

BirrNews

High praise from scholars for Birr man's book

Derek Fanning

HIGH praise was offered by a number of scholars for a Birr man's book and lecture during an online event organised by the Manchester Law Centre last week.

Jim Houlihan delivered a fascinating lecture during the zoom event about his acclaimed book on the Law of Adomnán, following which a number of respected authorities on legal and historic matters praised him for the hard work which he invested in the book and for bringing to light much important and intriguing information.

Jim's book is called "Adomnán's Lex Innocentium and the Laws of War" and it was published during the summer. It examines one of the most notable events to have happened during the history of Birr; some would say that it is the most notable event in the town's history.

The book tells the story of Lex Innocentium, also called the Law of the Innocents or Cáin Adomnáin. In one early source, the Law is referred to as "The Great Law of Birr". It was a groundbreaking law (foreshadowing, some would say, the Geneva Conventions) which sought to protect civilians in time of war. There was a decent impulse, an

enlightened ideology, behind the Law which remains as relevant today as it was in the year of its enactment, 697AD

Jim dedicated his book, "To the people of Birr, from this generation to future generations, about something remarkable that happened in their native place many generations ago. To the people of Ireland, so they may learn of one of the great treasures of their heritage. To the custodians of the Geneva Conventions, so they might know of and be inspired by one who went before them."

Jim is a former state solicitor and retired member of local law firm, D.A. Houlihan & Son. In 1997 he and a committee organised a superb weekend of events to mark the 1300th anniversary of the enactment of the Law in Birr. Following his retirement he completed an MA and PhD on the Law, which he later adapted into his book.

During last week's zoom event Rob Dunbar, a law lecturer at the University of Edinburgh, warmly complimented Jim on "a great book" which shone a light on an event in Birr which isn't well enough known. Rob said he organised a conference in Glasgow which was also held in 1997, and focussed on St Columba. 1997 was the 1400th anniversary of St Columba's death,

as well as the 1300th anniversary of Adomnán's Synod in Birr. St Columba founded the important abbey on Iona. Adomnán later became an abbot of Iona. Adomnán decided to create his Lex Innocentium following a dream vision during which his mother demanded that he do something to protect the women and children of Ireland.

Another scholar pointed out that Adomnán's law is quite well known



Pictured is Jim at home after the launch of his book earlier this summer

by medievalists but not as well known as it should be by legal scholars. He said Jim's book shines a light on a law which reveals much about the society of seventh century Ireland, but it is also an important moment in legal history.

Rob Dunbar pointed out that Adomnán's law was meant to be a practical document, not just a moral statement, and the text "was meant to have immediate and practical effect." Part of the text details how the law was to be implemented. It is quite a sophisticated and well defined system of law. "The law was meant to result in practical change; it wasn't just a statement of ideas."

He added that in 687AD Adomnán also negotiated the release of a number of captives from north-eastern Ireland who had been taken prisoner by raiders from Northumbria.

He said he had highly recommended Jim's book to many people. "It's good to see that legal scholars are expressing an interest in the book, as well as medieval scholars and celticists."

Jim said Adomnán's Law was an important moment in the history of "Jus in bello". Jus in bello refers to the laws defining what is acceptable or not acceptable conduct by participants during times of war.

Tributes paid to retiring Birr Garda

GARDAÍ from across Offaly have paid tribute to their retiring colleague, Martina Nolan.

"An Garda Síochána and our colleagues in Birr Garda District say a fond farewell to our wonderful friend and colleague, Garda Martina Nolan on her retirement from An Garda Síochána," a post from the Laois-Offaly Garda Facebook page read.

Martina served in Ballinasloe, Tullamore, Banagher, Ferbane and Birr during her 34 years service, finishing up in Birr.

"We wish her good health and happiness on her retirement," her colleagues added.



Garda Martina Nolan

Birr woman gives presentation during UN global conference

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A Birr woman has given a presentation during a global conference organised by the United Nations.

