the implementation of the County Donegal Heritage Plan (Action 5.14), Donegal County Council provided part-funding for the acquisition of Gabriel Montgomery historic, pre-Rutland survey maps (1780s) to support Burtonport Heritage Group crowd-funding initiative. The original maps have now been lodged with the Donegal County Archives.

Pictured at Teach Mhicí Mhic Gabhann, Derryconnor, Magheraroarty are a group of visiting Heritage Officers and Heritage Council staff, members of Togra Fiontar agus Cultúr Uladh, Dr. Fidelma Mullane, Dr. Eithne Ní Ghallchóibhír, Cathal Ó Searcaigh, Donegal County Council staff and County Donegal Heritage Forum members.
‘Tidy Towns’ Local Authority Pollinator Award

Since 2016, Local Authority Heritage Offices & Biodiversity Offices in partnership with the National Biodiversity Data Centre have sponsored an annual Local Authority Pollinator Award as part of the ‘Tidy Towns’ competition. The focus of the award is on biodiversity and the crucial role that the declining population of Irish bees play in the pollination of our plants, trees and vegetables. The award encourages local groups to implement pollinator-friendly actions in their towns and villages. There is an annual prize of a national winner and four regional award winners in two categories (each prize is €1,000). The award contributes to the achievement of the All-Ireland Pollinator Plan and Action 1.2 in the County Donegal Heritage Plan. There was a great response again this year with 67 applications nationwide from 22 counties. For the second year in a row, Buncrana Tidy Towns has won the regional ‘Tidy Towns’ Local Authority Pollinator Award for the North West & West Region in the Large Town Category for its pollinator project. The winners were announced at the National Tidy Towns Awards in The Helix, Dublin City University on Monday, September 24.

‘Connecting with Letterkenny’s Historic Streetscape’ Culture Night Event

As part of ‘Culture Night’, the County Donegal Heritage Office hosted a built heritage walk in Letterkenny with Colm Murray, Architecture Officer with The Heritage Council on Friday, September 21 (Heritage Plan Action 1.1). The short walking tour entitled ‘Connecting with Letterkenny’s Historic Streetscape’ encouraged participants to explore the town’s historic buildings and streetscapes, and in the European Year of Cultural Heritage to ‘make a connection’ with its built heritage. Drawing on the stories these buildings tell, built heritage archives and historical photographs, Colm identified clues to the development of Letterkenny’s built environment.

‘Birds & Wildlife of Tory Island’ Brochure

In partnership with BirdWatch Ireland, the County Donegal Heritage Office sponsored the updating of the ‘Birds & Wildlife of Tory Island’ brochure as part of the implementation of the County Donegal Heritage Plan (Actions 4.1 & 1.7). The brochure was originally produced in 2008 and has proved to be very popular with visitors to the island.
‘Creative Habitats’ Workshops for Children

Wainfest is Donegal County Council’s Cultural Services Arts, Heritage and Book Festival for Children. In association with the County Library Service, the County Donegal Heritage Office sponsored Éanna Ni Lamhna to undertake ‘Creative Habitats’ Workshops for Children in Buncrana, Bundoran, Carndonagh, Falcarragh & Gaoth Dobhair on October 9, 10 & 11. At the workshops, pupils got the chance to explore the trees, flowers, birds and creepy crawlies to be found on their own doorsteps. Some of the workshops included a fieldtrip to a local habitat where children used umbrellas, nets, pooters and jars to catch, study and release the wildlife they encountered in their own ‘wild’ places. Éanna is the author of Wild Things at School, a member of the panel on the RTÉ Mooney Goes Wild radio programme and the wildlife expert on The Six O’ Clock Show on TV3. The events were part-funded under the County Donegal Heritage Plan (Action 3.7).

Joint Committee on Culture, Heritage & the Gaeltacht

The County Donegal Heritage Officer was part of a delegation from the Local Authority Heritage Officer Network and The Heritage Council to present to the Joint Committee on Culture, Heritage & the Gaeltacht on Wednesday, November 14 in Leinster House, Dublin. The delegation included Shirley Clerkin (County Monaghan Heritage Officer & Chairperson of the Local Authority Heritage Officer Network), Michael Starrett (Chief Executive of The Heritage Council), Marie Bourke (member of the Board of The Heritage Council), Helene O’Keeffe (Communications Officer with The Heritage Council) and Joseph Gallagher (County Donegal Heritage Officer). Issues addressed included the role of Local Authority Heritage Officers, the preparation of the new National Heritage Plan, the implementation of the new Heritage Council Strategy, the expansion of local authority heritage services and the establishment of an Assistant Heritage Officer Programme. The proceedings of this meeting of the Joint Committee for Culture, Heritage & the Gaeltacht can be viewed on-line at: https://www.oireachtas.ie/en/debates/debate/joint_committee_on_culture_heritage_and_the_gaeltacht/2018-11-14/
Culture & Creativity Strategy (2018-2022)

Culture embraces arts, heritage, traditional ways-of-life, folklore, Irish language, environment and creative industries in their broadest sense. The Creative Ireland Programme is a government initiative that envisages that every person living in Ireland will have the opportunity to fully realise his or her creative potential. Each local authority in Ireland prepared a Culture and Creativity Strategy that reflects the overall structure and aims of the national strategy for culture and creativity. In particular, local authorities are charged with implementing Pillar II of the Creative Ireland programme which is ‘Enabling Creativity in Every Community’. The strategy addresses how creative approaches and imaginative thinking can make our culture better understood, fully appreciated, more engaging, widely practiced, more relevant, promote best practice, support jobs, attract visitors and/or deliver what is needed locally. The Culture & Creativity Strategy for County Donegal was launched along with all the county strategies at the national launch in the Irish Architectural Archive in Merrion Square, Dublin on Wednesday, September 12. The Heritage Officer represented Donegal County Council at the launch.

Compiled by:
Joseph Gallagher
County Donegal Heritage Office
January 2019

Pictured at the national launch of the County Culture & Creativity Strategies outside the Irish Architectural Archive in Merrion Square, Dublin on Wednesday, September 12 are representatives from every local authority in Ireland. The Heritage Officer represented Donegal County Council at the launch.