Acclaimed photographer Tina Claffey spoke about Ireland's peatlands at the Global Peatlands Initiative Conference as part of the "One World - One Health" Global Landscapes Forum, which was the largest biodiversity conference of 2020.

The presentation was via Zoom and Tina joined a number of other speakers in the section called "Peatlands as a super nature based solution to climate change, and a refuge for unique and threatened biodiversity."

Tina's particular segment was a seven minute presentation, during which she portrayed her perspective of Ireland's bogs and wetlands, "Peatlands Through the Lens", showcasing her acclaimed photography of the flora and fauna.

The peatlands section was a one and a half hour session, and was one of many sessions running over the 28th and 29th of October at the online conference. The conference featured speakers from all over the world, and was watched by a global audience.

"This was a wonderful conference to be part of," Tina told the Tribune. "I was invited by Dianna Kopansky of the Global Peatland Initiative to give the presentation. It was nerve-racking and it really was an honour to be asked to be a speaker showcasing the beauty of our Irish bogs." The feedback to Tina's segment was very positive.

The conference pointed out that peatlands are found all over the world, coming in many forms, displaying many different characteristics and being used in many ways.

Peatlands provide critical habitats for an array of species, they are highly efficient carbon

sinks and they are crucial for hydrological cycling. However, they are one of the least understood ecosystems on the planet. They cover less than three per cent of the global land surface, and they are estimated to contain twice as much carbon as all the world's forests combined. The UN conference was told that "protecting peatlands against degradation and destruction is critical in the fight against climate change."

Many peatlands offer a safe haven for rare and threatened biodiversity, from the Orangutan of Indonesia to the Golden Sphagnum Moss of Ireland. Peatlands are found in the remote forested swamps of the Congo Basin and the tip of the South American continent.

Peatlands are also vital stopping off points for migratory species. The United Nations recognises that peatlands are "a critical habitat for biodiversity" and offer much to our climate and our health.

Last week's global conference provided examples, shared experiences and strategies while highlighting the role and importance that partnerships can play in safeguarding biodiversity. It underlined the point that conservation, restoration and sustainable management of the world's peatlands should be a "priority in biodiversity and climate action narratives alike. Indeed, despite providing essential ecosystem services, peatlands around the world continue to be damaged by drainage and conversion for agricultural or forestry use, fire, overgrazing and peat extraction."

Each speaker during the peatlands section was given seven minutes to speak about their particular subject. The other speakers in this section included a Minister for Natural Resources in the Peruvian government, speakers from important environmental groups, and Ministers from Indonesian and Republic of Congo governments.



Pictured is Tina Claffey

Speaking in the Europe segment about "Peatlands in our Cultural Identity", Tina conveyed "the awe and wonder of the ancient peatland wilderness, through the eye of her macro lens, documenting the biodiversity in peatlands that can easily be overlooked." She presented "a medley of images" that took the participants "on a brief journey through the seasons, opening their eyes to the otherworldly miniature life of the flora and fauna that have adapted to survive this unique environment."

Birr man passes away following road accident

A Birr man involved in a road accident earlier this month passed away last week in Beaumont Hospital as a result of his injuries.

Paddy Seery, aged in his 60s, was seriously injured when cycling after he was involved in a collision with a car in Birr on Sunday, October 11. The accident happened at Syngefield.

He was taken by ambulance to Tullamore Hospital on the day before being transferred to Beaumont Hospital where he died on Tuesday October 27.

Paddy, who lived in Clonbrone, Birr, passed away surrounded by his loving family. He is predeceased by his wife Bridie and will be sadly missed by his loving son Paul, sisters Elizabeth McEnerney, Ellen Seery, Kitty Walsh and Nora Rankin, brothers in law Vincent, Kieran, John and Peter, Tom McEnerney, Brian Rankin and Tommy Walsh, sister in law Peggy, nephews, nieces, relatives, neighbours and friends.

In accordance with government advice a family memorial mass was held on Friday. A funeral mass will take place at a later date in St. James Church, English.



The late Paddy Seery